



Image and classicism in housing social life spaces in Recife, Brasil

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Abstract

The problem of classicist composition and representation in architecture has been revealed until the present day, in the social life spaces of housing in the city of Recife, Brazil. The social life spaces, is defined in our research as the entrance hall, its main facade, and its living and dining rooms. They have been valued in relation to the other spaces that compose the house, where the scene, the angle of view, and the background are privileged. This aspect of the scene is reinforced through the use of classical compositional principles, such as symmetry, proportion, order and character; transforming spaces into true visual scenarios to be enjoyed by focused vision, privileged since the Renaissance period, with the advent of perspective. Thus, it was demonstrated how the habit of classicist composition presents itself in the social life spaces visited by the authors, where it is observed that it occurs from the wealthiest layers of the population to the simplest houses, exemplifying how the aestheticization of the architectural space is a constant in this city.

Keywords

Design, social life spaces, aesthetics, focused vision, classical compositional principles



Living room project for wealthy family apartment in Recife, Brazil. Source: author's photograph.

Introduction

The drawing, which precedes the project, which materializes the idea of the professional architect, was identified by Vasari as its foundation [Tejo 2012, p.20]. Alberti already attributed the importance to architecture of what he called *delineamento*, which defined the form of the building, and which together with the construction, made up the building art [Alberti 2011, p.145].

The academic doctrine, since the Renaissance, has emphasized the importance of drawing, considered not only as a technique, but as a project conception, making the idea of architecture precede its construction, being independent of it [Pereira 2004, p. 1]. This made room for mental exercises of the composition of space, where the aesthetic dimension of architecture was developed, perceived mainly by the sense of vision. For example it got to the point that, for the protagonists of the 18th century *Architecture Parlante*, design would already be considered architecture, oblivious to its constructive dimension.

The advent of the perspective technique will be a fundamental achievement in the representation of the space idealized by the architect, in the design of the project. However, the representation in perspective is relative to points of view fixed on a plane, which eliminates the other views, also possible for the representation of a possible world. These other views, which would lead to a more accurate understanding of reality, lead to an incessant game of questioning about the represented space, which, however, is imprisoned in a single one, chosen by the architect.

This moment punctuates the problematic of classicist composition and representation in architecture, that is, according to our observations, valued until the present day in the social life spaces of the dwelling, defined for our research as the main access and the main façade, its living and dining rooms. Privilege is given to the scene, the angle of view, and normally the background is defined from the main access to the house, in the sense of whoever enters it. This aspect of scenery will be accentuated from the classical compositional principles, such as symmetry, modulation, ordering and character, transforming spaces into true finished scenes.

Classicism and the scenography effect of social spaces

According to Pedro Janeiro, the mastery of perspective aestheticized the architectural space, in the *Quattrocento*. Since from then was a tendency to compose the space only from the point of view of design, of its elements, that is, the plans, the floors, the walls, doors, windows, stairs, privileging the physical-aesthetic dimension of architecture, to the detriment of its much more complex essence. "The image is a simplified interpretation of reality", which generates "a distorted reality of space" [Janeiro 2010a, p.424].

Nevertheless, not even perspective has the power to represent space in its entirety, and even if it were, it would not encompass all the dimensions that an architectural space can arouse in man. The "space simulated by the drawing is just a visual space" [Janeiro 2010b, p.417]. According to him, the drawing is a "becoming", an anticipation of something that is to come, an initial stage. It is no longer the idea, as it has already materialized in design, but it is not yet architecture. The drawing is situated in the middle between the idea, the imagined reality and the realization of the idea, the concrete reality or constructed project.

However, the design seduces. It makes the man see himself within this space. It makes him glimpse a drawn reality. Although the drawing does not exhaust the much deeper dimension of real space, the tendency is the man transport himself to a place where everything is defined, organized, aesthetically beautiful.

Certainly, from the Italian Renaissance onwards, the adoption of classicism in architecture meant retaking the compositional concepts practiced by the Greeks and Romans in classical antiquity. This resumption is also symbolically linked to the fact that modern man turned to his ancestors, representatives of an anthropocentric society, which valued man and his rationality and for whom the examples of ancient architecture were once again the basis for the new ones housing programs of the moment, the Renaissance *Villa* and the private palace. In the

Fig. 01. Renaissance Villa Quinta das Torres: example of order, regularity and symmetry. Source: [Pires 2016, p.236]



Quinta das Torres Renaissance *Villa*, in Portugal, (fig. 01) we can see the central point of view that has always been taken as a composition reference for the views, where symmetry was necessary for the harmony of the whole building, obtained from the look.

Later, during the neoclassical movement in Europe, Jacques François Blondel established, in his *Cours d'Architecture*, according to the "feeling of the best architects", points of distance relating to the extension and elevation of buildings. This proves that, in order to arrive at a good judgment of the effect of the composition, it is first necessary to decide the point of distance and the point of view, according to the place and the rules of optics. [Blondel 1771-1777, p.xxvj]. There is a concern here with the focal point and the development of the gaze from chosen points of view, more favorable to the conceived composition.

In the modern movement of the 20th century, Le Corbusier, in his work *Vers Une Architecture*, criticizes the fixed angle of view and the axes of the School of Fine Arts, which for him are the "[...] calamity of architecture [...] a recipe, a trick" [Corbusier 2011a, p.133] He considers that they would be a formula for obtaining a certain preconceived vision of space. It points out that this school works the axes "in a star", considering that the spectator in front of the building fixes his eye exclusively on its center of gravity, while in reality what happens is that the human eye is not fixed, "it always turns and the man also always turns to the left, to the right, pirouette" [Corbusier 2011b, p.137].

Contemporaneously, Juhani Pallasmaa also criticizes these procedures, pointing to the emphasis that has been given to the sense of sight in Western culture. For him, "focused vision" and "perspective representation with conscious intentions" are reductionist of the spatial dimension, as he considers that, "instead of creating mere objects of visual seduction, archi-

Fig. 02. Reconstitution of the "House of the Faun", Pompeii, 19th century. 6th B.C. to 79 A.D. (Source: <http://itali-caromana.blogspot.com/2012/03/casa-del-fauno-pompeya.html> (accessed 26 April 2022)).

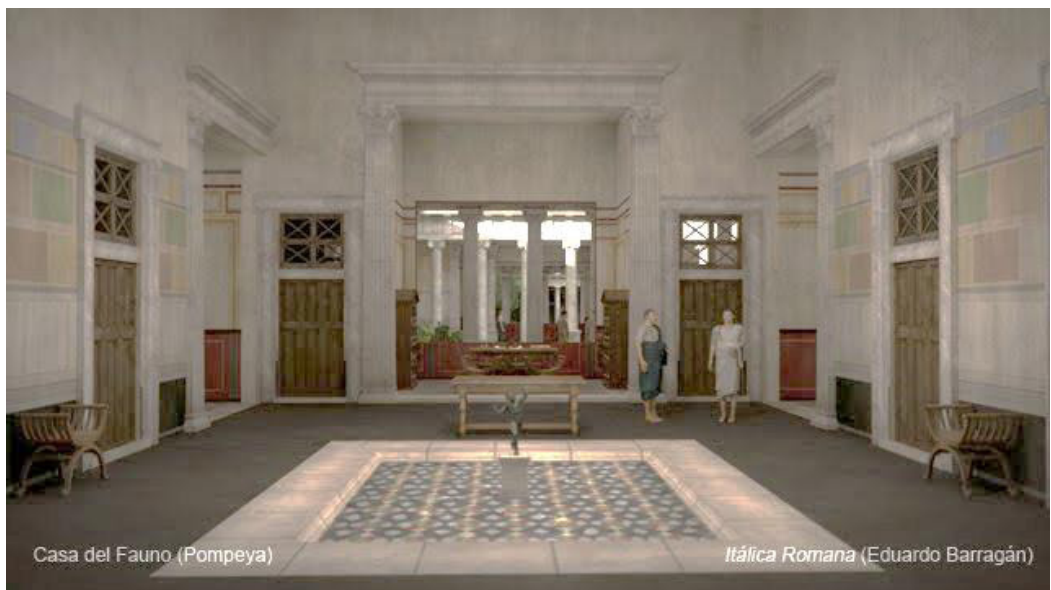


Fig. 03. Living room project for wealthy family apartment in Recife, Brazil. Source: author's photograph



itecture relates, mediates and projects meanings" [Pallasmaa 2011, p.11]. In other words, architecture, in addition to having the power to visually seduce, is a plural space of experiences, and should not be subordinated only to the sense of view.

The focused vision is typical of the scenography approach to architecture, where the vision and aesthetic dimension of the architectural space are privileged. Although in some cases this is the intention of the project and/or user, we believe it is possible to emphasize this dimension, but the other perceptive and functional dimensions will never cease to be present in the space, and therefore should not be disregarded, in view of full satisfaction of the user. A reconstitution of an environment from ancient Pompeii, (fig. 02) illustrates how the scenography approach has privileged a focused vision, where the perspective emphasizes the classical compositional principles of order, symmetry, proportion and character of space.

The image of the social life spaces of housing in Recife

In Recife, Brazil, there is a habit that dates back to the 19th century and which, in our view, still remains. This is the scenic valorization of the social life spaces of the dwellings, in view of the aesthetic dimension of these spaces, since they will be the spaces used by visitors to the house. Because of this, they are spaces where the sense of sight is the most privileged, since it is fleeting, and causes the first impression to observers.

A living and dining rooms of apartments of wealthy families in Recife (figs. 03, 04) exemplify how the final scenography aspect was obtained, considering the use of classical compositional principles, and the vision focused on the composition of the projects.

Our research shows that the habit of valuing the social spaces of the house is not restricted to the upper classes, nor to spaces designed by architects, but is also found in the humblest residences, composed by the residents themselves, with greater freedom. We noticed that the higher strata of the population act in the sense of "examples to be followed", forming a general opinion that has been consolidating over time and that has remained in the daily practices of inhabiting.

To illustrate our discourse, we present houses that we analyzed located in the neighborhood of Brasília Teimosa, in Recife, Brazil, attached to the neighborhood of Boa Viagem, a stronghold of the wealthier classes. Brasília Teimosa had its formation from an invasion of the site by homeless people around the 60's. These people initially settled in wooden houses, structuring themselves over the years with renovations in their houses, currently in masonry in for



Fig. 04. Dining room project for wealthy family apartment in Recife, Brazil. Source: Ilka Rosas architect Studio's photograph.

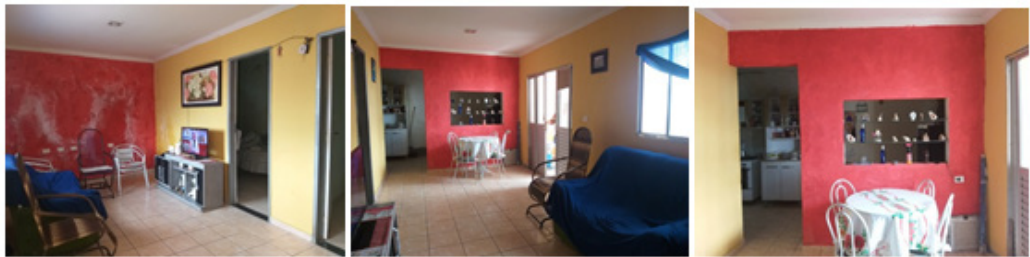


Fig. 05. The House 1, Brasília Teimosa neighborhood, Recife, Brazil. Source: author's photograph.



Fig. 06. The House 2, Brasília Teimosa neighborhood, Recife, Brazil. Source: author's photograph.

the most part. However, this neighborhood has not lost its disordered and unhealthy character, the result of its genesis, and is currently inhabited by the lower and lower middle classes. Well, in this neighborhood, the rooms of some houses are composed with an aesthetic valorization, expressed through furniture with design, historical, double living and dining rooms, paintings, ornaments, engravings, vase of flowers, the TV always ubiquitous and carpets. They are composed by everything that can contribute to a symbology of possessions, memory and visual delight the owner may have and want to express to people who enter inside de house. When we arrived, many asked permission to "clean up" the living room a little, before the photo, as well as removing the blankets on the sofas, placed to protect them when there were no visitors, and closing the curtains that faced the other rooms less presentable. In the House 1 (fig. 05), we see a composition of living and dining rooms, where the walls received the same colors as their opposites, and where a TV rack, shelves for objects, paintings, picture frames and ceiling wheel are observed. In this room, the living and dining division is defined, according to the social habits that remain. These habits are presented more cen-

tered on the classical heritage of the composition of social spaces, than on the proposal of a functional room recommended by the modern movement.

The House 2 (fig. 06) also demonstrates what is considered to be included according to what has already been established, which remains even in the economically less favored strata. The room is divided into two ambiences, dining and living rooms, although there is not enough space between the table and the sofa. There are also historicist design furniture, a rack with objects, picture frames, equipment, TV, paintings, a vase with flowers on the table, and a painted yellow facade with many ornamental plants in the access and terrace before the rooms, announcing the owner's care for the house.

Conclusions

Several houses visited in Recife, over the years of observation, illustrate a habit of valuing social life spaces indiscriminately, regardless of social class. These are the spaces where greater financial resources are invested, since they are aimed at the visual judgment that will be seen by their observers. We identified a concern with the appearance of these social life spaces, housing rooms aimed at the function of receiving the public, which is why these rooms are always the focus of an emphasis on their aesthetic dimension, acquired from the composition, materials, furniture and decorative objects.

For the social life spaces of the more affluent classes and designed by professionals, we have observed as recurrent the valorization of the image of these spaces. We realize that these spaces are worked within a context of scenery, where can be observed the use of focused vision and some of the classic compositional principles, such as ordering, symmetry, proportion and character.

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