

# CARTHA

## CARTHA 2018 ON BUILDING IDENTITY

After the conquest of south Mexico by the Spanish in 1528, the inhabitants of San Juan Chamula, the Tzotzil people (part of the family of the Mayas), developed a very particular form of catholic strain as a result of a syncretic process between the local Mayan heritage and the imposed Spanish catholic beliefs. During such process, the previous religious identities were analyzed, compared and negotiated towards the construction of a new religious idiosyncrasy that has kept evolving during the last five centuries until today.

Though many key aspects of the Catholic religion were *assimilated*, or simply *appropriated* by the local population, some of the specificities of the new faith have been manipulated into fitting the local culture through a not always subtle process of *rejection* and *conciliation*. A clear outcome of this blatant contact is the San Juan Chamula temple.

This church, which still now functions as spiritual and social epicenter of the town, displays the representations of the main symbols of catholicism. They were *assimilated* by the local religious identity while *rejecting* its monotheist basis, turning “saints” into deities just as relevant for the local cult as The Holy Trinity. This is visible in the disposition and use of the altars inside the church where most of the religious ceremonies are properly conducted, creating a situation where multiple congregations can be inside the same church while conducting the often disparate rituals in honor of different gods, embodied as saints.

At the side altars a group of “healers” conducts individual healings and collective ceremonies parallel to the catholic mass, diagnosing afflictions and prescribing remedies such as candles, flower petals, feathers or even the ritual sacrifice of live animals if the situation calls for it. This cohabitation of the two types of spiritual guides under one typically catholic roof is a clear *conciliation* of two drastically dissimilar interpretations of the role of clergy and its traditional spatial relations.

Adding up to the peculiarity of this church, its windows are covered so that the only source of light are the candles of each of the altars and neon lights in the ceiling, while the floor is

completely covered with pine leaves and the air is dense as a result of the smoke of the copal incense. Moreover, ceremonies and rituals are usually accompanied by *Pox*, an artisanal sugarcane based liquor that during the last decades, has slowly been replaced by *coca-cola* as the chosen drink for religious rituals.

The example of San Juan Chamula is one of many where a typology which was originally intended as a colonial tool, ended up becoming an intrinsic element of the local identity - in an undisputedly different way from the originally intended by the Spanish evangelizers - through a constant and ongoing process of evolution, which acts upon the mechanics of form, function, material and meaning. Identity is an inherent constant in Architecture but the awareness of its relevance has been intermittent in architectural history. Its importance is usually heightened in moments of crisis<sup>1</sup>, when the defining characteristics of society are set under scrutiny. In the current global context, when identity tends to follow the general trend of becoming a commodity or a political tool, it becomes particularly relevant to approach it from an architectural standpoint.

In order to be able to deal with the complexity of the relation between Identity and Architecture, we propose to decompose it into a set of processes<sup>2</sup>:

*Assimilation*

*Appropriation*

*Rejection*

*Conciliation.*

Having these processes as departing points, how could one approach architectural identity? And how do these processes reveal themselves in Architecture nowadays?

We propose to study each process in a dedicated issue. By doing so we intend to understand better the specifics of each of these four processes of construction of identity and as a result architectural identity at large. We welcome submissions that elaborate on identity by means of any of these processes - *assimilation, appropriation, rejection and conciliation* - or that question, contradict and suggest alternatives to them.

With this year's cycle we intend to look into the role of Architecture at building identity and how identity is expressed, imposed or perceived through Architecture.

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<sup>1</sup> See Erikson's and Marcia's theories of psychological development.

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<sup>2</sup> This set of processes is based on the Hegelian views on Identity and Lacan's Mirror Stage. We opted to take constant duality and constant prevalence as guiding lines for the elaboration of this set. Appropriation and Rejection (Hegel) acted as the base while Assimilation and Conciliation, resulting from a quite architectural analysis of identity building processes, serve as triggers for the suggestion of further possible processes by the contributors.

## 4 ISSUES call for papers

The cycle will be divided into four issues, each of them corresponding to the identity building processes mentioned before.

Submissions should reflect and expand on the aforementioned possible processes of identity building and their relation to the past, present and future of Architecture. A draft of the submission should be electronically sent to CARTHA with the following deadlines :

*Assimilation* 21.06.18

*Appropriation* 26.07.18

*Rejection* 23.08.18

*Conciliation* 20.09.18

### schedule and submission details

> Contributions should be electronically sent to:  
**info@carthamagazine.com.**

> Accepted proposals will then be prepared for publishing by the author and the editorial board together.

> Different interpretations of the topic and its processes are possible and wished for by the editorial board.

> Contributions are free of format.

> All texts must be written in English (**max. 1500 words**) and submitted in .rtf format.

> All images must be submitted as individual files (.jpeg) at 300 d.p.i. and at 72 d.p.i. Captions should be submitted alongside the images.

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