

**An interlude in a history of strangeness: when “street-orientated” homes
met “movement-orientated” streets in Brazil**

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Abstract

The proposed study explores formal attributes that unfolded across successive scales of the built environment - grid configuration, plots and buildings - during the mid-twentieth century in Brazil and are thought to bear strong connotations with the socio-cultural milieu that framed them at the time. It draws from data resulting from morphologic studies of the urban grid structure and the domestic architecture of Natal, in which space syntax linear representation was applied in diachronic perspective.

The early and subsequent nationwide adoption of the modernist formal repertoire in Brazil, where instances of “international style” affiliations can be found as early as the 1920s in major towns and in the 1930s throughout the country, has been a constant study theme. In Natal, a minor capital city in the Northeast region of the country, away from the avant-garde circles, the dissemination of modernist building features in the 1950s coincides with a major expansion of its urban settlement. New relation patterns between buildings erected at the time and their plots, as well as between these and the public spaces present interesting analogies with some spatial attributes of the town’s global grid structure.

Findings suggest there to have been a turning-point in the global-to-local relationship around 1955, when the mean global integration of the grid becomes very high thus signalling a strong movement-orientated configuration. Most residences then built on the most integrated streets present high levels of visibility and permeability to the public space. It, therefore, looks as if a new “movement-orientated” configuration went hand in hand with a new “street-orientated” dwelling type designed to contemplate that movement and to be part of it.

As the literature points to a notorious averseness in visual and access interfaces between dwellings and streets in colonial Brazil that appears ferociously re-enacted in the heavily walled and gated condominiums of the present era, and as similar trends can be found in other towns throughout the country, the 1950s panorama herein discussed evoke the idea of a brief honey-moon between the public milieu of the streets and the private sphere of domestic life.