A REMARKABLE WORK OF CONSERVATION IN 19TH-CENTURY BRAZIL: THE REBUILDING OF THE SANTA ISABEL THEATRE, IN RECIFE

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Abstract

This article focuses on a pioneering work of architectural conservation that was carried out in Recife, Brazil, during the early half of the 1870s: the reconstruction of the Santa Isabel Theatre, one of the best Brazilian edifices of the second third of the 19th century, which had been ruined by a fire in 1869. The work was conceived and undertaken by the Recife native engineer Tibúrcio de Magalhães, and managed to preserve the character of the original theatre, designed by the French engineer Louis Vauthier, as well as most of its surviving parts and the compositional structure of its exterior. This paper discusses and evaluates the operation, compares it with other interventions, and concludes that it was judicious, innovative and beneficial to Brazilian architecture.

Keywords: conservation, reconstruction, Brazilian architecture, 19th century.

Introduction

In 1869 a fire ruined one of the most elegant Brazilian theatres: the state-owned Santa Isabel Theatre, designed by the French engineer Louis Vauthier and built in Recife between 1841 and 1850.

The provincial government soon took measures to re-erect it, and in order to reduce building costs, decided to keep the parts of the structure that had not been destroyed by the flames (the frontal portico and the main walls), following a practice which was common in the country at that time.

Based on that decision, Tibúrcio de Magalhães, the Brazilian engineer who was commissioned to rebuild the theatre, turned the reconstruction into an unusual and successful work of conservation, which preserved the character of Vauthier’s edifice as well as the main features of its exterior.

Magalhães could have created a new edifice that incorporated the remains of the burnt theatre, since it proved necessary, for functional reasons, to increase the length and the height of the building. Such a new project would have brought him more fame than extending the life of a structure conceived by another person. He had the skills to do it, as a few years earlier he had designed a magnificent theatre for another major Brazilian city: Belém, in Pará. However, instead of this, with uncommon modesty, he preferred to prepare a project that conserved Vauthier’s creation.

This article draws attention to this important operation carried out by Magalhães (which probably had no precedents in Brazil) by examining and evaluating it.

In the following section, the history and the architectural features of Vauthier’s
theatre are described. In the next, the work undertaken by Magalhães is explained. And in
the final section, an assessment is made of the latter in which it is compared with similar
operations carried out in the second half of the 19th century, and related to the theory of
architectural conservation available in 1870. Furthermore, in order to see if the
intervention comprised aspects that comply with the modern doctrine of architectural
preservation, it is related to the Venice Charter (1964), document chosen as reference for
being the most famous international conservation charter and the one that laid the
foundations of that doctrine.

The original Santa Isabel Theatre

In 1840 Louis Vauthier, born in 1815, arrived in Recife to work for the provincial
government. He belonged to the corps of engineers of the French government and had
studied, from 1834 to 1836, at the prestigious École Polythécnique, in Paris (one of the best
in the world), where he obtained excellent marks.

A major task was soon assigned to him: to design the main theatre of the city. He
was not experienced in the design of buildings and probably most of his architectural
knowledge had been provided by the one-year course on architecture that he attended at
the École Polythécnique.

For over three decades, this course was taught by the brilliant professor and
theorist J.N.L. Durand, who was an advocate for rational, sober and geometrical
architecture, based on the repetition of elements.

Vauthier was not a student of Durand, who had left the École Polythécnique
(because of a disease that killed him in late 1834) a few months before Vauthier was
admitted to it.

But Durand’s doctrine – expressed in a textbook he prepared, *Le précis des lessons
d'architecture* …– was taught, during many years, in the course given by his successor.

Thus, Durand’s ideas were probably present in the architectural knowledge that
Vauthier acquired at the École Polythécnique.

When Vauthier arrived in Recife, a new type of architecture was being produced
in the city (Sousa, 2000, p. 53). Peculiar to Brazil, it was characterized by the use of a
classical language (which I named *Brazilian imperial classicism*) that combined national
traditions, derived from Portugal, with formulas borrowed from the Italian Renaissance
and from French and British classicism. It must have pleased Vauthier, as it possessed
several of the main characteristics of the architecture advocated by Durand. This was
probably the reason why Vauthier adhered to the new Brazilian style and decided to
employ it in his design for Recife’s main theatre.

The theatre design received government approval in early 1841 and its execution
was completed in 1850. It generated an outstanding building – named Santa Isabel
Theatre and located in the middle of an open public area – that at the time of its opening,
was the most elegant Brazilian imperial classicism edifice (Sousa, 2000, p. 64).

The most interesting feature of Vauthier’s theatre was its geometrical fragmented
massing, composed of juxtaposed elementary volumes, each having a shape that
corresponded to the space requirements of its functions. This type of massing was seldom
used in the first half of the 19th century and became a common solution only after the
advent of Modernism in the early 20th century – which means that in employing it
Vauthier proved to be well ahead of his time. We do not know why he decided to adopt
it; perhaps he was influenced by Romanesque architecture, which made use of it in a distant past and was being praised and reproduced in the early 1840s (Sousa, 2000, p. 55).

The massing of the theatre was formed by four well defined volumes (three of which were rectangular, the other being a pentagonal prism), arranged so that their bases had a common axis, which ensured symmetry to the whole. The frontal block was a small arcaded portico, topped by a terrace. The contiguous one, whose top was a shallow roof concealed by a parapet, contained the foyer and an upper hall. The next, much longer and taller than the others and covered with a gable roof, comprised the auditorium and the stage area. The rear volume, identical to the foyer block, accommodated various minor rooms. This way of shaping the massing (along with the austerity that governed the treatment of the external surfaces) lent it a strong geometrical character.

To create the building façades, Vauthier made use of features and models that he found in the local architecture, in Italian buildings (of the Renaissance and the 18th century) and in French Classicism.

From local buildings he borrowed essential features like (a) the painted stucco cladding that covered the vast majority of the external wall surfaces, (b) the use of Lisbon stone in important elements of the main elevation, (c) the utilisation of quoins, (d) the fenestration composed solely of round arch openings, (e) the use of mouldings constituted by archivolts and impost bands (this characteristic and the preceding one were inspired by the Soledade Palace, built in the early 1830s), and (f) the utilisation of large honest triangular pediments resting on walls, suggested by the Anglican church of Recife.

Italian architecture provided models for the portico and the composition of the lateral façades of the block containing the auditorium. The portico derived from the one that exists in the neoclassical La Scala Theatre, in Milan, and its design was based on a formula contained in Vignola’s treatise. And the mentioned façades were influenced by those of certain Renaissance Florentine palazzi, like the Strozzi.

The French contributions were the rows of oculi on the side elevations, borrowed from the Theatre of the Odéon, in Paris (late 18th century), as well as two major features of the main façade of the foyer volume – its openings and the segment of classical peristyle on the upper floor – both inspired by the late 17th-century garden elevation of the Palace of Versailles.

While traditional classical elements – pediment, peristyle and arched portico – played a key role in the composition of the front elevation, the other façades were dominated by geometry and regularity, being an orthogonal arrangement of horizontal stripes, narrow vertical rectangles, semicircular bands, ovals and figures resulting from the juxtaposition of a semicircle and a rectangle.

Figure 1. The original Santa Isabel Theatre in 1852.
Source: Emil Bauch, 1852.
Note that the forepart of the rear elevation (not shown in Figure 1), whose mouldings and openings were identical to those featured by the lower sections of the lateral elevations, was divided into three bays by superimposed pilasters.

Some months after the beginning of its execution, the theatre project was criticized in a local newspaper article by someone who argued that the dimensions of the auditorium and the stage area were inadequate. But when the building was inaugurated in 1850, the vast majority of Recife’s population found it magnificent. And in 1857 the edifice was publicly praised by a famous Recife journalist, A. P. de Figueiredo (1992, p. 172), who wrote that it was “a masterpiece of art and beauty” that could be rivalled only by European theatres.

Imposing and very elegant, the theatre was, during the period in which it stood, one of the best Brazilian buildings produced in that period.

As I said at the beginning of this paper, the edifice burnt in 1869, its surviving elements being confined to the portico and the main walls. The provincial government decided that it should be rebuilt and that its remains should be incorporated into the reconstructed building as a means of reducing the building costs. Another decision made then was to employ a new building material, cast-iron, in the roof structure and in various elements of the interior (Pernambuco, 1869). An engineer born in Recife and trained in Rio de Janeiro, Tibúrcio de Magalhães, who in 1868 had designed the impressive Peace Theatre, in Belém, Pará, was asked to plan and undertake the reconstruction.

A reconstruction that was a remarkable work of conservation

The decision to include the remains of the building in the reconstruction project did not compel Magalhães to give the rebuilt theatre a character and an overall appearance similar to those of the destroyed edifice. In my view, he adopted this approach because he preferred to do so, driven by his admiration for Vauthier’s theatre.

A governmental report (Pernambuco, 1869) states that it was basically due to cost considerations that it was decided to utilise the building remains in the reconstruction. This decision made sense in economic terms and aimed, above all, to make use of the physical content of the remains – the preservation of their appearance being a minor concern.

Something similar to this happened in Rio de Janeiro, in the 1820s. A large unfinished construction, composed only of foundations and one-storey high walls, stood in the city. It was the result of works begun in 1749 to erect the city’s cathedral, and interrupted in 1797, because of a shortage of funds. In 1811 the rear part of the construction was adapted, with modest expenditure, to house the newly created Academia Militar. And in 1826 a project was designed to convert the front section of the construction into a new building, of good quality and taller than the existing walls, which would be occupied by the same academy and would maintain these walls. However, what was maintained was their physical content, not their appearance. Their projections (pilasters, mouldings, etc.) were removed and their openings were blocked. They were raised and gained new features (fenestration, projections etc.) that gave them a completely different external appearance from the one they had before (Barata, 1973).

This kind of approach was used even when an entire existing building was transformed into a larger one (by means of the addition of extensions or an extra storey), as was the case with the enlargement of Recife’s customs house, in 1839-41. In 1826 this government department was installed in an ancient convent – attached to a church – that
was adapted to its new use by means of minor works. During its enlargement a street was opened to separate the church from the building, which thus became freestanding. To the enlarged customs house, its designer gave an outward appearance that differed strongly from the one of the building that existed between 1826 and 1839 (Sousa et al., 2004, p. 83). This means that in visual terms the latter, although preserved in physical terms, disappeared inside the new edifice. As a matter of fact, in most enlargement projects the intervention was seen as an opportunity to improve and modernize the building’s façades.

Another example of this type of intervention was the enlargement of the São Cristóvão Palace, in Rio de Janeiro, belonging to the Brazilian emperor. In the 1830s, its frontal section was formed by three distinct volumes: a lower central one, with a plain traditional Luso-Brazilian appearance; a bizarre three-storey domed tower, attached to one end of the latter and erected in 1816; and another three-storey tower, with elegant classical façades, attached to the opposite end, built in 1828-31 and design by the French architect Pezerat (Brenna, 1987, pp. 30-35). In the late 1840s works were begun to add one floor to the central volume and to unify the composition of the building’s exterior. The architect who planned them could have arrived at a good result if he had reproduced Pezerat’s design in the 1816 tower and had used it as a model for the façade of the enlarged central block. Instead of doing that, unconcerned with conservation, he preferred to give the edifice a new exterior – of poor quality – conceived by himself, which destroyed the fine and unprecedented Pezerat’s creation (Lago, 2001, pp.158-159).

Sometimes it was not the totality of the exterior of an enlarged building that gained a new appearance conforming to the prevailing architectural taste – but only a part of it, which included the additions. In this case, two different kinds of composition, or even two distinct styles, coexisted on the façades. Such an approach was adopted in the enlargement of the Viscount of Suassuna’s residence. This project, undertaken in the early 1850s, produced a front elevation containing a central section, taller than the others, in the language of Brazilian imperial classicism, and two other sections featuring characteristics of late Luso-Brazilian colonial architecture (Sousa, 2000, pp.146-149).

Magalhães could have used this last approach in the reconstruction of the Santa Isabel Theatre. He could have preserved and restored the portico and the foyer block, but attaching a new volume to it – comprising the auditorium, the stage area and the minor rooms, and including part of the remaining walls – conceived in accordance with his views and preferences. This form of intervention would comply with the guidelines established by the provincial government.

In fact, there was no point in altering the portico, finely executed in Lisbon stone and whose well proportioned design followed a formula contained in one of the main architectural treatises of the Renaissance: Vignola’s Regola delli cinque ordini d’architettura. The foyer block was another well designed construction and featured an elaborate decoration, executed in Lisbon stone as well. In my view, based on my experience as an architect, one of the very few acceptable modifications it would admit would be the addition of a gable roof and a triangular pediment. Hence, though its total preservation did not constitute an obligation, it was highly desirable.

As to the rest of the surviving walls, part of them could not be preserved. The reconstruction was an opportunity to increase the length of the volume containing the auditorium and the stage area, in order to eliminate a problem (insufficient internal space) that existed. But such an extension would require the demolition of the rear block, since this was attached to the bottom of the volume that was to be enlarged.
However Magalhães did not opt for the approach in question, which was compatible with the 1870s.

He preferred to carry out a judicious work of conservation—probably without precedents in Brazil—guided by the following principles: (a) the character of the exterior of Vauthier’s theatre should be maintained in the rebuilt theatre; (b) the three lower volumes of the ruined building (the portico and the blocks containing the foyer and the minor rooms) should be conserved faithfully in terms of massing and façades; (c) the tallest volume of the original theatre should be enlarged, vertically and horizontally, but its global external appearance should be reproduced as much as possible in its enlarged version.

To conform to these guidelines, Magalhães divided the reconstruction of the edifice in the following distinct operations.

Apparently the simplest one was the restoration of the portico and the exterior of the foyer volume. It probably consisted of the reconstruction of the roof of the latter and minor works such as the installation of new doors and windows, the repair or substitution of the stucco cladding and the replacement of damaged parts of elements in stone.

Less simple was the operation dealing with the rear block, which consisted of its demolition and its reconstruction a few metres ahead. Demolished to make room for the enlargement of the auditorium and the stage area, it was rebuilt with the same massing and the same elevations at a position such that the posterior façades of the old and the new block were parallel (the distance between them equalling eight metres) and their side façades were aligned. The reconstruction was not a difficult undertaking, because Vauthier’s design for the theatre had been kept by the provincial government.

From the standpoint of its meaning, this double intervention (demolition and reconstruction) may be regarded, to a certain extent, as an operation, equally two-fold, that restored the structure in question and moved it to a very close location. Although it caused the physical destruction of the ruins of the block, it conserved the image of the latter by rebuilding this at a place contiguous to the one where the construction stood, which allows us to consider it as a work of conservation.

The most complex and creative part of the theatre’s rebuilding was the one concerning the volume to be enlarged, containing the auditorium and the stage area.

With the exception of the parapet, which was removed, its side walls and their external composition were wholly preserved. However, these walls were extended across the place that had been occupied by the demolished rear block, each of them becoming eight metres longer. To treat the external surface of the additional portions of wall, Magalhães reproduced the fenestration and the projecting elements of the preserved walls on them. Four windows (two on each floor) were pierced in each portion.

Afterwards, the enlarged wall was raised 3.5 metres. The upper part of the addition constituted a new parapet resting on an entablature, and below this Magalhães placed a row of oculi identical to the one that the preserved wall featured.

These measures minimized the differences between the outward appearance of the enlarged side walls and that of the original ones.

On the raised side walls, Magalhães erected a new roof, similar in shape and in pitch to the one destroyed by the fire, but different from it in terms of detailing. It was supported by modern cast-iron Polonceau trusses spanning some 20 metres.

The gabled front wall of the block was raised 3.5 metres as well and gained a row
of oculi. Modelled on it, but with a blind pediment, a new rear wall was built eight metres in front of the position of the original one.

Figure 2. The rebuilt Santa Isabel Theatre in 1878 and the outline (in red) of the two volumes of Vauthier’s theatre that were modified.


The remaking of the interior of the volume in question was the only part of the project that was not governed by a concern with conservation. Since the interior created by Vauthier had been entirely consumed by the flames, Magalhães preferred to design a new auditorium and stage area in accordance with both his preferences and the governmental decision to employ largely cast-iron components in the reconstruction. This material imported from Europe was used in various pre-fabricated elements, such as trusses, columns, staircases, parapets, etc., and their utilisation gave a modern appearance to the auditorium.

The above remarks show that the complex intervention concerning the auditorium and stage area block was composed of four distinct kinds of operation: (a) preservation of surviving parts; (b) addition of portions of wall reproducing preserved walls; (c) reconstruction of some elements (roof, etc) at new positions; (d) construction of a new enlarged interior.

The way in which Magalhães conceived the intervention allowed him to create a construction that externally was fairly similar to the one it replaced, in spite of differing from the latter in terms of proportions and other aspects of lesser importance.

What resulted from the various above examined operations carried out to re-erect the theatre was an outstanding building that conserved the character, features and elements of the edifice created by Vauthier, as Figures 1 and 2 testify and as the above analysis has revealed. Such operations ensured not only a partial physical preservation of the latter, but also the survival of the concept it expressed.

The new theatre was taller, longer and more imposing than the original one, differing from this in terms of proportions (as Figure 2 shows). But its massing was less balanced than that of Vauthier’s theatre, because of its less harmonious articulation of volumes (derived from the larger size of its auditorium and stage area block).

The reconstruction also permitted the preservation of the urban scene in the area where the theatre stood (which was as important as the conservation of the building itself), since the edifice it produced, viewed as a component of that scene, was almost identical to Vauthier’s theatre.
Note that an important work of building extension undertaken in the United States in the 1850s was also guided by a concern with preservation: the one that enlarged the national Capitol, in Washington, D. C., edifice completed in 1827 (top image on Figure 4) which was the result of designs conceived at different moments by William Thornton, Benjamin Latrobe and Charles Bulfinch (Whiffen & Koeper, 1990, pp. 126-130). Devised by the architect Thomas Walter, that intervention almost entirely conserved the existing Capitol, the extension taking the form of two symmetrical wings located a few meters away from the latter and linked to it by two corridors (bottom image on Figure 4).

Their external composition was strongly inspired by that of the main front of the preserved building but their facades were executed in a stone whose colour was different from the one used in the exterior of the original Capitol. However, this approach, clearly concerned with preservation, modified substantially the edifice massing, which produced an effect detrimental to conservation: “the new north and south wings so lengthened the building that the need for a new dome was quickly perceived” (Ennis, 1985, p. 45). As a result, the central dome was soon replaced by a much taller one of a different shape (the same that exists today), which altered radically the appearance of the construction that had been preserved.
An assessment of the work

The first aspect of the rebuilding of the Santa Isabel Theatre that ought to be highlighted here is Magalhães’s decision to conserve Vauthier’s architecture as much as possible. This kind of attitude must be praised, because it was unusual in the Brazil of the 1860s and 1870s – which places the Brazilian engineer ahead of his time.

Nothing obliged him to adopt such an approach. In the early half of the 1870s, there was not any legislation in Brazil aimed at the preservation of the built heritage, and if it had existed it would not have applied to the Santa Isabel Theatre, as it was not a historic building, since it was only 19 years old in 1869. Even today in Brazil the government is not concerned, in general, with the preservation of buildings of that age. It is true that the theatre was a fine architectural work, much admired by Recife’s population. But even nowadays in Brazil, one should not expect the government to require the conservation of the architecture of a remarkable 19-year-old building that is going to be enlarged or reconstructed.

So I am inclined to think that Magalhães’s behaviour was dictated by his admiration for Vauthier’s theatre (a good reason for wanting its survival), and by his purpose of giving back to Recife’s citizens a building that they loved and had lost.

The pioneering character of the operation becomes evident when it is compared with the reconstruction of Dresden’s opera house (beloved by the local population and destroyed by fire in 1869, the same year in which Vauthier’s theatre burnt), carried out by the eminent Gottfried Semper, also in the 1870s.

Born in 1803, this German architect had designed this building, of Renaissance appearance (top image on Figure 5), which began to be erected in 1838, three years before the start of the construction of the Santa Isabel Theatre.

In 1869 Semper was exiled in Switzerland for political reasons. In spite of this, he was invited to plan, in that country, the rebuilding of Dresden’s opera house, because this was the will of Dresden’s inhabitants, who perhaps imagined that in the reconstruction he would conserve the features of the ruined edifice. Professor of architecture for almost three decades, in Dresden and Zurich, he was famous in 1869, by virtue of his respected architectural treatises and the fine buildings he had designed (Evers et al., 2006, pp. 402-404).

His 1838 opera house and Vauthier’s theatre were similar in terms of the times of their erection, destruction and reconstruction as well as in terms of the cause of their destruction.

Nevertheless, despite his admirable curriculum vitae, Semper did not behave like Magalhães. He did not opt for conserving the architecture of his original opera house, preferring to design a new building (Mignot, 1983, pp. 148-149), with clearly different massing and façades, although inspired by the Italian Renaissance as well (bottom image on Figure 5).
Thus while Magalhães humbly and judiciously respected the work of another designer, the brilliant Semper did not respect his own work, which in the late 1860s was no longer his property, belonging rather to Dresden’s citizens, who loved it.

Another interesting comparison that can be made is the one between Magalhães’s project and the enlargement of the Candelária Market, in Rio de Janeiro, which was also governed by a concern with conservation and was carried out in the late 1860s.

Designed by the French architect Grandjean de Montigny, professor of architecture at the Brazilian academy of fine arts, the market was a nice single storey building, built in 1834-41, which played an important role in the local urban scene, by reason of the fact that it bordered the main square of the city (Ferrez, 1985, p. 66).

In the late 1860s it was decided that the market should gain an additional floor and that the existing construction should be preserved (perhaps as a tribute to the memory of Montigny, who had been a respected architect). Unfortunately the designer who conceived the extension did not arrive at a satisfactory result (Ferrez, 1985, p. 67). In fact the character of Montigny’s market was lost with the enlargement (despite the conservation of the existing structure), which in my view was due to the use of windows of a different shape on the new floor and to the fact that this floor was not set back from the ground storey.

Another demonstration of this is an unexecuted design for the enlargement of the Escola Politécnica, in Rio de Janeiro (by means of the construction of an additional floor), devised by the Brazilian engineer Antônio de Paula Freitas in 1889 (Barata, 1973). On the façade of that floor he almost entirely reproduced the elevation of the existing upper storey (the major alteration introduced consisted simply of replacing the arch with the lintel in three of the seven windows), and by doing so he produced an enlarged front elevation (Figure 6) that preserved the character, the compositional structure and the main elements of the original two storey façade.
In the early 1870s there was no architectural theory serving as a guide to the reconstruction or enlargement of existing buildings that were only a few decades old. So the assessment of the rebuilding of the Santa Isabel Theatre has to be made through the comparison between it and the works of reconstruction or enlargement carried out in the preceding decades, which have been exemplified by the interventions examined above and may be classified as follows:

(a) reconstruction that created a new exterior (e.g. Dresden’s opera house);
(b) enlargement that created a new exterior (e.g. Recife’s customs house);
(c) enlargement that preserved most of the existing building but generated an exterior very different from the original one due to substantial modification of the massing and to the different external appearance of the parts added (e.g. Candelária Market);
(d) enlargement that preserved most of the existing building and added parts whose external appearance resembled that of the latter but, even so, generated an exterior different from the original one due to a substantial modification of the massing (e.g. Washington’s Capitol before the replacement of the dome).

All these four approaches differ from the one adopted in the rebuilding of the Santa Isabel Theatre, which not only preserved most of the surviving parts of the burnt edifice and reproduced on the façades of the parts added the formulae used on the exterior of the latter, but also preserved the composition and structure of the massing (which was one of the main achievements of the intervention), in spite of having altered its size and proportions.

Since the principles that today guide the conservation of historic buildings did not exist in the early 1870s, it is not fair to assess Magalhães’s project in the light of these principles. Even if they existed they would not be a suitable reference, because his project dealt with an edifice which was only 19 years old in 1869.

Nevertheless, in that year there was already a theory concerning the restoration of historic buildings – in which Viollet-le-Duc’s thought stood out. He regarded that operation as a "means to reestablish [a building] to a finished state, which may in fact never have actually existed at any given time" (1990). I think that to a certain extent the work carried out by Magalhães conformed to this view, despite the fact that the Santa Isabel theatre was not a historic building.

If the work had been undertaken a few decades ago, its most controversial aspect would have been the demolition and the reconstruction of the rear block. In general, experts responsible for the conservation of historic buildings tend to reject these two types of operation. However, in essence, the intervention concerning that block does not conflict
with the Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1966). This document admits the reconstruction of a ruin when it consists in reassembling existing dismembered architectural elements (Article 15), which means that the rebuilt structure will contain only parts that have survived. It can be argued that in essence, the reconstructed rear block may be viewed as the product of the reassembly of the separate parts resulting from the demolition of the original construction. The block was re-erected eight metres away from the place where its predecessor stood, having thus remained in the same setting, which complies with another principle of the document (Article 7).

The enlargement of the volume containing the auditorium and the stage area also conforms to the charter to a certain extent. By changing the size of the block, it moderately altered the relation between this and the other three volumes of the theatre, which conflicts with Article 6 of the document. But the enlargement was necessary, and without it the building would not have been conserved. In terms of the exterior, the design adopted was a solution that complies with Article 13, which states that additions should respect the structure and the balance of the architectural composition. Besides, the new interior created by Magalhães is in agreement with Article 12, which says that new parts that replace missing parts should be distinct from these. As to the preservation of the portico and the foyer volume, the intervention conforms entirely to the charter.

To sum up, the operation in question, which proved invaluable to Brazilian architecture for having conserved one of its best 19th century edifices, was judicious, innovative and beneficial. In fact, taking account of the above discussion, I would consider the intervention correct even if it had been carried out a few decades ago.

References


