



To Interpret architecture: curatorship as a formational practice

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Abstract

Uncommon in Brazil, architectural exhibitions offer opportunities for interpretation of specific works, which depend on curative action. The article traces a brief evaluation of the conditions of production of these exhibitions in large US centers with the Brazilian precariousness, a decisive limit so that the intellectual capacity installed here can produce samples of great relevance. It highlights the author's reflections on his practice in curating architectural exhibitions at the Casa de Vidro, home of the Bardi Institute and the challenges of exposing items from the collection within a space designed and lived by the couple Lina and Pietro.

Keywords: Architecture exhibitions. Lina Bo Bardi. Glass House (Casa de Vidro).

Although we live in huge buildings and areas designed by architects, the understanding of the architectural body of work requires intellectual interpretative effort. Such effort happens through operations that demand knowledge of the architectonic culture built over time. Without the ability to locate the work in the location, in the time and in the societies in which they are produced, we are taking the risk of a naive reading. My academic activity is based on the idea of history can prevent the enjoyment *naïf* of the density of knowledge accumulated that acquiesces the architecture. Nevertheless, even though it is indispensable, a restrict history to the disciplinary field of architecture is not enough because the design and the production of an architectonic work use knowledge emerged from other subject areas. So, its interpretation perhaps is the most complex one among the other arts. In the absence of this intellectual effort, the architecture easily provides to the sensorial enjoyment the qualities of the experimented spaces.

Just as bibliography productions, the curatorship of exhibitions is an exercise of interpretation of an architectonic work that aims at the general public understanding, lay or not. In this sense, the range of my academic activity to the curatorship of exhibitions was an outcome of the research and its dissemination through articles, books, websites, conferences, and interviews. It means that the exhibitions that interest me the most are those ones that promote the formation and diffusion of knowledge regarding architecture.

The exhibitions present particularities that differ them from those other means, especially for the relationship between enjoyment and movement of the visitor throughout the exhibition space. The narrative that constitutes the interpretation of the work exposed by the curatorship does not depend on the linear sequences as in books or movies. The exhibition space can offer a bigger liberty to the visitor, as in means of routes as in means of

the relations between the exposed items, allowing the enjoyment in one exhibition to be a proper exercise of free interpretation about a proposed agenda by the curatorship.

Architectonic exhibitions differ themselves from the fine arts for the lack of the work itself. In contrast to what happens in exhibitions of paintings and sculptures, the exposed building attends only through selected and organized representations by the curatorship. It is exposed not only the items produced especially to facilitate the understanding of the work, but also the original items, such as drawings, photographs, audiovisual media, templates, furniture and objects of applied arts, fragments of the building, prototypes, which offer to the visitor the contact (almost) direct with accessible objects only for teams of research.

Architectural Exhibitions, in Brazil and abroad

Architectural Exhibitions are very uncommon, especially in Brazil, and just a few ones present formative and academic approach, such as the ones presented in a static way. Of all the exhibitions that I have visited abroad since my first stay in Italy in 1994, I highlight two exhibitions organized by Barry Bergdoll at the Museum of Modern Art – MoMA, in Nova York. “Latin American in Construction: Architecture 1955 1985” is an example of investigative curatorship, which has explored art collections for seven years in 10 countries outside of the United States of America,

with the support of two co-curators and all the Architecture and Design Department of the museum¹. Most recently, Bergdoll bid farewell to the museum with the exhibition “Frank Lloyd Wright at 150: Unpacking the Archive”, meant to offer a new interpretation of the architect’s work from the transference of his collection from the two Taliesin to the Avery Architecture & Fine Arts Library at Columbia University and MoMA, initiated in 2012.

Both exhibitions made usage of an outstanding institutional structure supported on the competence of raising substantial resources that allow some stability to medium and long-term works: seven years in the first, five years in the second. Even though the existing intellectual ability in the architectural field in Brazil can be equivalent to the one that we are able to find in countries of the western hemisphere, the institutional and financial conditions of the organization of exhibitions are incomparable. Wholly dependent on resources of culture support programs through fiscal resignation, the few Brazilian exhibitions of architecture take place due to the isolated effort of curators. Significant museums do not offer exhibitions of architecture, regularly or not. If anything, they host exhibitions organized abroad or accept *freelancers*’ proposals, considering that they are being supported by a sponsor.

In this Brazilian context, it is hard to find architecture exhibitions, independent of their quality. Rio de Janeiro received some exhibitions at a spe-

1.Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1985. Curador Barry Bergdoll, co-curators Jorge Francisco Liernur and Carlos Eduardo Dias Comas, Patricio del Real, assistant curator at Department of Architecture & Design of the MoMA.

cial institution for a few years, the Architecture and Urbanism Center. It was inaugurated in 1997 while the administration of the mayor Luiz Paulo Conde, an architect. The center was managed by Jorge Czajkowski, a professor at UFRJ and responsible for large exhibitions on the appreciation of the architecture of Rio de Janeiro². Beyond this institution, we can also highlight the “O Rio jamais visto (The Rio you have never seen before)”, by Ana Luiza Nobre at the Banco do Brasil Cultural Center in 1998, which presented many not built projects, consisting on works that would yet cause a huge impact on the city’s layout. We can notice that in the Rio de Janeiro, the period of these important exhibitions coincides with the development of relevant architectonic and urban works, such as the programs called Favela Bairro and Rio Cidade. Exhibitions, academic publications, research and qualitative projects implanted in the city allowed Roberto Segre to speak on the “Renaissance” of the Rio de Janeiro architecture on those years, what did not sound like an exaggeration back then⁴.

In São Paulo, I highlight the exhibition “Arquitetura Brasileira: Viver na floresta (Brazilian Architecture: Living in the woods)”, organized by Abilio Guerra in 2010 at Tomie Ohtake Institute and the celebrative exhibitions of the centennial of Lina Bo Bardi held in 2014/ 2015, as well as “Maneiras de expor: Arquitetura expositiva de Lina Bo Bardi (Ways of Exhibiting: Expositive Architecture of Lina Bo Bardi)”, by Giancarlo Latorraca at Casa

Brasileira Museum and the “Arquitetura Política de Lina Bo Bardi (Political Architecture of Lina Bo Bardi)”, by André Vainer and Marcelo Ferraz at SESC Pompeia, all of them held in São Paulo. In all exhibitions, the curator’s role is, clearly, informing the public and demonstrating a proposal of an interpretative strand.

An Institution that centered a relevant set of exhibitions of architecture produced in Brazil was the Bienal de Arquitetura de São Paulo (São Paulo Biennial of Architecture), reopened in 1993 after 20 years of the execution of the first one⁴. Special Exhibitions exposed works by already renowned architects, such as Oscar Niemeyer, Vilanova Artigas, Lina Bo Bardi, alongside others practically unknown by the new generations, such as Rino Levi, Victor Dubugras, Abrahão Sanovicz, Jorge Machado Moreira, Fernando Chacel. New thematic exhibitions arose, as the examples of “Construir a Escola, Construir a Cidade. A experiência do Convênio Escolar em São Paulo: 1948-54 (Building Schools, Building the City: The Scholar Covenant Experience in São Paulo: 1948-54)”, “Cidades Jardins: a busca do equilíbrio social e ambiental 1898-1998” (Garden Cities: The search for social and environmental equilibrium 1898-1998), “Arquitetura e Habitação Social em São Paulo: 1989-1992” (Architecture and Social Housing in São Paulo: 1989-1992), among others. Exhibitions that brought to wide public research that were becoming developed in post-graduation courses of the main universities of the country.

2. You may want to read the necrology written by Roberto Conduru, Jorge Paul Czajkowski, Drops 037.04, 2010. Available at < <http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/drops/11.037/3630> >.

3. SEGRE, Roberto. Guias de Arquitetura Carioca. In Resenhas Online, 01.22, jan. 2002. Available at < <http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/resenhasonline/01.001/3257> >.

4. This article was written right before the releasing of the book *Arquitetura em Retrospectiva*, organized by Elisabete França.

However, the exhibitions always had to face the difficulties of attending to the necessity of the developer, the Brazilian Architects Institute, in promoting the project of the production of whom is affiliated with them. The balance between the corporate celebration of the class of architects and the promotion of investigative exhibitions.

Even the curator's image is not very present in architecture exhibitions, one needs only to remember that even today the Brazilian Architects Institute are reluctant about determining how curators, the responsible people for the Biennials of Architecture of São Paulo, are replaced by the title of competent director in some editions.

Dismissed from the Biennial Foundation building at Ibirapuera, it has almost been a decade that The Architecture Biennial wanders through the city, in search of a bigger integration towards the society. Banished from a referential physical location, it has diluted in an irreversible way in a process out of reach of any curator, do not matter how competent and devoted the professional might be.

A Casa de Vidro (Glass House) as an exhibition site.

In this a little upsetting context, a new idea of organizing architecture exhibitions at the headquarters of Badi Institute, the Casa de Vidro (Glass House), arose. Owner of one of the largest private architectural collections of the coun-

try⁵, it is coherent that the Bardi Institute should promote exhibitions from curatorships' projects supported by thematic researches. The performing of these exhibitions inside the Casa de Vidro itself, in turn, stems from the space created in the living room due to the sharing of the heritage of Pietro Maria Bardi after his death in 1999⁶. The sharing resulted in the removal of the historic furniture, paintings, sculptures, decorative objects, and rugs, deconstructing the integrity of the place that had been built throughout the couple's life.

In the impossibility of fully restoring the site, the option of using the room as an exhibition site is also pertinent to its history. The pictures taken of the newly-constructed house interior in 1951 demonstrated that it was the place of rehearsal to the museology that would be created in the new MASP headquarters in the Avenida Paulista a few years later.

I had the opportunity of curating four exhibitions in the Bardi Institute headquarters. The first three ones aimed the presentation of the items that composed the collection, while the fourth one proposed a comparative study of the work by Lina Bo Bardi with foreign works that were produced at the same period as hers. Debates and lectures complemented the initiatives. It was a very specific situation regarding curatorship associated with a collection and a projected and experienced space by the architect herself, who was the object of the exhibitions.

5. The collection is composed by around 7 thousand original drawings of projects, 15 thousand photographs, textual documents, artworks, furniture, audiovisual media, professionally secured and supported by resources from Petrobras, Fapesp and Caixa Econômica Federal.

6. The couple Lina and Pietro did not have any children and they donated all their goods to the Bardi Institute. However, Pietro had daughters from his first marriage, heirs that claimed their part of the heritage after his death.



Figure 1. Detail of the exhibition “Anhangabaú, Tropical Garden”. Glass House, São Paulo, October 13th – November 24th, 2013. Source: author’s collection.



Figure 2. Detail of the exhibition “Lina at home: Pathways”. Glass House, São Paulo, April 12th – July 19th, 2015. Source: author’s collection.

7. “Anhangabaú, Tropical Garden”, exhibition curated by Renato Anelli, sponsorship by Papaiz and mockup made by the architect José Renato Dibo

at the Laboratory of Templates of IAU USP – São Carlos. 8. The centennial of Lina Bo Bardi was celebrated at December 5th, 2014. The Bardi

“Anhangabaú, Tropical Garden” (“Anhangabaú, Jardim Tropical”)

A special challenge was finding an expositive system with competitive holders to the Glass House. The first, “Anhangabaú, Jardim Tropical” (“Anhangabaú, Tropical Garden”), was composed by a large mockup of a project by Lina Bo Bardi, made specially for a contest promoted by Emurb in 1982 and by the original drawings, sketches and practices planks, all exposed in holders similar to clipboards⁷. The exhibition was complemented by two days of debates with guests, in the room turned into an auditorium, which provided for new perspectives about the architect and this peculiar work of urbanism. (Figure 1)

“Lina at Home: Pathways”

In the beginning of 2015, we organized the exhibition “Lina em Casa: Percursos” (Lina at Home: Pathways) as a part of the celebrations of the centennial of the architect⁸. The aim of this exhibition was presenting records of the intellectual and political transformation of Lina Bo Bardi in the years that she lived in Brazil, when she evolved from a Eurocentric position into a special knowledge regarding Brazilian culture, mainly the appreciation of popular culture. Excerpts of mail as yet unprecedented were unveiled to the public, by the side of documents that contextualized them as special moments of her life. Photographs, drawings, videos, and mockups composed the exhibi-

tion that had spread to several sectors of the Glass House. (Figure 2)

The expo-graphic project by the architect Marina Correia has created vertical and horizontal platforms, structured by slender black tubes, forming transparent edges of cobbles. Besides simple panels to be glued to the banners with reproductions, some holders allowed the presentation of original pieces, flat or volumetric, protected by acrylic boxes. The abstract and transparent tone of the holders subtly demarcates the space of the panels, making them being the exceptionality in the environment of the glazed room, but without contrast. It affirms its condition of a new intervention, but in a delicate way, without obstructing the continuity of the space. An exhibition system was set up that was very suitable for the home and flexible, and was used in other expositions with different contents. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Detail of the exhibition “Lina at home: Pathways”. Glass House, São Paulo, April 12th – July 19th., 2015. Source: author’s collection.

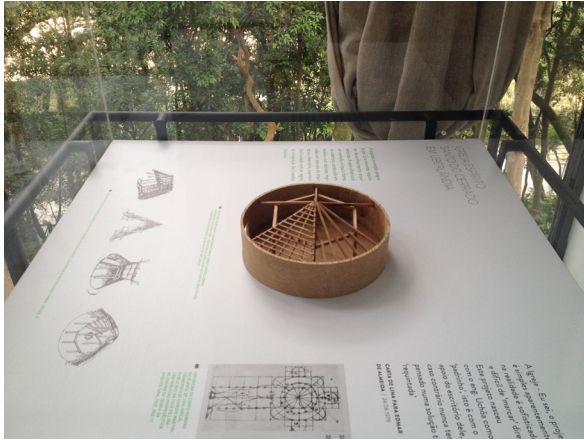


Figure 4. Detail of the exhibition “Lina at home: Pathways”. Glass House, São Paulo, April 12th – July 19th, 2015. Source: author’s collection.

Institute formed a coordination of the commemorative activities, aiming optimizing the material of the collection. It was defined a period of 12 months, with start on August of 2014, to the promotion of exhibitions, which took place in São Paulo, Munich, Zurich and Rome. The exhibition “Lina at home: Pathways” had

the curatorship by Anna Carboncini and Renato Anelli, with the sponsorship by the Culture State Secretariat of São Paulo, from April to July of 2015.

9. “The Design Impasse. Furniture by Lina Bo Bardi: 1959 – 1992”. Curatorships by Renato Anelli and sponsored by PRONAC – Ministry Of Culture. Between May and July of 2016.

Whenever possible, we try to establish relationships between some exposed contents and the house itself. In the last three exhibitions, it was selected academic publications about the collection of the couple Bardi and exposed along the library. In the exhibition “Lina at Home: Pathways”, a holder was positioned on the concrete floor by the side of the oven and the barbecue pit, showing a picture of its original situation, with the architect amongst the greenery and pets. A drawing of a cat made by her on the still-fresh concrete floor represents with affectio her husband Pietro, according to sketches in letters exchanged by the couple. Items of the exhibition and the house interact, reverberating the strong presence of the recordings of the life of the Bardi couple. (Figure 4)

“The Design impasse”

The exhibition “The Design Impasse”⁹, which took place between May and July of 2016 introduced the projects of furniture by Lina Bo Bardi performed from her staying in Salvador (1959 and 1964). It was about the moment of the beginning of critical deviation of Lina Bo Bardi, a consequence of her engagement in the national-popular project arising while the governments of Juscelino Kubitschek, Jânio Quadros, and João Goulart. In it, the regional development of Bahia constituted an effervescent situation. The ethnographic research and the exposing of “Nordeste” (“Northeast”), conducted by Lina gave subsidy to the formation of a school of Industrial Drawing



Figure 5. Detail of the exhibition “The Design Impasse. Furniture by Lina Bo Bardi: 1959 – 1992”. Glass House, São Paulo, May 28th – July 31st, 2016. Source: author’s collection.

intended to transforming the regional handicraftsmanship into a system of the industry of low technology and intensive usage of the workforce. After the interruption of this project by the Estate Coup of 1964, Lina disowned the serial industrial manufacturing, acknowledging the furniture production as a part of the architecture project. After the “Cadeira de Beira de Estrada” (Chair of the Edge of the Highway), resolved with four tied props, they would become the wooden furniture made on laminated timber at SESC Pompéia and the chair and tables produced in her returning to Salvador in 1986. (Figures 5 and 6)

The exhibition presents the main elements of the architects’ practice in this context: texts, drawings and photographs of the time period by the side of the furniture of the collection of Bardi Institute and of SESC Pompéia. Unlikely to what is



Figure 6. Folder of the exhibition “The Design Impasse. Furniture by Lina Bo Bardi: 1959 – 1992”. Glass House, São Paulo, May 28th – July 31st, 2016. Source: author’s collection.

10. “Glass Houses”, curatorship by Renato Anelli, Ana Lúcia Cerávolo and Sol Camacho. Sponsorship by Glass Industry AGC through Statal PROAC. From October of 2017 to March of 2018.

11. The drawings and photographs of Glass House

by Philip Johnson are at the Avery Library, Columbia University and at Getty Foundation. The drawings of Farnsworth are at MoMA NY and the drawings and images of Eames house are at Getty Foundation, in Los Angeles.



Figure 7. Detail of the exhibition “The Design Impasse. Furniture by Lina Bo Bardi: 1959 – 1992”. Glass House, São Paulo, May 28th – July 31st, 2016. Source: author’s collection.

more common in museums, it was encouraged that some people would sit on some of them. (Figures 7 and 8)

“Glass Houses”

The last exhibition “Glass Houses”¹⁰ differs from the previous ones because of the expansion of the theme to the comparison with three other houses with transparent characteristics similar to the Bardi house: the Farnsworth houses, the Mies van der Rohe (Plano, Illinois, 1945-1951) house, the Glass House by Philip Johnson (New Canaan, Connecticut. 1946-1949) and the house Ray and Charles Eames (Pacific Palisades, California. 1945-1949). For the diversity of the collections, we opted not to present the original items rather than authorized reproductions¹¹. Between 2015 and 2017, the collections of New York and Los Angeles, were a target of a broad research, besides the visitations to



Figure 8. Detail of the table on laminated of the exhibition “The Design Impasse. Furniture by Lina Bo Bardi: 1959 – 1992”. Glass House, São Paulo, May 28th – July 31st, 2016. Source: author’s collection.

the houses in the USA, which allowed the elaboration of the main hypothesis of comparison.

The panels presented the houses on their sites, development of the project drawing and current and old photographs. Besides their projects and constructive technical characteristics, the exhibition presents recordings of the lives in the houses until their transformations in museums.



Figure 9. Mockup 1:200 of the Glass House in the exhibition “Glass Houses”. Glass House, São Paulo, October 12th – March 04th, 2017. Source: author’s collection.

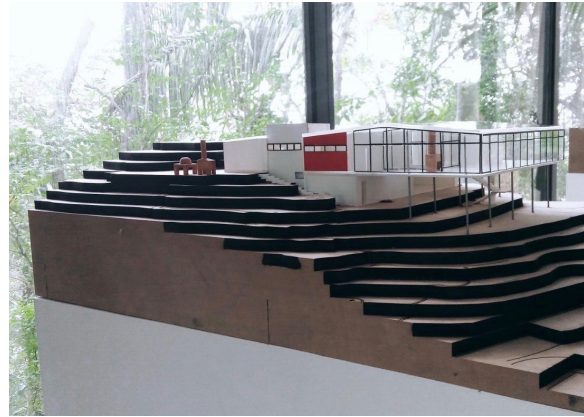


Figure 10. Mockup 1:100 of the Glass House in the exhibition “Glass Houses”. Glass House, São Paulo, October 12th – March 04th, 2017. Source: author’s collection.



Figure 11. Mockup 1:5 of the Glass House in the exhibition “Glass Houses”. Glass House, São Paulo, October 12th – March 04th, 2017. Source: author’s collection.

Each house had three mockups in different scales¹². One in the scale of 1:200 to explicit its implementation strategy; another one of 1:100, highlighting the structuring of the internal space, and finally, the mockup in the scale of 1:5 of a corner, where the structural systems and the transparent sealing is reproduced in detail. Therefore, the visitors are able to interpret the relationship between the houses with the outskirts landscapes, the necessary operations to allow the transparency of the external limits and the technical innovations to allow the iron-and-glass façade. (Figures 9, 10 and 11)

The exhibition aims the amplification of the possibilities of understanding, by the visitor, of the architecture that he/she is visiting. It offers the experience of being in a glass house in the moment that an exhibition unveils the meaning of glass architecture through the comparison among four sam-

ples. A timeline locates the houses in the glass-architecture history, developed in the hundred years after the Crystal Palace of London (1851). The representations of the architecture get mixed with the work itself, creating an instigating resonance between the exhibition and the expositive space.

We must bear in mind that the best configuration of the room would be the one existing in the last years of the life of the couple Bardi. If it were

12.The research of identification of the technical details was done by Roberto Leggeri, the models were produced by the architect José Renato Dibo in the Laboratory of Models of the IAU - São Carlos, with the support of the students Luiana Carolina Cardozo, Aluisio Teles and Isadora Romano Leoncio.

possible its reconstitution, exhibitions like those ones would not be pertinent any longer. For now, it is necessary finding break-even points between what is left of the room lived by the Bardis and the current explosive usage. These exhibitions are just a part of this research.

The considerations presented above comply with a clear position towards the curatorship of architecture exhibitions activity, whose formative aspect of a public able to interpret it is defended by me. Besides this formative aspect, the exhibitions are also instruments of appreciation attribution, because they select and prioritize the works. I

consider the formation of a public able to interpret and appreciate the architecture of the place that they live is essential for the possibility of the elevation of its quality. Without lay appreciators, it cannot exist good clients to demand projects of quality. However, the architecture exhibitions are intended also to a specialized public, and it can contribute to their maturity as professionals.

To overcome the inconstancy of the institutional conditions that make possible the spreading of exhibitions of this kind in Brazil, it would be necessary combined efforts of the academic, cultural and professional communities. Publicizing in a special edition of the *arq.urb* magazine about the topic is an important step. ■