

Home: What is it for?

A syntactic analysis of the configuration of middle class apartments currently available on the property market in Recife, Brazil.

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Fabiana Moreira Pedrosa Pereira de Carvalho

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas - ESUDA, Brazil

Abstract

This work, now presented as a short paper for the Domestic Space theme, was initially conceived as a final project for the Undergraduate Course in Architecture and Urban Planning at the Humanities Faculty ESUDA: Home, What Do I Want It For? - A Syntactic Configuration Analysis of Apartments Currently Available on the Property Market in Recife, Brazil.

Keywords

domestic space,
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FARO@TRUENET.COM.BR

This paper aims to broaden a longstanding and thus far unresolved debate in Brazilian architectural theory: whether it is possible to redesign urban apartments to make them better suited to the daily activities and needs of the middle classes and more satisfactory in meeting their domestic space requirements.

In researching the socio-cultural design representate of middle-class metropolitan apartments, it was necessary to take into account the lack of studies concerning the profile of the contemporary middle-class family, its pluralistic makeup and diverse characteristics. Indeed, the Space Syntax Theory would seem to be able to fill part of this gap, insofar as it can determine to what extent socio-cultural characteristics influence the configuration of domestic space.

The aim of this research was to obtain, analyse and compare the syntactic measurements of ten middle-class apartment designs, randomly selected from those on the Recife property market directed towards a given family income, and interpret them from a socio-cultural perspective. These results were then compared with those obtained from research by IBGE¹ and Nomads-USP² into the wishes of the middle class concerning the domestic space they would like to live in.

There is, in academic literature and thought, a tendency to lay the whole blame for what is generally considered to be the inadequate architecture of this kind of apartment on property speculation. However, the syntactic analyses carried out on the configuration of these apartments reveal the need for more caution in accepting this argument as an absolute truth.

Moreover, the genotype obtained by comparing the recurrences and inequalities in the values of the syntactic measurements applied to each space of the configurations analysed, and the way they interface and communicate with one

another, suggests two things: either these apartments carry strong socio-cultural characteristics in their configuration or this model of space configuration is imposed by the property market as the only one this social class can afford.

Close observation of the retention of some of the most highly segregated and purportedly least useful spaces such as the balcony, a colonial legacy; or the servants' quarters comprising bedroom and bathroom, another inheritance from the early Brazilian urban middle class lifestyle and its architectural sample, the "sobrado" (townhouse), suggests that these seem to be either examples of cultural meaning supplanting specific functional needs or a market imposition.

To clarify this question, it is intended to carry out a post-occupancy analysis of this kind of apartment available on the market, using questionnaires to encourage residents to talk about their special needs and to formulate justified *grafos* of these spaces themselves. This procedure will enable a closer comparison of the configuration they have in their apartments with the properties they need for them.

In other words, this paper intends to systematize information whose analysis will enable the comparison of the genotype found in the design of these apartments with the configuration models this middle class desires for its domestic spaces. This will allow the core question of this project to be dealt with: is it possible to propose a new design for these apartments?

Notes

¹ IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Geography and Statistics Institute)

² Nomads – USP – Departamento de Estudos da Habitação Metropolitana – da Universidade de São Paulo (Metropolitan Housing Studies Department, University of São Paulo)