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N AESTHETIC IMPASSE IN
ARTIGAS: BETWEEN SOCIALIST
REALISM AND CONCRETISM

ABSTRACT

This article explores the ambivalent position of Artigas in the political-cultural debate of the Cold War, during the 1950s, when two principal art movements were opposed. On one side, socialist realist tendencies that emerged in post-revolutionary Russia, particularly after the ascension of Stalin, who intended it to be the new art of the proletarian masses, along the lines of cultural policies shared by many communist parties. On another side, concretism, already held as a new avant-garde art of geometrical abstraction, attacked by communist militants for its supposed "imperialist" links. To carry out this exploration, we have mapped the architect's treatment of both currents from two simultaneous fonts. One refers to the writings and classes of Artigas, where it is possible to trace the changes in meaning that each movement underwent throughout his career. The other refers to his projects, where we studied two paradigmatic houses: the Olga Baeta, of 1956; and the Rubens de Mendonça, of 1958. Although the former is usually regarded as "socialist realist" and the latter as "concretist", analysis of the drawings do not permit any narrow bonds to any of them. Both positions are mixed together in both houses, revealing the cultural impasse in which Artigas was set, present in both the texts and buildings, not only regarding the formal development assigned to each of them, but the link between long-term national and political projects.

KEYWORDS

Artigas, João Batista Vilanova (1915-1985). Casa Olga Baeta. Casa Rubens de Mendonça. Socialist-Realism. Concretism.

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UNA ENCRUCIJADA ESTÉTICA EN ARTIGAS: ENTRE EL REALISMO SOCIALISTA Y EL CONCRETISMO

UM IMPASSE ESTÉTICO EM ARTIGAS: ENTRE O REALISMO SOCIALISTA E O CONCRETISMO

RESUMEN

El artículo explora la posición ambivalente de Artigas en el debate político-cultural de la Guerra Fría durante la década de 1950, donde se oponían dos movimientos artísticos preponderantes. Por un lado, el realismo socialista, tendencia que ganó fuerza en la Rusia postrevolucionaria, sobre todo a partir de la subida al poder de Stalin, al colocarse como el nuevo arte de las masas proletarias, en las directrices de la política cultural común a diversos partidos comunistas. Y por otro lado, el concretismo, visto ya en aquel momento como una nueva vanguardia moderna de abstracción geométrica, aunque era atacado por los militantes comunistas, por sus supuestos vínculos “imperialistas”. Para demostrarlo, mapeamos el tratamiento que el arquitecto da a cada vertiente, por medio de dos fuentes simultáneas. Una se refiere a los textos y cursos dictados por Artigas, que permitieron percibir las transformaciones del significado que aquellos movimientos sufrieron a lo largo de su carrera. La otra es la de sus proyectos, donde estudiamos dos casas paradigmáticas: la casa Olga Baeta, de 1956, y la Rubens de Mendonça, de 1958. Aunque la primera sea normalmente vista como “realista socialista”, y la segunda como “concretista”, el análisis de los planos no permite una vinculación estricta con ninguna de estas. Ambas posiciones se encuentran en franco mestizaje en las dos casas y son desarrolladas de modo inconcluso, lo cual revelaría la encrucijada cultural en que Artigas se encontraba. Callejón sin salida presente en sus obras y textos, que concierne no sólo al desarrollo formal que cada frente le abría, sino también a su vinculación a proyectos políticos y nacionales de gran envergadura.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Artigas, João Batista Vilanova (1915-1985). Casa Olga Baeta. Casa Rubens de Mendonça. Realismo socialista. Concretismo.

RESUMO

O artigo explora o posicionamento ambivalente de Artigas no debate político-cultural da Guerra Fria, durante a década de 1950, em que se opunham dois movimentos artísticos principais. Por um lado, o realismo socialista, tendência que tomou força na Rússia pós-revolucionária, sobretudo a partir da ascensão de Stalin, ao se colocar como a nova arte das massas proletárias, nas diretrizes da política cultural comum aos diversos partidos comunistas. Por outro lado, o concretismo, já então visto como uma nova vanguarda moderna de abstração geométrica, mas que era atacado pelos militantes comunistas, por seus supostos vínculos “imperialistas”. Para tal, mapeamos o tratamento que o arquiteto deu a cada vertente, em duas fontes simultâneas. Uma se refere aos textos e aulas de Artigas, que permitiram perceber as transformações que as acepções de cada movimento sofreram ao longo de sua carreira. A outra é a de seus projetos, em que estudamos duas casas paradigmáticas: a Olga Baeta, de 1956, e a Rubens de Mendonça, de 1958. Embora a primeira seja normalmente vista como “realista socialista”, e a segunda, como “concretista”, a análise dos desenhos não permite uma vinculação estrita a nenhuma delas. Ambas as posições estão mescladas nas duas casas e são desenvolvidas de modo inconcluso, o que revelaria o impasse cultural em que Artigas se encontrava. Impasse presente nas obras e nos textos, referente não só ao desenvolvimento formal que cada frente lhe abria, como também por suas vinculações a projetos políticos e nacionais de longo alcance.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Artigas, João Batista Vilanova (1915-1985). Casa Olga Baeta. Casa Rubens de Mendonça. Realismo socialista. Concretismo.

Within the architectural works of Vilanova Artigas, there are two succeeding projects, very close in date but showing decidedly divergent solutions, among themselves as well as regarding the architects' general oeuvre. These are two houses, the Olga Baeta, of 1956, and the Rubens de Mendonça, of 1958, both of which are set in an intense artistic debate that was occurring in the early 1950s¹. On one side, socialist realism, championed by the Brazilian Communist Party, following Soviet indications; on the other, concretism, a modern-based-abstract-geometric art movement. Therefore, the difference between the houses would be given according to their relationship to either one of these artistic movements: the Baeta House, due to its reference to the "Paranaense (from the state of Parana) House", inspired in the popular tradition, was related to socialist realism; the Rubens de Mendonça, for its theme of multiplied triangles throughout the house, would rather be of concretist style. To the debate opposing socialist realists and concretists corresponds, even if ideologically, the political dispute between communists and capitalists. Therefore, this artistic debate was imbued with strong doctrinal conflict, leading to extreme positions – a context in which Artigas, a communist militant, was profoundly immersed.

¹ An extensive view of this debate can be seen in AMARAL, 1984.

² The course of socialist realism, mainly in architecture, is well documented in KOPP, 1978.

THE BAETA HOUSE AND THE SOCIALIST REALIST HYPOTHESIS

Let us begin with the Baeta House, which, as we have said, would be linked with socialist realism. In it, at last, Artigas would have submitted himself to the guidelines of the Party, according to which the "people" should play a central role in the artistic conception. Here we find one of the few references Artigas had made to vernacular architecture, namely, to the "*Paranaense* (from the state of Parana) house of his childhood", fact that the architect would have reiterated throughout his career (ARTIGAS, 1980, p. 164; ARTIGAS, 1984, p. 225-26; ARTIGAS, sept. 1984, p. 224; VILANOVA..., 1997, p. 72). From it, the drawings of the dual-pitched roof would derive as well as of the façade in which the imprint on the concrete alludes to wooden planks of the original construction.

The importance of the "people" and of the "vernacular" dates back to the beginning of the socialist realism doctrine², opposing to and competing with other artistic movements in post-revolutionary Russia. In the midst of futurists and constructivists, the 1920s were full of debates between the many groups that stood for art with the people's participation. In 1932, the hegemony was finally established: through Stalin's resolution, all Soviet art should be submitted to State planning, similarly to politics and economy. Hence, the Union of Proletarian Architects (Vopra) officially became the only architectural organ in the Soviet Union, joining under its roof different neo-historicist movements, where modern technique and classic vocabulary would unite. Examples of this architecture are the Metro System and the Moscow University, built in neoclassic style and that intended to bring aesthetic forms to the proletariat quotidian, previously exclusive to palaces of the elite.

Socialist realism, closer in this sense to a Stalinist aesthetic doctrine, was approached by Artigas in his text *Os caminhos da arquitetura moderna* ("The Paths of Modern Architecture", ARTIGAS, 1952). In this article, Artigas defends

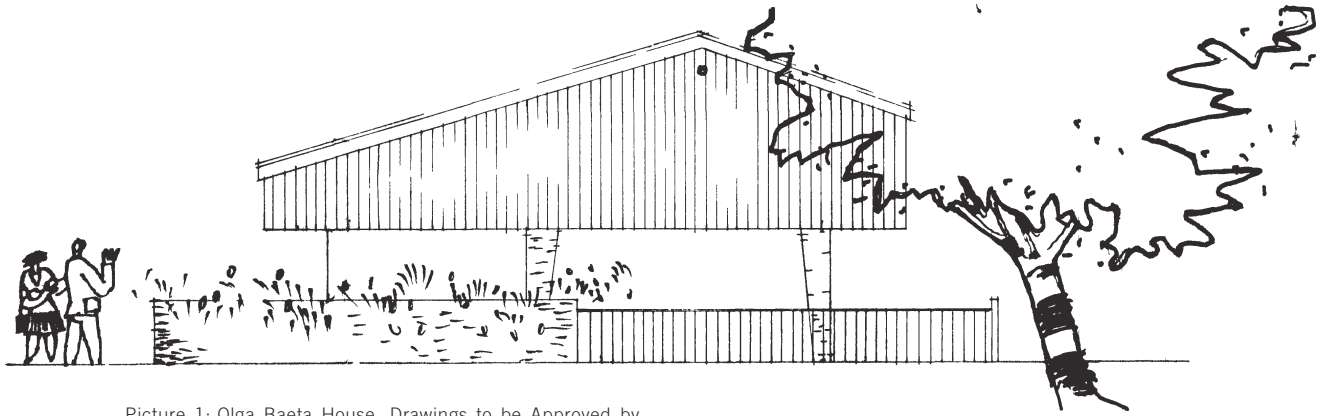
Soviet socialist-realism, which had given Moscow “a very luxurious metropolitan”. The appropriation of anachronistic languages by the “Soviet builder” would be considered sound due to the reutilization of forms previously used as instruments of oppression. The “people” should have the right to enjoy the comfort of their former rulers, experiencing “houses with columns and cornices”, while the “forms of the future” were being created. Therefore, any critique directed at Soviet “academicism”, was first and foremost an attack directed at the “proletarian revolution” and therefore a defense of the bourgeoisie.

By means of argumentation with generic subjects (“Soviet builder”, “people”), Artigas submits aesthetics to politics and reduces the importance that collectives of architect and politicians have in defining socialist realism (THOMAZ, 1997, p.200). For him, this architecture would represent only the first daydreams, people fumbling in the darkness in order to build a different future – socialist – disregarding the fact that socialist realism, either Brazilian or Soviet, was an artistic doctrine composed by an intellectual elite, whose execution was never directly linked to the masses.

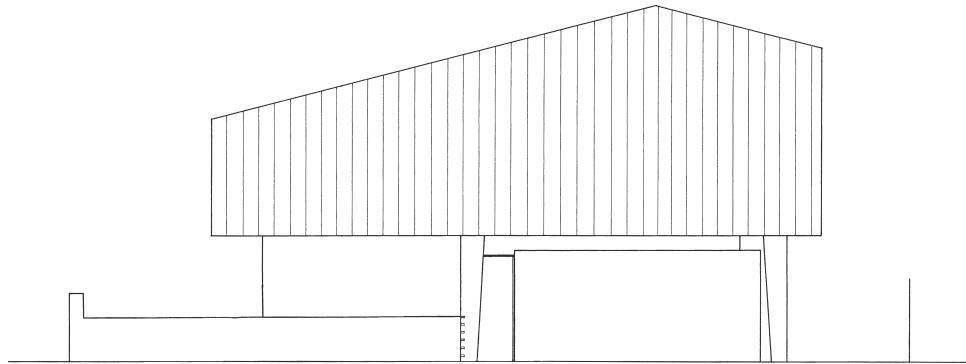
However, the first meaning of socialist realism – that of an eclectic art which offers the masses the right to enjoy that which had been denied to them – is not the one prevailing in the aesthetic guidelines of international communism, but rather a second one, related to the anonymous vernacular architecture. Some texts by Artigas allow for this reading, such as in his article in praise of Sullivan and Wright, in which he considers them the architects of the collective imagination, rather than architects of their own idiosyncrasies. Architecture should not be “an artist’s personal expression”, but the expression the “people”, of your “fellow-citizen” (ARTIGAS, 1960, p. 99).

This bias was already present in the Soviet Union, among different currents of socialist realism, as in the architectural work of Alexander Tamanian. On one hand, his projects adapted classical architecture to the traditional style of each nation added to the Soviet bloc; also he created a stylistic identity for regions which did not possess one. His works would be “socialist realist in their content” but “national in their form”, according to the formula put forth by Andrei Zhdanov who was responsible for cultural policies in the most totalitarian years of Stalin’s regime. This interpretation was common in post-war Europe, expanding through the mediation of architects associated with the many communist parties. This was the case of Italy, researching traditional forms and techniques associated with local craftwork with its prime example in the neighborhood of Tiburtino, by architects Mario Ridolfi and Ludovico Quaroni. This was also seen in England, where part of the London City Council architecture was a rereading of the work by William Morris, seen as a model of genuine English architecture. In both cases, local traditions were opposed to functionality in many different aspects: the setting out of the building, construction and roofing solutions, details of window frames and façades.

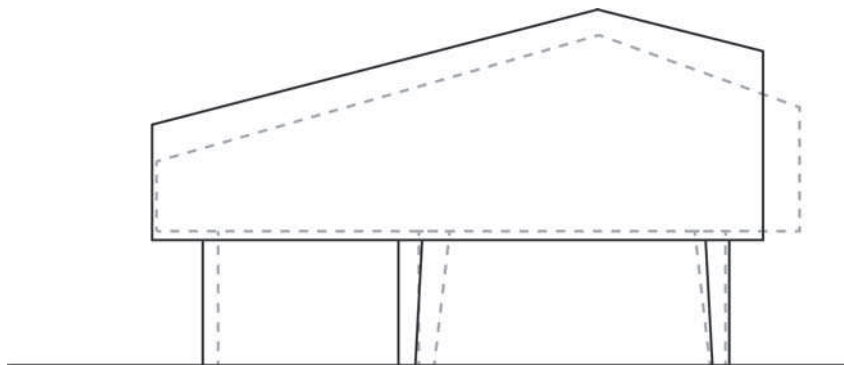
In this way, this conception includes the Baeta House in the communist aesthetic practices, while distancing it from the sumptuous Soviet academicism. However, even from this point of view one can hardly label it as socialist realism. Regardless of the roofing solution, nothing attaches it in a clear way to vernacular architecture, or to anything that could remit to the “Paranaense house”, due to its features such as the use of reinforced concrete



Picture 1: Olga Baeta House. Drawings to be Approved by the City Hall - Front Elevation (1956). Not to scale. Source: FAUUSP Library Archives.



Picture 2: Olga Baeta House. Construction Drawings - Front Elevation (1956) Not to scale. Source: FAUUSP Library Archives.



Picture 3: Comparison of Front Elevations: Initial Design Version in Dotted Line, Construction Drawings in Continuous Line. Not to scale. Source: author's archive.

as constructive solution, its opacity in relation to the street, its primary colors and so on. The house is much similar to a modern work of architecture, and for this reason it was seen, at the time, as a local variation of brutalism.

Regarding this argument, it is through the analysis of different versions of the design project, mainly the solutions given to windowless façade on the street-side that one can find the relations suggested by Artigas in his comments³. In one of his first sketches of the finished version (VILANOVA..., 1997, p. 72), the roofing is traced vigorously, stretching beyond its limits, showing more inclination than in the built house. The rhythm of the form is clearly marked, and in the façade, there is a porthole connecting to one of the rooms. According to Júlio Katinsky (apud BUZZAR, 2014, p. 329), initial studies by Artigas indicate that the windowless façade would not be built in reinforced concrete but in wood, to which it eventually makes an allusion. All these elements can be seen in the floor plan sent to the municipality for approval (Picture 1), the small porthole, and steeper incline of the roofing angle, sufficiently steep to appear in the blueprint of the first pavement—therefore reducing its ceiling height. The roof also presents, in the front elevation, visible eaves and flashings, and the windowless façade does not hide the shingles with a small platband, as eventually built⁴. Finally, in the construction drawings (Picture 2) there are sensitive alterations in the front elevation: the angle of the roofing decreases in both pitches increasing the ceiling heights of both living-room and rooms; the windowless façade acquires a more solid aspect through greater height and reduced width (Picture 3)⁵; and the roof flashings, originally visible, are concealed behind it. The porthole also disappears, replaced by two square modern windows on the rear windowless façade functioning as vent to the bathrooms.

The course of the windowless façade throughout the different versions of the design presents changes even on the level of representation, which indicate the architect's intention in the very production of the drawings. The outlines of this windowless façade, firm in the sketches, preserve its strength in the drawings for approval, the weight of the lines are kept the same as the other elements of the project. In the construction drawings, however, the lines are much lighter, and in the final built house, they are almost imperceptible – even if they can be seen with some clarity in professional photographs, it is mainly due to extensive digital resources, which tend to force the reading of the project according to the architect's original intentions. Therefore, in the early studies, references to the “Paranaense house” are stronger, but the series of drawings exposes the gradual departure from this concept, so that in the final product there are few of the original elements presented in the original sketches.

References to the vernacular is even smaller, seen that if, in the first schemes it is symbolic, superficial and apparent, it is reduced to an imprint on walls of the front and rear elevations, without intervening in the spatial conception, or the organizational structure of the design project, and without using any constructive elements of the “Paranaense house”, even if assimilated, mediated or reread. In this last case, we can see a procedure similar to that of Lucio Costa, in which, not only would the roofing elements, frames and guardrail of the traditional house be present, but also the very colonial space, with its patios and spatial organization, would serve as reference. In an opposite direction, the Baeta House organization is modern: the spatial fluidity acquired

³ Part of the analyzed drawings can be found in ARTIGAS, 2010. Concerning the analyzed houses, see Volume 4, p. 703-710, for the Baeta House, and p. 782-816 for the House of Triangles.

⁴ Even if the façade preserves the design of the roof's profile, and therefore, does not simulate a flat roof, as seen in the first residences of Warchavchik, this solution, in accordance to his “constructive moral”, is the reason for his approach of Wright. Cf. GABRIEL, 2003, p. 36-37.

⁵ The values of the changes are as follow: the living-room pitch goes from an angle of 16° to 14.5°; the pitch of roof above the rooms goes from 19.7° to 14°; the side measure of the windowless façade pertaining to the living-room decreases 0.7m, and the respective in the rooms, 1m. The ridge increases 0.5m, the base of the façade decreases 0.6; the ceiling height of the garage decreases 0.2m.

through separation of ambiances by means of half levels and the use of color was imagined since the very first drawings. In the construction of this space, nothing is ancient. On the contrary: according to the architect, Baeta House is an inaugural work in his research for the new typology of Paulistana House (from the state of São Paulo), which needed to be updated “*regarding the social modifications in progress in our country*”. A house that could no longer “*imitate the traditional house, influenced by the country life*”⁶

In the drawings one can see the evolving understanding that it is aesthetically impossible to quote the vernacular architecture. This understanding is expounded by Artigas himself, probably in reference to the Baeta and Berquó Houses:

“In this way [...] I frequently go after expressions that could be called assimilated by national culture, that which the people have selected. The people, in their entirety, have already selected a form defined as pleasant or beautiful. I do not like these things called universal harmony, universal beauty; I like beauty once it has passed through the sieve of our way of being, and I strive to include these aspects in my work. I confess that this is not very easy, and am quite sure I have failed many more times than I have succeeded [...] some years ago I have made houses like the houses I used to enjoy as a boy in the state of Paraná. I made use of concrete lambrequins, and large illuminated eaves, and have delighted in the beauty of roofs, and I believe that if they have made roofs, down low we might find happiness, and I am always licking [sic] these possibilities of ours, which are there to be used and enjoyed. If I don’t do more of it, it’s because I can’t convince [sic] of the truth of my hypothesis. (ARTIGAS, 1984, p.13 [emphasis added])

⁶ Cf. ARTIGAS, Sep. 1984. p.217; ARTIGAS, 1980, p. 164; ARTIGAS, 1984, p. 213. Besides this, See testimony given to Eduardo de Jesus quoted in GABRIEL, 2003, p. 43.

Meanwhile, other architects associated with the Communist Party stood for socialist realism, mainly the gaúchos (people from the state of Rio Grande do Sul). Without praising or directly referencing to the Soviet architecture, they are the first to openly discuss what would socialist realism be when applied to Brazilian architecture. Two positions are considerably remarkable. The first, of Demétrio Ribeiro (RIBEIRO, SOUZA & RIBEIRO, 1956; AMARAL, 1984, p. 179; BAYEUX, 1991, p. 219-222), attacked Brazilian modern architecture aiming at the main exponents at the time, the architects of Rio de Janeiro, in a similar manner that Artigas had attacked abstractionism. To him, the forms of Brazilian modern architecture were “abstract and without human significance” for they do not relate to the architectonic tradition of the people. Therefore, even if in its origins it opposed the preceding architecture, calling it false and academic, Brazilian modern architecture could not become democratic and cater to popular demands since it served the ruling class. This deformation of the modernists would come from their stand of superficially criticizing previous academicism without going deeper into the relationship with the culture of the country and the needed social programs, as if the sheer use of extreme technique would validate their stance.

The first answer to this article comes from Edgar Graeff (GRAEFF, 1977; AMARAL, 1984, p. 279-280; BAYEUX, 1991, p. 222-225, 246-248), an architect who had studied in Rio de Janeiro, and was largely influenced by the work conducted there. Defending Brazilian modern architecture, particularly the work of Lucio Costa, he states that modern architecture was revolutionary exactly because of its “leap” “*from empirical to scientific technique*”, and its

submission to the interests of man. It is worth commenting, nonetheless, *en passant*, that the design projects of these architects of the time express a clear contrast between the ideas defended by them: Demétrio Ribeiro is the author of projects significantly close to European rationalism, like the Biological Institute (1950) and the Júlio de Castilhos State College (1953); inversely, Edgar Graeff's Israel Chope residence (1953) turns out to be, perhaps the last project of what could be considered socialist realism in Brazil.

Back to São Paulo, Artigas was opposing the *gaúchos*, stating that the socialist realist stance, in Brazil, was that of Oscar Niemeyer:

"In this sense, the opinion of the architects that together with O. Niemeyer make up the "Pharisees" pointed out by Graeff is the correct stance, the materialist stance. Nonetheless, they are not correct in setting themselves immovable in the face of reality, waiting for a new society. This corresponds to not fighting – submitting oneself to imperialism – and therefore not striving toward the formation of the new architecture, whose embryo already exists, and which will take shape and strengthen inasmuch as they, participating in the process of national emancipation and fighting against American imperialism, and together with Vargas – always present in one form or another – keep selecting and understanding the year of the people." (ARTIGAS, 1954, p. 54)

In this way, the "very heavy cultural problem" that Artigas would speak of, later on, is configured: refusal to accept the Soviet cult of personality and its "wedding cakes", as well as the refusal of Costa's modernist-colonial revision (ARTIGAS, 1984, p. 209), searching for a third way.

However, Artigas was not the only one to suffer from cultural uneasiness in order to search for the vernacular. Let's narrow down to two positions: of Lina Bo Bardi and of Mário Pedrosa. The former, in the field of design, wrote, in 1980, the draft of what would make up her book *"Tempos de grossura"* (Bardi, 1994). In it, she argues that in Brazil there wasn't a significant material culture to be defended, since there had never been handicraft in our territory, handicraft as a product of a corporately-structured and craft-based labor division. This type of production would appear in Brazil only with the arrival of the 19th century European immigrants, soon replaced by the advent of industrialization. In Brazil, there has been only something of a "pre-craftwork", result of extra and occasional work, domestic and feeble, which disappeared as soon as the worker's income rose. Given its sporadic nature, this type of craftwork would see little development and remained underdeveloped, overwhelmed by the partial industrialization in a dependent economy, an "indigested, dry, hard to digest" poor culture (idem, p. 12). This would not invalidate its study and appropriation: the artist's role was exactly to comprehend this feebleness, clarify people's structure and creativity, in order to conceive its own artistic form, for *"a Country in whose foundation is the culture of the People is a country of enormous possibility"* (idem, p. 20). Therefore, Lina defends the vernacular traditions, without falling into a praise of poverty, and creating a primitive sort of aura, attractive to the high culture.

On another front, Mário Pedrosa also pointed out the impossibility of recovering an original, genuine culture of the people. For him, the *tabula rasa* of modernism connected directly to our culture since there were no other production systems in architecture, before modernization, to be supplanted:

⁷ For the history of the vernacular Paranaense house, see Dudeque (2011), specifically chapter 8: "A invenção de um vernáculo".

the Modern Movement would be the first structured attempt to do this. Here "soil was still virgin", without "old cultures", where "even the negro was brought from abroad" (PEDROSA, dec. 1953, p. 100). Architecture had an avant-garde role in the country, because unlike any other art form, there was nothing to "discover or rediscover", only a shock against virgin nature. Therefore, echoing the metaphor with which the critic used to describe Brasilia (PEDROSA, 1957), we could say that our architecture is an oasis: lacking in past models to guide us, we are "*condemned to the modern*" (p. 304; PEDROSA, sept. 1959, p. 347).

Pedrosa's interpretation, according to which Brazilian culture is entirely imported, appears to be proven in the history of the "Paranaense house", to which Artigas probably did not have access. This typology, seen for a long time as the most characteristic of the genuine Paranaense architecture is a direct product of the European immigration to the south of the country. With the Germans arrival in Curitiba in the first quarter of the 19th century, local buildings were soon modified, since a good share of civil construction at the time was taken over by immigrants. The "lambrequinated" German chalets became a fad that reached many social classes, thanks to the low price of the wood. Its generalization was also its decline: in searching for distinction, the local bourgeoisie started to adopt masonry, leaving behind the old solution for poorer classes. In little time, the outskirts were dominated by chalets. Wishing to maintain downtown Curitiba as a symbol of modernity, the 1919 Code of Postures, officially eradicated its wood-built area, and made the use of lambrequins compulsory in all wood-built houses in the outskirts of the city. Therefore, the "casa Paranaense" of Artigas, a symbol of the people's culture is false, historically: the appropriation of the elite's architecture which has turned into a fad and then into a legislation, decades after its appearance⁷. Whether in the thoughts of other artists and intellectuals or in the development of history itself, Artigas' uneasiness was not isolated.

THE HOUSE OF TRIANGLES AND THE CONCRETIST HYPOTHESIS

In the Rubens de Mendonça House, designed by Artigas in 1958, the most evident influence is that of concretism. Because of the blue and white triangles along the façades, the house became known as the "House of Triangles". The denial of perspective and the assertion of the surface can be seen not only on the elevations, but also in the flooring and in other constructive elements of the house, such as pillars, steps, benches and parapets. Moreover, the landscape design by Waldemar Cordeiro reinforces this association between Artigas and concretism.

Opposed to socialist realism, concretism did not search for a locally identified traditional form; on the contrary, it supported the developmental efforts of the Estado Novo political regime. To overcome Brazilian archaisms, they searched for the creation of an alliance between art and daily life, in which artistic work would walk hand in hand with design and industry. For this reason, many artists associated with the movement had graduated both in fine arts and engineering. The role of the concrete artist was in the market, conceiving "beautiful and useful machines", either in film, marketing, journalism or

industrial settings. He would act directly in the sphere of circulation of commodities.

This impulse did not wish to ultimately create new consumption goods, but to create a new man, a new “*forma mentis, a new form-sensitive attitude in man*” (PIGNATARI, aug. 1957 pp. 76-77). However, in the case of Brazil, there was not much participation on the part of the artists in industrial design; they achieve much more relevant impact in the graphic design field. Therefore, the development here worked in the opposite way of that of the Ulm school in Switzerland, where a successful partnership was established with Braun, the manufacturer of domestic objects. Thus, Brazilian concretism, in lieu of a utilitarian bias, has held, as its main concern, the communication and organization of the new man’s visual space.

From Brazilian concretism, the Mendonça House inherited more than just its triangular geometry; it inherited, most significantly, this relationship with information. It is through communication of this new concretist sensitivity that the house relates to the city and through it as well that its architectural elements (pillars, steps, benches) relate to the user. This impetus was already present in the trapezoidal pillars of the Baeta House, and the effort to develop the communicational appeal of the architectonic elements grew as Artigas developed his career, as demonstrated in the projects analyzed by Kamita (2000) and Weber (2005). The pillars in particular would have a strong impact on the user’s perception: a design that valued them as symbol would have quick acceptance and appropriation by the people, as it was seen in Brasilia (ARTIGAS, 1967, p. 117-18; ARTIGAS, 1970, p. 136; MEDRANO & RECAMÁN, 2014).

Regarding the façade, this was not the only work where Artigas have used this solution. The windowless façade, which acquires movement through an abstract-geometric design that communicates with the street, is also present in a year-later-design-project, the headquarters of the Union of the Workers of the Manufacturing, Spinning and Weaving Industry. The building is like a thin blade built within a typical São Paulo’s elongated lot, in it, the glass panel openings to the sides create, in opposition, a great opaque panel toward the street inspired in Mondrian’s late work.

The presence of concretism in these projects is a little odd, since the defense of socialist realism is inherently tied to the critique of abstraction. On the occasion of 1st Biennial of São Paulo, Artigas expressed severe criticism to concretism in his article “*A Bienal é contra os artistas brasileiros*” (The Biennale is Against Brazilian Artists, ARTIGAS, 1951). To him, abstraction is that which is “inhuman” and far from expressing the national culture, the ultimate goal of the artist, who could not reduce its work to the representation of his own idiosyncrasies, but always search to communicate with the collective group in which he is inserted – as would be advocated in favor and praise of Sullivan and Wright, earlier in the article. Moreover, abstraction would be to distance oneself from the demands and struggles of the people, an abstention from addressing “objective things, real issues”, which, in a moment of strong ideological conflict would mean opening the doors to foreign (capitalist) occupation. Artigas pointed, however, that for the conception of a national architecture, a simple defense of the forms of our tradition would not suffice,

nor would an attack at all new forms that bore a degree of cosmopolitanism, for, in being the “cultural cover” of the imperialist economic invasion, weapon of foreign penetration in our territory, the forms of resistance should be extra-cultural, (ARTIGAS, 1959, p. 79-80) – new submission of aesthetics to politics, such as one can read in Artigas’ *‘Os caminhos da arquitetura moderna’ (Paths of Modern Architecture)*.

Artigas saw in abstract art a cultural weapon of the American propaganda. This accusation should not be held only as an excess, given the historical moment, once later research pointed out that abstract tendencies, such as *action painting*, were part of the U.S government’s cultural policies. In this way, the freedom of the American Abstract Expressionism would be ideologically opposed to the academic rigidity of socialist realism. In Brazil, articles from *Fundamentos* magazine indicated that the São Paulo Museum of Modern Art (MAM) was a vehicle for the U.S propaganda. It had a program initially dedicated to disseminate Abstract art, being funded by Nelson Rockefeller, part of a number of initiatives dedicated to the insertion of the entrepreneur in the Brazilian market.⁸

⁸ See, for example: *Museus de arte na luta ideológica*. In: *Fundamentos*, year III, n. 17. São Paulo: Jan. 1951, p. 42-43; also: *O urbanista Rockefeller*. In: *Fundamentos*, year III, n. 18. São Paulo: May 1951, p. 28.

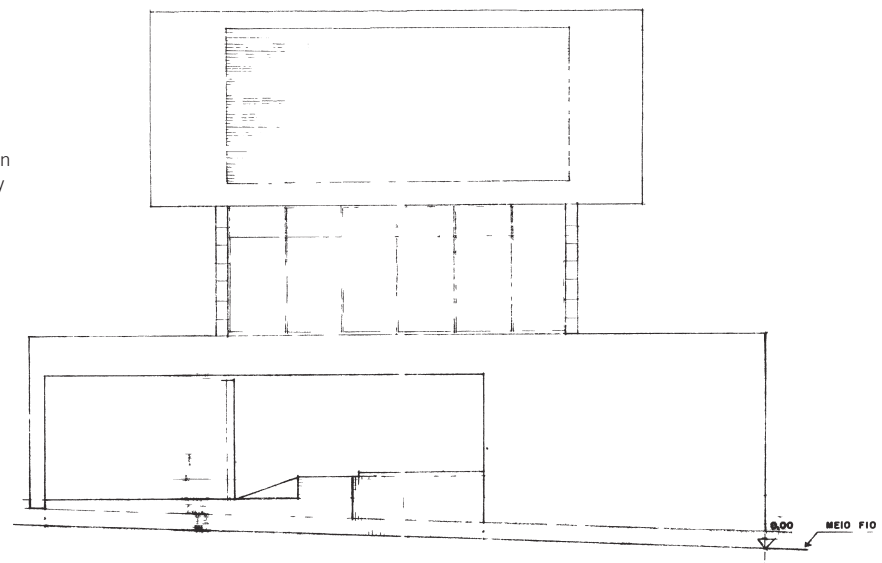
This antagonism hides the alliance between concretists and socialist realists that took place already in the 2nd Biennial of São Paulo. In an attempt to restrain the full power granted to the judges in the first Biennial, both sides united to try and change the rules of the event. Artigas also took part in this association, in search of a “*united political front*”, against the foreign hegemony seen in first Biennale (ARTIGAS, 1980, p. 160). In his writings of the time, Artigas still held himself apart from the concretists, maintaining a firm stance: “[...] *we fight for the application of socialist realist methodology – and it is with it that we enter this united front, to discuss [...] what should be Brazilian architecture*” (ARTIGAS, 1954, p. 54). Such association was only form-related, apparent: “I am a man that, like Volpi, I can jump through concretism towards my own flags” (ARTIGAS, 1984, p. 213-14). Thus, the House of Triangles would be the apex of this convergence, where Artigas strove to answer his own questions through a concretist approach.

Now back to analysis of the house. The earlier versions reveal much of its final form – most of all in its contradictions regarding the Communist Party – similarly to the Baeta House. Initially, the house would present a much more conventional design, in contrast with Artigas’ search for a new typology of the Paulista (São Paulo’s) House: at the entrance, an enclosed area would serve as garage; upstairs, a more concentrated and less elongated volume than the one eventually built and still showing openings to the street; in the back, a separate building that houses the service area and the employee’s rooms. This version was drawn to get the permit to build from the city hall, even though it was probably never sent.

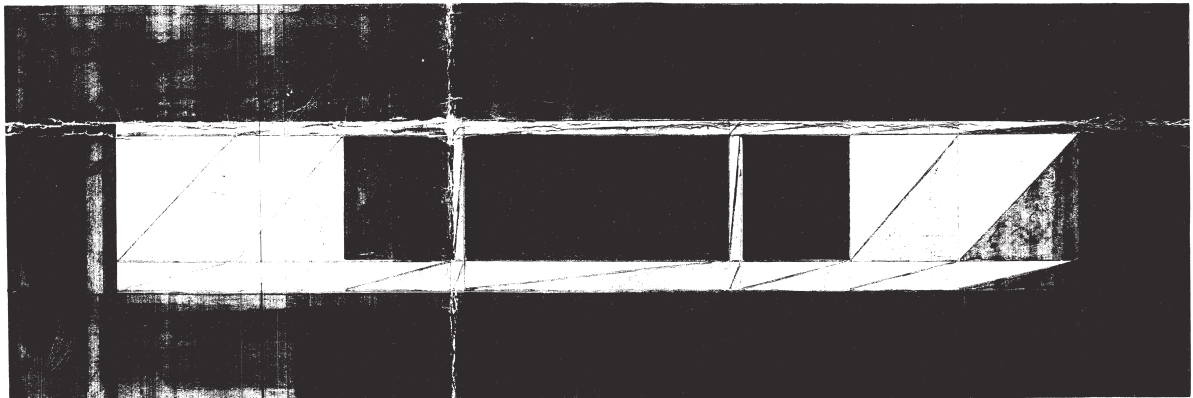
The following version, effectively approved, is much closer to the final built house, with some small differences regarding the studio and living-room, which were still rigidly separated back then. In this version there are no references to triangles, neither in the design of the windowless façades nor in constructive elements. Only in a later version, already in the construction drawings phase they would appear; this reveals that they were not intended as a fresco on the façade, but rather as interior constructive elements, with sections and elevations

identical to those actually built. In the front and rear windowless façades and on the blind ends of the lateral elevations, there are neither indications of triangles, nor of white planes waiting for further intervention: all of them function as frame for the brick facing masonry plane (Picture 4), remaining from the original version of the municipality drawings, and which therefore have already expressed the desire for an equal treatment on all façades. The triangle fresco was probably created once the house was under construction, since it is not shown in any of the construction drawings. The triangles on the façades, seen as essential to the building, are, on the contrary, the last element to be conceived; there are even clumsy composition attempts (Picture 5). Therefore, it is not the triangles, and their impetus to the development of the spirit, that colonize the rest of the house, but the exact opposite way around. The mural is a final element of the design, not having been developed simultaneously, nor with previous relation to the internal house modulation.

Picture 4: Rubens de Mendonça House. Front Elevation Construction Drawings (1958). Image treated by the author. Not to scale.
Source: FAUUSP Library Archives.



Picture 5: Rubens de Mendonça House. Study of the Façade's Fresco (1958). Not to scale.
Source: FAUUSP Library Archives.



Therefore, as described regarding concretism in art, Artigas' architecture, at least in the House of Triangles, has a more communicative than productive connotation. The constructive elements are not based on triangles due to functional reasons, neither to the user's experience, not to the constructive aspects or engineering issues. The formal analysis of the pillars' design, as seen in the composition rules by Weber (2005), does not reveal a *technical* origin, but rather a plastic one. Despite the possible correspondence between its triangular form and structural efforts, according to Kamita (2010), Artigas' texts and the ubiquitous presence of the theme throughout the house, besides the progressive complexity that the composition of structural elements have received throughout the architect's oeuvre, reveal a communicative emphasis, even if the content of the message is one of structural boldness: the *a posteriori* solution of the façade signals to the city the advent of pillars.

DISCARDED HYPOTHESES

As we have seen, both houses have had an orienting principle: Baeta House had the socialist realism, and the Triangle's House, the concretist avant-garde. The design projects of these houses carried out subsequent to the crisis the architect went through after having visited the Soviet Union and gotten in touch with "*real socialism*"⁹, present forms which were very different than any previously produced. Despite each house's connection to a different artistic movement, the hypotheses are not rigid, they blend together: the Baeta House is also "concretist"; the House of Triangles is also "socialist realist". In the first case, the primary colors remind us of De Stijl and other concretist fonts. Its space is modern, in it, different rooms are separated through the use of colors and levels rather than walls; the garden and living area blend together rather than affirm themselves. In the second case, the triangle mural was conceived with the collaboration of Mario Gruber, and executed by Rebolo Gonsáles, both figurative painters, with little to do with abstraction. In the same sense, the choice of blue and white colors for the triangles is not justified by an objective and concretist principle, but rather, due to the fact that these colors reminded Artigas of "the way the people use colors in the town of Itapecerica (in the surroundings of the city of São Paulo)" (ARTIGAS, 1980, p.164). Because of this ambiguity, the hypotheses are weakened even before the actual execution of the houses: they are, since the design project, incomplete. Artigas has not deeply developed nor a concretist nor a socialist realist stance, taking each to its ultimate formal consequences, he rather has made a commentary regarding their respective possibilities. After this hiatus in his work, in the years 1954-55, these houses represent more the expression than the resolution of the cultural problems he was facing.

Both hypotheses have suffered setbacks. In the Baeta House, the final result is defined by duality, with no satisfactory answers for the cultural difficulties encountered by Artigas. On the one hand, the technical duality, employing reinforced concrete, an advanced modern material but "*of rough and dense aspect, [...] revealing the heterogeneity of the industrial production and the technical fissures the architect had to deal with*" (BUZZAR, 2014, p. 326). On the other hand, the duality was also cultural, in the sense that it mixed

⁹ For more details and documents of this period, see THOMAZ, 1997, p. 208-209.

both socialist realism and concretism. For all intents and purposes, however, socialist realism in Brazil oscillated in its relationship with the people's culture, imposing limits to its action. In the fine arts, it did not manage to go beyond the first impact experienced by the artist when in the face of Brazilian extreme poverty: a transition from consternation and disgust to aesthetic elaboration did not happen. In architecture, the complaints directed at a non-democratic output far from the people, could not conceive an architectonic intention that would go beyond the colonial "rereading" of Lucio Costa.¹⁰

As regards the House of Triangles, the concretist option becomes empty of meaning; given that Brazilian concretism was more a wish than a possibility: with feeble industrialization, the relationship between art and the production line was fragile. The Brazilian concretists were driven by a desire for modernization and overcoming an ancient past, but were ultimately pressed against intermittently industrialization policies, out of pace with the serial production aesthetics proposed by the artists. Brazilian concretism was a project of a certain social class that preceded and hinted towards actual modernization (that was also the case of socialist realism: a project put forth by intellectuals, allied with the working class). For this reason, the mass production of industrial products by concretists was limited and almost nonexistent: its job unfolded much strongly in the visual programming field (namely graphic design). Besides, to Artigas, both concretists and the modern artistic avant-garde in general, valued technique as a solution to social problems, ignoring history, committing a political – and therefore also aesthetic – mistake (ARTIGAS, 1980, p. 154-57; see also ARTIGAS, abr. 1967, p. 43).

Both the Baeta and Triangles Houses are products of an impasse that is particular to the 1950s, but which, to a large extent, still remains in our present time: nor the recovery of an autochthonous primeval culture – once that was wiped out by modernization – nor the use of advanced industrialization, only possible through consistent State policies. These two works represent Artigas' association to concretists and socialist realists, but they also represent his distancing from them, given that the subsequent projects gradually drew further away from the approaches these positions would allow for. Situated between inconclusive aesthetic design projects, Artigas refused the duality of the artistic debate of the 1950s, in search for new solutions.

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¹⁰ For this critique on the limitations in socialist realism, see ARTIGAS, 1980, p. 158. According also to testimony by Renina Katz given to the author.

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