

**STUDYING (BY) DISAPPEARED BUILDINGS:  
the “social aspect” as methodology for writing the history of architectural preservation  
in contemporary Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.<sup>1</sup>**

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For this communication, I would like to present two questions that I assume represent the core of my reflection. The first one is: **“how can we learn and teach architecture using something that was, by technical arguments, discarded of the cities?”** And, in addition: **“Can we learn architecture with what was not maintained in the cities?”**

First of all, I would like to remind us that the actions linked with the “remembrance” opposed those tied to “forgetfulness”, as well the “demolition” is the “antithesis” of “construction”. Although these pairs appear to be neutral, detached from tensions, the simple fact that one oppose to other reveal us conflicts that allow the historian of cities and buildings questions such as:

Why someone intended this construction?

Who designed it?

Who built it?

Who was it owner or dweller?

Who masterminded the demolition?

Who performed the demolition?

**How** did the occupants or the society see the demolition?

This list of questions already allows us to realize that the buildings are, in essence, collective works, an expressive manifestation of many authors has been calling as "social production of space". This “social production of space” is a procedural and polysemic attitude. It is an important statement to open the gates for the comprehension that despite of its property, a work of architecture, from the moment it emerges inside the urban environment - and even rural - hence starts to act as beacon of social relations in time and space.

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This situation allows us to understand something that is still shy, but which may prove to be an important weapon in the preservationist policies: the idea of a building's reception by a specific society.

Far from here discuss the aesthetics of reception or the writings of Paul Valery, George Kluber and Hans Robert Jauss, I will try, however, to point out the relevance of the analysis of the "social circuit" of an architectural work: its idealization, production, construction, circulation and reception as a valid and broader method in historical studies.

The production of new analytical parameters, especially in the field of built heritage has moved out newer generations involved with preservation for opposite sides of those traditional ones, based in the imprecise - but seductive - arguments of "values", such as, architectural, aesthetical, historical. The two cases I will present here are good examples of the goal of my two questions. The Monroe Palace and the Solar Monjope are two of many buildings that disappeared in Brazil, during the 1970s, but, in a specific way, through them we can notice the intense presence of the social corpus and the emergence of social demands for a plural heritage in Rio de Janeiro.

## **WHAT WAS THE MONROE PALACE?**

The Monroe Palace was the name assumed by a supposed "ephemeral architecture" erected by the Brazilian government in 1904 in Louisiana, USA, to serve as the Brazilian pavilion at the International Fair of Saint Louis. Designed by the military engineer, Colonel Francisco Marcelino de Souza Aguiar, the building was designed to be disassembled after the American Fair. But, contradicting its ephemeral destiny, the Brazilian Government enacted a decree requesting its reassembling in Rio de Janeiro, in the final part of Central Avenue, which was being opened by the Mayor Pereira Passos in the first years of XXth Century.

The name "Monroe Palace" was given by a proposal of the Baron of Rio Branco to honor the U.S. President James Monroe, on the occasion of the Third Pan-American Conference held in Rio in 1906.

The Palace as an artifact reveals, as a mirror of time, many of the dilemmas and policies available to Brazil at that time. Rebuilt in Brazil, with a metallic structure, something which referred directly to the American world, it had received ornaments referring to the European aesthetic universe, showing symbolically a very important and lively triangulation noted in those years in Brazil: a country, looking for a "place" between America and Europe.

## WHICH FUNCTIONS PLAYED THE MONROE PALACE IN BRAZIL?

Apart from those function linked with the Brazilian representation abroad, in Brazil, the Monroe Palace had a long presence in the Rio de Janeiro scene. It was used as Convention Center and, also, as a place for official and private receptions (CASTRO, 1926, p. 36). However, in 1914, the Chamber of Deputies was officially installed and worked there until 1922, when, in June of that year, the building was transformed in the official address of the Executive Committee of the Centennial Exposition of the Independence of Brazil.

At the end of this, in 1923, the building was extensively renovated, gaining seals in their side *loggias*, and as Berbert de Castro pointed out, incorporated new spatiality (Castro, 1926, p. 40). With this renovation, the building was transformed in the official address for the Brazilian Senate, from May 3, 1925, until 1960, when it was transferred to Brasília, the country new capital city. However, due to the refusal of many career employees and the appeal of senators, Monroe was kept as a branch office of the house until 1975, when, finally, was officially closed, ending its usefulness.

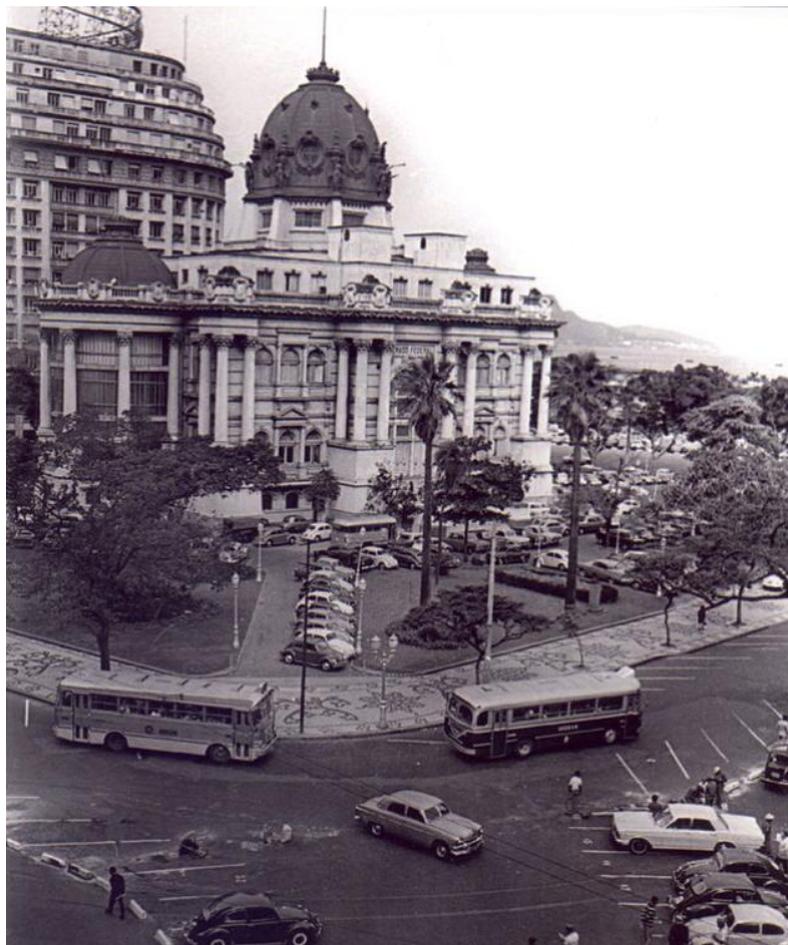


Figure 1: The Monroe Palace at Rio Janeiro. Unknown photographer. C. 1960's.

## THE CONTROVERSIAL SOLAR MONJOPE

The Brazilian physician José Marianno Carneiro da Cunha Filho emerged, in the late 1910s, in the Rio's scene, as an important social actor, engaging with the critic of art and with the patronage of architectural practice. During the 1920s, however, Cunha Filho demanded architectural solutions to some "aesthetical issues", which were answered by his support in various competitions, in which he argued for solutions as a sofa "Dom João VI", "a Colonial gate" and that which ended up being seen as the mother of his opulent residence in Gávea: "Brazilian Solar". The competition for the Brazilian Solar, established and conducted by Marianno, was brought to completion during the year of 1924, and attracted important architects like Nereu Sampaio, Gabriel Fernandes and Lucio Costa, for example (Pinheiro 2011, p. 150; KESSEL, 2008; CAMPOS NETO, 2002 p.197).

This residence, which was, in fact, redesigned after the competition by José Marianno, fusing the original solutions, was built on the shores of Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas in Rio de Janeiro, near the Botanical Garden. The mansion, described by his great-grandson and namesake José Marianno Carneiro da Cunha Filho, reveals the architecture of those space:

"The Solar was a huge house. To give you an idea, my room, in it, represented two apartments where I live today. It was a room of about 200 square meters. The house was arranged in four turrets and my room was one of those towers. My grandmother also lived in another tower. The house had three towers that were clean and the fourth tower was an entire library, very large. Downstairs there was a huge dining room, a living room lunch also very large, a small room, a huge courtyard and back patios of the rooms. Across the courtyard there was a huge hall, where were these huge halls and also the altar of the sacristy. Above, was the library, and beneath the altar of the sacristy, and the right side was the art gallery. "(TESTIMONY of José Marianno Carneiro da Cunha Filho to Fernando Atique and Ricardo Wilson Mingorance – July, 14, 2011).



Figure 2: The Solar Monjope's patio. Unknown photographer. C. 1970's.

Transformed by José Marianno in a "Built metaphor" of his campaign for the Traditional Brazilian Architecture, treated by historians as "neocolonial architecture", Solar Monjope was the scene of important celebrations in Rio de Janeiro, such as the Feast in honor of St. John, offered during the Fourth Pan American Congress of Architects, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1930, and portrayed in the national press, as in many other countries, such as Argentina.

The residence, near important equipments in Rio, as schools and parks, attracted many interests, and was considered an important place for the comprehension of the Neocolonial Architecture in Brazil, as pointed out, in 1936, the Brazilian writer and critic Mario de Andrade.

## **DEMOLITIONS**

The impact of a building, as already stated in this paper, surpasses the limits of your lot and the domains of its owner. In the case of Monroe, some considerations about the movement of his "image" and its representations become important vehicles for understanding its role in Rio's environment. Photographed repeatedly throughout the twentieth century, the Monroe, as a public building, became object of a dozen of postcards, figured on the covers of books, television series, in films, magazines and newspapers, having been, also, painted numerous times.

The fact of having hosted the Chamber of Deputies and for longer time, the Senate, created a movement of its name and image, in news and acts of the Legislature in the country, which resulted in its association with the former federal capital, making it "known" even by those who never set foot in Rio de Janeiro.

The same situation can be applied to the Solar Monjope, shrouded in controversy since its construction, and undeniably linked to their owner. The images and, even, the movie produced in its salons constructed a visual memory that extrapolates the geographical limits of its neighbourhood, its city and its country.

Thus, the power of visual elements on memory has great significance for the understanding of heritage. Although a building is not just image, whereas it has a dimension that might be called "tectonic", the technical reproduction of its image, enlarge the spectrum of their social knowledge.

Therefore, the quotation of Alberto Soares Goyena about the action of the photography helps to understand how society deals with the buildings, open pathways for the discussion of its reception. Soares says that:

[...] The photograph acts not so much as a tool to return to the past, but as a way to put the past in the present, keeping vivid images of other times such that they can return voluntarily or involuntarily to the current scene" (SOARES, S.D., s.p.).

Accepting the premise that the reception of the heritage occurs by other entries beyond the preservation of the physical and the stones, the Monroe Palace and Solar Monjope can be considered exemplary "objects" in this line. However, as the city is also an universe of stones and environments, the disappearance of buildings shows that memory is just one dimension of the heritage field, and that, as such, fades and does not replace the urban "experience". The disappearance of something chosen by a specific society produces a feeling of failure (HOBBSAWM 1996, p.13). This statement presenting an important dimension of this paper: the rejection by the government, the elective dimension of a heritage.



Figure 3: The demolition of Monroe Palace at Rio Janeiro. Unknown photographer. 1976.

The campaign pro-demolition of Monroe Palace, paradoxically, had its trigger in a document that intended to preserve it. A document drafted in 1972 by Paulo Santos, architect, art historian and also a counsellor of the National Institute of Historical and Artistic Heritage – Iphan – listed many eclectic buildings, reminiscent of the opening of Central Avenue, renamed in 1912 as Avenida Rio Branco, in Downtown Rio de Janeiro. The Santos' defense of these architectures was not welcomed by the Collegiate, and, a despite of it, the architect Lucio Costa, retired from the IPHAN's Division of Research, addressed the Council, rebutting the considerations of his colleague, Paulo Santos. This document produced by Lucio Costa was named *Problema Mal Posto* [Problem posed erroneously].

While considering misguided, in general, the defense of the eclectic architecture checked at Avenida Rio Branco, Lucio Costa focused with great emphasis against the Monroe Palace. Costa said that “the debased Pavilion Monroe, whose hindering presence is no longer justified” should be demolished, because the “relief of the area” was “necessary” (Apud COSTA PESSÔA, 1998, p. 275).

The idea that the Monroe Palace should disappear in favor of "urban affluence", left the Iphan's folders and took the national press, in special, the pages of a newspaper of great influence, known as Globo. This newspaper, as entitled by itself, installed a “campaign” against the building, promoting an intense debate pro-demolition in articles, testimonies and letters, that were refused by many sectors of society (O GLOBO, July, 5, 9, 10 e 11, 1974).

Consulted by O Globo, one of the most renowned historians on that period, Jose Honorio Rodrigues, stated that he supported the idea of demolition of Monroe Palace, because the only notable historic event passed there, "[...] had been the III Pan-American Conference " in 1906 (GLOBO, Jul. 10, 1974).

Although this incident occurred during the military period, the counter-campaign or "Pro-Monroe campaign" reached large scale, instated by the other newspapers, such as the Jornal do Commercio. In this sense, it is very interesting to note that even within the government; attitudes were taken against the demolition of the building. The reasons, capable of being deployed in a sequence of letters archived in Iphan, point out the lack of spaces for the various institutes of the Federal Government, especially the Ministries of Finance and Justice. It should show that the effervescence of the press about the demolition triggered the running of ministries in the Counter-Campaign, labeling Monroe as a "repository of traditions," according to José Alfredo Nunes de Azevedo (cited Aguiar 1976, p. 208). However, the counter-campaign failed to conquered fans inside the military regimen. In response to a letter sent to the President Ernesto Geisel, Golbery do Couto e Silva, chief minister of the presidential office, explained that meet "recommendations from the President of the Republic to the demolition of the building and the consequent transformation of the area into a public space" (SILVA cited Aguiar 1976, p. 212).

The Palace was demolished between January and June 1976. A firm specialized in historical demolition was hired by the federal government. The material obtained with the demolition was sold to private individuals.

Regarding the demolition of Solar Monjope we can say, until this moment, since our research is underway, that the preservation of the house was a problem for the owners. José Marianno passed away in 1946, and until 1972, the mansion was property of his widow and sons. The area occupied by

the mansions between 1940's until 1970's was transformed in one of the most expansive neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro. The Baixo Gávea and Lagoon, in Rio, was transformed in a special place for the elites' apartment buildings and the huge area of the Solar Monjope attracted the interest of the real state.

As pointed out by José Marianno's grandson, we realized that "someone in the family requested IPHAN to list the house as national heritage". The exactly applicant was not identified until this moment. But it is possible to understand that the family had other plans for the property. José Marianno's grandson said that: "My father did not want to sell the house, but my grandmother died in 1972 and the house was demolished in 1973, then there was an agreement among the brethren" (TESTIMONY of José Mariano Carneiro da Cunha Filho to Fernando Atique and Ricardo Wilson Mingorance, July, 14, 2011).

Something important to noticed is the presence of Lucio Costa in this episode too. The opinion issued by Costa on the Process requesting the preservation by IPHAN of Solar Monjope, indicates that the property, architecturally, had no distinctive elements that justify its preservation by the federal government. In the other hand, Costa pointed out that the personality of its owner was something to be taken into account regarding the preservation. However, Costa ponders that the preservation would be in charge of the state of Rio de Janeiro. In any case, it is important to highlight that "people did not believe and made a march against" is demolition. (TESTIMONY of José Mariano Carneiro da Cunha Filho to Fernando Atique and Ricardo Wilson Mingorance, July, 14, 2011).



Figure 4: The demolition of Solar Monjope, in 1974. Archives of O Estado de São Paulo. April, 06 1974.

## **THE DEMOLITIONS AND THE OUTBREAK OF A NEW POLICY FOR PRESERVATION IN RIO**

Although the outcome of the demolition of the Solar Monjope and Monroe Palace, in 1970, leave the impression that the period in question, marked by a military dictatorship and centralized governance actions, has step off preservationists social manifestations, should pointing out that the research we are conducting, shows otherwise.

Both the parade against the demolition of the Solar Monjope, in which students of a neighboring school, named Marques de Leão, took part, as the “journalistic battle” between national newspapers, in the case of the Monroe Palace, show us important cores for preservationist policy in the city of Rio de Janeiro, one of the most active cities in cultural terms in Brazil.

Even though the area formerly occupied by Solar Monjope has been purchased by the real state, and in its original lot some apartment towers of questionable architectural quality have been installed, and the old space occupied by Monroe Palace has received a fountain, the historical process that resulted in their disappearances were effective beyond the expected. As explained by Mirela Mota Macedo, the Corredor Cultural [Cultural Corridor] project arise from the understanding of a significant portion of Rio de Janeiro’s society that preservationists actions should be taken in order to preserve an urban and architectural ensemble that existed in the downtown area, which was represented by least four centuries of history, but that, nonetheless, was at risk by the urban technocratic discourse (Macedo, 2004).

Because of this perception, the Municipality of Rio de Janeiro took over the preservationist task and identified five areas of preservation: Sahara, Praça XV, Lapa, Cinelândia and Largo da Carioca who have found a non-canonical built heritage but very expressive in terms of urban live. This preservationist incursion inside a set of "non-symbolic" buildings, still in force in the 1970s, revealed, paradoxically, a great symbolism about new ways of thinking the territories of preservation in Rio.

We can say, in conclusion, that both the Monroe Palace as the Solar Monjope remains alive in memories and narratives about Rio de Janeiro, although they have physically disappeared, because of all the social, artistic, political and cultural projection that they triggered while "alive" is still circulating as images and narratives.

The applicant back to rebuilding the Monroe Palace, captained by portions of the Rio governance in recent years, seems to let emerge the carioca memory still cannot fix it just like building retained in the etheric field.

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