

PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN A SUBURBAN *VILLA* OF THE EIGHTEEN CENTURY - QUINTA DAS ÁGUIAS, IN LISBON

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Abstract

On Suburban *Villa*, architectural and spatial universe of great complexity and rationality (functional, geometric and symbolic), we find, in their relationship with nature and artistic imaginary with which it is designed, a rich array of sensory and visual experiences only possible to understand in all its dimensions, if we associate different fields of knowledge, here chosen 'Architecture' and 'Phenomenology'.

When apprehends architecture, the observer assumes an active position that permits the dynamic achieve of its formal and spatial characteristic. This type of perceptive experience is determined by the architectonic object and by the suggestions that it causes on its beneficiary. This interaction made from the architecture apprehension is an imaginative experience that has necessarily a strong subjectivity dimension and can even reflect a conception of its object totally different from the common, instinctive, perception.

The 'Phenomenology of Architecture' can be understood through the conscious apprehension of the observer, when he recognizes and experiments its space. In contrast with a simple physical analysis of the building, he identifies its proportions or stylistic properties that can be directly associated to the architectonic space.

Keywords: Suburban *Villa*; Phenomenology of Architecture, Quinta das Águias

Introduction

“In the matter of experience that man has of the environment that surrounds it is proven that the 'sense of place' is a complex process which concern many variables. We don't simply noticed a common world to us all, as claimed by some naive, practical and realistic men, but different worlds that are the product of our motivations and previous experiences. In general,

the perception highlights valid assumptions about the environment around us and such assumptions vary depending on the situations in which we participate. The perception interfere in a world that could be described also perfectly as events in a four-dimensional space-time."

Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existencia, Espacio y Arquitectura*, Ed. Blume, Barcelona, 1975, p.10.

"Addressing qualitative totalities of a complex nature, places cannot be described through analytical concepts of scientific character. As a matter of principle, science makes abstract elements collected to achieve a neutral and objective knowledge. You lose, however, daily life, which should be the main concern of man in general and in particular architects. Fortunately there is a method known as phenomenology, which was designed as a 'back to things', as opposed to abstractions and mental constructions."

Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Genius Loci, Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Ed. Rizzoli, New York, 1984, p.8.

It is from "*Existence, Space and Architecture*" and "*Genius Loci*" that Christian Norberg-Schulz builds a unique theoretical field under the Theory of Architecture, asserting itself as its first and main proponent⁵ - the "Phenomenology of Architecture" - theoretical and operational support of the work presented here.

We propose a phenomenological analysis of architecture that part of a conscious and imaginative perception of its space, inseparable from the particular experience of the one who perceives. From an active position of the observer looking dynamic recognition of formal and spatial characteristics of the building, the suggestions brought in users, always ends up determining a type of individualized perceptual experience. This experiment architecture, having an imaginative structure has an inherent subjectivity due to the individualized reading of architectural object and the effects that this causes in the directions of its viewer - it is evident, first, the sight associated with the dynamics of movement of the body in space, supplemented successively or simultaneously by the other senses.

⁵ Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture, an Anthology of Architectural Theory: 1965-1995*, Ed. Princeton Architectural, New York, 1996, p.29.

I.



Fig. 1 - Villa Cetinale, Siena



Fig. 2 - Villa Cetinale, Siena

We propose as an analytical structure of the ‘Quinta das Águias’, one of the most notable examples of the Suburban *Villas* of Lisbon, the principles theorized by Norberg-Schulz and the "method for the beautiful experience" defined by Raymond Bayer in his “*Traité d’Estétique*”⁶, that is developed in four phases: "open experience"; "Sensible intuition"; "Aesthetic organization of space and time"; and "intellectual intuition".

Open Experience

The first phase of the "beautiful experience" as a method to evaluate a work of art is the "open experience," Raymond Bayer relates to "*all that is unfinished in an image or show*" - "*all you can specify regards the object, its particularity and its natural determinations*". The "indeterminacy" is another sense expressed by the work of art, is a pretext of looking - the prospecting attitude that assigns a heuristic quality to "beautiful experience".⁷

As the Art focuses on the particular, unlike science that seeks the universal, is the emerging feature of the individuality of the artist who gives authenticity to the work created. As a result, the contemplation of the beautiful tends to "single" and focuses on the individual and the relationship that this created with the work.

⁶ Raymond Bayer, *Traité d’Estétique*, Librairie Armand Colin, Paris, 1956.

⁷ Idem, p.11.



Fig. 3 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa



Fig. 4 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa

Before discussing the subject of study is a brief reference to a “suburban *Villa* model” that could/should have had major influence in its design - the *Villa Cetinale* (Siena, Italy). This is argued, through its architecture, such as a streamlined unit with a perfectly harmonized integration with the site, and gives us a succession of multiple and varied experiences that lead us to a universe of sensations, only settled on the subject describing their paths and seize their spaces.

The interpretation of the architectural complex individual parts is a pretext of searching for understanding of all by the subject, which will aim to give a general sense to factors which, in part, may arise as undetermined due to the subjectivity inherent in the very nature of interpretive act.

Contemplation and qualitative recognition of the ‘Quinta das Águias’ architecture is built on progressive relationship that his interpreter creates with its spaces, to be recognized as a whole as a complete entity. Its aesthetic perception begins in a first moment, when the *Villa* is visually recognized in the distance, giving it a sense of uniqueness.



Fig. 5 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa



Fig. 6 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa

The suburban *Villa* is starting to be recognized in detail when it takes the first step in its space appropriation - when transposing its main entrance, giving access to the forecourt before the house.

The heuristic pleasure inherent in the aesthetic experience of the architecture begins, right away, to develop due to the understanding of the links between spatial areas with differentiable functional identities - proceeds thus a qualitative understanding of its architectural entities, recognizing their values as a function also of their usefulness.

Continued experience in analyzing its architecture allows the informed observer interpret and understand the signs that identify a particular object, with reference to the environment or place, and to give its judgment on factors that are determinants as the "proportion", "balance", the "hierarchy", the "strength", among others, enabling him to understand their particular qualities and their meaning, and distinguish those that have great architectural and artistic value.

Sensitive Intuition

The second phase of "beautiful experience," defined by R. Bayer, is the "sensitive intuition", which has the support or root sensory qualities which are the source of the sensations that the work of art provides or suggests. *"The experience of beauty is, of prime order, a 'test' of the sense of sight and hearing"*.⁸

Unlike the "open experiment", on "sensitive intuition" is not part of "nothing", the refusal of pre-existing influences, but guides the sensitivity to certain directions that conscious states instinctively.



Fig. 7 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa



Fig. 8 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa

The perception and understanding of the suburban *Villa* architecture exceeds their simple visual reading. These always seek recognize the significance on information gathered by the senses instinctively and add it the knowledge previously acquired in similar situations.

Memory plays an important role in this phase of the experience of architecture, not only in recognition of spatial order of analogies, as well as in association conceptual frameworks that may have influenced in any way,

⁸ Raymond Bayer, Op. Cit., p.18.

intentionally or not, the architectural structure of the object in question and their spatial relationships with the surrounding.

These factors take into account the feelings suggested by the architecture (open experiment phase), but it can arise also recognition of an exemplary type or model, from the intuitive association with this, can deepen a more rigorous understanding of the creative intentions of its spatial organization and its formal design, the conceptualization of its architectural structure.

At this stage of the analysis can begin to develop an approach that considers four types of essential spaces for the understanding of architecture - physical space; perceptive space; functional space and conceptual space, identifying the latter as a result of the understanding of others to perception.

A sensual experience initially of intuitive nature begins thus to provide "intellectual apprehension" that combines the phenomenological analysis side of the mental construction of a compositional rationality and rigor that creates a gradual rapprochement with the very embodiment tectonics of the building and the architecture of gardens.

Aesthetic Organization of Space and Time

This third phase of the phenomenological analysis, "aesthetic organization of space and time," has implications for the understanding of the spatial and temporal relationships of architecture, where the "sensible intuition" shall be objectively focus on the interpretation of key factors in the architectural composition as the "module" and "rhythm", which contemplates the proportions study of associated space and time measurements as well as conceptual geometries such as the "golden section".⁹

In the examples shown, the rhythms of the windows and the colonnades of "loggias" not only reflect the horizontality of the spatial progression of all built as evidence the modular structure of its spaces. These follow a geometrization with predetermined proportions, seized naturally in almost all stopping points along the possible routes.



Fig. 9 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa

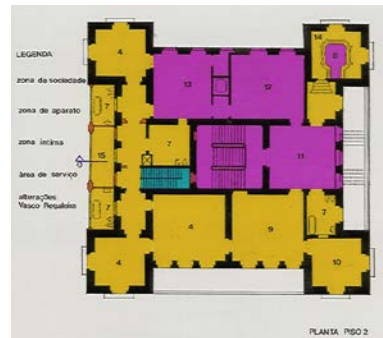


Fig. 10 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa

⁹ Raymond Bayer, Op. Cit., p.30.

The aesthetic organization of space is also marked by a clearly defined division or limit, and nips and spatial extensions. The rationalized spatial distribution of its volumes is easily interpreted by the observer, along with the rhythms and limits of various orders who consider objectively the human scale, which oppose or relate strictly.

By creating an architectural variable module, referenced to the size of a building, is assumed as a uniform measure given by the human dimension, but also related to the dimensions of the materials and the scale of built and environment.

“A door will not grow in proportion to the building. If the door is made for man, it shall keep the scale of the recipient; a step will always be a feasible step. The module is given by the man, and this module is invariable.”¹⁰

With the module are created materialized cadences, for example, colonnades defining architectural and spatial rhythms. Although composition rules are defined, they do not overlap the heuristic result of the work of art in which all phenomena are considered simultaneously. Only a formalistic attitude is that supersede the value of the rules, the number and geometry to all others.



Fig. 11 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa



Fig. 12 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa

The rhythmic phenomena have a psychological application and are directly related to "immediate perception of time." This is always limited to a zone of short intervals where consciousness immediately distinguishes a duration or time division which is more convenient for a spontaneous perception.

The rhythm formation, rather than of a measure requires a certain speed in reading the work of a whole, and this interaction. To be associated with time, the rhythm relates to the experience of human activity and has arguably qualitative value. *"The rhythm is something that comes from a*

¹⁰ Idem, p.33.

spiritual phenomenon", and its subjectivity joins the perception all analogies that could relate the architectural space with the senses triggered by it.¹¹

The aesthetic organization of architectural space can also be enriched by the recognition and interpretation of these "*spaces of realities related by opposition*".¹²



Fig. 13 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa



Fig. 14 - Quinta das Águias, Lisboa

At this stage of analysis, recognition and interpretation of the realities of architectural space is performed by three pairs of opposites. The first contrasts the "connected spaces" or interrelated fluidly to "static spaces", individualized or autonomous. The second concerns the opposition between the "directional space" and the "non-directional space" which can occur of one or more formal and spatially expressed axuality, or other orders - geometric and topological. The third concerns the difference between "positive spaces" or "negative spaces" - originating in juxtaposition/adding parts or, on the contrary, the volume subtraction to an all preconceived as closed unit. The cases in question are mapped to the first type (positive spaces).

Intellectual Intuition

The last stage of the analysis, defined in the "beautiful experience" by R. Bayer as "intellectual intuition" begins, in our case, of the results acquired in the previous phases and considers all the architectural context information (theoretical, morphological and typological), historical and cultural. It is also crucial given the symbolic importance, the symbol and its meaning as building aesthetic value of the work.

¹¹ Ibidem, p.41.

¹² Leland M. Roth, *Entender la Arquitectura, sus Elementos, Historia e Significado*, Ed. Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 1993, p.47.



Fig. 15 – Quinta dos Marqueses de Fronteira, Lisboa



Fig. 16 - Quinta dos Marqueses de Fronteira, Lisboa

The symbol has been considered by art history the primary element rendering artistic identity to the work of art recognized as such, and even their own reason of origin. This causes the imagination to understand the work by suggesting messages or puzzles that transform it spontaneous ambiguity in sensory and emotional experiences particularized by the very act of reading or apprehension.

The symbolic value is evident on ‘Quinta das Águias’, a first level, the very identity of the architectural complex and its immediate identification in the landscape. The *Villa* expresses itself as a symbolic affirmative entity and its constituent parts have, in turn, comes in with its own symbolic purposes loads that gave them typological identity in the spatial context built - see yourself as comparative example the square formal garden of ‘Quinta dos Marqueses de Fronteira’, which rigorously embodies the archetype of "ideal garden".

However, there are many and varied symbolic values associated with architectural elements - loggias, entry gates, fountains, sculptural niches, caves, pergolas, gazebos, etc. - Whose most objective or subjective symbolism establish a purposeful dialogue with users of space and build the cultural identity of the work.



Fig. 17 - Villa Almerico Capra, La Rotonda



Fig. 18 - Palacete Mendonça, Lisboa

Any architectural element identified as a symbol has three complementary dimensions that give architectural value. The "expression", which is subjective in nature and suggests the interpretation; the "representation", which refers to a language of communicative value; and "pure meaning," which arises from the ideas conveyed by the signs that define it. This reveals an open image that appeals to a number of defined and different values, which can be interpreted from an analytical decomposition of representing meanings.

While the first part of this analytical approach is strictly phenomenological framework - conscious apprehension of the sense of space, a demand to achieve the internal language of the building, contrary to its strictly physical analysis - with the "intellectual intuition" is developed the ability to intellectual understanding of architecture, with reference to an imaginative mind that starts on a visual perception, which associates the experience of the observer to the immediate understanding of the case study.

Conclusion

In architecture, and in any art, the simple visual act is totally different from the perception or understanding of complete work. The mind of the perceiver always finds a meaning or significant in all sensorial information that receives or assigns instinctively a particular significant to each specific information. In the act of receive has in account all the knowledge previously acquired about similar information. That permits to accomplish a satisfactory preliminary interpretation and locate the collected information in a place with meaning.

The continued experience in analyzing architecture permits not only to the informed observer to interpret and understand the signs that identify a particular object, referring to an environment or Place, and to give its judgment on factors that are determinants as the proportion, balance, hierarchy and solidity, etc., but also to make a judgment about determined understand their particular qualities and its meaning, and distinguish those that have architectonic value and artistic from the common objects, from the simple construction.

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