



The other body in the same body: the elderly invisibility in the architectural design.

Tania Mara da Silva Moura

taniamouraprojetos@gmail.com

Arq.ID, Universidade Lusófona, Lisboa, Portugal

Abstract

The aging of populations is generating reflection challenges for science and societies. Despite notable efforts in the technical solutions legislation and the population's awareness of the inclusion of the elders, it's easy to notice that in the design of buildings there are still difficulties in integrating the elderly into architecture. Western society is basing itself on young people, even though the elderly population gradually takes over in terms of the number of individuals. The patterns in the architectural design are embedded in dimensions and connections established by norms and regulations for a minimum space of human conformation. The standards that are considered ideal and unrealistic regarding the natural flow of human aging, ask the question of the non-visibility of the old body. What if the ideal body was one that has already crossed the barriers of time? If the core of the representations was in the body which remained alive, which slowly changed, but which still vibrates within a social core which persists in denying its existence? When they are designed to promote well-being, the buildings become fully appropriated by their inhabitants and become instruments of interaction for everyone, from children to the elderly. The building transposes its material function, expressing meaning and meaning to its occupation. Thus, it is necessary to develop more inclusive parameters where the elderly are taken into account, by inserting models of human representation that affect the population more broadly. Through bibliographical research and with a deductive method, this article intends to raise questions that seem ignored in the process of architectural design and evidences an invisibility of the permanence of the body of the eldest in the built environment.

INTRODUCTION

The demographic changes, establishing an increasing populational aging, is generating challenges that reflect in various areas of science and societies. Each country has been debating on this topic, according to its own reality, with the effort to create legislation for technical solutions or of sociocultural order, in addition to educating the society for more inclusion of the elderly. However, in the building's design there are still integration challenges of the elderly in the architecture. The western society is based on the youth, even though the older population is gradually rising to the top numbers of individuals.

The demographic composition has been gradually changing, nonetheless, the communication between the edified and the user have provoked disaffection and illegibility for a considerable part of society. The making of inclusive spaces utilizing the concept of Universal Drawing suitable to the principles of accessibility end up constituting specific places of segregation. In the formation of cities and in the designing of buildings the established reference for the citizen ends up not meeting the variables of the human body of who will be the user. Even that the relationship between the body that inhabits is directed connected to the environment space that shelters. Be that as the place that receives the offspring after the birth, in the development of childhood formation, in the adulthood support and subsequently in the welcoming of the elderly person. Spaces are built without the ambience's consideration.

With the methodology of bibliography research through the deductive method this article intends to raise questions that seem ignored in the architectural designing process and emphasize the invisibility of the aging body's residence in the built environment. The considered ideal and unrealistically criteria regarding the natural human aging flow raises the question of the lack of visibility of the aging body. What if the ideal body was the one that already overcomes the barriers of time? If the representation core was on the body that remained alive, that has been slowly altering, but still pulses strongly in a social center that insists on denying their existence?

It is understood that in the building takes place a set of complex inspirations and situations that will make it into an instrument that aggregates, contributes and generates bonds with the user. The habitat is related to its own human life condition. The habitation has the vocation to encompass the specificities of which inhabitant, creating diverse ambiances inside the same space. Therefore, it can be understood that the housing extrapolates the physical questions, reaching other levels of predicaments like the feeling of belonging, social integration, welcome and acts direct in the human sensations that sparks in a quality of life for all, especially the elderly that will benefit from a more effective form of living.

THE AGING'S INATTENTION

The correlation between aging, elderly and old age is part of an experiential process, where old age is the last step in the natural condition of life, therefore, the elderly is a being that belongs in time and present space (Morin, 1999a). Despite being a natural human process, the lack of connection and belonging of the elderly in the constructed space implies a narrative of no visibility of the aging people to the architecture, in the architectural project.

The increase of the proportion of elderly in the western population is the “clear proof of the victories of the human being about the nature mishaps and adversities, in fact evidence of expertise to numerous policies and programs”¹(Paschoal, 2002, 99, our translation). However, even though the longevity and the improvements in the health conditions unleashed a commitment for an active aging, it is noted that some questions raise the attention of the ones involved in architecture.

What measures can be taken to adapt the built environment for the older residents? What are the implications in the inhabiting of the elderly population? How does architecture participate in the maintenance of healthy conditions to the elders? The architectural design is to shape the building proportional to the human being or is it shaped from the edified? These questions are opposed to the development of the western society that is based on the youth, even though the elderly population gradually rises to the top number of individuals. A reality that evaluates the building generically implies that few would like to have attention. The building that shelters or the permanence in the house that receives it can determine the wanting to live. “The “brute survival” is worse than death”² (Beauvoir, 1990, 337, our translation).

The images presented in the media, prospects and projects are based in an active and consumer population, features yet more accentuated in the competitive marketing. “Every society tends to live, survive; praise the vigor and the fertility, connected to the youth; fears the wear and tear and the infertility of aging”³ (Beauvoir, 1990, 51, our translation). The standards that remain in the architectural design are embedded in dimensions and connections established with standards and regulations for a minimum space of human compliance, although in so long spreading that “the good architecture should be a projection of its own life and this implies an

¹ “[...] prova cabal das vitórias do ser humano sobre os percalços e adversidades da natureza, até mesmo um atestado de competência para muitas políticas e programas” (Paschoal, 2002, 99).

² “A sobrevivência bruta é pior que a morte.” (Beauvoir, 1990, 337)

³ “Toda sociedade tende a viver, a sobreviver; exalta o vigor e a fecundidade, ligados à juventude; teme o desgaste e a esterilidade da velhice” (Beauvoir, 1990, 51).

innermost knowledge of the biological, social, technical and artistic problems”⁴ (Gropius, 1963, 28, our translation).

In architectural projects, human representations, most of the time, are male figures, in their full joviality and robustness. "The different methods used to represent the body reveal that the 'human figure' is gender and race specific: male and white" (Lance, 2001). However, even when it is shown in different positions what seems is that only one 'body ideal' remains worthy of demonstration and this one is usually virile, robust and healthy. While some terms such as 'race, gender and ideal' remain in the imaginary or in the veiled discourse, there will still be distinctions and guides and theories will continue to disregard peculiarities. 'Fig.1 and 2'. "Such standards remain firmly embedded in modern architecture, in the dimensions, connections, and ideas of minimal and efficient space and in the regulations that control them" (Lance, 2001).

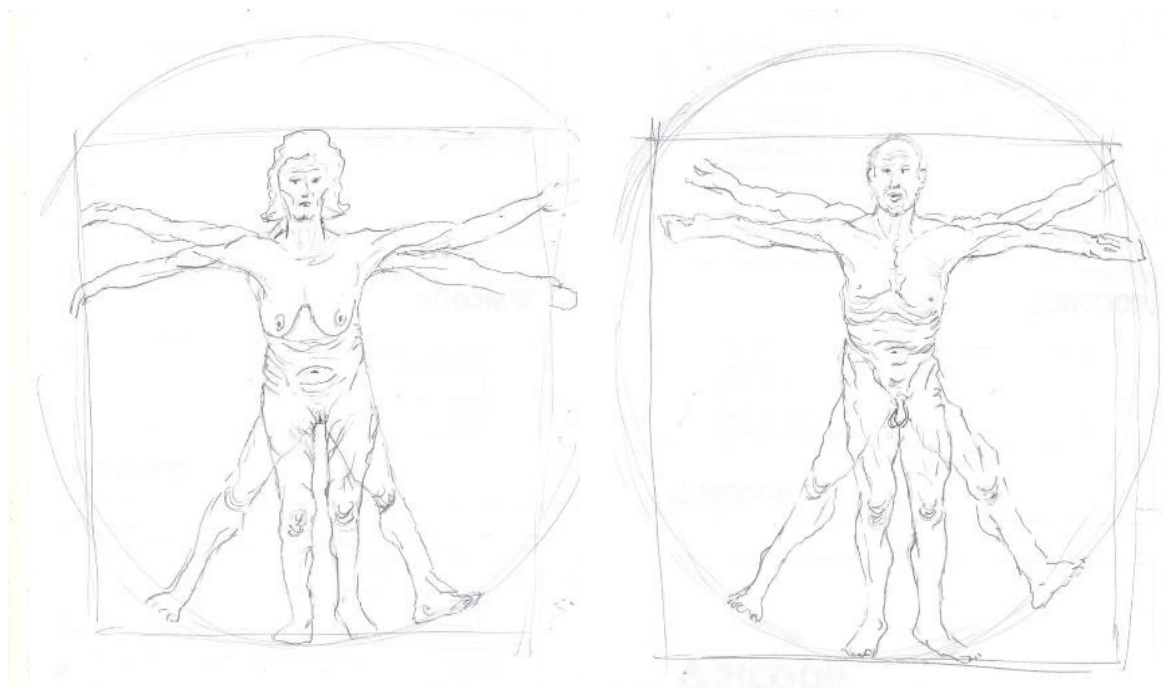


Figure 1 and 2: Sketch of the female and male human figure contrasting Leonardo da Vinci's work of Vitruvian Man. Source: author's archive

Elderly related research is increasing, but “the debate has been insufficient and the evidence of what can be done, is limited. Although, it does not mean that nothing can be done. In fact, the necessity of action is urgent.”⁵ (WHO, 2015,6, our translation). The review of the architectural collaboration with this theme is justifiable, therefore, identifies useful possibilities of a more inclusive architecture, with more assertive

⁴ “a boa arquitetura deveria ser uma projeção da própria vida e isso implica um conhecimento íntimo dos problemas biológico, social, técnico e artístico” (Gropius, 1963, 28)

⁵ “[...] o debate tem sido insuficiente e as evidências, do que pode ser feito, são limitadas. Porém, isso não significa que nada pode ser feito. De fato, a necessidade de ação é urgente.” (WHO, 2015, 6)

actions. “Should be built on a fundamental change in our comprehension about aging to one that includes the diversity of bigger populations and answer to the inequalities that many times are underlying”⁶ (WHO, 2015, 25, our translation).

THE BODY WITHOUT BODY

The body coexists with the home. The aging human lives in the house where, with all the objects intrinsic to it, are interred the phases of all his existence. Each wall, each room, each object holds in itself the picture of childhood, the hormonal altered youth, the marriage or the lack of it, the family and the loneliness. Your house is the proof of your existence, not as a constructed object, but as an idea of yourself where time and space merge. “I don't occupy my body anymore, neither of the time, nor of the world, such as how I live in the anti-predicative knowledge, in the internal communication that I have within.”⁷ (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, 109, our translation). The older body seems to not exist when the house design is still in the field of intellectual creation of the architect. The older body disappears as an untold history, because that which is not told seize of existing, before long, turns invisibly.

Aging brings to the human being bodily, emotional, and cognitive alterations. The human body can show countless structural and functional alterations due to senescence, that, while it varies from one individual to another, are found in all of the elderly, can influence in the physical and mental health and interfere in the functional performance and in the emotional and social relationships of the elderly. The work with this body which so many times does not respond to the mental stimuli is a hard job for the aging person (Mascaro, 2004). The aged body looks, sometimes, to be another body.

It is therefore, up to the professionals of all the different areas related to human care, a better dedication in terms of finding solutions to minimize the discomfort of the elders. The recognition with the built environment can enhance physical autonomy and, consecutively, grant the reach of psychological safety and independence. Thus generating, the belonging with the building. Therefore, remain and sense of belonging will depend on the adaption, “the built environment is a existential support, a shelter also to the soul”⁸(Schmidt, 2005, 32, our translation).

⁶ “Deve ser construído sobre uma mudança fundamental em nossa compreensão sobre o envelhecimento para uma que tenha em conta a diversidade das populações maiores e responda às desigualdades que muitas vezes estão subjacentes” (WHO, 2015, 25).

⁷ “Não me ocupo mais do meu corpo, nem do tempo, nem do mundo, tais como os vivo no saber antepredicativo, na comunicação interior que tenho com ele.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1999, 109).

⁸ “o ambiente construído é um anteparo existencial, um abrigo também para a alma” (Schmidt, 2005, 32).

FROM THE BUILDING TO THE AGED

The social relationships are essential in all phases of human life; however, the built spaces bring up situations of exclusion and impose limitations in the urban space. When the spaces/places to promote wellbeing are built, they are fully appropriated from its residents and the buildings are transformed into instruments of integration to all, from the children to the elders. “In this way, then, do genuine buildings give form to dwelling in its presencing and house this presence.” (Heidegger, 1980, 102).

The building transcends its material function expressing meaning and sense to its occupation, thus generating a relational state of being with the environment. “The notion of ambience replaces the sensorial space in the experience of the lived spaces; allowing us to distinguish our ways of experiencing the urban life; also supporting the imagination and design of urban and architectural spaces”⁹ (Thibaud, 2012, p.10, our translation). With aging the maintenance of autonomy and of independence are conditioned to the perception of the space.

The social limitations to the elderly in the cities, many times generated from the lack of options of social and recreational activities, turn their house, their home, everything they have to maintain their vitality and also their own identity, “from the decrease of being in the exterior world feels an increase in the intensity of all the values of intimacy.”¹⁰ (Bachelard,1989,78, our translation). This same space of belonging ends up turning into cloisters for holding inappropriateness. Because, the homes, without prediction for the longevity of its residents, turn in to prisons that collaborates, many times, with the crumbling of the individuality of its residents, “the spatial perception establish environment parameters of orientation, comfort and quality, with which these actors establish meetings with leading and active participation”¹¹ (Bestetti,2014,602, our translation).

Boubezari (2004) when explaining about the collection of information on human representation, exposes a path where architecture can take into account the language expressed by the elderly and ensure the permanence and belonging in the built space to those who will inhabit it for longer. The representations considering the human variables, "because the field of representations is discontinuous and does not obey

⁹ “A noção de ambiência restitui o lugar dos sentidos na experiência dos espaços vivos; ela permite caracterizar nossas formas de experienciar a vida urbana; ela auxilia também a imaginar e criar espaços urbanos e arquitetônicos” (Thibaud, 2012, p.10).

¹⁰ “[...] pela diminuição do ser do mundo exterior sente um aumento da intensidade de todos os valores de intimidade.” (Bachelard,1989,78).

¹¹ “[...] a percepção espacial estabelece parâmetros de orientação, conforto e qualidade ambiental, com os quais esses atores estabelecem encontros com protagonismo e participação ativa” (Bestetti, 2014, 602).

the geometrical logic of continuity. The debate is quite old. One can express in terms of language the significant forms described by the inhabitants" (Boubezari, ,2004, 02).



Figure 3: Characterising user conditioning, The lobster user, Photo by Neirda Iwanowski. Source: <https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/letters-from-the-editor/editorial-space-to-consume>

Going beyond all the fantasy of the ideal life, house and body, where an ideal life, an ideal lifestyle or the image of the ideal body predominate in the imagery of urban life. It is in the dwelling where the animal side of man is practiced, the sheltering, sleeping, eating for survival; the emotional and social side, the meeting with the family or the memory of it; an ambivalent space. In the house, on this built environment, being conditioning and conditioned the user, 'Fig.3'. For, it is in this domestic place, often controversial, between work and leisure that the user builds and destroys his own existence, does and undoes his image and his belonging in a place to inhabit and live.

The ambiances described by Augoyard, (1994), are models of perception of the object directed to the subject, the knowledge brought from the perception and the words that describe and express this perception, characterize the remainder in the surrounding. Therefore, the built environment space encompassing the modifications of all the steps of human life, specifying here the elderly, might guarantee their life in one habitat that was designed and built respecting, also, their sensations and perceptions.

CONSIDERATIONS

The elderly became like a rebel, a revolutionary that fights against the ideals of the perfect body, even being the one that overcame the hurdles and remained existing. The human is expected to pass for all phases of life until the final years in old age, where in the western culture, the stereotype remains undeserving of the conclusion, a survivor.

The solutions, the regulations exist in their own scientific domains, however, on the basis of the 'architecture' discipline, which is the project design process, there are still gaps in the transmission of architectural knowledge regarding the consideration of the lived space, especially with regard to the elderly user. By encouraging the development of more inclusive parameters, inserting models of human representation that reach the population more widely, the probability of integration and inclusion is no longer random terms to be part of the architectural composition.

The increase in the number of elderly people, the inadequacy of the buildings with the lack of legibility of the oldest, corroborate the need to change the design of the architectural project so that it takes into account the human condition and its variability. The architectural knowledge traversing human existence, where the stages and parts of life can be translated into experienced art. Thus, a direct insertion in architectural learning is suggested, establishing an architectural awareness, where architecture suits the human who has lived for more years.

When they are designed to promote well-being, the building becomes fully appropriated by its inhabitants and becomes instruments of interaction for everyone, from children to the elderly. The architecture has a fundamental role in the integration of the individual with his environment and in the development of more inclusive parameters where older adults are considered. Based, therefore, on models of human representation that reach the population more widely.

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