Abstract

The representation and the values of urban heritage: the Monroe Palace in Rio de Janeiro

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The need for different approaches of conservation and restoration drives our attention to the different kinds of urban heritage. These differences can be understood in terms of different degrees of heritage values – reviewed from Riegl’s 1903 work, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin” – for they allow the assignment of heritage to be greatly localized not only in space, but also in time. We also consider that buildings are assigned as urban heritage as much as for the narratives in which they are involved – or their representations – as for their physical presence.

We study the case of the Monroe Palace, former house of the Brazilian Senate in Rio de Janeiro after representing Brazil in Saint Louis, USA, during the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition. Its peculiarity lies not only in its polemic demolition in 1976; but also in the fact that its reconstruction – or at least of some sort of memorial = has been taken into consideration recently. Our goal is to analyze the reasons for its demolition – and the need to still represent it somehow – in terms of the heritage values. Also, its presence – and absence – in Downtown Rio can be used as a departure point to understand several aspects of the urbanization of Rio in the 20th century.

To display the analysis and to consolidate the various narratives in a comparative way, we used a hyperdocument – electronic network narrative –, since it presents an adequate way to comparatively display many points of view.