The dialogue in popular self-production

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Introduction

This article aims to discuss the way the philosopher Vilém Flusser uses the concept of dialogue and its possible relationship with the architecture and with the architect in the Brazilian context.

It is necessary to report briefly in which context was given this unusual contact: among the work of Flusser’, a Czech philosopher who lived in Brazil for more than 30 years, the Brazilian ordinary building, what we could also call as architecture¹, and I, as a young architect.

Flusser and an example of the Brazilian ordinary architecture.

This article, which seeks to show that relationship, is part of my Masters’ studies, particularly in an optional subject of the course, called "Architecture and contemporary culture and its relations with digital technologies," taught by Professor José dos Santos Cabral Filho, who did his master and Phd in this University. So it was with great pleasure and in good time that I was introduced, by Professor Cabral, to the brilliants Flusser’s thoughts that support some of my master’s research ideas. My proposal is to investigate other architecture practices, different from the conventional ones, focusing on the low-middle classes' environment. The conventional practice is understood as the group of procedures generally used in architecture Brazilian offices. Broadly speaking, this practice is restricted to pre steps that shape the design as a closed process with beginning, middle and end.

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¹ KAPP, Silke, in her text "Por que teoria crítica da arquitetura? (Why a critical theory of architecture? - our translation), proposes to call all spaces modified by men’s work as architecture. This understanding will be adopted in the present article.
This process has been insufficient and inadequate to meet certain types of demands, especially the low-middle classes’ ones. These people don’t believe they can afford the cost of an architect’s work or simply do not need or do not want a whole architectural project, but just ideas, tips and reviews. The conventional practice is historically consolidated in the context of bigger projects for wealthy clients, such as the State and other institutions, the upper class and private companies. Currently, it has also been used in projects for the middle classes’ customers, but with an obvious imbalance to the demands. Because the middle classes produce a huge number of buildings on their own initiative, they call for architects’ technical assistance very sporadically. Some researches indicate that this imbalance is due to the fact that common people, "non-architects”, tend to understand the design and the building as an open process or as a little simple request of advice. The solutions tend to be closed and overly formalized, which frustrates both parties, as often do not meet the demands and the expectations involved. The result of hours and hours of well prepared technical drawing can easily frustrate clients and architects because many times can not afford with their both demands.

An illustrative picture of the architect builder

As architects have become accustomed to deal with high-classes customers, they do not recognize the demands of the middle classes as a part of their work scope. It is possible that this deviation has origins in the way the profession has been built throughout history. Until the beginning of Middle Ages, the architect was an anonymous professional. At that time, the design was not relevant because the work was made by groups and the craftsman should follow his master’s geometric rules, building its share. The expertise of the profession was consolidated during the Renaissance and on pre-capitalist bases, strengthened by the emergence of perspective. Every social group that owned a particular economic segment could create layers of intellectuals who would give them a kind of their own function's conscience. Then, the architect’s profession came to give support to the royalty and later, to the bourgeoisie. Even today, to be an architect refers to have an aesthetic feeling and to know erudition symbols, at least in Brazil. Nowadays, in this country, a surge of economic development takes place, which ultimately creates prosperous conditions that heats the building market. Not just the upper classes contribute to this market by purchasing and selling properties, but the lower classes also moves in this direction, in its own pace. It has never been sold
so much quantity of building materials, increasing the periphery and the center sellers’ committees. However, a historically barrier is seen between architects and the popular classes. At the same time, these people do not recognize the architect as a service provider, although he has duties to perform technical activities that fill their needs in.

Flusser’s ideas about design and culture are very suitable to discuss the issues concerning the practice of architecture in the Brazilian society. It is important to highlight that Brazilian architecture is here analyzed in a critical way through the role and function of the architect in this society. His books such as The shape of things: a philosophy of design, Writings, Fenomenologia do Brasileiro and Towards a philosophy of photography bring arguments that can also be used to explain the gap cited above. Drawing from these readings, the first and central argument of this paper is the necessity for dialogical practices; the second argument concerns the origin of the genuine Brazilian man, and the last argument regards the concept of “to play” during the establishment of new ways of action.

Flusser’s books: theoretical basis
The main intention is to raise a theoretical discussion between Flusser’s concepts of dialogue and its pertinence with the architectural practice. Some examples of dialogue in Brazilian self-production processes and criticisms of the traditional architectural design process are quite illustrations of the discussion. For that, it is necessary to briefly show what it is called as a traditional architectural practice to then introduce the Flusser’s figure.

**The architect's practice**

It will quickly describe the architectural practice commonly adopted in order to justify the imminent need for a counterpoint. This practice has been characterized by the concentration of work at the offices and its consequent removal from the building site. In these offices, the product offered by the professionals are documents drawn up by digital technical design and three-dimensional modeling. The design process from its beginning to the end happens through some steps. Of course, depending on the kind and size of the service this routine tends to vary. In this case, our argument is directly focused in the practice with the user-owner of small and medium buildings such as houses, apartments and small shops, for example.

In the first contact with the client, the architect tries to understand what the demands are, visit the area to be built and prepare a price proposal. There is no common sense that features how this first contact must happen or that describes a method of charging for the work. These issues vary widely among the professionals and remain unknown by most architects. The development of a services contract, where are minimally described the obligations of both, the architect and the client, is the only practice that has been adopted by the majority. After this first stage, very "bureaucratic" and thus unpleasant for most architects, they work in the "Preliminary Study," in which are investigated the demands brought by the client. The goal is to reach a first brainstorm of ideas and to develop a kind of initial design, led to the client's approval. Generally, the architect tries to sell his product and hopes that the customer likes of what is being offered. If the client does not approve the first draft, others are drawn up until it is "fully" satisfied. Only now, begins the *Projeto Executivo* (Executive Design) in which all information for the implementation of the area to be built is supposedly provided and the exchange of information between professionals will happen, but rarely is it led by the architect. His presence in the building site is occasional and usually it happens if requested by the team of engineers, workers or the owner.

The practice traditionally adopted in these architecture offices disadvantages dialogue because they less consider the real economic, social and behavioral conditions of the clients as they should. They are rooted in a fragmented costume, which impoverishes the process of design. Even so many architects still believe that the architectural design can be a finished product. What usually happens is the little sparing use of this product, usually in the form of drawing. The building process generally take other routes, guided by workers, by the users and by the architect himself, that deals
with the most diverse and unpredictable situations not described in technical drawing sheets prepared by his office. It is not intended to encourage the understanding of designs as products, but rather the opposite. In fact, it is intended to encourage another kind of practice, which promotes dialogical relations among the speaker (the architect and stakeholders), the workers, the engineers and the users. The main hypothesis is that improvements are possible with the adoption of other practices, which could impact in the quality of the built space but also in the quality of the work itself, making the architectural processes less deteriorating and more accessible for everyone involved.

So far, we believe that the procedures usually adopted do not take clients either architects to satisfaction, requiring from them other types of practices. The main target of my master research is to study some new practices and its possible benefits.

With the decline of traditional middle class, represented by the classes called "A" and "B", the class "C", whose salaries range to just over £300, is the most grown recently in the context of their purchasing power, in Brazil. With the economy heated, there are more lines of credit available, reflecting the economic policy adopted, which causes substantial increases in consumption of goods such as vehicles, electronics and building materials. All the time, the mass media tells us about new funds for construction materials and reforms of housing, aiming to remedy new demands from this kind of people. This does not make the architect’s presence a rule but an exception. Nevertheless, a large number of young architectural practices has been constantly approached by these potential clients, though their demands are never that of usual clients. Sometimes they only need technical advices or cannot afford the usual architectural package. Thus, it is urgent to start the discussion of an alternative design process to suit this new demand.

A typical brazilian low middle class family.

**Flusser’s concept of dialogue**
Flusser is a Czech philosopher who had lived for 30 years in Brazil and in other countries, before died tragically in his hometown, Prague, 70 years later, in 1991. In Brazil, he became member of the Brazilian Institute of Philosophy and Professor of Philosophy in São Paulo. He wrote several books, some of them published only in Portuguese. He wrote about philosophy of daily life in the "Folha de São Paulo", one of the most important Brazilian newspapers, until 1972 when he moved to Italy. In Brazil, he produced much of his work, mostly about design and communication. In his texts, he adopts a critical stance, free of jargon or banners of any kind. He developed a rather objective reasoning and, at the same time, assumes an understanding about the Brazilian culture as a genuine foreign man. He took this approach with simplicity, as we could find in the first pages of the book Fenomenologia do Brasileiro. As he faces the Brazilian culture in a so original way, it is appropriate to take his speech also to the architecture, as an example of brazilian cultural event. Flusser presents us a clear and simple seducing written work which narrow the distance between the author and his readers. The issues about design and communication are, for him, unfolding of a much broader phenomenon: process of decoding our experiences. Actions produce things, shaped in accordance with some intentions. So, information means to shape things. To shape, as well as the architect does, is a way to produce objects, to transform the nature, men and their relationships. Flusser creates and re-visits concepts establishing connections between them. These are the theoretical principals under which this article was written. A perfect understanding of the concepts covered by Flusser is necessary. So, like in his book "Towards a philosophy of photography," a brief reminder of his peculiar terminology is presented below:

**Apparatus:** a toy which simulates thought.

**Code:** a system of signs ordered by rules.

**Functionnaire:** a person who plays with and as a function of an apparatus.

**Information:** an improbable configuration.

**Informing:** (1) to produce improbable configurations; (2) to impress this upon objects.

**Object:** a thing which stands in our way.

**Playing:** an activity which is own-purpose.

**Photographer:** a person who tries to make photographs with information not contained in the camera program.

**Production:** the activity which transports a thing from nature into culture.

**Program:** a game of combinations with clear and distinct elements.

**Symbol:** a consciously or unconsciously conventionalized sign.

**Technical Image:** an image produced by an apparatus.

**Toy:** an object to be played with.

**Work:** the activity which produces and informs objects.

As we said, Flusser’s ideas are quite appropriate to discuss the practice of architects in this society, mainly when we consider the brazilian enviroment. Here, arguments to explain the great gap between architects and low-middle class self-producers will be shown. Flusser’s essays defend the
salvation of the culture through a balance between dialogue and speech, the search for a new man and the fleeing from apparatus through playing, concepts that will be well analyzed in the lines to follow.

Let’s begin with the expression “fleeing from apparatus”. It immediately brings a dichotomy: situation where it diverts the game, without leaving it. The logic developed by Flusser to explain the society through a "philosophy of photography” allows us to understand the figure of the architect by the photographer’s:

Functionnaires, games and photographers: a short scope of Flusser’s concerns.

“Os caminhos tortuosos do fotógrafo visam driblar as intenções escondidas nos objetos.” 2 (FLUSSER, 1985, p.18)

The architects who can establish different working relations with users and their houses (or places) could be really playing with apparatus, going out from what Flusser calls “meta-program”, like groups of connected programs working together, with similar objectives. That would establish new working relations with people shortly assisted by architects: the low-middle classes, located on non-central neighborhoods, but not necessarily on the peripherals. In such cases, the architect is rarely present and the self-production is the dominant practice.

According to Flusser, culture is the set of objects produced by men. Transporting this idea to the issue of the construction and the architecture it’s easy to understand the term "dialogue". The meaning of the word "object" is found in its own synthesis: "a thing which stands in our way". The objects brought from nature and modified by men from different cultures reflect the society’s spirit of that group of people. Objects are extracted from nature with instruments, the extensions of human organs. The action involved in getting and transforming the objects is named "work". The result of the men’s work could be called "masterpiece". This whole process is just possible because of the existence of "apparatus". Who acts according to this is a kind of functionnaire, since he lives according to schedules, as a machine. For instance, let’s take the photography realm. The photographer is a functionnaire who acts according to the camera apparatus. His actions are conditioned by a programming. As a result, he produces technical images.

2 "The tortuous paths of the photographer intended to dribble the intentions hidden in objects." (our translation).
Objects produced by men.

Programs re-fuel and maintain themselves keeping men acting for apparatus’ orders. Apparatus are in everywhere and have any form. They may be advertising, commercial, industrial and informational. Since apparatus work automatically, it could be natural to think about a possible emancipation of men from work. However, it does not occur. Apparatus could release a man from his work, but unfortunately he would be a fonctionnaire of other apparatus. And a continuous process without a visible end is then consisted. The contemporary man even “off”, is available but not released. He just works according to other appliances, being the known fonctionnaire. This set of forces and actions contributes to the maintenance of meta-programs, shaping our society.

[...] os programadores de determinado programa são funcionários de um metaprograma, e não programam em função de uma decisão sua, mas em função do metaprograma. De maneira que os aparelhos não podem ter proprietários que os utilizem em função de seus próprios interesses, como no caso das máquinas. O aparelho fotográfico funciona em função dos interesses da fábrica, e esta, em função dos interesses do parque industrial. E assim ad infinitum. 3 (FLUSSER, 1985, p.16)

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3 “The developers of a particular program don’t plan in accordance with themselves, but in accordance with a meta-program, whose are its fonctionnaires. In order that, apparatus may not have owners who use them according to their own interests, like the machine case. The photographic camera works for industries interests and these in accordance with the industrial park’s interests.” (our translation).
The contemporary man, even acting automatically, is not in a state of freedom. On the contrary, he acquired a position of meta-program’s functionnaire, without being fully conscious of his condition. The Western countries are a good example: they widely announce their state of freedom, but their population is just like a functionnaire army. Therefore, the current Western spirit reflects a deep alienation and several facts of daily life are little or nothing questioned. Some of them are misunderstood as natural but indeed they aren’t.

Let’s take as examples the building and the drawing. The technical design is the way information is encoded to be transmitted to the building workers. In the specific case of mass architecture and construction, this kind of design hardly cooperates in the progress of the construction, because it contains many dispensable elements and unimportant information. Architects, historically away from the areas to be built, are trained to produce drawings and simulations. However, the real constructions have been made without architects and without designs. What is produced at the studios can be considered a "non-thing", poorly corresponding to the real building. That explains the architect’s divested behavior. Most of time he is not a builder, he is just a designer. Architects are smart to represent ideas in two or three dimensions, what have a practical utility that is not the building itself.
Technical drawings

The "civilized" west world used to think in "lines", outlining arguments through ordered plans. As in the reading of texts, the understanding of the technical drawing is done from left to right and from top to down. The Ptolemaic way allows us to create apparatus that can demonstrate phenomena afterwards. At the same time, the standardized architectural drawing was never central to build many of the existing constructions. This does not necessarily mean that the adoption of any apparatus for information is never required. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the design is later the construction. There is still an important distinction: the development of technical drawings in design process does not guarantee transmission of information, and in several times, it is necessary to eliminate some of the drawing sheets. The issue is not the drawing itself. It is rather on how to deal simultaneously with the linear thinking that governs the development of drawings with the technical images produced and with true building.
According to Flusser, "things" are objects with which we meet throughout life. He calls them "problems". If for Flusser, "to live means going toward death," "to live" would mean to solve problems to die. Thus, the problems are things - obstacles in the path - which are either solved or are forgotten. These assertions serve as a basis for understanding the concept of "non-thing." As anti-model of things, Flusser identifies and characterizes the "non-things" as intangible information that replaces the real ones. They are intangible, however have a high potential to be coded. The immaterial information is in everywhere, acquires various shapes and functions and replaces the real things. There is no difference between a “non-thing” and the architectural drawing: they must be deciphered by an expert because users or workers rarely can read them. So, it is acceptable to consider the architectural drawings as "non-things."

The universe of information and technical images, produced by apparatus, has increased considerably and has its major allies in the cultural industry. Consumption has really increased in the civil construction field, in varied degrees, according to the regions and with the levels of income. The interests, not only the construction field ones, have increased not in the things themselves but in the information value they carry or they require. Consequently, people want to have information more than things. Drawing is consumable because is palatable and easy to count: the sheets in general are numbered. Both the technical drawing and the three-dimensional pictures are simulations of other ones: they represent someone else's idea. Thus, because this information is "nothing", just an object of consumption and control, the architect remains far from the construction itself.

When a text is read, the information is processed in phases. On the other hand, while observing a picture, the impact tends to be more direct and immediate. Decode information through lines is historical and traditional. Decode information through images is non-historic, because it does not comply with a convention of linear ordering or visual interpretation. The drawing, recognized as an inefficient mechanism, is been substituted by technical images. The technical images, post-historical mechanisms, may even lead to better understandings about space, but does not necessarily eliminate misunderstandings of all kinds, especially when architects try to convince clients. What is shown can not be minimally feasible, for example. What is on the paper can acquire status of achievement not just for the customer, but also for the architect himself. It is a fiction, an imaginary concept communicated by mass media. The information represented by images could be more powerful, while information formed by linear apparatus could become poorer in content. This is what has occurring in architecture drawings: full of useless information, too hard to decipher.
Away from the building site, the architect does not create in its fullness, but is restricted to create representations. So, the design understood as a finished product would be able to interventions and adjustments. The problem is that this kind of event is not been treated with naturalness because the conventional design methods, stressed by technical drawings, are not prepared for surprises. Even dealing with the conventional architectural design, the architect doesn’t govern the site’s rules itself, as curiously mentions Paulo Bicca, a controversial Brazilian architect, known by his book “Arquiteto – A mascara e a face”, where he shows us the other face of the architect’s profession as a propellant and a reproducer of the division of labor. In accordance with Flusser, Bicca states the architect is also a functionnaire:

“Esse novo homem que nasce ao nosso redor e em nosso próprio interior de fato carece de mãos (ist landlos). Ele não lida (behandelt) mais com as coisas, e por isso não se pode mais falar de suas ações concretas (Handlungen), de sua práxis ou mesmo de seu trabalho.”  

(FLUSSER, 2007, P.58)

The society of the future is basically split into two big groups: one composed by programmers, who dictate and plan the programs; and another composed by those that act in accordance with the program. Generally, the architect acts in accordance with programs: design in obedience of apparatus. The professional field acts in what governs a lot of relations: operates on the basis of apparatus as the market, the cultural and building materials industry. The architect remains connected to a supposedly scientific work, but that actually built nothing. Despite the use of representation techniques such as drawing and modeling, in many cases, the architect has no power in major decisions, being a mere pawn. He is only a great interests’ instrument of action, where labor relations, in and outside the building-site, are already consolidated. Those relations are guided not only by drawing but by other domination mechanisms as the labour laws. If architects work for capitalist companies, in some how they agree and promote with the principles of that kind of institution. Even when they work as autonomous, in their own offices, they act in accordance with those principles. The contractor dominates the shares. Working with low-middle classes people offers possibilities guided by other kinds of action that could take us towards the individuals, their needs and conditions, allowing an escape from market rules and from what is imposed by big companies.

Acting in accordance with apparatus is the same as obey the meta-program’s monologue. In that way, the dialogue becomes undesirable because does not cooperate with the world governed and maintained by apparatus and functionnaires. On the opposite, the resulting acts from dialogue can be set as what Flusser calls as dribble: alternatives to escape from the program dodging certain

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4 This new man is born around us and in our own interior lacks hands (ist landlos). He does not deal (behandelt) with things anymore, and therefore can no longer talk about his concrete actions (Handlungen), his practice or even of his work. (our translation).
routes. The dialogue brings new information and allows the emergence of other demands, implications, results and concerns, turning men free from being functionnaires.

The architectural production as well as other culture spheres, works in the meta-program, what deprives us from freedom and therefore generates alienation. What illustrates this situation is the missing architects’ work, as a service provider, from the low-middle classes’ demands. In the popular mass building there is almost no architect, always seen as a professional that works for the wealthy people. The mass building doesn’t fit on the architecture scope.

![Examples of a brazilian ordinary building where architects rarely are present.](image)

It is not intended, however, to encourage the presence of the architect in this field, just looking for new niches and new ways for making easy money. That could be also considered an act in the apparatus way, operating according to a marketing logic, what could be an incoherency. It is strange and curious to think about how the low-middle class’ buildings are not an architects’ subject. Should architecture be restricted to the beaux arts field, as a part of the erudite culture? Therefore, such buildings should not be understood as Architecture? They are all possibilities. Nevertheless, in this article this context is being analyzed through another point of view.

There are just few studies about the architect’s participation in Brazilian low-middle classes’ self-production. However this fact does not stop us to state: if ordinary construction is also a subject for architects, there is no convincing statement to justify their absence from middle classes’ building. The authorship, the concern about users’ conditions and wishes rather than architects’ own desires are still taboos. The architect often takes place above the users and not on their side. Possible dialogues are limited or not happen at all. The architect’s business conduct usually do not match with the users’ real need. The gap between them goes beyond that frequently called "good architecture", made of modern images or a bunch of well done architectural drawing sheets. According to Flusser, all these are just technical images, representations produced by apparatus, made by instruments, therefore limited by programs.

The cultural industry’s role, specifically the advertising (or the advertising’s apparatus) is also responsible for the legitimacy of the perfect “happy family” image, usually showed in marketing campaigns and in the architectural magazines as examples of a life style that people should follow.
Images of quality of life, of well being and of good aesthetic feeling are built. The self-produced houses symbolize a poor architecture. They are built with the families’ own resources and on a small scale. This does not necessarily imply in bad, wet, poorly, unpleasant or even uninhabitable spaces. The symbols of quality that directly or indirectly come to us through advertising images rarely show us the daily low-middle classes’ building. These constructions seem to be devoid of a cultural value. This If we intend to reiterate that "culture" is the set of objects produced by men, according to Flusser’s ideas, the low-middle classes building are nothing more than their cultural background mirror.

Typical brazilian advertising of housing enterprises.

The conclusion is simple: when a society underestimates these types of buildings, not recognizing their important symbolic value, the market feeds the people’s imagination with desires and needs. It is difficult for the professional, even when acting as a functionaire, to establish dialogues. Architects are used to work in the traditional way, which is not appropriated to supply those people's needs. Without dialogue, it becomes hard to maintain and create solid relationships. These should be perceived, treated and re-visited constantly through dialogue in any design, for any customer. The architectural practice often refuses the dialogue or does it so superficially. Then, the architect’s job does not consider itself prepared to the low-income architectural reality. In an opposite way, the architect tends to obey the "good architecture" demands. Thus, the architect’s work is strongly guided by the meta-program. It is difficult to establish more fruitful working relationships with other demands in specific contexts, especially in less wealthy classes.

Much of architectural production processes have been long, expensive and distant from some user's life. The idea of finished design hampers subsequent changes, which is unthinkable in everyday popular architecture, for example. At the same time, the processes of design do not show themselves opened and adaptable to different users and demands. This fact well reflects the absence of dialogue. The architect does not often act as a listener and, as a result, does not give answers. Even in this situation, the drawing does not become a facilitator, but prejudices dialogical processes. Both architects and the people usually involved (public power suppliers, workers and users) – are unable to establish effective dialogues among themselves. All of them act in a planned way.

To answer positively to the complexity that the dialogue requires, positions that weaken the apparatus are demanded. The architect got accustomed to be a functionaire and has difficulties in being free. Not just architects live in this scheme, but the whole of society. It is necessary to adopt
another behavior. The main object is not to call for new niche markets, but to question about the architect’s role and mainly to locate him in this society, with its necessities and demands. Perhaps the dialogue is a good way to call "The Architecture" of just "architecture", what greater simplify and release the relationships.

**Elements of dialogue**

In the dictionary dialogue means "a conversation between two or more people". That requires speakers and interlocutors making input and output of information. When examining the buildings, regardless of conditions such as level of income, location and size, the dialogue is a crucial tool for the activities happen coherently. Coherent means a good combination of various activities that are part of a whole work. To get it, dialogue is the basis: the communication between those involved. It is a virtuous circle, a logical system based on a never-ending return.

In accordance to Flusser, the human communication process is artificial. It consists of discoveries and tools organized in codes. The artificial nature of human communication becomes so absorbed by customs that becomes unconscious. Thus, one of the objectives of the codes that surround us is to force us to forget that they are artificial instruments that forge representations. "Como os homens decidem produzir informações e como elas devem ser representadas?" Flusser himself responds to this issue saying that there are two ways to exchange information. One way is the discourse, which preserves the information in order to make them resist the nature. The other way would be the dialogic one, where information is exchanged by the synthesis of new information. These mean that to establish a real communication, one kind of communication can not happen without the other one. For a real dialogue takes place there must be, first of all, a speech (new information emerged from things previously produced). However, a big gap makes these types different, which is readily apparent during building process. There, the information is processed much as monologues than dialogues, which supposedly would be the driving force of architecture. Flusser still believes that an ideal situation would be the balance between speeches and dialogues. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the crisis of culture and media is manifested not by mere lack of information, but by the absence of dialogue or an imbalance with the speeches. There is a real link between meaning and structure, between speech / dialogue and shape. Information outlines things.

Transferring these subjects to the logic of the building defended here, three basic elements could be elected: people, resources and desires.

We still need people to make the intellectual and physical work of a building-site. There are several ways to use them. When the builder is the owner, there is a self-building process. In this case, the

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5 How men produce information and decide the way they should be represented? (our translation).
user not just decides about spaces, but also on the use of available resources and materials. He can also do the physical-manual work; chooses his team and the techniques to be used. This situation is typical of low-income people, in large and small city peripheries and also in slums. The ways of building are empirical and adopt rudimentary techniques, generally transmitted orally. In such cases, the dialogue tends to be intense and recurrent. The building works as a living organism. The needs arise during the work and the lack of design - which does not imply in a lack of planning – always allows new actions. The intellectual work is not separated from the manual and there is no expectation about a completed design. Indeed, the limitation of resources is a fact and it brings some consequences. The appearance is rarely the main plan. Instead, the fulfilling of specific needs and the maintenance of available resources are the objectives to be accomplished during the building process. Many times, there is a variety of technical problems such as an excessive spending of materials. These problems usually do not bring serious and immediate consequences to the buildings, but they are a great sign about this latent demand. A special assistance would be welcome in such cases, because it could avoid unnecessary costs.

The opposite of this situation, when generally architects or engineers are hired, is the traditional way to design and build, recognized as a standard procedure. In this case, an intense work fragmentation is observed, since the manual work is obligatory. It is preceded by the architectural design and also depends on other projects development such as structural calculating and electrical-hydraulic design. The basic assumption is that building must begin only after the design is finished, which minimizes the dialogue. So, the logic of speech is more frequent, because it maintains existing information. The architect or the engineer usually uses special apparatus to transmit information and to coordinate activities. The design through the drawing is the instrument most used for that and it has proven to be quite inefficient, not dialogic.

When the owner defines the application of resources and the configuration of spaces, but does not act directly on the job, it is a self-production process. In this case, there is the hiring of manual work, but not of intellectual work. There is a contract of employment rather than simple cooperation. The owner generally knows about his needs, but does not know about building techniques. Because of that, the techniques used are generally defined by the worker, often jointly with the user. Clearly, there is less fragmentation of the job and no design made in the traditional way. Users and worker’s sketches frequently coordinate the job and guarantee communication. This type of construction, known as the Brazilian mass popular building, is frequently found in lower middle-class neighborhoods of cities. Architects rarely are required, reporting the lack of preparation of architecture field to deal with this type of demand. The spatial and technical problems faced by the residents of these buildings are not a subject to architects. The designs offered by them usually do not argue with these people’s needs, because it is unable to supply the clients’ demands. The architects are traditionally listed as culturally superior, as people with a refined aesthetic judgment. The low-middle classes’ building are marginalized in architecture field even when creative and functional solutions are present, compatible to the needs of those people.
On the contrary, popular buildings are named as "non-architectural" places, except for very specific popular culture features that have been reminded by the media and currently occupy a status of kitsch or picturesque. It’s visible that in self-production field there is a great potential for a balance between discourse and dialogue.

The second cited is the resources: goods that make spaces available. The financial resources allow the purchase of materials and recruitment of labor. It is therefore crucial in the choice of materials and priorities. The material resources can be achieved without the purchase, through donations and recycling. In self-construction and self-production cases who decide on the use of resources is the owner. In the traditional way, decisions about the use of resources, at first, shall be decided by the designer, because he is the one who suggested materials. The architect often has formal and aesthetic intentions which are most of the time, dispensable forward the user's desires or necessities. This is more frequent in low income situation. The architect did not get accustomed to deal with this level of choices, needs and priorities. To dialog, even when the cultural or intellectual level is not equivalent, is something else than a mere compliment of a needs list. Dialogue offers what is really necessary. Often, people need small solutions, which is not part of the architects’ scope. These specific actions could be dialogical while the usual model seems to be essentially discursive, as a monologue.

The third element for dialoging is the desire. For constructive interferences, it is necessary to desire. To work with needs and desires is necessary to deal with a subtle limit between trial and alienation. In self-building and self-producing processes the user's desire is a guide by which taken attitudes are justified without big problems. When the architect is present in changes and decisions, there is one more factor to be attended: the own architect's desire. This professional tends to insert in his client's design his own desires, formal or aesthetic ones and even priorities, as if he could know about those questions more than the user. Architects have specific technical knowledge but should not overlap (and even not hide) the space users' experience themselves.

Dealing with users’ desires and needs, which are functionnaires of a meta-program, as the architects are, is too difficult because we could argue if these desires are really legitimate. To deal with these desires and at the same time to dribble the apparatus is an issue that goes beyond architecture, as a part of cultural events, set of produced objects. The distinction between legitimate needs or desires and illegitimate ones is not fully possible. People can have their needs supplied, even if they are scheduled. Architects even when are escaping from apparatus, could order procedures, as apparatus' functionnaires. If somehow the architect could take users to critical questions about their own desires, they would have done much more than the simple reproduction of programmed models. The most important is to understand that the architect or the architecture alone can not establish new paradigms, because of the vicious circle of crisis in which the culture is found. The operation of this circle relies on many other agents and may keep the architects serving as functionnaires. Anyway, the architect's work (in the imposition of discursive desires and needs
or as an agent of technical solutions) is also ruled by a meta-program. So, it becomes complicated to establish dialogical working relations with the demands and specific settings for each user.

When we analyze the desire in popular field, we realize that the cultural industry's influence is a crucial point, mainly because of the lack of resources. The desires are many, often represented by cultural status symbols, which crowd the people imagination rather than real needs. In all cases, the user just acts in accordance with their wishes and desires, regardless of any previously data order. In many times, because of the distance between the user and the architect, what is determinate in a design has little or no value. At the same time, the architect influenced by pictures that show a supposed “good” architecture and deceived by apparatus, tends to impose its will, regardless the client’s reality. Needs and desires, unlike the other elements of dialogue, are doubly tense: if there is the possibility to impose the architect’s will to the user, there is also the omission of himself from a critical position forward client’s desires and needs. A third path could be guaranteed through dialogical relations between the several parties. The architect can not classify legitimate or illegitimate desires, but can raise the criticism. At the same time, could there be in popular buildings professionals to guide the work towards the improvement of living and better use of resources? Given the elitist position to architects, it is doubtful. The architect, also a functionaire of the cultural industry does not recognize this market a good field of expertise. Again, this is just called "poor architecture”.

The gap between the architect, as he actually works, and low-middle class customers brings questions about his own practice. His actions, already consolidated and supported by the market take us to understand how the production of the space in the metropolis happens, its limits and results. The production of space in suburbs brings authentic elements not so common in places where the formal production usually happens. Such authenticity may be the result of the performance of engaged people, both in self-production as in self-building. The design is considerate as a continuous and open process, as the production of many. In such cases, the word "dialogue" can be the key element filling this gap.
In the still untitled Master’s research of the author, coordinated by Professor Silke Kapp, it was used an alternative design process, developed by the Argentine architect Rodolfo Livingston to attend low-middle class clients in Argentina and Cuba. The teachings of Livingston show us an important legacy mainly in what he calls the "Estrategias para Escuchar." In many cases in Cuba and Argentina, Livingston used a type of informal but professional attend, which makes the architect a less romantic figure, but a service provider. The architect can operate many services and can use his technical framework. Therefore, he becomes more a partner in the client’s decisions than a dictator of shapes. As also a part of the Master’s research, this method has been tested with real customers in the city of Belo Horizonte and its metropolitan region. We have been adding some variations, proposed and accepted through the experiments. The main idea is that groups of architects can be formed to work, after the initial experiments tested by the author, so that their behavior in the face of alternative procedures can also be evaluated. Thus, more tests can be done, which brings us a greater amount of information in shorter periods of time.

The method was created from Livingston’s experiences in building a group of houses in the city of Baracoa, in Cuba, during the ’60s. For Livingston, it is a participatory method, where the plans (let’s avoid to call them designs) are done with great participation in the election of the user’s demands and solutions. In this method, first of all, the clients really need to understand how the architect’s job happens. It is established what Livingston calls "pact" between the client

Rodolfo Livignston’s book: “El método”.

and architect. This is described in a document called "Route of Work" where the content, dates and values for the stages of services are known and dated. This route is just a guide and may be

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6 Strategies to listen to. (our translation).
interrupted in any time by the client. It has 8 steps, divided into 2 phases where the basic premise is to listen to the people carefully. They are:

1. **Pre-interview:** is usually done by telephone. It’s the first contact between client and architect. In this moment the architect must explain to the client how his system works.

2. **The pact:** it is the first meeting between architect and client. It is the most important stage of the whole process, because in this phase the main listening happens. The author invented different strategies for listening through games and some activities with the clients. The meeting should happen in the architect’s office and never in the client’s place. The pact is signed and the customer will know about his role in the process, how much he should pay for the interview and for the rest of the process if the process follows.

3. **Site - Client:** the architect visits the place. In this visit, he will study its conditions – sizes, lights, directions. He must review the first interview with the clients in order to remember something forgotten or to consider new issues, for example.

4. **Presentation of options:** some proposes are done and presented by the architect to handle the client’s demands, needs and desires.

5. **Return:** the clients choose some option, or combine them.

6. **Final options:** the architect reviews the options first proposed in accordance with the client’s return.

7. **User’s guide - Listening:** the architect and the clients talk about their preferences and technical issues such as finishes, models of doors and windows, colors and so on. The steps of the construction are also chosen.

8. **User’s guide:** after listening, the architect makes UM: User’s Manual, with all the information necessary for carrying out the work.

The tests with this procedure are being carried out since last August through advertisements in neighborhood newspapers and with leafleting in building materials stores, where much of the low-middle class families go shopping. Until the present moment, 3 couples were attended and another 6 phone calls were received, but that did not engage the services.
Leaflet distributed in stores and published in newspapers.

The first case was a house located on the outskirts of the metropolitan area of Belo Horizonte, where a 5 people family – husband, wife and three children live. It was quite interesting, mainly because of the nature of the resident’s speech before engaging the service, when they were deciding on the hiring. It lasts about a week for they contract the service. On the phone, they repeated several times they were a simple family, fearing to hire something perhaps they could not afford. Their intention is to make some changes in the house, increasing the kitchen and the couple’s bedroom size in order to meet their current activities.
Hand-made drawings produced for the second attended family.

The second one was a new building case: a young couple’s house. They had no children and the site was also in the peripheral area. The most curious in this situation was the architect’s difficulty in define the best way to represent the plan. The architect was really scared about to pre-determine the spaces. As in the previous case, the most substantial in the process was the moment of listening to the clients. When the planning process really began, we could see how the user’s needs and desires, thoroughly treated in the interview, could direct the plan. It is important to note, however, that this had never resulted in an alienated architect’s position. On the opposite, the moment of listening could be understood as the first step for a real communication between the engaged parts. From that moment beyond, when a first contact with the client’s speech happens, the communication becomes open to receive much interference that would shape the real demands of customer. That is the keys for this kind of planning. The architect’s responses establish dialogues with the client’s ones.

Model produced to the second case. It was noticed how the Sketch-up software improves the understanding.

The third case was also with a young couple without children. The house bought by them, which had just been built, was the object of reform. The couple’s intention was to create more rooms in the house, to meet other activities, as they told in the Pact, the only step done until the present date. As this case is still in progress and probably the architect might use the same techniques like those used in the first case, where drawings were hand-made and transparent papers were used to show the wall’s changes by steps. Moreover, the furniture was all drawn and cut to pieces to be moved on the drawings. Thus, both the demolition-construction and the scale of the places were easily understood. Traditionally, this is shown by architects through plants over of technical drawing
symbols that hinder the client’s understanding. The architect chose the universal symbols such as arrows and letters, more appropriate to this kind of procedure.

![Client’s drawings shows their own solutions for their necessities](image)

**Conclusions**

As shown, this article intended to be a critical view about the architect’s role in Brazilian context of building. For that, the concepts *alienation* and *culture*, hardly discussed in the book *Fenomenologia do Brasileiro*, are considered key words. First of all, for new possibilities of action, the practice must happen in a dialogical way: into its own context, such in the financial question, as historical, sociological and even personnel. This can result in changes on architect’s work, from a controller of procedures to a real partner with the same agents, becoming a contributor of those same processes.

The Brazilian architect intends to modify the environment where he is placed more than tries to identify signs of his non-historical culture, which could lead him to freedom. He intends to provide a historical culture even being a non-historical man.

According to Flusser, Brazilian people (including architects) feel wronged at the history and try to assert themselves all the time. This is the problem of delayed. The architect tries to translate his architecture through appropriate signs, never experienced. These signs can be understood as traditional architectural symbols, which little reference to truly local values. At the same time, the
signs deny that the architectural production happens in terms of apparatus: comply with the market economy, which mayor interest is in the capital increment.

Flusser tells us that who engages to became a real Brazilian man, succeeds when is able to break with delayed and articulates in its non-historic field, assuming their culture in so faithful and creative ways. The main idea is not to arrest scheduled models, but to break with them, escaping from the programs.

About divestment the Brazilian man tries to place himself in a historical place by his complete submission to apparatus, working in accordance with efficient gears. Brazilian architect has chances to be free when breaks with apparatus, but often wants to act as a functionnaire, like in central countries, an example of a historical culture “to be followed”.

If Brazilian bourgeois were genuine, they would tend to play with apparatus and to subvert them, like the worker does to survive, recreating a new man. But their historical position escapes through a false idea of culture. It is not different with the architect. Obviously “mimetic and imported”, his erudition takes the traditional form of the modernist architect, falsely committed to their field.

The resistance to assimilate the architecture as a popular cultural event is the portrait of the distance between the architect and popular issues. If culture is the set of produced objects, the anonymous or standalone production of peripheral buildings could also be considered examples of an authentic Brazilian architecture.
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