Housing: The Delights of the Private Sector

Declaration
I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried by a third party is acknowledged.

Elisa Bombi Lamú, November, 2006

1st text editor: Paula Muraca
2nd text editor: Irwin Tempkin

Master of Arts by Research (Interior Design)
RMIT University School of Architecture and Design, Design & Social Context Portfolio
The completion of this work was possible with the help of all this people,
thanks to: anna maria gregor, gabriele knueppel & rodolfo de la cruz for the journey we shared and started together,
paula muraca, and irwin tempkin for editing the work.
to claypots' staff specially vivienne, alice & tancy for that spark, to silvia rodriguez, verónica,
carol, suzie o, muntae, las chicas, barri patrick, omar, marilia, rosa-aurla, marta-p, claudia,
cristina, kenneth, xavi, anna, susana, stuart, mariel, alberto = salva, adrian & merete and specially nill for their words and advise when needed
thanks to the Interior Design department at RMIT, and very specially Andrea Mina my senior supervisor for the opportunity, patience, support, freedom and time given.

with all my respect and love, Gracias!
Introduction

Research Stimuli

The purpose behind this Masters by research was to dedicate time to developing my individual project. A research project that does not entail the production of any kind of design per se, but to undertake the process of articulating a theoretical discourse from the topic proposed. A topic that focuses on the search for a potential meaning of an object pertaining to the built environment; enabling me to experience the changeability and instability of my physical spatial world.

My interest in this subject of research was motivated and grounded by a personal reaction to the emergence of a new element previously unknown to my experience; the widespread use of large plate glass windows on inner city complex housing. It was introduced in my environment, Barcelona, as part of two major urban redevelopments.

The redevelopments, named Fòrum 2004 and Plà 22@ respectively, signified a celebration of capitalism and constituted the biggest urban developments that the city of Barcelona has performed in the last decade. A new technological and economical context began to emerge as a result of the City Council’s search for recognition at the international, national and local scales. New projects pursued the conception of a new geographical conscience for the city by constructing new financial abstractions represented by skyscrapers. This transformation has modified not only the skyline of the city, but also the relationship between its traditional life and newly designed spaces as these last are more greatly subjected to market logics and private interests.

What ‘protects’ the residents of Barcelona is the enclosed nature of the spaces we live in. But with these two urban projects a new order of housing is arising; one that constitutes a dramatic loss in the feeling of belonging to the place. These new spaces lack identity and memory and are completely unrelated to the significative cultural context of the area. Their designs offer a way to live the city differently: through a new scenario of urban housing in which the interior spaces are uniquely linked to the exterior through glass façades where what was hidden and protected from the sight is now exposed. Sounds and smells that once escaped to the exterior adding an essence or atmosphere to the community and life that inhabits the public space are now being silenced and locked in behind the hermetic glass.

This introduction, of a different way of living, anticipates an uncertain future that threatens what is familiar to me.

But since these urban developments were still under construction at the time I started developing my interest in doing an investigation, I needed to find a place that could provide me with first the opportunity to enrich my own personal knowledge with a more objective and global one - by immersing myself in an academic environment - and second could also present me the opportunity of experiencing and exploring the new-style housing in a more advanced stage. It is the city of Melbourne which has provided me with this ideal context; an observatory formed by high-rise buildings and a few skyscrapers (CBD, Southbank and Docklands). But more importantly, it is a place where I could find inner city housing complexes (with glass façades) completely subjected to the logic of control of the Central Business District.
To live with the other, with the foreigner, confront us with the possibility [...] of being another. It is not simply a matter – humanistically – of our aptitude for accepting the other, but of being in his or her place, which amounts to thinking of oneself and making oneself other than oneself. Rimbaud’s “I is an other” was not only the avowal of the psychotic phantom that haunts poetry. The word announced exile, the possibility or necessity of being foreign [être étranger] and of living in the foreigner’s country [vivre à l’étranger], thus prefiguring the art of living in a modern era, the cosmopolitanism of the excoriated [écorchés]. (1)  

Julia Kristeva, 1988

And with the willingness to [dis]place myself into the context of a foreign country in search of connections and meanings that could somehow relate me with this kind of environment, I might offer an understanding of this environment. This understanding would not be treated as a productive tool for adaptation into an artificial environment that has been subjected to a foreign symbolic order, since this would mean confining myself to the development of an instrument of conformity and thus reinforcing the loss of identity. Rather, it would be as means for anticipating an approximation or possibility of what this way of living that has been released in my own city might represent.
Proposal

All architecture, which does not express serenity, fails in its spiritual mission. Thus it has been a mistake to abandon the shelter of walls for the inclemency of large areas of glass.(2)

Luis barragán

It is a fact that the glass façade is taking priority in the housing of our cities; we only need to walk and look around the city to see it. But at this point it would be hasty to claim that the substitution of exterior façades for a transparent milieu has been an error.

My knowledge in relation to the subject of study was sparked by a moment of change in my environment; a situation involving a perceived threat to the previous way of living alongside the release of a new mode. My view then, is primarily grounded on personal experience and perception. Thus, it would be inaccurate to assume a priori that the world is perceived in the same way for everyone; it would be to forget that objects are not only as they appear to me, as I perceived them. The purpose of perception is to offer an immediate knowledge of the phenomenological world, one that does not transmit an objective world. And in accordance with Norberg Schulz, perception can also be distorted by a stereotyped reaction that comes as a result of a cultural knowledge inscribed in the individual.(3)

Since I cannot know how others perceive their world, the least I can do is to offer a glance into mine. For this reason and with a view to uncover and express with more clarity my position in relation to the glass façade, I thought it necessary to include a comparative analysis of a work produced during my undergraduate studies in Industrial Design (1998) together with the first images taken of this research.

Though these two works differ in time and purpose, both involve an exploration of the space that separates and relates the interior of a housing with the city: the windows.
Positioning

During the second year of my undergraduate in Industrial Design (1998), I was asked to create a psycho-geographic map of the city of Barcelona, for the elective studio ‘Monogràfic Cultural: Llegir la Ciutat (Reading the City)’, that did not necessarily have to be committed to the construction of a path or walk. I proposed a strategy for mapping the city of Barcelona through windows, as those signs or elements of the built environment that guided me to move through the city. These windows, that I had passed by thousands of times, comforted or distressed me and had marked on me a way of recognising the city and distinguishing its parts; corners, cul de sacs, streets, lanes, patios, plazas, neighbourhoods, but also communities, neighbours, strangers and friends.

My navigation was not only to respond the instructed intent of creating a map in which I could recognise and describe the city and its parts through its windows – as the predominant elements (images) in the landscape – but also to pursue the city that in Bachelard’s words ‘...is physically inscribed in me’. (4) In this sense I was contemplating my home not simply with regards to the physical domestic space of my apartment, but also the city I grew up in as the place I feel an engagement of belonging and identification.

Thus, the map’s aim was to reflect the city as I perceived it; where windows open or close to other windows producing a continuous awareness of the community living behind the façades of the city: a familiar condition of living within the city of Barcelona.

The work was recorded by photographing views of and from windows. These pictures documented what remained of the experience of inhabiting the city; a look to and from some of the scenarios of my life in Barcelona. The gaze moves along the distances between windows. These distances metaphorically illustrate the way in which I relate spatially with, or separate myself from, other spaces and bodies inside the city: from the intimate [and interior] city that exists within the broader plural city.
My understanding of windows is that, in their partial framing, they offer the possibility to enclose oneself and create the necessary or preferred [psychological] distance from the exterior as a way to detach from the idea that one is always surrounded by people living on the other side of the wall or façade. However, if so desired, they also allow for a connection with the realm of public life. Propound a choice, a more or less democratic way of living within a densely populated city (5), despite the lack of space.

Therefore, I understand windows, from my own experience in life, as objects that coexist between the two spaces of the interior and exterior simultaneously conferring value to these categories and providing the possibility of enclosing oneself or engaging with the other side without being compromised. How then, to approach something that is uncertain and unknown to one’s experiences? What is it about the window that I inscribe with a value that the glass façade has not?

When looking at those windows (ex: image 1998) I recognise spaces that I identify with my home. These are objects that just by looking at them transport me to past memories, familiar spaces and imagined situations. Windows comfort me in the way that they can open or close either toward a space of domestic enclosure, intimacy and solitude, or toward a space inhabited by many persons, the public realm. Glass façades do not open or close, they constitute hermetic barriers that only imply a continuous visual communication. They are like membranes of glass that expose views of one side or the other of the glass skin, and that play with our perception of the space when its materiality appears as visible or invisible. Unless, of course, one decides to definitively detach from this relation by closing the blinds (which curiously, based on my observations, is what people living in these kind of apartments with greater exposure to others, tend to do).

Thus, the window acts like a connective element that connects me with my home; it represents a symbol of my everyday life providing me an environmental continuity with my city. On the other hand, the glass walls newly employed on the city’s housing façades represent something unknown and uncertain that challenges the way I [have learnt to] perceive the relation between the city’s interior intimate spaces and that of it’s public domain.

Otto Fenichel writes: ‘one looks at an object in order to share in its experience’. (6) To look is an implicit activity when taking photographs. A picture can actually form an instantaneous critique. Images convey information and ideas, and by looking carefully at them with an eye to the intentions informing their creation I can gather the information contained in the images. Thus, the reading of my own images can actually help me to determine and communicate a clearer position in relation to the glass façades.

For example, as previously mentioned the images from 1998 spoke of the trajectory of my gaze running along windows, they therefore contain my position in relation to my environment. As I have said, windows are objects I identify with. Though I remain visually absent in the images, as do other human figures, it is precisely my own immersion with the spaces that justifies my absence and the absence of any others; in the work ‘I’ became a window, and others were treated as windows too.

My position in taking those pictures was not one of questioning the relation between spaces. The images were inscribed with a firm point of view; a self-projection that reflects the way I relate with my context.
In comparison to the first pictures taken in this research (slippers positioning with the glass façade), there is also an element that belongs to me, my slippers. Their inclusion inside the frame was an attempt to visualise my inquiry (how to relate with the glass?) from the interaction of an element directly related with the body and the housing scenario.

In this series of ‘slippers images’ my own doubt is staged within a very simple question,

how to place my own slippers when confronted with the glass façade?

Slippers positioning with the glass façade. september 2004
Of all the images, only one has been shown during the length of this research (ph. 1). This image was chosen from the rest because I found that its perspective angle illustrates more efficiently the intended focus of this research. On the one hand, the parallelism created in the composition between the glass frame and the horizon, allows a better visual connection or continuity – spatial relation – between the interior space with the exterior. And on the other hand the lens’s focus is on the close-up directing this way a strong attention towards the slippers and their immediate scenario, thus giving the contrast between the two spaces as separate entities.

In this image, the interior comes to be represented by the slippers, as characteristic objects that people wear in the interiors of their homes. Their placement inside the apartment gives the impression that someone was standing right there. The slippers are the trace left by someone facing the glass and the exterior view. The position of the slippers facing at the glass creates a visual dialog between the two spaces. Conversely, a division between the two spaces is created by the steel frame coupled with the ambiguity that the transparent glass endows when rain drops adhere to its exterior surface.

This picture contains the best expression of my concerns: centred on the inhabitant’s visual relation to the glass for the purpose of better understanding what the experience of living in this kind of housing – visually connected to the exterior through a glass skin – consists of and whether it represents a new way of inhabiting.
Research question

The housing I am looking at in this research shows itself to the exterior world through a glass wall; its privacy is increasingly scarce. Here, the shelter of the concrete, brick, wood or stone façade has been replaced by large plate-glass windows affecting an ambiguous relationship between the private and public spheres. As I perceive it, the framed views create a landscape through which high levels of intimacy are exposed. In a similar way, the framed exterior becomes almost fictitious when contemplated from the interior of the frame.

There can be no doubt about the standardising and unifying effect of differing societies’ conformity to the perceived model of the developed world. This provokes a surprising structural pattern between cultures characteristic, apparently, of this globalised age. This is coupled with an optimism that dreams of a free and infinitely interrelated society where social structures are the true forces behind architecture and styles of life; determining the parameters for dwelling and encouraging the living space to be experienced through the retina of the eye.

My confrontation with the idea that these spaces might be reproduced in my home city, present me with the opportunity to speculate about a significant change of values within the realm of housing. The glass surface seems to have acquired more importance due to the visual experience that it offers; an unconscious displacement from the ‘physical’ inhabited space to the ‘visual’ that appears on [and through] the glass surface.

In Capital Karl Marx claimed that every manufactured object under modern capitalism becomes a ‘social hieroglyphic’; by that he meant that attention could be diverted from the social conditions under which the objects were made to the objects themselves, the goods could acquire a mystery, a meaning, and a set of associations, which had nothing to do with their use. (7) In this sense, the object of my research is not arbitrary in its conception, but rather suspicious of providing a fundamental logic unrelated to its function as housing.

It can be argued that, given the lighter material quality of the structures, the use of glass in the façades is better able to support the construction of high-rise building; particularly compared with a heavy concrete wall for example. Similarly, it is a material that is faster to assemble quickening the construction process. I agree with both points. These kinds of explanations, however, are just structural and rational reasons that respond to technical and market logics, rather than engaging with the fact that the spaces are ultimately designed to house human beings. It is surprising that the new housing movement eschews the idea of providing interior-enclosed-intimate spaces in today’s over-crowded cities. On the contrary, the spaces promoted appear to insist on a particular way of living where the interior is on display.

Hence, my proposal is to investigate these buildings. Not in order to propose a design solution – since that would first require to identify or prove the existence of a problem which is outside this study’s intended aim – but, rather, to inquire into their productive meaning by deploying a speculative argument that looks for a set of associations that might provide a better understanding of the ideas behind as well as the formative effects of these new living spaces. Thus the central questions raised by this research are: what is the conception underpinning this type of housing where the interior appears connected to the exterior through the glass façade? And significantly, does the visual inter-relation affected by the glass potentially influence individual behaviour constituting new meanings for dwelling?
Methodology

The primary approach involved in the development of my argument is through the collection of data (theory) in conjunction with a practice (the construction of images) that responds to both, the stimuli generated by the theory and my own sensorial experience with the physical environment. Theory and images are integral tools of my process.

Whereas the selection of theoretical literature is based on the obvious need for material that can help me understand and develop certain areas of my research, image is used as a tool that frees me from states of uncertainty and at other times alleviates my lack of verbal communicability associated with having to fix or express ideas. Image enables me to make my thinking visible, to advance my decision-making and to explore my thoughts.

For me the activity of taking a picture or creating an image equates with objectifying or refining my position; it is an instantaneous declaration of intentions that becomes more clearly accessible to me once it is projected outside my mind.

It facilitates the articulation of my mental associations: by simply decoding words and sentences, through the identification of the elements in the image – colour, perspective, framing, composition – I can trace the connections from idea to idea. But while observation is important, understanding what I see and comprehending the visual relationship is equally significant. Thus through the interpretation of my visual actions – the objects and selection of a particular perspective angle and/or symbols – enable me to re-examine the meaning that [I] want to communicate.

Consequently, the images taken or created in this research are not to be seen or understood as [final] projects, but as vehicles to project, map, externalise, visualise, or organise thoughts outside of myself.
**Structure AVR**

Part 1 comprises of three activities that represent the main platform for launching the Masters: First, the realisation of an animation (*Requiem for a Window*, p. 13) produced in order to bring up the repressed intentions behind my research and to clarify my purposes by organising all the visual material compiled from the earlier stage of the study. Second the documentation of an artefact (and images) (*Visualizing the transition from private to public*, p.21) that was constructed as a direct consequence of a question raised in the animation (and from the readings related to that question) in order to visualise a concept that proved difficult to understand. Third, a short analysis (*Developing a [brief] understanding: the idea of house(ing) since modernity*, p.24) aimed at understanding the productive energies that might have been involved in the expression of this housing.

Part 2, is the development or articulation of my discourse that falls in two parts. First a *Pre-verbal and imaginary stage of my argument* (p.28) in which I produced a series of images as a means to translate the ideas that proceed from the concepts assimilated from Part 1 together with a new theoretical framework for this subsequent stage. These were images that act as my representational space within which I could link concepts in a clearer manner. (Also at the end of the chapter, under the caption *The cast* p.53, there is a brief explanation of the images). The following section, *The Seduction of Glass* (p. 44) develops an argument based upon the images produced – along the understanding process – and on existent studies engaged more specifically with spatial readings of glass as an architectural element that offers a set of different visual experiences. This is further coupled with a focus on sociological and anthropological studies that have advanced my understanding of human behaviour within urban as well as private environments, in order to facilitate my inquiry concerning the inhabitants’ responses toward the ambiguous surface.
(7' Animation)  requiem, per una ventana

Requiem For a Window was put together for an exhibition of postgraduate student works organised by the department of Interior Design. It is an animation of collected visual material designed to express visually that which I could not express with words. It was conceived as a response to the urge to produce something that could communicate - in a visual form - my concerns in relation to the glass façade, since at the time the research project seemed rather broad and unfocused.

The difficulty resided on the question of how to articulate an argument that had not yet been built and that was still waiting to be explored. The solution was to construct the animation through a set of comparative associations between this style of housing and another element more familiar to me; the window. The large plate glass window, distinctive of this new form of housing, appeared to me to be precisely what the conventional window was not - as expressed in the introduction:
The animation starts with a sequence of different windows that appear and disappear; windows with different shapes and lights, windows that are open revealing part of its interior and others that are closed. A visual exploration through some of the dialectics between inside and out that the window offers: first, a play of shadows and lights that move around the interior giving the sense of time. Followed by a series of camera frames in which I placed the camera in different points in the interior by moving across the space - in parallel with the window - the view framed by its edges changes offering different landscapes. The same happens if moving towards the window, shortening the distance between the eye and the window. All of them, shadows, light and frames, offer a sense of the interior as a bounded space separate from the street but yet giving the possibility for exterior contact. From here the window, as that space that endows many qualities and memories, disappears. A basic graphic animation - a cell - is slowly built to encapsulate more aggressive stages; massive community housing with glass façades are disposed on the screen occupying most of its space. With the camera I run along its surface and they seem to never to end, always the same image the same glass, floor after floor, revealing individuals moving around their spaces (sometimes even the same movements were captured, from different apartments, like choreographies), behind a hermetic glass barrier isolated from each other but exposed to the outside - some of them aware of my presence. Also steel images from an interior, an apartment I lived in, which served as an
observatory of these housings. Day after day for six months I lived surrounded by reflections and high-rise buildings with glass façades the new standard of urban housing. Some of them do not differ much from each other; many apartments from the lower levels have almost permanently drawn curtains covering their windows. On the other hand, many of these apartments had their furniture arranged as in shop windows; chairs and sofas placed towards the window like in a theatre or a cinema. Many people live in these apartments, but one can not hear a single sound from them.

When watching the video, the access to the images is not very accurate since my knowledge and experience with the video camera and the software were very limited. I experienced many technical problems when attempting to control the image resolution and regulate the final speed. It may prove difficult for a viewer to take the entire piece in, since there is too much going on at once. But from its making new realities emerged.

What surprised me is how comfortable I was working with the software once I learnt the three single and basic functions, with which I managed to complete the whole animation. Its production, based on these three functions, enabled me to reproduce and objectify on the screen a large amount of visual material and ideas without having to make any use of words. What was once only in my grasp, hidden in my mind, became something shared and more accessible to the public.
Media technology is a tool that doesn’t strictly require the use of language. In this sense it has allowed me, within the realm of my technical limitations, to put on the screen and thereby expose my thought process (8). This was represented in the many ways I organised the images: by employing a timeline, past and present, from windows to glass façades, and through the sequence and association of images that were placed on the screen and exposed for various lengths of time. These were significant patterns pointing to that which was of more concern and that which was not. To realise this allowed me to strengthen my focus and to abandon those aspects that were taking me to other paths far beyond my purposes within this research and instead head towards those which were appealing to me: those concerned with investigating whether the emphasis on the visual contact, either toward the glass or the outside, might influence the production of different behaviour inside the realm of the house. In three selected frames of the animation, the broad research question is approached by highlighting the glass’ ambiguities.
Fr.1

One frame shows two similar scenes simultaneously where two beds share the resemblance of being placed and displayed behind glass in a very similar way despite the fact that one of them is situated in an apartment while the other is located in the front window of a furniture shop (fr.1). This frame raises the following questions: can the privacy of an interior space of a house be understood as an extension of the exterior? Or even as an adaptation of features belonging to public spaces made possible by the way that the transparent structure awakens the presence of the outside? Thus is the privacy of the interior domestic space turning public?

(Developed in Part 1 & Part 2)
Fr.2

In another frame a girl appears behind the glass, she seemed to react after noticing my presence (fr.2), an event that made me wonder whether individuals living in spaces that meet with the visibility of the outside – or public space, as is the case in a city – might develop a greater awareness of external factors, perhaps provoking an oscillatory experience between the indoors and outdoors?

(see: Visualizing the transition from private to public p.21 and Part 2: Meeting the Public, p.46)
Fr.3

Two simultaneous images also appear in a third frame, one is a play of glass reflections and the other is a space in which there are two woman’s shoes facing their reflection in a mirror (fr.3). Shoes that I somehow associated with my sleepers. I imagined a woman standing right in front the mirror. From these two images taken together came the idea of considering the glass – also reflective surface – as a metaphor for the importance given nowadays to the self-image or appearance and thus the anxiety – to call it in some way – of being quasi-constantly aware and in control of one’s own image.

(Developing a[brief] understanding: the idea of house(ing) since modernity p.24, Meeting the Public p.46, Reflective Material: Control or Reflex p.48)
PRIVATE VS PUBLIC
Visualizing the transition from private to public

The realisation of this exercise was a technique to surpass the primary inquiry about the concept of the interior space shifting into a public one. It was made in order to visualise the loss or disappearance of what I consider is the private-intimate (interior) space as a shelter by translating the concept into a form - a scenario or passage that I could mentally inhabit - that could represent a transition from the private to the public in one piece. To visualise it as a totality was significant as it assisted me, in descriptive way, to make sense of what I observed from the material contained within the animation (Fr.1 & Fr.2) and within the theoretical framework used at the time. This in turn allowed me to move (in my mind), from one concept or object that I understood (the window) to another which I was starting or attempting to comprehend (the glass façade).

To describe the piece: it was a long pierced volume formed by layers of intimate and personal objects (an analogy with bodies) stringed together with a cord. On one side a smaller hole (that refers to a more traditional window) holds the materials together without revealing its content - protecting the objects from external gazes - but as the aperture becomes greater (referring here to the application of glass panels as larger frames) it gradually empties the interior of its volume. And in this gradual disappearance of its materiality is evoked the shift produced on the interior space of the housing.

A new way of reflecting about the loss of intimacy or privacy was gained in the course of its initial production. In the formation of the first layers, the objects were easily placed around the hole (my interpretation of window). As Georges Teyssot noted, the etymology of the word window combines ‘an element of the outside (wind) and an aspect of innerness (eye). The separation on which dwelling is based is the possibility for a being to install himself’(9).
But the experience became more violent once I started accommodating the objects around a larger hole. This involved stripping, distorting, deforming and breaking objects in order to adjust them to the larger hole. The action allowed me to reflect that in an apartment dwelling dominated by glass the idea of the possibility of installing oneself either inside or outside could not be realised since the spaces cannot be understood as bounded territories; the separation that defines the enclosed space has been blurred to the point where it is almost impossible for me to conceive a line that distinguishes the private space from its public exposure. But then, perhaps - in the same way that I had to adjust the objects to a different space - intimacy (which is practiced inside the house) might be also adapting to the new spatiality. It may be that the privacy of the interior is not lost or in the process of disappearing but rather just adopting different forms of expression. On this reading, subjects must adapt to the space.

As organisms individuals will be supposedly driven to adjust their behaviour to the unfamiliar environment by responding to its demands so as to fit in as fulfil the necessity of dwelling. Thus the subjects’ task might involve having to adopt some aspects of the outside into the interior space, or the other way around, in order to re-socialise themselves in an interior space that swings with the outside. This thought moved me to review some theoretical discussions that could inform me about aspects public conduct and how changes of behaviour are produced.

However, the artefact was never completely materialised because I had already gained the necessary direction to my thought. Thus, in order to document this idea (until needed) I took photographs and digital imaging completed the work.
Although, I must say that two years after the production of those images, one underwent some post-production work. The reason for this is that I am aware that the original images alone may not clearly communicate my intentions to the viewer. Given this, I decided to layer other images onto it, human bodies, that could perhaps help others to engage with it or see more clearly as a piece that contains my imaginary landscape; a space in which subjects fuse with the [interior] space and move in between the layers adapting themselves to the different spaces of privacy at any given stage (or layer) of the (imaginary) volume or passage. This was a move which I now consider unnecessary and that was produced in response to the frustration associated with having to make my process accessible to others and not being successful in the attempt. But with it a new reality emerged in relation this process; to realise that the introduction of bodies was analogous to the bodily - or tactile - experience I engaged in when trying to comprehend a concept. The simulation of an experience I never had by re-creating it through the sense of touch.
Developing a brief understanding: The idea of house(ing) since Modernity

The notion of house or home has often been described as a geography related to the ideas of origin, identity, belonging, shelter, etc. For example, in *The Poetics of Space*, Gastón Bachelard makes a remarkable topo-analysis that goes beyond the formal qualities of the house. He proposes that the house be seen as the space for interiority, in which multiple memories are cherished; memories of warmth and threatening presences and of corners of happiness, sociability and loneliness. The house is the territory where intimacy is configured. A space with a double function; that of sheltering the domestic home, and that of protecting the intimate (10).

A notion of [domestic and intimate] privacy that started developing from the seventeenth century and that culminated with the introduction of increasingly rigid codes of behaviour in public spaces, by the pressures of privatisation which [industrial] capitalism brought about in the nineteenth century.

Addressing here Hannah Arendt’s thesis (*The Human Condition*) about the reconfiguration of the concepts of public (politic) and private (domestic) of ancient Greece, caused by the new market logic of Modernity, in which [industrial] productive work (formally situated in the private-domestic sphere in the form of slavery) came to be an integrated part of the social realm and urban culture thus impinging on the freedom of the Greek model’s conception of public/politic space. Although Arendt’s critical analysis claims that this
control over the public sphere, ‘devoured’ other spaces (including that of intimacy) and ‘blurred’ the distinction between the private and public (11), the house was still considered as a separate (private) entity from the public realm. Because the house (private-domestic space), now completely apart from the productive work, was seen as a vital space of the private man. The private life of the [bourgeois] house held the [protected intimacy of the] aesthetic conscience of Modernity - but only as a retreat from the hostile exterior world characterised by the advent of Mechanisation. ‘It was in the interior of the house, where human could recover the lost order of things, the values as an individual that the universalist thought had taken away by the imposition of norms on public space.’ (12)

However, an aesthetic revolution took root towards the end of the age of Mechanisation at the beginning of the twentieth century. It embodied a reaction to the old tradition; the avant-gardes and some of their contemporaries did not share in the, aforementioned, ideal conception of the house. Mies van der Rohe claimed, for example, in the program for the Construction Exposition held in Berlin in 1930 that ‘The housing of our times does not exist yet. However, the transformation of the life style demands its realization’. (13)

The new ambition of architecture and the arts was to stretch the limits of sheltered housing until it could occupy the entire space of the world: to create a complete, homogeneous and physical environment in which all of the arts had their place in the total work of art. ‘Let us conceive, consider and create together the new buildings of the future’, Gropius wrote in the first Bauhaus manifesto. One ‘[…] that will bring all into one single integrated action: architecture, painting and sculpture rising to Heaven out of the hands of a million craftsmen, the crystal symbol of a new faith in the future’. (14)

Let’s for a moment remember that with pre-war modernity there was an aesthetic lineage of subjectivity and ethics. Art was kept separated from the mechanised and rational world (which was ruled by the principles of competitiveness, [cost] benefit and profit - the ‘vital praxis’) and directed towards an individualist subjectivity. Art was only found within the refuge of private life: the interior of the bourgeois’s house. And to the degree that art could be kept separate from this praxis, an individual could experience himself as human. This condition of strict distance between art and public life was termed ‘art autonomy’. (15). Henceforth, what the new European movements were doing was to mount an attack (16) against this autonomy of art (against the bourgeoisie and the pre-war aesthetic). Thus, it is not a coincidence that the idea of re-ordering and harmonising art with society’s industrialism had to be done through the reconstruction of the house.

In other words, the new aesthetic proposed by the Bauhaus and its contemporaries aimed to erase the distance between art and industrial society by transforming the house and objects of quotidian use and therefore also transforming the life-style of mechanised/industrialised society into a more organic one. In effect, artistic work would not only have, as its end goal the search for a new form, but it would also aim to modify quotidian life by way of this new form. (17)

However, this aim of restoring a society through a ‘total work of art’ – that would unify art with pragmatic life – failed in its totality. Instead of humanising the industrialised world the new movement affected everything to the contrary by inserting the ‘machine’ more completely into life – into house and art. Notwithstanding, the Bauhaus made an important contribution through the ‘standardisation’ of industrial forms, parts and elements that compose the house. From here, investigations on processes of prefabrication would be initiated.

Bauhaus started a path that was further developed during the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne). A series of congresses - that took place between 1928 and 1956 - where architects from different countries in Europe met in order to establish the new directions for the architectonic developments centred on the production of housing as well as establishing the normative framework that would integrate the practice of architecture and ‘building’ with the dramatic socio-political and economical situation. These new directions shifted significantly depending on whose influence dominated and set the agenda of the time: from a call for the establishment of the optimum criteria for the ‘minimum living standards’ to ‘monumentality’ in order to represent the community life in the public space. (18)

What is important to note in this [brief] analysis, is the deflection toward a set of different values including a faith in progress, utilitarianism and reason that grew out of the assumption that society, culture and their history were a human duty. Thus, it is not so unusual that the art schools and avant-gardes assumed the responsibility of changing their society through its forms and materials as a means to re-establish the unity between ethics, aesthetics and
the scientific and economic aspects of industrial progress particularly given that they were situated within a post-war-depression period conducive to reconstruction and reorganisation. (19)

The intended end of the artistic works was not only the discovery of new forms and material, but also the modification of quotidian life through the application of these new forms.

For example the glass rectangle, applied as the membrane that circumscribes the boundary between interior and exterior space, offered a new idea of visibility in the construction of buildings:

‘While it brings these two realms into contact by way of the transparent structure allowing the inside and the outside of the building to be dissolved to the least point of differentiation, it simultaneously forges a division by isolating the activities within the interior from the exterior. A different design concept which as Richard Sennett points out, the aesthetics of visibility and social isolation merged’. (20)

These aesthetics reflected the new contemporary patterns of public life that eroded in the early years of the twentieth century with the formation of the new capitalist urban culture.

The gradual will to control, exercised by the superimposition of the private upon public imagery and the rapid reconfiguration of the public order, changed the way people related to one another influencing their sense of singularity and creating new modes of conduct. (21)

When private is superimposed on the public, the defence against being read by others was to withdraw from feeling […] Silence in public became the only way one could experience public life, especially street life, without feeling overwhelmed.

As a result public behaviour become a matter of primary observation, of passive participation, of a certain kind of voyeurism, the gastronomy of the eye Balzac called it […] This invisible wall of silence as a right that meant that knowledge in public was a matter of observation —of scenes, of other mean and women, of locales.

Isolation in the midst of visibility to others was a logical consequence of insisting on one’s right to be mute when one ventured into this chaotic yet still magnetic realm.

[…] Crisis of public life is to speak of broad forces such as capitalism and secularism on the one hand and of these four psychological conditions on the other: involuntary disclosure of character, superimposition of public and private imagery, defence through withdrawal, and silence. (22)

From here derived the actual understanding expressed by many anthropologists and sociologists of the urban environment as a dramaturgic space in which strangers meet in their transits. A space where people are exposed to the outside while remaining invisible under the shadow of anonymous identities.

The public space, according to Manuel Delgado, ‘tends to be constituted as a base to anonymity and mutual inattention or as a base to ephemeral relations grounded on appearances and highly codified relations which are generally founded on simulacrum and evasion’ (23). Public space is the space for endless virtualities, where transitory relationships based on theatricality take place alongside other codes of behaviour such as defense through withdrawal from feeling and isolation.

But coming back to the idea of house, the truth is that there wasn’t a drastic rupture between the concept of the private house pertaining to the nineteenth century and the rationalisation that Bauhaus and the avant-gardes started, the model remained the same: the house as the shelter and domain of private/domestic life.

But nowadays, this type of inner city housing which I am looking at evokes the influence of the modern movement more than ever by applying the window-wall as an element that creates an illusion of spaciousness and continuity with the outside —public— world. An effect that became increasingly popular in the post-war period in America: ‘the widespread dissemination of large plate-glass windows for both domestic and commercial use levelled the environment by encouraging the removal of sharp distinctions between indoors and outdoors and thus created an ambiguity between public and private space’. (24)

Thus, following from the above, could it be that this concept of inner city housing is only now (in recent years) catching up with the fundamental social and political changes that began after the Second World War and are indicative of a contemporary society that has assimilated the associated ideals and codes? Or, rather, is it an attempt to affect the ultimate collision between private/domestic and public realms by unfolding ‘images’ or views of one space in the other? (control or reflex, p. 48)
PART 2
In this section, the making of images was the technique employed in order to articulate the thinking material by preserving the ideas through an ‘imagining’ of them: to translate [to me] in a visual form the ideas that proceed from the conjunctive activity of reasoning and imagining simultaneously. This method allows me to stage concepts and ideas without necessarily having to fix them.

As I read, either literature or physical space, I created a kind of non-linear story - through mental images - conformed or (fantasised) from the emotions gained in its course. Thus these images represent the preverbal stage of my argument where I visually described my concerns through the relation between my objects-choices, represented by three characters: the figure of a pin-up (playing the role of the subject), a mask (as the subject’s otherness or projection as a public individual created in response to the material of glass as a boundary) and an ethereal figure (as the hidden meaning of glass). These were [simply] staged so that I could visualise the intermediate world between the perceptible - my sensations - and the intelligible - the associations between concepts. To link seemingly unrelated things through an imaginary world where imaginary characters relate and effect each other in the image-space in a more obvious manner (to me) than in the real or physical space.

Although the term ‘imaginary’ may retain connotations of illusion, it is not simply synonymous with the illusory. However, in the images there is a hidden underlying structure that implies a linguistic dimension, since these were already mentally constructed during the reasoning process (the assimilation of concepts from Part 1 together with the new theoretical material reviewed for this second part). Thus, the way for me to gain any purchase from my images is by rendering them into words. Its important to remark that these images, as instruments of personal knowledge that served to guide me in the primary stage of my speculative argument, were projected as truths or statements. These are mental images, the result of the accumulation of various perceptions or particular ideas that inhabited me.
See p. 46,56
The collapse of the public into a private situation
See p. 46, 47 and 55.

public being
See p. 46,56 > The collapse of the public into a private situation
the seduction of glass
THE REALITY & FICTION OF THE TRANSPARENT FACADE

The mystery of the glass wall resides in its ability to mix the interior with exterior space. The glass wall orientates the desire of looking and confuses the inhabitants in their experience of the space as it transfers all the attention not only towards the other side of the glass – when this appears as invisible material – but also to its own surface.

This displacement from the interior can occur, for instance, when looking through the glass towards the outside – providing one keeps some distance from the glass and their own body in order to see the panel frame as a whole from edge to edge – the exterior is not perceived as a material reality, it is not present as such. The exterior enters the intimate sphere by way of an illusory effect as though it were one more wall, becoming a representation in two dimensions added to the surface – therefore its absence.

This effect can be produced by differently: for example by the isolation between the interior from the exterior created by the hermetic glass panels, which emphasises a stronger visual relation over any other sensorial experience. A second example, which applies only to high-rise buildings, concerns the height at which the apartment is placed from the ground, the further from the ground level the further suspended it’ll be from where life tends to happen.

The third, considers the position from where one regards the glass: if from the interior of the housing the representation will be produced during the daylight particularly when the facade is in shadow. If looking ‘front-on’ from the outside towards the building the effect will be more evident in the moment that the light-conditions are balanced between the two spaces.
And finally, there is an argument that points at the influence of the elements that support the transference of media (communications). To suggest the hypothesis that our constant use of screens in our daily-life may have accustomed us to look at or perceive other surfaces and spaces differently. Let’s start with the definition of screen given by Lev Manovich:

The visual culture of the modern era, from painting to cinema, it is characterized by an integrant phenomenon: the existence of another virtual space, of another three-dimensional world enclosed in a frame and placed inside our normal place. The screen separates two completely different spaces, which some how coexist together [...] A screen is a rectangular and flat surface that is thought or designed for a frontal view. It exists in our space, in the space for our body, and acts as an open window to another space: the space for representation, which can present us more or less accurate scales from our habitual environment. (25)

Consider the similarity between a screen and a glass panel; both are placed in our physical space and both provide a division between two spaces in a similar way. For example, the expectation with the screen is that it will absorb all of the subject’s attention while the [exterior] surrounding environment is ignored. In a similar way the wall to wall glass boundary, instead of standing between the two spaces as a neutral medium, seems to force the subject’s attention towards the illusory glass effect of space; while everything admitted inside the frame promotes the vision, what is outside the frame remains somehow unnoticed.

Thus, everything outside the frame, either the interior or exterior is transferred to appear on the other side of the glass. What once used to be protected or separated from the exterior, the domestic or intimate life of many individuals is now being standardised and naturalised as a common image or view in our urban landscape, revealing once again that the ‘collapse’ of the private/intimate world into the public is a notorious feature of the ‘modern visibility’ described by Hanna Arendt:

[...] intimate life – heart’s passions, mind’s thoughts, the delights of the senses – carry an uncertain and obscure existence, until they become ‘de-individualized’, as though saying, in a more appropriate form for its public appearance. (26)

From a different point of view, the display of the interior activities on this housing, or the entry of the ‘great city’ view in the interior, seems also to respond to this articulation of public/politic with private/domestic. This opens up the possibility for thinking of this housing as something that highlights particular encodings of our visual culture with the potential [will] to transform society, and the public and private space, through the application of glass veils as instruments that carry subtle metaphorical inflections, perhaps monitoring the attention’s displacement from a material or physical environment to the visualisation of it.

MEETING WITH THE PUBLIC

To me, living in a densely populated city means that one is continuously aware of the community, either from the street or from an apartment. So once inside the interior space the glass wall might serve to intensify this awareness of the outside and the community. Richard Sennett claims that
when people are visually exposed to one another they are more likely to keep to themselves. Therefore, when they are under some measure of surveillance, or in this case exposed to the potentiality of another’s gaze – real or imagined – they feel they must protect themselves from it by curtailing their spontaneity. To rephrase, human beings need to have tangible barriers in order to feel comfortable. By extending the realm of intimate contact – such as leaving someone exposed or creating the feeling of exposure to the exterior by removing a wall in the domestic space – the ability of individuals to be freely themselves is decreased. (27)

From the moment that this consciousness of the outside (other) appears and enters the house, inhabitants know that they are the subjects of other’s gaze. In this situation, inhabitants will behave as though they were not being watched taking the utmost care not to notice the glass rectangle. As Lacan reflected:

I can feel myself under the gaze of someone whose eyes I do not even see, not even discern. All that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others. The window if it gets a bit dark and I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straightway a gaze. From the moment this gaze exists, I am already something other, in that I feel myself becoming an object for the gaze of others. But in this position, which is a reciprocal one, others also know that I am an object who knows himself to be seen. (28)

In reaction to this absence of visual separation or exposure – effecting a blur between public/private space – subjects might project the self as if being in a public space in order to keep some measure of invulnerability; they become public and ‘other’ by ‘masking’ themselves in order to deal with the confusion that the glass affects.

Wearing a mask is the essence of civility, according to Sennett; a common code of belief that protect people from each other and yet allows them to live with each other’s company in a city or urban context, the place in which strangers are most likely to meet. Masks are created by those who will wear them, through a desire to live with others rather than through a compulsion to get close to them. (29)

Then, the projection of the mask is realised because subjects feel exposed. Yet, masks only exist through an engagement with [perceived or imagined] gazes. This way, masks are created by acts of fantasy and projection, in which subjects display themselves as distant, or in any case in a different or a more appropriate form of public expression.

Therefore, the transparent quality of the glass acts as an element of disconnection from the self, or at least from the interior space through this imperative of having to simulate something other as a means to keep some personal distance from an external presence.

From this perspective, I am drawn to conclude that from the moment that the interior is revealed to the outside – allowing the entrance of other gazes – there exists the possibility of having to create or project a simulated identity (and by acts of simulation what one is then performing is based purely on conceptions of ideal appearance, which implies the disappearance or the covering of the real self). Then, it is in this possibility for displacement, of having to shift from being in an interior position to being self-conscious in light of an external presence, where, once again, the metaphoric inflections of the glass can be recognised: perhaps in the secret form of its transparency is hidden a script that goes hand in hand to produce modern personalities. Or perhaps it is only a reflex of the way society has evolved, in which to be self-conscious about one’s own performance and image seems to be a naturalised feature of our times.
REFLECTIVE MATERIAL

However, this displacement vis-a-vis the outside is not the only effect that stems from this style of housing. The glass – when it appears as a visible material – also closes the space and in doing so entraps the vision of an illusory world by combining the surface reflection with the exterior view.

When focusing the eye on the surface, the interior unfolds onto it, producing the sense of an illusory depth, of continuity, expanding the interior space visually. This second projection is of a different kind to that of the mask since it is based on the evident material response of the glass (as a reflective surface) with the objects surrounding it. Now the glass also connects the subjects with outside images of themselves within the interior, providing a Narcissus like enrapture.

For an image to appear reflected, or be mirrored, one side of the reflective surface needs to be darkened, a duality that may invoke, one more time, the detachment and displacement from a tridimensional material world to an outer representation that appears on a surface and is simultaneously juxtaposed with the exterior view.

Thus glass is the moment in which the physical worlds, interior and exterior meet upon a flat surface. A visual metaphor that challenges space and perception, moving the subject from states of awareness to reflection. A surface through which I can read the expressions of reflex or the gestures dictated by our contemporary world through the appearance and disappearance of images day to night.
Control or reflex

In emotional states, sense stimuli seem to shift from the more redefined senses towards the more archaic, from vision down to touch and smell. A culture that seeks to control its citizens is likely to value the opposite direction of interface away from the intimate identification towards the publicly distant detachment. A society of surveillance is necessarily a society of voyeuristic eye.(30)

I regard this typology of housing as a product replicated on a massive scale in many cities around the globe, that responds to the impulse of economic globalisation. A global movement which in my opinion, seems to serve a common project: the desire to reflect and exercise its power, by demanding the regulation, standardisation and rationalisation of spaces and the individuals that inhabit these.

In the case of this housing, I have detected a possible method applied for exercising this control: by blurring the distinction between the private and public spaces. This process is successful, since the dominance of the glass façade in these apartments creates a reciprocal relation in which both the public and private worlds participate within each other. The glass forces the space to be in constant interaction with either the physical limit that separates it from the outside or with the outside itself. The interior space now appears in the outside and the outside appears in the interior and in both apparitions the subject and the interior space are detached from its enclosed nature.

In consequence, the interior space can not be thought as a bounded territory set apart from the exterior, because the glass in its absorption of all that surrounds it empties the interior and in its place creates an entre-deux(31); a passage that flows from the term private to the term public. The interior space loses the possibility of differentiation becoming a kind of ‘land’ undefined: without owner and without an identity or name. It is in this absence of definition or place where the control (32) is activated upon the subject shaping his gestures, directing his gazes, ‘the glass orientates the desire of looking.’

But the truth is that whether this housing is part of a political plot or not is impossible for me to know, its developers are mindful of their ends and their means. From my own point of view, these spaces bespeak the need to dominate through the spatial control exercised by the scarcity of space together with the subtlety of the glass material through which subjects are forced to adopt different modes of inhabitation and to experience their interior from their own displacement from it. Although this is not a unique phenomena in these times: the typology of housing could be added at the bottom of the long list of ‘spaces created by the Supermodernité’, in which citizens every day find themselves absorbing different mental processes, such as for example working with a computer, where we are compelled to follow or transit through the mental processes and associations of the software designer. Marc Augé, in his book Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, presents the thesis that ‘Supermodernity’ (that which embodies an excess of meaning) produces non-places. These non-places are not integrated with the precedent space, in which the cultural and historical relations to a place – integral elements for attaching an experience of familiarity to a space – have disappeared. Instead, a newly defined way of inhabiting a space is formed; one in which the subject is ‘surrendered’ to an individual transit caught in ‘the fleeting, the temporary and the ephemeral’. Non-places are zones for travelling and this is precisely what defines them: the transits of its users.(33)
Though, Augé refers to ‘transits’ as the routes created by the movement of the bodies in place (less) such as airports, hotels, supermarkets, office spaces, gas stations, free-ways, plains, trains, automobiles, etc. The notion of non-place has been also related to spaces – found in our everyday life – that do not pertain to the built environment. In many of these ‘spaces’ the use of the body is not so much involved such us writing theorists, media communications and networked arts, among others, but the transits created in these are seen as potential placeless to develop new experimental models of communication.

The interior space of this type of housing shares some characteristics with Augé’s descriptions of non-places – for instance, the fact that these spaces have no relation at all within the cultural or historical unprecedented context (as is the case in Barcelona). Further, the [un]definition of these housings, whereby the boundaries have expanded such that a paradox emerges, means that there is a continual oscillation between the two interior and exterior locations rendering the subject unrelated to their surrounding. But most importantly, for this oscillation to be possible – for the interior to appear in the public or the public in the interior – the space must be used and inhabited. The subject’s interaction with the space will animate it, just by using it, by being in the space and by making a simple gesture – like switching on the light – he or she will transit with the interior from one realm to the other, from one term (private/public) to the other, remaining undefined or rather defined by a transit, which is not produced by physical movement but by the presence and absence of gazes that the glass provokes.

Thus the subject is not only the passive spectator; he has become the unconscious accomplice (or victim) within this (global) process that dreams with a free and infinitely interrelated society. He interacts with it, without knowing it.

This means that a process of inclusion generates the subject’s interaction within this space, which is not a democratic choice but, rather, an illusory one. The ambiguous glass will challenge his performance through its seductive play between transparency and presence. This way the subject will be fascinated by it and will absorb its secret, its dynamic, and become a participant in this spectacle produced by the apparition and de-apparition of images and spaces in the façades.

But also this apparition and de-apparition of images and spaces that the glass produces seems to conform to the contemporary cultural parameters, in which the transitory state of our times are recognisable: dematerialisation,
simulations, appearance and disappearance of unstable images that might come from the influence of media communication and the use of media technologies in our every day life. Whether we live in a society dominated by spectacle or simulation is debatable. Less debatable, however, is the fact that we live in a society related to screens, confronted with screen surfaces (with appearances and images) and accustomed to the use of these surfaces. For instance, when working with a computer, it is through the screen that we interact with it, the interface through which we visualise the orders we give to the computer, but perhaps more significant is that before giving these orders we have previously learnt and absorbed the computer’s software language or processes.

The glass façade is very much like the computer screen; not only through its tangibility which may allude to the screen but also through the ambiguity that permits the buildings to visually transit from inside out, inducing the subject to assimilate a different mode of interaction with the space, one in which the subject learns to follow the dynamics of the glass.

There is a book or catalogue entitled the Un-private house, in which the author (and curator) Terency Riley looks at a number of private houses that respond to the latest innovations and changes of the cultural conditions dependent on the rapid growth of media and thus its influence transforming the notion of privacy within the realm of housing. He proposes that we contemplate the idea that the distinction between the private and public realms no longer suggests the sense of well-being it once did. Moreover, there is the possibility of recognising that ‘the presence of the public is not necessarily threatening, but rather [it] can be reassuring to have someone watching in our world of isolation.’(34)

The cases that Riley examines pertain to an upper class world, in which individuals, in a self-conscious manner demand (or accept) a specific ‘look’ or type of house in order to make a claim on social conventions: to distinguish themselves from those below and to secure their social status and identity, by bringing emphasis to the obvious, the exterior that we can see. The house can be thought of as the skin of the body, which we can read through its features and appearances, thus revealing some traits of personal identity.

Upper classes together with arts, in this case architecture, have always promoted experimentation seeking what is new and desired in order to create new styles, identities and images that reflect their modern personalities; conventions that their class more strictly demands. Moreover, whether the issue is technological or literal transparency all these ‘un-private’ houses that Riley considers are placed in specific locations and not completely exposed to a public eye, yet most of these have interior separations on either the horizontal and/or vertical axis, enough space to circulate and a great deal of thinking behind each of the decisions taken in order to control the openness to, or closure from, the public realm.

Unlike these, the type of housing with which I am concerned is not targeted to the upper class market, but rather to a middle working-class, and is conceived not for a private client but for hundreds of inhabitants; offering spaces on an average of fifty square meters of open plan with the minimum standards required and a glass wall as the sole boundary with the outside.

More difficult to consider is the idea that the development of these apartments may not be directly related to the reflexive gaze of the [electronic] media influence in which private and public imagery dissolve, but rather constructions that follow the latest trends in domestic architecture. Through the development of poor imitations or simulations of spaces in order to attract people who long for the pursuit of this ‘added (symbolic) value’ of being distinguished from other social groups or of living in a space that reflects - a particular and privileged social image - their contemporary lives (which in the end is a way of being socially homogenised within a group). Then, I should recognise perhaps, that the glass placed in a context that invokes intimate scenarios can actually awake more fascination than if it were to be placed in other contexts. That nowadays the articulation of the private/intimate space through its visual appearance on the public could be regarded as a naturalised and even desirable accustom of modern societies. That the application of glass in the exterior façades of the urban housing is a desirable ‘object’; a fashionable skin that evokes and simulates the gestures of a society which is surrendered to external phenomenon and imagery.
For instance, in the case of Barcelona, the emergence of a new economical and technological context has brought with it the rise of a new social group within the city. Thus the need or demand to construct housing that reflects and shelters this new identity has been created. But this also suggests that this type of housing can act as an instrument of exclusion, to those within the population that do not share the same ideals, as these are localised in specific areas and for certain social groups. Yet at the same time, these spaces that change from day to night by the mutability of their skin challenge the public perception and space. Thus, there may be implications with regards to the manufacture of modern attitudes, infused with promises of new visual sensations. This housing as a construct that takes place in the public space of a city may be asking or suggesting that the public accept, adopt, absorb or confuse different modes of living. Thus the glass, in its transparency and presence, can act as a script or screen in which the terms or limits ‘private’ and ‘public’ can be confused, accustoming individuals to a new different relation based on the constant visual articulation of the two spaces: private/domestic with the public. The subjects living in this housing along with those who perceive these spaces from the exterior, negotiate between voyeurism and exhibitionism, illusion and displacement, awareness and self-control and withdraw from contact with others; modes of conduct which seem to be regarded as more appropriate in our modern times.
The Cast
The pin-up figure in my [imaginary] scenario played the role of representing my primary vision of the ideal desirable subject for this type of housing, and by analogy, to evoke a possible concept behind this housing.

Pin-up cards, or images, are commodities that were conceived under the light of a fantasy, in this case, as a fetish completely dependent on a sexual excitement (which I personally do not regard as images implicated in the exploitation of women). These are 'objects' that clearly express the relation or reciprocity of two gazes: from the photographer or illustrator to the pin-up and from the pin-up's consumer with the image (although in this second case she is just an image the consumer's mind inhabits this fantasy through the image). Many pin-up images share a similar thematic setting: a woman surprisingly caught [by the gaze] or spied upon while undressing or performing any other activity that may suggest some kind of eroticism. And another important peculiarity involving pin-up images is the innocent or gentle look that these women give back to the viewer; somehow expressing acceptance despite the fact that the situations represented in these types of images (the surprise of an unexpected gaze), could probably involve, in some cases, a more uncomfortable reaction in a real scenario or situation.

Thus, what of interest to me here is the consent expressed by the concept of the pin-up as a fantasised image. As a consumer commodity - or desired object - the pin-up somehow involves the unfolding of the public - through an external gaze - into a private situation without showing any sign of resistance, rather, they communicate a docile and sometimes even pleasurable attitude towards the voyeur's interference. This is expressed either in the pin-up's response to someone else's gaze - which we can't know with precision if that attitude is naturally given by the model or if she is just responding to the photographers or illustrator desires - and also expressed by the commonly used domestic location within which the pin-up is situated.

The pin-up used more frequently in my images is not looking, she doesn't show her face. The reason why I have chosen this one in particular was to invoke a situation in which an individual carries-out his or her life naturally, accepting of the public eye, and thus an unconscious accomplice to the coupling of the intimate/domestic with the public.
Mask

By fabricating a mask I aimed to make tangible the concept used by Richard Sennett and Manuel Delgado of masking, the projection of otherness, of being [in]public; reproducing this idea in a visual form, through a mask, veil or skin, the way a subject might simulate their identity or interior-being by covering the self and displaying its more distant, guarded and cold public character.

This was important to me to do since it actually took me quite a while to assimilate this concept: I could not easily engage with theories that spoke about new codes of behavioural practice in the public realm, and the transformation of urban spaces during the twentieth century, that did not evolve in exactly the same way and time as they did in my country. Some of the behaviours subject to theoretical analysis are unrecognisable in the spaces and streets of my city. Thus, whilst making the mask (an its images) I could reflect on these studies.

The mask was placed in the space of the image in order to relate or visually simulate the process of transference from private to public. In the initial stages I had some doubts about who or what became public; the subject or the interior space? By playing with the mask’s location in the image (my imaginary context) I could begin to visualise how the transference or projection might develop. What became clearer to me is subjects might project or create these masks only when they are able to feel the presence of the outside; when they become aware that the space is visually exposed or related with the exterior.

With regard to its materiality, it begs the question of why it only appears in images and never as the original object. The answer is that, as in the case of the first artefact, I wanted to divert the attention from scales and material in order to focus solely on what was represented, only what was of my concern: to visualise it in an [imagined] context. The importance of hand-crafting the object derives from the texture it gains, something that I could not obtain digitally, and the significance of this textured quality lies in its ability to render it tangible (to me). Even once converted in image I could still touch it through my gaze.

During its making I also became aware that when I doubt or not understand a concept, previously un-encounted or experienced in my life, I need to take the time to familiarise it through a close and more tangible encounter. It is almost as if I could understand it through my hands. This was also the case with the first artefact, which I produced in order to visualise the concept of the private becoming the public by employing a performed analogy with the window and the glass façade.

The truth is that my images or artefacts do not provide me or illuminate me with clearer answers. I am perfectly aware that the production of these are completely subjective experiences and point of views, but it is in the activity of translating the concepts into a visual form that I am then able to more thoroughly engage with these. They contain the moment when I demonstrate to myself that I have achieved (some sort of) an understanding of the idea thus enabling subsequent development and articulation of the pertinent issues. Somehow, by dedicating the time to find a place in the image and staging artefacts, images or characters I assimilate those concepts and ideas that a priori were alien to me.
Narciso’s Character

The figure of Narciso is a complex character and one that has actually evolved in its form alongside this research project. The Greek myth of Narcissus first came to me whilst thinking about the glass as a reflective surface that confronts the subjects with projected images of themselves accompanied, simultaneously, by an increased awareness of, or attention to, one’s own external image and space when they know that they are exposed to the exterior.

Narcissus’s image appeared entrapped in the glass. For me this was a way to represent the seductive power of the glass: Narcissus was the glass convincing or shaping my subjects’ gestures in a performance directed to the glass or the exterior – self-awareness and self-control – depriving them of their true intimacy and imprisoning them within a self-absorption dependent on an external element.

Then, in order to see a clearer relation or illustration of the seduction between glass and subjects, in the place of the figure a flower appears; as it does in the myth. He then returns in the form a figure from which flowers sprout and enchant the subjects, becoming flowers along their [public] projections to the outside: an image that arose from the idea of the subject being an unconscious accomplice and one that has absorbed or accepted the system – someone surrendered to Narciso’s will.

The difference between this second form of Narciso and the first, is that while the first was referring to the glass as a material that orientates or awakes the desire of looking, in this second case he does not literally represent the glass but rather (the projection of) a system, which explains why his anatomy is like that of a nervous system.

The presence of a system which the glass comes to represent to me: A narcissistic system that seeks the representation or expression of itself, of its power in everything that it displays, for example in the arrangement of spaces such as the case of the housing in question. Its translation into the spatial form (and with the glass dynamic) is made explicit. The inspiration of these images came alongside the readings undertaken at the time: Sennett, Cassirer, Arfuch, Delgado, Augé, etc.

Consequently, I considered these spaces as weapons or methods that can transform individuals’ behaviour and acts so that they are more in accordance with this ambitious dream shared by various (capitalist) nations: on the one hand conforming or submitting their quotidian life to the parameters proposed, in which there is a clear attempt to link a private (intimate) space with the public. And, on the other hand, the promotion or speculation of capital or [cost]benefit -generated for the private companies (35) behind the development of these housings - is also explicit in the design of these spaces that contain an imperative to consume more services or energies (gas and electricity) in order to live comfortably behind the hermetic glass.

part 2 - Pre/verbal stage - 56
Conclusion
The aim of this Masters was essentially to develop a tentative explanation of what it may signify to live behind a glass façade inside a city. Inquiring into why glass panels are being applied on the façades of inner city housing and how an inhabitant might respond to them fulfils a logical need for reflection about this new mode of living that will undoubtedly produce significant changes to the treatment of the private-intimate and public realms at least of my cultural background.

Thus, in my attempt to learn about the glass façade applied in the inner city housing as the ultimate modus vivendi, I am certain that I have obtained a deeper understanding and greater knowledge about the ideas represented in these housings, although I have the impression that my understanding of what the conception of these buildings might be is only provisional.

During my research I found it difficult at times to engage with some of the material reviewed, specifically that which centred on the development and configuration of urban spaces alongside modernity and the attitudes that evolved from there. This inspired some doubt as to whether my argument could be applied to the context of my country, or perhaps considered an indication of what might come. But the consolation that this experience leaves me is what I take with me, and if necessary, sustained elaboration and rethink of the fundamental positions articulated throughout this research could be developed.
Perhaps I was too ambitious in embracing as much information as I could in order to overcome my ignorance in the field, to such an extent that in the end, I left myself with little time to elaborate (accurately or fluently) on how the work has progressively been built up. I have identified a tendency of mine when writing to expose ideas as though they were statements, rather than writing all the questioning behind them. This may be the result of the overwhelming amount of material collected along with the urge to simplify it. This has highlighted for me a weakness in my organisation of material.

Also, what I have come to realise is that my words and associations are a direct response to my own interpretations of reality and perceptions. Even though I have tried to build my interpretations by grounding them on existing studies and literature that could provide me with a more objective view, the weight of my work falls on the strong influence of internal factors. But I guess no one sees the world with fresh eyes, and as I looked at these buildings and was informed by readings, a whole set of different connections were arranged in my thoughts – fantasies, fears, feelings, memories and stereotyped ideas mainly conditioned by my cultural background. This explains why there is a certain tone of negativity concerning the glass façade that has driven me to conclude or consider this spaces as instruments than can transform modes of living or behaving by affecting the perceptions individuals have of a space.

Thus, with this insight in mind, the personal contribution that the experience of this research has offered me – looking back on it now – is the satisfaction of having investigated the object of my interest and of being introduced to a whole range of studies which have broadened my knowledge with a more global understanding of contemporary realities.

In other words, to have reached a stage in which I have been able to articulate a position after going through a process of understanding it, providing me – and perhaps those who might be interested in undertaking further investigations on related subjects – with analytical frameworks and concepts for further development and scrutiny.

The emphasis of the study has never been on the implication of manipulating material or on testing the effectiveness of the material produced (images or objects). Yet, along with it, this research has offered me self-knowledge gained after reflection on how I have progressed and the discovery of the distinctive ways I have engaged with my visual work: First, with the production of the animation to discover a tool that allowed me to organise and make accessible that was only in my mind to reproduce on the screen a whole amount of visual material and ideas without having to make any use of words, but by adopting or learning a different process, the software's. Also to realise the tactile experience in which I engage when faced with the difficulty of understanding or assimilating a concept, as was the case with the first artefact and again with the mask. As if by recreating textures –sensorial experience – and playing with material, I could simulate, explore or feel an experience I have never had.

And finally to discover that in order to externalise and articulate ideas, these had to pass through the filter of my intimacy and then externalised with the images; the creation and selection of my own symbols, three imaginary characters that meet and relate with each other (which curiously unfolds on the argument exposed: the fall or articulation of the intimate and private world with the public and exterior). Thus undertaking a process of introjection as a means to explore my own views by relating signifiers (symbols), which highlights that my interpretations don’t pertain to a common reality, but to a different reality: my subjective world.
PART 1

► Animation

8. Modern psychology theories see in the use of new media technologies the potential for, not only to exteriorize and objectify mental processes, but also ways to expand it and even control them. ‘These theories are based on the premise of mental operations with the external visual effects such as the sequence assembly (montage), chains or the creation of images. For instance, George Lakoff (linguistic) argues that ‘natural reasoning makes use at least of some automatic and unconscious processes through images, like overlapping layers images, the exploration of these and the focus on specific parts.’ (quotation’s translation is mine)


► Visualizing the transition from private to public


► Developing a(brief) understanding: the idea of house(ing) since modernity


13. Mies wrote this phrase right at the beginning of his nomination as head of the Bauhaus. Three years later Bauhaus forced by the Gestapo closed his doors 1933 (translation is mine) . Quoted in Pedregosa. Ibid p.2. From Mies Van der Rohe, Die Form, n.7, 1931, p.241

14. This was an adaptation from the words of Bruno Taut that were published one year before in the architectural program for the Arbeitsrat für Kunst . Stephen Games. Behind the Facade. First published 1985 © Stephen Games 1985. Published by The British Broadcasting Corporation. London p.140

15. In reference to the ‘autonomy’ of art: ‘Only those that learn the work of art in its negative relation with everything that is not art, will comprehend it in its autonomy, in its own logic of representation and perception’. (translation is mine)

16. This is clearly expressed in the manifesto created by the Vienna Session of 1897: ‘We have just removed the divinity of art and architecture from the hands of the official art establishment, and it now resides with us, inside our compound. We no longer depend on the patronage of the nobility, the merchant class, the state, or any other outside parties for our divine eminence. Henceforth, anyone who wishes to bathe in art’s divine glow must come here, inside our compound, and accept the forms we have created. No alterations, special orders, or loud talk from the client permitted. We know best. We have exclusive possession of the true vision of the future of architecture.’
(The Vienna Secession formally seceded from the officially recognized Austrian cultural organization, the Künstlershaus. Was formed in 1897 by a group of artists and architects, including Otto Wagner and Josef Olbrich. The Vienna Secession originated an entirely novel form of association, the art compound. The members of an Art compound would meet regularly, agreed on certain aesthetic and moral precepts and broadcast them to the world. In an art compound you announced usually through a manifesto.

17. The search for new forms was approached through the objectivity of the ‘Neue Sachlichkeit’, that meant giving form to the material from the material itself (taking things entirely and objectively on a material basis), and not from the geniality of the individual artist (without ideal implications). The term Sachlichkeit was used first time in the architecture context by Hermann Muthesius for the journal Dekorative Kunst between 1897 and 1903. Schachlichkeit for Muthesius meant an ‘objective’ functionalist and eminently yeoman attitude to the design of objects, tending towards the reform of industrial society itself.

18. Ibid, p.180, 273-75
The first five years of the CIAM the congresses - under the Neue Sachlichkeit socialist architects - centred their interest on the necessity of reforming the methods from a craft era through the adoption of rationalised and standardised production methods in order to increase housing production. Along the subsequent fourteen years, the CIAM shifted its direction towards town planning under Le Corbusier’s influence. While the general aim remained Functionalist —in comparison with the earlier stages of the CIAM—, the concerns were more generalist and less related to practical and technological problems (the advent of a neo-capitalist doctrine); functional zoning of city plans, and a single type of urban housing - high, widely spaced apartment blocks- for wherever the necessity of high densely populated housing existed.

‘This generalization of Le Corbusier and the French of town planning, brought with it a greater breadth of vision and insisted that cities could be considered only in relation to their surroundings regions, but this generality which gives this air of universal applicability conceals a very narrow conception of both architecture and town planning (...) At a distance of thirty years we recognize this as merely the expression of an aesthetic preference, but at the time it had the power of a Mosaic commandment and effectively paralysed research into other forms of housing’. In words of Reyner Banham, 1963.

And during the third and last stage the purposes of the CIAM — under the influence of the British group MARS [Modern Architecture Research Group] - attempted to move towards a ‘monumentality’; the design of a physical environment that would represent the community life and the ‘space of public appearance’. The young generation of architects were in the search of a more precise relation between the physical forms and the socio-psychological needs. They were aware of the emotional need of identity; belonging to a place.

19. It is necessary to stress that in this document works that were developed along Modernity are not being considered as references for this investigation, as these remain within the paradigms of the nineteenth century industrial metropolis. However, a general historical review was required — and briefly developed in this document - in order to achieve and demonstrate some understanding of the construction and evolution of the new aesthetics evolving around the concept of urban housing that came out of that —; the placement of the arts within industrial society.
But understanding that the original decisions that made changes in the nature of dwelling possible evolved from the ethical and aesthetic transformations pertaining to the specific cultural environments in the years following the First and Second World Wars leads me not to consider modern architectural models - such as the Unité d’Habitation (1946-1952) by Le Corbusier, for example - because these embodied social agendas. The social concern that architects and avant-gardes carried throughout Modernity stemmed from the critical economic crisis that followed the World Wars and the serious scarcity of housing in urban centres. For instance, the Unité d’Habitation could be considered the expression of an aesthetic preference (within the general aim of Functionalism at the time); an opportunity for Le Corbusier to put into practice his ideas on social integration, among others.

On the other hand, the principal focus of the developers - of the typology of urban housing being considered in this research is the profit obtained by the mass-produced urban housing; a kind of land speculation focused on rapid growth of development in the urban area, especially for middle class urban housing. Thus, in view of the divergent concerns between the architects of Modernity and the capitalist land developers of our times, I find no interest or necessity in this investigation to make reference to any specific modern architectural model, since I am looking at this type of housing as an expression of new cultural parameters – such as capitalism, and communications - that may relate to or address significant shifts in the concept of privacy in the area of housing. Therefore my concern is positioned far from developing architectural arguments through comparative analysis with existing architectural samples that pertained to past times, circumstances and ideologies, but is rather centred on the pursuit of an understanding of this housing as a cultural invention (or product) in the light of contemporary influences that may be reflecting (or affecting) a new aesthetic expression.


21. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer exposes three of the firsts methods developed by modern politics of the twentieth century with the purpose to effect that people who acted under their parameters lose every sense of their individuality. ‘Myths were invented and manufactured by modern politics; these were no longer a free and spontaneous play of imagination. They were regulated and organized; adjusted to political needs and used for concrete political needs’. ‘Modern politics knew very well that great masses could be moved much easier by the force of imagination than by sheer physical forces’. ‘One of the first steps of the new political theory was to deny and destroy the very concept of truth. What we call “objective” truth is a mere illusion. To inquire into the truth of the political myth is meaningless as to ask for the truth of a gun. Both are weapons, and weapons prove their truth by their efficiency’; Second, a change in the function of language: in which the whole emphasis was laid on the emotional side; And third, in the totalitarian state there was no longer any separation between private and public life, even private life was suddenly inundated by a high tide of new behaviours. And these were not regarded as a mere sin of omission: a crime against the leader and the state.’ Ernst Cassirer, Symbol Myth and Culture, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, p. 223-27, 236-37, 253-54, 256-59

Also, within this period a universalist understanding of individual [ethical] freedom emerged, one that dictated the equality of all. ‘Moral people’ that acted or worked became equals because they had erased the specific of each - the instincts and impulses that individualise and differentiate one human from another. Kant pointed out in his Critique of Practical Reason, ‘freedom is not a exemption from binding rules; it is, on the contrary, a rule which the moral will gives to itself. It means ‘Autonomy’, that is to say, it means self-control and individual responsibility (…) Freedom is not a gift, but a task, and perhaps the hardest task that we can impose upon ourselves’ (Cassirer, 1979: 257)

22. Op Cite., p. 19-27


PART 2

▶ The reality & fiction of the transparent façade


▶ Meeting with the Public


▶ Reflective Material: Control or reflex


32. José Ortega y Gasset, La rebelión de las masas, Barcelona: Orbis, 1983, p.17, see also Ernst Cassirer. Symbol Myth and Culture, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979, p. 256 –59 José Ortega y Gasset exposes the thesis that the imposition of the blur between private and public realms (in the totalitarian state), creates a lack of [own] ‘territory’, and is a great form of control to exercise over the individuals that occupy or move in this territories because they have no [strong] identities or fragmented identities.

33. Marc Augé. Los no-lugares. Espacios del anonimato. Barcelona: Gedisa, 1993, p. 79-83. Augé uses Certeau’s concept of space in order to distinguish between place and placeless, in which the space is defined by the intersection of bodies in transit, the animation of a place by the movement of the bodies.

34. Terence Riley. The Un-private House, Published on the occasion of the exhibition The Un-private House, organized by Terence Riley, Chief Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, New York : The Museum of Modern Art, 1999, p.17

▶ The cast

35. In the case of Barcelona all the institutions behind the urban redevelopment, either sponsoring or investing in it, were private companies such are bancs (Banc Sabadell, La Caixa, Banco Santander, Deutsche Bank, Caja de Madrid, Banco Bilbao Vizcaya, and Caixa Catalunya), energetic and services companies (Gas Natural, Fecsa Endesa, General Electric, Telefónica) and other private entities well known by their profit (Coca-Cola, El Corte Inglés, Alcatel, Hispasat, Indra, Freixonet, IBM, Iberia, Dragados, Toyota, Siemens, FCC Fomentos, Auna, Damm, Media Pro, Nestlé, Nutrexpa, Randstad, Henkel, Leche Pascual, Roca, GL Events, Agbar, etc.)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Augé, Marc. Los no-lugares. Espacios del anonimato (Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity), Barcelona: Gedisa, 1993

Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994

Barcelona marca registrada, un model per desarmar (Barcelona a registered brand, a model for disarming). Unió Temporal d’Escribes (UTE). Barcelona, Virus Editorial, 2004


Baudrillard, Jean and Nouvel, Jean. The Singular objects of Architecture. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota, 2002


Blake, Peter. Form follows fiasco: Why modern architecture hasn’t worked. Toronto: Little Brown & Company 1977


Deu Raons per no anar al Fòrum (Ten reasons for not going to Fòrum). Barcelona: Asamblea de Resistències al Fòrum 2004


Frankovits, André (Editor). Seduced and abandoned. The Baudrillard Scene. Australia : Stonemoss Services, 1984


G. Cortés, José Miguel. Impasse 6È: Ciutats Negades 1: Visualitzar espais urbans abscents. (Denied Cities 1È: Visualising absent urban spaces) Lleida: Centre d’Art la Panera, 2006

La otra cara del Fòrum de les Cultures SA (The other side of Fòrum de les Cultures SA) La Biblioteca del Ciudadano. Barcelona: Ediciones Bellaterra, 2004


Ortega y Gasset, José .La rebelión de las Masas, Barcelona : Orbis, 1983


Riley, Terence. The Un-private House, Published on the occasion of the exhibition The Un-private House, organized by Terence Riley, Chief Curator, Department of Architecture and Design, New York : The Museum of Modern Art, 1999


Smithson, Alison and Peter, Changing the Art of Inhabitation, Mies' pieces, Eames' dreams, The Smithson. London: Artemis London Ltd,1994


INTERNET

Guerra, Carles. Desde arriba y desde abajo (From up and down). Text d'autor / Arquitectura i urbanisme. 4th July 2004. www.e-barcelona.org


NEWSPAPER, MAGAZINES


‘Madrid necesita recuperar el centro de la ciudad’ (Madrid needs to recover the city center). Interview to Cristina Narbona Ruiz. Federal Secretary of Environment and Urbanism of PSOE ( Spanish Social & Worker Party ). Edited in the Spanish Real State 1st May 2002

Mas de Xaxès, Xavier. Nueva York y Barcelona excluyen a sus clases medias. (Medium Social Class excluded in New York and Barcelona). LA VANGUARDIA. Tuesday, 15th June 2004

Negri, Toni. ‘La multitud y la metrópoli’. Article edited in the Nº5 of POSSE magazine.


NEWS

Edificio Master (Master Building) . A film -documentary by Eduardo Coutinho. 110’, Brazil, 2002


Bibliography - 66