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# THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE TRADITION. JUVENAL BARACCO AND THE RECOMPOSITION OF THE LOST CITY

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**Abstract:** In Peru the arrival of modern architecture has meant a pause in the consolidation process of a local tradition, which has repercussions on contemporary architecture, as it seeks to build a modernity by the generation of a cultural hybridization process as it develops.

Through a critique of modern functionalist architecture, Juvenal Baracco poses a way of reconstructing the tradition by thinking that the universal architectural problem can be resolved within the space provided by Peruvian territory and society. The traditional structures, as well as the typological study of the city, will be the referents for the reconstruction of a local tradition expressed in a contemporary language in the project of the Peruvian Air Force Officers School of 1981.

The paper presents, at the end, a new approximation about the consolidation of an own modernity based on the possibilities of assuming a hybrid culture with a non linear review, but in different levels, as nodes connected inside a network.

**Key words:** Juvenal Baracco, Identity, Peru, Cultural hybridization, Tradition

## 1. Introduction

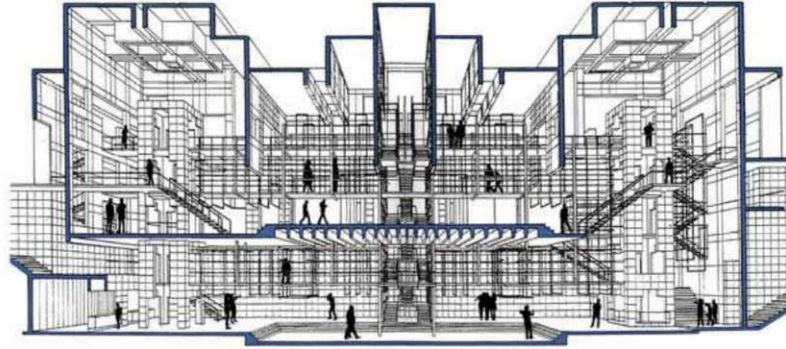
The construction of Peruvian modernity, unlike other processes of cultural adaptation, will be determined by what Javier Sologuren calls "happy promiscuity" (Rebaza Soralez 2017, p15), a term that seeks to understand Peruvian history and culture not as a linear process but rather as a dynamic and three-dimensional model in which cultural hybridization will represent the inclusion of the various cultures and their symbolic practices, presented in the Peruvian territory in the twentieth century.

This form of modernity, which is not going to compromise with the sociopolitical events that made it possible, will reflect a wealth of production that will take cultural elements within a network that goes beyond the definitions in terms of time and space. The construction of this form of national modernity, which began in the mid-1920s and continues into the early 21st century, will rise the cultural hybridization with which Peruvian artists face intellectual production.

... the version of the ultramodernism elaborated by a group of Peruvian intellectuals and artists implies as much an articulation with the local as the conscious construction - through diverse instruments of understanding, from the artistic to the scientific ones - of a dynamic model of cultural appropriation that is applicable in other areas of the world (Rebaza Soralez 2017, p124).

Inside this cultural context, Juvenal Baracco (1940-) will develop his work as an architect and a teacher assuming the idea of the Peruvian modernity as a hybrid and flexible entity in spatial and temporal terms, allowing him to take various elements of the Peruvian culture to respond to a need for expression of international architecture, as well as the need to appropriate a system of symbols typical of the national culture.

As a designer, Baracco will take as a reference the American modernity of architects such as Paul Rudolph and Louis Kahn (Fig. 1), exploring the possibility of monumental construction of space from the wall - adapting the Peruvian constructive technology (Belaúnde 1988) - as well as the attitude to take tradition and transform it into a contemporary language.



**Fig. 1** Section of the cafeteria at the Peruvian Air Force Officers School

Baracco is going to make reference to the tradition:

... defined by a physical context; a cultural product of a social process that has historically worked to shape the medium that is the city, perceived as a text read and appropriated by its inhabitants, from the application of different ideological codes in time and space (1992, p14) .

From the academy, Baracco will propose a model of analysis of the national tradition from the reading of the city, looking for the traditional systems that are transformed to create new ways of adapting to the needs, desires and visions of its inhabitants. A research for the reconstruction of a mixed image, in the context of a society that has adopted cultural hybridization as a form of subsistence of tradition and, as a new form of representation of the Peruvian identity.

One of the points of analysis of the Peruvian Air Force Officers School (Fig. 2) confronts the spatial typology found by Baracco within the Lima block, which will be transformed into a contemporary language and a project tool. This allows him to take references of Peruvian culture regardless of the historical phase or the dominant tendency of the moment, thus accepting that cultural hybridization is a way of reconstructing a lost tradition.



**Fig. 2** Principal view of the cafeteria at the Peruvian Air Force Officers School

The research aims to propose a new way of reviewing the Peruvian architecture from the possibilities of the cultural hybridization as a form of identity and, in that sense, the consolidation of the Peruvian modernity. The critic to the modern functionalist architecture and the reading of the typology of Lima – assuming this as an example of identity because of its adaptations in time– will be the key to understand the construction of the Peruvian contemporary architecture.

For this, a review of the consolidation of Peruvian modernity from various fields of culture has been made, arriving at the architecture and the personage of Juvenal Baracco as the best exponent of the consolidation of an own architecture in the 80s. Subsequently, its been made a review of his project work to determinate a compositional calligraphy that is developed from the use of the wall, the space

and the paths. To this analysis is added the revision of his teaching work, especially in the reading of the typology of the city, finding that the spatial and moving typologies are extrapolated to the interior of the Lima block, in spatial codes within the Peruvian Air Force Officers School, proposing to a larger scale what was sought in the minor works.

## **2. Background**

In both Peru and Latin America, the 1980s represent a moment of search for local roots within the various fields of culture. Although modern thought is instituted and accepted by the figures of Latin American culture, the need to seek links with the tradition leads to the questioning of modernity and the translation of traditional knowledge into a contemporary, therefore, universal language.

The need to find a value in the tradition and not only to follow the occidental tendencies makes that the Latin American architecture responds critically to the process of adaptation to the modernity. While modern language is accepted as a predominant form of expression, the absence of content that links the Latin American imagination with material production promotes the search for specific answers to universal questions.

### **2.1. Latin America**

Since the 1980s, Latin America has begun to focus on local identity and tradition as a response to Western modernity. The Seminarios de Arquitectura Latinoamericana (SAL) become the perfect setting to confront the relations between tradition and modernity, trying to understand Latin American architecture and its relationship with the artisan construction, topographical management as a form of relationship with the territory and reading of the landscape as a cultural entity as announced by Frampton from Critical Regionalism (1983).

The first meeting was on May 25<sup>th</sup> of 1985 in Buenos Aires, where the participants search to establish the basic ideas for the research for a Latin American architecture that should represent the cultural roots avoiding trends outside their own reality. Since the beginning, the meetings have sought to pay attention to the acceptance of the city as a being under construction, saying that identity and modernity themselves mark the way for a new proposal that does not fear, like Latin American cities, the apparent disorder. The communication continues promoting the construction of a theoretical body based on the potential of the local tradition and adds a council for the architecture schools, calling for an emphasis on the training of conscious and responsible architects with their own cultural horizon (CEDODAL 2011).

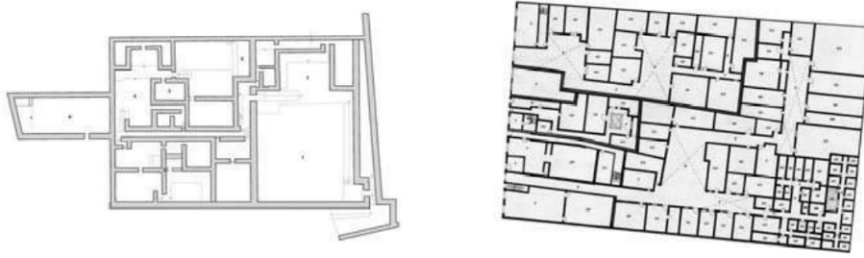
Although the Latin American search is based on the idea of a common territory and identity, the cultural processes of the region have taken different paths since the sixteenth century, determining different levels of cultural hybridization. We can see that each country appropriates the idea of modernity at different scales. From a more international proposal of material production in Argentina and Chile, to the examples of contextualism and historicism in Bolivia and Ecuador.

### **2.2. Peru**

In Peru, since the 1940s, the cultural figures begin to see critically the national reality reinforcing the discourse of tradition as something that must be thought from the construction of Peruvian modernity.

The value of the pre-Hispanic tradition as a language that relates us to the past and the territory begin to take a great importance. New discoveries in the archaeological field reveal a traditional form of construction made of earth and *adobe* with a compositional calligraphy of continuous walls that produce a spatial organization based on full and empty spaces.

These structures will reveal a form of organization that is generated from the interior of the space; generating modulations with perimetral enclosures and that will be connected from linear paths. In the same way, the Lima block after the Spanish occupation will be organized from the enclosure of its perimeter to develop an interiority of modular spaces, interspersed between rooms and courtyards, related by corridors and galleries. (Fig. 3)



**Fig. 3** To the left: Puruchuco, pre-Hispanic structure in the city of Lima. Right: Drawings of the interior of a block in Barrios Altos, Lima, developed by the Baracco workshop

At the beginning of the 20th century, the city of Lima developed a rapid growth promoted by internal migrations from the mountains to the coast, adapting traditional structures and forms of settlement that can be seen in the reading of the urban plot of different parts of the city. This process is interrupted by the arrival of modern architecture in the 1940s, which leaves behind the historical process of urban consolidation.

In the case of Lima, this resulted in the breakup of a slow and progressive evolution of 400 years of local architecture, which from the colonial models brought by the Spaniards, were subjected to processes of adaptation to the environment, labor, local materials and climate requirements of the humid desert of Lima (Baracco 1988, p98).

The urban explosion and the migrations from rural areas to the city promote a new form of culture, where the city of Spanish foundation meets the customs of the Andean society. In this development, the city becomes the center of exchange of both worlds. In spite of the efforts of the State to contain urban expansion and to plan the city, the occupation of the territory will take place through the adaptation of preexisting structures and self-construction, using forms of settlement and spatial organization typical of traditional Andean culture, adapting to the territorial and climatic conditions of the Lima desert.

Lima, in its state of constant construction and coexistence with pre-Hispanic and Hispanic historical structures, became, in the second half of the twentieth century, the stage for the development of a form of cultural appropriation by proposing a syncretism between the local and the foreign.

### 3. Rethinking modernity and tradition

In the Latin American context, modernity has always presented itself as a point of confrontation with tradition because it develops as a foreign product, unrelated to the local culture and sometimes part of the negation of the territory and the city in benefit of the *tabula rasa*. The long cultural process in these countries is subject to a violent interruption, but at the same time, it influences a new form of construction of the tradition, since Latin American culture tries to rethink its role as constructor of identity.

In the world of culture, the modern project aims, in the first place, to unsacralize the culture, detaching it from its metaphysical-religious foundation to endow it with a rational foundation. And, secondly, it tends to construct autonomous cultural spheres (objectivity, legitimacy and representation), each endowed with its own logic, its own experts and even specific paths for the training of these experts. Thus, sciences and philosophy (sphere of objectivity), ethics and law (sphere of legitimacy) and symbolic systems, modern arts and language (sphere of representation) are constructed. The expert is defined according to the domain of those logics and languages. To be recognized as an expert is necessary to pass through learning systems that are increasingly patronized and schooled. Culture is detached from everyday life to become a knowledge of experts. There is, therefore, a divorce of profound consequences between the culture of the experts and the popular culture or world of life (López Soria 2007, p 57)

Although in general terms Latin American architecture manages to find a point of contact with Western modernity, the debate and the struggle to be the dominant thought becomes a form of cultural appropriation.

From this modern conception, the history of Latin American architecture tends to be grouped into fixed compartments determined by specific facts, presenting a before and after. Whether with the domination of local culture or globalization, history is defined as specific states that do not propose, *a priori*, a full reading of historical events. Latin American culture, then, is presented as a reflection of memory and the construction of imaginaries. Referring to Borges, Martí Arís explains that:

... one of its fundamental themes is to recognize that our relationship with reality is fatally determined by culture. In his writings appears recurrently the figure of the labyrinth. Borgian labyrinths are deliberate mental constructions, complex artifacts that are the product of man's action: they are, above all, a metaphor for culture (2002, p23).

In the Peruvian case, we can see more clearly what is sometimes not evident in the Latin American panorama: the constant search for the construction of a local modernity, that is, the moments of cultural hybridization that create a stronger and more complex material production within the modern discourse and, therefore, in the cultural construction of space.

It is more effective to understand contemporary Peruvian culture as a process of hybridization rather than as an adaptation to the Western thought, because multiculturalism and the diversity of territories require a specific response according to the uniqueness of the historical process.

While art, sociology or anthropology have studied this process, architecture has been kept apart by reaffirming a foreign vocation, using only superficially some symbolic and iconographic aspects.

The figure of Juvenal Baracco and his approach to the local culture from the reading of the city is proposed as a form of reconstruction of the tradition that adapts to the canons of Western modernity. Baracco renounces at the modern conception of culture as a knowledge of experts and puts in value the popular knowledge, that finds it in the construction of the imaginary of the Peruvian culture meanwhile studies the city as the system that reflects the daily life and their spatial adaptations.

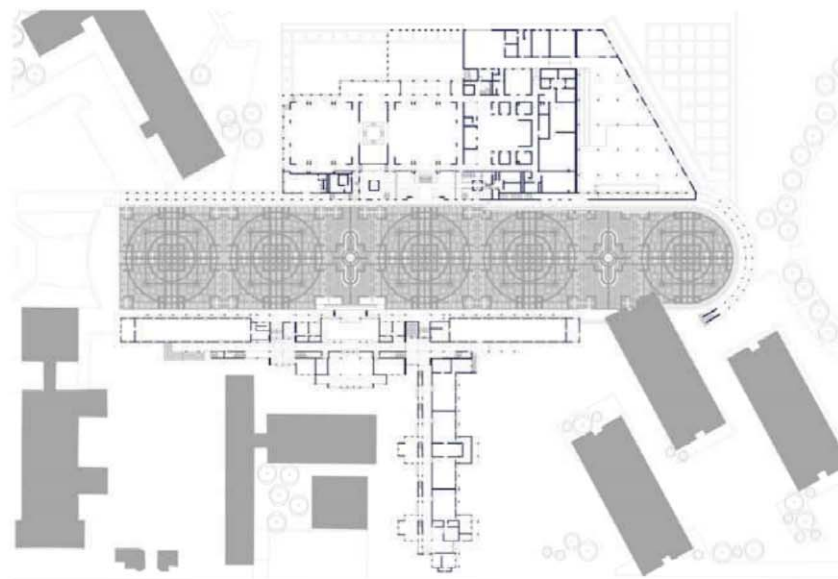
Although Baracco criticizes functionalist modernity and its effects on Latin American cities (Baracco 1988), he also recognizes the role of modernity as a common language (Baracco 1992). That is to say, the architectural language of Baracco respects the rules of modern representation, but takes as reference the culture, not the history, that is presented in the city. Understanding that culture represents the cultural hybridization shows us a particular reading of the architectural work, leaving the superficial references that can be derived from the historical interpretations, common in those years.

The research on the typology of the lost city tries to recognize the historical stratum that exists within an urban space, not consolidated yet. The typological study focuses on hidden geometric rules, trying to understand chaos as a form of order; studies the spatial structures and the paths, both determinants for the evolution of the city and the understanding of the society's adaptation forms.

Reading the city, Baracco recognizes its complexity and concludes that:

... the city acquires a condition of enabled ruin where the forms of appropriation and adaptation of the inhabitants in their urban commitment are analyzed, the myths that created monuments, the way they were implemented in the plot and how it was elaborated, modified or canceled, rescuing the spatial and architectural codes and analyzing their transposition to the cultural codes produced by the evolution of the city (1992, p14).

From the recomposition of the spatial codes found inside the city of Lima, Baracco manages to approach the reconstruction of a tradition that does not clearly shows its limits of definition. To do this, Baracco will return to the compositional calligraphy inherited from the historical process of Peruvian architecture: having as main element the wall as a continuous entity that folds to generate spaces. These spaces are going to be connected and reconstructed, within the imaginary of the human being through the design of the interior routes and their transitions. The Air Force Officers School (Fig. 4) is going to take the pre-Hispanic compositional imagery, at the same time as it recomposes the city's spatial codes.



**Fig. 4** General plan of the Peruvian Air Force Officers School with the design of the square (unbuilt)

#### 4. Between the wall and the space

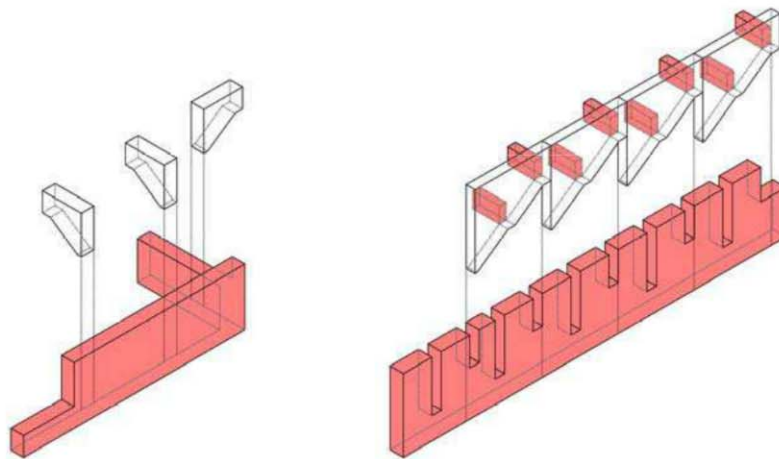
Juvenal Baracco is part of a generation that does not accept the idea of purist modernity and wonders why the architectural language proposed in Europe or the United States cannot have a relation with the place, the landscape and the specific context of the Peruvian reality. Baracco mentions that after the arrival of modernity in 1940:

... an architectural tradition disappeared, that included rules of organization of spaces, architectural composition, construction methods and physical limitations resulting from the condition of the materials as well as the wisdom of the artisan tradition of Lima architecture (Baracco 1988, p98).

This interest in the lost tradition is applied in his projects and is the thought that guides the design workshop he has organized since 1974, focusing on the urban research that develops from the drawings of Lima.

Although the designer life and the academic life are understood as two separate entities, in the Air Force Officers School we can find an example of a personal language that responds to the ways of reading traditional and international architecture and the application of urban research, where spatial codes of popular architecture are extrapolated as richer and more varied spatial sequences.

This can be better understood when we see that Baracco discovers the interior of Lima's blocks through his typological investigations and concludes that there is no intention of dynamizing the space, he does not find unexpected turns since all the movements are referred to very precise points, in also very concrete sequences (Baracco 2011). (Fig. 5)



**Fig. 5** Internal circulation schemes. Left: circulation scheme of the typology of the working-class housing in Lima. Right: circulation scheme in the residence of the Officers School.

As mentioned, Baracco's proposal for the Air Force Officers School responds to a compositional calligraphy based on the wall and space raised as independent entities within a virtual structure. The whole complex is articulated from the presence of the wall, which on the outside is folded to give the idea of a continuous mass that defines the enclosure, while the interior works as subtle planes that are embedded to create the illusion of a vacuum interior, discovering diverse episodes in the spatial sequences that proposes the idea of penetrating into a mass and then discovering that it is a contained void.

The wall acquires the quality of facade, since, individually, is understood as a symbolic figure that defines the interior spaces while compositively presents itself as an abstract surface that is folded to define the spaces. The position of the walls, their way of defining the spaces and their development inside a virtual three-dimensional plot will generate interstices, like corridors, that will put in tension the position of each of the spaces, having so the possibility of not only defining the routes quite clearly, but also forcing the user to look at the void from different perspectives, leading him to conceive a sequence of images that then he must mentally recompose to have a complete understanding of the interior. While the exterior figure represents a monumental building of clear volumetry despite all its movements, the inner space is understood as a mystery to be discovered through the movement of the users.

This compositional calligraphy that presents itself between the wall and space raises the movement and the spatial sequence as the element to be handled to achieve the surprise in the user. As Baracco himself states in an interview:

...in this spatial structure, the fundamental theme is the handling of transitions and spatial rhythms determined by the path, in which the viewer has the sensation of penetrating the mass and then discovering that it is a void [...] there is an ambivalent sense of being inside and then outside, and this is produced by the tour. (Belaúnde 1988, p. 112).

The strategy of discovering the spaces through the tours reinterprets the urban architecture found in the typological studies of Lima, where the city is understood as an intern to be unveiled through the variations of the space sequence (Fig. 6). The city becomes a direct reference for the development of architecture, but not in its urban understanding but rather in the typology of its traditional spaces, adapted by the inhabitants over the time. For Baracco, Lima presents itself as a young and in consolidation city, allows its recognition as an entity that transmits the values of tradition and identity due to its constant state of transformation, so the idea of recomposing a city that does not exist, a imaginary culture, will be the key to the understanding of tradition.



**Fig. 6** Drawing of the interior of a block in Lima, developed by the Baracco workshop

## 5. The recomposition of the lost city

One of the interests that Juvenal Baracco proposes and that develops from the academy is the reading of the city of Lima as an entity under construction that does not leave aside the historical strata that have generated variations in its urban plot. In this sense, the proposal seeks a typological study and understanding of the spatial codes within the block.

Since the mid-1970s, Baracco proposes a lecture of the city that initially focused on the historic city as a typological reading invariable in time, later in the expanding city seeking to predict the urban language and, finally, he focuses on the spaces where the traditional city is integrated with the spontaneous city, making the research for urban identity based on the forms of adaptation of society and popular culture within an established urban structure.

This reading will understand that the Lima block is a closed mass towards the outside that must be discovered through the spatial transitions and adaptations of Hispanic models such as the courtyard house, the manor house, the alley, and so on. Although Baracco critically describes the urban development of Lima since the mid-twentieth century, we can see that there is an interest in rethinking the way the city is conceived and that we should be paid attention to the city as a historical but adaptable structure:

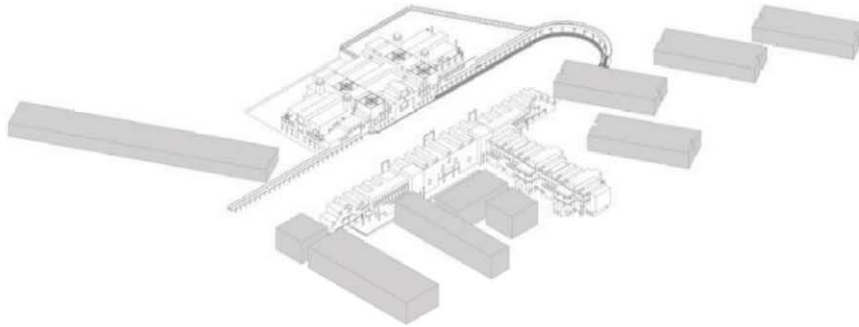
It means to rethink the methodological simplification of functionalist urbanism, it means to begin to recognize the city as a historical structure, to discover the original typology of the city, its architectural characteristics and its evolution, understood as a structure of signs and symbols that have been appropriated by the users in different ways and how they read the city and its components, through a discourse with a rhetoric with which they identify (Baracco 1988, p.98).

We can see that Baracco's vision of the city and its understanding has two important aspects. On one hand, the need to recognize it as a historical structure to be read within the classic codes of urban typological studies, in order to discover its main essence. On the other hand, he understands that the city is a flexible entity and that history is a continuous entity, so it also seeks to discover the manipulations and adaptations created by users over time.



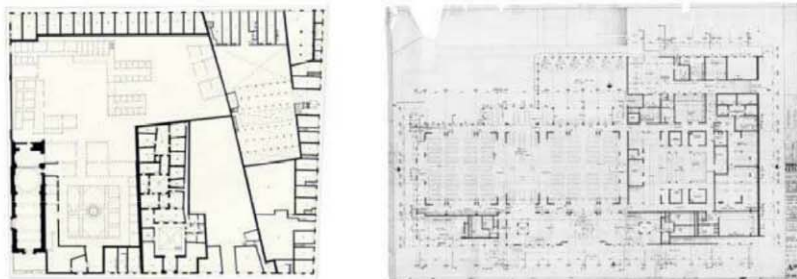
That's why his studies are not going to focus on the important or iconic buildings of the city. Churches, convents or palaces will not be part of their interest as specific objects, but rather the understanding of the whole urban plot and its adaptations. In this way, the reading of the city manages to focus on historical continuity and its adaptation as a reflection of a lost tradition and that seeks to adapt based on the needs of the users.

This way of understanding the city allows it to be manipulated and abstracted without having a direct relation with the historical language, but rather with the adaptations and spatial sequences that are found and repeated throughout its evolution. The abstraction of these invariable spatial codes, which can be found in pre-Hispanic structures as well as in the city of Spanish foundation, are going to be decisive in order to understand the Baracco approach within the Air Force Officers School. (Fig. 7)



**Fig. 7** General axonometric of the Peruvian Air Force Officers School

In this particular case, the urban reading and the adaptation of the space codes found in the city will be protagonists for the understanding of the interior of the project. Baracco manages to abstract the spatial sequences that he finds inside the block and then apply them, in a more monumental and varied way, to the interior of the routes and sequences of the project.



**Fig. 8** Left: drawing of a block with patio houses. Right: first floor of the Officers School

Two clear trends can be identified in both buildings. In the dining room the importance of the structure of the patio house is recognized, that is to say, the sequences between hallway, patio and corridors, that are in the adaptations of the block (Fig. 8). In the residence instead, it is seen that the spatial typology refers to the idea of the internal corridor, that is, longitudinal spaces that will distribute to the different units within the lot and that will vary in height due to basic needs of lighting and ventilation. (Fig. 9)



**Fig. 9** Corridor and stairs to Access the romos of the residence in the Officers School

The complex that forms the Officers School is to be considered as a recomposition of the lost city, where the discovery of spaces, their sequences and their forms of perception are to be discovered from the penetration of the mass, as it is read in Lima from its typological studies.



**Fig. 10** General view of the Officers School

## **6. Conclusions**

The Peruvian Air Force Officers School is an example of reconstruction of the tradition from the understanding of architecture and the city as a cultural product, characteristic of a certain time and

space. The references he takes make it possible to understand Peruvian history, not as a sequence of isolated facts and with its own rules, but rather as a continuous and constant process of adaptation, where the syncretism of thoughts will determine a form of cultural hybridization that finally represents the identity of a city: mixed and without defined limits.

Juvenal Baracco is going to propose a way of seeing the tradition that escapes the established canons, paying attention to the ways of adapting society and finding the reading keys in a city that at first sight does not represent an interest or a stimulus for the architecture. His reading will go beyond material structures to focus on the inherent capacity of society to rebuild tradition. The importance of knowing how to look beyond the walls will translate into a project that collects and reinterprets the relationships between society and space, recomposing the city within the imaginary of the architect and then being translated into a complex spatial structure. The role of the popular tradition is fundamental, representing a form of cultural hybridization that combines the Andean cosmovision, the western influence of the Spanish city and the Lima society.

The methodology of analysis and general reading of the work of Baracco will give as a result a way of approaching the contemporary architecture that will not be afraid to take its own of foreign elements. It will consolidate a form of hybrid modernity that is based on the language of Peruvian culture as well as on the universal language, taking abstraction and interpretation of the city under spatial codes and movement as a form of identity construction through architecture.

The reconstruction process proposed by Baracco represents a form of understanding the local identity based on a critique of modernity and its effects on the Latin American city. Its architecture can be located within an international panorama, showing that it is possible to be and belong at the same time.

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