

# An Anonymous Byproduct: The Urban Morphology of the Motel in Quito

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**Abstract:** Since the 1970s, the industrial structures that once predominated the northern zone in Quito have become the canvas of a Las Vegas-like landscape. When tall walls and colourful signs mesmerize your eyes, you have reached the motel area. Misplaced from its original context and function, the motel was imported from the United States of America to Quito, moving from routes and rural areas to the periphery of the city. The original function of low-cost temporary accommodation changed to one related to the renting of rooms for sexual encounters, usually by the hour and by unlawful couples. Its built type mutated to later adapt to its new urban surroundings.

The motel can only be reached by car. Once the users drive into the enclosed parking lot their identity is hidden and they become anonymous. This typology merged into the industrial area of the city due to normative requirements, as a legal agreement not only between the owners of the motels and the authorities but with the predominantly conservative society. Based on analytical drawings, this paper explores the architectural, typological and urban qualities of the motel in Quito. It will be seen from above and street view, unveiling a unique by-product.

## 1. Introduction

In Ecuador's conservative society, sex has commonly been considered a taboo. Quito's catholic culture, reinforced by political and social parameters, encourages a behavioural standard in which sex is only accepted in marriage, mainly for reproductive purposes. Thus, any establishment categorized as a motel is directly related to unlawful and perverted sexual encounters, in rooms rented by hours and with particular architectural and urban characteristics. This social standard has evolved during the last 50 years.

Back in the 1970s there were few spaces used for sexual related purposes, mainly brothels. Additionally, there were few hotels and pensions used only for touristic purposes; the lodging industry was just starting to develop. Consequently, the necessity for a space that could be used for sexual encounters arose. Furthermore, during this decade, Ecuador was a developing country buried into political and economic turmoil as it was facing a dictatorship period, since president José María Velasco Ibarra assumed total power in 1944. He was followed by a series of unstable governments until 1976, including a military dictatorship by Guillermo Rodríguez Lara (Carrión,

1992). These were repressive systems that condemned by threatening and persecuting any non-regularized activity. By the 1980s Ecuador recovered its democratic government. Nonetheless, a repressive society gives space for double standards and hidden purposes. Consequently, as in every dictatorship, society had to respond in a creative yet disguised way to embrace forbidden topics, mainly ones related to sex. New opportunities build up when non-politically correct activities happen and have the necessity to become anonymous. In the case of Quito during the 1970s, this necessity became an opportunity to create a type of building that could serve these purposes. But there were no references of buildings or even ideas for temporary accommodations that could satisfy the demand for spaces for sexual encounters, without prostitution services.

Owned by María de Lourdes Herzog, a Brazilian immigrant, one of the first known establishments for extramarital sexual encounters in Quito was named "Los Faroles" [The Lanterns]. This establishment started with 10 rooms, and after thirty years in successful business, it currently offers 66 rooms. There are no registered documents of the exact opening date, but newspaper records date it existed since 1978, when its opening caused controversy among the old-fashioned society according to peoples' interviews (Gómez, 2005). Los 'Faroles' was inserted near the actual industrial northern zone in Quito, along the Avenue 10 de Agosto, which is one of the main peripheral highways. The location of this first establishment resonates with the 'medicalization of the body' in modern cities; according to Michel Foucault: "*it implies that the sick need to be isolated, both physically and psychologically from the society they belong to before being treated*" (Foucault, 1969). On the one hand, this type of business was not wanted; it was treated as an undesirable sickness, isolating it not only because of its function, but also because of its acquired purpose. On the other hand, it was wanted to the point that it became a success and trailblazer. The architectural object was isolated to an alienated environment, atypical to lodging services, which unexpectedly developed an unknown typology. Without noticing, Maria de Lourdes Herzog not only translocated the American motel as the generic building of this business, but also, by inserting it in a new environment, initiated a transformation process.

### 1.1. *The Architecture of the Motel*

The American Motel is a low-cost accommodation located in peripheral routes, secluded from urban areas. The architecture of the American motel started in the urban sprawl after World War II, when economic and political changes generated an increasing human displacement along the United States of America. Its vast territory, although connected through a sophisticated system of vehicular arteries that demand long journeys, fostered the emergence of a new type of building. It is distributed along routes to satisfy the need of travellers for inexpensive overnight accommodations. Consequently, the motel passed through a series of transformations before becoming a consolidated building type; from basic Auto Camps, to Rural Cabins, Motor Courts and Motor Inns. Isolated from city's congested downtowns, Moto-Hotels, or Motels, became the convenient accommodation for truckers, nomads and travellers (Jackle, J., Sculle, K. & Rogers, J. 2002). Therefore, the motel became a low-cost typology for short-term lodging in peripheral rural areas destined for the travelling classes. The car, the parking lot, and the room conformed this building type isolated from the city's centre social demands.

The architectural features of the American motel and its isolated environment give it a mouldable condition as it could be used to hide a restrictive activity in Quito. Once imported to Quito's conservative society, the motel ironically became the perfect typology to disguise its iniquitous necessities. As previously noted, the motel in Quito was intentionally placed in a border location and not for adaptive purposes; it needed to be isolated. In order to understand

the plot of its location it is imperative to review the Quito's urban growth plans during the past century. Economic growth during the 1950s – due to banana exportation – leads to a drastic increase of urban population and informal settlements, unveiling the urgency for control and legislation. Particularly in Quito, its population had tripled in just 25 years – in 1950 Quito had 209,932 inhabitants, whereas in the 1974 census the total number rose to 625,828 people (Cifuentes, 2016). Therefore, a new regulatory urban plan was developed in 1967, substituting the first urban plan designed in 1944 by the Uruguayan architect Jones Odriozola. The first plan was based on a land use division of the city which main purpose was to divide city into three main functional activities: residential, working and recreation. This plan divided the city into three main zones: south, destined for industrial activities; centre, for residential, financial and commercial uses; and north, eminently for residences. These zones included vast voids destined for recreation and public space. However, until 1967, the city grew in a spontaneous way, and public space and equipment were left unattended. Thus, the 1967 Master Plan approved through the 1165 Metropolitan Ordinance, included a set of four large 'unit system' instead of a divisionary system (Municipal Council, 1967). Consequently, mixed uses were assigned to the main areas of the city. While the south was considered mainly residential and industrial, the geographical centre of the city was divided into two: the Historic Centre as the administrative core of the city and, next to it, the hyper-centre, destined to residential, commercial and mainly financial purposes, transforming this area into the most equipped zone of the entire city. Finally, the north was equally programmed as the south: residential and industrial (Carrión, 1992). This 'unit system' has developed its own intricate way, where its land use assignation is its key organizational element.

Since then, in Quito, the use of land defined the city's performance, and therefore, the distinct units were connected in order to function as a hole urban mass. Consequently, following the Master Plan's studies and proposals, at the end of the twentieth century, new peripheral avenues were inserted in the city according to its new limits. Quito's irregular and mountainous topography led to a longitudinal growth, defining a unique urban morphology. 10 de Agosto Avenue serves it and it has been the commercial spine of the city since the nineteenth century. Since Odriozola's Regulatory Plan, four main longitudinal roads were established to unify and connect the city from south to north: Mariscal Sucre and Amazonas Avenues on the occident, and Eloy Alfaro and Simón Bolívar Avenues on the orient. These roads connect the industrial zones (south – north) bordering the city but not still being part of it (Figure 1). Hence, they defined the form of the peripheral areas of the city, where the motel was strategically located.

From 1973, a Directory Plan was supposed to be developed until 1993, in order to define and document the complete area of the metropolitan city of Quito. The new plan established the total area of the urban settlement of the city, including the peripheral industrial zones and the residential areas surrounding them (Carrión, 1992). During the 1990s, the motel in Quito was already acknowledged in people's imaginary as a restrictive commerce, and therefore it was categorized under normative definitions in the first Metropolitan Zoning Ordinance 001, approved on December 12, 1997 (Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito, 1997). Quito's Regulatory Use of Land Ordinances approved during the twenty-first century, establish that industrial land use includes factories, industrial commerce, car dealers and equipment for restrictive trade. According to normative definitions, the latter refers to "establishments that provide spaces for sexual services with or without lodging", without specifying the permitted type of services (Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito, 2002). Nevertheless, in the peripheries of the north, there are not cabarets, brothels, or the offering of prostitution services, as they are normed in other areas of the city.

## 2. The Urban Morphology of the Motel in Quito

The concepts of city and type are indispensable to analyse the urban morphology of the motel in Quito. Quito is and always has been political in its essence. The fragmentation and re-composition of the city's spaces and forms can never be separated from political implications. Although architecture is often aligned to the concept of uniqueness; unrepeatable by definition, type is an implicit concept in the generation of architecture. If we see an architectonic built form as a repeatable object, its desirable uniqueness essence changes to one conceived to being recreated, restructured and perfected through its repetition. But, in this research the motel type in Quito mainly relates to systems of organization rather than stylistic approaches. Hence it is important to distinguish between type as form and type as organizational structure. The first refers to the definition of the material object by its geometrical configuration. Usually form gives the building a geometrical attribution; a form based type. Nevertheless type, as organizational structure, is a non-material definition of the object as it refers to the particular relationships between the components that serve to a certain use, within any form. In this perspective, the principal conditions for the invention of the motel in Quito do not necessarily fit between the relationship of form and use. The study of the urban morphology of the motel in Quito inquires the relationship between the type's organizational structure and the industrial environment.

There are several methodologies and traditions on how urban morphological studies examine the creation of built forms, such as Caniggia's work on the city's diachronic phases of development and transformation. As Cataldi points out, one of the major contributions of Caniggia is the establishment of the method of processual typology (Oliveira, 2016, p. 116). It primarily focuses on the permanent re-negotiation of the connection between "body and environment" and the body's capability of reprogramming itself, demonstrating the reversibility of "manmade processes" (Caniggia, Maffei & Marzot, 2018). In fact, the motel in Quito as an architectural object re-negotiates its original connection to its original environment and gains a new opportunity to reprogram and convey its type organizational structure as it relates to its new environment. Nevertheless, in a Darwinian manner, the mutation of the motel and its adaptation with the industrial environment does not necessarily fit into a cyclic process of permanent renegotiation. Instead, two building types, the industrial shed and the motel, merge together in a symbiotic relationship with their environment.

Within this frame, the aim of this study is to explore the mutation of the original American motel building type and its further adaptation to the urban morphology of the industrial zone in Quito. Based on the new object interaction with the environment, this paper engages into a synthetic analysis of the Motel's opportunistic camouflage that allowed its mutation. The mixture of assigned land uses, such as industrial with residential zoning in the northern area of the city, where you mainly reach by automobile, generates a particular urban morphology. The relationships between the shed's building type and the urban fabric reveal nothing atypical at first sight, since the sheds that mainly represent its built form organize the urban morphology. The motel business' owners take advantage of the existing built form by hiding the motel services they offer inside the industrial shed. The desire and necessity of keeping their costumers' identity private, derives specific qualities and mutations of the motel type and its relationship to the environment. The original American motel couples with the sheds and adapts to the industrial land use in Quito creating a unique by-product that has not been architecturally documented yet.

### 3. Methodology

The area of study has a restrictive movement due to privacy issues as both, motels and industries are private property controlled by specific organizations. The industrial use of land in the north of Quito has 276.97 ha with a total amount of 19 motels. We delimited the area of study to 108.95ha, which are a 39.33% of the industrial use of land, because this area contains the major aggrupation of motels. The area has 16 motels corresponding to the 84% of the total amount of motels in Quito's northern industrial area (Secretaría de Territorio, Hábitat y Vivienda. 2019).

On first instance the gathering of information was limited to Google Earth images and public regulatory ordinances. Because this is an understudied topic, methodologically we used conventional urban morphological techniques of map series analysis combined with drone technology – ortho mosaic photographs – to survey the area of study<sup>1</sup>. Two main points of view were used to structure the survey and the data analysis of the area: seen from above and street view. The secondary roads that connect groups of motels have minimum sized sidewalks turning them into non-pedestrian friendly roads. Consequently, the lack of constant pedestrian flow generates an atmosphere of insecurity. The streetscape skyline and performance was collected by a sequential set of photos, both by drone and by automobile.

Actualized GIS maps of the city's zoning and use of land regulation were the base maps in our research. However, field survey and observation were the main tools for collecting detailed information that complemented the GIS maps information of the ground floor composition of the industrial mega blocks. The industrial use of land is conformed by massive blocks compared to the residential city blocks. Whereas the average industrial block's measurement is 290 x 180 ml, the average residential block has 100 x 50ml (Gobierno Abierto, 2019). This is why we categorized them as mega blocks. Since the regulatory entities have unspecific data; the missing data was collected through drone flights during day and night. The drone flights gathered quantitative – pedestrian and vehicle flows- and qualitative information – building heights, building form, and building real use. Additionally, another important activity was visiting the sixteen motels as paying customers in order to collect specific information from the garage, the rooms and the service corridor. Meanwhile we managed to have unclassified interviews with motel's personnel to discover the service corridors' functionality as access is denied to clients.

Finally, the use of ground floor drawings including the collected data allowed us to identify and document the urban morphology and ground floor performance of the motel in Quito.

### 4. Analysis/Results

Based on the methodology we used to survey information, three main categories were established to classify the urban and typological findings.

1. There are no data protection and privacy laws in Ecuador concerning drone flights. During the survey, drone flights neither invaded private property nor took any ortho-mosaic photographs inside lots and buildings. No direct photographs were taken from people's faces. The photographs were taken from a 100-meter distance from the ground floor, and the distance from street view photographs varied from 10 to 20 meters. The drone was located on the street axis avoiding the capture of images inside private property.





Figure 2. GROUND FLOOR DYNAMIC. Mapping of Quito's northern industrial land use area, based on Arcgis maps obtained from the Municipality of Quito complemented with field and drone survey. Showing the motels location inside the area of study and ground floor zoom into two main areas of motels' aggrupation. © Karina Cazar.

week. From 9 am to 5 pm – average established office hours – the main vehicles in the area are trucks and medium sized cars that serve the storage and minor productions buildings. This is clearly seen from above, as the sheds maintain the same static, massive, industrial appearance. The trucks enter through the main avenues, cross the area through the grid streets, load and unload inside each lot, and leave following the same route. The motel camouflages under the shed form and there is no distinguishable difference between the industrial shed and the motel shed (Figure 3).

From dusk till dawn, the night top view uncovers differences between lots: some of them are invaded by neon lights revealing the disguised activities under some of the industrial sheds. Trucks flow decreases and regular sized private cars take over not only the streets, but also the area inside the colourful shining lots.

## 6. Urban Findings Seen from Street View

The motel's camouflage in the industrial shed is noticeable through street view as it unveils the elements that help it camouflage in pedestrian abandoned streets. The motel takes advantage of specific architectural elements to disguise itself during the day. Driving through the industrial mega blocks, some of the front enclosure walls are divided into three portions, where the middle one is displaced behind the other two, forcing the approaching car to make a "u" turn so it can enter into the motel's lot. The car hides behind the wall where there is no entrance control, but you are being observed through security cameras. In contrast, the surrounding sheds that accommodate industrial functions have typical guarded enclosures,



Figure 3. CAMOUFLAGE.

*Top View of a section of the industrial island in the northern area of Quito, taken from drone ortho-mosaic images. Showing the industrial built form located between two main roads: 10 de Agosto avenue on the occident (upper road on the image) and Eloy Alfaro Avenue on the orient (lower road on the image).*

creating a contrasting streetscape. The industrial shed's grey shades juxtapose with the motel's unusual walls as most of them have attached signs. These signs on the peripheral walls start lighting up at evening and the word "Motel" appears everywhere. This new unified architectural element becomes the motel's façade; as if following Robert Venturi's and Denise Scott Brown's conclusions from Las Vegas, the shed acquires a new way of exposing its new function. In the American motel the sign complements its façade with flashy logos and type fonts, without dividing walls between the street and the building. In the by-product of the motel the wall preserves the building's need of privacy attaching discrete signs to its front enclosure walls. On the one hand, day street views of the motel in Quito show dull signs with 3D texts words, without a specific font type. Visually it looks like a usual industry brand with the motel's name. The sign doesn't have explicit images regarding the building's use. On the other hand, these architectural elements turn into striking screens during night, competing to persuade visitors to use their establishments and the motel as a building loses its disguised form (Figure 4). These are not ordinary facades; thematic objects such as palm trees and hearts next to the signs overwhelm the visitors. The enclosure walls have colourful decorative lighting that drastically contrast with the white and cold lighting of the rest of the industrial environment. When the users approach to these walls the feeling of hiding their identities arises; it is not politically correct to be seen there. Nevertheless, once the users drive through the façade walls their identity is disguised and anonymous.

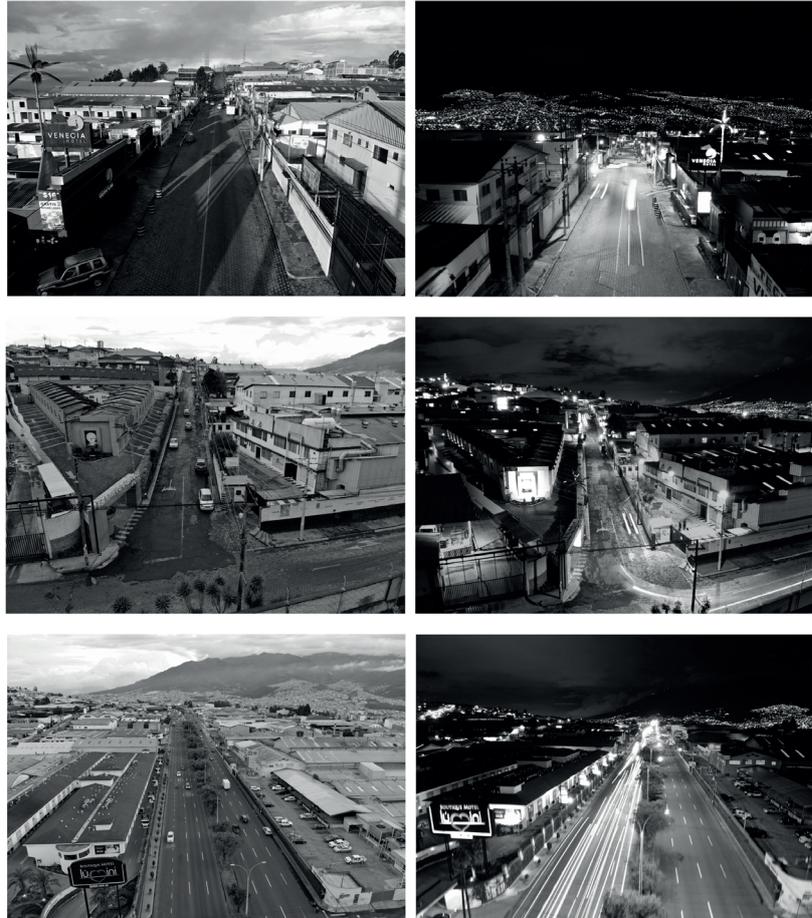


Figure 4. *DAY & NIGHT PERFORMANCE*. Street View collage images taken by drone flights. Showing three motel's day and night appearance. The upper images correspond to 'Venecia Motel', the middle images correspond to 'Flamingos Motel' and the lower images correspond to 'Lumini Motel'.

## 7. Motel Type: Organizational Structure

A typological transformation takes place when the motel and the industrial shed become one. The shed loses its industrial value to accommodate the temporary lodging services of the motel by suffering a series of mutations. The reconfiguration of the shed, becoming a motel, has its own intrinsic relationship with the industrial environment. The motel business owners use the shed form as a container and mutate the motel by altering the sequence of its original organizational structure. The alienated object has a preconceived space organizational sequence: the parking lot, the service corridor/circulation system and the room. For instance, the parking lots in the American motel – specifically the motor inn – are separated from the room and the building. The exterior circulation corridors are the only transition space between the parking lot and the room; both guests and service staff use them (Jackle, J., Sculle, K. & Rogers, J. 2002). Once you enter the motel's lot in Quito, a lineal paired set of garage doors – some opened and some closed – flows besides the interior road where sidewalks disappear. The only thing left to do is to enter one of them and park. The garage door automatically closes behind your back and in the enclosed space of 5 per 3 meters, a narrow staircase guides you to the upper floor: the motel room. Sometimes there is a waiting time while the service cleans the room. Once the wooden door revolves, blocking the service connection to the room, you are allowed to enter. In this sequence of spaces, nobody saw the visitors' face. Therefore, the original motel's organizational structure is completely altered. In Quito, the introduction of the street into the motel's shed transforms its typological configuration and combines the space for the user with the space for the car. In this case, there are not parking lots but private parking garages

that are located as thresholds to the motel rooms. The private garages act as the transitional space between the street and the room, altering the original American motor inn circulation sequence. Furthermore, the mutation of the motel eliminates the exterior corridor and introduces an interior “invisible” service passage that can only be reached the moment the users leave the room. The same door divides the intersection of the room entrance and the service corridor; the motel staff reaches this private corridor by entrances isolated from the visitors’ path. This organizational structure is found in fourteen out of the sixteen studied motels. The other two motels don’t have the service-blocking door. Instead, they have two doors; one serving the users and other one destined for service staff. The motel in Quito symbiotically interacts within the industrial island due to the opportunistic mutations and the further adaptations of the motel by-product with the industrial street grid.

## 8. Discussion/Conclusion

By definition, the word opportunistic has negative connotations, referring to taking advantage of circumstances with dubious principles or ethics. In our use of this term, we explore the beneficial connotations this word implies as it leads to generative and creative uses of architectural and urban conditions that were used to mutate the American Motel in Quito. Opportunistic overlaps between forms, space, program, organizational structures and environment conveyed into the Quito’s by-product of the motel type. Working opportunistically, the motel in Quito camouflages under the sheds of the industrial mega-blocks serving the society’s necessity to keep morally forbidden sexual encounters anonymous. Then, it mutates re arranging its organizational structure and interaction with the user and the road. Finally it adapts to the industrial street grid, symbiotically working with its environment.

A society with double standards found an opportunity to normalize a restricted activity by using the American motel building type isolated in an industrial environment. This paper describes the formal evolution of the motel where the industrial urban environment was the perfect canvas for hiding a non-politically correct service under its sheds. The block analysis and streetscape photographs portray idyllic conditions for hiding this building type. The predominant shed forms in the industrial island allowed the camouflage of the new purpose given to the alienated type, producing an anonymous by-product.

Once the motel is placed into the industrial island, the holistic functioning of the original American motel mutates and creates its own space organizational sequence; not ruled by the shed’s form. The fundamental relationship between use and form in the generation of type is not the main essence of the motel’s by-product. The shed’s form is not relevant to its new use since the organizational structure of the motel is the predominant element of this typology. Even though, some motels’ façade look different form others, they share the same operative and organizational structure. The by-product of the motel in Quito embodies the merging of two different building types in which one of them – the American motel – reacts to the environment of the other one – the industrial shed – by opportunistically camouflaging, altering and adapting to it. The political and cultural implications explained in this paper created the conditions for the invention of the motel in Quito. Its atypical location shifts the surrounding urban context performance. During the day, the mobility and activity of the area mainly responds to industrial equipment and businesses. In fact, the motel remains anonymous disguised under the industrial sheds. During night, the industrial island turns into an active zone where the motel

changes its performance by incorporating atypical flows of users, services and atmospheres to the industrial zone.

Interestingly enough, the ambiguity of the motel in Quito's urban imaginary and collective memory lays on our society's double standards. It is a by-product that emerges from the business owners' creativity to maintain both its purpose and users anonymous. However, the motel's location, use and purpose are of common knowledge and it has been a successful business for decades. In fact, television shows and newspapers have produced short clips explaining and promoting the motel. Yet, it is still stigmatized becoming the stage of public scandals<sup>2</sup>.

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2. "Lady Tantra", this was the given name to a public scandal where a husband discovered his wife's infidelity. He confronted her when she was driving out of a motel's entrance located in the northern industrial area of Quito. The case reached national and international diffusion; several communication mediums were used for the dissemination of the incident such as news and social media. The appearance of the motel in the video gave context to the event since most viewers easily deduced the motel's purpose in the scandal. This is just one example of multiple confrontations that have caused controversy in Quito.

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