

Rethinking Vilanova Artigas: his unbuilt courtyard-houses

Repensando Vilanova Artigas. suas casas-pátio não construídas

Repensando Vilanova Artigas. sus casas patio no construídas

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Artículo de reflexión

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze three courtyard-house projects by the architect Vilanova Artigas, taking into account six concepts: i) dwelling; ii) *place*; (iii) "public" domain; iv) *utopia*; v) *manifesto*; vi) *socialization*. Significant characteristics of the analyzed projects were identified, especially role of the inner courtyard and character of the architect's residential work. It is important to emphasize the unbuilt projects' interpretation, which relates to the completeness and comprehensive vision of his work. The article contributes to the understanding of unbuilt residential projects and highlights the psychological, socio-cultural, symbolic, and utopian dimensions that are implicit in Artigas' production.

Key-words: Vilanova Artigas; Courtyard; Unbuilt; Concept

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar três projetos residenciais do arquiteto Vilanova Artigas à luz de seis conceitos: i) *habitar*; ii) *lugar*; iii) domínio "público"; iv) *utopia*; v) *manifesto*; vi) *sociabilização*. Foram identificadas características marcantes nos projetos analisados, sobretudo o papel e o caráter do pátio interno na obra residencial do arquiteto. Destaca-se a importância da interpretação de projetos não edificados para a completude e visão abrangente da sua obra. O artigo contribui para a compreensão dos projetos residenciais não construídos, e destaca as dimensões psicológicas, socioculturais, simbólicas e utópicas implícitas na obra do arquiteto.

Palavras-chave: Vilanova Artigas; Pátio; Projeto não construído; Conceito.

Resumen

Este artículo busca analizar tres proyectos de casa patio, realizados por el arquitecto Vilanova Artigas, teniendo en consideración seis conceptos: i) residencia; ii) *lugar*; iii) dominio "público"; iv) *utopía*; v) *manifiesto*; vi) *socialización*. Ciertas características significativas de los proyectos a analizar fueron identificadas, especialmente el rol del patio interior y el carácter del trabajo residencial del arquitecto. Es importante enfatizar en la interpretación de los proyectos no construidos, lo cual se relaciona con la completitud y la visión comprensiva de su trabajo. Este artículo contribuye al entendimiento de aquellos proyectos residenciales no construidos y resalta la dimensión sicosocial, socio-cultural, simbólica y utópica que se encuentran implícitos en los proyectos de Artigas.

Palabras claves: Vilanova Artigas; casa patio; no construídos; concepto

Introduction

In the 1950s, when the architect João Batista Vilanova Artigas emerged as a protagonist in Brazilian architecture, some important developments taking place in society were Martin Heidegger's essays and lectures on dwelling, Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas' reflections on the human condition, and social, cultural, behavioral, economic, and technological transformations. This was immediately after the Second World War, and this new existentialist character influenced the ideology of modern architecture. Moreover, at that time, when the role that technology would play for the benefit and collective advancement of society was being rediscussed, Brazilian architecture was beginning to be recognized worldwide, particularly because of the impact of Oscar Niemeyer's work. In this context, Artigas realized that the so-called "bourgeois" house would have to be reviewed.

Artigas was known for being an acute critic and, he assumed a leading role in the "Escola Paulista". The architect contributed to delimiting the striking features of this architecture, particularly between the 1950s and 1970s, which, in general terms, can be characterized by buildings defined by a regular volumetry, monovolume, by large covers of reinforced concrete, a rational structure, spans and fluid spaces interconnected by ramps, and a strong concern regarding the "drawing of emptiness" in buildings' internal spaces. Thus, by reviewing architectural programming and how this was implemented, and as part of a new proposal for space, Artigas explored these techniques, but was aware that in architecture *"the man conditions the technical solutions"*, and that *"architecture is, above all, the cultural expression of a people"* (Artigas 1981, p. 22-24).

There is no doubt that the Cold War, the military government, the emergence of mass society, the rapid growth of cities, and the need for architecture and urbanism to intervene to improve public spaces and solutions for housing deficit problems in Brazil, led to a new ideology, of which Artigas was the

protagonist. Oscillating between a developmentalist and a nationalist view, and also between the preservation of Brazilian culture and the need to overcome the country's cultural and technological backwardness, the architect acted propositionally through actions rooted in the reality of that historical moment. Between utopia and reality, and also between the need to deal with urgent social issues and the dream of a brighter future, Artigas conceived around two-hundred residential, private, and collective projects. These were based on the architect's strong concern with society, and, in particular, on the search for the balance between the technical and the artistic solution appropriate for construction problems in Brazil.

However, due to obstacles and difficulties encountered throughout his career caused by the political and economic situation, about 20% of his residential projects were never built (Tagliari 2012). One of this research's assumptions is that the study of unbuilt projects contributes to the identification and understanding of the work as a whole; ideas are highlighted that would support the constructed works, even though they did not materialize.

All designs that architects develop throughout their careers are somehow relevant to understand the entirety of their architecture. Thus, it is possible to say that unbuilt projects, in many cases, contributed to the formation of ideas and that, in some cases, they culminated in built architecture of immense value. In this way, some unbuilt projects are important experimental laboratories.

Relevant studies conducted by Kent Larson (2000) on the unbuilt projects of Louis Kahn; by Antonio Foscari (2010) about Andrea Palladio; by Mirko Galli and Claudia Mühlhoff (2000) on Giuseppe Terragni; by Alberto Sdegno (2008) on Palladio and Wright; and by Nicholas Webb and Andre Brown (2011) on James Stirling, state the importance of studying the unbuilt to gain a complete insight as to how an architect's work should be understood.

As will be seen below, fundamental concepts and important characteristics present in unbuilt projects reveal the nature of the residential projects that Artigas' built. Therefore, the objective of this article is to analyze three of Vilanova Artigas' residential projects while taking into consideration six concepts: i) *dwelling*; ii) *place*; (iii) "public" domain; iv) *utopia*; v) *manifesto*; vi) *socialization*. Significant characteristics were identified during the analysis, especially regarding the role and character of the inner courtyard in the architect's residential work. The importance of interpreting unbuilt projects to gain a complete and comprehensive vision of his work is evident.

The courtyard as a shelter

The space represented by the central courtyard in Vilanova Artigas' projects has the character of shelter, reception, permanence, and essential aspects for socialization. If the city of São Paulo causes the introversion of the house, it is because the urban chaos requires a space for tranquility, which is represented by the "courtyard": the privacy, peace, shelter, and tranquility of which is opposed to the agitation present in the city's public space. In Heidegger's words (2001, p. 129), "[...] *dwelling, being brought to the peace of a shelter [...] the fundamental trait of dwelling is this shelter.*" Artigas admired Heidegger and used the philosopher's ideas on several occasions to justify his thinking.

Henrique Villaboim Filho's (Figure 1) unbuilt residence (1966) shows architectural features belonging to the "Escola Paulista": regular geometry, monovolume, structure definer of spaces, and large interspace. But what stands out most is the importance of the central courtyard, and its psychological dimension of shelter, reception, privacy, and tranquility. The same is true of José David Vicente (1959) and Jorge Edney Atalla's (1971) residences. In these projects, the courtyard stands out as a central core and articulates the spaces in the residence. Consequently, the *psychological* dimension, represented by the courtyard, is a clear demonstration of the architect's concern with the meaning of *dwelling*.

The courtyard as a space of introspection

The courtyard is a place for thinking, reflection, and introspection. It is a space qualified to concentrate on and extract from our memory the most meaningful part in our experience. We keep in mind what touches us and what we consider most significant in explaining our existence. If "*the memory is the concentration of thought*", as Heidegger affirmed, it is because thinking allows us to remember and relive what we perceive with greater vigor: what we perceive to be of greater importance. In this sense, the courtyard is an archetypal space that

refers to the idea of peace, tranquility, security, and protection of the outside world.

The three analyzed residence projects show that the position of the covered courtyard, surrounded by the other sectors of the residence, intensifies the introspection process: the turning inwards. In this sense, the psychological dimension is present once again.

The courtyard as a space for coexistence

Heidegger (2001, p. 128) stated that "*all building is in itself a dwelling*". Thus, when designing and constructing a dwelling, a space is created. This space concomitantly promotes security, identity, sense of orientation, and meaning for the human being. In this sense, the courtyard assumes two dimensions: first, it is a space belonging to the *psychological* dimension, which brings together the idea of peace, security, protection, identity; and, second, it is a space belonging to the *social* dimension, for meeting, coexistence, and exchanging ideas.

While the courtyard refers to the idea of looking within, because silence provides *peace*, at the same time it forces us to *listen* and to pay attention to the other. Consequently, the courtyard, as a place of meeting and interaction with the other, is a space for promoting the spirit of solidarity, cooperation, and the collective growth of individuals: what we refer to in this paper as *socialization*.

Figure 3 shows how the large central space, which has a double or triple height ceiling, forces all eyes to converge on it, making this the meeting place, the place where the family coexists.

The courtyard as a symbolic space

There is also a *symbolic* dimension in the space dedicated to the courtyard. This place is qualified for permanence, that is favorable for reflection, meeting, and coexistence; architects see it as the place for democratic and transparent debate, and in private residences, it represents the assumed role of the "public square".

For Artigas, to build was to construct spaces qualified for permanence. As Heidegger affirms (2001, p. 137), for the architect, "*to build is to construct places*". In Vilanova Artigas' architecture, the production of spaces and their articulation was essentially linked to the idea of place, in its most intimate human condition. In this sense, the courtyard represents this symbolic dimension of *place*.

In addition, the courtyard, in Artigas' work, has another equally important meaning: *the public domain*. Hanna Arendt, in her

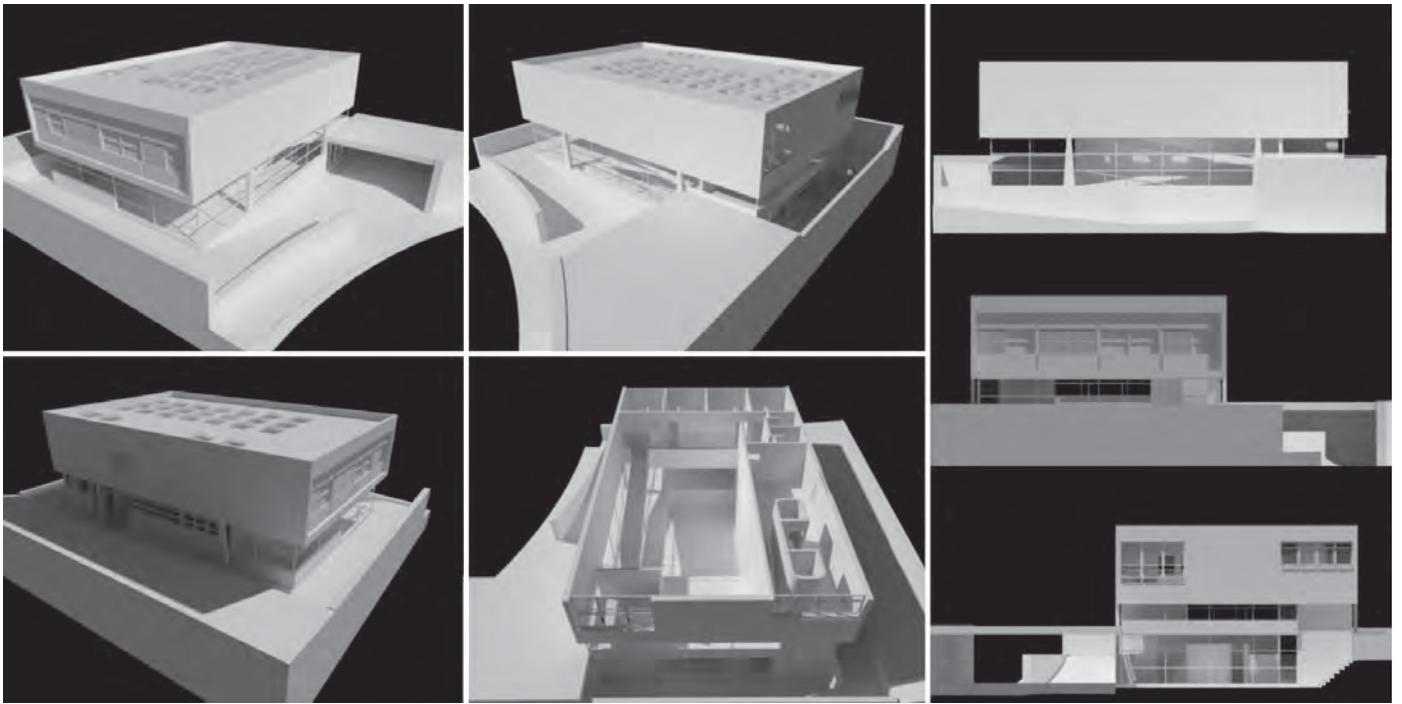


Figure 1: Henrique Villaboim Filho House's (1966). Source: Authors.

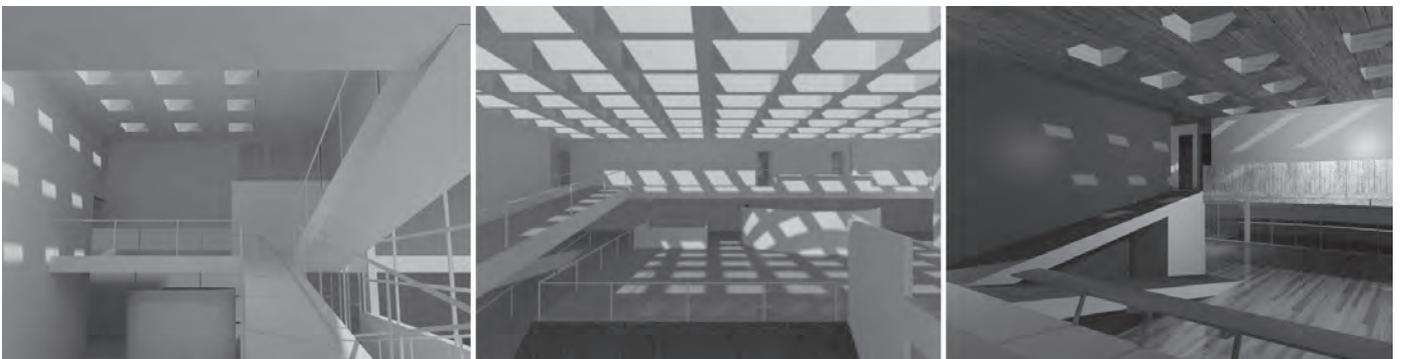


Figure 2: Three residences with a courtyard. Source: Authors.

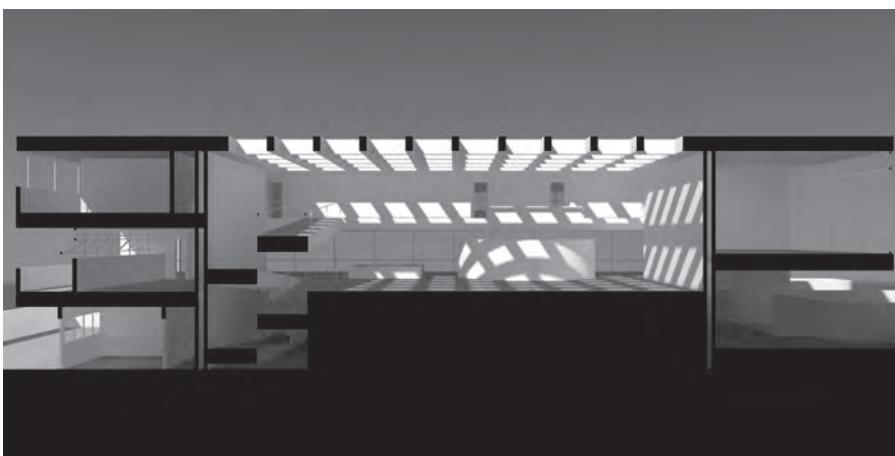


Figure 3: Jorge Edney Atalla's House. Source: Authors.

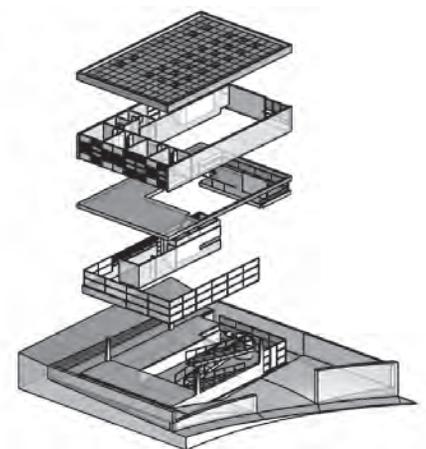


Figure 4: Henrique Villaboim's House. Source: Authors.

exemplary definition of the term "public", explains that primarily it means *"that everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everyone and has the greatest possible publicity"* (Arendt 2010, 61). For this philosopher as well as the architect, *"the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear guarantees us the reality of the world and of ourselves..."* (Arendt 2010, 61). This fact leads us to think that for Vilanova Artigas the real role of the courtyard as a central space was for the family to converge: a place that can be seen from several points of view in space. It has a "public" character, where everyone talks and listen without secrets and, thus, they are more aware of the reality in which they live. Therefore, it can be stated that the clash between the public and private space, between the collective and the individual, are also the underlying question about the role of the courtyard in Vilanova Artigas' residential work.

If for Habermas, public space is defined as *"a place where community relations occurs (...) a space where demands and claims are expressed; welcoming several institutions — state and non-state; space to act publicly, of encounters; space par excellence of free and collective action"* (Habermas, apud Paiva 1995, 10). This is because the public domain is the place of meeting and debate par excellence. However, this definition of public space, in terms of the courtyard being a residence, is intended to designate a space for family meetings and collective, but private, actions.

"The distinction between public and private domains, conceived more from the point of view of privacy than from the political body, is the distinction between what must be displayed and what must be concealed" (Arendt p. 88). This important observation about Arendt is fundamental for the discussion regarding the inner courtyard of a residence. This space has a private character when comparing it to public space in the city, but it has a collective purpose in terms of social relations for the family that lives there.

The courtyard as maximum expression of architectural character

Artigas identified practical knowledge that guided architects' actions; thus, he questioned the values underlying the practice and, more clearly, bourgeois habits, which defined not only the architectural programming, but the architectural decisions, both in terms of constructive nature and aesthetic character. Unlike the "French-style of living" (Lemos 1985) where environments were rigidly separated, there is a strong proposal for spatial integration, where the courtyard plays a special role. When the covered courtyard of the studied residences takes a central position, it reveals the intense spatial



Figure 5: José David Vicente's House. Source: Authors.

integration between the sectors that constitute the residence. It also simultaneously allows the enlargement of the internal visions among spaces that turn toward the center.

By incorporating the covered courtyard as a prominent space that is positioned in the center of the house, with high ceilings, surrounded by the intimate and service sectors, the architect can achieve the maximum degree of spatial integration. Environments can be connected, and fluid and transparent spaces can be made, which spatially materializes what is most important: democracy, transparency, and socialization. Once again, the *social* and *symbolic* dimensions are very prominent.

The courtyard for habit change

Hannah Arendt (2010, p. 10) warns that *"men are conditioned beings, because everything they come into contact with immediately becomes a condition of their existence."* Thus, it can be inferred that technique, culture, and the *habitus* subliminally guide the architect's ideas. As the proposition of residential spaces is in tune with this *human condition*, the design of such spaces is consequently shaped by the environment and circumstances that guide the architect's professional performance, while spaces shape behaviors. In this sense, Artigas rebels against the bourgeois habits, which he called the "French-style of living": environments that were compartmentalized.

It is well known that the "habit" of living in a compartmentalized dwelling and having private spaces was widely questioned by modern architects throughout the twentieth century. For Artigas' generation of architects, the priority was to expand collective spaces and reduce the residence's private spaces. But change is never an easy task. Artigas who was also taught, questioned "bourgeois" habits as he knew that new ways of dwelling would only be possible if there were new negotiations during architectural programming in which the courtyard played an important role. Therefore, in order to transform society, it was necessary to identify what had been crystallized in culture and the most daily habits. As Pierre Bourdieu asserted:

"What the cooptation operation must reveal and teaching must convey or reinforce, in this case, is not only a knowledge, a set of scientific knowledge, but a know-how or, more precisely, an art of putting into practice this knowledge, and to do so with discernment, in practice, which is inseparable from a global way of acting, an art of living, a habitus." (Bourdieu 2013, p. 88-89)

Artigas was aware that human behavior is shaped by tradition. In his point of view, it was necessary to induce "new habits", with more favorable spaces for collective coexistence. Thus, he is committed to teaching architecture and defended changes regarding habits: starting with the reformulation of architectural programming and its spatialization. This can be seen in the space represented by the courtyard, the meeting between the *symbolic* and the *utopian* dimension of a new transparent and democratic society.

The courtyard as a poetic element

The light passing through the zenithal openings on the courtyards' cover reveals a poetic side of architecture. More than just a need for natural illumination, the domes allowed the celestial vault to be observed. It was possible to "see" the stars and to become aware of the sun's course as well as the play of light and shadow caused by the displacement of this great star throughout the day.

The breadth of the courtyard, with a double or triple height ceiling, reveals the desire to create a microcosm that was inhabited by the "gods". *The drawing of emptiness*, provided by the covered courtyard, also reflects the domain of construction, of wide spaces and zenithal light, provided by the balance between technique and its poetics.

For the architect, the proposition of form was intrinsically linked to the human condition:



Figure 6: Section of Henrique Villaboim Filho's House. Source: Authors.

"Architecture is a way apart, original and unique. It contains the technical vision in coexistence with the artistic vision. – Difficult coexistence, full of contradictions. We do not just research on the terrain of form. But the initial proposition, in formal research, has human content. The human content, in Architecture, conditions the technical one." (Artigas 1981, p. 24)

In this way, the wide coverage, the large spans, and the ramps that intersect space are, at the same time, an expression of technique (reinforced concrete) and a poetic expression of freedom.

The utopia

It is important to emphasize that, in the face of rapid behavioral and societal changes, Vilanova Artigas' residential projects had the utopian character of anticipating new ways of dwelling for contemporary society.

"I refuse to accept that there is a crisis of architecture itself, even if I can throw myself against what, throughout the architectural proposal, was utopian. Because it is not through utopia that things should be criticized, but because it is impossible for utopias to be realized" (Artigas 1975).

The desire to change society through architecture, as well as the desire to see a fairer and equalitarian world, encouraged the architect to criticize and, at the same time, elaborate proposals to overcome the situation in which Brazilian architecture found itself between the 40s and 80s, which was the time Artigas was productive.

The architect explored the theme of housing to catalyze the transformations that he considered to be fundamental in society. For Artigas, the construction of a residence had ample meanings: "[...] for the man, to construct was originally to build his habitation, to lodge himself in the space, mastering it as part of nature." (Artigas 1969, 13). But for him, "from the habitation, primitive man would have transposed his no less primitive 'threshold', appropriating himself of the space on a wider scale." Thus, housing becomes universal in several themes that have a greater social magnitude, which leads the architect to state: "The city is a house. The house is a city" (Artigas 1969, 15). According to him, the house was the starting point for society's redefinition as well as other design themes in this domain of nature:

"I meet with the house in the city to build with it the house of the new society that emerges as an inevitable consequence of the ever deeper knowledge that we are having about the world and the relationships between men. This pursuit for rationality has no end, and keeps us in constant experimentation; the specific

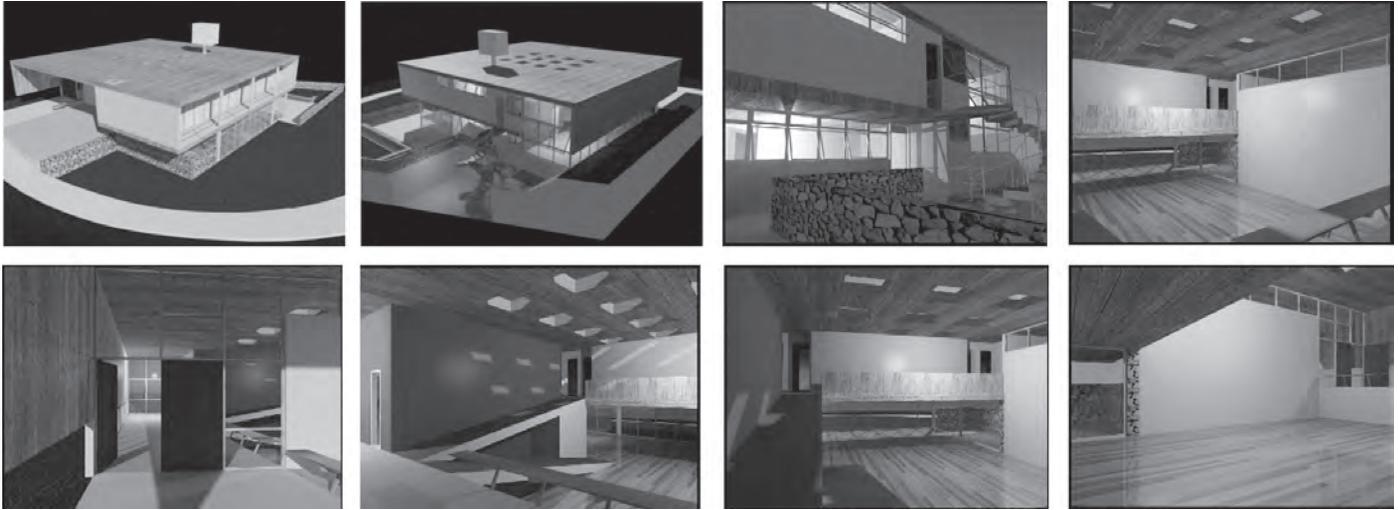


Figure 7: José David Vicente's House. Source: Authors.

experimentation of the arts is also private to science and technology, applied to the art of building." (Artigas 1969, p. 1)

These statements lead us to infer that the house was, in fact, the most explored subject for experimentations in search of a new society, and it provided the production of new knowledges that could be applied to major themes. Far from being a "minor, irrelevant work," as expressed by Artigas, the residence would be the preferred means to experiment with and move towards the utopia of a fair and equalitarian society.

While "memory thinks what has already been thought", as Heidegger (2001, 118) wrote, utopia thinks about the future. Artigas reflected on the past and learned from lessons that could justify and upon which he could base actions to make the necessary changes in the coming society. Artigas' famous phrase, "what cathedrals do you have in mind?", leads us to the idea of utopia, to the idea of an investigation into a future that hybridizes archetypes rooted in the past, but that creates new symbols for the future.

"To affirm the city corresponds to design the city of tomorrow. And here architecture meets the utopian project, the hypothesis of 'ideal city', but at the other end, armed with a new critical capacity." (Artigas 1981, p. 120)

On the other hand, Artigas also reveals the architect's anguish, stating that "...national industry does not develop at the necessary pace, in order to become the instrument we need to definitively abandon the colonial remains that hamper our technical development" (Artigas 1981, 18). This made him look for the alternatives in the use of reinforced concrete.

Willing to face the industrialization problem in Brazil, Artigas defended the technique, but he did not forgoing the artisanal

artistic character of construction, which differentiates the architect from the engineer. For him, *the modern technique made possible all utopias* (Artigas 1981, 44). However, he explored what was available in his time. He fought for professional recognition and to train architects to face society's important social issues.

The courtyard as a manifesto

Artigas fought to promote citizenship. While working, he also played a critical role at universities. In his writings, his proposal for a new reality is striking, and it demonstrates a clear political position that shows the architect's performance as a professional capable of contributing to the transformation of society. In this sense, Vilanova Artigas' projects can also be considered an important part of his *manifestos*.

As stated by Beatriz Colomina (2014), "design is part of the manifesto". It is possible to affirm that the courtyard represented, for the architect, a clear spatial manifestation of the democratic spirit within a residence, which simultaneously reveals social, psychological, symbolic, and utopian concerns.

The ramps crossing the inner courtyard space manifest a desire to cross space freely. The large central void attracts the attention of everyone who is located on different pavements. Thus, the courtyard represents both the most important hierarchical space of the house, the desire to make it the center of attention, and the preferential meeting place of the family.

The courtyard also symbolizes the desire for non-segregation, to connect people, and to invite them to socialize. Therefore, the individual cedes to the collective. This is a clear demonstration of the search for the social function of the architect, which appears most intensely in his ambition to "change" society.

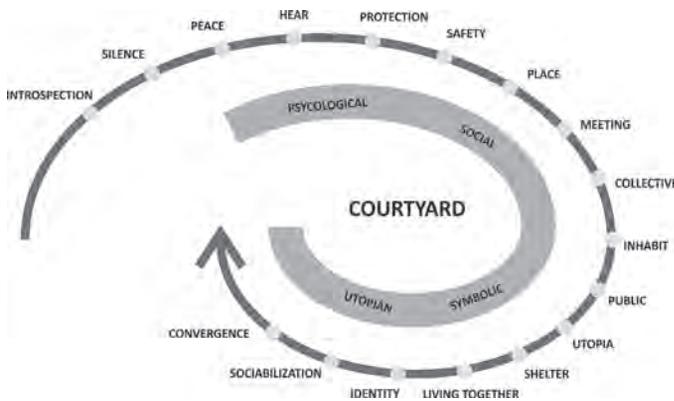


Figure 8: The four dimensions represented by the courtyard. Source: Authors.

The four dimensions represented by the courtyard

The conclusion of this study is that the central covered courtyard, a common element of the three unbuilt residential projects analyzed in this paper, has multiple dimensions and meanings, which are rooted in the concepts of *dwelling*, *place*, *public domain*, *utopia*, *manifesto* and *socialization*. Such concepts, present throughout Artigas' work, are vehemently expressed in his unbuilt projects, which confirm the scope of the architect's ideas.

The survey revealed that the *psychological aspect* of the covered courtyard refers to the shelter's sense of protection and safety, the family environment, and, therefore, represents a place qualified for permanence: for reflection and introspection. Moreover, the *social aspect* concerns the *place* of meeting and family coexistence: a space destined for socialization.

The courtyard, which is a large space, transparent, articulating, and has integrating environments, assumes a *symbolic dimension*. This is principally because it allows frank and democratic debate, without secrets, for all to see.

Finally, the *utopian dimension* is represented by the architect's desire to transform habits, customs, programs, and social relations. The house was a *manifesto* for the architect to prepare and anticipate future actions for larger public projects. Thus, far from being a minor theme, the house, for the architect Vilanova Artigas, represented the beginning of a major societal transformation.



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