

CONSERVATION CRITERIA FOR HERITAGE IN EVOLUTION

J.A. García- Esparza ^a

^aDept. of Mechanical and Construction Engineering, University Jaume I, 12071 Castellón de la Plana, Spain –
juan.garcia@emc.uji.es

KEY WORDS: farmhouses, *barraca*, heritage, conservation criteria, new perceptions.

ABSTRACT

The study provides a metric analysis of the *barraca*, a typical one-story thatched farmhouse in the Valencia area, and analyzes its construction and pathology. It presents a breakdown of the construction's constituent parts through diagrams to offer a greater understanding of its creation and subsequent transformation processes.

The study departs from the strict reinterpretation of traditional building techniques by adopting an approach that examines the use of its component materials, thus furthering understanding of types of intervention that are compatible with conservation.

The paper is the result of several years' research that records the last centenary *barracas* that have survived in Valencia and the surrounding areas. It establishes analogies with other areas at a national and international level and details the intricacy of its maintenance and promotion through a description of the building process and traditional techniques, since the study of popular housing cannot be separated from the characteristics of its habitat, that is, its physical environment.

Of the various positions from which popular housing can be studied, I take an architectural and ethnographic position, with the aim of shedding new light on the development of the *barraca*, thus allowing us to examine and correctly classify the extremely poor legacy that remains today, and avoid ambiguity or misinterpretations.

Architectural descriptions can take different forms: vernacular, related to a place, territory or country; native, related to the land or territory; typical, offering a quaint and delightful image; traditional, set in the transmission of customs and manners; self-constructed, built by the owner; without architects, not designed by experts or builders, etc. However, Spanish history has adopted the term 'popular', as was widely used in the 1920s and 30s (Torres Balbás, 1933).

The paper illustrates this vernacular construction, located on the Mediterranean coast, through analyzed samples showing how various construction phases have satisfied the needs of their inhabitants and have always been highly valued by them. (L'escribà, 1978).

I attempt to provide not only a documentary record, but a guide for further research on old types of popular housing that are now gradually disappearing. It should be remembered that although many settlements are considered to be insignificant, ordinary and humble, the true spirit of their societies lies within them.

HISTORICAL PERCEPTIONS

In answer to the pure intellectuals who claimed that man's true dignity lies in knowledge, Kant proclaimed "the supremacy of practical reason", according to which man is not only a thinker, but above all an active human being. (Lichtenberger, 1909).

What interests Kant is to build a bridge between the material and the intelligible ...a distinction must be made between reflective judgments with a purpose, in which nature is assumed to have ends and designs tailored to human reason, and the strictly aesthetic judgments that, by contrast, are disinterested and in no way assume that reason has an end. (Xirau, 35)

The Hegelian definition of art is by essence split from craft: art has a transcendental function to which craft can not respond; true art has its issues, a small set of reasons that show the essential features of the Spirit in that moment of its development, the utilitarian or decorative nature of craft is completely different. The aesthetic, as content, avoids describing rules for constructing a work of art, because artists are never totally aware of what they are making, and they lack sufficient perspective to represent the spirit of their time. This historicity is the product of the Spirit; it is not set, but dynamic,

and therefore to be properly expressed, it requires sensitive variations in technique, theme and style. (Xirau, 37)

The fact that the Spirit is dynamic seems to ensure the continuity of art as an activity; however, Hegel argues that art in itself belongs to the past. (Xirau, 37)

Fichte saw a distant future, beyond the age of science where reason and its laws are seen in perfect clarity, to an age of art, where humanity—through the perfect freedom that would arise in its evolution—would be invested with beauty, truth and science. Schelling understands art, in which a complete balance of conscious and unconscious activity is revealed, to be the perfect manifestation of the self. It allows the last identity of genius and of nature; the ideal world of art and the real world of objects are the products of one and the same activity that, acting unconsciously, creates the aesthetic world of art.

For Schopenhauer, genius is the marvelous gift—accorded to a chosen few—of rising up to the disinterested contemplation of things, and work of genius, art, is privileged to "reproduce the external ideas that have originated through contemplation" (Lichtenberger, 1909: 335).

Theoretical elaborations become monuments and, like them, become 'untouchable', in that they take on a sacred aspect: they provoke comments that never question their goodness, although they may argue over their interpretation.

A scientific interest, significantly more considerable than the rationalism of the eighteenth century, arose in Germany and crossed borders, but never reached the status of a truly popular 'religion', nor penetrated the deep strata of the nation. For this reason, it is too intellectual, too complicated and too subjective (Lichtenberger, 1909:273). At the beginning of the century, socialism expected that future society would bring free access to all the realms of truth and beauty (Lichtenberger, 1909: 352).

SENSES AND FEELINGS

Extending the range of 'the aesthetic' is more consistent with the plurality that governs our contemporary culture. Not only is art no longer normative, but also the 'aesthetic' has been blurred, it has become associated with many facets of culture where previously it was not. Reflection on art and artistic practice is proliferating, following a process known as "world normalization" (Xirau, 38.9).

"Once nature and craft or artisanal means of production have been removed, once the psychology of aesthetic experience has been devalued... the very aesthetic discipline is left without content". The normativeness that always accompanied the aesthetic does not sit well with an epoch in which art is characterized precisely by the absence of rule (Xirau, 38.9).

The privilege of the formal structure of the object is the base of 'aesthetic taste', understood as the possibility of sensitively appreciating such an object disinterestedly, from the free play of the faculties and pure contemplation (Xirau, 286). This division sets the boundaries between the fetishized sphere of the architectural object and other expressions that do not meet the essential requirement of futility that characterizes the great work of art and are relegated to the domain of mere observation or the museological conservation of 'material culture'.

In popular cultures it is far more difficult to grasp the aesthetic essence and the accurate design of the many reference points that populate the everyday life of communities, towns, villages and neighborhoods. Popular cultures are not directly aimed at arousing aesthetic emotion, but at strengthening—with indisputably formal arguments—the many tasks that the community has entrusted to them (Xirau, 287).

There is another phenomenon that testifies to the presence of the aesthetic in popular cultures, even though it may be hidden and we might not be able to set it apart: the existence of a formal surplus that exceeds the level of functional.



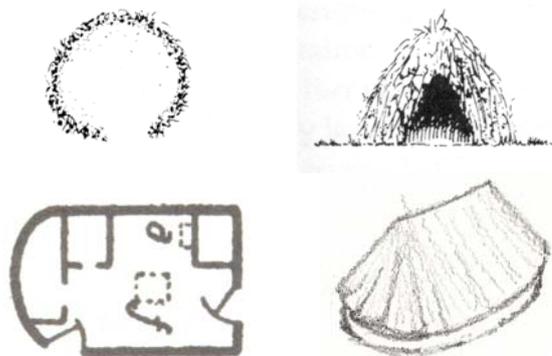
ORIGINS OF THE BARRACA.

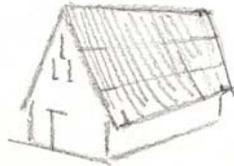
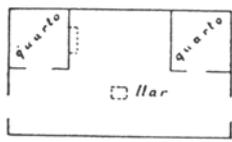
Three main areas survive from times when farmers lived in *barracas*, basic constructions typical of regions with mild temperatures, where life largely takes place outdoors, and where the intensive cultivation of a small piece of very fertile land demands full-time dedication. These areas are the Turia Delta, covering the fertile irrigated region of Valencia and the Albufera lagoon; the Segura Delta encompassing the fertile irrigated region of Orihuela and Murcia, and the Ebro Delta. (Torres Balbás, 1933).

These areas were designated by the published documents in the *Aureum Opus* or legal body of the City and Kingdom of Valencia, "Don Jaime permitted the construction of houses instead of barracas and other existing homes of fishermen and sailors, which gave rise to the settlement of the *Villanova maris Valencie*" (Mateu, 1955).

Whether due to these changes on the coast, or to the spread of intensive cultivation in the fields, when expansion began significant changes were observed in the characteristics of the buildings, which progressed from the simple hut, defined as a building made of light materials, to houses constructed with solid building materials.

The type of rooms therefore varied according to the length of time spent indoors. Dwellings built to provide shelter for seasonal jobs did not need to be permanent constructions; however, where activity was more intense, farmers were required to spend practically all their time on their lands. Consequently, the constructions in the Valencian countryside are more complex or developed than their equivalents in the Ebro and Segura areas.





EVOLUTION OF THE BARRACA

The *barraca* is the construction on the traditional smallholding of the Valencian *Huerta* (agricultural lands). It reached its peak during the first third of the nineteenth century due to increased agricultural activity, the high commercial turnover of produce, and the population explosion. The external walls of the ground floor were built in adobe rendered with a layer of mud up to two centimeters thick, and covered with thick coats of protection or whitewashed with lime. The internal partitions and pine walls in the loft were constructed from common reed and coated in the same way.

Today these buildings are understood to result from a range of evolutionary construction processes to which they have been subject (L'Escrivà 1976:41). The socio-cultural movements in the area around the *Huerta* have meant that the *barraca's* original functions have virtually disappeared, and it remains as a construction with traditional features, used as a place for its owners to store their belongings.

The writings of Perez Pujol i Sociats describe the most prestigious proposals to deal with continued urban growth on the peripheries of Valencia, and to solve the housing problem for the popular classes. A typological option was decided upon: the family house with a garden (Blat, 2000:45), following the same design pattern as the traditional detached dwelling, but modified to be built in rows, which led to substantial changes in their internal layout to solve lighting and ventilation issues in certain rooms. Perez Pujol's proposal was based on its inhabitants working from home and a single-family property with a small yard or garden, representing a true economic tool (Blat, 2000:47). Thus, the ideal worker

settlement model was intended to be converted and directed towards the rural ideology of the garden city. (Blat, 2000:48).

CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTION

Popular cultures are ambiguous; in principle, they attempt to produce, maintain and reproduce their own signs and resist the onslaught of dominant forms, or appropriate them by internalizing and reincorporating them into their own culture. However these movements are never so clear in reality, and in the end such cultures often pick up conflicting signals, and comply with elements that are far removed from their own experience.

Thus, today the boundaries between popular and intellectual culture, between the erudite and mass or popular, and between universal and particular have become confused. Moreover, popular no longer means the expression of a historical subject, fatally opposed to contemporary movements. It ceases to function as an attribute of an uncontaminated community that must resist the ravages of the corruption of modernity to safeguard its original authenticity (Xirau, 294).

By assuming this mix, we can better understand the notes of our troubled present and, moreover, we are able to challenge the imposed vow of chastity of intellectual culture and recognize that there is no one preferred course of history, a clear straight path that does not permit or authorize diversions, shortcuts, junctions, turns or returns. Once all intercultural boundaries have been abolished, once all symbols have been interspersed, the overall picture is conceived as a tremendous jumble.

The passage of time transforms, deletes and adds. Given this evidence, the technician proceeds to read the works of art from a perspective of critical reason, and crystallizes the conflict in his interpretation. Choice of interventions, with awareness of these changes, then becomes the major issue. However, the aesthetic of the artwork may have been damaged through these mutations. In this case we must be clear that it will never be what its creator intended: there is already another, and there will be more after the possible intervention. Thus, many works, while not setting out to distort history, are gradually losing their aesthetic component.

To intervene is to put into action a critical reason that is processed in the dialectical relationship with the work, which demands that it come out of the user's needs, and expresses the symbolic speech in which the intervener is embedded. The aesthetic component cannot therefore be dispensed with when studying the face of reality, organized around knowledge, rule and feeling. (Moreu, 1999: 61.62).



In the early twentieth century, the idea of two diverging and opposing trends in the development of architectures was discussed: one was the national estate, the indigenous, what could be called the index of the country; the other was the solemn international current of opinion, the great evolution of the historical senses (Anasagasti, 1929). Both come together today under a kind of confrontation between the critical reason of the 'invasive' architect and the pragmatic thinking of the 'indigenous' builder.

We are thus creating an environment where questions may again be raised about truth, justice and beauty as cognitive, normative and ethical learning, on a unique and appropriate level, to ensure the right proportion and correspondence between the individual and his or her natural environment. (Moreu, 1999: 63)



CONCLUSION

The transformation of the values of heritage in the rural world and the implementation of the mechanisms of cultural globalization incorporate 'new materials' into the architectural language, which in any case simply replace the traditional elements with others that 'conceptually' carry out the same functions.

Cultural changes that introduce progress and improvement into means of communication must indiscriminately offer the self-builder "other materials", which "aesthetically provide" new formal resources for the maintenance and transformation of housing. Although the popular builder, in the search for convenience, considers an attractive appearance as secondary, without prejudice and self-consciousness he has every useful solution at hand, and has no pretensions to create art (Anasagasti, 1929).

A partial reconstruction should be understood as an element of cultural authenticity, maintaining consistency and compatibility between traditional and contemporary materials and construction systems with respect to those that have managed to survive and are in a good state of conservation, or those which can be recovered and adapted to new uses due to their cultural value and economy with which they can be adapted, since if we burden the popular object by turning its

historical features into dogmas, we encourage 'art' to be identified with a specific time in its cumulative history; therefore seeking to preserve traditional architecture in its primitive state may turn it into a cultural falsehood.

Intervention in buildings should involve research into existing models, learning the proper use of indigenous materials and discovering the original construction systems; it should promote the recovery of traditional techniques and materials as one of the intrinsic values of the cultural identity of the local environment, not for their aesthetic qualities, but as symbolic elements of a value-laden culture.

The heavy impact that growing productivity has on the natural environment demands a new consciousness that sheds light on the new balance between the two tendencies, that attempts to develop consubstantial principles linked to the conformation of the rural and urban landscape to the new environmental context we wish to strengthen.



This requires a social awareness that enhances the collective sense of a common living space, where value is placed on the impact of the transformation process and the biased concepts of both the technical and the local builder.

REFERENCES:

- L'Escrivà, J. 1976 ; *Les nostres barraques.(inici d'estudi)*. Privada, Mislata.
- Torres Balbás, L. 1933; "La vivienda popular en España", en F. Carreas (dir.): *Folklore y costumbres de España*, vol III, A. Martín, Barcelona, pp. 137-502.
- Lichtenberger, E. 1909, *La Alemania moderna : su evolución*. Librería Gutenberg de José Ruiz, Madrid.
- Anasagasti, T. 1929. *Enseñanza de la Arquitectura, Cultura moderna técnico artística*. Inst. Juan de Herrera. E.T.S.A.M. Madrid.
- Blat, J. 2000. *Vivienda obrera y crecimiento urbano : (Valencia 1853-1936)*, Ed. Conselleria d'Obres Públiques, Urbanisme i Transports, Valencia.
- Moreu, A. 2000. "L'altre, un referent de la pedagogia estètica" en *Seminari Iduna* ; Ed. Àngel C. Moreu, Conrad Vilanou Universitat de Barcelona. Barcelona
- Xirau, J. 2000. *Escritos sobre historia de la filosofía. Artículos y ensayos*. Ed. Joaquín Xirau. Anthropos. Barcelona

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Joan Mateu; Professor of Geography at the University of Valencia.

APPENDIX
ELECTRONIC CATALOGUE of the BARRACAS.



INVENTARIO DE BARRACAS DE INTERES ARQUITECTONICO DE LA HUERTA Y DEL AREA METROPOLITANA DE VALENCIA FICHA 10

UBICACION	DISTRITO 11	ENTORNO Urbano
Zona	VALENCIA La Punta	ACCESIBILIDAD: Regular
Dirección	Camino viejo de la Punta al Mar (e. de colorado 1/4)	CONTAMINACIÓN AMBIENTAL: Débil: Fuerte: Muy fuerte: X
Nombre Barraca	Barraca de Flores	ELEMENTOS DE AFECCIÓN: La Urbanización de Viviendas de Realajo le ha afectado en su dinámica. Adiciones (autopista del saler, ferrocarril, ZAL)
Nombre Propietario	Tomás Flores	TIPO DE SUELO: SNU (PA)
Fecha Construcción	250 Años	
Intervenciones efectuadas:	Fachada y Cubierta.	



SISTEMA CONSTRUCTIVO Y MATERIALES

FACHADA	
Muros	Adobe / Ladrillo
Hastiales	Ladrillo
Revestimientos	Revoco / Encalados y Alicatados
Carpintería	Madera y Rejería
ESTRUCTURA	
Desván	Madera y Caña trenzada
Cubierta	Madera
COBERTURA	Teja Plana y Curva
USOS	Abandonada

ANALISIS COMPOSITIVO

Volúmenes edificados	1
Superficie Barraca	68,04 m ²
DOTACIONES	
Electricidad	No
Agua	No
ESTADO DE CONSERVACIÓN	
Valoración global	RUINA parcial
VALOR ARQUITECTÓNICO	2

