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Huachafo architecture between kitsch and aesthetic innovation

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Abstract

One way of theorising the fundamental reorganisation of the aesthetic coordinates that modernism brought about is to understand modern and post-modern artistic creation as phases of a dialectical movement. As Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek pointed out, modernism may well be understood as the negation of pre-modern art, whereas post-modernism acts as the moment of sublation – the final synthesis – that preserves and combines elements from both stages. Admittedly, this is *Plumpes Denken* at its best – there is no room for finesse here – although it does work surprisingly well in the field of architecture. After all, the advent of the modern upended the lavish styles of the late nineteenth century by producing their polar opposite (think of Adolf Loos, who went as far as to criminalise the use of ornaments), whereas post-modern architecture succeeded in blending both traditional and modern elements in a jocular, casual and often parodistic fashion. Against this background, this article proposes an in-depth exploration of an even more recent phenomenon: *huachafo* architecture, an emerging cultural trend in Bolivia and Peru. Although frequently dismissed, or even derided, by its detractors, with the term *huachafo* itself being translated as 'tacky' or 'tasteless', it has already established itself in many neighbourhoods of the countries' largest cities, often in less

affluent, or even informal, areas. Much like its Western counterpart, *huachafo* architecture approaches its subject with a sensitivity to traditional and modern stylistic codes; however, its results differ considerably from most classically post-modern designs. This article posits *huachafo* architecture as a kind of alternate post-modernism that draws heavily on regional influences, while challenging some of our preconceived notions about the importance of good taste and the implicit assumptions about class that often accompany this type of reasoning.

Keywords contemporary Peruvian architecture; *huachafo*; informal architecture; postmodern architecture; Slavoj Žižek; Fredric Jameson

Introduction

In the field of natural sciences, the era of individual discoveries has been on the decline: scientific progress is no longer achieved through trailblazing breakthroughs made by solitary researchers, whose names will forever be remembered, but through hard, scrupulous, systematic teamwork.[1] Curiously enough, contemporary art seems to be headed in a somewhat similar direction, at least if one is inclined to consider international gatherings such as the Documenta in Kassel, Germany, as indicators of trends for the not-too-distant future. In 2022, the renowned exhibition, celebrated once every five years, strove to lend a voice to creators from the Global South, hitherto unheard of, when they appointed the Indonesian collective Ruangrupa as artistic directors. This decision, conceived of as an act of appreciation of those agents in the art world that, until then, had had no place within the traditional framework of the 'biennial circuit', must perhaps be taken with a grain of salt.[2] However, Ruangrupa's choice to disregard the principle of individual authorship – to a certain extent, at least – and instead embrace a communal spirit of collaboration and participation produced quite remarkable results that perhaps speak of things to come.[3]

Architecture does not seem to have been much affected by this (not so) recent trend towards a more collective approach, which is centred less on individual creators and big names. Most, if not all, of the new buildings and structures that find their way into our shared imagination (or at least receive awards and some media attention) are the product of a studio; no architect is an island, one might say. But the importance of individual names, brands and recognition, even when a group effort has produced the result, still plays an important role in contemporary architecture. Perhaps this is also about to change, not on the high-powered international stage, of course, but in the more modest, yet intensely colourful, regions of popular architecture. One particularly eye-catching, as well as theoretically promising, manifestation goes by the name of *huachafo* architecture, a recent development in Bolivia and Peru that emphasises a collaborative, do-it-yourself approach that celebrates the idiosyncrasies, knacks and quirks of its (virtually anonymous) creators.

Although frequently dismissed, or even derided, by its detractors,[4] *huachafo* has already established itself in many neighbourhoods of the country's largest cities, often in less affluent, or even informal, areas.[5] Much like classical post-modern architecture, the *huachafo* style is characterised by traditional and modern stylistic codes; its results differ considerably from most Western creations. This article sets out to posit *huachafo* architecture as a kind of alternate post-modernism that draws heavily on regional influences, while challenging some of our preconceived notions about the importance of good taste, as well as the implicit class assumptions that often accompany this type of reasoning.

Defining *huachafo*: between imitation and creation

The first step towards a comprehensive examination of *huachafo* architecture necessarily entails defining the term itself, not only because it is not very familiar to a wider public but also, as we will see, because it cannot be defined all that easily. The coining of the term *huachafo* is usually ascribed to Peruvian writer and journalist Jorge Miota, who introduced it to a wider public in the first two decades of the twentieth

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century. Miota created it as a malapropism of the Colombian Spanish term *guachafita*, which has a decidedly more pedestrian meaning: it is employed to refer to a situation of hubbub and commotion.[6]

Following Miota, the term developed a life of its own. It is now, arguably, one of the most prominent examples of *peruanismos*, as well as, some would contend, a defining characteristic of the sociocultural coordinates of Peruvian society. Simply put, *huachafo* may mean 'kitsch', 'tacky' or 'lacking in taste', but these ad hoc translations hardly capture the complex web of signification at the heart of the concept. There is no consensual, all-encompassing definition of what *huachafo* can be characterised as, although there are some common, more or less agreed-upon features. Peruvian intellectual Sebastián Salazar Bondy was one of the first to theorise it in one of the essays in his collection *Lima, la horrible*, published in 1974. *Huachafo*, he says, 'is a Peruvianism that unites – in a single, full beam – the concepts of corny, snobbish and ridiculous'.[7] This initial definition exhibits a certain proximity to the notion of kitsch in Western aesthetics (reasonably close, for instance, to Clement Greenberg's definition of kitsch as 'rear-guard art'[8]), with the notable difference that kitsch is usually associated with popular low-brow art that has no desire to appear snobbish.

What separates *huachafo* artefacts and practices from kitsch in the classical sense is a desire to appear more cultivated or refined than people really are, yet this assumes forms that the upper classes easily identify as spurious. *Huachafo* is thus a characteristic that is most often ascribed to the lower strata of Peruvian society. Salazar Bondy puts it this way:

> It has been pointed out that poverty does not equal *huachafería* …, but what has been omitted is that it is especially among the poor where the satirists come to diagnose it. This may be explained easily: if the poor remain poor, if they accept poverty, and come to recognise it as providential proof, imperturbable fatalism, or irrecusable nature, there will be no danger of them threatening in any way the state of things that determines their poverty. Now, if the poor seek to get out of this situation and deny their poverty as destiny, two paths open up to them: subversion against the oppressors or infiltration among them. The first is tantamount to war and is fought by denying the legitimacy of the powers and their estates. The second is a manoeuvre that is executed through trickery. For example, by imitating those among whom the upstart wants to place himself. To be what one is not, one needs a disguise.[9]

Huachafismo or *huachafería* – both terms are employed synonymously to denote the quality of being *huachafo* or the act of undertaking *huachafo* activities – may be understood in the broadest sense as the imperfect emulation of the habitus of those of a higher social rank; a desire to appear wealthier, more sophisticated, learned or elegant than one actually is, with results that, rather than conveying the image of a member of the upper classes, underline one's actual origin. Salazar Bondy offers the following examples:

> The shopgirl who imitates the dresses of debutantes, the bureaucrat who adopts a forensic verbal gravity, the petty bourgeois who designs his own little house, modestly copying the architectural trappings of the palace, the graphomaniac who writes with puffiness and vacuity because he assumes that this is what an academic pen is like. These are cases of disguise in pursuit of a category that one does not have and that is presumed to be superior, although in fact it may not be. The phony is, ultimately, *huachafo*.[10]

In Salazar Bondy's account, the aesthetic effect of *huachafería* results from a maladaptation of not being able to 'fake it till you make it', of an unsuccessful emulation of the manners and fashions of the upper classes. At the same time, he cautions us that calling someone *huachafo* serves as a marker of distinction for the upper classes, as a discursive weapon to prevent the ascension of those one considers unworthy of a higher social status.[11]

Much like the denunciation of the other's bad taste in general (calling another tacky is, after all, tantamount to saying 'I am *not* tacky'), *huachafo* may be employed as a means of asserting one's own perceived sociocultural superiority as well as a simple descriptor for those who, clumsily and haplessly, try to improve their social standing.

The view espoused by Salazar Bondy can be considered a standard definition of *huachafería*. Mario Vargas Llosa – perhaps the most prominent figure to comment on the phenomenon – gives it a much more positive spin, understanding it as one of the most peculiar and defining traits of Peruvian culture and society. '*Huachafería* may be brilliant [*genial*], but is rarely intelligent,' he says. 'It is intuitive,

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verbose, formalistic, melodic, imaginative and, above all, maudlin [*sensiblera*].'[12] This is a first indicator that *huachafo* may be understood in a certain sense as anti-modern, irrational and not constrained by the principles that usually guide and inform an enlightened Western world view. As such, *huachafería* could aptly be inserted into a decolonial horizon as an autochthonous means of accessing the world, a cosmovision that rejects those conditions of knowledge and being that were imposed by the coloniser.[13]

That is not the direction this article pursues. Instead, it considers *huachafo* architecture as a possible, although fairly belated, alternative to classical post-modern architecture, unencumbered by the weight of the historical styles and forms of European and American traditions but with a similar levity and playfulness. The approach adopted in this text thus exhibits closer proximity to Vargas Llosa's theorisation of *huachafería* as a characteristic feature of Peruvian society (and a stylistic trait of some of its cultural artefacts) than to Salazar Bondy's account, which nonetheless serves as its point of departure. Rather than considering *huachafería* as a defective form of cultural emulation, a failed attempt to be someone or something one is not, Vargas Llosa posits it as a way of creating something entirely new through misunderstanding or misrepresenting the old – a sort of productive misreading:

> Tackiness [*cursilería*] implies distortion of taste. A person is tacky when he or she unsuccessfully imitates something – sophistication or elegance – and, in so doing, debases and caricaturizes certain aesthetic paradigms. *Huachafería* does not pervert any models because it is a model unto itself. It does not degrade aesthetic patterns, instead it creates them, i.e., it is not an absurd copy of elegance and sophistication, but a distinct – Peruvian – form of being sophisticated and elegant.[14]

Theoretical interlude: post-modernism as the sublation of the modern

Before considering a number of concrete examples that illustrate how *huachafería* is expressed in contemporary architecture in Peru, a brief theoretical interlude is called for to support this article's central contention. There are many ways to theorise the passage from pre- to post-modern art, from broad, generalist approaches to highly detailed, even painstaking, accounts that seek to delve into the minutiae of even the most partial phenomena. For the analysis in this article, I found Slavoj Žižek's theorisation, based on an observation of film history made by Fredric Jameson, particularly suggestive. In the closing essay of his collection *Signatures of the Visible*, Jameson sets out to illustrate how film history can be explained, 'or at least usefully estranged',[15] as he remarks somewhat obscurely, through applying categories pertaining to period theory. For Jameson, three of them become particularly relevant in the given context: realism, modernism and post-modernism.[16] One should take note of this curious selection. Whereas modernism and post-modernism are applied, however contentiously, in a general cultural context, realism as a broad periodical category is almost exclusively employed in the field of literature. That is to say, while realism exists as a stylistic category in, for example, painting (as opposed to abstraction or surrealism), it is not a category that refers to a specific moment or period in time. For example, while virtually all Baroque painting is realist, realism is, evidently enough, not a synonym for this specific type of art.

The above observation may serve as a first indication that Jameson's model should not be examined too rigorously. Instead, it may be considered to shine a light, not so much on concrete historical constellations, but on general developments in the history of film as a whole. This is a fact that Jameson himself also underlines as he concedes that his personal application of the triad 'realism/modernism/post-modernism' does not insert itself effortlessly into existing schemata, above all because film history largely coincides with the twentieth century only:

> That this periodizing operation is not particularly 'linear' or even evolutionary will be usefully underscored by its invocation here in the *context* of film history, whose chronology – virtually coterminous with the 20th century itself – signally fails to coincide with any of the rhythms or coordinates of development in the other arts or media (in literature, for example, the 'origins' of realism in the 17th century, the inauguration of 'modernity' with Baudelaire or with the *fin de siècle*, the appearance of some properly post-modern cultural logic after World War II, but more particularly from the 1960s onwards).[17]

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In its initial configuration, the above model is firmly inscribed in the area of film studies. It is only through Slavoj Žižek's subsequent interpretation that the universal dimension inherent in Jameson's account becomes apparent. Rather than (merely) offering a descriptive take on successive developments in the history of film, it can be understood as a representation of the changes that the advent of modernity brought about with regard to the governing principles of the relationship between reality and its representation in the manifold avatars of art:

> The triad realism – modernism – post-modernism … corresponds to the three logics of the relationship between reality and its reflection: in traditional realist logic, reality is 'out there', unaffected by reflection (whether the subject is aware of it or not, reality takes its course ...); modernism believes in the redemptive/liberating power of reflection (the fundamental premise of the critique of ideology, this modernist procedure *par excellence*, is that our awareness of the true causes of ideological distortion will make it disappear); post-modernism not only does not return to premodern naivety but, rather, adds a supplementary turn of the screw to modernist reflectivity – the very immediate state of things can sustain itself only via a reflective distance (I can be wholly submitted to Power, wholly integrated in it, only if I maintain a cynical distance towards it …).[18]

In other words, Žižek's core aim here is to posit a dialectical trajectory in the historical evolution of art, wherein modernism functions as the negation of pre-modern art, while post-modernism emerges as the moment of sublation – a conclusive synthesis that deftly amalgamates elements from both antecedent stages. An informed combination, which sometimes seems to signal a return to a more immediate, more spontaneous understanding of form, cannot attain the 'theoretical innocence' of the pre-modern altogether.[19]

Admittedly, the above amounts to a splendid example of *Plumpes Denken* in the Brechtian tradition, although it does work surprisingly well in the field of architecture. After all, the onset of the modern brought about an unprecedented shift in architectural expression. It upended the lavish styles of the late nineteenth century by producing their polar opposite: reformed constructions in all their glorious sobriety. In many cases – most tangibly, perhaps, in the German-speaking world – these sought to reconcile humans with their natural surroundings by, somewhat paradoxically, creating unadorned and subdued, usually rectilinear stereometric, forms in a bid (or so it seems on some occasions) to determine the bare minimum of architecture necessary to constitute a building. One of the most poignant manifestations of this first negation within the Žižekian dialectical movement must surely be located in the works of the Austrian architect Adolf Loos, who, in the prolific writings that accompany his architectural projects, established his famous comparison between ornaments and crime.[20] Post-modern architecture, in turn, succeeded in introducing the reflective distance identified by Žižek as characteristic of the second stage, the moment of sublation that consists of blending both traditional and modern elements but doing so in a jocular, casual and often parodistic fashion, thus generating a kind of screen that impedes a return to the spontaneous, unmediated forms of pre-modern times.

As we can see, Žižekian logic holds true for the Western tradition – the majority of it, anyway. However, my contention in this article is that Peruvian *huachafo* architecture may, too, be understood as the synthetic stage of the dialectical model proposed by the Slovenian philosopher. That is to say, *huachafo* creations may well be considered a temporal and geographical alternative to classical Western post-modern architecture. As a different – and highly idiosyncratic – approach to contemporary architectural design that blends old and new and foreign and domestic elements in a similarly playful fashion, it eschews engaging in the intellectual diversions of quotation, estrangement and pastiche that have often been deemed characteristic of Western post-modernism and its creations.

Avatars of *huachafería* in contemporary Peruvian architecture

Most theoretical elaborations are moot if they cannot be illustrated by pertinent examples. Therefore, let's examine just a few of the more prominent *huachafo* creations in Peru. To begin with, there are but a few examples of this particular tendency that seem to exhibit a certain proximity to classically Western post-modern architecture that underlines Salazar Bondy's ideas of emulating stylistic features that are generally considered lavish or elegant. The hotel in northern Lima – aptly named Palacio Dorado, the 'golden palace' (Figures 1 and 2) – employs a number of elements that resemble European historical

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styles, be it the ornamentation of the main entrance or the very opulent embellishment signalling the primary access. This effort to emulate the splendour frequently associated with Baroque architecture, which dismisses any concern for symmetry, or the little balconies with their balustrades and their pairs of columns in the Composite Order, may perhaps appear a little stubby to the Western eye. The parallel with the Western approach to post-modern architecture is surely the first thing that comes to mind here. However, one should point out that Lima has a sizeable Baroque heritage.[21]

Figure 1. Hotel Palacio Dorado, northern Lima

Figure 2. Hotel Palacio Dorado, detail

More frequent, however, are those buildings that blend a broad variety of heterogeneous stylistic elements in a cheerful, spontaneous way (Figure 3). These creations do not employ historical styles in the same way that Western post-modern architecture does. We may find subdued allusions to certain elements pertaining to specific styles or periods – in this case, for example, the double windows, reminiscent perhaps of high-medieval Italian palatial architecture. However, their appearance does not

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denote a specific preoccupation with the architectural traditions they might evoke for some; rather, they are taken at their face value, with only the direct aesthetic effect in mind.

Figure 3. Residential building, Arequipa

Yet other creations stylise their elements to a degree that makes it almost impossible to ascertain their original provenance or dispense entirely with more elaborate compositions and ornamentations. Instead, they employ the most basic geometric and stereometric forms, often underlining their light-hearted nature by including elements that run counter to ideas such as functionalism or rationality in architecture. Consider Figure 4, a dwelling in the town of Ica, where one finds eaves without a roof as the building's main stylistic feature, the only purpose of which is to structure the façade and to add a certain whimsical charm.

Figure 4. Residential building, Ica

As outlined, the key contention of this article is that *huachafo* architecture may be understood as temporally and geographically eccentric (or ex-centric) post-modernism. Classical Western post-modern

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architecture revolved around the free play of historical forms and traditions, often combined in a playful and ironic fashion. It implied the liberation of historical forms from their specific context by introducing a reflexive distance.[22] Forms were no longer an inseparable part of a bigger whole of an overarching, sometimes even all-encompassing, principle – a trait that becomes especially apparent with high modernist avant-garde art and culture and its zeal to transform reality itself. Instead, the forms could be selected freely in a transtemporal manner, responding only to the artist's own inclinations, preferences and designs.

Huachafo architecture has no absolute guiding principle, no formal canon, no master signifier and no manifesto. It shares with Western post-modern architectures a predilection for the playful and the light-hearted, but this is a candid playfulness, a forthright light-heartedness. Quirky or even ironic meditations on historical styles do exist, but they are rare: *huachafo* architecture – as though itself conscious of Vargas Llosa's reflections – has little interest in these often cerebral exercises that presuppose a considerable amount of architectural knowledge (and a desire to engage with a building design on an intellectually mediated level). Instead, it celebrates spontaneity, creativity and idiosyncrasy in a way that may appear somewhat kitsch in the eyes of a beholder versed in the classical European architectural traditions. At the same time, it constitutes not only an aesthetic novelty but also a divergent model in terms of the actual construction of a building, minimising the role of professional architects, designers and contractors and celebrating the peculiarities of each builder. Scholars like Cristina Dreifuss Serrano reflected on the tension inherent in *huachafo* architecture and on the tense dialectics of being and appearing, and of being and wanting to be, that lie at the heart of *huachafería* – at least in its more traditional definitions.[23] Less has been said about *huachafo* architecture as a self-confident, playful and rather exciting cultural phenomenon – sometimes driven by an urge to impress and clearly embraced by those motivated by the humble desire to turn their home into a special place – by those who understand *huachafería* as a particularly Peruvian way of perceiving and accessing the world, much as Vargas Llosa proposes.

Huachafo architecture: indicator of a global phenomenon?

Huachafo architecture is not an isolated phenomenon, not a creation *ex nihilo*. Other areas around the globe are witnessing developments that exhibit some shared traits, although they lack the distinctly Peruvian cultural connotation characteristic of the informal creations on the outskirts of the country's urban centres. Take, for instance, Peru's neighbour to the southeast, Bolivia, where a similar movement has produced equally remarkable creations, particularly in El Alto, the largest urban centre of the Altiplano. However, there are some notable differences, beginning with the fact that the vast majority of *huachafo* dwellings are truly self-built structures, assembled by their owners with little to no input by experts, whereas in El Alto, this emerging architectural trend is linked to architect Freddy Mamani Silvestre, who has designed the bulk of these so-called *cholets*.[24] Since they are the result of formal architectural planning, these creations (Figure 5) tend to exhibit a higher degree of stylistic cohesion as well as a notable increase in professionalism in their construction, a divergence that is mirrored by the more diverse range of uses given to them. The lower levels are usually occupied by shops, artisan workshops or, most frequently, by a salón social, a kind of ballroom that can be rented for special occasions such as weddings. Whereas *huachafo* buildings are, above all, a frank, unmediated expression of the individual tastes, quirks and inclinations of their creators, Bolivian Neo-Andean architecture revolves around the idea of integrating elements of traditional, indigenous aesthetics into contemporary designs, hence the emphasis on cheerful colours and large-scale geometric ornamentation borrowed from quilts and other objects created by Aymara artisans.[25] While also producing aesthetically suggestive designs, this more or less exclusive focus on a collective whose cultural expression has often been repressed in the past confers on the Bolivian counterpart of *huachafo* architecture a different theoretical status. Its decolonial aspiration and political dimension become more palpable, whereas the refracted line of continuity and dialogue with classical Western architecture that may be detected in the Peruvian phenomenon is practically absent in these creations.

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Figure 5. Freddy Mamani Silvestre, multi-purpose buildings, El Alto, Bolivia, *c.* 2009–15

But Latin America is not the only region that has witnessed a revival of popular architecture in recent years. In Europe, one of the most striking examples of this trend can be found in the colossal estates built by various Roma families in a number of towns in rural Romania (Figure 6). These dwellings, sometimes pejoratively referred to as 'gypsy palaces', may be understood as the epitome of tackiness and an affront to good taste, or they might be seen as a radically different approach to architecture in our post-post-modern age. Their design challenges precisely these preconceived notions of taste and style, in essence, the very same field of tension in which *huachafo* architecture is inscribed. They are also a marvellous illustration of the plasticity of architecture itself. Some commentators have remarked that these designs, similar to the approach adopted by Mamani Silvestre in El Alto, are an attempt to display a social status that has been extremely difficult to achieve after decades or even centuries of stigma and oppression.[26] In stylistic terms, these Romani family estates result from an even more flamboyant, eclectic and idiosyncratic process of stylistic hybridisation than those at work in their Peruvian counterparts.

Figure 6. Residential buildings, Buzescu, Romania, 2009–15

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The trend towards highly creative self-building has even sprung up in areas that previously had little contact with this form of architectural creation. Adequate housing has become something of a global issue in recent years, with many regions experiencing a variety of difficulties, ranging from a lack of available funding, materials or space, to exorbitant rents or the seeming impossibility of acquiring property due to equally exhorbitant prices on the real estate market.[27] Some local governments, predominantly in Europe, have discovered institutionally promoted self-building (as opposed to its unregulated form) as a means to ease the pressure on the housing market while offering prospective owners – and builders – the opportunity to design their dwelling with little to no restrictions in terms of layout or style. One example, particularly famous for its unconventional, individualist designs, can be found in the Dutch city of Almere, part of the Amsterdam metro area, where an entire neighbourhood, the Homeruskwartier, was constructed primarily by its inhabitants, although architects and other professionals also helped.[28] In many respects, these cases are a far cry from the developments we find in Peru, Bolivia or Romania. Nevertheless, they are linked to the evident need for housing by a wish to form a connection to the spaces one inhabits and by the desire to shape one's home and to give it an individual, even idiosyncratic, appearance.

Huachafo architecture's grassroots placemaking

This wish to shape one's home according to one's own ideas and needs is often linked to another similar desire: to turn the space where the home is located into a 'place', an aspect of *huachafo* architecture (and its cognate tendencies) that has not been factored into this appraisal of the phenomenon so far. Although research is still non-existent in the case of Peru, it is fairly evident that the *huachafo* trend goes beyond the desires of self-expression and representation. After all, it is telling that these dwellings have sprung up in areas often deprived of material comfort and that they display a distinct lack of a sense of place. Surely, one has to acknowledge that creative, self-built structures do not possess the same placemaking power that can be unfolded by urban planning or similar interventions on a larger scale.[29] They do, however, portray a genuine longing to create a place where there was none before: at the fringes of the urban centres, amid many other nondescript buildings, in neighbourhoods that might well be understood as non-places, even as they escape the most classical, narrow definition of the concept as laid out by French anthropologist Marc Augé in his eponymous treatise.[30]

Perhaps *huachafo* architecture can be seen as a small, local, partial antidote to the sprawling excess of modernity and modernisation that Rem Koolhaas, in his famously pessimistic essay from 2002, has dubbed Junkspace: the alienating, almost tumoral proliferation of architectural substance, the vast expansion of ever-new spaces that simulate diversity while bowing down to conformity and inconsistency at the same time.[31] Although virtually ubiquitous, Junkspace is not actually designed with the needs and desires of those who inhabit it in mind; rather, it is a kind of entity in its own right, a non-human architectural agent that devours spaces and people with its homogenising vortex. 'Our concern for the masses,' remarks Koolhaas somewhat enigmatically, 'has blinded us to People's Architecture.'[32] The Dutch architect's essay is as lyrical as it is obscure. Suffice to recall that, towards the end of his reflections, Koolhaas conceives of the English language as a globalised form of collective linguistic Junkspace that, more often than not, hampers signification instead of facilitating it. He invites the reader to surmise that his whole meditation might be better understood as an allegory rather than a descriptive take on real-world architectural phenomena. Yet we may understand it in a literal way nonetheless. Perhaps *huachafo* architecture is not only the expression of alternative post-modernism, as this article set out to show, but is also a reaction to the shortcomings of modern architecture, a response to its unfulfilled promises; a new People's Architecture, not grandiose, meticulously planned, or highly professionalised, but localised, playful and popular in the truest sense of the word.

Notes

[1] Some even argue that disruptive discoveries, once plentiful and often linked to single, outstanding researchers, have experienced a significant decline in recent years. See, for instance, Kozlov, '"Disruptive" science'.

[2] Whether this gesture is one of true appreciation or just another avatar of well-meaning but, ultimately, futile tokenism is difficult to discern.

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[3] See, for example, Hickley, 'Bumpy Road'.

[4] A tentative definition of *huachafo*, beyond simple one-word translations, can be found in the corresponding section of this article. For a detailed historical account of the term and its usage in Peruvian society, see Pinto Gamboa, 'Envés y reflexión de lo *huachafo*', 84–5 and 139–44.

[5] Dreifuss Serrano, 'Lo *huachafo*', 96.

[6] Mudrovcic, '"La tía julia y el escribidor"', 127–8. Romance philologist Ellen Spielmann maintains that the term *guachafita*, which served as an inspiration for Miota's coinage, stems from the Quechua language family and, in fact, displays a certain semantic proximity to its more contemporary counterpart rather than merely denoting a noisy or chaotic situation. See Spielmann, 'Costos de una huachafería limeña', 57–8.

[7] Salazar Bondy, *Lima*, 116; author's own translation.

[8] Greenberg, 'Avant-garde and kitsch', 9–15.

[9] Salazar Bondy, *Lima*, 116–7; author's own translation.

[10] Salazar Bondy, *Lima*, 117; author's own translation.

[11] In this regard, consider another fragment by Salazar Bondy: 'This is the meaning of "huachafismo": it is derogatorily employed by those who, from the summit, unlawfully ... determine the fate of social hierarchy, defending themselves with it, but it also embodies the aspiration, marked by a contained aggressiveness, of those who try to climb that social hierarchy. Sometimes … the class struggle assumes … unsuspected forms: these, of an apparently innocuous semantic nature, are peculiar to Lima.' Salazar Bondy, *Lima*, 118; author's own translation.

[12] Vargas Llosa, 'Understanding *huachafería*', 157. Vargas Llosa's contribution to the volume is a translation of an earlier piece entitled 'La huachafería' which appeared in the Peruvian newspaper *El Comercio* on 28 August 1983. The English translation has been minimally modified to better reflect – in the author's opinion – certain semantic details of the concept.

[13] One has to point out that research into this – in my view, more than the palpable potential of *huachafería* as a decolonisation tool – is still virtually non-existent.

[14] Vargas Llosa, 'Understanding *huachafería*', 156–7.

[15] Jameson, *Signatures*, 155.

[16] Jameson, *Signatures*, 155–6.

[17] Jameson, *Signatures*, 156. Note how the example of other arts and media Jameson employs here is literature, which is, as we have pointed out, the one ambit where realism may, in fact, be understood as a general historical category.

[18] Žižek, *Indivisible Remainder*, 233.

[19] Žižek, *Indivisible Remainder*, 233.

[20] See Loos, 'Ornament und Verbrechen', 276–88.

[21] For a detailed account of the foundation and the early years of colonial Lima during the Baroque era, see Osorio, *Inventing Lima*, especially 7–25 regarding the city's rich architectural heritage.

[22] in Žižek's view, this was achieved during the passage from high to late modernism with the emergence of realism as a contingent stylistic preference, liberated from the constraints of its historical embedding:

> We can see how 'late' modernism is a necessary mediator between 'high' modernism and post-modernism: it is only within the 'late' modernist universe that realism can be appropriated as a contingent style. Let us take the triad (in art theory) of realism, modernism, and post-modernism – when do we pass from modernism to post-modernism? On the abstract conceptual level, there is only one precise answer: when realism itself (re)appears, is (re)appropriated, as a 'modernist' procedure.

Lenin and Žižek, *Revolution at the Gates*, 326, n.132. Regarding the above, see a slightly more condensed, earlier formulation in Žižek, *Ticklish Subject*, 370–1.

[23] Dreifuss Serrano's reflections occupy a middle ground between Salazar Bondy's perspective of *huachafería* as a principally imitative process and Vargas Llosa's self-confident approach that considers it a specifically Peruvian way of 'being-in-the-world'. About the mentioned dialectical tension, Dreifuss Serrano remarks that: '"Appearance" is the watchword; it encloses a rather complex process rich in nuance, which not only refers to the formal result but, above all, underlines the cultural and social motivations that underlie the process of making fundamentally aesthetic decisions.' Dreifuss Serrano, 'Lo *huachafo*', 95; author's own translation.

[24] *Cholet* is a portmanteau of the term *cholo* – a concept with a certain similarity to the Peruvian *huachafo* – and *chalet*, the Spanish term for a standalone house or a single-family dwelling. Although both concepts overlap, the specifics vary considerably, to the point that *cholo* is a commonly used qualifier in Peruvian Spanish as well (although the cultural implications of *cholo* as a concept are perhaps more pronounced in its neighbour to the

south). For an informed approach to *cholo* in Bolivian culture, as well as its decolonial potential, see Soruco Sologuren, 'La ininteligibilidad de lo cholo en Bolivia', 49–58.

[25] See Andreoli, 'Learning from El Alto', 42–3.

[26] Similar to the case of *huachafo* architecture in Peru, there is still little formal, and even less academic, documentation of this phenomenon. One of the more insightful accounts so far is an article written by Edwin Heathcote for the *Financial Times*, in which the author, aided by the Romanian Roma writer, philologist and activist Delia Grigore, explores the iconography of these remarkable dwellings. See Heathcote, 'The Gaudy, Joyful Palaces of the Roma'.

[27] See Aalbers, 'The Great Moderation'. Aalbers develops a detailed historical account that culminates in his analysis of the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. While these events no longer determine the current situation, it is safe to say that things have not exactly taken a turn for the better in recent years.

[28] Bossuyt, '"Residents" experiences'.

[29] Two very prominent examples in Latin America – both of them in Colombia – of successful institutional placemaking are the widespread introduction of *ciclovías*, or bike streets, in Bogotá from the 1980s onwards, as well as the extensive urban renewal programme that has transformed the city of Medellín, once known as the country's most notorious drug hub, into a more inclusive and attractive place for its inhabitants, a development that began shortly after the turn of the millennium.

[30] See Augé, *Non-Places*. French anthropologist Marc Augé, widely credited as the inventor of the non-place, focused on those spaces that promote an atomised, transitory and transactional relationship with their users instead of inviting their visitors to form a lasting connection. Prime examples of such non-places are airports, shopping malls, hypermarkets, toll booths and similar elements of motorised travel infrastructure. The specifics of the sites that are home to many, if not all, *huachafo* creations are not particularly consistent with this narrow definition of the non-place, although Augé elaborates, in the closing remarks of his essay, that the relationship between place and non-place, far from being a mutually exclusive dualism, should be understood as a plastic, adaptable, essentially dialectic model.

[31] Being the invasive entity it is, Junkspace is multiform – or rather, amorphous – and, as such, not easily defined. What one may do in the light of this is to tentatively piece together some of the partial definitions and descriptions Koolhaas offers on the first page of his essay:

> Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course, or, more precisely, what coagulates while modernization is in progress, its fallout. Modernization had a rational program: to share the blessings of science universally. Junkspace is its apotheosis, or meltdown … Junkspace is the sum total of our current achievement; we have built more than all previous generations put together, but somehow, we do not register on the same scales. We do not leave pyramids … Junkspace seems an aberration, but it is the essence, the main thing… the product of an encounter between escalator and air-conditioning, conceived in an incubator of Sheetrock (all three missing from the history books). Koolhaas, 'Junkspace', 175.

[32] Koolhaas, 'Junkspace'.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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