

THERAPEUTIC FIELDS anti-stress tactics

SCHWECHAT, AUSTRIA NO **911**

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1. SUMMARY

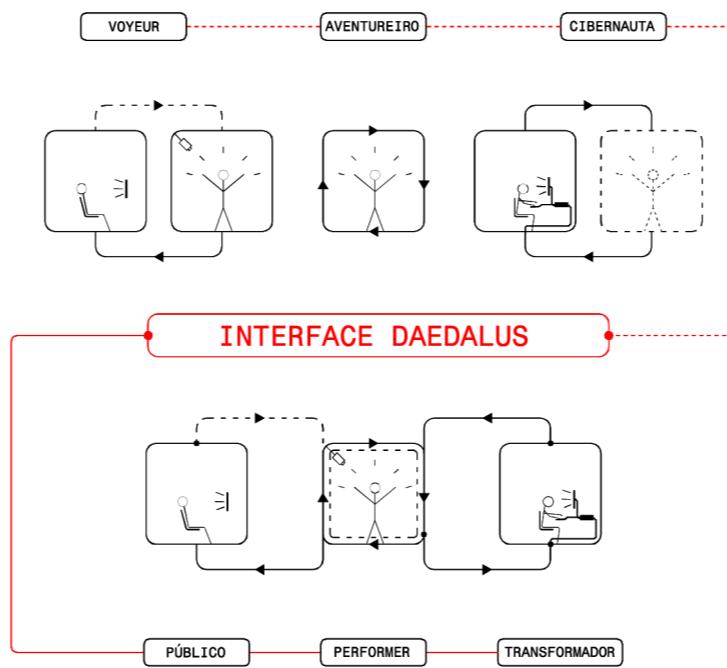
1.1 BACKGROUND : SHRINKING CITIES_ reinventing urbanism & DEDALUS_ contemporary ludic practices

This project was born as an evolution of two previous works which reflect different approaches over the contemporary society. We decided to converge as a large debate team made essentially with 5 architects having in mind an ambitious task - reflecting critically a contemporary subject and materialising this reflexion through a housing project. In order to develop our concept free from limitations we didn't want to choose *a priori* a particular urban site, neither to submit our thoughts to a specific program. One of the difficulties of this project was to think of a program which would be indissociable from the housing request and which would fit in any place. The geometrical and volumetric considerations should come after choosing a particular site.

This two previous works referred in the beginning are basically two theoretical approaches made upon different contemporary subjects and for specific situations:

The SHRINKING CITIES_ reinventing urbanism competition (01 / 2005) gave birth to the project URBAN THERAPY and consisted of a psychanalytic therapy used against symptoms of depression affecting the "shrinking" cities. Our case study was Ivanovo (Russia), a city under a postsocialist regime which faces serious problems of unemployment, poverty and drug addiction... We wanted to create several therapeutic "happenings" in the city confronting the citizens with the past and future, generating a new feeling of positiveness which was the main tool to reconduct the society from conformism to participation. We also suggested several patterns of public space which would redirect the population emotions to personal expressions, acting as a chess board for human activities. In this project we first used the GENERIC THERAPEUTIC METHOD which evolved in the project we are presenting today to the CUSTOMIZED THERAPEUTIC METHOD to fit a more particular scale - the domestic space.

DEDALUS_ contemporary ludic practices is a personal thesis (03 / 2005) which reflects over the contemporary society and the role that entertainment represents in everyone's life. It develops a metaphorical game with 3 intervenients : the voyeur, the adventurer and the cibernaut using them to express particular traces of the ludic experience. In this sense this previous work was the generator of the reflexion over the habitat, supporting the principle that today the house can be seen as the ultimate entertainment place, a place to relax from the intensive work and to express our own (private or public) ludic experience.



1.2 EUROPAN 8_ EUROPEAN URBANITY AND STRATEGIC PROJECTS

The main subject proposed by this years' Europan committee encompasses a very difficult analysis showing that maybe it's really impossible to describe a common **European urbanity** due to the different urban realities and sensibilities. The last Constitutional referendum proves that it's quite difficult to have a unified image of Europe and that each reality and each specific situation demands a closer look. Perhaps Europe can be described as an enlarged economic community made of european citizens blurring particular national identities. So if we want to talk about a european identity we must refer to the economic scale and to the job market that Europe sustains.

What aspects are common in the economic european reality ? What situations define the job market in European cities? What conditions can describe the work in Europe ?

Europe is an open economic realm that promotes free exchange of people, goods and technology, but actually it reflects the profound politic and cultural heritage of the several nations that constitute the whole. There is actually a "european directory" made of the richer democratic nations (UK, Germany and France) that establishes the common order and an heterogeneous group of nations (the East and southern countries) which have a long past of politic dominance that conducted to several periods of social turbulence. So consequently the job market offers different opportunities depending on the country you are living in. One aspect may be transversal to all these nations, with the economic crisis that affected Europe in the last decade and the exponential growth of emigration, work is more difficult to find, everytime you work harder and you are less paid.

2. SUBJECT

2.1. THE NEW URBANITY : Residential Districts and Suburban Housing

As we were asked to develop **Strategic Projects** we started by formulating the question if we wanted to respond to a particular problem for a specific site or to a more generic condition ? We found interesting to develop a strategic approach over the stress problem generated by the current working system prevailing in most Europe's countries. In doing this study before choosing a site we had the autonomy to reflect over the house as the ultimate anti-stress device capable of responding to the demands of contemporary life (the perfect opposite to the office environment).

Our strategy was divided in three different phases: the first was completely analytical focusing on the study of the contemporary habitat (Chap.II - The Subject) and on the individual condition (Chap. III - The Action) ; the second was more experimental trying to translate the collected data into the housing design (Chap. IV - The Method) ; the third step consisted in the urban approach (considering a particular site) and on the creation of networks (ONSE) _ actually the fundamental step in which city / housing and individual are integrated.

Urbanity is an environmental condition which is continuously suffering changing processes. Growth and shrinking phenomena affect every year the urbanised surface of our planet and force the movement of people from different places. Real Estate markets and building economies insure the permanent investment in the construction of residential districts erasing the former limits between city and nature.

In face of the new colonisation processes is it still relevant to divide the contemporary city in the classical scenarios_urban or rural?

We think that we should use new terms to describe the contemporary urban condition. Like SPRAWL who is slowly replacing the rural settlements, and SUBURBIA which is taking place over the city CORES creating peripheral centralities and huge satellite districts. The new city grows with the economic and cultural evolution of the last decades which developed networks of quick public transports, large energetic supplies and affordable housing. A **New Urbanity** is being constructed over the historical legacy of the old european cities_ the urbanity of the residential districts and suburban housing.

Actually, in the **Residential Districts** the speculative process is taking place over the concern for human comfort. Densities are increasing and functionality is taken to its limits. You can even feel the crisis in the post-war typological experiences which have chosen the aesthetical experimentation instead of the programmatic reflexion. For example, the manufactured housing model developed in the U.S , with such extensive results like in Levittown (Pennsylvania,1959), is one of the principal responsibles of the current sprawl phenomena, exhausting resources and generating huge amounts of waste. But in spite of being so exhaustive, this urbanisation model proves to be of unsurpassable comercial value and maybe it shows us a path to revolutionize and apply the manufactured housing process to suburban collective housing which requires more density and more attention for ecological and sustainable values.

The concept of Suburbia is profoundly linked with **Suburban Housing** patterns which determine not only the urban densities but also and most directly the cultural and social status of its inhabitants. Unfortunately until the moment the suburban models have proven to be generically more segregative than integrative and even the cause of social problems like criminality, drug addiction and poverty. The suburbia is no longer the sweet dream of a neighbourhood with a happy life. The real image of this problematic urban condition can be sustained by the detachment that actually the suburban inhabitant shows from his own property, living mainly on the streets and running away from the stressful environment in which the suburban house as transformed itself !

2.2 THE SUBURBAN HOUSE : A PROGRAMMATIC ANALYSIS ?

In this first analytical process we tried to demonstrate the potential of the suburban house and from its particular functions. Such task demanded a deep inside look to several suburban housing models which clearly illustrate the reductive planning tendency that creates a reductive functional disposition.

Actually we decided to consider 3 particular functions in the suburban house : the psychological, the physiological and the spatial functions. In spite of not being always successful, it was interesting to verify that the suburban model tries to respond to each one of these needs.

The psychological functions which should respond directly to the brain activities, embrace a large extension of programs, that are not always included in the suburban model. Activities like socialize and work are sometimes considered, but entertainment, love and dream are more often excluded.

The physiological functions which respond directly to the vital functions of the human organism are always considered and even emphasized. The house offers always a physiological program: in your room you are reduced to your bed, the living room is a good place to eat and of course, in the bathroom just look behind the door for the place to piss.

The spatial functions should respond directly to the physical standard of our body, but unfortunately space is something that the suburban house cannot afford easily. In the most cases you will find houses where the space is reduced to the minimum. The movements and ergonomic positions of our body are often conditioned by tight corridors, tiny doors and uncomfortable rooms.

In the analysed suburban models we verified the lack of importance that psychological functions like leisure, entertaining, loving and dreaming occupy in the habitat solutions. The privilege from the physiological over the psychological is the current condition. And even for the spatial aspects we asked ourselves how can the mind work correctly when the body is not properly envisioned?

So definitely our response to this profound lack of consideration for such fundamental human needs is the urgent reinforcement of the psychological and spatial apparatus of the house. The house should be seen as the ultimate entertainment device, capable of responding to the relaxing demands of its users, stressed by days of intensive work, intellectual activity and repetitive monotony. The space must be conceived in order to reinforce this therapeutic program, adjusting its dimensions to new functions, new objects and new ergonomic positions.

2.3 THE *Fetichisation* OF THE HABITAT

If we want to consider the contemporary habitat as our main research topic we should try to relate it with its inner life. The habitat may be the clearer picture of the contemporary society and its perverse addiction to consumism and individualistic desires. One could say, as the city is the realm of space the house is the realm of objects, expressing the personal and private fantasies of its owners. Minimalistic decorations create a desired organized environment or, in the opposite direction, picturesque and pop objects suggest a playful and recreational atmosphere. We can say that the house works as a big container of memories and experiences reflected in the decorative objects which condense life in all its particular expressions.

Objects sometimes may seem a little bit nostalgic, aggressive, or even pamphletary and these feelings can really affect the whole spatial atmosphere. Actually its more probable that a room's decoration affects the whole space that the architectural skin which confines the room itself.

In this sense we think that it is somehow a misleading idea the fact that everyone (and in particular the architects) search for a neutral (white and empty) environment that should allow everyone to occupy it in its own way. As Mark Wigley would say "white is in itself an image". An image of ordered and clean environment which is clearly contradictory with the "occupative tendency" that most people desire. Particularly in the suburban house districts where small houses and apartments are often occupied by large familiar groups with huge amounts of objects and furniture.

Since the 60's that the POST_WAR housing model is the reference in all the programmatic solutions.

The house is functionaly conceived and its functions are often related with single objects. For example we cannot imagine the living room without a television or the kitchen without a fridge. Today more than ever we are dependant of objects and they tend to assume a supremacy over the space we use. We can even talk about the fetichisation of the habitat through the compulsive use of decorative objects.

As a reference to the "fetiche of objects" we could talk about Neil Leach's The Anaesthetics of Architecture which relates the imagetic desire with the architecture contemporary culture. Objects are closely related to this imagetic culture and in this sense they can fulfill the ultimate consumerist dependency.

Maybe it as come the time to take advantage of this culture and avoid the unpleasant confrontation between architectonic and social values. To give the place to a new habitat we should create spaces where human activities can be completely fulfilled with new programmatic considerations. In this sense maybe it's the time to change our designing principles- maybe objects should overcome over space and generate space through objects.



3. ACTION

3.1 URBAN STRESS : 3 cases of pathological conditions through urbanity

EVA LOETSCHER (23)

49 Wiener Strasse, Schwechat, Osterreich

PROFESSION_bar waitress

CONDITION_stressful condition from precarious work in a Donuts N' Coffee shop

(particularly sensitive to noisy and smoky places)

Hilda, a 23 year old waitress, seems to suffer from anxiety and nervous symptoms due to her precarious work conditions. Working daily 10 hours and having just one day off per week may be one of the causes of her pathological status. But also the fact that she was forced to save some money to finish college may be appointed as one of the main causes of her anxiety and desire to go back to her studies.

Searching for a young and communal way of life in a small apartment, maybe with a flatmate.

FRANZ SCHULTZE (36)

13 Alanovaplatz, Schwechat, Osterreich

PROFESSION_lawyer from HEIERMANN and PARTNERS agency

CONDITION_stressful condition from intensive work and recent divorce situation

(particularly sensitive to claustrophobic and crowded environments)

Franz Schultze is a successful lawyer from HEIERMANN and PARTNERS. At the moment he is facing a difficult divorce process with his wife Anne. Disturbed by the possibility of loosing the custody of his two childs, Frank is currently becoming more obsessed and nervous. Occupied by long days of work in the office, he can't find the time to spend with his childs.

Searching for a confortable and large apartment with private facilities (health club and swimming pool) with enough space for visits.

KAREEM JAMAL (27)

57 Wiener Strasse, Schwechat, Osterreich

PROFESSION_unemployed

CONDITION_stressful post-traumatic situation caused by dismissal from an official teaching post

(particularly sensitive to rush hours and jam traffic)

Kareem, is a 27 year old from pakistani origin. He was formerly studying biology in Freiburg University. He came to Wien after finishing the academic studies to give some classes in the local university. He found the experience very interesting and was excited about the possibility of pursuing an investigation career. He was very disappointed with the sudden dismissal. Now he is looking for a new job since last December. He starts to get stressful and anxious with his financial situation.

Searching for a flat to rent. Possibility of dividing the apartment with a flatmate.

3.2 PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS : tracing a psychological profile and mapping the individual condition

Urbanity is becoming more and more intensive and this fact tends to affect directly our environment and consequently our way of life. The previous cases may exemplify typical pathological conditions which can turn people quite sensitive to the urban environment. A stressful condition may be generated by a noisy coffee shop, by claustrophobic offices and intensive work or by the traffic jams and rush hours. In fact the ordinary problems of everyday life may be quite amplified by intensive and aggressive urban conditions.

Nevertheless it is more feasible that our psychological condition improve than for urban conditions to change to less intensive parameters. We have to assume that the future may no longer be the brighter scenario that we all aspired but that realistically it will probably engage new levels of climatic and environmental problems and certainly a new step in the evolutionary process of mankind. Maybe we have reached the time to confront the real problems of urbanity and consider the urban pathological condition as a sociological status that we have to consider.

In this sense our team's position in this work was to reevaluate the urban environment (with all its problems and complexities) in relation to the individual psychological condition. We wanted that the city we are thinking off can bring a new kind of sustainability that involves the human being in a way that as never been considered before.

It was important for us to trace strategic guidelines in order to develop a psychological analysis which could define psychological profiles and clinical scenarios. The individuals would be defined by their necessity for fun and on their availability for performing it.

In this sense we traced psychological profiles, using basically two analytical parameters: levels of sociability and tendencies to addiction. We also defined the individual condition on the basis of other two parameters: needs for fun and time to spend.

We believe that these parameters can define with more accuracy the possible interactions between the future inhabitants and the urbanized plot that we intend to plan. They can even suggest a programmatic rescheduling of the house in the design process in order to create a more personalized environment, specifically orientated to a therapeutic action.

3.3 ANTI STRESS ACTION

This therapeutical action was defined through a combinatory programmatic intervention defined in the CTM (Customized Therapeutic Method). This psychanalitic method is the domestic evolution of the GTM (Generic Therapeutic Method) which was the urban therapeutic program used against the economic and social depression in a shrinking city context (Ivanovo). Whether in Ivanovo the GTM acted as a tool to perform an ANTI DEPRESSIVE ACTION in the CTM the main challenge is to create an ANTI STRESS ACTION.

The CTM operates in a first step through a clinical meta-analysis that defines the psychological profiles of the users and that simultaneously evaluates the therapeutic potential of the house and its functions.

In a second step this method evolves to an extensive data-mapping that creates the main coodenates to sustain the ANTI STRESS ACTION. In a third step it defines the desired Therapeutic Output and the Entertainment Input neccessary to its completion.

Actually this method recognizes entertainment as the main therapeutic and psychological tool to counterbalance the predominant spatial and physiological functions of the house. In this sense it defines the operative tools that create an anti stressful environment. Urbanism and architecture are the medicines that insure the therapeutic output.

The program of the house is adapted according to the profile of the user (identified in the analytical moment according to parameters like levels of sociability, needs for fun, time to spend and tendencies to adiction) and results in several typological solutions that respond to a careful and almost "clinical" therapeutic environment. To achieve this architectural idea we used objects of entertainment and relaxation as the main generators of space.

The entertainment input is not only introduced at the scale of the house but also at the scale of the city.

House and housing District are indissociable realities. In this sense both the individual and the collective can have the possibility to enjoy the entertainment program (playing alone or in group) and create a complex network of entertaining activities and socialising environments.

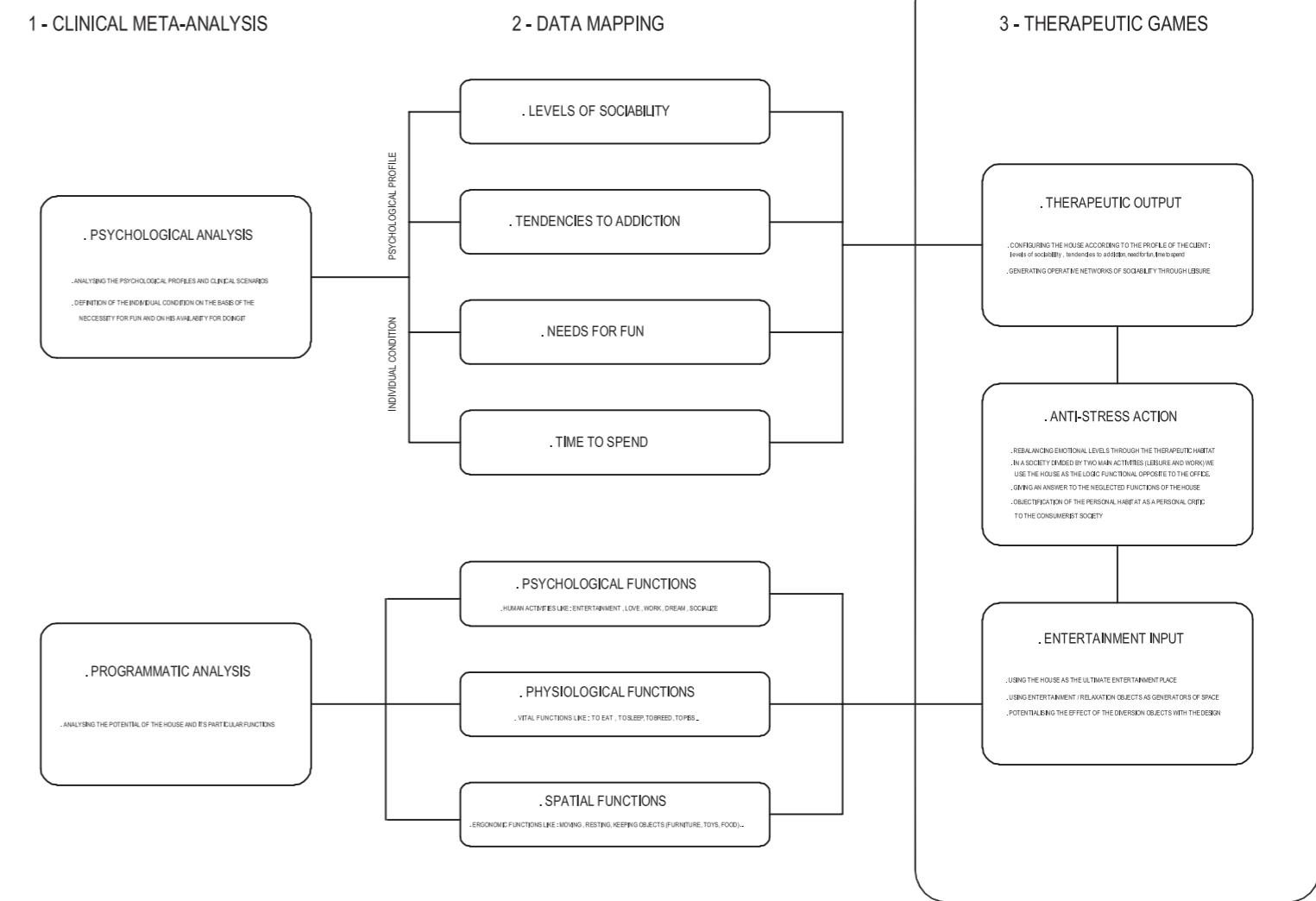
The ANTI STRESS ACTION prevails over the project in a way that it should make it directly the result of the CTM in all its considerations, from the definition of the program to the urban and architectural design.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. THE CTM _Customized Therapeutic Method tentatively illustrated :

The European 8, as an experimental and front lead contest, gave us the real chance to test and apply our ideas using the CTM as method and the site of SCHWECHAT as laboratory. In this sense the site approach was done with a background knowledge and a strategic concept. We decided to choose Schwechat due to its strong urban conurbation and to its close relationship with Wien. Problems like the proximity of the airport, the loud noise of aeroplanes and the quick urban transformation seemed good motives to act with therapeutical and social ambitions. This project was the closest step we have been from engaging a social action in the operation field, not only producing an urban design but also trying to reevaluate the housing program and its current status.

. CUSTOMIZED THERAPEUTIC METHOD _A PSYCHANALITIC DOMESTIC THERAPY USED AGAINST STRESS IN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICTS

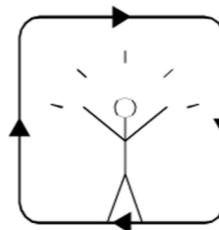
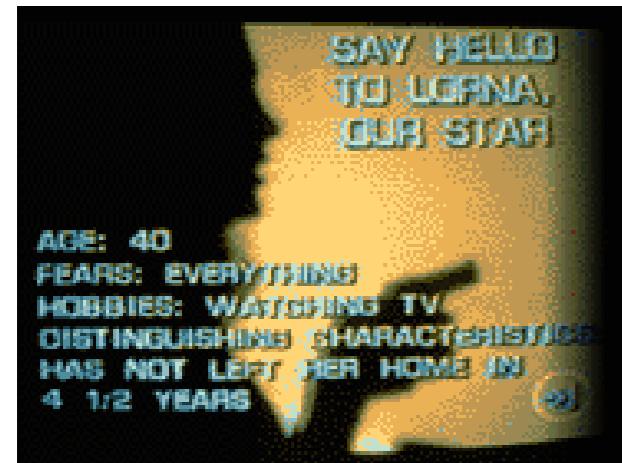
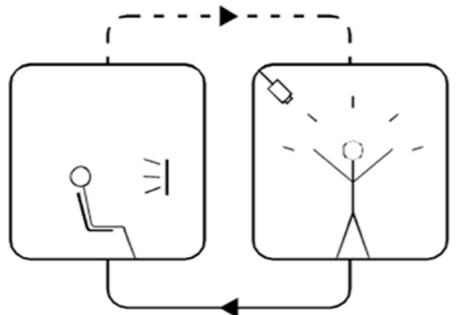


4.1.1 ENTERTAINING : the voyeur, the adventurer and the cybernaut

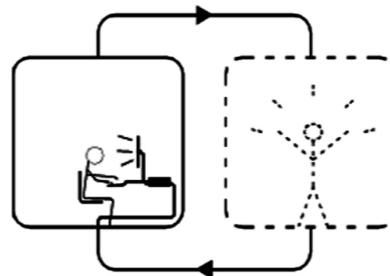
The first step according to the CTM is the analysis of the psychological profile of the future users. This analysis suggests the individual condition on the basis of his necessity for fun and on his availability for doing it. The parameters of evaluation (levels of sociability, tendencies to addiction, need for fun and time to spend) construct a special individual profile.

In our perspective the profile should be directly associated with the entertainment theme creating three types of users : the voyeur, the adventurer and the cybernaut. The classification into these three main characters define the relationship of the individual towards the entertainment or ludic experience.

The voyeur performs a passive ludic experience. As a spectator, he is virtually projected in a real scenario. His perception of reality is essentially bi-dimensional – an image. The voyeur does not use his body as a whole, centring his experience of reality on the optic nerve, i.e the visual senses. We may consider as an example for the voyeuristic ludic practice watching TV or going to the movies, i.e. a practice of identification and hypnosis in a fictional plot. The recent phenomena of reality shows or the webcam sites are an adequate illustration of the current voyeuristic world.



The adventurer performs an interactive ludic experience. As a performer, he interacts in a real scenario. His perception and experience of the reality is four-dimensional, using his whole body as a complex sensorial apparatus. For the adventurer his pleasure lies in challenges that defy his abilities, both physical and intellectual. As an example for the adventurer ludic practice we may consider all kind of sports or open-air activities, but also adventurous travels into exotic landscapes. It's the adrenaline that feeds the adventurous ludic experience.



The cybernaut also performs an interactive ludic experience, although mediated through technological devices. As player he acts in a virtual scenario (mediated). His perception of the reality is multidimensional – the cyberspace. His body is used actively but mediated through interface devices. His experience is strongly based on the imagination and the intellectual apparatus.

Considering the entertainment experience the main occupation of your free-time, the habitat must respond to the entertainment needs of the contemporary living.

These three types of users create the fictional program to be used both in the habitat spatial devices and in the whole residential complex.

4.2 THE "FETICHE" OF THE CONSUMIST : generating space through objects

One of the main tools that we used to define the housing space was the close relation between the domestic functions and the objects of the daylife. Each function is in part symbolised and defined by the objects that we use to perform each activity, like doing the make up or simply couching in the sofa. The power of this relation is so effective that even space is submitted to its importance. These objects can transform the meaning of the rooms and displace our activities from one place to the other.

We tried to translate these principles in the design of the housing typologies that flow in the space between the old brewery buildings.

Each one is designed with a great flexibility and possibilities of expansion according to the users needs. We even predict a progressive occupation based in the colonization of a common infrastructure (access, electricity and water). Elevated from the ground, this infrastructure will define an occupation assembled and configured by its users. The result would be an unpredictable form made of living spaces united under the same skin.

The principle of spontaneous addition is stimulated encouraging the users to expand their housing units at their discretion and according to their needs and desires. The fetishisation of the habitat is clearly assumed and potentialised. The space is generated through a permanent addition of objects, entertainment capsules and fantasy modules.

Inside we centered our attention in the configuration of three domains of use : the physical, the social and the mental. These spaces would be prepared to receive specific objects, like the TV, the PlayStation, a huge mirror or even a bubble bath. Some are designed as capsules and others as open spaces, each one with a specific atmosphere.

We simulated 5 possible housing types, characterised by its areas and composition modules; each of them being able to have different configurations. Like a gadget, the habitat is based on basic modules and its components. The basic spatial module is a free open space – the social space, where main social activities take place. Added to this module, we consider the refugee capsules, which respond to the mental needs of the inhabitants – to sleep, to study or just to relax. These small capsules are like niches in the habitat, providing an intimate and relaxing atmosphere. Finally, to respond the physical needs of the inhabitants we place "infrastructural walls" (walls that carry water and ventilation pipes) on each extreme of the habitat, where you can "plug" devices in order to configure the kitchen, bathroom, i.e. the spaces where you fulfill the main physiological needs like cooking/eating, washing, etc... This disposition will locate the physiological

spaces on the extremes of the apartment, liberating the core as a social plateau, onto which are added the refugee capsules.

Apart from the individual entertainment program (defined by each user) the collective therapeutic effect is achieved through an accurate distribution of housing program and an intentional implementation of indoor and outdoor ludic activities. The housing buildings are assumed as a network, connecting the collective entertainment places located in the old brewery buildings, along a common gallery that gives access to each unit.

The acoustic problem created by the proximity of the airport made us reconsider the material and formal aspect of the housing solutions. We think that an absorbent material and an angular continuous skin can be useful to protect the houses from the disturb created by the aeroplanes.

3.3.3 ONSE_Operative Networks of Sociability through Entertainment

"We treat the site like a game board, literally. The goal is to create communities and the product is a dynamic master plan. We said there's no topology whatever, no significance to anything. We may as well put a game plan there. We look at what's there and, as a result, choose specific points : the centres of the community. Then, with these specific points, the Urban Gallery generates a dynamic environment with centre points, which have a name and a development based on the engines of five or six prototypes. They are not unique to any one of these; they repeat themselves over different places. This is the "genetic code" of one centre : the anchor point, a name, a prototype number, a space for the development, though not necessarily the form of the development, and some kind of built environment. The result is a kind of mix between landscapes, density, mixed use, sports facilities, etc... Some prototypes are very concrete: housing, cultural centre, playground. Others are more about rules: rules about density, rules about landscapes, rules about open space, rules of how to deal with the waste that you make in this town. We make program for prototypes, and the criteria of when a prototype is effective. When you have a whole collection of them - a performance cube, machines for living, plug-in infrastructures, etc... – you get something like a three – dimensional version of the Urban Gallery."¹

The network of houses expressed by the the intuitive association of housing modules is intended to create a complex social system. A system of cross breeding experiences translated in the use of the entertainment parasites located in the Brewery buildings (Record Store / Mini Golf Circuit/ Bookshop / VideoStore, etc...) and in the Therapeutic space of the housing modules.

The system operates at three levels: basement, surface and elevated ground. These levels correspond to three different uses. In the basement you will find a mixed use program with shopping areas, fitness center, cinemas and parking. In the surface an extensive garden with direct access to the brewery buildings where we have injected new program _restaurant and bistros, housing on demand, hostel and stores. The elevated ground gives access to the proposed housing infrastructure and creates an independent path to the entertaining parasites.

The concept of sociability is explored in this combination of houses and entertainment places, using the mixity to counterbalance the isolation of the housing modules and the monotony of this residential district of Wien periphery. In this sense we decided to call this system ONSE_Operative Networks of Sociability through Entertainment.

¹RaoulBunschoten_CHORA_A New Suburb : Hoje Taastrup
ARCHITECTURE AND PARTICIPATION ; P.Blundell Jones, Doina Peterscu,
Jeremy Till; Spon Press 2005

