Topogenesis of a place, case of the dining room or triclinium of a Roman domus in the proconsulary Africa

Rym El Asmi Nouira
cai.valenz@gnet.tn

Summary

This article deals with the genesis of a place, here the dining room of the roman *domus* or called *triclinium* and with the contribution provided by the «lived « architecture. This one is not limited to surface effects, but in fact draws in depth a poetic of the «inhabit». The latter takes into consideration the action program of the actors in their inner space.

Here we start with the «architectural paradigm» which according to Muntanolà considers architecture as a «logico-topo-symbolical» instrument generator of places for living[1].

For that we will try to understand the process that allows us to move from a lived space to the configuration of that space, by focusing on the different everyday life scenes.

According to Renier we can start with the fact that the lived or real space encloses several comprehension levels tied by the action activated by its occupants. Thus, this article attempts to demonstrate that from the first conforming of this space, which is rigid, static and born of the programming, a second configuration is connected. That one is actually flexible and dynamic, the dweller's anchored[2] real space in their temporal experience. The dining room of the *domus* will be taken as a support space of this application.

Key words

Architecture, Architectured, Configuration, Conforming, To Anchor, Hetero topical, Place, Programming, Topical.

Quoted authors

De Certeau Michel, Lévy Albert, Greimas A.J., Muntañola T. Josep, Pellegrino Pierre, Renier Alain.

Introduction

This article is presenting the analysis of an architectured space, in other words the space lived by its occupants.

We are putting into practice a method of reading established by a research work that dealt with the syntax and the paradigms of the domestic space[3].

We are here interested in a historical space, «the roman *domus*». Therefore, the actual experience will be explained through the texts describing life in that particular space full of history.

Broadly, the actual space is considered as a support of action and is evaluated through its user. The «user» function involves a program of action dictated and guided by the real life[4]. So, the objective of this work is to shift from geometrical reading of the physical space to the semantic reading of that space.

Thus, we are trying to prove the relation between the space built by the architect and the space seized by the dweller. In other words, we mean the relation that exists between a spatial organization and the model generated by the actual experiences.

The project's conception is considered as an entirety of shapes whose meaning is in a general conforming. It is then experienced by the dweller under multiple figures finding their coherence in a general configuration.

According to Alain Renier, the semiotic relation existing between the built space and the space seized by its dweller reveals several levels of meanings. The archirectured space will be thus taken as an articulation between text and context and will be materialized by figures. Indeed, in order to escape from the «illusive» space imposed by the physical space, the semiotics allows us to define the architectured space as an articulated and organized system. The semiotics applied to architecture allows to shift from the level of appearances to the level of logical forms belonging to a network of component relations having apparent architectural expressions[5].

Through an observation of the architectured space, we will attempt to show the different complex strata that this space contains.

The adopted method for reaching these objectives relies on two levels: the first level demands the texts that have described life in the private roman domestic space, which is the textual analysis. The second one is the analysis of the material support, being here the plan of the *domus*.

The first level considers texts that have described the real experience in a private roman domestic space. This first stage of «textual» analysis enables us to bring out the conformings anchored[6] in the architectural configurations of the domestic space.

The second level, which is the concern of the «material support» of those spaces called morphological level, enables us to apply the model suggested by the first level in order to analyze the «experienced»[7] space.

The *triclinium* space, the «dining room» of the roman *domus* will be the support of this application.

Operative tools

This textual and morphological leveled method application which is carried out on the *triclinium* space, or dining room of the roman *domus*, integrates in its method the experienced or practiced space. That one involves the «hidden dimension» linked with the «active dimension» insured by its inhabitants.

We are defining the place by a noun, a function, a destination; in this quest for the meaning of the «architectured» space or place. Indeed, this definition relies on Michel De Certeau's assertion: «the space would be the place as what the word becomes when it is spoken».[8]

The place is considered here the space conjugation. This conjugation is insured by the space's dwellers. So, we can say that the gap lying between «places» and «spaces» is defined by the using, by the actor and the action operated in the space.

Moreover, our approach refers to three particular researches as well:

Eleb Vival's and Debarre's «architecture of the private life in the XVII-XIX» (1999)[9] which approaches a plans' reading based on the terminology of the places. It allowed us to have access to the uses of the inner spaces.

Albert Levy's research «the machines for making believe» («les machines à faire croire») (2003)[10], for whom «the space is in the account as well as the space functions as an account... . The spoken word is a connotation to spatial indictions». This quotation has
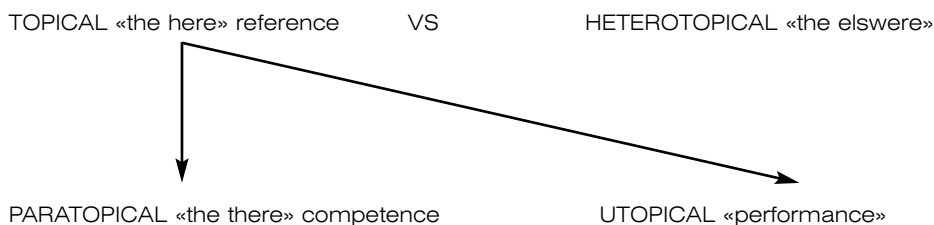
helped us to find the relation between accounts and spacialities generated thanks to the narrative structure.

The research carried out by Michela Deni on Zeffirelli's movie Romeo and Juliet (2001)[11]. The author approaches different points: representation of the city given by Zeffirelli and mostly the topological[12] organization of Verone and the narrative function represented by the places. This research has allowed us to understand the topological organization of places thanks to segmentation of Greimas who subdivided the places in a succession of places and the events in a succession of events.

Application on the actantial space: «The dinning room» triclinium of the domus

Thanks to this analytical method, we could have set an abstract segmentation based on a device presented by the following diagram of principle:

Diagram of the principle: topical space – paratopical space – heterotopical space – utopical space[13]

TOPICAL «the here» reference   VS   HETEROTOPICAL «the elswere»

PARATOPICAL «the there» competence   UTOPICAL «performance»

Thus, the settlement of these three types of abstract spaces referred to the «topical» space, the «paratopical» space and the «heterotopical» space, could reveal us the strata of complexities resulting from the practiced space.

We will be defining the topical[14] space as an abstract space where all the action takes place: it is the *reference*-the *place* where the events take place.

– The «here» or topical.

– The «elsewhere» or the exterior which is the heterotopical.

Any action needs a preparation: so, we will be defining the appropriate space for its realization (concretization) by the *para topical* space.

Therefore we will find three types of spaces, in order to realize a so-called elaborated observation of the real experimented space.

This observation could bring out the «trace» syntax anchored by the users' experimentation in their private space of the roman *domus*, «the triclinium».

Texts dealing with different possible scenes in the «dining room», helped us to bring out the following configurations:

1- Attending the «cènà»: the diner.
2- Enjoying oneself/ lying.
3- Talking/ discussing.
4- Entertaining the guests.
5- Having something to eat.
6- Serving.
7- Clearing away.

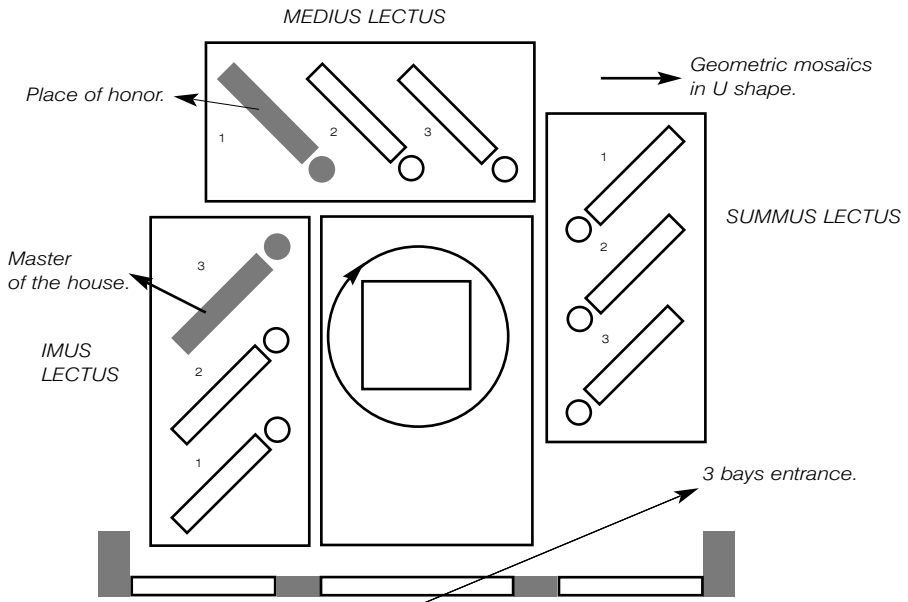A presentation of the «triclinium» is preceding the schematic plan of these configurations.

MEDIUS LECTUS

Place of honor.

Geometric mosaïcs in U shape.

SUMMUS LECTUS

Master of the house.

IMUS LECTUS

3 bays entrance.

Figure 1. *Arrangement of the benches in a triclinium.*[15] *(Arrangement in U-shape, the configuration of this space is a rectangle). Source, J.N.Pannetier, «Volubilis, a city of the ancient Morocco» Maisonneuve et Larose, 2002.*

The *triclinium* or dining room of the roman *domus*, is generally a rectangular-shaped space, opening on the *domus'* central space by three bays. It is furnished by three benches, two lateral ones on each side and a central one facing the *triclinium's* entrance, and by a central table disposed as indicated in the schematic plan above. This space which is geometrically defined by a rectangular form will reveal several configurations dictated by the users thanks to a multitude of activities inscribed in the places, and even the micro-places.

Furthermore, basing on Greimas' definition related to simple articulations of the space, any place can only be seized by fixing it in relation to another place. In other words, a topia's appropriation is only possible when postulating a heterotopia.

> The relevant retained configurations have been defined according to the different sequential chains: the space in accordance with the activity in which it happens, "the place"; this place is itself inscribed in a series of places and sub-places nicknamed micro places.

An appropriate nomenclature has been finalized for the formal configuration and the marking of the three established types of spaces:

Topical space

Para topical space

Hetero topical space

NB: here we designate by

> *1 the topical space.*

> *2 the para topical space.*

> *3 the hetero topical space.*

1', 2', 3' have been chosen to localize the micro places related to their respective places. These configurations are therefore schematically represented in the following way:

The configuration 2: enjoying oneself/ lying[16]

> These activities occur in the *triclinium*: we have defined here activities such as the diner. Actually, this activity encloses sub-activities or a series of activities which organize the principal activity. Moreover, we define here the place as a support of this principal activi-

ty i.e. the diner, and micro places as support of the sub-activities like for instance serving- clearing away- lying- discussing... We define places and micro places.

We have firstly classified the activities into daily activities, occasional and frequential activities.

Then, time has been decomposed according to the division of the roman day: *time T1-* the morning or mane- *Time T2* before midday or ante meridiem- *Time T3* of meridia or before midday and finally the evening T4.

-2' (micro-place) space occupied by *benches* beds the *para topical* space, and at the same time -1' topical: the guests talk with each other and enjoy themselves.

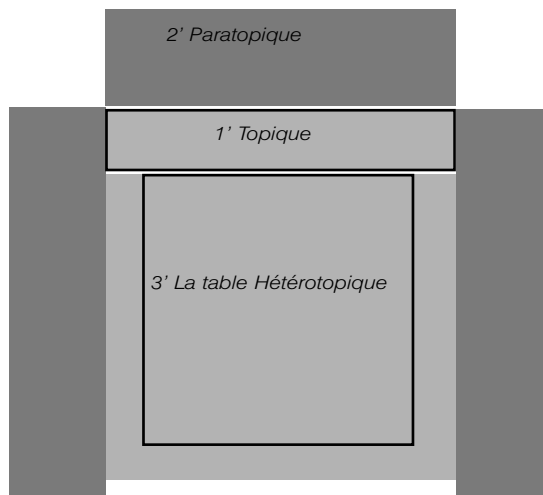The table can be considered as an expansion space to this configuration.

Figure 2. *Schematic representation of the configuration 23 in the triclinium: marking of the micro-places.*

Space where the slaves can entertain and play *in front of the beds* (micro-places), *the topical space the here 1*': action entertaining the guests.

The beds on which are laid the guests, represent the *para topical space the there*: 2.'

The table is *the hetero topical space 3*' for these micro-places.

The restoration, the actual «cènà» or the diner: daily and everyday life activity.

• The cénà takes place in the triclinium, that diner starts in the afternoon and finishes late in the evening: it is a real banquet.
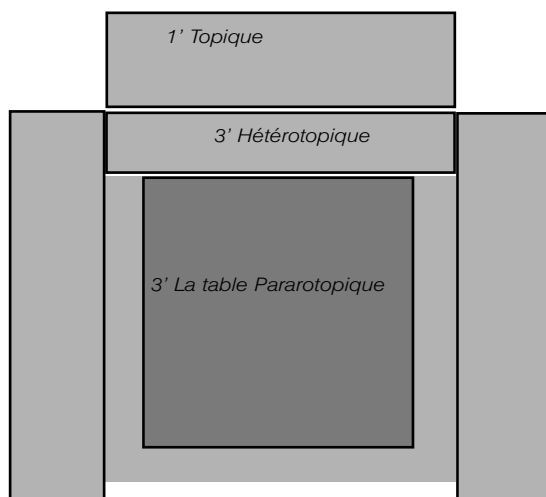
Test of schematic representation

Figure 3. *Schematic representation of the configuration 24, marking of micro-places.*

The guests have dinner being laid on the benches, the space «on the benches» is *the topical* space *the here 1'.*

The middle table on which the food is placed is the *para topical space the there 2'.*

For the first configuration *enjoying oneself/lying*, the benches are *para topical* spaces, in other words they prepare the action for the actual configuration having something to eat. So, these benches will become here *topical*, a place of action. As well, the table which for the *enjoying oneself/lying* configuration is a simple expansion of this activity, will become for the *having something to eat* configuration a *para topical* space: the food is indeed set on the table which becomes the space of preparation. Therefore, we can assert that the space can transfer under those abstract concepts and can reveal us a hidden dimension.

We notice that for the places and the micro-places as well, many abstract sub-spaces are possible, depending on the activity that takes place in a same space. According to the case of topical space, the interior space can transfer towards a para topical space or even hetero

topical, and vice versa. The abstract spaces we have used for this so called elaborated observation of the architectured space, has allowed us to reveal the polyvalence of the practiced space. That one realizes the space complexity thanks to the different activities it can support.

We join Alain Renier's analysis of the first rigid and static conforming, that is coming from the programming, and to which a second flexible and dynamic configuration can be articulated. That one is the anchorage of the dweller's experimented space in their temporal experience.

Conclusion

The analysis of the variables attributed to each space has revealed the existence of a series of sequences both on the actantial level and on the spatial level: the fragmentation of the actantial spaces into topical – para topical and hetero topical space is not always materialized by a physical limit.

The latter highlighted the existence of places and micro-places, which under «the zoom effect» convokes a profound analytical level, which goes beyond the «illusive» effect provided by a geometrical reading. Thanks to the three types of abstract spaces[17] the topical, para topical and hetero topical, we can say that the limits of the architectured spaces are not always materialized by the physical limits of the architectural space. This device set by our method of analysis has underlined the «multidimensionality» of the architectured space insured by the occupants' action.

Notes

1. MUNTANOLÀ «Topogenesis, foundation of a living architecture» («La topogenèse, fondement d'une architecture vivante»), p.117. Anthropos edition, Economica 1996.
2. Term borrowed from Pr. Alain RENIER'S.
3. Our doctorate thesis «Syntax and paradigms of the domestic space, the domus of proconsulary Africa» under the direction of Pr. DJERBI, October 2008- National School of Architecture and Town Planning, Sidi Bou Said- Tunis- Tunisia.
4. A.J.GREIMAS, J.COURTÈS, «Semiotics, reasoned dictionary of the language theory» («Sémiotique, dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage»), Hachette, 1993.
5. A.RENIER «space, construction and signification", Edition de La Villette, Paris, 1984.
6. A.RENIER, Article «The multidimensionality of the spatial object», («La multidimentionnalité de l'objet spatial»). High National School of Arts and Industries of Strasbourg (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts et Industries de Strasbourg) , Research Laboratory in Architecture, Data Studio, 1993, Strasbourg.
7. Term borrowed from Pr. Alain RENIER'S.
8. M.DE CERTEAU idem.
9. ELEB VIDAL M. and DEBARRE A ; «Architecture of the private life in the XVII-XIXth c». (Architecture de la vie privée du XVII-XIX). Edition Hazan- Bruxelles 1999.
10. LÉVY A, «Machines for making believe: form and functioning of spaces of worship», Anthropos, Paris, 2003.
11. M.DENI «Verona, fragments of a place in love» Pulim 2001.
12. TOHRENBERG MONTANOLÀ J.; «Topogenesis foundation of a living architecture», Anthropos editions, Paris, 1996, p.167.

13. J.Greimas, J.Courtès, «Semiotics, reasoned dictionary of the language theory» («Sémiotique, dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage"), Hachette, 1993.
14. The definitions of the following abstract spaces topical – para topical – hetero topical and utopical are built under «Semiotics, reasoned dictionary of the language theory», Hachette, 1993.
15. Jean Luc Pannetier in collaboration with Hassan Limane, Ex keeper of Volubilis site. : «Volubilis, a city in ancient Morocco". Maisonneuve and Larose Malika Editions 2002, p 67.
16. J.N.Robert, «Walkings in the ancient Rome, Eo Roman» Paris: Les belles letters; 1980.
17. Adapted from the Doctorate Thesis entitled «Syntax and paradigms of the domestic space- The domus in Proconsulary Africa»- defended and presented by Rym El Asmi-Nouira supervised by professor Ali Djerbi. National School of Architecture and Town Planning of Tunis ENAU, (2008).

Bibliography

De Certeau M; «The historical operation» («L'opération historique»), in J.Le Goff and P. Nora, Making History (Faire de l'histoire), Gallimard, Paris, 1974.

Deni M; «Fragment of a place in love, Verne» («Fragment d'un lieu amoureux, Verne») Zeffirelli's film, Pulim 2001.

Eleb Vidal M. and Debarre A ; «Architecture of the private life in the XVII-XIXth c».(Architecture de la vie privée du XVII-XIX). Edition Hazan- Bruxelles 1999.

Greimas A.J, J. Courtès ; «Semiotics, reasoned dictionary of the language theory» («Sémiotique, dictinnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage») Hachette 1993.

Renier A, Article; «The multidimensionality of the spatial object» («La multidimentionnalité de l'objet spatial"»). High National School of Arts and Industries of Strasbourg (Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts et Industries de Strasbourg) , Research Laboratory in Architecture, Data Studio, 1993, Strasbourg.

Greimas A.J, J. Courtès ; «Semiotics, reasoned dictionary of the language theory» («Sémiotique, dictinnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage») Hachette 1993.

Greimas A.J «For a topological semiotrics, in the space semiotics: Architecture City planning leaving the impasse», Denoel / Gonthier, Paris 1979.

Lévy A, «Machines for making believe», Anthropos, Paris, 2003.

Pannetier J. L in collaboration with Hassan Limane, Ex keeper of Volubilis site: «Volubilis, a city in ancient Morocco». Maisonneuve and Larose Malika Editions 2002; p 67.

Manar H; «Reading the space, understanding architecture». Essay semiotics, Pulim Geuthner, Presse Universitaire de Limoges, 2006.

Pellegrino P; «The sense of space», Book IV, «The architectural project», Anthropos, Paris, 2007.

Renier A. «The space and the representation as semiotic objects» in (under the direction of) A. Renier, Space and representation, Editions de la Villette, Paris, 1982.

Renier A., «Value and valence, dynamics of the configurations of places originally from the valence of lived spaces», in (under the direction of) B.Pagand and P. Pellegrino, «Forms of the Architectural Patrimony», Anthropos, Paris, 2007.

Ricoeur P; «Time and narration», Tome I, Seuil, Paris, 1983.

Tohrenberg Montanola J.; «Topogenesis foundation of a living architecture«, Anthropos editions, Paris, 1996, p.167.

We have been relying on a conference of the International Association of the Space Semiotics that Alain Renier had organized at the University of Carthage, with the support of the researchers' team whom he had trained at the National School of Architecture and Town Planning of Tunis, under the title of: «Intersemioticity of the architectural space in its being, its appearing and its fiction».
Other works have raised this question, those of Mannar Hammad and the «sans tête» group, about the architecture of large entireties, until those of Albert Lévy, on the religious edifices and their ritual usage.
A Renier, «Intersemioticity of the Architectural space in its being, its appearing and its fiction», University of Carthage, National School of Architecture and Town Planning, may 2001.