

Alice's Mirror:

Marketing strategies and the creation of the ideal home

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Abstract

This is a study that deals with the creation of people's lifestyle expectation, part of a broad investigation on the evolution of domestic space in Recife, Brazil. It is focused on the apartment building, nowadays the most popular middle-class housing form. It looks at the advertisement campaigns publicised by housing developers, with the interest to identify and describe the attributes used in these promotional pieces. Three main integrated categorical attributes were found: location, architectural program and the name of the development. It is suggested that it is through these attributes that expectations are created and recreated, generating a certain lifestyle culture, also identifiable in a peculiar symbolic division of the city into distinct territories

Keywords

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1. Introduction

It is in the realm of the common sense that the ideal home offers comfort, safety, and privacy, and houses the dreams of its inhabitants. In this sense, this ideal home acts as the territory that mediates, reflects and shapes social identity. It is based on these features that housing developers create their marketing strategies, articulating the purchase of a property with the feeling of a dream that is becoming true.

The Brazilian private housing market is a strong industry, which has been generating jobs for different professional categories and creating an economic buzz in main urban areas of the country for the past 40 years or so. This industry is fed by the constant recreation of an ideal living through the constant introduction of new products to the property market, which may satisfy consumers' expectations. In this market, advertising plays a fundamental role in keeping alive this constant need for the acquisition of a perfect place for living.

This study presents an analysis of the diverse prototypical lifestyles, or model lives, used by housing developers of Recife, Brazil, to sell the 'house of your dreams' through newspaper advertisements and promotional material, where certain attributes of contemporary life are associated with the architectural distinctiveness of the

housing properties. These models represent marketing strategies that offer to the potential owner a phenomenology of the future, i.e., an ideal world where he or she will satisfy all his or her needs and dreams. However, this model acts not only as a mirror that reflects and reproduces the ideal home, but also feeds the construction and growth of this dream. Marketing key-words, such as “living in grand style ...” or “privacy and security ...” illustrate how certain daily life attributes are associated with the architectural characteristics of the property, constituting the basis of a certain lifestyle culture.

Within this context, the study tries to understand which elements or forces shaped the taste of middle class in the past decades. It is interested in which basis the collective dream of acquiring a home is constructed by marketing agencies, particularly through their advertisement campaigns. Therefore, from the analytical point of view, the study observes the aspects concerned with two laws of the object (Hillier, 1985): (a) the law from society to the built form, while interested in the mechanisms used by society to adapt the laws of the object for its purposes; and (b) the law of space to society, while interested in the principles through which built form interferes in social life.

The main source of information were the advertisements published in Sunday newspapers. This is because housing developers aim to influence the typical weekend housing hunters. The advertisements were analysed in order to identify the concepts, key-words and key-images which helped to establish the image of the ideal home. These main attributes were described, classified and grouped in three categories: (a) the property’s location, highlighting the neighbourhood qualities (historical, environmental, etc.) and the access to services offered by this location; (b) the housing complex architectural program (individual units, services and common facilities); (c) the name of the building and housing complex, which evokes themes of local history (places, historical buildings, etc.), but also of glamour (aristocracy, nobility, etc.), both associated with the conquest of status and social differentiation. The three interact to induce a new living experience.

These constituted attributes are revealed through four conceptual strategies: (a) imitation, by translating foreigner lifestyles; (b) simulation, by inducing and reinforcing non-existent attributes; (c) representation through symbolic references to past times and places; and (d) identification with cultural aspects of local society.

2. Housing form and function

Lawrence argues that even though a house is primarily a functional object, it also serves to a range of purposes to which values could be attributed, being tangible and quantifiable, such as economic value (exchange, use and aesthetic values), as well as non-quantifiable ones (symbolic and sentimental values) (Lawrence, 1997/1990: 78). Changes in this structure of values generate changes in housing design (from the program to buildings' structure), and in its symbolic values and space use.

But these values and attributes are not only dependent on changes in society. Hillier suggests that buildings have at least two social dimensions, and that both are configurational in nature. In this way, buildings have a twofold social role: "they constitute the social organisation of everyday life as the spatial configurations of space in which we live and move, and represent social organisation as physical configuration of forms and elements that we see" (Hillier, 1996: 4). His argument is based on the fact that, as pointed out by Hanson, the house is a pattern of space, more than a list of activities and rooms. This pattern of space is governed by "intricate conventions about what spaces there are, how they are connected together and sequenced, which activities go together and which are separated out ... the house is therefore an ideal vehicle for exploring the formal and experiential dimensions of architecture..." (Hanson, 1998: 2). The pattern of permeability and barriers are, therefore, profoundly influenced by social requirements.

Kent (1997, 1990) also developed a model for studying the relationship between architecture and space use based on two premises: a) social complexity determines space organisation and the built environment, particularly with regards to partitions; b) when society becomes more socio-politically complex, its culture, social behaviour, space use and material and architectural culture, become more segmented (Kent, 1997, 1990: 127). According to the author, societies based on fragmented and differentiated cultures tend to organise segmented activity areas, in other words, they tend to promote architectural and urban structures functionally discrete and with restrictive access (Kent 1997, 1990: 128).

If these are the variables and the mechanisms that constitute the nature of domestic ambience, how are they appropriated, if so, by advertisers and developers to promote their products? Do they explore the formal and experiential dimensions of daily life to dream up the domestic realm? How are social stratification and cultural habits embedded into the images and messages of the promotional campaigns?

2.1 Case study: apartment buildings in Recife, Brazil

The object of investigation is the housing market in Recife, particularly its segment dedicated to flat buildings. The introduction of this type of collective housing in Recife is recent and quite interesting. Historically, co-habitation was never seen as a positive social attribute, always denoting a family's low social status. Travellers, who lived in Recife in the 19th century, narrated their experience within Brazilian society in a variety of books and diaries. Perhaps the most important testimony is given by a French engineer, Louis Vauthier, whose comments on housing form and space organization are precise and definite. Vauthier (1975) affirms that social status was related to particular forms of housing structure, ranked from the single family suburban detached house and urban multi-layer *sobrado* (Portuguese expression to describe a typical front narrowed terraced house), followed by the mixed use *sobrado*, and the simpler ground-floor terraced house. In any circumstance, co-habitation would declare the decadence of any of these housing types.

The modern flat building was firstly introduced in Recife during the 1930's by social security companies to supply their associates with an alternative of hygienic and comfortable housing. It is only in the late 1940's and the beginning of the 1950's that flats start to be offered to middle class families. At that time, building location seemed to be an important attribute to seduce families, as the proximity to work or services, mostly centralised in the city centre, was the key point in selling this new product. It took two more decades to suppress the remaining negative attributes carried by co-habitation.

It is evident that changes in the local social structure and social relations backed up the acceptance and proliferation of flats. At the end of the nineteenth century, families were structured under a rigorous semi-patriarchal regime and safely guarded at the heart of their homes. The urbanisation of Brazilian society slowly freed women and children from the strong patriarchal ties, leading to the emergence of the modern family, still centred at the father's chair, but open enough to allow women's independence and effective presence in the working market. Contemporary urban society reflects the complexity of our age, being multifaceted, formed by a diversity of family arrangements, such as single parents, childless couples, or extended families, generated by sequenced marriages and divorces. It is also characterised by its high levels of urban violence. The combination of these factors contributed to give to the vertical condominium flats the status of an ideal housing form. Collective protection, achieved by means of organised condominium structures, substituted for the individual detached house as the symbol of protection and safety for the family, shared and desired by typical modern families. Indeed, flats achieved the status of the ideal contemporary home, safe, modern and practical, and the housing marketing seems to know that.



Figure 1:
a) Luxury flats at Boa Viagem Beach,
b) Panoramic view of Recife with its skyline defined
by apartment buildings.
(photograph by Luiz Amorim)

3. Advertisements: building a dream

In this context, publicity had a central role, conveying and reinforcing people's perception about their needs, and introducing new forms of living. But to understand how marketing strategies had helped to change people's taste and perception of their ideal home it is necessary to describe the mechanisms that advertising campaigns use to achieve their goals.

Advertisement campaigns encourage consumption, arousing the desire to acquire new products, be it to fulfil basic needs or simply to satisfy a compulsive desire to buy. In order to influence the consumption, these promotional pieces should present the product in a distinguished way, differentiating it from the others of the same class. The content of the message not only offers available alternatives, but also interpretative commentary, in order to assist the potential consumer in recognising the merits of the new home, as exemplified by Hanson in her study on housing market and space form in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom (Hanson, 1998: 134-154). They offer the advantages of an ideal world consumer are enticed to consume (Dovey, 1991: 139).

In this way, the publicity pieces act through images and messages to reinforce that necessity, aiming to act at the level of buying decision. The pieces are based on potential consumers' survey which identifies images and messages that could be used to reach sales' goals. According to Wilk, "the house is part of larger social field, and the decision to buy, build and modify a house is linked with other social and personal decisions" (Wilk, 1997, 1990: 35). The messages that are communicated put together the dreamland of a contemporary life, and nobility and tradition, shaping the taste of the new middle-class, offering both a fantasy life and a set of cultural cues.

In the last decades of the 20th century, new forms of dreaming up the domestic world were facilitated by the use of new informational technologies. Virtual 3-D models and e-commerce are some of the marketing tools used to reach middle-class consumers. They offer them an almost real experience of the future space: something like a frame to visit the ideal world. As highlighted by Dovey, these models offer a phenomenology of the future. They act as a mirror that at once reflects and reproduces a dream world (Dovey, 1991). They allow developers to be aware of consumers' needs and to shape their dreams.

In Recife, the advertising campaigns released since the 1970's explored strongly attributes of social differentiation, observed at three different environmental levels – the neighbourhood, the building and the apartment. As social differentiation is an issue to distinguish the object in the marketing, strong classification is present on the attributes in the advertisement.

3.1 The neighbourhood: “tell me where you live and I will tell you who you are”

The first housing differentiation attribute is related to its location, following the logic of traditional commerce: “location, location, location”. According to Ribeiro (1997: 114), buildings tend to be differentiated by their location not only in terms of volume (number of units to be sold), but also in their price (certain areas will allow luxury enterprises, others will not) and type of transaction (mortgage, direct sale, etc.).

Ribeiro affirms that the merchandise – the building, is not determined by its architectural qualities, but fundamentally by its location in the urban territory, because the housing development could incorporate its qualitative and quantitative properties offered by the means of production and collective consumption (Ribeiro, 1997: 115). This process is regulated by the following rules of thumb: a) landscape factors, such, proximity to beaches, rivers or mountains; b) being in the immediacy of a large supply of public services and facilities, such as schools, supermarkets, public transport, etc.; c) distance to the business centre; d) symbolic values, which socially distinguish citizens according to the places they have chosen to live.

Symbolic values, or symbolic division of the urban territory, were explored by Velho in his study about Cobacabana, in Rio de Janeiro, during the 1970's, with the interest to establish a relationship between social division, housing and ideology. His argument is that society rather than simply presenting a differentiation between rich and poor citizens, takes the neighbourhood where people live as a reference. In this sense, it is the neighbourhood you live in that will establish your social prestige and status (Velho, 1975: 81).

In this 'social map', as Velho defined, the territorial boundaries can be either clear or fuzzy. The studied advertisements showed how neighbourhood frontiers are elastic in Recife, in order to incorporate the positive values found in the vicinity to a housing development. There are two main strategies. The first one consists of extending the limits of a more distinguished neighbourhood, so as the location of the building is wrongly informed, to avoid any stigma associated with some parts of the city. Perhaps the expectation is that, with time, the boundaries will be extended, as new families move in and the old ones move out.

The second one is the use of adjectives to distinguish certain localities. Locations which carry certain social stigma can be renamed. In Recife, there are notorious cases. 'Novo Prado' (New Prado), for example, takes its name from its contiguous traditional neighbourhood, as part of a marketing strategy to refund and to rename an old piece of the city and therefore legitimise a new development for new middle class families, who needs a new tradition to be recognised with (Marques and Loureiro, 1999).

'Nova Torre' (New Torre), on the other hand, is used to identify a new neighbourhood that emerged after the dissolution of textile industries and the consequent speculation of the land for housing projects. The emerged parcels and apartment buildings needed to be identified with a new piece of urban territory, and not with the old industrial area. It is interesting to observe that Nova Torre is crossed by the set of the most integrated lines of contemporary Recife, part of a North-South perimeter via. The easy accessibility to the area offered an additional attraction to the site.

Another peculiar example is Bairro do Recife (Recife district). Recife's historic centre became the new 'Recife Antigo' (Old Recife), after a rehabilitation process guided by the municipality (Loureiro and Amorim, 2002). Advertising the Old Recife, and not Recife district, is part of a well elaborated strategy to turn the city's history into a profitable estate's marketing. A similar strategy was also used in the Gaslamp Quarter, in San Diego, U. S. A.

In this context, a gentrification process can be observed caused by the expansion of noble areas. This is the case of Casa Forte, traditionally occupied by the old aristocracy, and Casa Amarela, a working class neighbourhood. This is what Smith (1996) called new urban frontiers, a phenomenon constituted by a sort of differentiation of parts of the urban territory already established, qualifying the area, and smoothing any social class connotation associated to it.

Apart from these social attributes, living close to public services can qualify and certify a degree of “good neighbourhood” to certain areas, but can also offer a practical life to its inhabitants, avoiding, for example, exhausting and stressing urban movements for shopping, recreating or simply taking children to school. Another aspect that increases significantly developments’ value is the proximity to natural sites and landmarks. In both cases, symbolic values are aggregated to a site’s advantages to qualify the housing development, even if, some of these values and advantages are imaginary or fuzzy. It is common to find advertisements’ key-words such as ‘close to...’ or ‘a few meters to...’, used to capture the intrinsic value of the natural site, even if, these meters are not a few.

To make messages more effective, it is common to combine them with distorted images of the surrounding areas, produced to induce potential clients to believe in their campaigns. Perspectives, photographic montage and computer simulations are used to make services or sites of interest closer than they are in reality, and the site plan is usually adapted to suppress secondary streets, creating an illusion of shorter distances. It is curious to perceive that after acquiring a flat, inhabitants tend to assume and sell the illusion that he or she lives in a privileged location. In this way, inhabitants try to enhance the property value and to make him or her part of a distinct social group.

3.2 The building

At the building level, campaigns express the pragmatic side of the development (the architectural program), but also its glamour, normally synthesised by its name. The advertisement campaigns normally highlight the diversity of services and facilities offered by the promoted developments. Some emphasise the property facilities, such as central air conditioning system (the ‘must’ of the 1970’s), hot water, cable TV (included in the condominium taxes) or central gas. Others highlight the security system: CCTV, remote controlled gates, internal communication, and central security.

Signs of changes in social relations can be perceived in the complexity of the programme of modern housing complexes. More and more developments offer collective services that extend the limits or domains of the housing units. Playgrounds and recreational areas become more and more sophisticated with the inclusion of gyms, swimming pools, football society pitch and play room with all facilities – fully fitted kitchen, toilets, etc.

These services and facilities, their number and characteristics, are the distinctiveness explored by most promotional pieces: “treasure’s arch” – referring to the building; “the treasure” – the flat. In fact, services and facilities are a

compensation for the loss of privacy offered by the old residential flowery gardens and fruity backyards, in favour of an easier, more practical and safer daily life. In fact, safety is one of the items most cited in a recent survey carried out by developers' association (Mercês, Melo and Rodrigues, 1998).

The other side of the coin is that larger common areas justify a reduction in flat sizes. Children now have to play outside, because there is no space for collective games indoors. Naturally, if “mommy” is not at home as she used to be, collective surveillance and mutual help is more efficient in collective spaces. It is common to see housekeepers and nannies sharing their roles as caretakers with building's porters and servants. For this reason, the design of the playgrounds and playrooms is of vital importance. Hillier (1996) has already showed how important the existence of a net of spaces is for the community fulfilled by different categories of users and supervised by responsible eyes.



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Figure 2: Promotional leaflet of Cap Ferrat Building
(translation: Find your treasure at Graças neighborhood. The Arch: swimming pool, sauna, playroom, gym, cable TV. The treasure: 4 bedrooms, 2 en-suites, closet, living room with 3 living spaces, kitchen and scullery, 2 garages, facing East, 152.00 m2. Cap Ferrat Building: a treasure for all you life.)

A curious effect of the absence of parents during the day is the creation of new job opportunities, from driving services – to drive children to and from school, to a recent activity, called rented mother, whose objective is to plan and supervise children's daily life. These 'fake mothers' occupy in children's life the void left by their natural mothers, educating and teaching them how to deal with the uncertainties of life. Certainly, this service is just affordable by a particular substrate of society, but it is likely that it would be a successful enterprise, and soon accessible to a larger population. Their effect on housing form is yet to be perceived.



Figure 3: Apartment buildings and their promoted facilities:

(a) and (b) Tamari building (Source: promotional leaflet by Habil Engenharia Ltda);





Figure 3: Apartment buildings and their promoted facilities:

(c) and (d) Saint Louis building (Source: promotional leaflet by Gabriel Bacelar);



Figure 3: Apartment buildings and their promoted facilities:

(e) and (f) Vila Nazareth building (Source: promotional leaflet by A. C. Cruz).

3.2.1 On the names of buildings

As it has been demonstrated, status, social identity and traditional values – particularly those related to local oligarchy, are used by the property market to create a cycling interest in their products. Another key-element in this game of illusion and seduction is the name given to the product. Names transmit symbols of auto-promotion and social togetherness, and advertisement companies explore them with a particular sense of creativity, even though, as identified, limited to certain themes (Loureiro and Amorim, 2002; Borba, Loureiro and Amorim, 2002).

In this context, archetypal imagery is fundamental, constituting what Dovey has interpreted as ‘province of meanings’ (Dovey, 1991: 148). Perhaps the most notable is the theme that evokes nobility, power and tradition, assembling names of castles, kings and queens - Queen Mary, Baronesa de Gurjahu (Baroness of Gurjahu), Barão do Rio Branco (Baron of Rio Branco), Windsor, Versailles. Tradition is also associated to the local sugar cane oligarchy, presented in the names of sugar mills (Banguê, Engenho Monjope), or to local personalities, such as painters, writers and historic figures. Native themes were quite popular until the 1980’s, mainly represented by the names of indigenous tribes (Acaiaca, Tupy, Tamoyo, Kamayurá, Tapuias, Aymorés, etc). They all evoke an imagery of an ideal home that is found in distant places or past times.

The name of the property is so important that developers have created themes to identify them in the competitive property market, functioning as a 'griffe' to be assigned and looked for. All buildings by Queiroz Galvão, for example, are identified by proper names initiated by Maria... (Maria Norma, Maria Eduarda, Maria Cristina, etc.). A.C.Cruz produces the series Villa ..., in an effort to relate its buildings to the distant Italian villas or to the more modest Recife suburban eclectic villas. De Paula, responsible for establishing the quality standard of the seaside luxury flats, in the 1970's, created the series based on classic painters (Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, etc.), suggesting a close relation with the artistic quality of their masterpieces. The goal is to distinguish their properties, always designed by recognised architects, by their artistic and architectural qualities.

Others use foreign languages to name the buildings, conveying a certain distinctiveness; after all, we live in a global era. Apart from 'villa' (in Italian), used to distinguish it from the Portuguese 'vila', usually associated to social housing, it is also common the use of the English 'residence', to avoid any association to 'residencial' (in Portuguese), also carrying a connotation of popular, low income housing. In both cases, developers and advertising companies try to avoid the negative sense of co-habitation, or collective housing, even if an apartment building is essentially that.

Other thematic groups are also recurrent. Those related to nature are quite popular, grouping names of local flora (Jacarandá, Samambaia) or natural sites (Golden Garden, Golden River, Golden Lake). Also common are naval motifs (Atlântico, Jangadeiro, Catamarã, Jangada), seaside resorts, particularly those which carry a sense of glamour and lifestyle (Nice, Biarritz, Saint Tropez, Cannes, Estoril) or more modestly, those names which connote outside life or summer holidays, represented by local beaches.

Finally, the more recent fashion is baptising the development after the name of the family which originally owned the property site, or paying homage to somebody closely related to the developer (mother or father). In the first example, an old proprietor's name creates an identity with the history of the place, and tries to seduce the old neighbours to accept the significant transformations in their vicinity: at least they can relate to somebody who is part of their history, and now, the history of the place. In the second case, the effect is the creation of a new tradition, as the building and its name are now urban references.

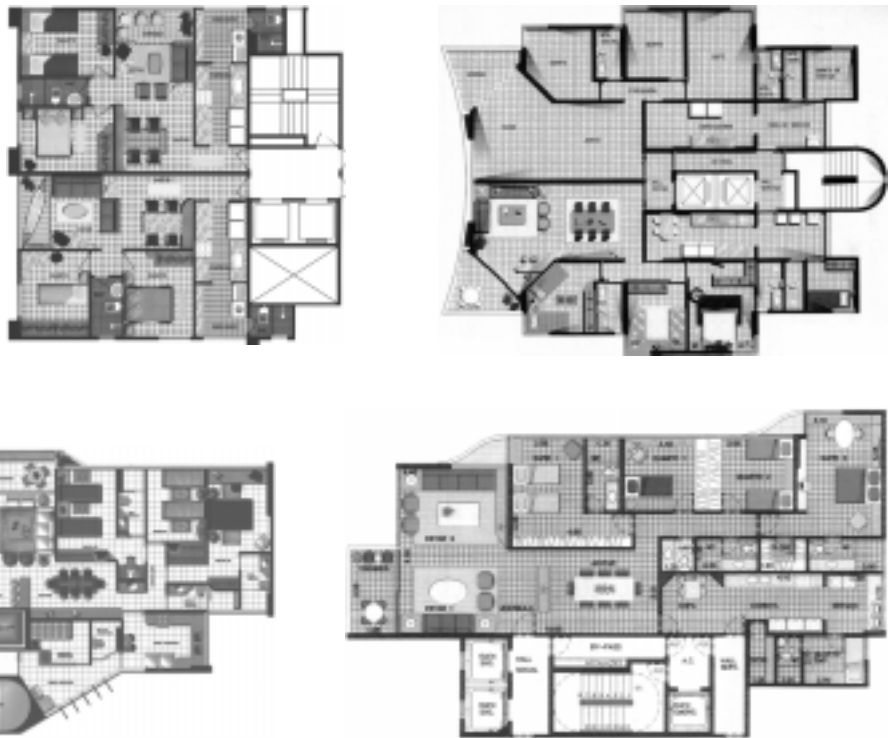
3.3 The flat

The flats' programme is varied, depending on the social class which is supposed to acquire them. Flats' area and programme always walk together: the higher the area, the more complex the programme is. This rule is normally kept, even when the size of the flats are reduced to be adapted to recent financial constrains. For example, a three-bedroom flat advertised in the 1970's would have around 160.00 m², whereas more recent products can be found with 80.00m².

Figure 4: Plans of typical flats:

- (a) Tamari building (Source: promotional leaflet by Habil Engenharia Ltda);
- (b) Saint Louis building (Source: promotional leaflet by Gabriel Bacelar);
- (c) Vila Nazareth building (Source: promotional leaflet by A. C. Cruz).

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The market also offers a great variety of flat types, from a simple one-space unit, to complex maisonettes, equipped with five or six bedrooms, three or four receiving areas, large terraces and swimming pools. The most common ones are the typical three-bedroom flats for middle-class families. In every case, they are carefully divided into zones or sectors which structure domestic activities in a particular manner, each dedicated to a set of activities and related to a group of actors. This sectors' structure orders the potential interaction amongst inhabitants, visitors and strangers, rendering them predictable and full of social meaning.

Studies on sectors organisation of modern houses in Recife (Amorim, 1999) reveals how the distribution and grouping of domestic activities has been altered with changes in social relations, family structure and architectural concepts. Similarly, recent studies focused on Recife's flats (Amorim and Loureiro, 2000) identified a certain continuity in their sectors' organisation, constituting a sort of model of good living. This is a type of domestic space organisation that has been socially reproduced,

also by means of promotional pieces, acquiring the character of a model to be reproduced. This model is defined by the classification and grouping of domestic activities into three sectors – social, private and service, organised in order to put the social sector at the core of the flat, but also, to give easy access to the service sector and proper isolation to the private one.

This general pattern is present in housing units (houses or flats) of different sizes and offered to different social classes. The recurrence of this type suggests the existence of a housing genotype. The distinction made between social classes is identified by the complexity of the architectural programme: the higher the social status is, the longer the prescriptive text. In this sense, the sectors are immutable, but the text, which establishes the requirements of each flat, is altered. It could be perceived that the intent is to give a functional specialisation to rooms, increasing the architectural programme, in the number of rooms and in the description of its properties. Classification is increased, understanding classification as the number of elements which define a domestic structure – the higher the number of elements in the text, the higher the classification, meaning a higher specialisation of the component elements, and a stronger differentiation between them.

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In the social sector, for example, the multifunctional living room, normally found in social housing and middle class flats, has its area increased with the 'spatialisation' of specific activities in the same proportion to the inhabitants' social status, hence the advertisement of programmatic elements such as receiving room, dining room, play room or TV room – recently renamed as home theatre. The increase in the number of labels is a sign of higher classification and complexity of the programme's attributes.

In the private sector, the phenomenon is more significant. In social housing, the bedroom is never preceded by an adjective, neither being to identify its user (couple, son, and daughter) nor to establish the degree of importance (main bedroom). In middle class flats new adjectives and labels (en-suite) appear as strategies to highlight rooms with a higher specialised function. In reality, a single room becomes a spatial complex, with the introduction of new commodities. To the en-suite bedroom, the highest level of luxury that middle class families can afford, is incorporated a closet, a new label for the older dressing room, a gym or an office. In these cases, the suite becomes master suite. At this most intimate level of the bedroom spatial complex, strong spatial classification marks the gender differentiation in some high middle class apartments, as is the case with separate toilets and closets for husbands and wives.

The service activities are significantly manifested in advertisement campaigns, particularly to highlight the number and peculiarity of the program. As indicated before, the number of spaces of the sector is determined by social status, but its spatial complexity may not be. Service sectors are found as a single kitchen-service space, found in small flats, but also with two, or even three, bedrooms (maids and driver), deposit and copa, a traditional space for family meals. The number of spaces in the sector can rise to more than eight rooms.

But the more distinguished programmatic element, largely advertised in middle class flats, is the 'reversible room'; an ingenious solution that allows the use of the servants' bedroom either as a private or a service space. Morphologically speaking, the room is a by-pass from one sector to the other, generating an internal ring, which invariably passes through the living-room, kitchen, service area and bedrooms' corridor. Its origin is related to the regulation of servants' profession, with the consequent increase of their wages, the economic recession that hit Brazilian society in the 80's and the emergence of new family arrangements. The reversible bedroom arrives to satisfy families that cannot afford a permanent servant or those who simply need more space, but cannot afford it.

Recently, developers realised that a significant part of the flats offered to the market passed through refurbishments before been inhabited. The need to adapt the flats was so common that in some buildings, 100% of their flats suffered important transformations (Cavendish, 2000). Consequently, developers and architects started to offer different spatial arrangements for the flat, in order to avoid or reduce the number of refurbishments. This opportunity to choose your particular flat became an important attribute to be explored in the ads. Another consequence of this tendency is the emergence of studios and lofts (used here to describe a certain spatial arrangement where space visual continuity overcomes the traditional space isolation and segregation), offered to a new sub-culture identified within certain young professional classes.

In sum, flat's program is explored in advertisement campaigns in two forms: (a) to express housing traditional space organisation revealing the organisation of the plan, the segregation of the service area, the isolation of private spaces, etc.; (b) social status, by calling the attention to the number of rooms (4 en-suite bedrooms) or particular spaces (home-theatre); (c) the flexibility of the plan, offering possibilities for arrangements to be selected by buyers.

4. Marketing and architecture

Advertisement campaigns, as seen, were powerful instruments to introduce and create a strong housing market in Recife, whose foundation depended on a continuous recreation of certain lifestyle expectations. Advertisements were and still are, both, the representation of people's desires and the origin of them. In the specific case of Recife, they are effectively used to evoke popular images that suggest a safe and comfortable life, reminiscent of the stability, tradition and wealth presumably real in our recent past. Like in Alice's mirror, reality and imagination are deeply embedded in each other.

Nothing is more evident of this process than the collection of architectural imagery explored in the campaigns. The architectural attributes of the housing developments – style, proportion, decoration, etc., do not always carry any relationship with the images evoked by their names. The French Castles of Loire are the inspirations for a myriad of enterprises that are far from the abstract modern profiles of their tropical relatives. Not to mention the total absence of the notorious formal French gardens. What is being sold is the desire to acquire and live in a lifestyle, and what is being bought is a dream.

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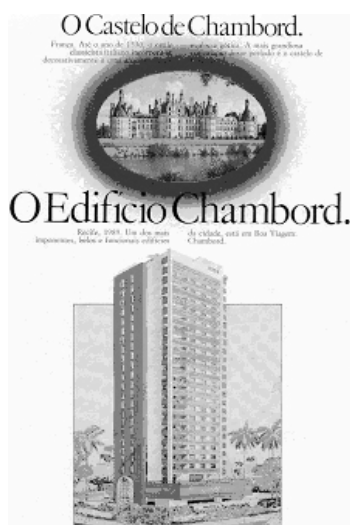


Figure 5: Advertising campaign of the Chambord Building
(Source: promotional leaflet by Concal Engenharia)

The identified marketing strategies point to a peculiar and particular process of gentrification. Different from what has been observed in big cities of developed countries, gentrification in the case of Recife and its metropolitan region is not based on a non-familiar culture of the everyday life. On the contrary, most of these processes are not concentrated in the inner city, and the strategy to influence the process of middle class decision making is based on traditional relations, even though tradition has to be, sometimes, invented. In fact, the main market for middle class housing offers what consciously is sought by the social group: an atmosphere of tradition and solid domesticity that is associated with the past.

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