

Architecture, Radical Criticism and Revolution in Brazil

Arquitetura, Crítica Radical e Revolução no Brasil

José Tavares Correia de Lira*

*Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of Sao Paulo. His most recent books include *O Visível e o Invisível na Arquitetura Brasileira* (2017), *Memória, Trabalho e Arquitetura* (2013) and *Warchavchik: fraturas da vanguarda* (2011-award at the 7th Ibero-American Architecture and Planning Biennale), jose.lira@usp.br.

usjt
arq.urb

número 29 | set - dez de 2020

Recebido: 17/06/2020

Aceito: 30/09/2020

<https://doi.org/10.37916/arq.urb.vi29.484>



Keywords:

Mário Pedrosa,
Sérgio Ferro,
Modernity,
Criticism.

Palavras-chaves:

Mário Pedrosa,
Sérgio Ferro,
Modernidade,
Crítica.

Abstract

Since the 1950s, it became a national commonplace to remark the misery of architectural criticism in Brazil, as if the international magnetism of local modern architecture would have blocked any possibility to evade either apologetic or admonitory perspectives. This article aims at sketching a genealogy of radical architectural criticism in Brazil by connecting a few intellectual and political challenges to the emergence, development and decline (or persistence) of modern architecture among us. In order to do so, I will return two different critical projects: first, the writings on architecture of art critic Mario Pedrosa (1900-1981), whom, in the 1950s and 60s, was in search of a cultural framework to the modern architecture in Brazil; secondly, a more professionally committed discourse raised from the 1960s to the 1970s by architect Sergio Ferro (1938-) to whom the socio-technical role of design should be tested in face of Brazilian material modernization. By doing so, I hope to be able to touch some of the contemporary critical dilemmas in face of the discipline, its history and its intellectual and political topicality.

Resumo

Desde os anos 1950, tornou-se um lugar-comum nacional assinalar a miséria da crítica arquitetônica no Brasil, como se o magnetismo internacional da arquitetura moderna local tivesse bloqueado qualquer possibilidade de escapar de perspectivas ora apologéticas, ora de censura. Este artigo tem como objetivo traçar uma genealogia da crítica arquitetônica radical no Brasil, conectando alguns desafios intelectuais e políticos ao surgimento, desenvolvimento e declínio (ou persistência) da arquitetura moderna entre nós. Para tanto, retornarei a dois projetos críticos distintos: primeiro, os escritos sobre arquitetura do crítico de arte Mário Pedrosa (1900-1981), que, nas décadas de 1950 e 1960, buscava compreender o lastro cultural da arquitetura moderna no Brasil; em segundo lugar, um discurso mais comprometido profissionalmente, levantado entre os anos 1960 e 1970 pelo arquiteto Sérgio Ferro (1938-), para quem o papel sociotécnico do projeto deveria ser testado diante da modernização material brasileira. Ao fazer isso, espero poder tocar alguns dos dilemas críticos contemporâneos em face da disciplina, sua história e sua atualidade intelectual e política.

Architecture, Radical Criticism and Revolution in Brazil

In 1957, while Brasilia was being erected, architect Silvio de Vasconcelos (1916-1979) published an article about “Art and Architectural Criticism” in the magazine *AD Arquitetura e Decoração*. The lack of a critical approach to architecture in Brazil was a matter of concern to him. It derived from a number of reasons, including the autodidactic origin of local architectural critics, their perplexity towards the sudden burst of modern architecture in Brazil and their immediate affiliation to its strong demands for legitimacy. For him, a certain unanimity seemed to have thus been produced among them and in such a way that “any unbiased or dispassionate analysis, any attempt to specify bright or less favorable results, became reckless, an offense, a position against art itself, a proof of mental or emotional disability.” (Vasconcelos, 1957) This attitude had supposedly played an important role in the early refusal of both style architecture and stern functionalism. But it was time then – he thought – to move away from such dogmatic vista, which blocked Brazilian contemporary architecture of a more thorough examination. Criticism shouldn’t ever mean self-justification, nor limit itself to merely visual kinds of appreciation. After all architecture was not a subject of visible aspects but of experiences and of spatial organizations to serve lifestyles.

It is worth realizing that such a cry for criticism emerged in a moment when modernism had spread out nationwide, establishing itself as a major Brazilian cultural achievement. Indeed since the 1940’s, Brazilian modern architecture had gained fabulous attention everywhere and was also internationally acclaimed as one of the most creative alternatives to the rigid standards of the modern movement. From Brazil to the US, from Europe and across Latin America, critics, curators, editors and historians were fascinated with its regional wisdom, formal inventiveness and technical audacity. (Martins, 1999; Liernur, 1999; Xavier, 2003; Cappello, 2006; Tinem, 2006) Along with it, a certain number of rather sophisticated works have entered the international canon to mold a Brazilian input to the modern movement as a whole, shaping a coherent narrative about its origins and development, its diffusion as well as its continuous decay a few years after the completion of Brasilia.

At the same time, the 1950s coincides with the first really resonating restrictions to a Brazilian formalism, affecting the local self-esteem and eventually stimulating

new standpoints. In Rio de Janeiro, for instance, where the basis of Brazil’s modern architecture had been settled, such attitude reflected on a relative intellectual and institutional drive for rationalization, somehow echoing the critique launched since 1953 by Max Bill against its supposedly frivolity. (Nobre, 2008; Fiammenghi, 2020) In Sao Paulo, a number of periodicals – like *AD* itself, which espoused concrete art after 1955; *Habitat*, directed from 1950 to 1954 by Lina Bo and Pietro Maria Bardi; and *Acrópole*, which was increasingly assuming a local avant-garde investment on techno-social discourses – took on rather unique perspectives on the national debate, later to be assembled around the so called Sao Paulo’s school of brutalism. (Zein, 2005; Stuchi, 2007; Junqueira, 2009; Mesquita, 2011; Dedecca, 2012; Silva, 2017) Even Oscar Niemeyer himself, who in 1958 acknowledged his dismay about the social role of architecture, admitted “to have been taken to adopt an excessive tendency for originality” in many of his early projects, in spite of the sense of economy and logic they required. (Niemeyer, 1958)

A critical bias

In spite of Vasconcelos’ evaluation, and the undeniable hegemony of pro-modern and national representations, it seemed as though a new critical milieu was emerging everywhere in the country. And it would not indeed be unbiased, neither dispassionate. Partly it was composed of an early generation of professional art critics, beginning with Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) in the 1920s, whom in 1944, in face of Brazil Builds’ show at MoMA (Goodwin, 1943) and the prestige of fascism in Sao Paulo, rejected architecture’s aesthetic analysis as an expression of any kind of will to form. (Andrade, 1944) But also with Mário Pedrosa (1900-1981), Geraldo Ferraz (1905-1979), Mário Barata (1921-2007), and Flavio Motta (1923-2016), all of them unavoidably drawn to the burning architectural debate, which had recently acquired unprecedented relevance on the Brazilian cultural landscape. In part, though this growing critical awareness in Brazil was formed by practitioners, some of whom strongly rooted in the field as major players such as Lucio Costa (1902-1998), Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2012), Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992), as well as João Vilanova Artigas (1915-1985), whom, in fact, had been in charge of a most demanding ethical and political cry for engagement against both Apollonian and Dionysian aesthetics, as well as averse to all forms of professional commercialism, land speculation and yankee control of architectural developments. (Artigas, 1951;

1954). A call for criticism in face of reality which would appeal to younger generations of architects, deflecting into more specialized careers as scholars, historians or preservationists, like Vasconcelos himself, Edgar Graeff (1921-1990), Carlos Lemos (1925-) and Sergio Ferro (1938-).

It would be impossible a task here to review this whole history of architectural criticism in Brazil. Its various theoretical grounds and diverse poetic, cultural and political agendas, the institutional and intellectual networks it engaged and the unique individual itineraries it relied upon are many-sided and yet to be closely examined and broadly comprised. By outlining here a couple of exemplary individual outlooks, I solely mean to address a certain bias which seems to have played a rather unique and productive role in the Brazilian architectural criticism across the 20th Century: its radical trend. I believe that by reconnecting some local critical challenges to Brazil's modern architecture debate from the 1950s to the 1970 may help to illuminate a few unparalleled ways to address the international contemporary lineages of architectural criticism.

By a radical bias I mean in general the set of ideas and attitudes that counteract an exceedingly reactionary collective unconscious, which differently from some other Latin American countries have largely prevailed in Brazil among the political, literate and professional elites. It would eventually shape a peculiar – although marginal – tradition, intensely responsive to the pressing socio-cultural problems and its corresponding aesthetic dilemmas, tending to think them as a whole, either in the scale of the nation or in the global scale of modernity. Strongly rooted in the urban enlightened middle classes, this radical tradition in criticism has often endeavored to identify with the issues raised by the popular or the working classes, and at times has assumed a revolutionary platform. Of course the radical critic is mainly an insurgent, but even if much of its stances are really transformative, they “may also retreat to conservative ones”. (Candido, 1995, 266) Acting within an underdeveloped society, full of colonial slavery and oligarchic remains and often experiencing military interference, Brazilian radicalism, though always politically oriented and revolutionary at times might eventually aim at feasible changes. It is important to highlight this touch of ambiguity that permeates the radical sense of commitment to major causes and its potential transiency to pacifying narratives. For we might find it deeply rooted in Brazilian quests for cultural identity or autono-

my, in the duties concerning the building of the nation-state as well as in various responses to the calls for Brazilian development and for politically self-sufficient, patriotic and populist promises.

Mario Pedrosa, in the 1950s to the 60s, and Sergio Ferro in the 1960s and 70s – to whom one could add Otilia Arantes (1940-) in the 1980s and 90s – definitely represent some of the most prominent intellectual endeavors to sow a revolutionary front in architectural criticism in contemporary Brazil. Advancing the limits of radicalism, and oscillating between artistic avant-garde and political avant-garde, each of them, on their own and sometimes interrelated ways, seem to have extracted from Marxist theory and the dramatic local experience, seen both from a national and a contemporary point of view (Schwarz, 1999), rather creative and deprovincialized effects (Candido, 1967; 1973; Chakrabarty, 2000) for the understanding not only of architectural production in Brazil, but of architectural modernity and criticality as a whole.

Abstraction and Utopia

In his article, Silvio de Vasconcelos had referred to Mario Pedrosa's approach to that same topic of architectural criticism. Differently from him, though, early that year the art critic had reinforced his reproach to functionalism in architecture, praising the maverick virtues of Brazilian modern architects who – in his own words – had “sent the functional diet to hell.” For Pedrosa, it was time to overcome the established “narrow kind of architectural criticism” in order to reach “its specific task, which is aesthetic appreciation.” (Pedrosa, 1957a)

Since 1944, when Pedrosa published his first articles on Alexander Calder's (1898-1976) solo retrospective at the MoMA the year before, he had engaged in a radical move towards abstract art and aesthetic criticism. (Pedrosa, 1944; Arantes, 1991) Since then, main issues of the period began to emerge in his writings: the relations between art and technology and art and utopia, the binds between visuality and perception, the debate over abstraction versus realism, the integration and synthesis of the arts etc. It is important to remind that, engaging on the cause of autonomy by then (Gabriel, 2017), he had started his career as an art critic in 1933 with an essay on “Käthe Kollwitz and the social tendencies in art”, where he proposed a kind of “proletarian art” able to convert the emotional and collective life of the proletariat into subject matter to visual perception. (Pedrosa, 1933)

Indeed Pedrosa's prolific collaboration in several newspapers throughout his life wavered between avant-garde art and Trotskyist politics. But in 1942, in face of Candido Portinari's (1903-1962) murals for the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., recently painted with themes drawn from Brazilian history, Pedrosa, a strong opponent of Stalin's socialist realism, held off their gravely national representations. Absorbed in a sophisticated visual analysis of the series, he advocated for aesthetic categories of judgment of the work in clear reaction to its figurative theme (Pedrosa, 1947). His comments on Portinari's murals are exemplary:

"Through processes immune to any recipe, he tends to what one might call demythologizing of icons, images and landscapes. Evading external contingencies of time and place, national or not, he multiplies the geometric signals in a sort of anxiety for abstraction." (Pedrosa, 1943, 19)

Aesthetic value and etic-political commitment could thus be reconciled within "the field of artistic procedures." (Arantes, 1991, p. 31) The problems posed to the concept of art by Calder were a response to a social, or even a "vital" platform for abstraction: the idea of the unfinished work, issues of suspension, surprise, and of spatial stimuli, the problems of organizing movement and contrast, of variable relations of forms in space were seen as both a way to grasp the art work's aesthetic value and its specific role within society. "Disembodied of any convention or external function", Calder's works could then avoid any realistic suggestion (Pedrosa, 1944, 61), and at the same time be intimately integrated into collective life. Their prosaic character would not evade direct contact with the people, actually supposed to move, touch and push the artist's *Estabiles* and *Mobiles*. Besides, these were supposed to occupy public squares and gardens with "unseen things, with suggested worlds and unknown animals, with new fables, dreams, and imaginations, of revivifying silences." They did evoke "motifs of remote geological eras or omens of things yet to exist", but in such a way that we could call them "democratic art because it can be made of anything, fit anywhere, in the service of any condition, noble, rare or usual", revitalizing and transforming "the everyday lives and the sad environment in which the large brutalized masses vegetate." (Pedrosa, 1944, 65)

As such, revolutionary art could not schematically be seen as a simple cultural nurture for the masses to carry out the revolution. Its mission was not to compete with the massive means of culture and communication. It would rather be to "speci-

fy and isolate" what Pedrosa saw as "unperceived angles of the ever-changing visual realm", which would lead to a "revolution of sensibility." (Pedrosa, 1952a, 98)

In his very first article about architecture, "Space and architecture", published in 1952, Pedrosa would insist on that revolutionary role of the art of architecture. Drawing to Geoffrey Scott's *The Architecture of Humanism* and his praise to space as the supreme category for architectural criticism, he reaffirms the concept of space as a "nothing", in other words, as "a mere negation of the solid." (Scott, 1914, 226) Its unconformity to our traditional focus on matter, has made it to be often overlooked. Nevertheless, "to enclose space is the object of building; when we build we do but detach a convenient quantity of space, seclude it, and protect it, and all architecture springs from that necessity." Space and movement, "space as the liberty of movement", and the architect's appeal to movement were the main strategies "to excite a certain mood in those who enter it", a sort of "physical consciousness" of space, to provoke their instincts to adapt to the spaces in which their bodies project themselves. (Scott, 1914, 227) According to Pedrosa, such organic, corporeal, material characteristic of modern space was in line with contemporary civilization:

"it yearns for freer, malleable, unlimited spaces, as if we were all mysteriously waiting for a new dimension beyond the three Euclidean ones. (...) The architectural revolution is not, therefore, purely external. Instead, it goes outside and inside the building, where we are allowed, for the first time, since prehistoric times, when primitive man lived inside the earth, to be physically conscious of the inside out of space, of its physical existence." (Pedrosa, 1952b, 253)

Such a concept of an unlimited, malleable, plastic space, to be tactilely apprehended in movement; such idea of a physical awareness of a spatial nothingness seen as the inside out of building, there is certainly an echo of Pedrosa's enthusiasm for Calder's works, which, in this sense, could indeed be related to Niemeyer's architecture. But if the reference to one of the heralds of architectural autonomy like Scott was certainly unorthodox (Gabriel, 2017, 108-112), it was not by chance either. After all, the role of the art critic should be to question how far an architectural work embodied aesthetic impulses or not (Pedrosa, 1957b), or else "to simply and immediately perceive architecture as such." (Pedrosa, 1957c) It is important to remark that in order to do so, the militant critic would not avoid speaking for himself, "not to 'defend himself', but to explain himself" in the wrestling arena of criticism; in

other words, the radical critic would not at all avoid being “partial, political, a partisan” in search of a point of view that could open up new horizons. (Pedrosa, 1957d)

By the 1950s, Pedrosa had definitely reached one of the most active and influential positions in the Brazilian art system, heading important art movements, lecturing and publishing intensely, spreading fresh, refined and insurgent art ideas, counseling young artists, curating some of the most remarkable exhibitions at the time, and becoming a leading name of the International Association of Art Critics. (Arantes, 1995) In a lecture held and published in Paris in 1953 – a few months after Bill’s blustering critique of Oscar Niemeyer’s work – he addressed the overall modern architectural production in Brazil. Highlighting to the French audience the “revolutionary state of mind” that had been rising in the country since the 1930s, Pedrosa borrowed from Lucio Costa (1952) the idea of a primary European influx in the basis of its sudden spring, in order to understand the international relevance of some of its design peculiarities: the imaginative play of surfaces, volumes and spaces; the inventive use of the *brise-soleil*, not only in control of light and heat but animating and sometimes creating pictorial and graphic effects in the facades; the games of free forms, even if at the expense of the program; the integration of interior space, the outdoors and the landscape; and the lightness of structural solutions and sharp combination of materials. For him, the young Brazilian “jacobins” of an architectural purism, confident on the democratic virtues of mass production, had apparently embarked on a theoretical search of an agreement between art and technique.

According to Pedrosa, the immediate adoption of Le Corbusier’s revolutionary ideas in Brazil was in fact attuned with the country’s unstable and contradictory atmosphere after the 1929 world crisis and the Vargas’ revolution. Differently from France, lacking in “faith” on mass production, and from Mexico, where revolution had been deeply rooted on an indigenous outcry for reparation against the white colonizer; Brazil did not count with ancient civilizations nor any dissident ethnic or nativist tradition. But if “the land was still virgin”, if “we were condemned to be modern” as he would later state, the local rise of a totalitarian regime would prove to be a profitable opportunity for architects to engage in a national effort for modernization (Arantes, 1991, 84-86). But as the new builders were relying upon “the active

power of dictators to implement their ideas” (Pedrosa, 1953a, 259), a contradiction emerged between new architecture’s social and rational commitment and its local appeal to luxury and fashionable forms in line with the regime’s concerns with force representations and self-propaganda. As “islands” or “oasis” in the vastness of the country, works like the Ministry of Education and Health or Pampulha complex, in compliance with the dictatorship’s aspirations for grandeur, would never achieve any organic, fruitful or vital effect on their surroundings (Pedrosa, 1953b, 266), nor rightly face the crucial problems of social housing, favelas, and urban chaos in Brazil. Instead, they reinforced the local gap between intentions and potentialities within modern architecture.

Although sharply critical of Niemeyer - “it is not known whether dilettante because skeptical, or skeptical because dilettante” (Pedrosa, 1958a, 290) -, Pedrosa would certainly keep some optimism concerning Brazilian architecture. For him, the works of Burle Marx and Reidy were typical of a rising democratic era, and epitomized its aesthetic values, reintegrating socially oriented principles into local environment. It is probably due to his own persuasion about the advantages of Brazilian delay, about potentially converting the negative into a positive, that explains his initial enthusiasm towards Brasília. Of course, a close reader of Trotsky, Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, he was perfectly aware of the abyss between local conditions and those prevailing in advanced societies, which constantly reaffirmed imperialism, colonialism and dependence, as well as the emulation of “modern civilizational apparatus”. But, as Otilia Arantes has acknowledged, he was “also a Brazilian intellectual, responsive to the culturalist tradition of interpreting and accommodating our singularities.” (Arantes, 1991, 92)

Despite his apparent political mistrust on Kubitschek, Brasilia would soon emerge as a potential synthesis of the utopian dimension of a national creative will, a “civilizational oasis” or a Worringean abstract transplant in a land with no past (Pedrosa, 1957e, 303-306), “a transition from utopia to planning” (Pedrosa, 1958b, 319), “a hypothesis of reconstructing a whole country”. (Pedrosa, 1959, 334) It is true that he would never endorse the experiment uncritically: much of its hybrid and uncertain character, programmatically vague and somewhat anachronistic rested in a mystical appeal to both the images of a cross, reminiscent to colonial settlement, and that of an airplane, a sort of mandinga or charm: “in the hope that the very

vitality of the country far away, on the periphery, would burn the stages, and come towards the capital-oasis, planted in the middle of the Central Plateau, and then fertilize it from the inside.” (Pedrosa, 1957e, 307)

Years later, as the national political process once again fell into a new totalitarian regime, he would become much more demanding about such hopes. If Brasilia had paved the way to an ideal city as a true work of art; if it had created a physical and spiritual prospect for the whole of Brazil, only on the day it becomes "the real capital of a new country", it could indeed correspond to the highest economic, social, ethical, and cultural platform it sponsored. And then, “from the top of this platform, the regional will be subsumed in the national, the national in the international, and the nation’s inequalities will be dismantled. A new Brazil will have its own message, its own voices, its own modes, and its own art as well, all perfectly intelligible to any other messages within the semiological system of global communication”. (Pedrosa, 1973, 276) But there was yet a long way to go. Indeed, by 1973, the city had already been taken over by the militaries and Pedrosa was living in Chile as a political exile, accused by the Brazilian government of having vilified the nation.

Labor, Work and Liberation

By the end of the 1950s, Sergio Ferro was studying architecture in the University of São Paulo and would soon be starting a brief but remarkable career as a practitioner. In 1963, a year after becoming an art history professor at USP’s Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism (FAU-USP), he co-authored an article with Rodrigo Lefèvre (1938-1984) titled “Initial proposal for a debate: possibilities for action”. Manifesting a critical approach to practice, the two young architects proposed to discuss the dilemmas faced by any architect working in an underdeveloped country that was economically booming since the end of the war and which had recently inaugurated its new capital. In a way, they reframed Pedrosa's reading of modern Brazilian architecture’s contradictions. For them, any architectural action in Brazil was inevitably challenged by what they called “a situation-in-conflict”, more precisely a conflict between the expansion of productive forces and the vital needs of the people. In spite of any aesthetic or technical qualities achieved by local architecture, major contradictions were constantly boycotting its social principles and should be critically tested in face of larger structures of production, alienation and commodification within building activity. After all, by leaving aside the real needs of

architecture’s primary producers and consumers, Brazilian architects – despite their political persuasions - had been systematically neglecting the real spatial demands of the community. (Ferro and Lefèvre, 1963) In fact, they were systematically working for the “falsification of the profession”, promoting “the idea of architecture as a luxury item”, and as such betraying the bourgeois commitment to which the profession had surrendered. (Ferro, 1965, 39)

Ferro belongs to a generation of architects marked by the completion and critique of Brasilia and its corresponding development ideology, which would lead him to an early break with modern architecture’s democratic claims. As known, this debate was notably staged at FAU-USP by the end of the 1960s and performed through a basic contention over the relationships between architectural practice and social transformation. (Arantes, 2002; Koury, 2003) On one side, stood architect and professor Vilanova Artigas, by then one of the main exponents of modern architecture in Brazil, leading a whole group of architects in Sao Paulo since the 1940s, and acting as a mentor to those who were graduating in the 1950s and 60s. A leading intellectual name within the local branch of Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), he advocated for the ability of a professional elite to deliver revolutionary solutions by backing the call for a design able to rationally stand between intentions and means. (Artigas, 1967) On the other side, were his young disciples Ferro, Lefèvre and Flávio Império (1935-1985), who created the so-called *Arquitetura Nova* group and had just begun to teach at FAU. Disregarding for professional niceties in a moment when Brazil had been taken over by a military regime, they were strongly critical of what they saw as a modern architects’ bond to conservative modernization in Brazil. According to Ferro, between the 1940s and the 1960s, the apparent symptoms of social and economic development in the country had “stimulated an optimistic anticipatory activity”; new instruments of design had been required and the works of Niemeyer and Artigas were the best expressions of such a constructive ambition and openness; Brasília was at the height of such hopes on social advances, which had overtly shown to be illusory by the eve of military curfew. However, young architects like him were starting to realize the growing gap between their training and wide range of expectations and the narrowing of their professional tasks:

"To the postponement of their hopes, they [these young architects, Arquitetura Nova members] reacted, at first, with a sharp and renewed assertion of their main positions. Hence this hillbilly kind of brutalism (as opposed to European aestheticizing brutalism); this forced didacticization of all procedures; excessive constructive rationalization; the economism that generates ultra-dense spaces rarely justified by objective impositions, etc." (Ferro, 1967, 49)

It is obvious that this was not only a professional contention between two different generations or disciplinary/poetic perspectives, but expressed an underlying left-wing disagreement over the ethos and the course of Brazilian revolution. In fact, the various Marxist positions on dispute at the time seemed to agree that it should follow the classic model of a two-step revolution: a liberation movement against US imperialism, in which the nationalistic ranks of Brazilian urban bourgeoisie would take part in the modernization of productive forces and working classes' rights; and a second stage, which would lead to the overthrow of the military dictatorship on power and the establishment of a proletarian revolutionary government. (Ridenti, 2010, 32-39) Despite that, for those loyal partisans, like Artigas, its bourgeois, patriotic, and peaceful phase was still going on; while to most of PCB's dissident groups that emerged after the 1964 coup - like the National Liberation Action (ALN) in which Ferro and Lefèvre would eventually engage, the latter in the Revolutionary Armed Vanguard (VAR-Palmares) as well - this first step was over, remaining a socialist armed path as the only possible alternative to unblock the Brazilian anti-capitalist revolution.

Indeed, in those circumstances, among the several revolutionary organizations in Brazil, the presence of architects, artists and intellectuals was a hallmark to PCB, ALN and VAR-Palmares. But while among PCB members prevailed the idea of an intrinsically neutral and favorable technico-industrial progress, no matter its class basis or totalitarian origins; to those supporting the urban guerilla it seemed as though material progress should necessarily be linked to people's liberation, a position that would often lead them to a sort of skepticism towards modernization. Within their cultural dilemmas, one could find either a constructivist aesthetics or a program leaning to popular or pre-capitalist traditions (Ridenti, 2010, 71-80), which at some point could inflect to a pop or tropicalist hybrid with culture industry, combining the modern and the ancient, the high and the low, folk culture and commercial derision, criticism, irreverence and conformity. (Schwarz, 1978, 73-78) To Roberto

Schwarz, even the intellectualized Arquitetura Nova group was susceptible to such a populist bias within Brazilian Marxism; the interruption of a political perspective resonating on the overburdening, tormented middle-class residential experiments in the 1960s, raised to the level of a "moralistic and uncomfortable symbol of a revolution that did not happen". (Schwarz, 1978, 79)

Ferro's critical radicalism is unreadable without such reference to a certain revolutionary agenda. After all, for him, modern architecture's aesthetic, technical, and industrial convictions had clear social impacts on the building activity and its corresponding capitalistic divisions of labor. The despotic command of modern architects within the constructive site intensified the huge complex of productive forces that were increasingly, and violently dooming millions of workers to profitable exploitation. Ferro would actually repropose architectural analysis by shifting the focus on design solutions in themselves to the relations of production within the larger realm of building.

Since 1968, Ferro had been expanding his criticism of the construction site by facing the larger issue of architectural production and its political economic contradictions. (Arantes, 2002, 107) In 1972, already in France, to where he had moved due to political persecution, he highlighted the complex relationships between architecture, production and consumption in the education of architects. Closely following Karl Marx's theory of cooperation and of division of labour, Ferro starts by recognizing the conservative nature of architectural production as a type of manufacture. A building manufacture had some characteristics of its own: a large number of workmen simultaneously employed, extensively fragmented and hierarchically divided to produce the same commodity; the signs of both manual craft and industrial means in the construction process; the despotic mastership of one capitalist, managers, overlookers, foremen, or of small masters, contractors and designers; the pretended and inefficient separation between art and techniques, architecture and building practice, etc. (Ferro, 1972, 203-207) More than that, the blaming of the architect's despotism is already linked to a criticism of design activity as a phoney privilege:

"Such schemes, lacking in reality, abstract, simplistically functional and mechanical, not reflecting a collective project, give a better image of those who deliver them than of a supposed objective; nothing more authoritarian than such propositions permitted only by a privileged position." (Ferro, 1972, 208)

As a pedagogical program commissioned to him by Grenoble's School of Architecture, it is understandable the broad historical and structural framework in which the author proposes to locate architectural manufacture. Its radicalism though comes straight from his earlier work in Sao Paulo as a professor at FAU, a member of a notable group of readers of Marx's *Capital* at USP, a political activist engaged on a socialist revolution in Brazil, due to which he was arrested, tortured, persecuted, prevented from teaching, before searching for exile in France.

Many of these ideas would reach maturity only by 1976, when Ferro started to publish in Brazil parts of the book he was writing in France, and which soon would turn him into one of the most pervasive Brazilian architectural theorists. *O Canteiro e o Desenho* [The construction site and the design], first published as a book in 1979, is not indeed an account on Brazilian architecture. Turning to Marx's theory of value, as well as to the Frankfurt School, as well as to series of studies on sociology of work and the philosophy of techniques the author takes modernity at large and the process of rationalization to grapple the status of architectural design as "an irreplaceable mediation for the totalization of production under capital" through the divisions set between thinking and making, duty and power, manual labor and intellectual work. In the beginning of the book he also acknowledges the impact of the work published in 1973 by Andre Gorz, *Critique de la Division du Travail*, as a pathway to the study of commodity's fetishism, alienation and foreclosure within architectural production: design, like technology or science, is not at all neutral, but "the mold where the idiotized labour is crystallized" (Ferro, 1979, 110; Ferro, 2011, 115). After all, "if design sets itself as an immediate mobile for production, and if it prints in its symbolic script, it is because it materializes separation and reifies disruption." (Ferro, 1977, 79) Or else, design is

"An indispensable tool for despotic direction. To speak about design, as we know it now, implies dependence and despotism. (...) Because it was made what it is through the separation of reason from concretion, and through its violent break with production. (...) Design is thus one of the embodiments of the heteronomy of the construction site. (...) It is an obligatory path for the extraction of surplus-value and cannot be separated from any other design for production." (Ferro, 1979, 107-108)

There was no other way to decipher the farce of architecture except by referring to its material production and to its role in the production of space as exchange-value.

As a matter of fact, a reader of Panofsky, Blunt and Tafuri, this general hypothesis referred to the whole history of perspective since its invention in the Renaissance to its contradictory history until the first machine age, to use Reyner Banham's category, from Michelangelo to Le Corbusier and beyond. (Ferro, 2010, 193-200) In a work published much later, the author specifies his own methodological alternative. For him, architecture was always marked by the complexities and tensions within its production and should always be seen as a dialectical whole, involving architectural schemes and projects, material investment, execution, reception, use and management. Any analysis of a piece of architecture should thus not focus on the object alone, but on this whole constructive genesis within the realm of human work, labor relations, and political economy. (Ferro, 1996)

This whole theoretical framework had of course great impact on the critique of Brazilian contemporary architecture, marked by tremendous inequalities between the local elite of "mannerist" architects, aesthetically up-to-date and even innovative, and a gigantic unskilled work-force, crushed by some of the most tragic conditions of production, deprived from all benefits of modernization. Owing a lot to a wider Brazilian and Latin American debate on underdevelopment, seen as part of the uneven development of world capitalism, Ferro would clearly take sides with the working classes, investing on what he would take as revolutionary devices, such as: the inevitable manual work within a manufacture as a possible form of material, physical, and bodily awareness; the openness for improvisation and for self-determination of production; the release of antagonistic tensions, the free association between groups of producers in order to overcome separations; in a word, the overcoming of a design for production on behalf of a production design, with all its mutability, discontinuity, and collective partaking. (Arantes, 2004, 117-119, 180).

Art, Matter and Radicalism

No questions about the persistence of radical representations, still now rather potent in the Brazilian architectural system, as well as operative on architect's collective memory, imagery and aspirations. They have varied in terms of objects, categories, strategies and discourses, and eventually surrendered to the limits of their own historical ground and theoretical choices. It is interesting though to realize how

much this radical bias has advanced to the understanding of modern architecture as a global force.

Both Mario Pedrosa and Sergio Ferro were strongly influenced by their local backgrounds and had to deal with contemporary economic, political and ideological dilemmas in Brazil: cultural closure and creativity, modernization and dictatorship, industrialization and underdevelopment. But in face of the disciplinary field, it seems that their approaches to architecture are the most innovative and refreshing. Indeed it has been often forgotten their connection to the international state of mind concerning criticism and design. In Pedrosa's case: the fatigue with functionalism, the early

reference to Gestalt theory to face aesthetic issues; the appeal to new kinds of monumentality and public art, the concept of modernity as an unfinished, movable and always surprising project. In Ferro's case: the investigation of design and the construction site as part of political economy and the micro-divisions of labor; the approach to Hegel, Marx and various sources of Marxism, to psychoanalysis and semiotics, to structuralism and post-structuralism; the proposition of a critical, reflexive, or non-designed architectural practice.

In fact, one's emphasis on the aesthetic power and the public relevance of architecture, and the other's obsession with the material relations in which architecture is inevitably engaged, seems to have illuminated areas still neglected by the majority of contemporary architectural criticism, mostly focused on the work and life of architects. Their approaches thus are not only relevant for the understanding of architectural production in a developing country like Brazil but anywhere where art and labor have developed in modern terms, that is, entrenched in contradictions. Indeed, Pedrosa has immortalized the paradoxical idea of Brazil as a country condemned to modernity. Free from old traditions and a stable national identity, there would be no other future to Brazil than to engage and critically interfere on the universal trends of art, architecture and civilization. To Ferro, any project of emancipation, or any sort of experimental design should be tested in face of the social relations of production it proposes or entangles. On that path, though, architects in the country should not ever stand comfortably over previous achievements, but always search for values of inventiveness, awareness and liberation, both in art and politics. This is certainly just as productive an output in cosmopolitan terms as it is

locally grounded. No matter its uncanny contingencies and obstacles, it is possibly there that they offer great contributions to contemporary radical criticism and practices.

References

- Andrade, M. de. (1944) Brazil Builds, in: **Folha da Manhã**, São Paulo, 23. Mar. 1944.
- Arantes, O.B.F. (1991). **Mário Pedrosa: itinerário crítico**. São Paulo: Editora Página Aberta.
- Arantes, O.B.F. (1995). Dados biográficos (cronologia), in: Pedrosa, Mário. **Política das artes**. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, pp. 349-363.
- Arantes, P.F. (2002). **Arquitetura Nova: Sérgio Ferro, Flávio Império e Rodrigo Lefèvre, de Artigas aos mutirões**. São Paulo: Editora 34.
- Arantes, P.F. (2004). Reinventing the building site, in Forty, A.; Andreolli, E. (Orgs.). **Brazil's Modern Architecture**. Londres: Phaidon, pp. 170-201.
- Artigas, J.B.V. (1952). Os Caminhos da Arquitetura Moderna, in: **Caminhos da Arquitetura**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004, pp. 31-50.
- Artigas, J.B.V. (1954). Considerações Sobre Arquitetura Brasileira, in: **Caminhos da Arquitetura**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004, pp. 51-55.
- Artigas, J.B.V. (1967). O Desenho, in: **Caminhos da Arquitetura**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004, pp. 108-118.
- Candido, A. (1967) Literatura e cultura de 1900 a 1945, in: **Literatura e Sociedade**. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, pp. 127-160.
- Candido, A. (1973) Literatura e subdesenvolvimento, in: **Argumento**, n. 1, out. 1973, pp. 6-24.
- Candido, A. (1995). Radicalismos, in: **Vários Escritos**. São Paulo: Duas Cidades.

- Cappello, M.B.C. (2006). **Arquitetura em Revista: arquitetura moderna no Brasil e sua recepção nas revistas francesas, inglesas e italianas (1945-1960)**. São Paulo, Universidade de São Paulo (Doutorado).
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000). "Historicism and the narration of modernity", in **Provincializing Europe**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 27-113.
- Costa, L. (1952). **Arquitetura Brasileira**. Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Saúde.
- Dedecca, P.G. (2012). **Sociabilidade, Crítica e Posição: o meio arquitetônico, as revistas especializadas e o debate do moderno em São Paulo (1945-1965)**. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo (Mestrado).
- Ferro, S. (1967). Arquitetura Nova, in: Ferro, S. **Arquitetura e trabalho livre**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006, pp. 47-58.
- Ferro, S. (1977). II - O Desenho; **Almanaque** No. 3, pp. 74-101.
- Ferro, S. (1979). **O Canteiro e o Desenho**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006.
- Ferro, S. (1994). Programa para polo de ensino, pesquisa e experimentação da construção, in: Ferro, S. **Arquitetura e trabalho livre**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006, pp. 222-232.
- Ferro, S. (1996). Questões de método, in: Ferro, S. **Arquitetura e trabalho livre**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006, pp. 233-240.
- Ferro, S. (2010). **A história da arquitetura vista do canteiro: três aulas de Sérgio Ferro**. São Paulo, FAU-USP.
- Ferro, S. (2011) História da arquitetura e projeto da história, entrevista a Felipe Contier. **Designio**, Ns. 11-12, pp. 113-126.
- Ferro, S; Lefèvre, R. (1963). Proposta inicial para um debate: possibilidades de atuação, in: Ferro, S. **Arquitetura e trabalho livre**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006, pp. 33-36.
- Ferro, S; Lefèvre, R.; Império, F. (1965). Arquitetura experimental, in: Ferro, S. **Arquitetura e trabalho livre**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006, pp. 37-44.
- Fiammenghi, J.B. (2020). **Max Bill, a crítica e o ensino de arquitetura no Brasil, 1948-1962**. São Paulo, FAU-USP (Trabalho Final de Graduação).
- Gabriel, M.F. (2017) **Mário Pedrosa e a arquitetura brasileira: autonomia e síntese das artes**. São Paulo, FAU-USP (Doutorado).
- Goodwin, P. (1943). **Brazil Builds: architecture new and old, 1652-1942**. New York: MoMA.
- Junqueira, M. (2009). **Poéticas da razão e construção: conversa de paulista**. São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo (Livre Docência).
- Koury, A. P. (2003). **Grupo Arquitetura Nova: Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre e Sergio Ferro**. São Paulo: Romano Guerra/ Edusp/ Fapesp.
- Liernur, J. F. (1999). The South American way; **Block** No.4, pp. 23-41.
- Martins, C. A. F. (1999). Hay algo de irracional...; **Block** No.4, pp. 8-22.
- Mesquita, A.M. (2011). A presença estrangeira em Habitat (1950-54) e Mirante das Artes, Etc. (1967-68), in: Lanna, A.; Peixoto, F.; Lira, J.; Sampaio, M.R.A. (Orgs). **São Paulo, os estrangeiros e a construção das cidades**. São Paulo: Alameda, pp. 521-542.
- Niemeyer, O. (1958). Depoimento; **Módulo** No. 9, pp. 3-6.
- Nobre, A.L. (2008). **Fios Cortantes: projeto e produto, arquitetura e design no Rio de Janeiro (1950-1970)**. Rio de Janeiro: PUC-RJ (Doutorado).
- Pedrosa, M. (1933). As tendências sociais da arte e Käthe Kollwitz, in: **Política das artes: textos escolhidos I**. São Paulo: Edusp, 1995, pp. 35-56.
- Pedrosa, M. (1943). Portinari: de Brodóski aos murais de Washington, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 7-25.
- Pedrosa, M. (1944). Calder, escultor de cata-ventos, in: **Modernidade cá e lá: textos escolhidos IV** São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2000, pp. 51-66.
- Pedrosa, M. (1947). Pela independência da arte, in: **Política das artes: textos escolhidos I**. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1995, pp. 67-68.

- Pedrosa, M. (1952a). Arte e revolução, in: **Política das artes: textos escolhidos I**. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1995, pp. 95-98.
- Pedrosa, M. (1952b). Espaço e Arquitetura, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 251-254.
- Pedrosa, M. (1953a). A arquitetura moderna no Brasil, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 255-264.
- Pedrosa, M. (1953b). Arquitetura e atualidade. in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 265-268.
- Pedrosa, M. (1957a). Arquitetura e crítica de arte I, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 269-271.
- Pedrosa, M. (1957b). A crítica de arte na arquitetura, in **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 273-275.
- Pedrosa, M. (1957c). Arquitetura e crítica de arte II, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 277-279.
- Pedrosa, M. (1957d). O ponto de vista do crítico, in: **Política das artes: textos escolhidos I**. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1995, pp. 161-164.
- Pedrosa, M. (1957e). Reflexões em torno da nova capital, in **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 303-316.
- Pedrosa, M. (1958a). O depoimento de Oscar Niemeyer - I, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. Aracy Amaral, org., São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 289-291.
- Pedrosa, M. (1958b). Utopia – obra de arte, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. Aracy Amaral, org., São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 317-319.
- Pedrosa, M. (1959). Introdução à arquitetura brasileira II, in: **Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981, pp. 329-335.
- Pedrosa, M. (1973). A bienal de cá para lá, in: **Política das artes: textos escolhidos I**. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1995, pp. 217-284.
- Ridenti, M. (2010). **O fantasma da revolução brasileira**. 2a. ed. São Paulo: Ed. Unesp.
- Schwarz, R. (1994). Pelo prisma da arquitetura, in: **Sequências Brasileiras**. São Paulo Companhia das Letras, 1999, pp. 199-204.
- Schwarz, R. (1978). Cultura e Política, 1964-1969, in **O Pai de família e outros estudos**. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, pp. 61-92.
- Scott, G. (1914). **The Architecture of Humanism: a study in the history of taste**. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company
- Silva, N. M. da (2017). **As revistas Acrópole e Habitat e a consolidação da Arquitetura Moderna Brasileira (1950-1956)**. São Carlos, SP, IAU-USP (Mestrado)
- Stuchi, F.T. (2007) **Revista Habitat: um olhar moderno sobre os anos 50 em São Paulo**. São Paulo, FAU-USP (Mestrado)
- Tinem, N. (2006). **O Alvo do Olhar Estrangeiro: o Brasil na historiografia da arquitetura moderna**. João Pessoa: Ed. Universidade Federal da Paraíba.
- Vasconcelos, S. de (1957). Crítica de arte e arquitetura; AD No. 24.
- Xavier, A. (2003). **Depoimento de uma geração**. São Paulo: Cosac Naify.
- Zein, R. V. (2005). **A arquitetura da escola paulista brutalista 1953-1973**. Porto Alegre, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (Doutorado).