

To read Brazilian *Arquitetura Nova*: Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre and Sérgio Ferro architects

Para ler Arquitetura Nova Brasileira: arquitetos Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre e Sérgio Ferro

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The first studies examined the role of Grupo *Arquitetura Nova* in contemporary Brazilian architecture that was done almost 20 years ago. (Koury, 1999 [2003], Arantes, 2000 [2002]). The *arq.urb* journal, from the Graduate Program in Architecture and Urbanism at São Judas University, features an edition that seeks to broaden the debate on the multifaceted work of architects Flávio Império Rodrigo Lefèvre and Sérgio Ferro. These early studies admitted that the three architects' work in the 1960s was a co-production between them, as Sérgio Ferro repeatedly stated in his interviews.

This narrative has recently been reevaluated through studies that address the specificities of these architects' individual contributions in the path of Buzzar, 2001 [2019] and Guimarães (2006). Buzzar had clarified the role of Rodrigo Lefèvre in the company Hidroservice. Recently Koury (2019) has brought together and introduced Lefèvre's texts to a broader audience than the scholars of Grupo *Arquitetura Nova*.

Gorni (2004), Garcia (2012), and Quevedo (2019) have studied Flávio Império's multifaceted work bringing light to his contribution to architecture, scenography, painting, respectively. On the other hand, the study of Sérgio Ferro's career gained momentum from the collection of texts, organized and presented by Arantes (2006), which spread the author's thinking, previously dispersed in old issues of magazines with restricted circulation. The research on Ferro's career is addressed by Costa (2008), who analyzed his teaching performance, and Contier (2010), who presented his theoretical and historiographic contribution from his move to France in 1972.

This special issue aims to gather some unpublished contributions from this ongoing research in the country such as the articles of Guimarães, Quevedo, Garcia and

Contier in this special issue. But it also seeks the contributions of national authors recognized for their contribution to the historiography of Brazilian architecture, which in other ways have also accumulated reflections from Grupo *Arquitetura Nova*, such as Ruth Verde Zein, José Tavares Lira and João Marcos Lopes. Zein and Lira had respectively illuminated the importance of Rodrigo Lefèvre to the teaching of architecture and Sérgio Ferro's role in the history of architecture criticism in Brazil. Lopes, in turn, points out methodological elements for the study of Ferro's work.

The international interest in the work of Grupo *Arquitetura Nova* has been noticed in events, such as the Industries of Architecture seminar, held in Newcastle in 2014 (Thomas, Amhoff and Beech, 2016) or the exhibition, "Dreams seen up close," a room dedicated to Grupo *Arquitetura Nova* in the 2nd Biennale d'Architecture d'Orléans, in 2020. Katie Lloyd Thomas, one of the organizers of the seminar in New Castle, and Davide Sacconi, curator of the exhibition in Orléans, contribute to this special edition of the *New Brazilian Architecture*. Davide Sacconi presents Ferro's political praxis through architecture and offers us a theoretical-critical reading on the work of the group *Arquitetura Nova*.

Ferro produced a significant part of his work in France, where he moved and in 1972 and built a long career as a painter and teacher. Some of these works were originally written in French and only recently translated into Portuguese Ferro (2015 and 2016). The teaching experience at the Dessin / Chantier laboratory in Grenoble should also be considered, primarily through the work of his closest collaborators such as Chérif Kebbal, Philippe Potié, and Cyrille Simonnet, or Patrice Doat, at the Craterre laboratory. Indeed, Ferro left a significant legacy in France, which goes far

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beyond the didactic project for the Isle d'Abeau experimental site. Vincent Michel noted Ferro's contribution in presenting the French edition of *O Canteiro e o Desenho* (2005). But the Ferro's group followed different paths, even departing from the Brazilian's premises.

The contributions of João Marcos Lopes and Katie Lloyd Thomas, and Christopher Donaldson point to the expansion of studies on Sérgio Ferro's work in the United Kingdom. In this sense, an important initiative is a project for translating into English Sérgio Ferro's written work, carried out by a vast collaborative research network between Brazil and the United Kingdom. Marcos and Thomas had an essential role in it. In turn, Donaldson contributes with the text John Ruskin's *Shells*, whose developments in the interpretation of Sérgio Ferro's legacy in the tradition of English romanticism are explored in the presentation by Cláudio Amaral.

Sérgio Ferro's theoretical work has aroused great interest in the United Kingdom and the United States. Harvard Design Magazine translated the controversial article by Sérgio Ferro [1988] "Concrete as a weapon" in 2018. Also, the architectural projects of Rodrigo Lefèvre have been of ongoing interest to professor William Watson in the United States. He has been researching Lefèvre's work and contributes a text on Lefèvre's proposals for migrant housing along the periphery of São Paulo.

From the USA, Fernando Lara and Patricio del Real, who are recognized authors due to their contribution to the history of Latin American architecture, reinterpreted in this number, the meaning of the military dictatorship in contemporary architecture in Latin America. Although with very different methodological perspectives, the two texts that open this edition allow us to shed light on a central theme for both trends, the engaged and critical architecture such as Grupo Arquitetura nova, and that which attended the cycle of economic development associated with the Military State. Lara presents a manifest framing the relations between modernization and colonization and claiming architecture's political engagement today. Del Real reconstructs the plot of cultural and political ties between Latin America and the United States during this period by analyzing the Museum of Modern Art's architectural exhibition in New York. Both contribution are based on a transnational history and allows the reader to revisit this period of political and social history of Latin America through Architecture.

The set of texts gathered here demonstrates the vitality of the work of Grupo Arquitetura Nova, which continues to instigate contemporary reflections. Regardless of the

regional scope in which it was previously recorded by Yves Bruand (1971 [1981]), as an effect of the leadership of the architect João Batista Vilanova Artigas in São Paulo, or even expanding the interpretations and meanings of Sérgio Ferro's work in the political-cultural sphere as done by Bicca's pioneering work (1984).

If it is not possible to deny the formation of a qualified group of researchers in the cultural and academic environment that today is dedicated to the study of the work of Grupo Arquitetura Nova, we also cannot deny the universality of the issues raised by Sérgio Ferro, Flávio Império, and Rodrigo Lefèvre. What can be attested by the inclusion of the work of these architects in the historiography of Brazilian architecture produced in Brazil (Segawa, 1997, Bastos, 2003, Bastos and Zein, 2010) and internationally broadcasted (Andreoli & Forti, 2007, Anelli, 2008 and Williams, 2009).

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We need a political architecture to resist a civilizing architecture

Precisamos de uma arquitetura política para resistir a uma arquitetura civilizatória.

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Abstract

Architecture has always been a tool for spatial control. The civilizing mission imbedded in our profession comes with a layer of coloniality that we need to first be aware of and then subvert. Arturo Escobar's discussion of colonization as something inherent to modernization explains that our civilization and our civilizing processes are directly responsible for the social evils that circle us today. The question that comes regards the role of architecture as both a tool and a result of such modernization/colonization and the possible antidotes that I believe lies in the political realm.

Resumo

A Arquitetura sempre foi um mecanismo de controle territorial. A missão civilizadora embutida em nossa profissão vem com uma camada de colonialidade da qual precisamos primeiro estar conscientes e depois subverter. Arturo Escobar em sua discussão explica a colonização como algo inerente à modernização, sendo nossa civilização e nossos processos civilizatórios diretamente responsáveis pelos males sociais que nos cercam hoje. A questão resultante diz respeito ao papel da arquitetura como ferramenta e resultado de tal modernização/colonização e os possíveis antídotos que eu acredito se encontram na esfera política.

We need a political architecture to resist a civilizing architecture.

Even before this year's Covid-19 emergency that placed us all in quarantine the ugly facets of our Western civilization were already visible: unbearable inequalities, unsustainable resource exploitation, deep rooted sexism, racism and xenophobia. I propose that we think of all the evils just mentioned and so many others as inherent components of our civilizing processes, and that we think of political processes as the only possible solution for the herculean challenges of overcoming them. I know it sounds counter-intuitive, for according to the prevalent common sense, civilization is something that everybody should aspire and politics, well politics is the dirty job of pushing and pulling on the inevitable path of our Western civilization. I had to disagree with the established norms here for I see colonization in every act of modernization that lies at the core of the West hegemony. The work of Walter Dignolo and Arturo Escobar are by now well-known enough that I don't need to explain who they are and why what they wrote matters. Nevertheless, I suspect that very few of my fellow architects and even the scholars of architecture have not yet fully grasped the consequences of the modernity/coloniality group (as they are known) in deconstructing many tenets of our discipline.

In that sense I apologize for any redundancy but I will start by remind us all that civilization is rooted in the Latin term *Civitas*, meaning the social body of citizens bound together by law. In contemporary language *civitas* gave us city, civilization, citizenship. *Polis* is a Greek word that also means a group of citizens that agreed upon certain rules and customs. Used as a synonym of city, the term *polis* gave us politics but also policy, politeness, police. But their similarities end here. The Greek idea of *polis* implies smaller groups of people deciding their rules and customs while the Roman idea of *civitas* implies the imposition of the law over the population at large. *Polis* is grass-roots, *civitas* is top-down.

Moving back to Arturo's Escobar paradigmatic analysis of colonization as something inherent to modernization, it is not hard to understand that our civilization and our civilizing processes are directly responsible for the social evils that circle us today. The root of our *civitas/modernity* lies in Rene Descartes' separation between *res cogitans* (mind) from *res extensa* (everything else), the mind of European men were now 'masters' of everything else that is not only land and resources but also all women and all non-European men. For Descartes, there is no soul or mind in

nature, only in men, angels and God. This synthesis made Descartes second only to Plato in the Western tradition. In a recent article published at *The Plan Journal* I have elaborated on how the occupation of the Americas triggered transformations in the discipline of architecture that we had not examined before. In the word of Argentinean scholar Roberto Fernandez, "no territory has been closer to a pure modernity, from the Renaissance utopias to the energetic application of the ideas of counterreformation (1600s), illuminist (1700s) and positivism (1800s)."

Don't take me wrong, I celebrate many of the achievements of our cartesian modernization such as clean water, sanitation, vaccines, encyclopedias in my pocket, and air travel (or whatever new format of visiting different people and places we shall have after the Covid pandemic). But I cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that such modernization / civilization was built to benefit the white male, at the expense of everybody not-white and not-male.

The question that follows is about the role of architecture in this process. From the 16th century military treaties that used geometry (as developed North and South of the Mediterranean) to optimize the European occupation of the Americas, to the grid that turned Amerindian lands into commodities to be bought and sold along with millions of African bodies, to the churches and chapels that gave a divine reasoning for such tragedies, the history of architecture overlaps with the hegemonic modernization/civilization that brought us here now.

It is of course easy to point to centuries ago and see coloniality in the actions of kings, cardinals, *conquistadores* and *coronéis*. More difficult is to see coloniality or the dark side of our civilization in beautiful buildings that we not only admire, we celebrate daily in our seminars, lectures and writings.

Starting in chronological order, we rarely discuss the fact that Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* was built to "civilize" North Africans that were emigrating to continental France and had Marseille as their main port. The history of the *Pieds-Noirs* (dark feet) people cannot be detached from the French government decision to build the first *Unité* in Marseille for Corbusier consistently tried to see his architecture as a civilizing tool. When we use the coloniality/modernity theoretical approach to look into modern architecture we perceive that it worked as an instrument of expulsion and control everywhere. In *Eugenics in the Garden* Fabiola Lopez-Duran found several references to white supremacist eugenics ideas in Le Corbusier notebooks.

The same notebooks that dozens of scholars had studied before and choose not to see the eugenic references. Despite having invented and benefited from it, Europeans do not have the monopoly of coloniality. The campus of the UNAM displaced an Ejido – communal land – in the southern periphery of Ciudad de Mexico, Mies iconic Crown Hall displaced an apartment building (coincidentally called Meca) which housed a thriving African-American community. So many of our celebrated modernist buildings in Rio de Janeiro were built on top of *cortiços* violently removed, starting with mayor Pereira Passos in 1904 and continuing all the way to mayor Eduardo Paes one century later. As a student of architecture 30 years ago I was enchanted with the undulating forms of the Balbina Environmental Center designed by Severiano Porto, only to learn 20 years later that Balbina is one of the worse disasters ever built by Brazilian engineers, its shallow lake destroyed miles and miles of forest, displacing thousands of families in order to generate only 30% of the expected electricity. As a result, Balbina generates more green-house gas than a coal plant of the same capacity due to the huge amount of methane constantly liberated by the shallow since operations started in 1989.

Architecture has always been a tool for spatial control and Brazil has always been a huge land grabbing machine since 1500. We know very little about the reasons for the murder of Marielle Franco but it is surely linked to land invasion (*grilhagem*) by militiamen in the west of Rio of January. We know a little more about how this land was managed before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500, but it is worth remembering that the first European economic activity in Brazil was to convince the natives to cut off Páu-Brasil and send it to the other side of the ocean. Our land was named after a process of deforestation with cheap labor to export commodities with low added value. What a destination!

To overcome this tragic fate, we need to decolonize the stories of our architecture and this implies several actions:

To realize that there is no modernization without colonization. For each Esplanada do Castelo or Pampulha that we built, hundreds of poor families were expelled from their homes, indemnified or not, so that modernism settled in all its exuberance.

To realize that each of these wonderful buildings existed before in wooden forms cut from some area of Atlantic forest (in the case of the Rio-SP axis where they are more

numerous) and soon afterwards be filled with steel, limestone and clay excavated from some other site.

To realize that poor shoulders (mostly blacks and mulattos) carried each of these materials in exchange for a salary that did not allow them to enjoy the modern city, forcing their families to build their own houses, without a document of ownership, without water, electricity or sewage.

To realize that architecture is an integral part of the economy's financialization process, draining resources previously invested in production and generating employment and income, carried through the financial system to processes displaced from the world of production.

To realize that modern architecture has always brought with it a moral component that seldom had a progressive bias such as the women's empowerment project of Conjunto Pedregulho and in most cases normalized the inequality expressed in maid's rooms and service elevators. Regardless of the progressive or reactionary bias, modern architecture has always been an instrument of coloniality in the sense of teaching the masses how they should live their lives.

Is there any hope for a progressive, truly empowering architecture in the future? I dare to be optimistic and to answer yes. Moreover, a Brazilian experiment called Participatory Budgeting have already proven to a powerful instrument of community organization and empowerment. Created by the PT mayors in the late 1980s, the Participatory Budgeting brought to the table parts of society that had been excluded for centuries. Allow me to diverge a bit to discuss the fact that architecture has always been a tool of exclusion, although we dress it as exclusivity. Exclusivity and exclusion are one and the same, one only exists because of the other. Architecture has celebrated exclusivity for too long and it is time to understand that the real consequence of an exclusive design is the exclusion of the majority that cannot be there. What the Participatory Budget induced in Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte (the two largest cities that experienced it the longest) was a significant increase in political participation and a popularization of the terms of the debate. Conceived and implemented when municipal budgets were tight, the Participatory Budget was sidelined when the GDP growth of the Lula years brought big money to big construction companies. A movement that grew out of polis became civitas once it reached the complexity of

the federal government. Other groups took over the grass roots space, groups that preached religion, violence and hate.

On the pessimist side, we have not yet fully examined the ecological impact of every line we draw. At the XII São Paulo Architectural Bienalle I presented a study of the ecological footprint of the Pampulha Chapel (Niemeyer 1942); Brasilia Cathedral (Niemeyer 1960); MASP (Bo Bardi 1967) and FAUUSP (Artigas 1968). My students at Texas calculated the mineral breakdown of those famous buildings, and the volumetric impact that those left in the landscape. Plotted over an aerial photo of the Mariana / Bento Rodrigues dam disaster of 2016, the four paradigmatic buildings had the holes that each demanded drawn to the scale of Bento Rodrigues covered in toxic mud.

A political architecture in the sense of opening the decision-making process to a variety of actors could reactivate the power of design as an antidote to the coloniality consequences of our modernization endeavors. Arturo Escobar leads the way again with his publications around the design of the pluriverse¹. In his words, we should “ask whether design can actually contribute to enabling the communal forms of autonomy (...) mobilizing the grass-roots communities of Latin America firmly in the scope of design, perhaps even at its center in the case of those wishing to work closely with communities in struggle”. The synthesis of Escobar teaches us that we should work “from the bottom, to the left and with the earth”.

Contemporary architecture inherited several problems from modernity, and those problems create many layers of coloniality. We have an industry that consumes an insurmountable amount of resources to create instruments of exclusion, guided by the ego of a few “enlightened” white men. The politics that we need now are the precise opposite of this. The participatory / collaborative processes “from the bottom” are the antidote for the authorship trap that holds architecture hostage of a few inflated egos. The “left” direction moves architecture to become a tool of inclusion, abandoning once and for all the obsession with exclusivity that disguises the forces of exclusion that supports it. And “with the Earth” reminds us that unlike what Descartes

proposed 400 years ago, we are not separate from all other beings in this small planet of ours.

As an undergraduate student of architecture, thirty years ago, I had a professor called Radamés Teixeira that used to repeat ad infinitum a very simple question to all of us during design reviews: how does your project makes the world a little better? Professor Radamés is now 96 years old. He grew up, studied and taught for 4 decades under the belief that modernization would lead to better lives, and it did in so many aspects. But he also understood that every line that we draw will generate some coloniality, will few richer than most, will abuse ecological resources and will often be the result of the architect’s egotistical projections. His question remains as a guide for our very much needed political stance.

How does your project makes the world a bit better?

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Modern + Architecture = Democracy: Laundering Dictatorship's Cultural Capital at MoMA

Modernismo + Arquitetura = Democracia: o apagamento da ditadura do Capital Cultural no MoMa

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Abstract

As cultural artefacts, architectural exhibitions have fostered dominant political imaginaries. In the mid-20th Century, New York's Museum of Modern Art and its Department of Architecture and Design presented modern architecture as a symbol of liberty and democracy under the egis of the United States. Modern architecture in Latin America played an important role in this worldview. Starting with the exhibition *Brazil Builds*, MoMA deployed a strong curatorial agenda to stage this message and used its exhibitions as cultural weapons to manage dictatorships in the region and to explain to U.S. audiences how "democracy" worked in Latin America.

Resumo

Como artefatos culturais, as mostras de arquitetura fomentaram imaginários políticos dominantes. Em meados da metade do século 20, o Museu de Arte Moderna de Nova York e seu Departamento de Arquitetura e Design apresentaram a arquitetura moderna como um símbolo de liberdade e democracia sob incentivo governo dos Estados Unidos. A arquitetura moderna na América Latina desempenhou um papel importante nessa visão de mundo. Começando com a exposição *Brazil Builds*, o MoMA (Museu de Arte Moderna de Nova York) implantou uma forte agenda curatorial sendo palco para essa mensagem, usando suas exposições como armas culturais para gerir ditaduras América Latina e para explicar ao público americano como a "democracia" funcionava nessa região.

Modern + Architecture = Democracy: Laundering Dictatorship's Cultural Capital at MoMA



Figure 1. Estadio Mendoza model being hung for *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980*. Photo by author.

A wood crate arrived at the galleries, wheeled in by several art-handlers. We all stood in conversation around the low square box, eagerly waiting to see what was inside. The handlers opened the crate and there it was: the model of the Estadio Mendoza in Argentina (1976-78). Its grey body was both striking and dull. The light wood-color of the crate and the white protective Styrofoam surrounding the inside edges of the box accentuated the contrast, not to mention the spotlights that somehow flattened the reliefs and the sinuous shape of the stadium seating. The model was carefully lifted out of the crate and, in a series of well-coordinated steps with the help of a hydraulic mobile scissor-lift, it was hung on a gallery wall. The process brought the model to life, with shifting shadows that revealed why this work of architecture was chosen as part of the the 2015 exhibition *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980* at the Museum of Modern Art.

The stadium is a large work that negotiates a monumental and symbolic topography in Mendoza, Argentina. It is located on the Parque General San Martín, a late 19th century urban park by French-Argentine landscape architect Carlos Thays that honors the Argentine Libertador José de San Martín and services the city of Mendoza, a key regional center that serves as a gateway to the monumental Andes mountain range. The sporting complex sits on a natural hollow next to the Cerro de la Gloria and the monument to the Ejército de Los Andes that commemorates the crossing — one of many — of the mountain range in the wars to gain independence from Spain. The verdant site was charged with national and transnational “Latin” American symbolism, and, in 1978, it was woven into international sporting imaginaries when the stadium hosted the FIFA World Cup. By then, nearly two years had passed since the military coup that, in March 24, 1976, initiated what was officially termed the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (National Reorganization Process).

The Estadio Mendoza is associated with a military dictatorship that ruled Argentina between 1976 and 1983. This “original sin” is inescapable and emerged as a pointed criticism of the MoMA exhibition causing, moral indignation among a vocal contingent. The sign of dictatorial rule marked many of the works presented in *Latin America in Construction*; which is no minor issue as it is more than just “guilt by association.” How did we, as curators of the show, manage this sign? Can architecture as a cultural object survive state terror? We enter dangerous territories. Visitors with a “moral eye” called into question the inclusion of the model of the stadium and other works in the exhibition. Should dictatorship or its taint in the building of significant works be a criterion of curatorial selection?

The moral indignation that emerged with the Estadio model has sound historical roots in exhibitions that not only altogether dismissed anti-democratic practices but also, and more importantly, went so far as to transform authoritarian regimes into democratic ones. There were diverse reasons for such willful silences and manipulations; yet, these all converged in the equation: *modernism = democracy*, a principle that underwrote most, if not all, exhibitions produced by the Department of Architecture and Design (A&D) of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The groundbreaking 1943 exhibition *Brazil Builds* is paradigmatic of such acts of political transubstantiation. Without irony, its curator, Philip L. Goodwin, and those in-

volved in the exhibition presented modern architecture in Brazil as the vanguard of International modernism:

Other capitals of the world lag far behind Rio de Janeiro in architectural design. While Federal classic in Washington, Royal Academy archeology in London, Nazi classic in Munich, and neo-imperial in Moscow are still triumphant, Brazil has had the courage to break away from safe and easy conservatism. Its fearless departure from the slavery of traditionalism has put a depth charge under the antiquated routine of governmental thought and has set free the spirit of creative design. The capitals of the world that will need rebuilding after the war can look to no finer models than the modern buildings of the capital city of Brazil.¹



Figure 2. Installation view of *Brazil Builds* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Jan. 13-Feb. 28, 1943). Photo by Soichi Sunami.

Such panegyrics equated modern architecture with enlightened government, and helped veil the fact that the United States had enlisted the dictatorship of Getulio Vargas in the United Nations fight against fascism. This did not go unnoticed; yet, in the context of the Second World War, any criticism on political grounds was to be summarily dismissed. After all, everyone involved was fighting the “good fight.”

¹Philip Goodwin cited in MoMA press release: “Brazilian Government Leads Western Hemisphere in Encouraging Modern Architecture Exhibit of Brazilian Architecture Opens at Museum of Modern Art,” January 12, 1943. Exh. 213, Curatorial Exhibitions Files (CUR), The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.

The struggle against authoritarianism, however, didn't extend to Latin America. It was enough to focus on the extraordinary building and the construction boom caused by the war as a gesture of creative freedom that would someday transform into political liberation.

The Modern was not alone in cleansing the image of the Vargas dictatorship.² The museum participated in a vast transnational information network that under the Pan-Americanism of Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) employed every possible means to wage “psychological warfare” in the Americas. The war transformed architecture into propaganda. Many worried about this newfound activist ground of architecture culture, as accusations of propaganda, cast doubt on the formula that equated aesthetic modernism with political democracy. A careful reader of the exhibition catalogue can identify the two key institutional grounds that enabled MoMA's project in Brazil: the Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (National Historic, Artistic and Patrimony Service, SPAHN) and the Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda (Press and Propaganda Department, DIP), the Vargas's regime censorship machine. The exhibition consolidated the image of Gustavo Capanema as a progressive minister, serving the nation rather than an authoritarian regime.³ Capanema's image, along with SPHAN Director Rodrigo Mello Franco de Andrade, accompanied those of modern architects at the end of Goodwin's catalogue. Missing was that of the Minister of propaganda and fascist sympathizer, Lourival Fontes. The Vargas regime had no overarching official stylistic policy and each ministry advanced its own cultural imaginary. Yet, cultural management, especially the projection of Brazil's image abroad, could not escape Fontes's powerful DIP.

The Brazilian architecture show was a collaborative endeavor. This explains how Goodwin, who knew no Portuguese and whose trip “was taken on the spur of the moment [...] partly on a good will mission and partly to investigate the advanced modern architecture,” as he himself argued, was able to produce such a satisfacto-

² On the many initiatives see: Antonio Pedro Tota, *O impeliasmo sedutor: A americanização do Brasil na época da Segunda Guerra* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras/Editora Schwarz Ltd., 2000). Darlene Sadlier, *Americans All: Good Neighbor Cultural Diplomacy in World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

³ On Capanema as linchpin of progressiveness and the complex dynamics of cultural management: Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil: The First Vargas Regime, 1930-1945* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2001), 79-88.

ry and convincing message.⁴ Crafted to shape U.S. public opinion, it reversed the hegemonic circulation of information and cultural values, now flowing south to north, violating the most important CIAA rule: to demonstrate U.S. leadership in all matters. The MoMA exhibition made clear that architects in the U.S. and the world needed to pay attention to what was happening in Brazil. "We can learn a great deal from the courageous architects of Brazil," Elizabeth Mock argued.⁵ This was unprecedented and tantamount to the decentering of International modernism, at the time still fastened to north Atlantic exchanges. There is much to be said about this groundbreaking exhibition and its particular synthesis of modernity and tradition as an image of postwar democracy. It is productive to disentangle the knot of ideological complicities and reveal how MoMA was not alone in cleansing the image of Brazil's authoritarian government. The project was crafted as a private-public partnership. Although approved by the U.S. State Department — as all projects had to be — the museum's friends were select and few. Not everyone — in Washington, D.C. or Rio de Janeiro — shared its faith in the aesthetic message of modernism. The CIAA funded only the catalogue. This underscores the perceived limits of exhibitions and the government's doubts on their ability and effectiveness in carrying the desired image of Brazil. The exhibition, Alfred Barr noted with irony, was "a kind of magnificent poster for the book."⁶ However, it would be an error to simply dismiss *Brazil Builds* as a propaganda tool. Such reductive instrumentality shows profound disdain for the optimism that still — to this day — illuminates its core and is the reason why we return again and again to this exhibition and the works in it. We remain fascinated and enchanted by its images and message; this eternal return signals an unfinished project.

The Modern's involvement with the war effort was no hidden agenda. The Second World War provided the grounds and context for all museum exhibitions of this

⁴ Philip L. Goodwin, "Modern Architecture in Brazil," in *Studies in Latin American Art; Proceedings of a Conference Held in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, 28-31 May 1945, under the Auspices of the Joint Committee on Latin American Studies of the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council*, ed. Elizabeth Wilder Weismann (Washington, : American Council of Learned Societies, 1949), 89. On Goodwin see also: Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern; an Intimate Portrait of the Museum of Modern Art*, [1st ed. (New York, : Atheneum, 1973).], 190-195

⁵Elizabeth B. Mock, "Building for Tomorrow," *Travel* 81 (1943), 39.

⁶Alfred Barr to Philip Goodwin, October 7, 1942. Correspondence, Alfred H. Barr Papers (AHB), mf 2167: 345. Archives of American Art (AAA), Washington D.C.

moment, including *Brazil Builds*. This was not the case with the 1955 exhibition, *Latin American Architecture since 1945*, which — although elaborated in the context of the Cold War — presented the region as if immune to its politics. There are significant differences between both exhibitions; nonetheless, the Latin American Architecture show built on the 1943 exhibition by advancing the equation: modernism = democracy, now unashamedly framed within U.S. liberal democracy. In 1955, Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Arthur Drexler enlisted architecture in another "good fight," one that, in their view, did not extend to Latin America or the decolonizing world. Covert operations by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Iran and Guatemala, just to mention two examples from the early 1950s, make clear that the "good fight" had become a "dirty war." Exhibitions were enlisted in this dirty war as they could help direct public conversation, as the planned visit by Guatemala's Carlos Castillo Armas and his wife Odilia to MoMA's Latin American architecture show suggests. Castillo Armas had deposed the democratically elected president Jacobo Arbenz with the help of the CIA in 1954. The museum's invitation was part of a well-orchestrated "psychological action program" organized by the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), a U.S. government committee responsive to the Executive Branch that oversaw all covert operations.⁷ The aim of the Guatemala "action program" was to transform the violation of democratic law into a heroic anti-communist act, remaking Castillo Armas into a Cold War warrior. The OCB assembled a plethora of established cultural, educational, and political institutions, including the United Nations, in a mosaic of deceit. The visit to MoMA was unexpectedly cancelled at the last moment due to Castillo Armas' sudden illness. The apparatus of deceit, which posited the dictator as a champion of "human dignity," however, was not seriously affected.⁸

The 1955 exhibition could be used as a cultural weapon publically brandished to explain how "democracy" worked in Latin America. The impetus of the exhibition, however, is not altogether clear. The show effectively brought the modern architec-

⁷Memorandum for the Operations Coordinating Board, by JW Lydman: EMU. Subject: Some Psychological Factors in the Guatemalan Situation, SECRET, DRAFT. September 30, 1955. Folder 91, Box 3, Sub Series 9, Recently Declassified, Series O, Record Group 4, Nelson A. Rockefeller Papers, Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, New York.

⁸"Guatemala Chief Gets Two Degrees," *The New York Times*, November 6 1955. "Text of Address to Un Assembly by Guatemalan President," *The New York Times*, November 4 1955. Edith Evans Asbury, "City Parade Salutes Castillo on His 41st Birthday," *ibid.*, November 5.

ture of the region to a U.S. public, presenting its evolution from 1943 to 1955. As Drexler noted, the show was the museum's second survey, fastening it to *Brazil Builds* and to a project that can be traced back to 1939, when John McAndrew was curator of MoMA's architecture department. Yet, in 1955, the context of this long, drawn out project had radically changed. Cultural Pan-Americanism was on the wane, to say the least, and the museum's relationship with the U.S. government had seriously deteriorated. As early as 1946, conservative ideologues had accused MoMA of being a site of communist infiltration. Growing "red hysteria" advanced a traditionalist aesthetic predicated on anti-urban and anti-cosmopolitan values, prompting Alfred Barr to go public and explain why modern art was not "Communistic."⁹ Modern architecture was not without controversy, since it offered significant grounds with which to advance official statements on liberal democracy, as A&D's "Architecture for the State Department" (October 6-November 22, 1953) made clear. But modern architecture had staunch critics in the U.S. government.¹⁰ This exhibition, which presented a very public defense of the equation: modern architecture = democracy, helped veil the conservative turn in the U.S. government that questioned the equation and went so far as to dismantle cultural exchange programs. In the context of this ongoing battle against reactionary forces — to the point that President Dwight D. Eisenhower himself was called upon to defend the work of the museum — one has to wonder: Why did MoMA's A&D department call on Latin American architecture at this time?¹¹ Unlike *Brazil Builds*, there was no evident and direct political gain. Commissioned by MoMA's International Program, the Latin American architecture show came into being amid cultural tensions in the United States. Created in 1952, the International Program crystalized the museum's war experience and enabled its postwar global projection. Run by Porter McCray, who had gained experience in Rockefeller's CIAA, it was the logical development of MoMA's Department of Circulating Exhibitions, masterfully run by

Elodie Courter since 1932. The International Program underscored the private management of culture that underwrote most cultural programs in the United States; not absent of shady alliances with government and various economic interests, as made clear by the scholarship on the cultural Cold War.¹² McCray's program, however, did not only export U.S. culture abroad, it also imported select cultural "statements," such as Latin American architecture, for U.S. consumption.

At the time McCray turned his attention to Latin America, Venezuela had become a "New Latin Boom Land." In this country, however, a dictator also sponsored modern architecture. Readers of *Life* magazine, for example, learned that U.S. businesses, industry and capital all went south like moths to light, made brighter and seemingly eternal by the country's oil wealth and safe by strongman Marcos Pérez Jiménez. "Under a firm rule, freedom to spend" was the maxim *Life* trumpeted as it revealed the secrets of Venezuela's success. Hotels, resorts, luxury apartments, and high-end homes, all in modernist style, received top billing. The article celebrated U.S. consumerism, which had overtaken Venezuela; penetrating even squatter settlements: A the full page color photo by Cornell Cappa showing three men carrying the latest G.E. television set into the Planicie rancho, or favela, carried the point across. The U.S. was penetrating Venezuela from the ground up. At the same time, socially minded readers did not need to fret, since oil and iron royalties provided poorer Venezuelans "with one of the fanciest public works programs in South America."¹³ The magazine chose not to illustrate these wondrous projects; they found a home at MoMA.

⁹George Dondero, "Americans Take Notice—School of Political Action Techniques," in *92 Congress Record (79th Congress 2nd Session, House of Representatives, Tuesday, June 11, 1946)* (Washington D.C.: 1946), 6701. Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Is Modern Art Communistic?," *The New York Times*, December 14 1952.

¹⁰Jane C. Loeffler, *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies*, 1st ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), Chapter 5. The 1953 exhibition, as Loeffler's study suggests, coincided with the first wave of critique, 115-120.

¹¹Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Freedom of the Arts," *The Bulletin of the Museum of Modern Art* 22, no. 1/2 (1954).

¹²There are too many to list. The classic being: Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art : Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Also: Michael Kimmelman, "Revisiting the Revisionists: The Modern, Its Critics, and the Cold War," in *The Museum of Modern Art at Mid Century at Home and Abroad*, Studies in Modern Art (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994).

¹³"New Latin Boom Land," *Life*, September 13, 1954: 122-33. (Photos Cornell Cappa)



Figure 3. Installation view of *Latin American Architecture since 1945* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Nov. 23, 1955-Feb. 19, 1956). Photo by Ben Schnall.

Public works, which received only passing notice in *Life's* coverage, could be found in *Latin American Architecture since 1945*. Among these were the mammoth Cerro Piloto housing project. Drexler and Hitchcock highlighted this work with a magnificent panoramic view by photographer Rollie McKenna that bookended the main exhibition space known as “the Corridor.” Public housing emerged as a central concern in Latin America that manifested, in the views of Lewis Mumford, a “freshly awakened social consciousness.”¹⁴ Opposite Cerro Piloto, and next to the entrance of the exhibition, was an equally large photomural of Oscar Niemeyer’s São Francisco Church in Pampulha, Brazil. Both projects violated the parameters of the exhibition: the former for being unfinished and the latter for being completed in 1944. Such curatorial transgressions were not uncommon and, more importantly are the implications of their curatorial staging. With Pampulha, the exhibition gestured back to *Brazil Builds*, summoning a work not included in 1943, both as conclusion and departure for a new chapter of modern architecture in the region. Both

works had been born under the sign of dictatorship. The 48 mega-blocks of the Venezuelan project appeared to march into the gallery, thanks to the large rectangular panels carrying images of other Latin American works. It was as if Drexler had summoned the developmentalist force of the Caracas housing project transmuting its bureaucratic impetus into a neo-plastic abstract composition, all to be embraced by Niemeyer’s lyrical vaults. Drexler simply followed the aesthetic guidelines of the Caracas project, set by Carlos Raúl Villanueva. In collaboration with local artists and with the architects of the Taller del Banco Obrero (TABO, the State Housing Authority), Villanueva transmuted the housing *superbloques* into a colossal abstract geometric composition, installing it in the landscape. The implicit juxtaposition of the figural work of Candido Portinari, present in the *azulejo* façade of the church, with the abstract polychromies of Venezuelan artist Mateo Manaure, carried by the Venezuelan housing projects, mapped the development of the synthesis of the arts in the region. It drew an arc from explicit collaborations between named artists and architects —Portinari-Niemeyer— to the general notion of *teamwork*, which in most cases happily dispensed with the need to credit the artist, especially if they were local.¹⁵ In the Venezuelan context, aesthetic teamwork acquired a newfound consciousness as a magical process that could summon universal meaning to valorize mammoth serialized housing projects with “art.” As Hitchcock argued, the juxtaposition of the crude superblocks against the landscape appeared as a splendid “colored rendering” of modernism’s urban dreams.¹⁶ In other words, the evolution of the synthesis of the arts carried with it the promise of modernism’s equation: modern architecture = democracy. Today it is difficult to find this promise, as the stunning three-dimensional color photos in the exhibition were not included in the catalogue, which presented only black-and-white photos unlike *Brazil Builds*.

The juxtaposition of Pampulha-Caracas was mediated by several works represented though photomurals in a braided formal and aesthetic experience that manifested a region called “Latin America.” In the main gallery, Drexler arranged a field of

¹⁵Manaure was credited as working in the University City, Henry Russell Hitchcock and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), *Latin American Architecture since 1945* (New York.: Museum of Modern Art, 1955)., 51.

¹⁶Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), *Latin American Architecture since 1945* (New York.: Museum of Modern Art, 1955)., 137.

¹⁴Lewis Mumford, “The Sky Line: The Drab and the Daring,” *The New Yorker*, no. February 4 (1956)., 84.

formal relations and narrative actions, all under one critical and overarching curatorial move: a luminous ceiling. At MoMA, Latin American architecture appeared under the hallmark of U.S. corporate modernism as the light of democracy. In 1955, few critics chose to tell the story of dictatorship. Even Mumford, who was generally receptive to social issues in architecture, summarily dismissed the question. Without flinching, he remarked on the “new economic prosperity” that was driven by the extraction of raw materials — oil, coffee, and iron — and had produced “buildings of considerable vigor and inventiveness.” For Aline Saarinen, the “fantastic building boom” served as the sole critical context of the “staggeringly ambitious university cities, hundreds of public buildings and housing projects.”¹⁷ This architecture evidenced a heated economic development, which by default implied social modernization. Architectural aesthetics thus acted as a manifest statement of social development. In short, the region was on the road to political enlightenment. The 1955 exhibition was a snapshot of a “take-off.” A critical stage of development in the telos of Western modernity, as proposed by U.S. economist Walter Whitman Rostow, a few years later, in *The Stages of Economic Growth, a Non-Communist Manifesto*.¹⁸ If architecture in the region exhibited aesthetic maturity, abandoning European cultural tutelage, it stood to reason that the region would soon abandon political immaturity. So demanded the political economy of modern architecture. Neither Hitchcock nor Drexler were naïve. Confidence in modernism was not simply a matter of architectural aesthetics. Conviction rested in U.S. leadership and influence in the region; brilliantly embodied in the light of the Corridor. Under the soft glow of U.S. corporate enlightenment, the signs of dictatorship would be a thing of the past, which was the soft promise of the 1955 exhibition.

Hitchcock celebrated the progressive promise of U.S. business in the 1953 A&D exhibition, *Built in the USA: Postwar Architecture*, which served as the phantom companion to *Latin American Architecture since 1945*. In 1953, Hitchcock turned to “Beauty, character, grace, and elegance” as key markers of postwar democratic architecture. These aesthetic ideas — which had had little to no currency in func-

tionism or in the International Style — found their fullest applications in postwar corporate modernism with Maecenas who put “quality before economy” such as General Motors. At the time the largest corporation in the world, GM had commissioned Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates for the Technical Center in Detroit, Michigan.¹⁹ There, Saarinen developed one of the most-sophisticated examples of the dropped luminous ceiling. Drexler chose not to use this device in his 1953 staging, instead he emphasized MoMA’s translucent glass curtain wall. Goodwin and Stone’s south-facing façade was a key element of *Built in the USA*; incorporated as part of the exhibition, it brought home the ongoing debate on curtain wall construction in which U.S. businesses again led the way. Drexler unfolded the debate at MoMA with key examples such as Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill’s Lever House, which advanced the “advertising value of striking architecture,” not to mention the United Nations, which consecrated Wallace K. Harrison as the consummate US-American postwar architect.²⁰ Drexler staged the United Nations alongside Lever House and the Technical Center in a swift nationalization that highlighted an architectural corporate triumvirate of pragmatic businessman-architects with Harrison & Abramowitz, Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, and Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates. With the United Nations, Harrison became the embodiment of the U.S. national character of business-pragmatism.²¹ Harrison’s pragmatism was deeply tied to the Rockefeller’s real estate holdings at home, such as Rockefeller Center, and abroad, most significantly to Venezuela and the Avila Hotel, which had launched Rockefeller’s Compañía de Fomento Venezolano (Venezuelan Development Company). This 1939 holding company served as a beachhead for Rockefeller’s future Latin America projects; an early learning ground for the 1946 International Basic Economy Corporation (IBEC) that will operate in Venezuela and Brazil as a form of enlightened missionary capitalism.²²

¹⁹Henry Russell Hitchcock, Arthur Drexler, and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), *Built in the USA: Post-War Architecture* (New York,: Distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1952)., 16.

²⁰On Harrison: Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Harrison* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989).

²¹Charles L. Davis II, *Building Character: The Racial Politics of Modern Architecture Style* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 2019)., 231. Davis elaborates on this nationalization of the U.N. through Harrison’s depictions of the project with U.S.-American colloquialisms, 229.

²²Cary Reich, *The Life of Nelson A. Rockefeller: Worlds to Conquer, 1908-1958*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1996). Chapters 12 and 25. Also: Darlene Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹⁷Mumford., 84. Aline B. Saarinen, "Drama in Building: The Museum of Modern Art Sets Forth Impressive Latin-American Show," *The New York Times*, Sunday November 27 1955.

¹⁸I deal with this in Patricio del Real, "Para Caer En El Olvido: Henry-Russell Hitchcock Y La Arquitectura Latinoamericana," *Block*, no. 8 (2011).



Figure 4. Installation view of *Built in the USA: Postwar Architecture* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Jan. 20-March 15, 1953). Photo by David E. Scherman.

In 1953, Drexler filled MoMA's gallery with light of winter by demolishing the false wall that covered the Thermolux panels of Goodwin and Stone's south-facing façade and let natural light in.²³ Two years later, he built a luminous ceiling to cover

²³The false walls would have to be rebuilt after the show since the natural light proved to be too intense for artworks. On MoMA's glass façade: Lynes., 195. Problems with the MoMA's Thermolux

the skylights of MoMA's third-floor sculpture gallery and shine light upon the architecture of Latin America. Under the soft light of Drexler's 1955 luminous ceiling, the field of narrative actions was clear. In all, there was no need to talk about dictatorship because the region was under the tutelage of the United States and its enlightened corporations. Few outside or inside the region chose to highlight the very visible and known link between architecture and dictatorship that the exhibition tacitly sanctioned. Hitchcock generally spared his Latin American friends the embarrassment of lifting the formal veil that hid their collaborations with questionable "regimes." Lecturing at London's Royal Society of Arts, however, he uncharacteristically did by focusing on the "famous University City in Mexico," a monument to President Alemán. "Whatever may be said of the characteristic *regimes* of Latin America, there is no question that the President-Dictators have generally seen in architecture, like the sovereigns of the European past, a means of personal aggrandizing," he claimed. Authoritarian politics affected all public works. "In Mexico the most impressive housing developments are for Government employees and elsewhere I fear it is generally members of Government party who are housed first."²⁴ Monumentality and authoritarianism, with a side of corruption, undergirded these artful projects. "No dictator is happy unless he has embarked on a vast university or a series of housing developments to which his name can be attached," Hitchcock claimed; "so you have in the very social immaturity of these countries, conditions more conducive to elaborate architectural expressions than the bureaucratized state."²⁵

Such naked political observations were rare in Hitchcock. His comments gestured to actual socio-political conditions as well as to serious structural problems in the region's governments. But transformed through quick, schematic, and superficial brushstrokes to add realist color to his lecture, these overtures effectively supported ingrained stereotypes that saw the region as if populated by *caudillos*. In London, Hitchcock effectively advanced the general hegemonic image of the region

panels had sparked Goodwin's interest in Brazilian solutions and his 1942 trip. Zilah Quezado Decker, *Brazil Built: The Architecture of the Modern Movement in Brazil* (New York: E&FN Spon, 2000), 115.

²⁴Henry Russel Hitchcock, Jr., "Latin-American Architecture," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, March 1956, 344-46.

²⁵Henry Russell Hitchcock, "Men of the Year (Henry-Russell Hitchcock Interview by Sam Lambert)," *Architect's Journal* 123, no. 3177 (1956), 82.

summed up in the equation: *Latin America = dictatorship*. He recognized that the region's recurring political disturbances impinged upon "most people's consciousness;" that the region's endemic regime changes were not without relevance to architecture. Yet, he told his London audience, "in considering Latin American architecture we may properly disregard the political background and its social results, while recognizing that the local situations permit and encourage certain types of achievements and discourage others."²⁶ Juan Perón's rule, for example, had not been "conducive to a lively architecture activity." With him gone, "It is to be hoped that Argentina will now once again take its rightful place" in the region, he proposed.²⁷ Hitchcock lectured on March 1956, six months after Perón's downfall with the military-civic coup, euphemistically called the *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberating Revolution) that ushered the advent of developmentalist policies and Raúl Prebisch's "Plan de Restablecimiento Económico."²⁸ Hitchcock's comments seemed specifically aimed at his British audience, and the long and contorted history between England and Argentina. Yet it produced no effective lasting response. Politics could indeed be called upon to entice audience interest and such examples added a modicum of variety to Hitchcock's sustained attacks on Mexico's official architecture and its bombastic nationalism—as when he compared Carlos Lazo's Ministry of Communications and Public Works with Rio's famed Ministry of Education. The "loud external mosaics" of the former just did not compare to the "refined" azulejos of the latter.²⁹ Hitchcock was always careful to stop short of an "ethnic critic" of Mexico's architecture. Aesthetics helped veil a racialized discourse that surfaced in his public references to the "immaturity" of the region or in private letters, as when Colin Rowe asked Hitchcock why he had changed his mind about traveling to places where "beer was called *cerveza*"³⁰ All this is to say that com-

ments that directed audiences' interests to specific local situations in Argentina or Mexico, as in the case of Hitchcock's London lecture, supported the equation: *Latin America = dictatorship* and, at the same time and perhaps more importantly, drew attention away from the most egregious example of modern architecture under the sign of dictatorship: Venezuela. Just about everyone remained silent on the subject of Marcos Pérez Jiménez.

By 1955, two equations operated at MoMA: *modern architecture = democracy* and *Latin America = dictatorship*. Hitchcock's solution was to disregard the second not because politics did not impinge on architecture, but because U.S. influence in the region would necessarily be a palliative to dictatorship. Thus, it was not that modern architecture actually or necessarily equaled democracy but rather that modern architecture, commanded by U.S. political leadership plus corporate business know-how, would result in democracy within the region and the world. The benevolence of U.S. leadership manifested in different ways and emerged with particular acumen in its architecture schools, which gave "Latin Americans a training so broad that it could readily be applied under very different local conditions," Hitchcock argued.³¹ Yet, the final measure of U.S. influence would play out in the concept of architecture itself and the production of large-scale works; in short, the future of the region rested upon the question of monumentality in architecture. In Latin America, architecture "is still very much an art," Hitchcock stressed. "Public authorities" turned to it "as a principal expression of cultural ambition." This was patent in housing projects and University Cities that showed "the sociological and cultural aspirations of the various presidents and their regimes" as well as the "high standards of official taste." The University Cities in Mexico City and Caracas, as well as in Rio de Janeiro, were key examples; but this form of "cultural ambition" managed by government with "the determination to achieve monumental results" was present "in almost every Latin American country." Monumentality was the sign of a Latin American character trait, and Hitchcock found this drive to create monumental works "self-defeating." These projects shamed U.S. works, "even if we remember Wright's Florida Campus," Hitchcock slyly commented. Yet, he noted, construction often lagged and more modest proposals would better serve higher education in the region. Not all public works expressed grand cultural ambitions.

²⁶Hitchcock, "Latin-American Architecture," 344-46.

²⁷Henry Russel Hitchcock, Jr., "Latin-American Architecture," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, no. March (1956). 344-45.

²⁸Paúl Prebisch, *Moneda Sana o Inflación Incontenible. Plan de Restablecimiento Económico*. (Buenos Aires: Secretaría de la Presidencia de la Nación, 1956). Also: Celia Szusterman, *Fronzizi and the Politics of Developmentalism in Argentina* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).

²⁹Hitchcock. 350.

³⁰Colin Rowe to Henry-Russell Hitchcock, December 29, 1954. Correspondence R, 1954, Box 7, Hitchcock Papers, AAA. I have dealt with this in: Patricio del Real, "Un Gusto Por La Cerveza: El Decubrimiento De Henry-Russell Hitchcock De La Arquitectura Latinoamericana / a Taste for Cerveza: Henry-Russell Hitchcock's Discovery of Latin American Architecture," *Trace*, no. 7 (2013).

³¹Hitchcock and Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.), 21.

For the most part, public buildings, such as hospitals and schools, were surprisingly contemporary in design, although rarely “strikingly excellent.”³²



Figure 5. Installation view of *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (March 29-July 19, 2015). Photo by Thomas Griesel. ©2015 The Museum of Modern Art.

The “social immaturity” of Latin American countries, Hitchcock argued in London, underwrote the architectural production of monumental works. Authoritarian governments were more conducive than the democratic European “bureaucratized state” to solicit such works, which he saw principally as expressions of personal ambitions of dictators or presidents. In short, monumental works, such as large-scale housing projects and University Cities, were signs of a deep Latin American character flaw. They revealed authoritarian desires no matter if they had been produced under dictatorships or not. With this, Hitchcock expressed the period’s deep preoccupation and distrust with monumentality, and surreptitiously reiterated Mum-

ford’s 1937 fundamentalist thesis: “if it is a monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument.”³³ The social immaturity of Latin American governments brought about a temporal lag that recalled the immediate past of the Second World War and cast doubts on the region’s future. This temporal lag emerged in Hitchcock’s characterization of architecture in the region as being “still very much an art.” Monumental public works revealed the mismanagement of the vital energies of postwar architectural production and the need for some “good-old” U.S.-American business knowhow. These works “lagged behind” and more important — he implied — focused all creative energies in overly ambitious works, leaving the rest of the public sphere with modern, yet unexceptional works — not worthy of being exhibited.

Dictatorship was present in *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955-1980*. Contrary to 1943 and 1955, in 2015, visitors confronted a monumental timeline that carried the difficult history of military coups, dirty wars, forceful economic measures, and U.S. interventions. This monumental wall, painted yellow, traversed the entire main galley much like Drexler’s and Hitchcock’s luminous ceiling traversed their “Corridor.” But unlike the diffused light of 1955, the bright yellow wall stepped forward to speak historical truths. Visitors could read the political history of the region as they contemplated the works of architecture. The exhibition made dictatorship present, yet it was not about repressive government regimes, since it actively refused to employ the equation *Latin America = dictatorship*. Such a stance would homogenize the region and effectively erase the conditions of architectural practice under these regimes, which, as Graciela Silvertri notes, unfold overarching dualisms that posit “los que se fueron contra los que se quedaron” (“those who left against those who stayed”).³⁴ The Estadio Mendoza by Manteola, Sánchez Gómez, Santos, Solsona, Viñoly (MSGSSV) invited us to enter an important architectural tradition of integrating monumental works in the landscape. This did not negate that the Estadio’s communitarian promise was managed by the military regime as a nationalist authoritarian project. But let’s not forget, that this

³³Lewis Mumford, “The Death of the Monument,” in *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*, ed. Naum Gabo (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 264.

³⁴Graciela Silvertri, “Apariencia y verdad: Reflexiones sobre obras, testimonios y documentos de arquitectura producida durante la dictadura militar en Argentina,” *Block 7*, Argentina 01+, 2010, 38. Also in: Graciela Silvertri, *Ars Publica: Ensayos De Crítica De La Arquitectura, La Ciudad Y El Paisaje* (Buenos Aires: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, 2011).

³²Ibid., 29. Hitchcock’s reference to Wright operates in diverse registries: it underscored the U.S origins of the idea of university campuses; juxtaposes a private educational institution: Florida Southern College with public ones, and underscored the outdated grounds of monumental works by referencing “the greatest architect of the 19th Century,” as Philip Johnson called Wright.

nationalist imprint was part of Argentina's World Cup and that this project dated back to the government of Juan Domingo Perón and Isabel (María Estela) Martínez de Perón. Both governments coincided in the use of and need for mass spectacles to express their power. The exhibition *Latin America in Construction* invited us to revisit the architecture of a difficult period. This was not an invitation to escape history, but to return to it through architecture.

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Architecture, Radical Criticism and Revolution in Brazil

Arquitetura, Crítica Radical e Revolução no Brasil

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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.

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Architecture as praxis: notes on the legacy of Arquitetura Nova

Arquitetura como praxis: Notas sobre o legado da Arquitetura Nova

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Abstract

The separation of *desenho* and *canteiro*, identified by *Arquitetura Nova* as the cleavage of the conflict between capital and labour, operates today in an augmented reality. The role of the architect is one of an illusionist who reduces the complexity of architectural labour to uniqueness, a process through which capital is reified and endlessly reproduced in the pervasive circulation of images. Against this condition *Arquitetura Nova*'s work offers a method. As a group they exercised a radically collective form of practice that opposed authorship placing the workers' knowledge at the centre of the design and building process. More importantly they turned the gap between the real subject and one imagined in their theory and practice into the substance of their political project. The archetype of the vault-house, in its very material form, reclaims and exposes architecture as a collectively produced form of common knowledge: architecture as praxis, rational critical action.

Resumo

A separação entre *desenho* e *canteiro*, identificada pela *Arquitetura Nova* como a clivagem do conflito entre capital e trabalho, opera hoje em uma realidade aumentada. O papel do arquiteto é o de um ilusionista que reduz a complexidade do trabalho arquitetônico à busca pela singularidade, um processo no qual o capital é reificado e reproduzido infinitamente através da circulação generalizada de imagens. Contra essa condição, o trabalho da *Arquitetura Nova* oferece um método. Como grupo eles exerceram uma forma radicalmente coletiva de projeto contra a autoria, e colocaram o saber dos trabalhadores no centro dos processos de projeção e construção. Além disso, eles transformaram a lacuna entre o sujeito real e aquele imaginado pela sua teoria e prática na substância do seu projeto político. O arquétipo da abóbada, em sua própria forma material, expõe e reivindica a arquitetura como conhecimento comum produzido coletivamente: arquitetura como práxis, ação racional crítica.

Building: a horizon of emancipation

Arquitetura Nova is a multitude of experiments in painting, scenography, pedagogy, building techniques and political theory that challenges the conventional understanding of architectural practice.¹ The intense collaboration between Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre and Sérgio Ferro during the 1960s – shared with a larger group of architects, artists and intellectuals – has been a permanent exercise in free and collective labour as a means of radical political change. Indeed, the adjective *Nova* had nothing to do with the search for novelty and originality that pervades contemporary architecture. *Nova* identified an ethos, an attitude towards work and life for which architectural practice was understood as technique of critical thinking and political action.²

Having experienced first hand the brutal working conditions demanded by Niemeyer's abstract white curves of Brasília,³ the group realised that the historical task of the architect within capitalist relations of production is to enforce the separation of the builder from his own knowledge. Through the *desenho* – both design and drawing – the architect reduces the act of building to a mere execution of orders and at the same time enforces a strict division of labour. Ultimately design weakens the workers' collective relationships with the aim of assuring efficiency and control of the production process. In short, the architect's "art" is to mediate between capital and labour, ensuring that construction remains the largest and most effective source of capital accumulation and labour exploitation.⁴

¹Sérgio Ferro first used the term "Arquitetura Nova" in a text of 1967 referring to the new generation of "rational architects" in Brazil and just twenty years later to identify his collaboration with Flávio Império and Rodrigo Lefèvre. FERRO, 1967, p.3-15; See also FERRO, 1988, p.272-273; KOURY, 2003, p.13.

²The adjective "Nova" was borrowed from the "Cinema Novo", a cinematographic movement lead by directors such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Ruy Guerra and Glauber Rocha, that questioned the very idea of development by assuming scarcity of resources as an opportunity to challenge the dominant aesthetic and model of production. See XAVIER, 1983.

³Sérgio Ferro and Rodrigo Lefèvre, still students, had the chance to realise some large commercial and residential buildings in Brasília and thus to experience the construction of the new capital. "I closely followed the horror of Brasília's construction sites. Out of an ethical obligation, I was forced to review the airy certainties of the profession - and so I continue today". FERRO, 2002, p. 1-5. Translation of the author.

⁴The group elaborated the critique of the role of the architect in a number of polemic articles in the 1960s and early 1970s. Sérgio Ferro further elaborated and systematised the theoretical approach in FERRO, 1979. For Ferro building is not an industry but a manufacture, a labour intensive activity

Against the false hope of development and the deception of a free, open and democratic aesthetic promised by national Modernism, the group proposed the rationalisation of popular construction techniques as a means to liberate the workers from alienation and exploitation. Arquitetura Nova pursued a "poetic of economy," an architecture of reduced means where scarcity is not accepted as limitation nor aestheticized as a moral value, but rather assumed as the rationale that informs the structure, the production and the aesthetic of the work.⁵ From this perspective the role of the architect becomes one of organising the collective labour of building, of designing new relationships of production that minimise labour intensity and reclaim the value of the workers' knowledge: from *desenho* for the construction site to the *desenho* of the construction site (ARANTES, 2002, p.119).

Articulating the building activities in separate phases and parts, the design recognises the autonomy of each team of workers – masons, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, etc. – fostering their thinking and making according to each technical sensibility. Following an "aesthetic of separation" (FERRO, 1979), every phase and component of the construction process is left exposed in the building, allowing the marks of free labour on matter to act as the index of the workers presence (FERRO, 1972; KOURY, 2003, p.100). Rather than representing the power imposed on the workers through the drawing, the building becomes a didactic device that exposes the potential of cooperation and collective will. Thus the construction site is reimagined, from a space of oppression and exploitation to an arena of political experience, a stage where differences and conflicts between workers are negotiated through the self-determination of production rather than repressed through the hierarchies of labour division.⁶ Assuming the building process as the preminent theatre of the conflict between capital and labour, Arquitetura Nova shifts the core

with little mechanization that maximises the extraction of surplus from labour. It is precisely in virtue of its quantity, diffusion and backwardness, that the building activity plays a crucial role in the global capitalistic organisation, extracting from labour the capital to be invested in more advanced sectors.

⁵The definition of "poetic of economy" is published in an article by Sérgio Ferro and Rodrigo Lefèvre ([1963] 2006, p. 33-36): "It's from the useful, constructive and didactic minimum need that we take [...] the basis of a new aesthetic which we could call 'poetic of economy', of the absolutely indispensable, of the elimination of all that is superfluous, of the 'economy' of means for the formulation of a new language entirely established in the base of our historical reality." Translation of the author.

⁶To describe this form of productive cooperation Sérgio Ferro used the metaphor of the jazz orchestra, where free improvisation of the performer is allowed and encouraged within a common theme. FERRO, 1997, p.100.

of architectural labour from design to production. The construction site, often seen as an obstacle between the perfection of the idea and its realisation, is embraced as the locus where the working class could build its emancipation. Architecture should not only stop enforcing alienation and exploitation of labour through drawing, but must also refuse to provide for the working class according to the paternalistic logic of developmentalism imposed by the State. On the contrary, building itself is the horizon where the workers could come together and realise William Morris' motto: "art is man's expression of joy in labour" (MORRIS, [1883] 2012, p.164-191).⁷

Subject: from rural migrant to urban dweller

Arquitetura Nova proposed a practice of architecture rooted in the existing relationships of production, directly engaged with the oppressed subjects and their demands through collective action. Such a radical approach was developed within the hopeful spirit of the early 1960s, when the basic reforms proposed by President João Goulart and the rise of popular organisations, such as the Ligas Camponesas and the Comunidades Eclesiais de Base, promised a profound transformation of the Brazilian social and political landscape: before the military coup of 1964 revolution seemed possible, if not imminent. (HOLLANDA; GONÇALVES, 1982; ARANTES, 2002, p.49). More importantly, the 1960s also mark the acceleration of the dramatic rural exodus that turned Brazilian cities into largely self-built megalopolis in only a few decades: millions of people migrated from the country's impoverished interior to the margins of the major urban areas where they were forced to sell their labour power and build their own shelter. While industrial capitalism professed the rhetoric of development as a remedy to this permanent crisis – a solution embraced by both the Brazilian State and the Brazilian Communist Party⁸ – Arquitetura Nova claimed the possibility and the need to organise a cooperative practice exceeding capitalist modes of production. If mass migration and self-construction provided a reservoir of labour force and a mechanism to reduce the

workers' salary,⁹ they also constituted the material condition and the base of production for a large part of the Brazilian people. Therefore, the subject of a truly popular architectural and political project was to be found less in the organised industrial proletariat, than in the rural migrant now turned into worker, builder and dweller of the Brazilian city. In the construction site, the encounter of the rural and the urban, of the migrant with the technician, of the popular with the erudite culture could generate an emancipatory synthesis based on the available means of production rather than on the false promise of a future development.¹⁰

The work of Flávio Imperio for the 1960 play, *Morte e Vida Severina*, is the first powerful manifestation of this emancipatory potential. Based on a poem by João Cabral de Mello Neto, the piece celebrates the rural popular culture following the journey of a peasant walking from the inland to the big city. The abstraction of the costumes, realised with poor and bare materials such as jute fabric and cardboard, contrasted with the realism of the migrants arriving in the station of São Paulo, brought on the scene by projecting photographs – a device borrowed by Berthold Brecht. As Sérgio Ferro recalls, "simple materials [...] transfigured through the lucid invention were definitely more suitable to our time than the falsification of metropolitan models." (FERRO, 1997, p.98-101).¹¹ Producing sets and costumes offered a more direct path to action than architecture and to a certain extent the backstage represented a simplified version of the construction site the group was imagining: a space organised collectively, where teams with different craftsmanship worked together to realise the various elements of the scenographic project.

However, if in theory Arquitetura Nova clearly defined the subject of their architectural and political project, in practice a self-managed construction site where work-

⁷Significantly William Morris' sentence will later appear in paintings by Sérgio Ferro, who will discuss the legacy of the British architect in various texts.

⁸The official line of the Brazilian Communist Party maintained that the path to the revolution required the development the industrial means of production and therefore supported the "developmentalist" project of the national bourgeoisie. This was one of the most relevant points of friction between Imperio, Lefèvre and Ferro and their master João Batista Vilanova Artigas, prominent member of the PCB. KOURY, 2003, p.26-27; ARANTES, 2002, p.39-48.

⁹Allowing the migrants to self-build illegal houses meant keeping the workers in a precarious condition, sparing investments in the provision of housing and discounting the value of rent from the salary. The seminal book on the issue remains ENGELS, 1872. The argument is rehearsed also in Rodrigo Lefèvre master thesis (1981, p.20-31). For the relationship between State, capital and social housing in Brazil see BONDUKI, 1998.

¹⁰In his master thesis Rodrigo Lefèvre discusses in depth the potential of the encounter between the migrant and the technician forming a new subjectivity. The thesis is a systematisation of the experiments produced in the previous decade, conflating in the project of a "school-construction site", a place where an architectural and political paradigm based on cooperation could be built. LEFÈVRE, 1981; the term "school-construction site" will be used later by Erminia Maricato in an article dedicated to Lefèvre. MARICATO, 1987.

¹¹Translation of the author.

ers could freely build their home was less a reality than a metaphor of a possible free and democratic Brazil (ARANTES, 2002, p. 84-85). As Sérgio Ferro will recall years later, empowering the workers' creative freedom was a dream relentlessly chased and almost realised in many experiments. (FERRO, 1997, p.100). Yet such ambition turned absolutely impossible in 1964 with the seizure of power by the army, which made of large-scale development, urban growth and violent repression the cornerstones of the Brazilian State.¹²

The emancipatory potential of the construction site was concretely tested in Brazil from the 1980s through the experiences of the *mutirões*, a series of collectively self-managed and self-built housing projects developed by groups of militant architects together with the housing movements. The growth of popular political forces demanding the basic rights of housing, education, healthcare and land reform in the face of staggering inequality, called for a radical questioning of the "myth of development"¹³ and therefore of the architect as a gifted individual envisioning social transformations from the heights of his atelier.¹⁴ Admittedly, the projects of the *mutirões* were less concerned with theoretical issues than with technical solutions. As such they adopted a diverse set of references spanning from the Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy to the British John Turner, from the Uruguayan cooperatives to internationally known references such as Bernard Rudofsky, Felix Candela, Frei Otto and Richard Buckminster Fuller. Yet, the affinity with *Arquitetura Nova*'s project is evident inasmuch as they pragmatically addressed the housing needs of the lower classes by experimenting with building techniques, participatory design and collective self-management of construction sites (ARANTES, 2002, p.163-

¹²Between 1964 and 1968, year of the infamous AI-5 (Institutional Act n. 5) that suspended the constitutional guarantees, the situation deteriorated until the point of pushing Flávio Imperio to retreat into "individual metaphysics", and Sérgio Ferro and Rodrigo Lefèvre to abandon architecture as a mean of political struggle and join the armed resistance, substituting the pencil with the rifle. Since December 1970, Sérgio Ferro and Rodrigo Lefèvre were imprisoned and tortured for one year in the Presídio Tiradentes of São Paulo where they organised a painting atelier as a form of resistance. ARANTES, 2002, p.91-98.

¹³As the economist Celso Furtado thoroughly demonstrated underdevelopment is not a temporary stage of an evolutionary process, but rather a structural condition in the global dynamic of capitalism that allows the centre to perpetuate its domination on the periphery both at a global and local scale. FURTADO, 1974.

¹⁴Not by chance the major studies on *Arquitetura Nova* were published in the 2000s, concurrently with the peak of the social movements popularity and strength. Together with the pioneering works by Koury (1999; 2003), Arantes (2002) and the collection of texts by Sérgio Ferro (2006), in the same period are published: BUZZAR, 2002; 2019; FERRO, 2004; 2010; CONTIER, 2009.

224). During the city government of Luiza Erundina in São Paulo (1989-1993), the municipality implemented over 100 *mutirões* for a total of 11.000 housing units, opening an extraordinary season of participation in the construction of the city that unfortunately was quickly dismissed by the following administrations (ARANTES, 2004, p.172-201).

The setbacks suffered by these experiences raise the question of the relationship between alternative forms of production and their institutionalization, and more generally of the role of architecture within this framework. On the one hand these experiments, backed by a strong political and economic support from the State, productively influenced the policies and the practices of the administration. In the following decade, under the pressure of the social movements, Brazil elaborated some of the most progressive urban legislation in the world, instituting the Ministry of Cities (2003) and adopting the Statute of the City (2001), which established the social function of property and the principles of participatory planning. On the other hand the dependency from State institutions and the shift of focus from architecture to legal and technical procedures tended to normalise the subversive potential of these practices and turning political participation into an instrument to gain consensus, reducing the housing question to a mere economic issue. In this respect the Federal program *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (2009), implemented under the "leftist" presidency of Dilma Rousseff, is exemplary. While including policies specifically catered to collective subjects like the *mutirões*, the housing scheme essentially entrusted private construction companies to deliver millions of housing units subsidised by the federal government: left in the hands of private initiative the program encouraged large complexes and low construction quality in the cheapest available land (FIX; ARANTES, 2009). The program not only reduced the housing question to a financial instrument, further deepening the social and physical segregation of the lower classes, but more importantly, contributed in a decisive way to shape a subjectivity where money and property mediate every relationship.

Under the pressure of capital, the legislative achievements were easily manipulated or disregarded while the *mutirões*, facing political resistance and economic restraints, struggled to reach a significant scale. The experimentation with housing types, settlement models and forms of property, necessary for the elaboration of an alternative to the hegemonic model of development, has been very limited.

In fact, as the terrain of demands shifted from architecture to urban processes, the antagonistic potential of built form has been largely disregarded and the political action diffused on the more slippery terrain of legal procedures and economic mechanisms. While inequality as much as social and spatial segregation kept increasing, the rise of globalisation and expansion of communication networks significantly changed the way in which lower classes relate to urban. If a migrant, arriving to the city in the 1960s, brought a rural culture capable of providing a form of resistance to the totalising power of the urban, today, after decades of exposure to information technology and commodity flows, such a distinction has been largely dissolved. The post-Fordist capitalism has dramatically increased the capacity of capital to penetrate all strata of the population and capture labour power through all sorts of informal and flexible means. Within this framework, can architecture still produce an emancipated subjectivity that is not pliant to the needs of capital reproduction? Can architecture carve a hole through the smooth and continuous surface of capital and put forward an alternative form of life?

Praxis: architecture as common knowledge

The dramatic political U-turn of 1964 impeded further radical developments and the brave experiences of the *mutirões* exposed institutionalisation as a problematic limit of radical practices. Yet, the legacy of Arquitetura Nova's built work offers a counterplan for the contemporary practice, a design method that focuses on the relationship between architectural form and the production of subjectivity.

Although rooted in the rigorous analysis of the material relations of production, the emphasis on the centrality of the building process in the construction of subjectivity easily slips into a utopian horizon, as Rodrigo Lefèvre himself has pointedly highlighted: "Only there, in the epoch of transition, where some of the political and economic relationship will be modified, I can accept to participate to a self-building process of large scale" (LEFÈVRE, 1981, p.31).¹⁵ Such a position resonates with the one put forward by Constant Nieuwenhuys in his visionary project of New Babylon, a city built by a radically nomadic subjectivity. (CARERI, 2001). Based on the notion of Homo Ludens (HUIZINGA, 1938), Constant envisioned building as the

sole playful artistic activity performed by the New Babylonians on a planetary scale, a form of life that could only take place after a revolution of the modes of production. In this respect New Babylon's condition is not far from the emancipated future imagined for the rural migrants by the Brazilian collective, or from the creative co-operation practiced in Flávio Imperio's theatre productions. Despite the differences, the comparison is relevant as much as it highlights how the position of Arquitetura Nova flattens the relationship between architecture and the construction of subjectivity into a single plane where designing, building and dwelling coincide. Ultimately the power of the construction site rests on the idea that the technician and the migrant would design, build and inhabit together. Yet, as Roberto Schwarz has noticed, tackling the housing question through the practice of self-building runs the risk of translating the conflict between labour and capital in the distance between the housing movement and the contemporary means of production (SCHWARZ, 2002). However, if Arquitetura Nova's theory gives to the building process the role of shaping the subject, on the contrary in their built work it is the architectural form the primary means used to construct a new subjectivity, to bridge the gap between the existing and the imagined forms of production and life.

Between 1961 and 1977 Flávio Imperio, Rodrigo Lefèvre and Sérgio Ferro produced a wide range of over 60 architectural projects including houses, schools, multi-storey buildings, competitions and renovations.¹⁶ Within this body of work, the experimentations on the single family house, and in particular the elaboration of the archetype of the vault-house, undoubtedly constitute the most consistent manifestation of their *ethos*. The clients for these residential projects were friends and relatives, a group of bourgeois intellectuals keen on experimenting with a different way of living in their own house.¹⁷ Yet, working with the single-family house meant to go to the political economic root of the production of space, as the home is locus of the institution and naturalisation of property and family as the productive core of capitalist society. The interior is the place of reproduction and comfort associated with women, which provides a relief from the busy and dirty space of production of the

¹⁶A complete list of works is in KOURY, 2003, p.133-135.

¹⁷It is worth to mention that Arquitetura Nova built a series of public schools in 1966-1967 and designed an unbuilt proposal for social housing in 1968, both using the system of the vault. However these projects are exceptional episodes within the trajectory of their work. KOURY, 2002, p.70.

¹⁵Translation of the author. See also the interview of Rodrigo Lefèvre by Renato de Andrade Maia, in KOURY, 1999, 111, available online on *Vitruvius*, last modified January 2000, <https://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/entrevista/01.001/3352?page=4>

city, associated with men. Such opposition enforced gender hierarchies and the myth of ownership of both the house and the commodities needed to make the interior a personal and protective space opposed to the repetitive character of the urban.¹⁸ This aspect is particularly emphasised in the Americas' suburban single-family house, where the house as the negative of the city acquires the territorial dimension of the plot. Furthermore, in Brazil the home is the place where extreme inequality rooted in racial and class segregation – a legacy of slavery from which the country was never truly liberated – is managed through the ambivalence of personal relationships between master and domestic labourers.

Facing these contradictions *Arquitetura Nova* elaborated the archetype of the vault-house as a mean to seize the gap between the existing and the imagined subject and turn it into the substance of the project. As such *Arquitetura Nova*'s ruthless critique of the architect's role exceeds both the recognition of the construction site as the battleground for the liberation of the working class and the call for collective self-building actions, to propose a critical horizon for architectural practice.

As Sérgio Ferro boldly puts it: "architecture is *praxis*, communion of theory and practice, rational critical action." (FERRO, 2008, p.20).¹⁹ In Marxian terms, *praxis* is the self-conscious, collective and free activity that distinguishes humans from the other beings, as opposed to the alienated labour imposed by capital.²⁰ As Marx himself noticed in describing the labour process, "what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality" (MARX, [1867] 1976, p.284). Hence architecture as *praxis* is not immediate action or the realisation of a theory, but a form of knowledge that is collectively produced throughout history. As such architecture can't be reduced to a set of universal principles nor to the mere sum of the individual buildings or practices, but has to be understood as the totality of design and construction techniques that allow understanding, producing and inhabiting space.

¹⁸For a concise history and thorough critique of the notion of the domestic see AURELI; GIUDICI, 2016, p.105-129.

¹⁹Translation of the author.

²⁰The concept of *praxis* was originally developed by Aristotle as the political and ethical activity of man in opposition to *theoria* and *poiesis*. Here Sérgio Ferro refers to the Marxian notion of *praxis*, discussed by Marx (1845; 1845). For a succinct reconstruction of the Marxian notion of *praxis* see PETROVIĆ, 1994.

In other words each individual building can be conceived, produced and inhabited because architecture exists as common knowledge, as a pre-individual condition collectively produced. Designs and buildings are the actuality of architecture as potentiality, individuation of architectural knowledge and at the same time a manifestation of the common undifferentiated horizon that allows the production of space.²¹ Yet, the common nature of architectural production is precisely what capital appropriates when the individuality of each work and the originality of each practice is obsessively emphasised. The reality of contemporary architectural production is constituted by two apparently divergent but in fact complementary movements: on the one hand the pulverisation of labour in a cloud of interns, consultants, subcontractors, visualizers, curators and social media managers while on the other hand the strive for the uniqueness of the product through which the abstraction of financial capitalism is reified and endlessly reproduced in the pervasive circulation of images.²² The conflict between drawing and construction site identified by *Arquitetura Nova* operates today in an augmented reality where the distinction between the building and its image is increasingly blurred to accommodate the light speed of capital and exploit the productivity of precarious and ubiquitous labour. For that, not only the marks of labour are to be erased from the building appearance, but also the traces of architecture as a form of knowledge collectively produced through history have to disappear underneath the artificially pumped uniqueness of the immediate present. The architect's role today is less about coordinating the building process than reducing the complexity of architectural labour to a unitary image and narrative, encapsulated in tautological diagrams and painted with a thin coat of social and ecological purpose. The master builder is dead; long live the illusionist.

Against this contemporary condition of architectural practice the work of *Arquitetura Nova* is exemplary: not only did they exercise a radically collective form of design opposing individual authorship while placing the workers' knowledge at the centre of both the design and building processes, but they also worked relentlessly on

²¹Here I refer to the idea of the common as pre-individual reality as theorised by Paolo Virno (2002; 2010). On the notion of architecture as common knowledge see AURELI 2012, p.147-156.

²²For an articulated critique of the relationship between architecture, financial capital, digital image and construction site see ARANTES 2012.

designing a form that would expose and reclaim architecture as common knowledge: the vault.

Form: the archetype of the vault-house

The *ethos* of Arquitetura Nova primarily takes the form of the vault-house, a gesture of powerful aesthetic intensity that manifests the theoretical and technical issues posed by the political position of the group into an precise architectural form: a single large vault defines the space of the house; two glass and wood walls on the short sides regulate the threshold between interior and exterior; the ground is manipulated to accommodate the topography and define different spatial qualities through fixed furniture; a number of secondary elements are overlaid to the vault and articulate the organisation of the space. These four simple operations constitute the archetype that Arquitetura Nova has produced and refined in a dozen variations, from the Casa Bernardo Issler in 1961 to the Casa Paulo Vampré in 1977.²³

The single vault is chosen for its structural efficiency and simplicity of construction: its geometry, based on the catenary curve, allows the structure to work almost exclusively in compression, therefore minimising the need of steel and concrete, and drastically reducing the amount of labour and the cost of materials.²⁴ Furthermore the project aims for each phase of the work to remain separate, legible and didactically exposed in the materiality of the building, so that the workers' labour can be celebrated in its technical and aesthetic autonomy. This tactic is particularly visible in the exposed electrical and plumbing installations and in the intentional separation of the vault from the elements that organise its inhabitation, such as the mezzanines, the "wet rooms," the openings of windows and skylights, and the fixed

furniture. While the geometry of the cover allows the use of the most common and familiar materials of the Brazilian city, their arrangement in an unusual form and the overlaying of autonomous elements against the absolute clarity of the vault, produce an effect of estrangement that echoes the montage technique devised by Berthold Brecht in his "epic theatre". According to Walter Benjamin, in the montage "the superimposed element disrupts the context in which it is inserted. [...] The interruption of action, on account of which Brecht described his theatre as 'epic', constantly counteracts the illusion on the part of the audience [...] Epic theatre therefore does not reproduce situations; rather it discovers them" (BENJAMIN, 1999, p.778). In the same way Arquitetura Nova's "epic details" counter the naturalisation of hierarchies and relationships of production – that is the core of the bourgeois ideological project of the interior.²⁵ By disrupting the conventional understanding of domesticity the vault allows a new form of life to be invented through inhabitation. The mezzanine floors hosting the resting areas, for example, are bare concrete structures built inside the house that suggest a penetration of the very generic fabric of the city within the intimacy of the interior. Suspended at the very centre of the vault they at once materialise and dissolve the idea of privacy through the continuity of the three-dimensional space. The openings in the vault defamiliarise the notion of window by piercing the surface with concrete boxes or slices of fibrocement pipes, or by subtraction generating unusual arched porticoes that reveal the pace of the structure. The "wet rooms" are autonomous concrete and brick structures containing kitchens, toilets or the maid's rooms: topped with water tanks and decorated with the geometrical arrangement of exposed coloured pipes these volumes stand like iconic and enigmatic totems. If the presence of domestic labourers in the Brazilian house couldn't be eradicated, at least it was not half-sunken or hidden in the backyard but bluntly placed at the entrance of the house, in a volume that could be eventually demolished when "abolition" would be finally achieved (KOURY, 2003, p.89). The concrete fixed furniture dissimulate the problematic moment when the vault touches the ground and reduces the inhabitable height (KOURY, 2003, p.85), and at the same time they are permanent objects removed from the endless cycle of commodification and open to appropriation through use. Finally every element, seen as produced, analogously represents the entire manufacturing cycle and thus counters the ideological separation between

²³Single-family houses constitute the most conspicuous and relevant part of Arquitetura Nova's architectural production. Among the 18 houses they designed between 1960 and 1977, 12 assumed the form of the vault. There is no unanimous consensus among the scholars on what should be included in the production of the group: after Sérgio Ferro was exiled to France in 1971, Rodrigo Lefèvre continued to experiment with the vault-house while working on large scale projects for Hidroservice and Flávio Imperio dedicate himself to art and set design. However the houses of the 1970s are clearly a development of the common trajectory.

²⁴The structure of the vault was initially made of straight standard hollow bricks and prefabricated beams. Disposed longitudinally on wooden moulds to form the curved surface the array of beams was then finished with a layer of lightly reinforced concrete. In the latest projects Rodrigo Lefèvre further refined the construction technique by turning the original catenary into a second-degree parabolic curve and using transversal curved beams, a system that made the construction easier and more efficient. KOURY, 2003, 74.

²⁵On the emergence of the interior as ideology see RICE, 2007.

the domestic interior and the city as space of production. Even enclosed within the individual plot and bound to private property, the vault-house strives to expose the conflict between capital and labour and to produce a political awareness beyond the collective moment of the construction site. In this respect the gap between the imagined and the real subjects inhabiting the house is not understood as a limit or a contradiction, but rather as an opportunity to imagine another way of dwelling and therefore new relationships of production against and within capital: the vault-house is striking inasmuch as its form is able to question the bourgeois canon of domesticity and put forward an alternative paradigm of living.

Although never explicitly claimed by the group, the refusal of a domesticity based on property and privacy finds a crucial precedent in the indigenous *oca*, the collective-domestic space of many Brazilian native peoples. The parallel goes far beyond a superficial formal resemblance or the fetishism of a national cultural identity, hinting instead to the idea that the formulation of an alternative form of life is inextricably linked with the valorisation of the native culture. Not only the *oca* is a vaulted space, but it is built collectively and lived as a space of the clan rather than as a stronghold of the nuclear family. In this respect the words of Sérgio Ferro, describing the unbuilt project of the Casa Império-Hamburger, seem to claim an idea of domesticity analogous to the indigenous one: “the gentle curve protecting first the construction site and then the family Império-Hamburger with its maternal, uterine connotation. Inside, total freedom, to escape the rigidity of the bourgeois house. On the mezzanine, completely open to the community of the numerous children, bed, wardrobes, benches and tables compose a festive *promenade architecturale*. Below, the *promenade* continues, fluid with few closed spaces (FERRO, 1997, p.100).²⁶ Going beyond the opposition between the opposition – still internal to the bourgeois tradition – between the subdivision of the apartment and the fluidity of the modernist open space, the metaphor of the uterus claims a much deeper sense of belonging to the land beyond the social construct of the family. Furthermore the *detournement* of the Corbusian *promenade architecturale* into a carnival of furniture suggests an idea of living based more on the communal use of space and objects

²⁶According to Sérgio Ferro the house Império-Hamburger, designed by Flávio Imperio for her sister in 1965, has been the most complete and original contribution of the group, a “legisign”, a term borrowed by Charles Sanders Peirce that can be understood as synonymous of archetype. Translation of the author.

than on privacy and property – a conception very close to the one of the native peoples. The form of the vault itself, blending the vertical and the horizontal plane into a continuous surface, challenges the conventional Cartesian dimension of the space, constituted at once of separation and repetition *ad infinitum*. On the contrary the space is fluid but constantly framed by the curvature of the ceiling-wall surface that, even when subdivided, always offers a way for the subject to analogously reconstruct the whole from the singular part. As such the form of the vault produces an understanding of space that is not of a mathematical kind but rather, as the indigenous one, symbolic and cosmological.

The power of the vault-house lies in its savage monumentality, in the autonomy of its form, chosen not in relationship to function or context but in spite of them. Lightly resting on the ground, the vault fulfils the problem of shelter and thus liberates the interior from functional preoccupations. As such the archetype is radically anti-typological: a mean of inhabitation without end (AGAMBEN, 1996). The vault house seems to anticipate the unfolding of post-Fordist production in the imagination of a self-managed construction site that opposes autonomy, cooperation and creativity to the hierarchical organisation of the factory (ARANTES, 2002, p.120-130). Furthermore it stages a living condition that blurs the boundaries between work and leisure, public and private, productive and reproductive labour. Rather than liberating the worker, the dissolution of the modern boundaries of human activities implies an increasingly pervasive control and exploitation of the very potential of human labour, of our common capability of thinking and relating:²⁷ the utopia of the plan overcome by the endless reproduction of urbanisation. However, the vault-house opposes to the ideology of monadic individuals and unique architectures the ability of architectural form to expose the irreducible presence of the common architectural knowledge. The vault house stands as an archetype, a paradigmatic form that produces a tension between the subject, the house and the city, and thus challenges prescribed norms and behaviours while opening to collective use and appropriation of space.

²⁷This is the central thesis of Paolo Virno's reflection on language based on the notion of “general intellect” proposed by MARX, 1993. Besides the already mentioned texts by Virno see also VIRNO [1985] 2010.

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Capital limits: the design and the manufacturing workplace

Margens capitais: o desenho e o canteiro da manufatura

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It approaches the relation in Sérgio Ferro's first production side by side with Flávio Império and Rodrigo Lefèvre and with the São Paulo modern architecture scene in terms of its ideology and language scope before the 1964 military coup and the radical criticism that they would later elaborate. With it affiliated to the Brazilian Marxist intellectual interpretive approach, which was related to the duality between archaic and modern. It enlightens the commitment of their ideas to users and architects with a view for a solution for the housing construction with social concern. It is about bourgeois residences designed by Ferro, characterized by construction sites served as heterogeneous manufacturing laboratories - Boris Fausto's house, in São Paulo - and organic manufacture - Bernardo Isler's house, in Cotia - this one in a dome design.

Resumo

Aborda os vínculos da primeira produção de Sérgio Ferro, ao lado de Flávio Império e Rodrigo Lefèvre com a corrente paulista da arquitetura moderna no âmbito da ideologia e da linguagem, anterior ao golpe militar de 1964 e à crítica radical que elaborariam na sequência, filiada à corrente interpretativa de intelectuais brasileiros marxistas, nos termos da dualidade entre arcaico e moderno. Ilumina o comprometimento de suas ideias com usuários e produtores da arquitetura, com vistas a uma solução para a construção de habitações de interesse social. Trata de duas residências burguesas projetadas por Ferro, cujos canteiros de obras serviram como laboratórios de manufatura heterogênea - casa Boris Fausto, em São Paulo - e manufatura orgânica - casa Bernardo Isler, em Cotia - essa última em abóboda.

Capital limits

Working in trio, duo or solo, since they had been students, Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre, and Sérgio Ferro were the authors, in the 1960s, of projects with concerns about the architecture sense, the worksite work organization, and about the construction systems rationalization. Immersed in multidisciplinary performances such as teaching, painting, criticism, and theater, in addition to architecture, the cooperative creation process that involved them is evident. As Sérgio Ferro told me in an interview (1995): “there were almost absolute osmosis and none jealousy among us” - and the ban on the appeal to the sensitive – “we had to argue, convince the other, or we did not do it. There was no violin, or when there was, it was on purpose, and then it was difficult to be cooperative: one proposed and the others embrace at the same time”.

I consider the first four years of this partnership (1961-4) as the period for a common architectural idea based on the positive works designed experiences in a collective studio. Thus, crossed references are made and the cultural amalgam resulted remain alive from the covered period. More than finding definitive answers, the trio raised questions specifically related to the Brazilian’s architecture, transforming their projects and works as a laboratory of technical and spatial possibilities, whose background was the public housing problem. In July of 1965, this production would be put together for the first time in the magazine *Acrópole* (n. 319) special issue.

Eduardo Corona's editorial "About popular housing" made the motto clear, followed by Vilanova Artigas' article, whose title message also states: "A false crisis". For the three architects, the atmosphere of the moment was about frustration due to the architecture's social meaning limitation “in a time of war”. So Artigas intended to show that the country despite the military coup did not embrace the modernization wave, and also show that there was no crisis in functionalism architecture, but a national “overcoming period” based on Oscar Niemeyer self-criticism. This resulted in a new synthesis between technique and art, conciseness and purity overlapping the early excessive originality. He ended by quoting Paul Langevin: “thought is born from the action and, in a healthy spirit, returns to action.” This was an invitation for a professional practice that minimized the latent desire for effective political action by

young architects, beginning a heated debate.

In the same Journal, there are introductory texts written by Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre, and Sérgio Ferro for the notebook project: “Notes on architecture”. Each one complained in their ways about the precarious labor market and the bourgeois architecture consumption, forcing the architect to work nearby fields such as painting and theater and also about the “concern in surveying and interpreting facts of our culture”, a direct criticism about the political moment. The projects, covering four years of architectural production, are presented in a non-chronological and non-random order, creating a discourse. After an urban project and three other residences, we have the Boris Fausto’s house (1963) as an epilogue, an index of the developmental impasse vision focused on the industrialization problem in Brazilian civil construction. And finally, two experiences in dome, opening trails: “Residence on the beach” - Simon Fausto’s house (1961), a project by Flávio Império - followed by “Residence in Cotia” - Bernardo Issler’s house (1963). The innovation was not only formal but about the technical nature: the dome reflected some of the Ferro, Imperio, and Lefèvre’s architecture guiding concepts: almost perfect structure - working only with compression; improvement of working conditions at the worksite - protecting the worker from the sun and the rain; and material savings - brick being used for sealing and in the roof. Also, the use to the form adaptations would lead to possibilities of changing in the traditional house spaces.

In “Arquitetura Nova” (1967), Sérgio Ferro discusses the period between the 1940s and 1960s. When there were social possible development symptoms. These, true or not, served to stimulate an “optimistic anticipatory activity” translated by a “sober and direct architecture” and appropriate to our underdevelopment country. “Brasília¹ marked the height and the interruption of these hopes: we soon stopped our timid and illusory social advances and answering to the military curfew”. The correct interpretation of the dubious sentence seems to be a key for the understanding of the three architects first collaboration. A possible interpretation is proposed by the literary critic Roberto Schwarz in his unusual essay *Cultura e Política*, 1964-69. In some drafts - in which Roberto Schwarz briefly comments on Ferro's article - it is about to understand that “the cultural process, which has been overflowing class limits and

¹Brasília is the federal capital of Brazil.

the mercantile criteria, was dammed in 64". According to his logic, as in that time theater scene, the "new architecture" would have become "a matter for own consumption", since the military coup had broken the sketchy contact among the artists and the exploited ones for whom the work was directed and oriented. Hence the architects lived the anticlimax of the bourgeois house²:

The political architecture perspective was washed; however, there was a remaining architect's intellectual training. Hence, they will torture the space, overloading houses with ideas and experiments for those newlywed friends who had some money and ask them to design a project. Out of its proper context, taking place in a limited sphere and as merchandise, architectural rationalism becomes a good taste show of - contradictory with its profound line - or a moralistic and uncomfortable symbol of the revolution that it did not take place.³

When considering the particularities of the architecture field, the idea of "interrupted design" does not seem to be supported. The modern Brazilian architecture social commitment had always been thin. That "brutalism" identified by Schwarz as a "moralistic symbol" was already in Artigas, as pointed by Pedro Arantes:

Puritan morality and rational control of wealth is the goal of the bourgeois modernization project. That is why, when Sérgio speaks about "committed aesthetics", we could add: it was particularly committed to transforming the bourgeois house and educating the elite. This is our "cause" (2002, p. 48).⁴

Moving on to another possible reading for that sentence; that Brasília construction made explicit the Brazilian modernization contradictions, being the apex and rupture of architecture's commitment to the country development. The downward curve here predates that on from the general culture in the four years between the city

inauguration and the military coup. The Pilot Plan realization and its contrast about the satellite towns highlighted the time conditions limitations and also highlight the political project contradictions and its impracticability in terms of its proposed goals.

⁵

In bifurcated reality, Brasilia was at the same time the affirmation of the unequal and combined and a symbol of the impossibility of overcoming this reality through peaceful or institutional ways, which would lead to the Jânio Quadros' election and the radical populism of João Goulart. João Goulart associated himself with the left-wing. The duality between the archaic and the modern was not exogenous to him, and the democratic interruption process in 1964 did not cancel the modernization process and the economic development that engenders it. Developmentalism, of course, without a renewing social project: while social inequalities grew, increasing income concentration, the military exacerbated technical-industrial development and the nationalist ideal of progress. Having designed together with Lefèvre two buildings in the new capital, Ferro on an interview said the following:

The political activist and professional training came almost together. Since the second year of FAU-USP, works were already under construction, especially in Brasília. The absurd contrast between the dominant professional discourse, in general, generous and compatible with the left-wing and frightening reality of the worksites could not be disregarded, except by bad faith. I followed the horror of the Brasília's worksites closely. Because of the ethical obligation, I was forced to review the certainties of the profession - and I continue to do it today (2002b, p. 141).⁶

Corroborating with this statement, I hypothesize that the limits were already at the root of the first Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre, and Sérgio Ferro joint projects, based on some awareness of the means of production in architecture, but it has not yet

²In the original: Cortada a perspectiva política da arquitetura, restava entretanto a formação intelectual que ela dera aos arquitetos, que iriam torturar o espaço, sobrecarregar de intenções e experimentos as casinhas que os amigos recém-casados, com algum dinheiro, às vezes lhes encomendavam. Fora de seu contexto adequado, realizando-se em esfera restrita e forma de mercadoria, o racionalismo arquitetônico transforma-se em ostentação de bom-gosto – incompatível com a sua direção profunda – ou em símbolo moralista e inconfortável da revolução que não houve

³Op. cit., p. 79.

⁴In the original: Moral puritana e controle do uso racional da riqueza, cujo fim é o projeto de modernização burguesa. É por isso que, quando Sérgio fala em "estética empenhada", nós poderíamos completar: ela esteve particularmente empenhada em transformar a casa burguesa e educar a elite. Esta a nossa "causa" (2002, p. 48).

⁵Paulo Bicca, in a critical essay, promotes an interesting parallel between Brasilia and the Tower of Babel to highlight "the irrationality of a generous project and the distance between intentions and results". Cf. BICCA, P. R. S. (1985). *Brasília: mitos e realidades*. In: PAVIANI, A.. (Org.). *Brasília, ideologia e realidade - Espaço urbano, em questão*. São Paulo: Projeto, p.100-33.

⁶In the original: Militância política e formação profissional vieram quase juntas. Desde o segundo ano de FAU-USP, já tinha obras em execução, particularmente em Brasília. O contraste absurdo entre o discurso profissional dominante, em geral aparentemente generoso e de esquerda, e a realidade assustadora dos canteiros de obra não podia ser desconsiderado a não ser por má-fé. Acompanhei de perto o horror dos canteiros de Brasília. Por obrigação ética, fui obrigado a rever as certezas enfunadas da profissão – e assim continuo ainda hoje (2002b, p. 141).

formulated as a critic. Even linked to the national development process, with which the architects' group was committed, they already had a concern about the rationality about the doing process. According to Sérgio Ferro, still in the early 1960s, he and Rodrigo Lefèvre started working on a hypothesis of what architecture as manufacture would be like:

Capital distinguishes two types of different manufacturing: one called serial and the other called heterogeneous. In the serial production you do almost everything at the worksite: make one layer, and then do another, and then do another, and then do another; an adding process. In the end, the house is ready. In the heterogeneous production, parts are made in plants or warehouses and are brought and set at the worksite. Both are manufacturing. Pre-fabrication at the worksite is not an industry. The components industrialization has nothing to do with the construction site industrialization. They are quite different things. You can have the most sophisticated products on the worksite. And these more sophisticated products from the cutting edge industry will enter the dominant manufacture, the dominant structure (2002a, p. 18-9).⁷

Using this work for improve terms precision, the two forms of manufacturing identified by Karl Marx are heterogeneous and organic:

Manufacturing comes in two fundamental forms. Although they eventually combine, they are formed by two essentially different species and play entirely different roles in the further transformation of manufacturing in the large machinery-based industry. This double character results from the nature of the produced item. Either the item is formed by the simple mechanical set of independent partial products [heterogeneous manufacturing] or owes its finished form to a connected handling sequence operations [serial manufacturing].⁸

⁷In the original: O Capital distingue dois tipos de manufaturas diferentes: uma chamada serial e outra chamada heterogênea. Na serial você faz quase tudo no canteiro: faz uma camada, e depois faz outra, e depois faz outra, e depois faz outra. E aquilo vai somando, no fim, a casinha está pronta. E na heterogênea você traz peças que são feitas em usinas ou em depósitos, que são trazidas e montadas no canteiro. As duas são manufaturas. A pré-fabricação no canteiro não é indústria. A industrialização dos componentes não tem nada a ver com a industrialização do canteiro, são coisas bastante diferentes. Você pode ter produtos os mais sofisticados no canteiro. E esses produtos mais sofisticados de indústria de ponta entrarão na manufatura dominante, na estrutura dominante. (2002a, p. 18-9).

In this perspective, Ferro experienced in his initial house projects, both in 1963, the “two fundamental manufacture forms” that assess the most pertinent sets in the Brazilian production conditions. The first, the Boris Fausto house, reinforced cement concrete roof with internal characteristics determined by prefabricated panels, a heterogeneous manufacturing test. The second, Bernardo Issler house - a circular vault built using a precast concrete system, with the aid of wooden molds - an example of organic manufacturing.

The Boris Fausto house, built in the Butantã neighborhood, in São Paulo, presents a fluid space organized by four central columns in support with one meter high beams and six meters swing column, which supports a square roof slab structured in exposed concrete. The architectural program obeys the criteria of minimum space. Functional equipment executed in fiber cement boards⁹ gives the divisions among the rooms, in addition to large pivoting doors, all freely set from a fixed structure. Thus, the building can be open or closed almost entirely, ensuring continuousness between internal and external areas - the house is a garden closure - and the integration of the spaces for collective and private use. Space is subject to a social pedagogy in which living together designs the project, radically, Le Corbusier's concept of the “living machine” taken to the extreme. In industrial aesthetics: drains and concrete cylinders with boulders showing the rain flow, bathrooms lighting in high domes like chimneys, marine plywood niches draw out from the main slab - ventilated by breezes -, apparent pipes.

Proposed as a “test of incorporating technical progress”, it ended up pointing out the impasses of the Brazilian construction industry in the early 1960s:

⁸In the original: A manufatura se apresenta sob duas formas fundamentais. Embora se combinem eventualmente, constituem duas espécies essencialmente diversas e desempenham papéis inteiramente distintos na transformação posterior da manufatura na grande indústria baseada na maquinaria. Esse duplo caráter decorre da natureza do artigo produzido. Ou o artigo se constitui pelo simples ajuntamento mecânico de produtos parciais independentes [manufatura heterogênea] ou deve sua forma acabada a uma sequência de operações e manipulações conexas [manufatura serial].

⁹Expression borrowed from Ana Paula Koury to designate furniture built during the work (beds, tables, countertops, benches, cabinets, etc.); circulation heating devices and others (stairs, landings, fireplaces, barbecue pit, etc.); and also some private environments (bathrooms, kitchens and bedrooms). Making objects intrinsic to the installation and spatial configuration of houses designed in order to optimize the use of space of these buildings

The main difficulties in our test were not about manual labor, which has adapted to the new techniques. Several manufacturing “defects” impair the whole proposal, forcing countless corrective expedients (the plates do not isolate due to material savings, which the theory would presume; the resin disappears due to the water action, forcing a not forecast clapboards use, etc.) (FERRO, 1965, p. 34).¹⁰

The Bernardo Issler’s house located in Cotia (a city in São Paulo State), brings for the first time the large vaulted roof typology aiming the popular housing construction, later improved by Lefèvre in a group of houses designed in the 1970s. The previous house fluidity is maintained. This time, the functional equipment was built in brickwork. With even more restricted confined spaces have independent coverings in precast concrete joist slab and ceramic blocks like a vault trying not to touch the point of biggest inflection. Thus, there is no disadvantage to space total visual capture, also guaranteed by an internal gap. The Sérgio Ferro’s presentation text of the residency in the Acrópole magazine had an undisguised tone:

The best technique, in some cases, is not always the most suitable. There are situations that constructive modernity is a secondary factor. While large-scale industrialization is not possible, the housing deficit requires the use of popular and traditional techniques. Its rationalization, unconcerned with fine finishing and refinements and associated with a correct interpretation of our needs. It favors not only the appearance of a sober and rustic architecture but also stimulates the living and contemporary creative activity that replaces, often based on improvisation, the elaborate drawing of a drawing board (n. 319, p. 38).¹¹

A criticism of Niemeyer’s work, in the “elaborate drawing of a drawing board”, was implied in almost manifest. They made explicit the coordinates for work coming from the trio of architects, who would deliberately choose organic manufacturing. This manufacturing type is, according to Marx himself, the perfect form of this production model, as a paradigm for Brazilian civil construction.

¹⁰In the original: As principais dificuldades que surgiram no nosso ensaio, não foram as de mão-de-obra que se adaptou facilmente às novas técnicas. Uma série de “defeitos” de fabricação prejudicou o conjunto da proposta, forçando inúmeros expedientes corretivos (as placas não isolam, pela economia de material, o que a teoria faria supor; o mástique que desaparece sob a ação da água, forçando o emprego de mata-juntas que não estavam previstas etc.).

¹¹In the original: A melhor técnica, em determinados casos, nem sempre é a mais adequada. Há mesmo situações em que a modernidade construtiva é fator secundário. Enquanto não for possível a industrialização em larga escala, o déficit habitacional exige o aproveitamento de técnicas populares e tradicionais. Sua racionalização, despreocupada com sutilezas formais e requintes de acabamento, associada a uma interpretação correta de nossas necessidades, favorece, não só o

No less important than the constructions is the ideology formulated by Sérgio Ferro, Rodrigo Lefèvre, and Flávio Império at the beginning of the 1960s, fully expressed in the text “Initial Proposal for a Debate: action possibilities¹²”, written by Ferro and Lefèvre, published in 1963 by the Student Union of FAU-USP¹³, from who they were teachers since 1962, the year they graduated in the same college. A “poetics of economics” was traced there:

So it is from the minimal useful, the minimal constructive, and the minimal didactic necessary that we almost removed the new aesthetic foundation that we could have called the “poetics of the economy”. An aesthetic of the indispensable, removing all the superfluous, and also the “economy” of tactics for creating the new language for us, entirely established based on our historical reality.¹⁴

From the conventional materials appropriation and current constructive forms, a new language would emerge, on the other cultural formulations trail of the period, a combination of ethics and aesthetics. In addition to the three architects painting and scenography singular production, their action platform had some parallel with the “aesthetics of hunger” by Glauber Rocha. And their action also had some parallel with the entire “*Cinema Novo*” production, which saw the lack of third world media as a way of critical expression to the international film industry model - and by extension to Brazilian developmentalism. But it is necessary to be careful: the complexity of this “poorness” that in architecture is greater than a brick on the hand and an idea in the head, considering the specificities of civil construction and manufacturing activity in the class struggle in a capitalist society context. What it was at stake was a different sense of technique from that signaled by the hegemonic national architecture that, despite great achievements, it was not able to reach the people.

A text wrote at the time of the Boris Fausto and Bernardo Issler’s houses construction, and on the eve of the ill-fated coup, when there was still “confidence in the

surgimento de uma arquitetura sóbria e rude, mas também estimula a atividade criadora viva e contemporânea que substitui, muitas vezes com base no improvisado, o rebuscado desenho de prancheta. (n. 319, p. 38)

¹²Original title: *Proposta Inicial para um Debate: possibilidades de atuação.*

¹³School of Architecture and Urbanism / São Paulo

¹⁴In the original: Assim é que do mínimo útil, do mínimo construtivo e do mínimo didático necessários tiramos, quase, as bases de uma nova estética que poderíamos chamar a “poética da economia”, do absolutamente indispensável, da eliminação de todo o supérfluo, da “economia” de meios para formulação da nova linguagem, para nós, inteiramente estabelecida nas bases da nossa realidade histórica.

progress process in a progressive sense”, in 1963. This text already questioned the relevance of the architect’s work in terms of the “economic bases evolution of our society”, a profession impregnated with mannerisms reflecting a “situation in the conflict”:

Examining the history of the proposals we have chosen, the reasons why the proposals were created and developed do not always seem to be coherent with what we intend. We are forced to make a choice. Determining which forces have conditioned this choice is not possible all the time. The predictions carry more personal or situation trends than based on a supposed and sometimes ill-informed way. The doubt is constant in any option: the anguish originated is accentuated by the strange and even unknown intentions with the presented paths¹⁵.

Rodrigo Lefèvre and Sérgio Ferro put at stake the modern democratization premise as a natural consequence of progress. For those who were about to choose organic manufacturing as an adequate solution to Brazilian architecture - from strong criticism to architecture work relations elaborated later - they contradictorily propose a “poetics of economics”, a supposedly new language with roots that rest, in fact, in the modern tradition of heterogeneous manufacturing, found in the field of architecture and industrial design since the Bauhaus of Gropius.

Going back even further in time, I take a chance on a paradox, following William Morris (1834-96) and John Ruskin (1819-1900) example, the first industry sworn enemies and aestheticism defenders. Despite their intentions, they ended up opening the way to industrial aesthetics based on the equation between form and function that modern design would perform. So, the three architects reinforced the capitalist overview from what they pursue to be against it; study became the norm, cause a style, giving echo to the voice of “space mannerists”. More than “Paulista school” critics, Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre, and Sérgio Ferro contributed to its conformation.

¹⁵In the original: No exame da história das propostas que escolhemos, as diversas razões por que foram criadas e desenvolvidas nem sempre aparecem coerentes com o que pretendemos. Na escolha que somos forçados a fazer, a determinação de quais as forças que condicionaram nem sempre

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é possível. As previsões carregam mais tendências pessoais ou da situação do que se baseiam num andamento suposto e, por vezes, pouco informado. A dúvida é constante em qualquer opção: a angústia originada se acentua pelas intenções estranhas e mesmo desconhecidas com que se apresentam os caminhos

Images

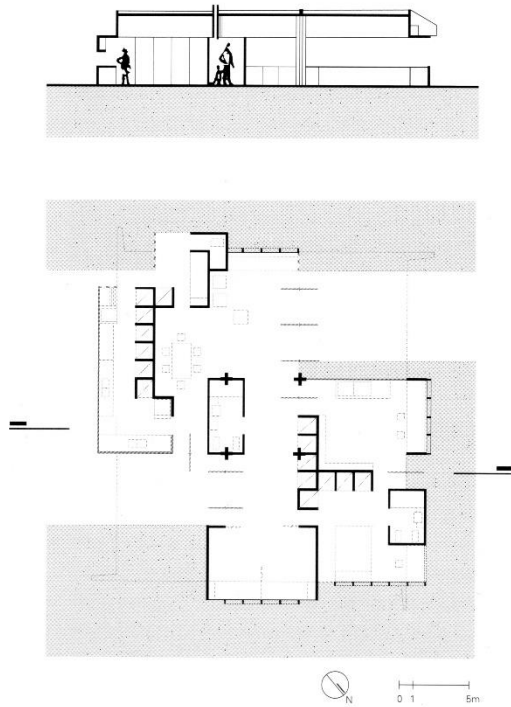


Figure 01. Sérgio Ferro, Boris Fausto House. Plan drawings (and cuts) from *Acrópole* magazine publication n. 319, jul. 1965. In: KOURY, Ana Paula. *Grupo Arquitetura Nova*. São Paulo, Romano Guerra, 2003



Figure 02. Sérgio Ferro, Boris Fausto House. External view. Photo by Unknown Author. In: FERRO, Sérgio. *Futuro anterior*. São Paulo: Nobel, 1989



Figure 03. Sérgio Ferro, Boris Fausto House. External view. Photo by José Moscardi. In: *Acrópole*. São Paulo, ano 27, n. 319, jul. 1965



Figure 04. Sérgio Ferro, Boris Fausto House. External view. Photo by José Moscardi. In: *Acrópole*. São Paulo, ano 27, n. 319, jul. 1965



Figure 05. Sérgio Ferro, Boris Fausto House. External view. Photo by José Moscardi. In: *Acrópole*. São Paulo, ano 27, n. 319, jul. 1965

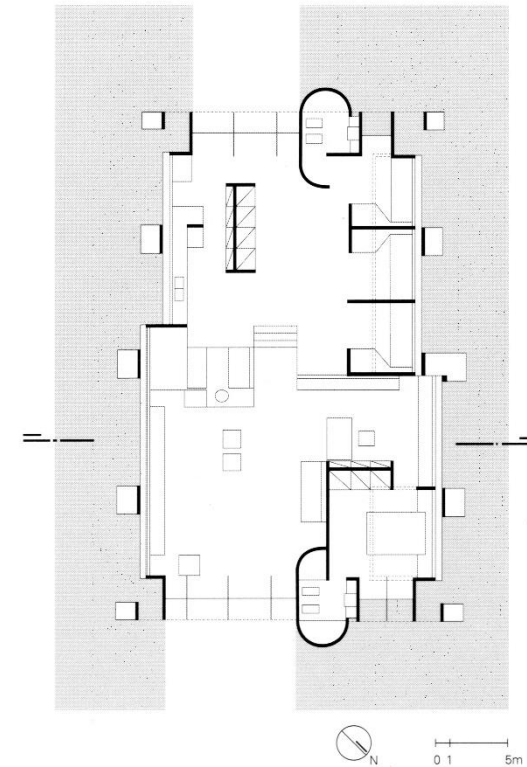
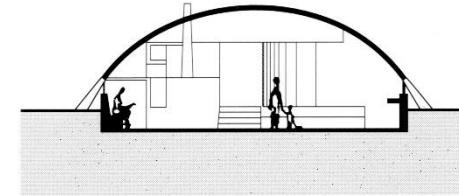


Figure 06. Sérgio Ferro, Bernardo Issler House. Plan drawings (and cuts) from *Acrópole* magazine publication. n. 319, jul. 1965. In: KOURY, Ana Paula. Grupo Arquitetura Nova. São Paulo, Romano Guerra, 2003



Figure 07. Sérgio Ferro, Bernardo Issler House. External view. Photo by Unknown Author. Rodrigo Lefèvre's collection (Biblioteca FAU-USP Library)

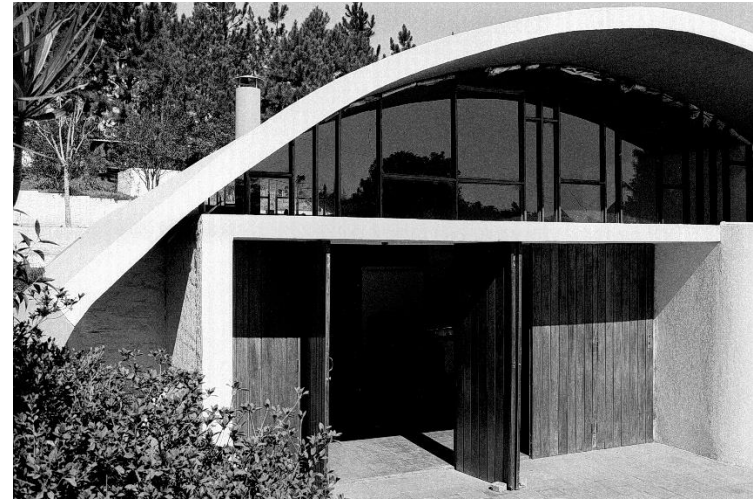


Figure 09. Sérgio Ferro, Bernardo Issler House. External view. Photo by Unknown Author. Rodrigo Lefèvre's collection (FAU-USP Library)



Figure 08. Sérgio Ferro, Bernardo Issler House. External view. Photo by Unknown Author. Rodrigo Lefèvre's collection (Biblioteca FAU-USP Library)

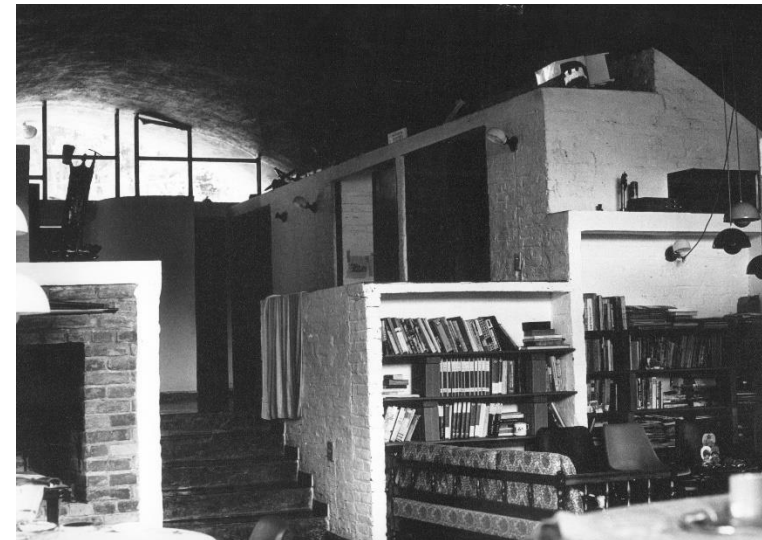


Figure 10. Sérgio Ferro, Bernardo Issler House. External view. Photo by Unknown Author. Rodrigo Lefèvre's collection (FAU-USP Library)

Notes from a Study: contemporary remarks on a pioneering text

Notas de um Estudo: reflexões contemporâneas sobre um texto pioneiro

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Abstract

Written in 1976/7 by Brazilian architect and professor Rodrigo Brotero Lefèvre the text "Notes from a Study on the Objectives of Teaching Architecture and Means to Achieve them in the Design Process" discusses some parameters and paths for helping to bridge the gap between teaching and practice, between design activities and construction activities, between the individuality of creation and the necessity of learning to creatively work within a team. This re-reading of that fundamental text seeks to understand some of the circumstances of the author and his time and some of the most relevant reflections the text proposes, which include the dealing with the difficulties, and obstacles to overcome, and the advantages and interests in promoting and activating the possibility of the architectural design process to be taken as both a self-understanding individual process and a collective team process.

Resumo

Escrito em 1976/7 pelo arquiteto e professor brasileiro Rodrigo Brotero Lefèvre, o texto "Notas de um Estudo sobre Objetivos do Ensino da Arquitetura e Meios para Atingi-los em Trabalho de Projeto" discute alguns parâmetros e caminhos para ajudar a superar as lacunas entre ensino e prática, entre atividades de projeto e atividades de construção, entre a individualidade da criação e a necessidade de aprender a trabalhar criativamente em equipe. Esta releitura desse texto fundamental procura entender algumas das circunstâncias do autor e seu tempo e algumas das reflexões mais relevantes que o texto propõe, que incluem possíveis caminhos para lidar com as dificuldades e obstáculos a serem superados, assim como as vantagens e o interesse em se promover e ativar a possibilidade do processo de projeto arquitetônico ser praticado tanto como um processo individual de autoconhecimento como um processo de trabalho coletivo em equipe.

Introduction

A craft profession is recognized as an activity connected to the type of knowledge that is gradually acquired through practice. The art of construction, or architecture, has traditionally been organized by an amalgamation of the activities of several "officers", or "craft" professionals, trained in practical life to acquire certain specialized knowledge, conveyed by example, who are coordinated by a (more experienced) major officer with a vast mastery of these crafts, for having been practicing them for some time. Some professionals in the art of building, or architecture, had some literary knowledge; but its erudition is usually linked to the recognition of appropriate, everyday and/or noteworthy precedents, as applicable to the case, and to their skills in emulating them in a more or less innovative and/or experimental way.

This concept alters when the exercise of architecture changes from being a "craft" profession to intending to be a "liberal profession", and the architect is no longer a professional trained by hands-on learning, but qualified by accumulated theoretical knowledge. Architecture, or the art of building, will never be a totally abstract activity. However, the focus of its teaching and learning changes: it becomes the domain of the art of knowing how to design in architecture. The qualification of this professional is almost restricted to training and individual mastery of a metalanguage: the a priori abstract figuration of what may or may not be a work of architecture. In order to be recognized as a product born of an intellectual, personalized, and individual conception, the "new" profession – architect – degrades to a secondary level of importance (and often even forgets) that the execution of a work – and even its design – is always an activity that must involve a team of people, qualified in different types of knowledge, both theoretical and practical. The learning and "training" process of a future architect changes fundamentally, as its goal turns to be the provision of an appropriate environment and incentives for architecture, or its design, to be accomplished, ideally, from a supposed personal and private "creation", which is operated, in each case, by a single and isolated individual.

But as the ingrained millenary practices of construction still exist and resist, inertially, to changes, the daily practical reality, in most cases, continues to be carried out indifferently to intellectualized explanations. The job of building "in the traditional way"

has not, so far, been eliminated in any way: it still exists, although precariously under the law. On the other hand, as ideas and thoughts produced by intellectual thought also progressively reverberate, in one way or another, in reality, neither is anything exactly the same as before. The "new" profession of "liberal architect" gradually consolidates, permeated with contradictions, sailing between idealized chimeras and partial successes. And, for this very reason, very recently, young graduate architects are perplexed by realizing their profound ignorance of the practical things of the profession of building, or architecture. They see that they are barely or not prepared at all to work in this real, complex, and contradictory world, in which their knowledge and skills will possibly be of little value. And where, almost always, their status as an architect will not guarantee them any priority; and even if they do have an opportunity to practice their profession as an architect/a-designer, they will almost always be part of a group or team, which will rarely be under their command.

The possibility of suggesting ways to help them overcome, even if partially and circumstantially, this gap between teaching and practice, between the design activity and construction activities, between the individuality of creation and the basic need to learn how to work, creatively, as a team seems to have been the intention of the architect and professor Rodrigo Brotero Lefèvre in his 1976/7 text, "Notas de um Estudo sobre Objetivos do Ensino da Arquitetura e Meios para Atingi-los em Trabalho de Projeto". In this encouraging and complex article, the author organizes several reflections, vast and pertinent, in a systematic and coordinated manner, dealing with the possibilities, hardships, problems, obstacles to be overcome, and the advantages and interests in promoting adequate incentives to enable the possibility of "design work" occurring as a process of individual self-knowledge, and through professional and creative teamwork. It may seem little, given the complex panorama of professional life, slightly described above. But it is not. Furthermore, 40 years after it is published, the content of this article remains very relevant: the problems it points out still happen, the proposals it organizes are still possible, feasible, and interesting. Therefore, it seems important to emphasize, again, its pioneering contribution to the teaching and practice of architectural design, also in contemporary times.

Complexities and contradictions along the way

Originally published in 1977¹, this text (or a preliminary version) was originally written in French, during Lefèvre's stay in Grenoble, France², in the 1975/6 school year; and it was probably translated into Portuguese (and possibly expanded) by the author himself, after teaching in Brazil again in the second half of 1976. Rodrigo Lefèvre was temporarily removed, between 1970-1976, from teaching activities at FAU-USP, where he worked as a teacher since 1962. Unlike the situation of other professors, who had also been politically persecuted, he had not been officially terminated from the faculty in the years he was "compulsorily" removed from the university. His return established a "de facto" situation, in spite of the dictates of bureaucracy and the institutional body of the university, which were reluctant to accept his presence. Rodrigo returned into being a teacher, but only because he wanted to.

When he returned, he already had in his baggage the desire to deal with the subject of "team project work". The temporal coincidence of the preparation of these reflections with the period of absence from the university suggests that his previous activity as a teacher was not the only or the main trigger of this reflection. I would even dare to suggest that his stay in Grenoble is an opportunity, rather than the cause of the writing of that text, since an important part of these reflections seems to have its origin in his experience as an "employee architect" in the company Hidroservice, where he worked since 1972 and until the end of his life. In later moments³ Lefèvre will defend the validity and the importance of his professional per-

¹Recently republished in KOURY, KOURY, Ana Paula (org), 2019, p.87-140.

²According to Koury (2019, p.32), "in 1975 [Rodrigo Lefèvre] spent a year as a professor at 2 interdisciplinary studios at Unité Pédagogique d'Architecture in Grenoble, France, where Sérgio Ferro was a professor. Lefèvre's stay in France gives him an important entry into psychology due to his contact with Françoise du Boisberranger, from where he extracted the elements he needed to transform the way of approaching the project. From this stay comes the textbook "Notes sur le travail de projet dans une école d'architecture, for students of Unité pédagogique d'architecture, Grenoble", later translated for FAUUSP's students (Notas de um Estudo Sobre Objetivos do Ensino da Arquitetura e Meios para Atingi-los em Trabalho de Projeto de 1977) and transformed into a University Extension Discipline taught in collaboration with Architect Paulo Bicca in 1982."

³As in his testimony in the forum "Arquitetura e Desenvolvimento Nacional" organized by IAB-SP in 1979 (transcribed in KOURY, 2019, p.157-178), and in the text "O Arquiteto Assalariado" published in the magazine Módulo in 1981 (transcribed in KOURY, 2019, p. 187-194).

formance as an employee at a large company, in spite of the criticisms of the "liberal" standing from his peers and in line with the reality already faced by a great number of his students. But it is in this text that this subject is pioneered, although not explicitly, debated.

From the 1970s onwards, important changes in the capitalist appropriation and production of Brazilian cities were established, and, at the same time, the social origin of a major portion of the students of architecture schools significantly changes. From the end of the 1960s, with a pressure to increase places in public universities, good students, well educated in public primary and secondary schools, which were also of good quality, started to gain legitimate and massive access to public higher education; at the same time, many private universities were also opening their architecture courses. This layer of young middle-class students was often the first generation of their families to reach university. However, more often than not they did not have the necessary social stock to thrive in an office of their own, only with orders from one-time customers; nor did they reach access to important government orders, still common in the 1970s, when they formed the bulk of the usual clientele of architects belonging to the generations that graduated before this teaching expansion.

The son of a traditional bourgeois family, Rodrigo Brotero Lefèvre chooses to participate intensely in the political struggles of that crucial moment in the 1960s-70s, when hopes of social change are shattered by the destruction of the democratic regime and the establishment of the military dictatorship of 1964-85; an engagement with dramatic consequences, which resulted in the extreme fragility of his personal and professional life. As soon as he could, he returned to his architect profession⁴; in parallel with some individual design orders and undertook, as a basic source of income, wage-based and regular employment in a large engineering company. Which, on the other hand, allowed him to adopt a work regime that was flexible enough for him to keep exercising his teaching activities.

Thus, after a half-decade interregnum from the university, Rodrigo Lefèvre resumed teaching at FAU-USP in August 1976. But it was not enough for him to go

⁴In a way, he never stopped working, since even during the period in which he was a political prisoner he continued to carry out studies and projects, made possible with the support of external collaborators.

back to be a teacher and make a difference by direct contact with some students. When he returned, he also resumed his writing practice, which had already been prospering simultaneously with his professional and pedagogical practice. Designing, writing, teaching – as well as acting politically – were not watertight worlds for him, but facets of the same reality, intensely lived in all its aspects⁵

Despite the struggles and contradictions of his time and condition, Lefèvre refuses to face the reality then experienced as "disappointing", understanding that it is his duty to help build instruments to face it in a consistent and transformative manner. This seems to be the objective, or rather, the bottom line, of "Notas de um Estudo..."; although the author only says it at the end of the text, in the last point of the fourth chapter:

There is a trend among us to see all our actions, all our attitudes, all the products of our work as disappointing. [...] That is, our subjectivity, with its high complexity, ends up supposing, through reflections on itself, that it can do things of high significance, of great importance – but in reality, in doing, drawing, writing, making a sculpture, relating to someone, the result of such doing always seems diminished to us, always smaller, always disappointing. [...] In fact, this disappointment is nothing but an attitude that corresponds to an idealistic position. The produced object is what matters, what is real, and the modifier. It is a modifier in all aspects, whether in the external reality or in the inner reality of each person's head. A produced object is never disappointing, it cannot be disappointing, it is, in all instances, the concrete syntheses of human thought – and it contains human thought. (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.138-9)

And to face and overcome this disappointment syndrome, Lefèvre understands that it is not enough to rely on "tangible things", because theories (or theoretical reflections) can also be, and are, equally concrete things:

But if we take a theory as an object, then we may have the option again of unraveling it to look for the elements of the culture to which it belongs, to look for all the different aspects, to look for even its future, to look for how it was produced, or what is its use and what has been required to conserve it. But this implies not taking a theory as truth, it implies taking it as a means, necessarily, among others, to develop knowledge. (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.139 - final paragraph of the text).

⁵As in Lefèvre's text, "Do Pensar, do Fazer..." (in KOURY, 2019, p.141-150), originally published in 1979.

In light of this understanding on where the author apparently wants to go, perhaps a brief exegesis of some of the issues that the text's journey establishes may be proposed. Also, to better understand how the issue of "knowledge development" is approached there: not in a general way, but focused on a restricted and specific subject, the teaching of architectural design. Maybe it's a microcosm. But it contains, or may contain, as anything and everything, the world.

The structure of the discourse

The text "Notas de um Estudo sobre Objetivos do Ensino de Arquitetura e Meios para Atingi-los em Trabalho de Projeto" is organized in an introduction and 4 chapters. Perhaps it comes from the conscious, or atavistic, memory of Rodrigo Lefèvre's basic education in Jesuit teaching at Colégio São Luiz, the choice to adopt a way to start and develop the text within certain rules and measures of classical rhetoric. For example, in the introduction, the author humbly apologizes for the fact that it is incomplete work, or of little value, which he considers to be "more of a bunch of ideas, appraisals, assumptions than something structured and developed to reach proven conclusions" (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.87). Modesty is ethically required as an attitude to be adopted, as opposed to displays of erudition or an arrogant authority attitude. But being excessively modest is possible: the text is actually very well structured, carefully and extensively developed, slowly lingering on long definitions of concepts and ideas, before dealing and working with them. The text also reminds me of certain features of Spinoza's way of thinking, whose philosophical writing deliberately adopts the rhythmic concatenation of mathematical demonstrations.

The introduction clarifies that the text's intention is to bring to light – that is, to show in a clear and systematic way – the "subjectivism" of pedagogical works. Which, paradoxically, would be precisely a consequence of refusing and/or masking the inherent subjectivity of human acts, in favor of an "objectivism" – which is also not a manifestation of the desire for objectivity, but its peculiar distortion and/or concealment. It also explains that, in order to better develop this idea, the first chapter will establish definitions (or operational concepts), the second some postulates (or theories), the third a working methodology, and the fourth some "notes", or considerations on how to support the presented proposals for effective application. Finally, still in the introduction, Lefèvre presents some synthetic definitions of the text's

operational terms: subjectivity, subjectivism, objectivity, objectivism; in themselves, and in their relationship with each individual.

Chapter 1 begins by clarifying that what will matter, in this case, are not these terms in themselves, but how these aspects are expressed by the attitudes of an individual, in his or her relations with other individuals. The specific individuals, under examination in this case, would be architecture students. But they can also be, as deduced from the possible motivations that gave rise to this text, the members of a project team, whether they are students or professionals, in their relations with each other.

The first warning in the text is against the idea that teaching – and, indeed, design – can be done from scratch. When starting a design task, therefore, avoiding the nihilistic attitude of “I don’t know” is necessary, from the realization that, in any case, something is already known. Because it is precisely the understanding of this “something” that can reveal what one really needs to know. Note that this consideration, although addressed to students, is in fact to teachers; who are seen, in the text, as those with the task to help and make learning easier, and not simply to “grant” their knowledge (supposedly supreme and unchallenged...) to students that are unprepared and/or in a pristine state of ignorance. For Lefèvre, “the objectives of a didactic work [...] can only have this knowledge [of the student] as a starting point. Once the previous knowledge is denied, the proper objectives [of a didactic work] do not exist or are not clear” (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p. 90).

Lefèvre warns of possible problems arising from producing studies and designs permeated by “subjectivist” and “objectivist” attitudes. I admit that, whenever I read or remember this text, I mentally change these words for terms that, in my view, can be equivalent: “pseudo-subjective” and “pseudo-objective”. I understand that there are subtle differences between both terms; but I appreciate the prefix “pseudo” because it has been used, since the ancient Greeks, to qualify what is not, but intends to be, what is a lie or false – in this case, a “false conscience”. It also suggests the idea that, when we are students or teachers, we are rarely the ones who are there, but we consciously or unconsciously operate under the domain of a “heteronym”, or a persona, or a character.

The good news that Rodrigo brings us is that, even though our products – drawings, texts, sketches, models etc. – have been carried out under the influence of

our “pseudities”, the strength of facts saves us: even so, “a thorough and systematic study of these results can help to objectify the subjectivity of this individual” (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.91). This simple sentence had a profound impact on my learning and professionalization as an architect, teacher, and writer; in fact, it is one of the primary sources of inspiration for two of my first texts on teaching architecture⁶. From the reflections born from a meticulous and careful consideration of that sentence, I understood that the role of the teacher, especially a design teacher, is not to make judgments of taste, nor to make a priori judgments, nor that of providing magic formulas for students to be “successful” in their tasks – or any other explicit or disguised authoritarian teaching attitude. But only analyzing, with as much knowledge, rigor, and erudition as possible, the results, only the results – and not the ideas; only the products – and not who produced them. Therefore, I understand that:

The presence of architecture criticism should occur only when the practice of design has already started. A minimally responsible architecture critic should refuse to discuss ideas that have not yet seen the light of paper – or of the monitor, if that is the case. The first attitude of design teachers could be to only critically discuss the student’s design. It seems to be obvious, but it is not. (Zein, 2018, p.79-80).

But Lefèvre’s text goes much further than these general recommendations. It examines, step by step, several of the possible and common situations that occur in interactions between teachers and students, in project teaching studios, carefully unfolding each aspect, revealing its different sides, making pertinent suggestions, etc. The language the author adopts – does not say “students” or “teachers”, but “those who dedicate themselves to doing this or that...”, often using this generic and indirect form (perhaps even more expressive in French than in Portuguese) – it occurs, in my view, out of sheer delicacy. Whoever had the privilege of meeting the author in person will remember his extreme warmth, mixed with an ethical sense of truth that never allowed him to renounce saying and doing what was necessary. In fact, this was my first contact with Rodrigo, in August or September 1976: through his overwhelming criticism about a design proposed by a team of fellow students of which I was a part. Said with such authority, firmness, and, at the same time, sensitivity, that I realized that, I was standing before, finally, a master (Zein, 2001).

⁶Texts written in 2001 and 2003 and republished in Zein (2018, p.68—89 and 90-103).

The second chapter of this text will deal with “postulates” – which, in my view, could also be called “theories”, or at least, a very promising and consequent outline of a theory formulation. This section is also organized in 3 parts, or “problems”, and a synthesis, or an application of the exposed contents: a) the problem of demonstration; b) the problem of judgment; c) the problem of self-demonstration, and d) constituent elements of an action directed towards an end. The third chapter ends by resuming and establishing the definitions proposed in the first chapter, basing them more thoroughly and explicitly.

From this second chapter, I will extract only what seems to me to be one of the key phrases for understanding the focus, intentions, and objectives of the text:

Anyway, what we want to look for is where it is unique distinguished and how they can develop until superimposition or coincidence, two things that are: on the one hand, the “desire” to reach an verbally expressed end, formed in the field of consciousness, almost always present throughout the action, but remaining objectively inoperative; on the other, a “real willingness” to reach an end, formed in the core of evidence, which often gives sensitive results. (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.118)

Lefèvre's proposal, therefore, is that this duality between abstract wanting and concrete making needs to be synthesized in an integrated/abstract “doing wanting”. Unfortunately, this is not what usually happens in most teaching activities, particularly in architectural design. And even more particularly in the context in which Rodrigo wrote those words – the 1970s – hard times when architecture schools, from all over the world, were permeated by many discourses and by a paradoxical devaluation and debasement of design activities. This situation, although it has changed, is still current and recurring, in many and varied situations, even today, almost half a century later. It is interesting (and sad) how Lefèvre's words still sound relevant today:

Perhaps only the degree of awareness of students on architecture and urbanism problems is being achieved, without reaching enough changes in their core of evidence to assume a “real willingness” to participate in the solution of these problems. Perhaps [...] (if) it is only making students aware of their need, not even allowing, or promoting, a change in the students' “attitudes” in search of a “real willingness” to seek solutions to architecture and urbanism problems. (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.118-9)

Of course, a lot of things has also changed, in the decades that permeate this text, and the contemporary moment. I may sound be biased, but, in my opinion, if something has changed, it is because texts like this existed, were read, influenced, and helped to change the world. That we have forgotten where the incentives to rethink teaching and the profession came from is just a stumbling block, which I am sure would not bother the author of the text either. It is not, and it does not matter much, who said it first. Because changing social and pedagogical attitudes, can never be attributed only to an initial big bang because its effectiveness is given by the accumulation, concentration, repetition, and emphasis, in different ways, on different occasions, of some fundamental concepts. As Lefèvre does, by the way, in the excerpt I highlighted above: he says almost the same thing, twice. The keyword, in this case, is “almost”. It is neither error nor redundancy: it is precision and encouragement to readiness.

After presenting the concepts and ideas, developing the postulates and theories, determining the problems, their causes, and developments, in chapter 3 the author will, finally, propose what he calls a “methodology outline”. A new repetition of the above excerpt: it is not enough to understand the problems that arise, a “willingness to real” needs to be activated to solve them. For something to change, a possibility of an alternative future to the status quo must be designed.

But although the name given to this part is “methodology”, it is not a “vade-mecum” at all, nor a list of tasks, nor a point-by-point catalog of things to accomplish, nor a formula. Because Rodrigo Lefèvre does not propose that the outer space changes to conform to any genius and supreme solution. But that we, beings under education and learning, students or teachers, change internally, from the understanding of our own truths.

In several sentences of this section of the text, he starts with “what matters is that...” or “what is important is that...”. What matters is that students (and obviously, he is also talking about fellow teachers...) “try to discover what they are as a product of their education [...] what they are as an element inserted in a set of relations of other elements, seeking to understand their position, their choices in this set of relations” (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p. 125). Becoming aware of oneself would be the only real possibility for learning and change. It is impossible not to remember the Pythagorean “know thyself”, translated by the Greeks from the

knowledge of previous cultures and civilizations; and that, albeit they used to be esoteric, they are now available to anyone. It seems to me that this excerpt must be understood as a statement of a deeply spiritual nature. Which has nothing to do with any kind of religious affiliation. But with the deep ethical attitude that supported and moved the actions and thoughts of the author of this text.

I make a point of quoting, too, the final sentence of this chapter, especially because it is perhaps one of the best known quotes (although I do not know to what extent they are well understood) of this text:

Subjective will be transformed into objective, into an objective process, a development degree, when the representation, that is, the images of objects and phenomena and images of the relations between them, of that objective design at that development degree, are not fragmentary and not incomplete, in accordance to reality, are in the sphere of evidence and in the sphere of consciousness at the same time. At that moment, the verbalized "desire" correlates, it is part of the "real willingness" to take an action, in search of an end. (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.129)

Please read it again, slowly, word for word. Even if you don't understand it – and it's not easy, I've been trying to understand it for years, and I certainly haven't fully did it yet – keep reading. Personally, it reminds me of classes on Spinoza, given by Marilena Chauí, which I had the privilege of watching shortly after reading this text for the first time. In Spinozian philosophical geometry (if I understand it correctly, I apologize to the teacher for my limited simplification and literary tendency to analogies, metonymies, and metaphors) perfect Freedom occurs when it proves to coincide with perfect Necessity. Or something like that.

But it would be impossible to the kind and modest being that Rodrigo Lefèvre is to finish a text like that, in such a triumphant way. Perhaps that is why the fourth and last chapter called "sparse notes" follows, which it apparently needed to be added due to the "existing real conditions". All the notes (which he numbers from 1 to 11) are extremely interesting. But as there is no intention here to exhaust the subject, I exercise my subjectivity and choose to comment briefly only on some aspects that interest me most. I would even say that they excited me the most.

I already made a similar selection at the beginning of this article, commenting on Rodrigo's considerations on the deception syndrome, and theory as a concrete object. But I would like to end with an excerpt that, in a way, validates and author-

izes the effort of this text. Prophetically, perhaps. Or it is just longing. It is point number 8:

Trying to understand other people's ideas, trying to synthesize and then convey to others so that they can participate in the subsequent syntheses, this should be an additional activity to adopt in teamwork [...] in such a way that the others can adhere firmly to the syntheses by developing real provisions for the fulfillment of tasks to develop those syntheses, to verify those syntheses and to resume those syntheses, that is, with new syntheses, to restart the process. (LEFÈVRE, 1977 In KOURY, 2019, p.136-7).

Back to the future. With the awareness that everything that comes from the past, but remains meaningful, remains pending, remains a challenge to be fulfilled, continues to exist, by being and acting, in this present.

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Migration : Reflections from a Looking Glass

Migração : Reflexos de um Espelho

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Abstract

Rodrigo Lefèvre's Master's dissertation, Project for a Work Encampment: A Utopia, offers a production model for migrant housing along the periphery of São Paulo based upon mutually enriching collaborations between migrants constructing their dwellings and mentoring technicians. This partnership, an evolution of previous theories on eliminating hierarchical relationships between architects and laborers at building sites, recalls the foundational principles underpinning Lefèvre's earlier collaborations with Sérgio Ferro and Flávio Império under the collective Arquitetura Nova. In his proposed work encampment, these interactions become a mechanism to rebalance cultural transmission away from delegitimizing migrant heritage and towards an equitable and heterogeneous urban demography. Though suggested as a utopia, this framework also may be understood as a heterotopia—an alternate yet plausibly concurrent paradigm for the construction of migrant housing. As a heterotopia, Lefèvre's proposal, similar to other texts published by the members of Arquitetura Nova, is simultaneously a critique of prevailing conditions as well as an aspirational solution. And, as both criticism and expectation, Lefèvre's project illustrates the important contributions made by migrants in the development of society and invites us to evaluate and rediscover our empathy towards them.

Resumo

A dissertação de mestrado de Rodrigo Lefèvre, Projeto de acampamento de obras: uma utopia, oferece um modelo de produção de moradias para migrantes na periferia de São Paulo com base em colaborações enriquecedoras entre migrantes que constroem suas moradias e a assessoria técnica. Esta parceria, uma evolução das teorias anteriores sobre a eliminação de relações hierárquicas entre arquitetos e operários, lembra os princípios fundamentais que sustentam as colaborações anteriores de Lefèvre com Sérgio Ferro e Flávio Império no Grupo Arquitetura Nova. Em sua proposta de acampamento, essas interações tornam-se um mecanismo para equilibrar a transmissão cultural da herança deslegitimadora dos migrantes na perspectiva de um equilíbrio e de uma diversidade demográfica. Embora sugerida como uma utopia, essa proposta também pode ser entendida como uma heterotopia - um paradigma alternativo, mas plausível, para a construção de moradias para migrantes. Como uma heterotopia, a proposta de Lefèvre, assim como de outros textos publicados pelos membros da Arquitetura Nova, é ao mesmo tempo uma crítica às condições vigentes e uma aspiração de solução. E, como crítica e expectativa, o projeto de Lefèvre ilustra as importantes contribuições feitas pelos migrantes no desenvolvimento da sociedade e nos convida a avaliar e redescobrir nossa empatia por eles.

Migration : Reflections from a Looking Glass

After an already significant career as both professor and architect, Rodrigo Lefèvre returned to the FAU-USP at the age of thirty-eight to pursue a graduate degree in Urban Environmental Structures. During this academic interval, Lefèvre used his Master's dissertation as a reflection on the influences and theories underpinning his work. The resulting text, titled *Project for a Work Encampment: A Utopia*¹, investigates the plight of migrants in Brazil and proposes to address their misfortune with a system of self-constructed houses supported by an encampment of construction schools. It is an unusual composition of subject [migrants], time [transition], and location [utopia] that epitomizes the layered simultaneity that had been a distinctive feature of Lefèvre's earlier work with Sérgio Ferro and Flavio Império under the collective Arquitetura Nova.

Lefèvre's selection of migrants as his subject is not surprising. Since his initial experiences working with Sérgio Ferro on two residential buildings in Brasília, Lefèvre had been appalled by the living and working conditions endured by the migrants constructing Brazil's new capital. These laborers, desperate for work, were subject to both a lack of housing and a surplus of risk as they toiled on the large and complicated concrete buildings that delineated the new capital. Without adequate accommodations provided by the government, these migrants quickly fell into a tradition of self-constructed housing. "For many members of the lower strata of Brasília's population, squatting was simply the only possibility," David Epstein observes, "for they were blessed neither with political influence...and lacked the money to resolve their problem in the tiny private real estate market" (Epstein, David, 1976, p. 112).

In seeing migrants as the protagonists of social change, Lefèvre and Arquitetura Nova made a noteworthy break from the methodologies of an earlier generations of Brazilian architects. That older group, influenced by their involvement with the PCB, had proposed a hierarchical and sequential form of development wherein the middle class would initiate political change that would subsequently foster social improvements for the lower classes. Arquitetura Nova, part of a younger generation of more radical Communists, hoped to move away from this 'stagism' by advocat-

ing strategies that simultaneously confronted inadequacies of the political system as well as inequalities endured by the workers. Such rejection of linear theorizing in favor of nonhierarchical, multidirectional methods became a fundamental principle of Arquitetura Nova's theories, writings, and projects.

Referencing the work of anthropologists Eunice Durham and Cláudia Menezes, as well as folklorist Marcel Jules Thiéblot, Lefèvre argues for migrants as utopian agents because they are motivated by a quest for something better. To support this hypothesis, he borrows a structure developed by Durham, categorizing such motivations into two types—subjective and concrete. Subjective motivations are the personal desires to improve living conditions that encourage individuals to make specific, local decisions of displacement in search of a better life. Referencing Menezes, Lefèvre offers that, "change means, for the migrant, a search for improvement, in its broadest sense: better conditions for working, housing, transportation, comfort, entertainment, access to consumer goods, education, health care. All of this is what is necessarily found elsewhere, not where it is"² (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 141). In contrast, concrete motivations are the larger socio-economic forces that regulate displacement within a systematic process of shift and balance. Referencing Durham, Lefèvre introduces that, "migration was explained...as a response to problems created by the structure of national society and which are fundamentally economic. ...this migration, which appears as a solution to problems that affect the family...is a process conditioned by the types of social organizations in rural society"³ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 151). Through migration, the family structure is often fragmented, such that, "the migration of a person is not an isolated fact, but an aspect of a process that involves the successive movement of different people and can be extended for a considerable time"⁴ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 151). In effect, the subjective motivations are guided and propelled by the

²"A mudança significa, para o migrante, uma busca de melhoria, no seu sentido mais amplo: melhores condições de trabalho, moradia, transporte, conforto, distração, acesso a bens de consumo, educação, assistência. Tudo isso é o que necessariamente se encontra em outro lugar, não aquele em que está."

³"A migração foi explicada...como resposta a problemas criados pela estrutura da sociedade nacional e que são fundamentalmente econômicos. ...a migração, que aparece como solução para problemas que afetam a família...é um processo condicionado pelo tipo de organização social da sociedade rural."

⁴"...a migração de uma pessoa não é um fato isolado, mas um aspecto de um processo que envolve a movimentação sucessiva de pessoas diferentes e pode-se estender por tempo considerável."

¹Projeto de Acampamento: Uma Utopia

concrete motivations.

By distinguishing between these subjective and concrete motivations, Lefèvre addresses the simultaneity of the migrants' agency as well as the forces that drive change and progress. In this way, the subjective relationships and concrete relationships become symbiotic. Pedro Arantes explains that, "the migrant is the subject in transition, which contains the contradictions and the possibilities of overcoming Brazilian history and, at the same time, is the reverse of our 'miracle' of a modern country"⁵ (Arantes, Pedro Fiori, 2002, p. 134). The migrant is both the vehicle of development and its consequence.

To acknowledge the relationship between migrants and their context, Lefèvre inserts a second protagonist into his production model—the advanced degree technician. The polarity between the arriving migrants and these technicians is intended to foster an exchange of information. Outwardly, the technicians satisfy a traditional role as advisers to the migrants on proper building practices. Technicians are needed because, "the self-constructed house, due to its condition of being produced without proper technical knowledge, can be an object that barely meets the minimum physical needs for the conservation and reproduction of the work force"⁶ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 32). Yet, the virtue of Lefèvre's proposal resides in the reciprocity he imagines for his protagonists; the migrant is meant to have an equally important impact on the technician. Borrowing on the pedagogies of Paulo Freire, Lefèvre explains that, "the participation of higher level technicians in the model of a production has some purposes: to place the elements of bourgeois culture in discussion within the model in comparison with the elements of culture of the people brought by the migrants"⁷ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 65). "The re-training of higher education technicians," Lefèvre imagines, will foster the "search of knowledge, of science, of a more correct technology for the construction of a

new society"⁸ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 65).

Locating the transfer of ideas within a construction site revisits the theories developed earlier by *Arquitetura Nova* concerning the architect and the laborer. In contrast to the conception of architect as controlling figure, a working methodology favored by modernist architects, *Arquitetura Nova* imagined a design and construction process where inspiration and responsibility intermingled amongst all participants at the site. In effect, the responsibilities of the architect were to be demystified and allowed to migrate to the laborers. This shift would transform a 'hierarchical' job site into a 'collaborative' one. Instead of imagining construction as sequential—design followed by execution—inspiration would be generated from both sides of the project. The design input of the architect and construction worker would happen simultaneously and symbiotically.

Architecturally, a notable result of this migration of ideas was the disciplined and deliberate exposure of work by the 'trades'. Plumbing pipes, ventilation ductwork, and electrical wiring all were exposed to promote an appreciation for the project's infrastructure and its installers. For example, plumbing pipes were overtly displayed in many of Lefèvre's experimental residential projects—including those that animate the facade of Casa Dino Zammataro (Figure 1) and the interior of Casa Perry Campos (Figure 2). This technique not only led to greater efficiency on the job site, it is an architectural migration: the systems originally concealed by outmoded hierarchies of construction are able to move back into a location of notice and appreciation. The architectural design and the necessary engineering systems are seen and understood concurrently.

In his dissertation, Lefèvre introduces his production model using a block diagram (Figure 3). The left side of the diagram introduces his protagonists—the migrant and the advanced degree technician. The migrants arrive to the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (RMSP) from other regions of Brazil while the technicians may enter the production model from both local and non-local sources. These participants, through an exchange of culture, education, and labor, will collaborate on the periphery of the city to produce an encampment of common infrastructure and self-constructed houses. Their collaboration is displayed at the top of the block diagram

⁵"O migrante é o sujeito em transição, que contém as contradições e as possibilidades de superação histórica brasileira e, ao mesmo tempo, é o avesso do nosso 'milagre' de país moderno."

⁶"...a casa autoconstruída pela sua condição de produzida sem um conhecimento técnico apropriado, pode ser um objeto que atenda mal às necessidades físicas mínimas para a conservação e reprodução da força de trabalho."

⁷"...aquela participação de técnicos de grau superior no modelo de uma produção tem algumas finalidades: a primeira é colocar em discussão dentro do modelo os elementos da cultura burguesa em confronto com os elementos da cultura do povo trazidos pelos migrantes.."

⁸"...a re-formação dos técnicos de grau superior em busca de um conhecimento, de uma ciência, de uma tecnologia mais correta da construção da nova sociedade..."

where the production is imagined as a process of discussion, project, and construction. This provides the migrants with housing and the advanced degree technician with new experiences and influences. Following their transformations, the participants, along with their newly developed culture and infrastructure, are available to enter the general production workforce. The resulting integration of the protagonists into the metropolitan infrastructure is imagined along the right side of the scheme.

Lefèvre's diagram is reminiscent of the exposed plumbing pipes that distinguish his residential projects—the flow of process imagined as conduits that circulate through a system controlled by valves representing causes and influences. He explains that, “in these arrows there will be elements that are representations of arresting or releasing the flow between situations or elements so that it happens in greater or lesser amounts and in more or less time”⁹ (Lefèvre, 1981, p. 58). Some of these valves have elementary titles such as ‘employment capacity’ while others offer more emphatic descriptions such as ‘elements of worker’s political life’ or ‘urban culture: systemization, expression, dissemination’. The equal attention given to the ‘blocks’ and the ‘valves’ embeds importance in both the served and servant elements in the production model and corresponds to the proposed equality of the migrants and technicians.

Analogies to building construction are further evident in the methods of evaluation that Lefèvre applies to his production model, borrowing the terms ‘cross section’ and ‘longitudinal section’ from architectural drawings. Lefèvre defines the cross section as, “the set of relations existing at a given moment in the development of the work, relations between things and phenomena”¹⁰ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 70). In contrast, he defines the longitudinal section as “the whole set of relationships and elements that are changing over time, due to natural causes and/or human intervention”¹¹ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 72). Using these two sectional methods, Lefèvre suggests that his production model should be imagined in sever-

⁹“Nessas setas existirão elementos que são representações do prender ou do soltar o fluxo entre situações ou elementos para que ele aconteça em maior ou menor quantidade e em mais ou menos tempo.”

¹⁰“...o conjunto de relações existentes em um momento dado do desenvolvimento do trabalho, relações entre coisas e fenômenos...”

¹¹“...todo esse conjunto de relações e elementos em transformação no tempo, por causas naturais e/ou pela intervenção humana.”

al ways, at several scales, and at several moments in times. Such a viewpoint makes the multifaceted and simultaneous meaning of each component more discernible. Lefèvre explains, “each element can be seen by three basic aspects: as a product of a production...as a means of production...and as an element that triggers another”¹² (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 73). Each element has not only a specific role to perform, at a specific time, but also a generative impact on the production model over time. This form of evaluation highlights the migrants’ critical role in the operative evolution of the system.

Lefèvre’s proclivity for nonhierarchical and multifaceted relationships, whether in layered methods of explanation or analysis, is a cognition deeply rooted in his earlier work with *Arquitetura Nova*. It is fundamental to his working method and manifests itself at all levels, including even the format of his writing. Throughout the dissertation, Lefèvre presents his research sources through an unusual stitching together of quotations, switching back and forth between authors, and frequently presenting their findings out of sequence from the referenced material. Over this patchwork of citations, Lefèvre offers an additional narrative through selectively underlining important phrases within the quotations (Figure 4). He describes this technique as, “a mosaic...a collage made up of excerpts...with phrases or words underlined by me, as they compliment each other, confirm themselves, and sometimes deny themselves”¹³ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 124). This technique, prescient of hypertexts, establishes a three-dimensional relationship between the citations and Lefèvre’s arguments that imbues his writing with both the empathy and complexity that manifested in the earlier work of *Arquitetura Nova*. It also demonstrates how methodology and process are vital to the development and evolution of innovative ideas.

Lefèvre’s production model is an acceptance of migrant settlements around the periphery of the São Paulo as well as a proposal to improve them. By advocating for these forms of settlement, Lefèvre continues a prolonged argument about the virtue of self-constructed housing. His proposal is in contrast to both ‘dualist’ theories that believe migrant laborers to be too archaic and therefore in opposition to

¹²“...cada elemento pode ser visto por três aspectos: como produto de um processo...como meio de produção...e como elemento que desencadeia um outro.”

¹³“...um mosaico, uma colagem formada de trechos...com frases ou palavras sublinhadas por mim, na medida que eles se complementam, se confirmam, e às vezes, se negam.”

Brazil's industrialization as well as Marxist theorists that argue self-constructed houses will lower the prevailing wage for the working class. The surplus capital earned by migrants through building their own houses will reduce their financial needs, which will subsequently allow prevailing labor rates to be lowered. Effectively, any savings achieved by the migrants will be transferred to their employers. Lefèvre acknowledges and alleviates these criticisms by locating his production model in a 'time of transition' where the 'state' is given control of the 'means of production'. Lefèvre explains that, "only there, in the time of transition, where some economic and political relations are altered, can I accept to participate in a large-scale self-construction process"¹⁴ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 31). In this new economic system, where market-driven forces are replaced with a more socialist framework, the devaluation of labor caused by self-constructed houses would be avoided. Lefèvre's decision to locate his production model during a 'time of transition' also may be intended to suggest a utopian quality in a proposal that is otherwise notable for its feasibility. Miguel Buzzar explains that, "all the references...are within the reach of an immediate effectiveness...self-managed self-construction was not a utopia...and the model said to be 'utopian', despite reporting at another time, maintains an operative relationship with the present"¹⁵ (Buzzar, Miguel Antonio, 2019, p. 255).

Another possibility is that Lefèvre's production model is less a traditional utopia, oriented towards an aspirational and potentially unattainable destination, and more the provocation of an opposing yet concurrent reality. That is, Lefèvre is not presenting a replacement to the existing model but rather a synchronous alternative in the hopes of establishing dialogue. In this regard, Lefèvre's encampment is more equivalent to a heterotopia as introduced by Michel Foucault. These types of 'other' spaces may be classified, according to Foucault, into two main categories—places of crisis and places of deviation, with both groups experiencing some type of separation from society. Lefèvre's dissertation offers substantial evidence on the displacement of migrants, and analyzes how the altered social structures caused in

their displacements constitute a crisis for both the migrants and their families. In addition, the migrants' likely removal to the periphery of the city is a mechanism of both deviation and crisis. Arantes explains that, "by defining the migrant as a subject, the state as the provider and the periphery as a planning site, Rodrigo is realizing that the rapid urbanization process must be faced quickly before the scale of the problem begins to invalidate any solution."¹⁶ (Arantes, Pedro Fiori, 2002, p. 134).

Foucault posits that heterotopias provide precise and determined functions that are symptomatic to the society in which they exist. In answer to criticism that migrants settling on the edges of the city represent a failure to assimilate into modern urban society, Epstein explains that this viewpoint is "largely incorrect and misleading...squatters are economically deprived, but, far from being marginal, they [are] central in the new capital's construction. ...The squatments are not a carryover from rural Brazilian life but rather a fundamental...mode of urban expansion" (Epstein, David, 1973, p. 15). Lefèvre's proposal to positively address and facilitate these encampments, instead of erasing or alleviating them, is an acknowledgment of their heterotopic function.

Another principle of heterotopias is that they juxtapose different, sometimes incompatible, spaces in one site. This juxtaposition is fundamental to Lefèvre's production model where dissimilarity in the ideas of space-making and construction brought by migrants and technicians creates a dialogue that motivates their respective transformations. The migrants themselves also are sites of juxtaposition as they merge their rural traditions with the urban culture of their newly adopted home. Lefèvre cites Menezes when he writes that migrants "demonstrate that they are seeking to identify with the model they formulate of the urban man, the basic motivation for this being the fact that they are living in the city. This identification necessarily implies the negation of the previous reality"¹⁷ (Lefèvre, Rodrigo, 1981, p. 149).

¹⁴"...só lá, na época de transição, onde algumas relações econômicas e políticas estiverem alteradas é que posso aceitar participar de um processo de autoconstrução em larga escala."

¹⁵"Todos as referências...estão ao alcance de uma efetivação imediata. ...a autoconstrução auto-gerida não era uma utopia. ...e o modelo 'dito' utópico, apesar de reportar a outro momento, mantém uma relação operativa com o presente..."

¹⁶"Ao definir o migrante como sujeito, o Estado como provedor e a periferia como local planejamento, Rodrigo está percebendo que o processo vertiginoso de urbanização precisa ser enfrentado rapidamente, antes que a escola do problema comece a invalidar qualquer solução."

¹⁷"...demonstram que estão buscando identificar-se com o modelo que formularem do homem urbano, sendo a motivação básica para isto o fato de estarem morando na cidade. Esta identificação implica necessariamente na negação da realidade anterior..."

Foucault also suggests that heterotopias are “linked to slices in time...at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time” (Foucault, Michel and Miskowiec, Jay, 1986, p. 26). These heterochronic ruptures may be defined as either transitory (such as festivals and vacation villages) or accumulatory (such as museums and libraries). Migrant encampments along the edges of the city offer a transitory quality that is the direct result of migrants’ need for expediency and flexibility in accommodations. Epstein explains that, “the Brasilia in-migrant, arriving with little capital, can construct a very small, primitive barrack in a few hours or days, and immediately set forth on his main task, earning money in one way or another” (Epstein, David, 1976, p. 111). It also is worth noting that Lefèvre’s overtly suggests a break with traditional time by locating his production model in a ‘time of transition’.

Heterochronic relationships are fundamental to understanding the theories of *Arquitetura Nova*. Unlike dualist theses, wherein the primitive aspects of Brazil are considered to be in direct opposition to its modernization, *Arquitetura Nova* argued that the industrial development of the country must be embraced simultaneously with the primitive and historic characteristics that underpin it. Dualist theses defended, “industrialization against...‘feudal’ backwardness,” Ana Koury explains, “for which the rural heritage corresponded to a feudal mode of production that would be overcome by bourgeois modernization”¹⁸ (Koury, Ana Paula, 2019, p. 24). In contrast, *Arquitetura Nova* advocated pedagogies that foresaw “an approach to the urban problems of underdevelopment, proposing an engagement with the historical realities in which architects worked”¹⁹ (Koury, Ana Paula, 2019, p. 26). By advocating for both the transitory aspects of society, in their focus on migrant populations, and the accumulatory aspects of society, in their favoring of history and traditional building techniques, *Arquitetura Nova* and Lefèvre imagined progress less as a binary model and more as a heterochronic one.

The most potent characteristic of heterotopias is that “they have a function in relation to all the space that remains” (Foucault, Michel and Miskowiec, Jay, 1986, p. 27). That is, in being both real and illusionary, they become a mirror—two spaces joined by vision during an instant reflection. Foucault writes, “the mirror functions as

a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal” (Foucault, Michel and Miskowiec, Jay, 1986, p. 24). Lefèvre’s proposal may be seen as both solution and critique. The heterotopia is inversionary so that the relationship between the ‘other spaces’ and the ‘spaces that remain’ opens a gap by which a migration of ideas may occur.

It is only appropriate that members of *Arquitetura Nova* eventually became migrants themselves—Sérgio Ferro emigrated to France, following the political difficulties created by the military government after the coup of 1964, and Rodrigo Lefèvre left for Guinea-Bissau soon after the completion of his dissertation. While in West Africa, working on a health care system that he designed while employed by *Hidroservice*, Lefèvre was killed in an automobile accident at the age of forty-six. Decades later, as appreciation of Rodrigo Lefèvre and *Arquitetura Nova* develops outside of Brazil, a new migration is occurring. Their theories acknowledge the fundamental role that migrants play in the construction of society and provide essential examples of empathy in all its forms. Furthermore, Lefèvre’s proposed utopia is a mirror that reflects our own subjectivity back upon ourselves, allowing us to rediscover our humanity. A discussion of utopia, and the significant contribution that migrants may supply in its creation, offers us the potential for a new epoch of transition.

¹⁸“...a industrialização contra o atraso “feudal”...para as quais a herança rural correspondia a um modo de produção feudal que seria superado pela modernização industrial burguesa.”

¹⁹“uma aproximação com os problemas urbanos do subdesenvolvimento, propondo um engajamento com a realidade histórica na qual atuavam os arquitetos.”

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Approching the realism of Sérgio Ferro and Flávio Império

Notas sobre o realismo de Sérgio Ferro e Flávio Império

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Abstract

This text seeks to approach Brazilian realism in the 60's by looking at the thought and work of Sérgio Ferro and Flávio Império. After a general analysis of realism in visual arts, we examine how the intellectual orientation of Flávio Império's set design practice at Arena Theatre company and the critical debate on architecture led by Sérgio Ferro intertwine. It is possible to notice a convergence in their practice, although set in different fields, when we look at their critique of a realism that was not able to acknowledge Brazilian social reality.

Resumo

Este texto pretende realizar uma aproximação ao realismo na produção de Sérgio Ferro e Flávio Império. O tema foi abordado através de uma análise geral do conceito, entrelaçando as reflexões dos arquitetos pintores nos anos de 1960, algumas cenografias de Flávio Império para o Teatro de Arena, e o debate crítico sobre arquitetura. Apesar das diferenças entre cada um dos campos, é possível notar uma convergência em torno da cultura artística realista que os autores criticaram em reconhecimento à realidade social brasileira.

Visual Arts

A few concepts in Art History were so extensively used, disputed and transformed by artists, critics and historians as Realism. It happens the more so if regional, chronological and artistic variants are considered: poetic, epic, fantastic, socialist, psychological, *neo*, new and *nouveau* realism.

Approaching realism as an artistic tradition composed by plural and contradictory movements engaged in the political commitments of their time is fundamental to understand the Brazilian reception of the new realism of the second half of the '50s and its impact on the group Arquitetura Nova.

Flávio Império and Sérgio Ferro graduated in the 50's, in close contact with the international artistic culture, which was quite up to date in São Paulo. In 1956, Flávio was admitted at University of Sao Paulo school of architecture (FAU-USP) and took the drawing course of the Sao Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) Handcrafts School. In the same year, he started working with theatre in the Community Cristo Operário, and in the following years he got closer to the Arena Theatre company. Sérgio was encouraged to paint by Pietro Maria Bardi while still a sophomore student, and as soon as he graduated as an architect, in 1962, he became Flávio Motta's assistant professor at USP and also assisted Ciccilo Matarazzo in organizing São Paulo Biennials.

The architects painted in line with the international artistic production, experimenting in an eclectic way the informalism, the tachisme or the pop art of that moment, represented in the São Paulo Biennials, but insisting in political themes lacking in foreign pieces.

In 1965, Ferro and Império took part in the collective exhibition "Propostas 65", set out to debate "aspects of the current realism in Brazil"¹, in an initiative equivalent to the "Opinião 65", carried out at MAM, in Rio de Janeiro. In the following years, Ferro published texts about visual arts, such as "Pintura Nova" [New Painting] (1965), "Alberto Burri" (1966a), "A nova pintura e os símbolos" [The New Painting

¹ Expression used in the subtitle of the catalog Propostas 65 exhibition. According to an statement of Sérgio Ferro to the authors, the exhibition was organized in the architects' office, with the participation of Waldemar Cordeiro, Lina Bardi and Mário Schenberg, and held at FAAP, where Ferro and Império had been hired as teachers of the fine arts course

and the Symbols] (1966b), "Ambiguidade da pop art: o buffalo II de Rauschenberg" [Pop Art Ambiguity: Rauschenberg's Buffalo II] (1967a), "Os limites da denúncia" [The Limits of Denunciation] (1967b) and "Enquanto os homens corajosos morrem" [While Brave men Die] (1968)²; Império wrote "A pintura nova tem a cara do cotidiano" [New Painting Has the Face of the Everyday Life] (c.1965), among other several texts published in spectacles programmes, whose scenography and costumes he created.

If the formal repertoire of this new generation was both eclectic and international, regarding themes, at the beginning of the '60s the Brazilian artists prioritized national and social matters drawn from Brazilian history and literature, as seen in music and cinema – the most popular manifestations of this artistic culture: *Vidas secas*, *Morte e vida Severina*, *Macunaíma*, *Canudos* and *Lampião*, Hans Staden and the Tupinambás, *Ganga Zumba*, *Zumbi* and *Tiradentes*, *Afrosambas* and "favelas". These historical themes were used as a malleable raw material, resonant of the country's political and economic conjuncture. And, as these works of art became popular, cross references among them allowed for a broadened reach as they acquired new meanings; it created semantic displacements and subtexts that the attentive public would not fail to notice. This artistic context raised the standards of critique in Brazilian artistic culture, which in turn became more political, focusing on daily life, empiricism, vernacular knowledge and documentation of reality.

Theatre

On a notebook³, Flávio Império left the following comments about "the fourth wall" of the Italian stage:

The theatre accommodated between four walls seeks empathy by extreme resemblance, by the simulacrum of the dramatic fiction, by identification to situations lived by the characters in the weaving of the drama. This urge to reconstruct the written drama in the fictional found in the magic box of the so-called "Italian theatre" its elements of language and there it embedded itself comfortably for

² As the final work of a semiology course with Umberto Eco, held at Mackenzie in 1966, Ferro would have drawn a comparison between the realism of Honoré Daumier and the naturalism of Gustave Courbet, based entirely on the theory of the novel by György Lukács. (FERRO, 2011, p.114)

³ Flávio Império's notebooks were digitized and transcribed and are in the artist's collection at the Institute of Brazilian Studies (IEB-USP).

more than four centuries, not only regarding the demands of the spectacle but the ones from the audience as well, so much so that it ended up combining its own definition of theatre with this Italian arrangement of the stage, misapprehending a specific form of manifestation with the theatrical phenomena itself. Officially acknowledged as the “most refined cultural manifestation” (IMPÉRIO, Notebook 5.5).

According to the author, the Italian stage theatre preserves the shapes and signs of a “mummified” culture, officially protected, that lost its vitality and turned into an allegory for power. The theatre “black box” reaches the highest degree of realism, deluding and comforting the audience.

In São Paulo, the Brazilian Comedy Theatre (TBC), created in 1948 by the industrialist Franco Zampari, had a huge influence in forming a bourgeoisie culture in Sao Paulo and Brazil. The TBC brought a new perspective to the Brazilian theatre, with a solid infrastructure to create and manufacture scenarios, costumes and all the necessary premises to maintain two casts and two plays simultaneously. Working as if it were an industry, it was aimed at flattering an audience that was eager to see itself represented in the social patterns of a sophisticated lifestyle . It was a theatre whose formal artificiality and pageantry provided ideologically for a bourgeois imaginary (MAGALDI; VARGAS, 2001).

Despite Flávio Império’s familiarity with the theatrical stage codes of Italian tradition, his greatest contribution to TBC happened along with a series of dissonant reactions; among them, the one of a group of artists who searched for a theatre that reflected upon the problems of contemporary Brazilian society. In that regard, in the ‘60s, the Arena Theatre company and Oficina Theatre company stood out, both of them places where Flávio Império worked in many opportunities as a set and costume designer.

The Arena Theatre company was created by a group of students at the Dramatic Arts School (EAD), in 1953, directed by José Renato. At that time, there was a search for a theatrical approach different from TBC’s international language (IMPÉRIO, 1985). Theater-makers wished for a popular approach, one that would go find the audience wherever it was; one capable of more economical production. In any case, initially the formal and spatial innovations of Arena did not stem from the political and ideological positioning that became visible in the latter performances, one linked to criticism of Brazilian society, to social class divisions or with

a Marxist approach (MOSTAÇO, 2016, p. 29).

If, on the one hand, the opening of Arena headquarters at Teodoro Baima Street, in 1954, entailed a retreat from the previous company’s realist plays aimed at reaching a wider audience, on another hand, it allowed the premises to be used for several artistic activities, as well as for the development of a scenic outlook of that space. When members, some still amateurs, of Teatro Paulista do Estudante [Paulista Student Theatre] (TPE) joined the established staff of Arena in 1956, it triggered a change in the group’s emphasis, adding “a new critical thinking about the meaning of the political reality, in which people were living in” and about “the need to change reality, to seek a leftist political instance, participation, activism” (PEIXOTO, 2004). Augusto Boal’s arrival, in the same year, contributed with the search for a Brazilian theatre, both political and popular. In “Ratos e Homens” [Rats and Men] (1956), a play by John Steinbeck, Boal had already applied the selective realism concept:

the essential details give the idea of the whole. The performance, all of it, is characterized by absolute austerity, intentional and necessary. [...] In arena amphitheatres, maybe more than in stages with proscenium, human relations are of most importance. What matters the most is the essence of each scene, the meaning of things being said rather than the way they are said. And this results in austerity, in simplicity, as long as we can understand that simplicity does not mean the same as poverty. (BOAL, 1956)

It is possible to perceive a conceptual similarity between Boal and Bertold Brecht, even though it does not happen formally in the set design. Fernando Peixoto clarifies the set design approach defended by Brecht:

A selective realism: the reproduction of a site that offers elements to understand human relationships, emphasizing those which, in spite of existing in reality, are not immediately perceived . The set designer has the responsibility to reveal this truth. He must suggest it. Under the condition that these suggestions present a historical or social interest higher than what the real environment offers. (PEIXOTO, 1974, p. 336)

The group’s aesthetic choices demonstrate the option for a certain “realism”, sometimes considered socialist, other times critical or photographic, revealing a kaleidoscope of ideological, political and partisan beliefs held by the constituents of the group (MOSTAÇO, 2016). If the Arena arrangement forced the creation of a new

language, whereby it was impossible to escape realism (MIGLIACCIO, 2004), it also made possible the presence of students, of amateurs, of people that would hardly have the chance of being on stage, creating artistically. In their practice, there were the seeds of another pedagogy, aimed at making the process didactic and demythologizing the artistic technique.

At this time, Flávio Império, still a student at FAU-USP, was having his first theatrical experience at the Comunidade Cristo Operário company, working with the labourers of a furniture collective-factory called Unilabor. The theatre group built a platform, where they made presentations in non-conventional places, such as gyms and clubhouses, in a spatial set up close to the Arena Theatre's original design. However, the most important aspect of this experience for Império's later works at Arena was the direct conviviality with the population that would be represented at Arena:

This period was one of the richest ones of my life because it allowed for an interaction quite affective and intimate with certain groups of the population which I would come to find only later, in bus stop lines, in bars, but without any possibility of a deeper conviviality, as fellow humans. Restricted only to the sociability of my own social class, I became a member of Arena Theatre's group, beginning around the time that "Eles Não Usam Black-Tie" was on. I challenged the almost-photographic realism of the company the whole time, which was the foundation of dramaturgy and interpretation laboratories work. (IMPÉRIO, 1975, p. 40).

"Eles não Usam Black-Tie" ["They Do Not Wear Black-Tie"] (1958), by Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, directed by José Renato, was conceived in the middle of a crisis at Arena and changed its course completely. The text with a realistic range, almost naturalistic, brought for the first time to the scene the proletarian as the main character, with his specific problems and sensitivities. Before Flávio Império, the scenery and the costume design were a junction of elements made intuitively by the members of the company. After his arrival, the scenic image gained poetic strength and became a significant element, providing a second layer of meaning to the stage performances.

Initially, for the construction of the scene visual elements, Flávio Império would use a research structure similar to the one employed in the Seminars of Dramaturgy and Interpretation (started in 1958), which sought to understand the behaviour of Brazilian people. Following an almost "anthropological" research:

The same research that was applied in literature, on the seminars of dramaturgy or in laboratories of interpretation, I tried to apply to the image in scenography, studying the Brazilian people behaviour, through visual elements, watching candomblé, Carnaval, all the popular manifestations, documenting what I had seen, as I could manage. I used to watch what the characteristics of a student of that time were, or the shopkeeper, or the workman, or the industrialist, or the banker, and it became very clear. I used to watch how the politicians or the common people would dress in everyday life. I developed an anthropological work, bringing the image that we had of our own society to the theatre. It may have been the first time that it was done in a systematic way. (IMPÉRIO, 1985).



Figure 1: "Gente como a gente", by Roberto Freire. Direction: Augusto Boal. On the photograph: Flávio Migliaccio (Wilson) and Riva Nimitz (Jandira), 1959. Flávio Império's Archives, IEB USP. Available on Arena Conta Arena 50 Anos CD-Rom.

In 1959, Império worked on the graphic composition of "Chapetuba Futebol Clube" [Chapetuba Soccer Club], by Oduvaldo Vianna Filho, and on the scenic devices of

“Gente como a Gente” [People Like Us], by Roberto Freire. “Gente como a Gente” (Figure 1) presents, according to Boal (1959), “a catholic vision of a social problem”, it brought back to the stage the protagonism of regular workers such as railway labourers and switchboard operators. Despite the internal controversies regarding the making of the play (FREIRE, 2004) and its short-lived trajectory, we can see the construction of an image, starting from the rationalization of the arena. Flávio Império created five modulated scenarios: “Everything was square, straight, up to the nails of the train railway; they were either cubes or parallelepipeds” (BOAL, 2004). With the lighting design, Ziembski contributed to the creation of a succession of frames which focused only the characters in action. With a few resources, these scenic instruments guided the formal contents in a direct and synthetic manner, embedding them into the realism of the stage performance.

In 1961, “Pintado de Alegre” [“Painted of Joy”] (Figura 2), by Flávio Migliaccio, followed an empiric creative direction, driven by the text, in which the scenic elements were deployed according to the characters internal necessities, employing second hand and time worn elements, distancing from the clean and new: “a crutch adapted to the bed without its foot, the flower covers the patch” (IMPÉRIO, 1961). Flávio Império’s set up accompanied Boal’s direction. An “impressionist realism”, as the set designer classified it, who fragmented colors and highlighted details on the first plan (IMPÉRIO, 1961), in the quest for an atmosphere that brought popular urban life manifestations into the scene, not for its “folklore elements”, but for its “expressive reality”.



Figure 2: Pintado de Alegre, by Flávio Migliaccio. Direction: Augusto Boal. Rehearsal with Flávio Migliaccio, Milton Gonçalves, Angelo Del Matto and Altamiro Martins, 1961. Photograph by Benedito Lima de Toledo. Personal Archive. Available on <http://flavioimperio.com.br/galeria/509981/509999>

Even though at that moment Arena was quite concentrated on producing a national dramaturgy, the group did not abandon international texts. “Os Fuzis da Mãe Carrar” [Mother Carrar’s Rifles] (1962), directed by José Renato, is a dramatic play by Bertold Brecht about the impacts of bombings in Guernica. The play takes place for a specific time: the time necessary to bake a loaf of bread with the last package of flour left for Mrs. Carrar. The play is set in the houses of poor fishermen, where Mrs. Carrar and her two sons live. The text questions the notion of neutrality, the message is clear and didactical: in a situation of oppression, keeping neutrality is the same as walking with the oppressor. Flávio Império’s scenography brings the basic elements to the representation. In the scenography, there is no overlaying of elements as in “Pintado de Alegre”, but a synthetic rationality: Brecht’s selective realism. With only minimum and necessary objects, used in order to narrate the dramatic situation truthfully: the oven, the table and the benches forming a cross, a bottle, socks hung to dry over the oven, a fishing net (Figure 3). The scenario does neither delude the audience nor romanticize the characters.



Figure 3. “Os Fuzis da Mãe Carrar”, by Bertolt Brecht. Direction: José Renato. Rehearsal with Lima Duarte, Dina Lisboa and Paulo José. Photography by Benedito Lima de Toledo, 1962. Source: Flávio Império’s Archive - IEB USP. Available on <http://flavioimperio.com.br/galeria/507118/507132>

Capturing the reality helped the synthesis and accuracy of the scenic image, creating a theatrical and poetical response lived on the stage. Flávio “used to gather a bunch of photos, newspaper clippings, magazines, all apparently lacking any immediate relationship to each other[...] piece of fabric, photograph, object”. (FERRO, 2012).

“O Melhor Juiz, o Rei” [The Best Judge, the King] (1963), by Lope de Vega, belongs to a series of productions that, at Arena, was named “Nacionalização dos Clássicos” [Nationalization of Classics]. When putting the play together, the group performed an adaptation of the Spanish text, which takes place originally in the XVII century. The changes in the text aimed at echoing Brazilian circumstances. In order to so, the third act of the play, which is about a peasant that sues a nobleman, was altered. In the end, another peasant, friend of the suing part, came in dressed up as a king, to the benefit of his partner, delivering justice. If Lucrecia, the bride represented the power in “Lope de Vega”, in the adaptation, she enacted issues of land and agrarian reform.

In the spectacle program the choices for the space visual conception were clearly stated. Flávio Império (1963) affirmed that architecture, theatre and visual arts differed in regards of space, time and “mainly of mode and price of production” of production. So much so that the artist must submit to the “real possibilities of the ‘historic instant’ (IMPÉRIO, 1963). For him, the artist should always search for coherence with his own time and with the real possibilities of an underdeveloped country.

Flávio Império notices that the fact that they could not “count with good artisans” allowed for liberation on the one hand, while, on the other, it was a constraint as the country was not fully industrially developed, and most of the production was handcrafted or manufactured: “Finished goods offer a scarce opportunity for design training and their shortage and lack of quality are taken as an absolute limitation [...]” (IMPÉRIO, 1963). In TBC there was a team of craftsmen – sewers, carpenters, among others – ready and capable of executing any kind of project, but that kind of production was opposite to the impulses of Arena. Império explained that, in order to produce a scenic image, if in the theatrical language the object was employed by its “trait”, by its symbol, by whatever that distinguished it, using ready made objects in the scenic visual image would be efficient. But the lack of quality in ready made objects and of good artisans turned efficiency into challenge. The artist continued elaborating his choices:

If we take any object, made for a specific objective, and join another one to it, the result of this union is not necessarily a sum. Often, and this is one of those cases, the result is a third object. As in the scenic image it is always possible to control the whole and the parts, the object can have an entirely different meaning if isolated or as part of a composition.

Therefore, we can try to place the term ‘creation’ as something less esoteric and unexplainable, making it simpler, with a more straightforward sense of organization, ordination, systematization, a way of planning. (IMPÉRIO, 1963).

By the text, a process extensively used by Império becomes explicit. A process also explored in the visual arts since the beginning of the 20th century: the use of ready made and non-conventional objects. Besides creating scenic meanings, it carries the idea of dismissing the traditional artistic aura. The artist considers the handcrafts and the manufactured goods in a historical space and time, not abstracting or generalizing the handcraft production (Figure 4).



Figure 4. “O Melhor Juiz, o Rei”, by Lope de Vega. Adaptation: Augusto Boal Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, Paulo José. Direction: Augusto Boal. Rehearsal with Gianfrancesco Guarnieri (Pelaio), Alexandre Radová (male peasant), Dina Sfat (female peasant), Arnaldo Weiss (executioner), Abrahão Farc (D. Nunho), João José Pompeo (D.Tello), Isabel Ribeiro (Feliciano), Carlos Maurício Ferreira Lopes (soldier), Juca de Oliveira (Sancho) e Joana Fomm (Elvira). Multimeios Archive/ IDART – 1963. Available on “Arena conta Arena 50 anos” CD-ROM.

These ideas can be illustrated with a costume: to compose the characters, Flávio Império used ready elements, such as a rubber boot, acoustic felt, cotton and tow fabric, painted lace, overlaying these elements in such a way that they could be understood as a 17th century garment, giving the idea of a “theatrical theatre” (Figure 5). The theatrical would be not only an effect of distancing but an appeal to the spectator’s capacity of accepting and appreciating an artistic truth” (LIMA, 1997).



Figura 5. “O Melhor Juiz, o Rei”, de Lope de Vega. Adaptation: Augusto Boal Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, Paulo José. Direction: Augusto Boal. Costume design by Flávio Império. India ink on paper. Flávio Império’s Archive - IEB USP. Available at <http://flavioimperio.com.br/galeria/507437/507520>

After the military coup, the political left made an effort to suppress its internal controversies, gathering their strengths against fascism. Theatre companies soon mobilized to create an artistic “model” of political resistance. After the destruction of the Center of Popular Culture (CPC) in 1964, some of their members joined to form a protest art group called “Opinião”. These spectacles acted as rituals, as described by Mostaço (2016), whereby internal mythology was transmitted to the audience in specific and implied codes. There was an identification between actors and spectators, in which both represent the people, according to Brazilian Communist Party’s (PCB) ideology of a national-popular art. While Boal directed “Opinião” [Opinion] in Rio de Janeiro, Guarnieri brought Arena’s cast together to create a spectacle with the same patterns of the “carioca” (related to Rio de Janeiro) group, but based on a more consistent dramatic situation: the “Arena Conta Zumbi” (1965) play.

Coming back to São Paulo, Boal developed a system called “coringa” [joker], whereby actors enacted the various characters in the scene, allowing each performer to play different roles and situations. With the screening of maps and pictures, the company sought to clarify the issues dealt with by the text; if this explanatory material was lacking, the narrative would be interrupted and the gap announced; the “result was similar to an academic seminar, a dramatization made by students for classes depicted by illustrations” (MOSTAÇO, 2016, p. 104).

Arena Conta Zumbi launched the studies about the positive hero. The spectacle was the source of a deep identification between audience and actors, one in which there was a sort of closed circuit, a catharsis embraces both in a kind of protest ritual. Flávio Império was already distant from the group and creation process when Arena conta Zumbi was assembled, and he criticized the spectacle:

When I arrived, it was ready. [...] I did not take part in Zumbi. I only saw the spectacle. It was still raw, but it was completely structured. When it was over, I laughed my head off. It was the funniest thing! I said: ‘It looks like a bunch of intellectuals, on their dad’s carpet, drinking whiskey and talking about the people’. [...] I changed the theatre structure for Zumbi a little bit. I decided to cover the floor with an expensive and quite fluffy carpet, a nylon carpet, and it was bright too. Like a corny thing from a rich Turk. Because I thought everyone’s parents were rich Turks. It was a quite large red carpet, with which we covered the whole stage. It was red on purpose, to make a joke. Everybody’s clothes were garments that the petty bourgeoisie wore to go to universities: Lee jeans pants and a colored shirt. If I am not mistaken, there were seven people singing, so I decided to use the seven colors of the rainbow, and each actor got one, and the pants were white denim. Pastel, not white. There was this idea that the play took place in the living room of a bourgeois and rich family talking about the Brazilian peoples’ history. (IMPÉRIO, 1985).

At this point, it is clear that we are dealing with an epic realism that goes beyond criticizing its own performance, searching for an identification by speaking to the audience, not about it. The costumes and the setting were like mirrors for the audience. This contributed to the identification process while bringing an epic tone to the stage performance (Figura 6).



Figure 6. “Arena conta Zumbi”, by Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri. Direction: Augusto Boal. On the picture: Lima Duarte, Dina Sfat, Anthero de Oliveira, Marília Medalha, Chant Dessian and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri. Photograph by Benedito Lima de Toledo, 1965. Flávio Império Archives - IEB USP. Available at <http://flavioimperio.com.br/galeria/507872/507878>

In the tiny little stage in São Paulo downtown, a project of a specific aesthetics was established, letting go of the simulacrum. A project directly articulated with social reality and the group’s political choices. The choice of an aesthetic is also an ethical one. To Amélia Hamburger, what links Arena to Flávio Império’s work is the “continuous usage of intuition, of experimenting, of critical analysis; feeling like the Brazilian people, having an anthropological interpretation of the people’s expressions; being always unravelling and rejecting the authoritarianism in the relationships among individuals and between the individual and the collective”. (HAMBURGER, 2004, p. 2)

The “austerity” of the scenic image and the creation of a scenography specific to the Arena company is linked to Flávio Império’s work. The workmanship, combined with the materials that were most available, most ordinary, made the “understanding of things” (VARGAS, 1997, p.59) easier. It reveals features of the unfinished, informal, including and appealing to the audience to complete, with their imagination, the staging spaces. By so doing they could achieve a synthesis of the image, quite necessary to the arena spatial configuration. It creates strongly engaging

scenic atmospheres, which interact with the Brazilian social context, aiming at a sense of expression detached from the European one, critical of the economic developmentalism adopted by the military government.

Architecture

In the second half of the '50s, international criticism to the formalist carelessness of the modern Brazilian architecture (BILL, 1953), to the absence of urban planning and predominance of real estate speculation (ARGAN, 1954), to the irrational rapidity on finding its own expression (GIEDION, 1956) all started echoing among young architects, who began questioning the artificiality of adopting the architectonic modernism and its unsuitability to the Brazilian context.

This criticism made by renowned experts who identified with the international Modernism was largely ignored by the previous generation. Vilanova Artigas defended Oscar Niemeyer of such criticism, recalling a negative Brazilian experience with the cosmopolitan and anti-popular character of functionalism (ARTIGAS, 1953). And even after having had, in 1952 and 1953, direct contact with the neo-classicism that was being employed by the USSR government, he insisted that the socialist realism recognized in Niemeyer's iconic modernism "the right position, the materialist position" regarding Brazilian people's aspirations (ARTIGAS, 1954).

On the other hand, in a conference in 1954, translated into Portuguese and issued by the magazine *Fundamentos*⁴ in 1955, the leader of the Soviet Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, criticized the soviet architecture, declaring that the socialist realism should engage more with the economic dynamics and material necessities of the population rather than with its appearance. Khrushchev proposed to the architects that they would formulate a new poetics based on Russia's own constructive elements, seeking for a productive transformation towards industrialization (KRUSHCHEV, 1955).

It was only after Khrushchev's statement about the lack of realism itself in socialist realism that the architects of the Brazilian Communist Party reviewed their positions. Niemeyer and Artigas were the most emblematic architects to do so. Niemeyer's "testimony" (1958) and Artigas' support towards him (1958) played a big

part in this movement. But it is mostly in their projectual practice that we can observe this realistic turn. While Niemeyer declared that he was, since Brasília, committed to synthetic forms more adhering to the structure, restraining from multiple solutions in only one project, Vilanova Artigas reconciled himself with his Wrightian past and the morality of "material truth", exploring plastically the exposed concrete with his buildings.

The exposed concrete and the increasing dramatic configuration of structures – concentration of loads in a few supports, big cantilevers, muscled structures, exposed ribbed slabs, and so on – belong obviously to the celebrated and internationally widespread architectonic arsenal of the late '50s, quite identified with Le Corbusier's after-war work. This new architectural realism gathered many followers worldwide and elicited the most diverse and sometimes conflicting intellectual appropriation. Especially in the Brazilian context, even more in São Paulo, Joaquim Guedes was one of the first to embrace it, and the predominant explanation for its use was the economy, the common good and its relevance to the Brazilian historical and social reality.

Artigas quickly let go of his once decorative use of reinforced concrete, visible on the façade of Olga Baeta's house, built in 1956 (figure 7), for an emphasis on structural elements in schools, houses and social clubs in the following years: diagonal lines corresponding to the horizontal loads, continuity of the system foundation-pillar-gable-roof, mobile joints, thinning the edges of slabs and designing multifunctioning pillars and beams that served also to protection from sunlight, collection of rainwater and so on. In 1960, the term "brutalist" was already employed to refer to Artigas' work (ALFIERI, 1960), which converged appropriately to the continuity of a narrative started a decade before, which highlighted his severe morality, his engineer-architect rationality, his economy of language, his anti-bourgeois attitude and his realism (p. ex. BARDI, 1950).

⁴Magazine linked to the Communist Party of Brazil, edited by Editora Brasiliense.



Figure 7. Façade of Olga Baeta's Residence, Butantã, São Paulo. Project by João Vilanova Artigas and Carlos Cascaldi, São Paulo, 1956. Photograph: unknown author. FAU-USP Library Archives.



Figure 8. Simon Fausto's Residence, Ubatuba. Project by Flávio Império, 1961. Photograph: Benedito Lima de Toledo. Flávio Império Archives - IEB USP. Available at <http://www.flavioimperio.com.br/galeria/505589/509929>

Although Artigas became one of the most important names of Brazilian architecture in the 60's, this does not mean his work was an isolated or exceptional phenomena. Quite the opposite. His individual prominence was sustained by an ensemble of architects, and among them many of his students and teaching colleagues – Flávio Império, Sérgio Ferro and Rodrigo Lefèvre included –, whose projects sought for more objectivity on the one hand, and the consolidation of a new language on the other. (Figure 8).

This first brutalism, which prioritized didacticism, constructive rationality and a formal manifestation of an economic undertaking, making no concessions to deceptive representations of an enlightened bourgeois society, was related to the realistic artistic culture of that moment and its developmentalism, with expectations of deep social reforms. Tropicalism had not yet happened, and national movies and plays commented harshly on the country's obstacles and on the poor and marginalized from modernity. Architects equally seemed to acknowledge the country's underdevelopment, its limitations concerning materials and labor, which conducted them to a programmatic convergence around low tech. These same architects engaged in the defense of the working class and the promotion of its protagonism by an urban reform and public housing agendas (BONDUKI; KOURY, 2010).

If the bourgeois single-family residences constituted most of these architects' work, where common solutions were experimented, the projects for the State Government Action Plan(1959-1963) buildings and structures promoted by the government in articulation with the São Paulo Department of the Brazilian Architects Institute (IAB/SP) with, presented an unprecedented opportunity for the new generation, one "of a rational orientation in São Paulo" to disseminate, through the State, the new aesthetic principles. Worried about the enormous collective necessities, many could build public constructions with tolls that, in theory, were apt "to organize the space of a more human era" (FERRO, 1967c). It is what Sérgio Ferro himself acknowledges, possibly, including himself among the new architects from this generation.

In this same text, however, Ferro concluded that the 1964 State coup would have revealed how illusory was the perspective of social transformation by means of aesthetic. He turns, as it is well known, to a radical criticism of this "caboclo brutalism", which betrayed precisely the architectonic realism that would justify it, becoming a compensation for a frustrating reality, whereby emerged as symptoms the arbitrariness, the empty formalism, the hermetic character – self referent and anti-popular – and the radicalization of an alleged austere ethic, unsuited for the work's straightforwardness (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Fernando Millan's Residence, Morumbi, São Paulo. Project by Paulo Mendes da Rocha, 1970. Photograph: Hugo Segawa. FAUUSP Library Archives.



Figure 10. State Gym and Normal School in Brotas, SP. Project by Rodrigo Lefèvre, Sérgio Ferro and Flávio Império, 1966-1967. Photograph: Rodrigo Lefèvre. FAUUSP Library Archives.

Beyond criticism, Ferro highlighted the necessity of an architecture closer to what Flávio Império built on set design and in theatre: the return to objectivity in con-

struction, diving into the understanding of its own reality, and designing symbols rather than signs⁵. (Figure 10)

In "A casa popular" [The popular house] (1969), his last text about architecture written in Brazil, Ferro shunned the "paulista brutalism" programmatic issues even more - which according to his point of view were restricted to a luxury market despite its social discourse - to encompass a more representative ensemble of reality, in which the self-construction was the rule and the mass market was poorly developed.

In the late '60s, the Marxist theory became even more present in Ferro's texts and guided his understanding of architecture as a part of the construction industry, which by its turn is a part of political economy. This wide and systemic understanding of the profession increased the polarization between "practitioners and architectural critics. Despite setbacks in this not always productive debate, Ferro's realism left an astonishing theoretical legacy for the scholars at FAUUSP, who became more aware of the reality faced by cities and the building industry.

Conclusion

In these notes about Ferro's and Império's realism, we sought to bridge two practices in fields that the authors themselves insisted on distinguishing, even though they both worked on several different fronts. Looking at, for example, the constant comparison made by Ferro between free work on visual arts and heteronomous work in architecture. This distinction also must be made when approaching the theatre practice, in which the high hierarchic position of the architect, well positioned to control the totality, corresponds to the stage director in the 60's. The scenographer was somewhat akin to the master builder, a bridge between the stage designer and the workers-makers, whose hand disappeared in the illusionist theatre to give light to the director's concepts. At Arena Theatre, Flávio Império upgraded the set designer-maker role -which he continued to be-, to the role of participating in directing decisions, which determined the meaning of the play as the scenography appears and reveals an autonomous work that carries its own poetics.

⁵To Ferro, symbols are forms of participation, as they arise from the "apprehension of something existing, of dispersed but real content", in opposition to the sign, which would be the "arbitrary addition of a content to a form". (FERRO, 1967)

Flávio Império and Sérgio Ferro kept a critical relationship with the artistic culture in which they participated, those of the Arena's realism and of the architectonic brutalism. Their positions were set to review realism without renouncing its artistic perspectives. One thing they both criticized was the schematic and coerced didacticism, the excessive rationalization and the unreasonable economicism of certain works. They defended that the artists should keep themselves engaged in the alive and shifting cultural dynamics, therefore formally flexible and curious and opposed to stylistic arbitrariness. They should resist to a self-satisfaction assured by the success provided by the educated middle classes and overcome the mere representation of the people by allowing effective popular participation.

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A Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes: Flávio Império's painting between the maximum theatrical and the neutral theatrical

A Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes: a pintura de Flávio Império entre o máximo e o neutro teatral

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Abstract

This article starts from the painting *A Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes*, done by Flávio Império in 1965, to examine how the artist criticizes the military dictatorship through his work. For this, it briefly returns to the term *Pintura Nova*, and its meanings within the partnership with Sérgio Ferro and Rodrigo Lefèvre, as an instrument of knowledge of reality, molded from its elements. Then, it raises the comments of Flávio Motta and Mário Schemberg at the critical reception of the artist's work. And, finally, based on texts by Flávio Império himself about his activity as a scenographer, he brings painting closer to the notions of a mobile, neutral and theatrical maximum system, influenced by Anatol Rosenfeld's reading of Bertold Brecht. The objective is to bring the artist's reflections to the time by understanding his painting to elaborate on these issues, such as architecture and scenography.

Resumo

Este artigo parte da pintura *A Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes*, realizada por Flávio Império em 1965, para perscrutar a maneira com que o artista elabora a crítica à ditadura militar por meio de seu trabalho. Para isso, retoma brevemente o termo *Pintura Nova*, e seus significados dentro da parceria com Sérgio Ferro e Rodrigo Lefèvre, como uma instrumento de conhecimento da realidade, moldado a partir de seus elementos. Depois, levanta os comentários de Flávio Motta e Mário Schemberg na recepção crítica da obra do artista. E, por fim, a partir de textos do próprio Flávio Império sobre sua atividade de cenógrafo, aproxima a pintura das noções de *sistema móvel*, *neutro e máximo teatral*, influenciadas pela leitura que Anatol Rosenfeld faz de Bertold Brecht. O objetivo é aproximar as reflexões do artista à época entendendo sua pintura também como uma forma de elaboração dessas questões, tal como a arquitetura e a cenografia.

A Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes¹: Flávio Império's painting between the maximum theatrical and the neutral theatrical

Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes, painted in 1965 by Flávio Império, and today it is preserved in the *Pinacoteca*² in São Paulo state (n Brazil). It is a wooden painting on which several small objects were applied. This is the caricature profile of an elderly woman. Her face is made with graphite, without mass. There is only the contour scratched by thin lines that exaggerate her characteristics on a white background.

The clothes, coat, and hat are also implications made by areas of black paint; it is possible to glimpse translucent letters on a newspaper page. The letters do not have colors or pigment in their composition. They are traces left by a decal possibly produced from a newspaper page and glue. The newspaper is used again in the composing of the background covered by white paint. This white layer, wood decal, has the pigment texture and maintains the characteristic transparency of white-washed surfaces.

Several industrial pieces and objects are added to the painting. Lead soldiers, applied to the woman's hat, form a march. The assembly of these toys alludes to that fertile, ideally epic moment, typical in paintings of historical episodes from the 19th century. The set looks like a metal relief. The toy march guides the entire painting surface, including the woman's profile - which is less substantial than what adorns it.

At the bottom of the painting, gears form her hair, suggesting mechanical curls, wondering; the machining that engages the *Marchadeira's*³ head. A drawer, cupboard, or window handle is applied at the bottom curve that indicates the woman's ear. It is an adornment, cast in iron, but without any specific or notable characteristics. It certainly is a product of a process in series production mode that uses the image of the ornament as a style disconnected from its historical context.

Together, these fragments that are integrated with the other parts of the painting are attributes that assemble the *Marchadeira*. A conservatism typical character

expression which refers to the Family's March with God for Freedom. This march took place in March 1964 and was seen as a civil society representation, supporting a democracy rupture in Brazil. ⁴

The painting is part of a 25 works set by Flávio Império, made between 1964-1966, immediately after the Civil-Military Coup. Many of those works are now missing. If we know about their existence it is due to photographic register.⁵ They are plaster reliefs and paintings with small objects applications that respond to the country's political and social context. As a result, the artworks formulate a criticism in relation to economic underdevelopment and submission to the United States through a language that investigates the *Pop Art* procedures.

This set was shown several times throughout the 1960s. This moment the artist became professional and did a large number of exhibitions, among them were some of the most important for the art history in Brazil; the collective *Opinião 65* (MAM-RJ⁶) and *Propostas 65* (FAAP⁷). *Marchadeira* was in both exhibitions. The label on its back proves the first exhibition, and the list of works in the exhibition catalog proves the second. At the Arena Theater Gallery⁸, he made an individual exhibition in 1966, maybe when he wrote the text *The New Painting has the everyday face*⁹, naming this the works he did. The term is also shared by the painter Sérgio Ferro.¹⁰

In this article, I intend to look at *Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes*, which is part of mentioned above set, and to examine the critic's meanings that Flávio Império formulates through his work in painting. For this, it is first necessary to redeem how the artist defines *Pintura Nova*¹¹. Then, we will analyze these paintings through comments by the critics Flávio Motta and Mário Schemberg. Finally, we

⁴For a detailed point of view Family's March with God for Freedom, see Sestini, 2008.

⁵There are two collections of photographs: the first probably from 1967 by Benedito Lima de Toledo. The second made by Cultural Society Flávio Império (*Sociedade Cultural Flávio Império - SCFI*) which engage the cataloging of the artist's collection, between 1994-2000. Both are part of the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of São Paulo (*Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros da Universidade de São Paulo -IEB-USP*).

⁶Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro

⁷Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation

⁸In the original: Galeria do Teatro de Arena

⁹In the original: *A Pintura Nova tem a cara do cotidiano*

¹⁰cf. The use of the term in the author's text entitled *Os limites da denúncia*, Ferro, 1967, p.3.

¹¹New Painting

¹The painting name literally translated is: Well Thinking Families' Marcher.

²The *Pinacoteca* de São Paulo is a museum of the visual arts with an emphasis on Brazilian art

³Literally translated as Marcher.

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will see the picture of the Império owns ideas: *mobile, neutral, and maximum theater system*. The aim is bringing the picture closer to the idea of sociological *experiments*, as Anatol Rosenfeld¹² interprets the Bertold Brecht work. In this way, I want to bring the painter works closer to what he did as a set designer, contributing to a more complete view of his activity.



Figure 1: Flávio Império. *The Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes*, 1965. Acrylic, graphite and collage of paper and objects on canvas. 40 x 39 cm. Collection of Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo - Donation of Carlos Lemos, 2009

The Pintura Nova has the face of everyday life

The Marchadeira and the term *Brazilian Pintura Nova* are linked to the architecture studio that Flávio Império formed together with Rodrigo Lefèvre and Sérgio Ferro,

friends and partners since college, where they attended together¹³. After graduation, the three are immediately hired as professor assistants at the same place, FAUUSP¹⁴. In addition to his academic and office activities, Império is a set designer for the main theater groups in the city - Arena Theater and Workshop Theater¹⁵ - he also is a visual artist. All of these works are brought in the space where he lives with the other two companions and, often, seal relationships among them that go beyond architecture. Lefèvre signs as the artist who sets *Every Angel is Terrible*¹⁶ in 1963, and also the Workshop Theater renovation in 1967. With Sérgio Ferro, Império shares the making of painting - a practice that they will develop very closely during the 1960s.

The status of these other artistic activities developed in the architecture studio scope is in Rodrigo Lefèvre's text, published in the 1965 magazine *Acrópole*.

"To fight marginalization more directly, [the architect] is forced to get into construction non linked sectors as visual communication, industrial design, etc. There is increased performance, pretentious in some cases, in related fields as painting, theater, cinema, literature, etc. There is an increased interest in the survey and interpretation of our cultural facts, resulting in a needing for greater dissemination and discussion of our architecture through publications, debates, conferences, exhibitions, etc. is felt. This happens in an attempt to replace the performance almost total failure with the rigor of each attitude¹⁷.

This dispersion may implicate in characteristics compromise with the regime conditions. The underdevelopment and subservience are the easier choices that tend to enhance architecture as a luxury item concept. But this dispersion, on the other hand, if conscious, controlled, ordered, serving to increase our reality knowledge and combined with the coherent interpretations search, helps to establish the bases for overcoming this situation." ^{18 19}

¹³About the group, the fundamental importance it has for the History of Architecture, see Koury, 2003. The term *Pintura Nova* is related to the term *Arquitetura Nova* which is Ferro's text from 1967. Cf. Ferro, 2006, pp. 47-58.

¹⁴School of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of Sao Paulo

¹⁵In the original: o Teatro de Arena e o Teatro Oficina

¹⁶In the original: Todo Anjo é Terrível

¹⁷In the original: Para combater a marginalização mais diretamente, [o arquiteto] é forçado a penetrar em setores não ligados à construção, como a comunicação visual, o desenho industrial, etc.; é aumentada a atuação, pretensiosa em alguns casos, em campos próximos como a pintura, teatro, cinema, literatura, etc.; é incrementado o interesse pelo levantamento e interpretação dos fatos de nossa cultura e sentida a necessidade de maior difusão e discussão de nossa arquitetura, através de publicações, debates, conferências, exposições, etc.; numa tentativa de substituir a falha quase total de atuação pelo rigor de cada atitude

¹⁸In the original: Essa dispersão pode assumir características comprometidas com as condições do regime, subdesenvolvimento e subserviência é a escolha mais fácil e que tende a ampliar o conceito de arquitetura como artigo de luxo. Mas, ao contrário, essa dispersão, se consciente, controlada e ordenada, servindo para aumentar

¹²The choice of this author is not random, Flávio Império and he were colleagues as teachers at Dramatic Art School (Escola de Arte Dramática -EAD) between 1962-1966. The book, *O Teatro Épico* has its first edition in 1965.

In Lefèvre's words, we can see a hierarchy in which architecture takes some major importance. We can explain this by the fact that the text is dedicated to architecture and is not to other activities, which are seen as dispersion risky, as they would reiterate the profession's elitism. On the other side, this same *dispersion* localized in the heart of which we can include the Brazilian Pintura Nova by Império and Ferro, if executed consciously and rigorously it would serve as a tool for the knowledge and interpretation of the reality. Therefore, it would establish bases for overcoming the underdevelopment and subservience regime.

In what terms is the Brazilian Pintura Nova a knowledge tool? Exactly because of its efforts to engender a social, political, and economic critic. In these works, created images organize the violent daily life of Brazil after the coup as part of the typical forces capitalism system, recognizing the country in its position in the international logic: underdeveloped and dominated In *The limits of denunciation*²⁰, Sérgio Ferro talks about this point:

"The Brazilian Pintura Nova is a clear manifestation of what we are today: a yankee colony. It exposes the complexity of contradictory attitudes - attraction and repulsion, denunciation and envy, a confusion that sets the strained relations between the colonizer, his internal representatives, and the colonized."^{21 22}

The artists present this critique by appropriating the *Pop Art* language - which they also call Pintura Nova - to talk about these *tense* relations. The language is identified as a North American product and used to refer to the oppressor, as an iconography characteristic, presenting it as part of a paintings organizing force game. In these works, *Pop* is not just a technique set, but also a kind of *leitmotiv*, which introduces the United States the capitalist production system and mass communication, while also serving as a reference to them. According to Flávio Império in *The*

New Painting has the everyday face.²³

"New Brazilian painting is the daughter of 'pop', but undoubtedly a black sheep. It uses its language and responds to the punches, showing the other side of the issue. As a sorcerer apprentice learns the advertising language and shows that the king is naked - how brave the 'general sin general', 'motors electric [sic]', 'and so on'. U.S.A. ARMY NEEDS YOU but who needs USA Army"²⁴²⁵

According to Império,²⁶ the *Pop* starts from the awareness that the world is in crisis; that conflicts - war - are capitalist products urging to maintaining the middle-class life conditions, from the "consumer society it generated: the United States". Language responds to this observation objectively and directly. It turns away from the assertion that calls *Informalism* and *Tachisme*, but it remains an inseparable system part that generated it.

Pop is described by him as a "consuming middle-class product", assuming the image of the consumption objects, replacing art history with articles from the mass industry.

In this process, *Pop* divorces itself from painting to connect with the advertising language, feeding on it. Sérgio Ferro digs deeper into this analysis:

'Pop' is also a product of the violence awareness, but with a guilty consciousness, with a pang of shallow guilt. Its fault is being part of the amorphous mass that consents to the concentrated political, military, and economic power responsible for worldwide violence - in Congo, Greece, Laos, Vietnam, Brazil, and even in Harlem. And the biggest effort of this mass is to hide this evidence from itself. Its awareness would imply a burden choice between compacting or resisting.^{27 28}

But the appropriation these artists make from the *Pop* in their paintings has some significant characteristics that set the tone to the method in which they try to subject

²³In the original: *A Pintura Nova tem a cara do cotidiano*

²⁴Império, c. 1966. op.cit.

²⁵In the original: A pintura nova brasileira é filha da 'pop', mas sem dúvida a ovelha-negra. Usa sua linguagem e responde aos murros e pés-do-ouvido, mostrando o reverso da moeda. Como aprendiz de feiticeiro aprende a linguagem da publicidade e mostra que o rei está nu - como são valentes os 'general sin general', 'motors electric' [sic], 'and so on'. U.S.A. ARMY NEEDS YOU but who needs USA Army?"

²⁶Idem.

²⁷Ferro, op.cit.

²⁸In the original: A 'pop' é produto também da consciência da violência. Mas, de uma consciência culpada, com uma culpa vaga. Sua culpa é ser parte da massa amorfa que consente o poder político, militar e econômico concentrado responsável por uma violência no mundo inteiro - no Congo, na Grécia, no Laos, no Vietnã, no Brasil e, mesmo, no Harlem. E o empenho maior desta massa é esconder, de si própria, esta evidência: seu reconhecimento implicaria na escolha pesada entre compactuar ou resistir."

o conhecimento da nossa realidade, aliada à procura de interpretações coerentes, ajuda a estabelecer as bases para superação dessa situação

¹⁹The excerpt is part of the texts collection written by the three architects entitled *Notas sobre Arquitetura* and originally published in magazine *Acrópole*, issue 319. The complete transcript was republished with the new title *Arquitetura Experimental* em Ferro, 2006, pp. 37-39.

²⁰The original title: *Os limites da denúncia*

²¹Ferro, op. cit.

²²In the original: A pintura nova brasileira é manifestação clara do que hoje somos: colônia ianque. Expõe o complexo de atitudes contraditórias - atração e repulsão, denúncia e inveja, confusão que compõe as relações tensas entre o colonizador, seus representantes internos e o colonizado.

this North-American language to show that the “king is naked”, as says Império. It is about making an underdeveloped economy, precarious industrialization, and a violent production system appear.

“Then, due to distortions and radicalizations, we have tried to graft something into these imports. And yet, we express what we are, because we are what we manage to do within the limits and standards imposed on us by the metropolises. It may come a different day, but it hasn't come yet.”²⁹³⁰

Pintura Nova is deeper, in contrast to the smooth and uniform sophistication of works such as those by Andy Warhol and Rosenquist, according to Ferro. It makes the handmade performance painting appear as data, present evidence of the hand of the person who made it. In *Marchadeira*, we find this in the material aspect; each color layer takes and in the gestures marks engaged to the spreading of it over the surface of the wood. The characteristics of this surface indicate that it is a reused object, produced for a function other than receiving the painting. The many objects attached to the painting, also carry meanings of a precarious economy that, with creativity, knows how to prolong the useful life of what you have, taking advantage of little for other uses. Flávio Império uses this resource in his painting; making the city's residue part of his painting.

Other Important characteristic Pop language subversion is the caricature and its critical potential. In the Ferro's words:

“It even made the caricature reappear, typically 'given' and dismissed by the 'pop'. Particularly from those who criticize oppression, it does not have a room in bad faith. It means saying, and making understand, what is not said, and 'pop' does not mean what, despite itself, it says. Here, the violence prevents the violence reporting, in there, it is necessary to evade the violence awareness”.³¹³²

In *Marchadeira* this trace is already introduced in a generic aspect - not very subjective - and exaggerated in the character's look. It is also present in the title, ex-

pressed by the neologism that gives this lady's connection with the conservative march the line of a repeated practice; if attending to reactionary protests was her way of life, just as gossip is for gossipers. Anyone who sees the painting recognizes the distortion and exaggeration in the reference to these ladies who were at the country's daily news as Civil-Military Coup supporters. In this way, the artist shares laughter and mockery with its audience using the ridiculous image it elaborates on a character that everyone knows.³³ With the caricature, Império manages to point out the oppression that prevents the violence denunciation, of which the anti-democratic regime that ruled Brazil at the time was the expression of it. The critic Mário Schemberg reflects on this point:

“Flávio Império has a special position in the group of five painter architects due to his satirical temperament and political concern. He is undoubtedly the Daumier of Brazilian satirical art today, potentially one of the greatest satirical painters in the world.

[...]

With a sharp and relentless intelligence, Flávio reveals Brazilian reactionaries inhumanity, confusion, and vociferous ineptitude. Revealing their empty inflated [...]. Flávio unmasks and whips, without pity. It has the greatest political effectiveness”.³⁴³⁵

The way Flávio Império appropriates *Pop*, imposing in it the charge for underdevelopment, creates a caricatured image of the North American language. The several objects incorporation – useless stuff - also develop the ridicule of the *Marchadeira*: it is a profile that alludes to some heroism, but is elaborated with - and has as an attribute - children's toys, fragments of underdeveloped and rusty capitalism; the delay.

The caricature critical potential is connecting to the way these fragments collaborate *Marchadeira*' assemble. For this, it is important to note them as *extra-painting* elements that sometimes appear as images of themselves - things of the world - sometimes as character's attributes. It is the recognition of this double aspect that allows criticism through ridicule and caricature. Ferro track this characteristic witch

²⁹Idem.

³⁰In the original: “Depois, por distorções e radicalizações, tentamos enxertar alguma coisa nestas importações. E, mesmo assim, exprimimos aquilo que somos, porque somos o que de nós conseguimos fazer dentro dos limites e padrões que as metrópoles nos impõem. Poderá vir dia diferente, mas ainda não veio.”

³¹Idem.

³²In the original: Fez, inclusive, reaparecer a caricatura, própria do 'dada' e desprezada pela 'pop'. Própria de quem critica sobre opressão, não cabe na má-fé. É dizer, e fazer entender, o que não se diz, e a 'pop' não quer dizer o que, apesar dela mesma, diz. Aqui, a violência impede a denúncia da violência, lá, há que iludir a consciência da violência

³³For a preserved discussion of the caricature, cf. Belluzzo, 1980.

³⁴O título do texto é *Cinco arquitetos pintores* e foi publicado originalmente na revista *Acrópole*, 1965. The text was republished with the wrong date in a collection *Pensando a arte*, cf. 1988:187-189.

³⁵In the original: Flávio Império ocupa uma posição especial no grupo dos cinco arquitetos pintores pelo seu temperamento satírico e sua preocupação política. Ele é indubitavelmente o Daumier da arte brasileira satírica de hoje, potencialmente um dos maiores pintores satíricos de todo o mundo.[...] Dotado de uma inteligência aguda e implacável, Flávio revela a desumanidade, a confusão e a inépcia vociferante dos reacionários brasileiros, desmascarando a sua vacuidade empolada [...]. Flávio desmascara e fustiga, sem se apiedar. Tem a maior eficácia política.

is appropriate from *Pop*:

"Imitating 'dada', 'pop' has given a new pushing to an active and politicized painting. An example is the 'deconstruction' technique; an essential 'dada' procedure is the shifting of something or facts from its normal context and placing it in a different one. With this technique it is possible to highlight aspects or meanings that are usually overlooked or unnoticed".³⁶³⁷

The presence of these objects is also *part* of the painting essence. It reveals its production context and the underdevelopment of the country. As mentioned, this procedure contributes to a reactionary caricature forming. By gathering these pieces, Flávio Império draws attention to its ordinary aspect, a common residue made by capitalist daily life, a reality shared by all. That is pointed out by the critic Flávio Motta when he comments on the reliefs of this set of works.

"The artist captured reality fragments. He was standing on the sidewalk. He looked at the ground while waiting for the green traffic lights to cross. And he saw, on the street, lots of metal scraps smashed [...]. From this event, the incredible idea came from it; taking all these things from the floor and put them on the wall. Therefore, everything that goes over the top, indifferent, emerges in the frontality condition as something impossible. And it makes you think about things that are beyond, including the thought that thinks of reestablishing connections, the lucidity resources able of being present in the most distant future and the most aged past; in the presence of everything and everyone at the same time".³⁸³⁹

There is the painting as an instrument to achieve reality knowledge Lefèvre suggests in his text. It is this because it makes the experience of everyday life dipper. Each technique used in *mobile system* development present their intrinsic critical potential, calling the public for analysis. We are going to talk about this *system* later. Before, it is worth mentioning its *denunciation* aspect pointed out

by Sérgio Ferro; Brazilian *Pintura Nova* is "anti", according to him. It is a way of reacting to the "wide common frustration from 64, to the restrictions on any free and responsible action, to the morbid irrationalism that rules by proxy".⁴⁰ According to Ferro, it is a weapon, even though is a weak one. In Império's words:

"A lot of people find my painting aggressive. I wonder if is true. Currently, any newspaper news is a lot more. Either very little is being read, or there is a generalized hypersensitivity crisis ...".⁴¹⁴²

Mobile system; theatrical neutral and maximum.

If painting is intended to be as an instrument to achieve reality knowledge, it must be a *mobile system*. According to Flávio Império, in his contribution to the *Notes on architecture*⁴³ this is the way that allows learning.

"Some feel profound modern when they state that our century is 'chaotic' and that the world of our time is 'nonsense'.

This subjectivist attitude protects the neutrality peace by encouraging the masochistic heroic comfort of personal dramas.

Human relations have never been Cartesian, except in times when limits are officially defined. For that, it is necessary to use force, considering the objective which is holding the history.

The 'chaotic' is born from a simple comparison among facts aspects or idealistic cravings for final meanings on the 'explanation' of the Universe.

Non-finalist and mobile systems allow knowledge; knowledge as commitment and not as a definitive explanation, and also as a verification tool and not 'the truth' itself."^{44 45}

In the above quote, Império contrasts two systems, two ways of capture reality. The first is the one which seeks to organize the reality logically and without success, concludes that it is chaotic. This approach would aim to find the *truth* - or

³⁶Ferro, op. cit.

³⁷In the Original: "De fato, imitando o 'dada', a 'pop' deu novo impulso para uma pintura atuante e politizada. Exemplo a técnica da 'desconstelação', procedimento essencial do 'dada' que é a retirada de alguma coisa ou fato de seu contexto normal e sua colocação em outro diferente. Com esta técnica é possível evidenciar aspectos ou significações habitualmente desprezados ou não percebidos."

³⁸Unfinished text by Flávio Motta, Os Metamoldes de Império, probably written between 1965-1967. Today at IEB-USP.

³⁹In the original: O artista captou fragmentos da realidade. Estava parado na calçada. Olhava o chão enquanto esperava o sinal para atravessar. E viu, no asfalto, uma multidão de migalhas metálicas absolutamente amassadas [...]. Daí veio a sugestão sensacional, pegar todas essas coisas do chão e colocá-las no muro. Assim, tudo aquilo que se passa por cima, indiferente, emerge na condição de frontalidade como algo intransponível. E faz pensar nas coisas que estão além, inclusive no pensamento que pensa em restabelecer ligações, nos recursos da lucidez capaz de estar presente no futuro mais distante e no passado mais envelhecido; nessa presença de tudo e todos no mesmo instante."

⁴⁰Ferro, op.cit.

⁴¹Império, op. cit.

⁴²In the original: Muita gente acha minha pintura agressiva. Será? Nos tempos que correm qualquer notícia de jornal é muito mais. Ou se lê muito pouco, ou existe uma crise generalizada de hipersensibilidade..."

⁴³In the original: *Notas sobre arquitetura*

⁴⁴ Same collection of texts written by the three architects already mentioned. Cf. Ferro, 2006.

⁴⁵ In the original: "Há quem se sinta profundamente moderno ao afirmar que o nosso século é 'caótico' e que o mundo do nosso tempo é 'nonsense'. Essa atitude subjetivista resguarda o sossego da neutralidade incentivando o conforto heroico masoquista dos dramas pessoais. As relações humanas nunca foram cartesianas, a não ser em épocas cujos limites são oficialmente definidos. Para isso é necessário que se empregue a força, uma vez que o objetivo é reter a história. O 'caótico' nasce de uma comparação simplista entre a aparência dos fatos ou duma ânsia idealista de significações finais para a 'explicação' do Universo.

Os sistemas não finalistas e móveis permitem conhecimento. Conhecimento como forma de participação e não como explicação definitiva, instrumento de verificação e não 'a verdade'."

even to impose it. It has the univocal characteristic, therefore, authoritarian.

Mobile systems, on the other hand, do not have a single purpose or move around the *truth*. They are, in contrast, instruments to analyze reality. In this system, subjects learn when they face a situation and become aware of its complexity, realizing the

different competing forces in its construction. For this reason, *mobile systems* call public engagement by opening different possible syntheses.

This theory has interesting similarities with Berthold Brecht's proposals for an *Epic Theater*. In his plays, the author presents situations to the public as a result of social forces, giving the synthesis power to whoever sees the plays, and not to the characters. According to Augusto Boal:

"Brecht's poetics is the Poetics of Awareness: the world reveals itself to be transformable, the transformation starts on the theater itself, as the audience does not delegate powers to the character to think in his place anymore. [...]"⁴⁶

It is essential to say that Augusto Boal and Flávio Império have been working together since 1957 when the artist approaches the Arena Theatre. The study of Bertold Brecht's⁴⁸ work and the assembling of his pieces - for example, *Os Fuzis da Mãe Carrar (1962)* - spread through not only the company's trajectory but also the Império's one⁴⁹. For this reason, just like his work with Sérgio Ferro and Rodrigo Lefèvre in architecture, we can see how his thoughts in the theater feed the painting he does.

His painting seems to allow something very similar to what Brecht wanted from the audience, which Boal defines as *Poetics of Awareness*. As a mobile system that comes closer to what the German author calls *Versuche*, an essay, or *sociological*

experiments in which the audience is called upon to synthesize what they see⁵⁰. It doesn't get into history, but you see yourself in front of it. Instead of getting involved, the person studies. The actor does not act, but narrates, placing the viewer in the observer position. As opposed to entertaining, draining the audience's power, it awakens their action. Therefore, it does not work on emotion as the dramatic theater form, sharing experiences, but it forces the decision. In the character subjective feelings place, the performance presents arguments and social forces that shape the context that the scene develops⁵¹. As Anatol Rosenfeld summarizes, the intention is to:

"[...] presenting a "scientific stage" capable of clarifying the public about society and the need to transform it; capable at the same time to stimulate the public, provoking in them transformative action."⁵²

Like a Brecht character, *The Marchadeira* is not a heroic portrait or a negative allegory of the conservative lady. But a scheme where the viewer is placed before lots of procedures (forces) that appear in its elaboration. There is no identification possibility with the theme of the painting, but recognition of the actions that it develops. It is not about the character representation or the figuration its purposes, but the assembly of *The Marchadeira* as a result of several important processes.

This non-identification is particular of Brecht's theater, for whom "distancing is seeing in historical terms"⁵⁴. According to him, it is only from the *strangeness* that the audience is led to carefully study the scene, without getting lost in individual dramas. According to Rosenfeld about Brecht:

"For the children of a scientific age, eminently productive like ours, it cannot be more productive fun than taking a critical attitude in the face of the chronicles which narrate the social life vicissitudes. This joyful didactic effect is brought by the play' entire epic structure and mainly by the 'distancing effect' (Verfremdungseffekt = strangeness, al-

⁴⁶ Part of the text *Conceito do "Épico"* from Augusto Boal, written in Buenos Aires in 1973. Cf. Boal, 2005, p. 236.

⁴⁷ In the original: A poética de Brecht é a Poética da Conscientização: o mundo se revela transformável e a transformação começa no teatro mesmo, pois o espectador já não delega poderes ao personagem para que pense em seu lugar [...]"

⁴⁸ About Brecht in Brazil, see *Encenações Brasileiras - Brecht: Monstro Sagrado?* de 1967, originalmente publicada no *Suplemento Literário* d'O Estado de São Paulo. Cf. Rosenfeld, 2012, pp. 93-100.

⁴⁹ See text by Iná Camargo Costa, published in the catalog of the artist's retrospective exhibition, *Flávio Império em Cena*, cf. Costa, 1997.

⁵⁰ About the term see the afterword entitled *Brecht e a Teoria Teatral* wrote by Anatol Rosenfeld em 1962 to the Brazilian translation *Cruzada de Crianças*, by Berthold Brecht, published by Brasiliense publishing company. O texto foi republicado em coletânea editada pela Perspectiva, ver Rosenfeld, 2012, p. 81.

⁵¹This is a brief summary of the famous comparison in which Brecht opposes the dramatic form of theater vs. to the epic form of the theater, originally written as notes for the *Opera dos três vinténs (1928)* and *Ascensão e Queda da Cidade de Mahogany (1928-1929)*. Cf. Rosenfeld, 1965, p. 149-150.

⁵²Rosenfeld, 1965, p.148.

⁵³In the original: "[...] apresentar um "palco científico" capaz de esclarecer o público sobre a sociedade e a necessidade de transformá-la; capaz ao mesmo tempo de ativar o público, de nele suscitar a ação transformadora."

⁵⁴Brecht *apud* Rosenfeld, 1965, p. 155.

iation). The viewer begins to find something odd in many things that by habit are set as familiar things, therefore natural and immutable, convinced of the need for transformative intervention".⁵⁵

The synthesis is an action that Império calls the public through many processes that elaborate The Marchadeira' framework and that causes strangeness since they always present a displacement in relation to its original function. This calls the attention of those who see its meanings: the appropriation of Pop, as a language of capitalism, transformed by the underdevelopment technique⁵⁶; the caricature use in which the public shares the laugh with the artist and not the identification with the character; and, also, the incorporation of *extra-painting* elements that are strange to that context and, therefore, draw attention to their production context.

We can relate the strangeness caused by Flávio Império's caricature to what Rosenfeld says about the comic in Brecht:

"The combination of the comic and the didactic element results in satire. Among the satirical resources used is also the grotesque [...]. It is not necessary to say about the very essence of the grotesque which is to transform 'strange' by incoherent association, by the combination of unequal, by the merger of what does not get married [...] Brecht, however, uses grotesque resources and makes the world unfamiliar in order to explain it and guide us".^{57,58}

The *incoherent* association also appears in the incorporation of small objects onto the picture. These extra-painting⁵⁹ elements are used with the intention of provoking *strangeness* and, with this, make the audience ask themselves what are they? What do they replace in the form of attributes? Also, it makes them ask about the meanings of its use; and how these meanings reaffirm the caricature of *Marchadei-*

⁵⁵In the original: "Para os filhos de uma época científica, eminentemente produtiva como a nossa, não pode existir divertimento mais produtivo que tomar uma atitude crítica em face das crônicas que narram as vicissitudes do convívio social. Esse alegre efeito didático é suscitado por toda estrutura épica da peça e principalmente pelo 'efeito de distanciamento' (Verfrem-dungseffekt = efeito de estranheza, alienação), mercê do qual o espectador começando a estranhar tantas coisas que pelo hábito se lhe afiguram familiares e por isso naturais e imutáveis, se convence da necessidade da intervenção transformadora"

⁵⁶The underdevelopment seen as a technique is in Ferro, op. cit., p.158.

⁵⁷Rosenfeld, op.cit., p.158.

⁵⁸A combinação entre o elemento cômico e o didático resulta em sátira. Entre os recursos satíricos usados encontra-se também o grotesco [...]. Não é preciso dizer que a própria essência do grotesco é tornar 'tornar estranho' pela associação incoerente, pela conjugação do dispar, pela fusão do que não se casa [...] Brecht, porém, usa recursos grotescos e torna o mundo desfamiliar a fim de explicar e orientar."

⁵⁹The extra-painting idea here is the same as in Boal when the author speaks of Erwin Piscator's Epic Theater and relates to Brecht. In that case, it is about the audiovisual resources incorporation, such as the cinema and slide, used to situate to the public the historical reality that it wants to deal with in the play. Cf. Boal, op.cit., p.140.

ra. In the play the Best Judge, the King (1963)⁶⁰, by Arena Theatre, Flávio Império writes the text *A Good Experience*⁶¹, in which he talks about the statutes/role that each element of his set design takes place on the scene:

"The Realistic Theater [...] has its roots in the simulation of the accessible through knowledge, inscribing itself in the natural languages orbit. [...] It is always from real objects that it leaves, and through them that it communicates. These more private or more generalized objects take closer or more distant nature forms. In the whole scenario, the concept is not inverted [...]"

In theatrical realism, the use of one reality aspect as fundamental is restrictive. Hence, psychologism or the mere objects relative situations are restrictive as a scenic unit.

The colorful shape, the assigned object, started to be thought of as a new entity. It was necessary to specify its sphere.

Returning to the old approximation-detachment unit, applied to theatrical realism, we understand the 'neutral' as the minimum wear, the last obstacle to the object, the object-audience identity. The theatrical maximum, therefore, is the abstract contradiction structure of the usual attributions.

The same chair, inside a room and under a bridge lends both all different meanings. A usual chair in a usual room can be considered 'neutral'. If it is under some bridge it may be considered 'maximum contrast'. These attributes come from the sense of usual for some society. The scenic unit depends on the interplay between audience and scenic object, as a cultural factor.

From the relativity of these possibilities, the degrees of scenic 'theatrical' image arise. The process is never a summing one, but of synthesis."^{62 63}

⁶⁰In the original: *Melhor Juiz, o Rei* (1963)

⁶¹In the original: *Uma boa experiência*.

⁶²Império, Flávio. *Uma Boa Experiência*. Programa da peça *O Melhor Juiz, O Rei*. Teatro de Arena de São Paulo, 1963. Today part of the IEB-USP collection.

⁶³In the original: "The Realistic Theater [...] has its roots in the simulation of the accessible through knowledge, inscribing itself in the natural languages orbit. [...] It is always from real objects that it leaves, and through them that it communicates. These more private or more generalized objects take closer or more distant nature forms. In the whole scenario, the concept is not inverted [...]"

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The Império's scenography synthesis is made in the public sense; the relativization between the *neutral* and the *maximum* theatrical of each element. Now, in *Marchadeira* we also see the same process; the mentioned double aspect of the objects that are attached to the painting. When *neutral*, they are garbage, scrap, useless objects - witnesses of obsolescence itself, capitalism residues. Everyday things that, if they weren't on the board, we wouldn't even notice. In a neutral position, they present the Brazilian form of *Pop*, impregnated with the local context.

They assume the *theatrical maximum* when they have seen as attributes of the *Marchadeira*. It is not possible to ignore what they are. Hence the *strangeness* caused by the contradiction between what they are and the appearance they assume in the painting. *Neutral* and *maximum* can be understood as forces that tension *The Marchadeira* among things and its attributions; the everyday life and its narrative; underdevelopment and conservatism; the real and its meanings.

In the years that followed the re-democratization in Brazil, *Marchadeira das famílias bem pensantes* as well as other works by Flávio Império at the time, integrated some retrospective exhibitions, where they were exhibited together with works by other artists of the 1960s. It became common to relate these artists' works in large groups that moved around the *figuration return, new realism, Brazilian pop art*⁶⁴, among others ideas, and linked them to cultural resistance to the military and authoritarian regime.

After years of democratic normality, many of the meanings that these works shared with the public are lost. The daily life is no longer the same. Each work references related to an immediate reality loses space to broader classifications, which the objective is to understand what happened. These classifications impose certain rigidity to *the Marchadeira's mobile system* - as they already offer the public a more structured conclusion - in which the *synthesis* of the many operations results in a representation of the artist's performance to the period of exception.

But this view is also part of the past. Since 2013, more intensely during the President Dilma Rousseff impeachment (2016), and after 2018 with Jair Bolsonaro, reactionary right wing has regained power in Brazil, imposing absurd agendas on us.

The well thinking families' march is once again an image that visits our daily lives, and terrifies us. With this urgent impulse today, we are able to share the complexity of their meanings more easily and the framework system regains its mobility, inviting us to operate the synthesis and promote action.

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⁶⁴About these ideas, see Peccinini, 1999.

Translating Ferro for the New Field of Production Studies: A UK / Brazil collaboration

Traduzindo Ferro para a Nova Área de Estudos da Produção: Uma colaboração entre Reino Unido e Brasil

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Abstract

This article traces the emergence and trajectory of a new UK / Brazil 3.5 year collaborative project Translating Ferro / Transforming Knowledges of Architecture, Design and Labour for the New Field of Production Studies (TF/TK) launching 01 October 2020. It outlines the growing interest in Sérgio Ferro's work on architecture and labour in the English-speaking context, and sets out how it will provide the basis for a new and much-needed cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural field of Production Studies. The key objective of this new field is to challenge architecture's blindness to production, and understand and interrogate design and construction across cultural contexts.

Resumo

Este artigo rastreia o surgimento e trajetória de uma colaboração de três anos e meio entre o Reino Unido e Brasil, um projeto chamado "Traduzindo Ferro / Transformando Conhecimentos de Arquitetura, Design e Trabalho para Estudos da Nova Área de Produção (TF/TK)" inaugurada em primeiro de Outubro de 2020. O projeto destaca o crescente interesse no trabalho de Sérgio Ferro em arquitetura e mão-de-obra em países cujo idioma é o Inglês, e estabelece como isso a base para uma nova e muito necessária interdisciplinaridade e interculturalidade no campo dos Estudos da Produção. O principal objetivo dessa nova área é desafiar a cegueira da arquitetura direcionada à produção, e entender e interrogar o design e a construção através de contextos culturais.

Translating Ferro for the New Field of Production Studies: A UK / Brazil collaboration

In November 2014 UK-based architectural historians Tilo Amhoff, Nick Beech and myself organised an international conference *Industries of Architecture* (IOA) at Newcastle University with the intention to put production at the centre of the debate in architectural humanities. ‘All too often,’ we wrote in our Call for Papers, ‘architectural theorists, historians and designers side-line the industrial, technical and socio-economic contexts in which building is constituted or maintain that these are not the proper concerns of architecture, even when acknowledging the limits and possibilities set for architecture’s production in advanced capitalism.’¹ Two years earlier Nick and I, through a chance encounter with a group of Brazilian researchers at the close of the 4th International Congress of Construction History in Paris,² had been introduced to what we would later understand to be the single most sustained enquiry into design from the perspective of labour and the construction site available in any language, that of Sérgio Ferro. The tendency of architectural discourse to overlook production (in favour of new technologies, use, aesthetics, symbolism etc.), which IOA problematized, is demonstrated by Ferro to be more than short-sightedness. It is a structural necessity to the maintenance of the profession’s capacity to act ‘over’ the building site in the service of capital.

Despite the unique status of Ferro’s body of work and its far-reaching potential to inform understandings of relations of production and architecture, and to address the current worldwide crisis in the building industry, there were at the time, no translations of Ferro’s texts into English, and only a handful of accounts available of his contributions as a theorist and historian, and as an architect with *Arquitetura Nova*.³ We were keen that his arguments would inform the direction of debates at

IOA and, with the help of Felipe Contier, Ferro accepted our invitation to give the introductory keynote, which he wrote in Portuguese as an introduction to *Dessin/Chantier*.⁴ Although Ferro was unable to attend, we nevertheless launched the event with his talk – reversing the planned format in which the English translation by Ricardo Agarez would have been projected alongside the spoken Portuguese.⁵ Ferro’s hard-hitting argument, that design is one of capital’s means to enact its final goal ‘to extract a substantial amount of surplus value’ and that architects ‘whatever their intentions and when acting within the profession’s usual terms, are courtiers of capital’ was both unfamiliar to most of the participants, difficult and unavoidable, and it set the scene for the discussions that followed. Moreover his inclusion at IOA had also drawn a substantial number of Brazil-based researchers who were already studying or informed by Ferro’s work. With Silke Kapp (UFMG) and João Marcos de Almeida Lopes (USP), both scholars of Ferro’s work who base their work with grassroots groups (MOM and Usina CTAH) on Ferro’s analysis and the possibility it opens for alternative modes of building, our conversations soon turned to the need for the translation of his key texts into English. Silke and I visited Ferro at his home in Grignan, France in November 2014 to propose such a project and discuss the selection of texts, and so began our collaboration.

At the time of writing this in July 2020, we have just heard that our joint bid to FAPESP and the UK-based Architecture and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for a 3.5 year project *Translating Ferro / Transforming Knowledges of Architecture, Design and Labour for the New Field of Production Studies* (TF/TK) has been successful. The project will launch later this year. At a time when condi-

Salama and Andrea Hardy (eds.) *Architecture Beyond Criticism: Expert judgement and performance evaluation* (London: Routledge, 2015) and the entry on Ferro on the Spatial Agency website <https://www.spatialagency.net/database/sergio.ferro> (accessed 07.08.2020). On *Arquitetura Nova* see, Pedro Arantes, ‘Reinventing the Building Site’, in *Brazil’s Modern Architecture*, eds. Elisabetta Andreoli and Adrian Forty (London: Phaidon, 2004), 170–210, and also Richard J. Williams, *Brazil: Modern architectures in history* (London: Reaktion, 2009).

⁴It was the later revised version of Ferro’s *O canteiro e o desenho* (São Paulo: Projeto Editori Associatos, 1776, 1982) published in French as *Dessin/Chantier* (Paris: Éditions de la Villette, 2005) that I had been able to read. The title captured well for our audience Ferro’s idea that within the discipline, construction is conceived as if below architecture and keeps the double meaning of drawing and design that is otherwise lost in the direct translation as ‘design’. We have continued to use the French formulation.

⁵Ferro’s paper was published as ‘*Dessin/Chantier*. An introduction’ (trans. Ricardo Agarez and Silke Kapp), with ‘An Introduction to Sérgio Ferro’ by Felipe Contier in the *Critiques* series, Katie Lloyd Thomas, Tilo Amhoff and Nick Beech (eds.), *Industries of Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2015).

¹For details of the Call for Papers and the event see www.industriesofarchitecture.org (accessed 04.08.2020).

²The 4th International Congress of Construction History took place in Paris, 3-7 July 2012. For conference proceedings see Robert Carvais, André Guillerme, Valérie Neègre and Joël Sakarovich (eds.) *Nuts & Bolts of Construction History: Vols. 1-3* (Paris: Picard, 2013). The group of researchers included Felipe Contier, Silke Kapp, Roberto Eustaáquio dos Santos, Carol Heldt, Renato Anelli, Ana Paula Koury.

³For good (but brief) discussions in English of Ferro’s theoretical contributions see MOM (Morar de Outras Maneiras): Silke Kapp, Ana Paula Baltazar, Denise Morado, ‘Architecture as Critical Exercise: Little Pointers Towards Alternative Practices’ in *Field Journal* Vol.2 (1) 2016; José T. Lira, ‘Architectural Criticism and radicalism in Brazil’ in Wolfgang F. E. Preiser, Aaron T. Davis, Ashraf M.

tions for construction workers are worsening; design, construction and materials manufacture are ever more globally distributed, and responsibility is dispersed with serious consequences for builders, inhabitants and the environment, TF/TK proposes that Ferro's work can be mobilised to consolidate a new and much-needed cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural field of Production Studies (PS). The key objective of this new field is to challenge architecture's blindness to production, and understand and interrogate design and construction across cultural contexts. Moreover, following Ferro, PS aims to resist the privileging of architects over builders and will generate new knowledge through co-production with formal and informal building producers, as well as design practitioners and academics, and provide conceptual and political support for alternative models and agencies.

The project will involve a core team led in the UK by myself, and in São Paulo by João Marcos de Almeida Lopes together with 4 Co-Investigators (Silke Kapp, Pedro Arantes, José Lira, Matt Davies) with a team of 16 expert Affiliated Researchers drawn from a range of disciplines within and beyond academia, who will each contribute a Case Study in PS. TF/TK is organised around three key activities – that of i) collating a database of existing research, scholars and producers already concerned with production and labour in architecture and design, including the translation and publication of key works by Ferro;⁶ ii) structuring the field of Production Studies using Ferro's work as a basis and developing PS principles and methodologies with participants and iii) applying and testing PS methods through 24 case studies as exemplars to both address the gap in academic knowledge of production (histories of informal and formal production, related disciplinary approaches such as anthropology, political science) and provide resources for further action and change (documenting the work of social movements and self-builders, recording and trialing alternative forms of design pedagogy that engage with production). A series of public events in the UK and Brazil will begin with local PS website launches in 2021 and culminate in a Production Studies conference at Newcastle University in 2024.

⁶To include the translation into English of Sérgio Ferro, *Dessin/Chantier* (Paris: Éditions de la Villette, 2005), the publication in English and Portuguese of Ferro's *Construction of Classical Design*, and an anthology of published and unpublished shorter texts covering the range of Ferro's writings, as well as commentaries by project participants.

Our confidence that there is a keen appetite for Ferro's work in the English speaking context and a recognition of its unique value an expanding community of researchers for whom labour and production are central concerns has been confirmed by more recent events. In 2018 *Harvard Design Magazine* approached us to publish another of Ferro's text in their issue No.46 *No Sweat*, and funded the translation of Ferro's 'Concrete as Weapon' by Kapp and Alice Fiuza. The text (which appears at the centre of the book as an 'insert' that can be pulled out, rather like the mobile contractual documents that architects prepare for use on site which Ferro writes about in *Dessin / Chantier*) has already been influential. In March 2019, supported by a Bid Preparation fund from the faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS) at Newcastle University, we launched 'Concrete as Weapon' with a week of events in London, bringing together at least 70 people, some already known to us for their interest in Ferro's work alongside other new participants. We hosted two public reading groups of 'Concrete as Weapon' and launched the publication at Central St Martins with an introduction to Ferro's work by Silke Kapp and a screening and Q&A of *In Between*, a documentary about Usina CTAH (2016, 40 mins). By the end we had assembled the team and framework for the TF/TK project. And on 11 October 2019 an exhibition *Dreams Seen Up Close* curated by Davide Sacconi of the work of Arquitetura Nova and Usina CTAH opened at the second Biennale d'Architecture d'Orléans.⁷ Ferro was the guest of honour at the Biennale and the exhibition featured many elements of his personal archive.

As interest in Ferro's work grows beyond the Brazilian context in which it was first developed, it becomes clear that his arguments have an international audience in addition to the global reach of its concerns. But local building practices are determined by multiple factors, from environmental conditions, political systems, and geopolitical roles, to technological development, social and economic inequality, building traditions and labour organisation. Thus the field of PS demands awareness of singularities and commonalities across often radically diverse local production contexts. Indeed Ferro's own scholarship and ideas are themselves informed by translations of concepts across cultures of building. We look forward most of all

⁷See Biennale website, <https://www.frac-centre.fr/en/biennales/years-solitude/landscapes/dreams-seen-close/dreams-seen-close-1162.html> accessed 07.08.2020).

to the opportunities for exchange TF/TK provides, to directly tackling the translation of methods and concepts in PS, and opening out to allow for learning across disciplines and contexts. Through working with producers of the built environment in order to co-produce and transform knowledge of relationships between design and construction labour, TF/TK seeks not only to understand and critically evaluate these mechanisms, but also to identify existing and possible forms of production, in which building *processes* – in themselves and not just for their *products* – can become catalysts for social change, in which the social and material production of space engenders autonomy, equality, justice, creativity and joy.

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Thought under construction: Excursus on the possible methodological machinations of Sérgio Ferro to guide Production Studies in Architecture, Design and Labour

Pensamento em construção: Excurso sobre as possíveis maquinações metodológicas de Sérgio Ferro para orientar Estudos de Produção em Arquitetura, Projeto e Trabalho

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Abstract

The written work of Brazilian professor, architect, and painter Sérgio Ferro has been increasingly visited, studied, and commented on, not only in Brazil and France – the country in which he went into exile, when he left Brazil in the early 1970s, due to the civil-military dictatorship that befell the country in that period – as well as in other parts of the world. The attention devoted to Ferro's theoretical work seems to derive from the way he approaches his objects and gives them a critical and theoretical treatment, particularly instructed by Political Economy, Hegelian Logic, and Marxian dialectical materialism. Taking as a starting point the material bases of his production, both in architecture and in the plastic arts, his fields of historical and research and theoretical reflection advance through fields previously hitherto unexplored, putting well-established and widely consolidated concepts on trial. This work tests some conjectures about the author's methodological strategies, seeking to establish references for the institution of a new field of studies in Architecture, Design, and Work, which we are calling Production Studies.

Resumo

A obra escrita do professor, arquiteto e pintor brasileiro Sérgio Ferro tem sido cada vez mais visitada, estudada e comentada, não só no Brasil e na França – país em que se exilou, ao deixar o Brasil no início dos anos 1970, em virtude da ditadura civil-militar que se abateu sobre o país naquele período – como também em outras partes do mundo. A atenção dedicada à obra teórica de Ferro parece decorrer da forma como ele aborda seus objetos e lhes dá um tratamento crítico e teórico, particularmente instruída pela Economia Política, pela Lógica hegeliana e pelo materialismo dialético marxiano. Tomando como ponto de partida as bases materiais de sua produção, tanto da arquitetura como das artes plásticas, seus campos de investigação e reflexão histórica e teórica avançam por campos até então insondados, recolocando em julgamento concepções já consagradas e largamente consolidadas. Este trabalho ensaia algumas conjecturas sobre as estratégias metodológicas do autor, buscando estabelecer referências para a instituição de um novo campo de estudos em Arquitetura, Projeto e Trabalho, que estamos denominando *Production Studies*.

Thought under construction: Excursus on the possible methodological machinations of Sérgio Ferro to guide Production Studies in Architecture, Design and Labour

In November 2014, at an academic event at the University of Newcastle (UK) – the Industries of Architecture Conference – IoA – an audience of about 50 people applauded the reading of “Dessin/Chantier – an Introduction”¹ – a very condensed version of the main ideas of “*O Canteiro e o Desenho*”, a text of the architect, professor, and painter Sérgio Ferro, published in Brazil between 1974 and 1976². Sérgio was invited to the opening conference, but due to a health problem, he was unable to attend the meeting. Thus, Katie Lloyd Thomas, one of the organizers of the event, read the text while the images of the original in Portuguese were projected, closed by a well-known photo of the author. I record here, not only as a testimony, but as the impression that there was an unprecedented attention to the theoretical reflections, on British soil, of a Brazilian architectural theorist who was not always properly recognized or understood in his native land.

At the beginning of October 2020, as a result of that 2014 event and countless transnational academic articulations, we started an undertaking that has been planned for at least six years: it is about promoting the translation and dissemination of Sérgio Ferro's theoretical work in English. An author of a very singular, provocative and very strict critical approach to architecture, reasonably known in our country (but little understood, as we have already said), Sérgio Ferro's work is, for the most part, only published in Portuguese. Something in Portuguese and French and a small part exclusively in French. However, apart from some recent initiatives, already resulting from the effort to set up the project “*Translating Ferro / Transforming Knowledges of Architecture, Design and Labour for the New Field of Production Studies [TF/TK]*” (as presented, in this publication, by my colleague Katie Lloyd Thomas – the same one who read “*Dessin/Chantier – an Introduction*” at the ope-

ning of the IoA, in 2014), there are practically nonexistent versions of his texts in English.

The proposal, however, is not restricted to the translation and publication of Ferro's texts and the promotion of some reading and discussion meetings with academic colleagues who speak English. The idea is also to identify, select and articulate studies, texts, or reports of practices that, in a certain way, dialogue with the assumptions that guided (and guide) the formulations of Sérgio Ferro (and Grupo Arquitetura Nova, of which he was one of the members), as he himself insists on sharing³). In addition, TF/TK also proposes the production of studies and reports of specific practices, initially distributed among Associated Researchers, guided by approaches aligned with Sérgio's work. This is what we are calling Production Studies + Production Practices. The idea is to outline a new field of studies (and to recognize practices) that feed on Ferro's methodological strategies.

But, what would Production Studies be? What is peculiar about the way Sérgio Ferro takes his objects and how he builds his thoughts about them? What is the methodological differential that characterizes this true 'reflection construction site' in Architecture proposed by Sérgio before the concepts and his disconcerting movements?

What I am essaying here is a still very imprecise approach to an answer to these questions, ready for debate and contradiction, the result of a dialogue with the author, more or less interested in establishing some possible alternatives for this inquiry. More than that, these conjectures intend to help in the preparation of some guidelines to adjust the focus in this formulation still very diffuse – the Production Studies.

I

Since his teaching days at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAUUSP) and beginning his professional activity (something still reconcilable in those times), Sérgio Ferro has systematically produced a theoreti-

¹Published in LLOYD THOMAS, K.; AMHOF, T.; BEECH, N. Industries of Architecture. London: Routledge, 2015.

²The complete edition, published by Projeto Editores Associados, is from 1979. Before it, the text had already been published in two parts, in the philosophy magazine *Almanaque: Cadernos de Literatura e Ensaio* (published by Editora Brasiliense and which had professor Bento Prado Jr as a member of its Editorial Board), under the title “*A forma da arquitetura e o desenho da mercadoria*”, in 1976. See presentation note on “*O Canteiro e o desenho*” in *Arquitetura e Trabalho Livre* (FERRO, 2006 p.105).

³Regarding the group, its members – in addition to Sérgio Ferro, also Rodrigo Lefèvre and Flávio Império – and about the folds and unfolding of their performance, see, among other works, that of Ana Paula Koury, “*Grupo Arquitetura Nova: Flávio Império, Rodrigo Lefèvre, Sérgio Ferro*”, published in 2003; and that of Pedro Fiori Arantes, “*Arquitetura Nova: Sérgio Ferro, Flávio Império e Rodrigo Lefèvre, de Artigas aos mutirões*”, from 2002.

cal, reflective (almost obsessive - work himself) dominated by a “mantra”), much of it related to the relationship between the construction site and the drawing, the logics of production of the “architectural object” as a *good*, the history of architecture and art as cultural manifestations related to the dynamics of production of the goods, the potential of *free work*, etc. He assumes, for his approach to the history of architecture, that it is not only possible but necessary to understand it from within the construction and make its history go through the lens of political ⁴economy so that we can understand how it promotes and operates the *overdetermination* mechanisms established by the way of production and reproduction of life. This is the only way, according to Ferro, to understand how architecture, as a productive instance immersed in the world of material reproduction (and not in an ethereal 'reality' of purely theoretical formulation and bearing an alleged 'own rationality'), plays a fundamental role in the mechanics of reproduction of value and accumulation, through its radical capacity to exploit labor and extract huge masses of surplus value, both absolute and relative.

The argument is well known: because the construction is a special manufacture, which entails an expressive and extensive application of intensive labor, it allows the capture of high rates of surplus value, transferred in a preliminary way to other economic segments, especially those without the possibility of *labor* intensive agency – this is the only activity capable of producing value⁵.

In addition, the construction site is a special production structure, different from the factory due to a condition inherent to its particularities: as already pointed out by Benjamin Coriat, in civil construction the production line is the one that moves to create the product that is born immovable – unlike the factory, where the product is

on the production line⁶. This stems from a series of implications – which we do not need to go into here: the overdetermination of land ownership in the production process in civil construction, the limits of strict industrialization in this economic sector⁷, the susceptibility to the dynamics and oscillations of the labor market for agency and application of labor, etc. But when we look at the construction site as the main productive moment of any and all architecture, it seems clear to us how externally determined its development is in the course of history and how much it disappears as a productive reality when the finished work is imposed – and it seems this is precisely Ferro's resource for understanding the movements of design and the construction site: history as a *process in process*. This is my **first conjecture** as to its possible methodological machinations.

Factual history undoubtedly offers us the possibility of referring to events in time and space, allowing for more in-depth analyzes, beyond the ground of their apparent manifestations. However, what articulates such events? Would it be possible to reference some inherent and internal rationality to the facts if the material of its manifestations is found in the underworld of the kingdom of appearances – what makes this rationality irritatingly transparent?

II

First of all, Sérgio's research is not limited to the *History of Architecture*, in its strict sense. In addition to laying the foundations for speculative thinking in Hegelian dialectics, as well as in historical materialism and in the critique of Political Economy constructed by Marx, Sérgio also summons the history of art, technique, and construction to combine the material dimensions of the production of the architectural object to its inquiry as a product of Culture. Not only that, the author also articulates strategic approaches to formal logic in Philosophy (such as the *abduction*

⁴“We believe that it is from the analysis of construction, in its entirety, within the political economy and, then, from the architecture within construction, that we will be able to correctly understand this activity of ours: drawing, designing” (FERRO, 2010 p.13).

⁵To understand this process – which for me has always been very nebulous until – I suggest reading Lucia Zanin Shimbo's doctoral thesis, “*Habitação social, habitação de mercado: a confluência entre Estado, empresas construtoras e capital financeiro*”, of 2010. In it, the author reveals to us how the financialization processes and the game in the capital market are supported in the control and production mechanisms at the housing construction site in that period, transferring such masses of surplus value to the spheres of speculation and capital reproduction in the form of fabulous negotiations in the capital market and real estate portfolios – all of this thanks to a public housing provision program, “*Minha Casa, Minha Vida*” (SHIMBO, 2010).

⁶Bernard Kündig can say that, due to the fact that we are forced to use land as a support for use value, it is the work process itself, and in its entirety, that “circulates” and must adapt to a different support, unlike other industries where the product circulates between the work stations of a stable and previously planned work” (CORIAT, 1983 p.3).

⁷That is, industrialized manufacturing of its products, considering mechanization and/or intensive automation of operations and processes. *Dymaxion House* (1946) by Richard Buckminster Fuller, for example, would require another structure of land ownership in order to become viable: a proposal for a highly industrialized, light, and transportable construction, but which would require a distribution framework of the location quite different from the current one (see <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/dymaxionhouse/a-house-is-a-machine-for-living-in/>).

exercise, from Peirce's semiotics, for example, to account for the analysis of the Medici Chapel in Florence – see FERRO, 2016⁸), from Structural Anthropology (such as the reference to Lévi Strauss's “*type zero form*”, to enunciate “the priority reason of drawing” at the time of production – see FERRO, 2006 p.109), of Sociology and Political Science (to analyze the housing production in Brazil – *ibid*, p. 61-101) etc. But it is in the material of History, properly speaking, where he searches carefully the references for his reflections. He himself, once commenting on the preparation of “*Concrete as Weapon*” (FERRO, 2018), said he had faced the reading of “a 600-page brick on the history of anarchism in France” to use a single paragraph of it.

At first glance, it seems certain that Sérgio Ferro achieved an original way of reconciling the narratives of Architecture historiography with the most critical approaches to Political Economy. As Harvey says on Marx facing the classic tradition of Political Economy, when looking for his “gaps and contradictions” he was able to have “what we now call deconstruction” of his arguments, providing him with the elements for his radical criticism (HARVEY, 2013 p.15). I think that Sérgio sets forth on a similar operation, in a second order: he looks for “gaps and contradictions” in the classic narratives produced by Architecture historiography and, from the perspective of Political Economy, he turns this historiography inside out, rewriting it from the bottom up, from the point of “view of the construction site”.

In classes held at FAUUSP, in April 2004 and compiled in the volume “*A história da arquitetura vista do canteiro*” (published in 2010), Sérgio manages to reestablish the separation between design and construction and the emergence of a kind of

ancestral form of the profession already in the process of resurgence of cities, between the 9th and 11th centuries in central Europe – and not in the Italian Renaissance, as traditional historiography does, establishing the figure of Brunelleschi as the patron of the trade, largely because of Vasari's admiration.

Medieval corporations, which were used in the construction of cathedrals, walls, and castles, acted to contribute to carry large amounts of value to the rising urban centers. As Ferro says, quoting Le Goff, these structures were not objectively built on the grounds of a purely economic function, but they certainly worked as an “engine of primitive capital accumulation”. The wealth brought to the cities circulated by paying for materials and workers, who “ate, dressed, consumed local production, thus forming an urban market”. Such a process, promoting cities economically, ended up undermining the motivations that led kings, nobles, and bishops to invest in those structures: intra-urban trade, foreign trade, and urban business become more attractive as an economic activity, relegating cathedrals to second plane, dooming them to their typical unfinished nature. Thus, labor relations begin to change, especially around the end of the century. XII. Henri Pirenne, in his “*História Social e Econômica da Idade Média*” is valuable in describing these changes: with the predominance of business, corporations are subject to commercial and investment structures that are exogenous to them, providing a new format for manufacturing organization through commercial corporations (PIRENNE, [1933] 1968, particularly p.49, 184 and ss).

Sérgio Ferro mentions the case of Strasbourg and the construction of its cathedral as an example: the city “became a kind of Republic and the negotiations ended up becoming more complex. A council directed the works [of the cathedral] and, in order to reach a consensus, to draw beforehand, to make models, to predict started to be a requirement. Thus, the figure of the intermediary appears, which designs the design-contract” (FERRO, 2010 p.16). Sérgio calls him “protoarchitect” and mentions the figure of *Master Erwin of Steinbach*, responsible for transmitting the orders of the contractors to the masters of the corporations, as a kind of ancestor to the profession – later transformed by Goethe and the neo-Gothic movement as the “great hero of Gothic architecture.” From then on, this separation between the one who designs it and those who build it will only go deeper. He does not place Brunelleschi (and his cunning in controlling construction site work at the San-

⁸In this work, translated from the French in 2015 and published in 2016, Sérgio promotes a reconstruction of the entire context around the design and construction of the Medici Chapel, in the Basilica of San Lorenzo, in Florence, undertaken by Michelangelo and his ‘workers’. From this effort to reconstruct a very peculiar time and space – using observation, general history and art, elements of sculpture, material science, literature, etc. – Sérgio allows himself to recompose the sorting of the order and the answer given by Michelangelo: the constrained work of the architect, registered in the adornments and negations of the orders of the false support of decorative elements, in permanent tension with the free work of the sculptor, who allows himself laugh there at his contractors, mock their figures and allow himself to leave pieces of the work without finishing. The recomposition of this context that allows a type of logical inference, even if as an estimate – which I have indicated here as *abduction* – it is an operation attributed to Peirce, which José Ferrater Mora calls “reasonable conjecture”: “the mental processes, both of discovery and of justification or explanation are inferential. This means that there may be reasons for inferences (which are themselves ‘reasons’), even when propositions are formulated or conclusions are reached apparently by mere ‘conjecture’ or ‘intuition’” (MORA, 2004 p. 11-12).

ta Maria del Fiori) as the inaugural matrix of the profession and this separation, but he does place him as an important reference in this process:

“Thus, since the time of our patron saint (almost all architectural stories mention Brunelleschi as the first prototype of our profession), drawing has become a weapon in the class struggle. He started quietly leaving the construction site, from which he was for a moment. Soon, enthusiastic about the vision of the whole that he made possible and with the charms of his graphic freedom, he moved away from the technical requirements of the work and the materials it, however, commands” (FERRO, 2010, p.19).

It is in this way that, brushing “history against the grain” (BENJAMIN apud CONTIER, 2010 p.104), Sérgio manages to demonstrate, as in this example, that the “architect and separate design were constituted at the same time, and one is the product of the other: they are interdependent” (FERRO, 2010 p.14). And it is this interdependence that characterizes and exposes the contradiction between design and construction site – and not a paralyzing *opposition*, which would interrupt History as a *process* and *Reason in motion* (this is Hegel, we will return to this question later).

In a way, the methodological approach promoted by Sérgio Ferro sponsors this unveiling of contradictions. It does not happen mechanically, but it has always been problematized and problematizing itself. This means that, at first, it does not follow a pre-defined scheme, but self-builds in the process of its constitution. In a way, it is as if, poking at it, history itself reveals what underlies it as a structure. Something perhaps like what Marx proposes in the afterword to the second edition of “*Das Kapital*”, when establishing the difference between research method and exposure mode:

“Without a doubt, one must distinguish the exposure mode according to its form, from the investigation mode. The investigation has to take hold of the material [Stoff] in its details, analyze its different forms of development and trace its internal nexus. Only after this work has been completed can the real movement be properly exposed. If this is done successfully, and if the life of the matter is now reflected ideally, the observer may have the impression of being faced with an a priori construction [that is, a timeless form of thought]” (MARX, 2013 [afterword of the second edition of “*Das Kapital*”, from 1873] p.90 - the addendum is mine).

So, I come to my **second conjecture**, derived from the first one: to take History as a process, in motion, we need to take “the material in its details” and “trace its in-

ternal nexus”, not in search of what we see, what it seems to be, but in search of its most intimate *contradictions*.

III

We know, through testimonies by Sérgio Ferro himself, how much Hegelian *Logic* and the conception of *dialectic* that is peculiar to him support his investigative endeavors.

Hegel, according to Marcuse⁹, established as the first task of his *Logic* to define *speculative thinking* as the “first exposure” of his dialectical method (MARCUSE, 2004 [1941] p.52): before “the authority of facts”, Reason has to have mistrust as the norm. Opposed to common sense, the world of perceptions, of finite entities, “ruled by the principle of identity and opposition”, thought needs to be attentive. Ultimately, this opposition is one that arranges, in opposite fields, *Reason* (*Vernunft*) and *Understanding* (*Verstand*): an operation that underlies all of Hegel's philosophical architecture and that puts into judgment the innate trajectory initiated by Descartes some hundreds of years earlier, as well as the English empiricism of Locke and Hume's class and Kant's “critical idealism”, as he calls it in his *Prolegomena* (KANT, [1783] 1988 p.64).

“Speculative thinking compares the apparent or given shape of things to their potentialities, thus distinguishing, in things, the essence of the accidental state of existence. Such a result is not achieved through a process of mystical intuition, but through a method of conceptual knowledge that examines the process by which each form came to be what it is. Speculative thinking does not conceive of 'the material and intellectual world' as a totality of fixed and stable relations, but 'as a becoming, and its being as a product and a production'.” (MARCUSE, 2004 [1941] p.51)

Speculative thinking seeks to remove the veil from the “inside of things” and not be carried away by the phenomenal appearance, by the appearance of what it appears to be. The example that Sérgio offers us of this operation deals precisely with

⁹I use the work “*Razão e Revolução – Hegel e o advento da teoria social*” (2004 [1941]), by Herbert Marcuse, as an explanatory source of the Hegelian philosophical system and the establishment of possible connections with Sérgio's work (the memory and indication was by Silke Kapp, whom I thank). I therefore approach Hegel second-hand, therefore. However, from an author fully endorsed for the task, I believe. A more in-depth study of Sérgio Ferro's Hegelian references must be undertaken in a broader and more intensely debated context.

that opposition (thus determined by an approach, let's say, less strict) between the drawing and the construction site.

In “*The construction site and the drawing*”, when dealing with drawing in his “consulate of representation”, Sérgio is quite telegraphic, his text is almost encrypted (FERRO, 2006 p.158). Articulating arguments about the role of drawing in the context of architecture production, it provokes and disturbs architects – particularly the drawing posse as master of themselves and of architecture's designs: “It is because it is a drawing for the production (of added value) that it shrinks on the Mongiana's grid until it becomes its own synonymous” ... But, what does it mean to be “equal to itself”? Why establish the drawing as identical to itself? Undoubtedly, it refers to “a universal concrete, a full and 'superior' truth, which 'absorbed' previous identities” (MORA, 2005 p.1431)

Being “equal to itself” is the Being submitted to the principle of *identity*. But for Hegel, the “purely formal identity of understanding” differs from the “rich and concrete identity of reason.” As Ferrater Mora explains, “strictly speaking, the very form of the identity principle indicates, according to Hegel, that there is more to it than a simple and abstract identity; there is the pure movement of reflection in which the 'other' appears as 'appearance’” (ibid). The “other” of the drawing: the construction site.

“We have already said that, in drawing, it is as the appearance of a relationship that the separations of doing and thinking, of duty and power, of strength and means of work are manifested. And that the ties that the drawing proposes are ties of the separated kept separated (Appearance: 'is the name given to the *being* that immediately is in itself a *non-being*’) (FERRO, 2006 p.159, emphasis added in the original. The definition of 'appearance' is by Hegel, in the “*Phenomenology of the Spirit*”).

For Ferro, the drawing is “materialization of separation, reification of rupture” (ibid, p.159). A determined denial, therefore.

But what I feel is that the misunderstanding (or “understanding,” in Hegel's sense) of how this denial takes place ends up prevailing, contributing to a lot of misunderstanding about Sérgio's theoretical construction that has already been disseminated around: the formulation seems to be there only to *deny Architecture itself* – now

identified with the *drawing*. Hence the accusation that Sérgio “does not like architecture” – which is not true, I think.

As an 'explanation of the explanation', it will be in the unpublished “A construção do desenho clássico” – one of Sérgio's most recent works and that composes the collection of texts that have been prepared for publication under the TF/TK (that is, still unavailable, unfortunately) – that the author describes how the operations that lay out the design take place not only against the construction site, but also in contradiction to itself. I transcribe an excerpt of this analysis of the dialectical process of treating objects, according to Marcuse's formulation, as an explanatory package insert for what Sérgio will demonstrate next:

"Relationships must be apprehended in another way [other than "simple 'correlations' by which common sense connects one object to another"]. They must be seen as being created by the object's own movement. The object must be understood as that which, itself, establishes and 'it proposes itself the necessary relationship between itself and its opposite.' This would imply that the object had a definite power over its own development, so that it could remain the same, and this, despite each concrete stage of the object's existence constituting a 'negation' of the object, a 'being-other'. In other words, the object must be understood as a 'subject' in its relations to its 'being-other’” (MARCUSE, 2004 [1941] p.70).

What example, then, does Sérgio Ferro give us to elucidate the relationship that the drawing “proposes” itself between “it and its opposite”?

Historically, the drawing separates from the construction site and becomes self-supporting. Thus, it denies the construction site: it starts talking by itself, depending on an autonomous plastics, an explanation directed by guidelines other than those established by the material order of its production. Theories of architecture, analytical tendencies, and taxonomy arise from complex articulations with cultural constructions and their many explanatory aspects. However, the drawing remains a *project* and, as such, presupposes the constructed as a future, as a *becoming*. That is, the drawing anticipates a work to be carried out and, therefore, an ideal construction site. Thus, the drawing “starts to operate with a mental construction site independent of the real construction site” (FERRO, 2020). This is how it comes into contradiction with itself, with its material determination: at the same time that it denies the construction site, it needs to reaffirm it, ideally, for its self-justification. It is not a matter of opposing the construction site to the drawing: this opposition is momentary and the result of common sense, as Marcuse explains:

“Wherever common sense and understanding perceive separate entities in opposition to each other, reason discovers the ‘identity of opposites’. It does not produce such an identity through a process of connecting and combining opposites, but by transforming opposites, so that they cease to exist as opposites, although their meaning is preserved in a higher and more ‘real’ way of being.” (MARCUSE, 2004 [1941] p.52-53)

Third conjecture: like Hegel, the movement of the object, for Sérgio, does not occur in opposition to the subject. The object places itself as a subject and, in this way, it changes and *contradicts* itself. There is no opposition between subject and object.

IV

Fourth conjecture: in a step forward, like Marx, Sergio seems to agree to reverse the Hegelian dialectic. In the form of a *coda*, taking up the first conjecture, *History as a process* can only be assimilated, not by the mystical force of a spirit *in Hegel's ways*, but by the contradictory transit of materially determined processes, driven by a dialectic that “can handle ‘every form historically developed in its fluid state, in motion’” (HARVEY, 2013 p.21).

“My dialectical method, in its fundamentals, is not only different from the Hegelian method, but its exact opposite. For Hegel, the thought process, which he, under the name of Idea, gets to the point of turning into an autonomous subject, is the demiurge of the effective process, which constitutes only the external manifestation of the former. For me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing more than the material, transposed and translated in the head of man. (...) The mystification that dialectics undergoes at the hands of Hegel does not at all prevent him from being the first to expose, in a broad and conscious way, his general forms of movement. In it, it finds itself upside down. It is necessary to turn it back up, in order to discover the rational heart within the mystical envelope” (MARX, 2013 [1873, cf. already indicated] p.90-91)

It seems necessary to rethink the way we investigate our objects, especially in the context of historical research. We approach facts by seeking to find in them not evident oppositions or antagonisms – but contradictions. Replacing, as it seems to me the operation promoted by Sérgio Ferro, the “isolated reflection (understanding)” by “dialectical thinking (reason)”, according to the reading of Hegel proposed by Marcuse (MARCUSE, 2004 [1941] p.52). Trying to understand how the “transformation of opposites” takes place, without getting stuck in the dualisms that, as a

rule, hide between the folds of our historiographic approaches.

V

Hence, finally, seeking to bring these conjectures to a more practical field, risking making them enter the field of historiography in architecture.

I take as a first example the research on construction with *earth*. Invariably, much of the research on earth use as a building material in Brazil is limited to links with heritage studies and, in this field, essentially to buildings and contexts with very paradigmatic content. Now, the news and records of how labor was applied in the production of buildings in the colonial period is close to almost nothing. Except for military constructions – when some contingents of enslaved people were recruited to work on the construction site, partly also carried out by the *privates* – apart from one or another more prominent institutional building – little is known about domestic construction, the real urban production sites, before the advent of the Republic. Well, see: who were the workers who built Ouro Preto, for example? Who were the workers who built the peaceful village in the province of São Paulo, all built with earth, stone, and wood until the beginning of the 20th century? Certainly they were, in the vast majority, Africans and their descendants, enslaved or freed who, mastering traditional and highly specialized construction knowledge (such as rammed earth, wattle and daub, stonemasonry, carpentry, etc.), who produced a good part, throughout the period from its arrival in Brazil, around 1540, until the throes of the 19th century, of all the heritage built over these almost 400 years. And very little is known about it: how were these sites organized? I would like to ask João José Reis (REIS, 2019), a Bahian historian who accurately and thoroughly describes all the urban labor activity conducted by Africans in Salvador in the 1850s, more restricted to the activity of transporting people and genders in that city, who were and how did those ‘winners’ or freemen who used their energy in the construction sites that produced that thriving urban center in the province of Bahia at that time? What is the volume of resources involved in the production of that city? Who were its main investors? As in the rising urban centers in Europe in the Middle Ages, this activity also worked as an “engine of the primitive accumulation of capital”. If the productive logic that supported the birth and development of our urban centers escapes us,

we are left with the articulation of names, facts, frozen memory, and appearances of architecture and urbanism¹⁰.

Another example.

Much is said, for example, of Ramos de Azevedo and his importance for the History of Architecture, at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, and for the vertiginous growth of the civil construction, particularly in the state of São Paulo. Attracting and concentrating fabulous volumes of capital that made possible the radical transformation of the city in just over 20 years, Ramos de Azevedo's work and his office have already mobilized a number of publications on the projects under his responsibility. However, we still need to understand, through the lens of Political Economy, how Ramos's business empire was structured: since he returned from Gant, Belgium (without even completing his graduation as an architect) and took over the almost completed works of the Cathedral of Campinas, in the state of São Paulo, a true business conglomerate grew and consolidated under Ramos' baton. Since that period – when his business acumen becomes clear – Ramos has been involved in very diverse businesses (such as lime production in Caieiras, implementation of the glass industry brought from France, steel rolling, brick production, etc.), but absolutely concatenated with his contracts and his office interests¹¹.

¹⁰Some research has been initiated and oriented in the direction I indicate here. This is the work “*Tebas: um negro arquiteto na São Paulo escravocrata*”, organized by the writer and journalist José Abílio Ferreira. The work collects essays and research on the work of Joaquim Pinto de Oliveira (1721-1811), a practical professional of the 18th century : black, “master bricklayer”, Tebas was responsible, among other works still existing today, for the stonework that adorns the facade of the church next to the old Convent of São Francisco – today Law School of the University of São Paulo. As José Abílio, when introducing Tebas, he refers to him as “the master of the art of carving and rigging stones, imprinting his personal and non-transferable mark on his work”. What distinguishes him, in addition to the architectural objects he produced in the province of São Paulo, would be the fact that he “gained autonomy over his body and his destiny, contrary to the logic of the slave system, based on fragmentation and absolute domination (body and mind) of the enslaved” (FERREIRA, 2018 p.7).

¹¹It is worth mentioning at least two works that, in a way, raise this question: the master's degrees of Thais Carneiro de Mendonça, “*Técnica e construção em Ramos de Azevedo: a construção civil em Campinas*”, from 2010; and Raquel Furtando Schenkman Contier, “*Do vitral ao pano de vidro: o processo de modernização da arquitetura em São Paulo através da vidraçaria*”, 2014 (MENDONÇA, 2010; SCHEKMAN CONTIER, 2014). In addition to these, also in 2010, under the coordination of José Lira and me, we organized a Symposium, through the Center for the Preservation of Culture at the University of São Paulo – CPC-USP, called “*Memória, trabalho e arquitetura*.” The event yielded a homonymous publication, bringing together 19 of the 20 works presented on that occasi-

One last example.

British historian Michael Baxandall, in “*Padrões de Intenção – a explicação histórica dos quadros*” (in a very quick reference here) proposes to pursue the “will or intention” behind the making of a painting. The historian says that what we speak of the paintings are “representations of what we think we saw in them”. However, rejecting the description that corresponds exclusively to a “simple exploration with the eyes”, Baxandall argues that, in order for us to apprehend that object and all its creation and production process, we need to go beyond the pure description of what we see, remembering that “we use our mind, and the mind uses concepts.” Such a process would be there, in the painting, as a representation of “something more than a material object: we implicitly consider that it contains not only the history of the painter's work process, but also the real experience of its reception by the spectators” (BAXANDALL, 2006 p.38-39). This means that, in addition to the object there, it also presents itself as an object with a material, an experience of contemplative enjoyment, a work process, etc.

Baxandall's proposal is very pertinent, regarding this alternative of approaching the historical object, without a doubt. The idea of highlighting the way in which an art object crosses time and reaches the one who observes it, carrying another time and space for the time and space of the observer through its *material*, its signs, signals, and inferences of the context in which it was produced, it is very similar to the strategy that Sérgio Ferro employs in the treatment he gives to his analysis of the Medici Chapel.

But still, there is a crucial difference between the two approaches.

The fact is that Baxandall not only uses a picture, but a *bridge*, to essay 25 causal statements to propose a structure of historical explanation – testimonials of social relations, conventions, intentions, etc. of an era. For this purpose, he uses Benjamin Baker's *Bridge Across the River Forth*, commissioned and built between 1873 and 1889 to economically integrate cities such as Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh in Scotland and northern England (BAXANDALL, 2006 p.49 ff.)

on, in an attempt to address the history of architecture production under the biases that I have been discussing here. See LOPES; LIRA, 2013.

The bridge is a demonstration of impressive structural virtuosity: by launching successive swings over the river, based and anchored in huge tubular and latticed elements, the structure, all manufactured in steel and operating according to the logic of compensation between swings, allows a length of approximately 1.5 km, distributed in successive spans of around 520m.

Baxandall briefly tells the story of the contracting and construction of the bridge and then begins to inquire as to the reasons that would have led to build it, as to the motivations of the general charge ordered from Baker and, in this exercise, lists 25 evidences that would help in the construction of what he calls “descriptive construct”.

However, it does not pose a question that seems crucial to me: where did the ore used to build the bridge come from? Undergoing new iron treatment technologies to transform it into *mild steel* (Siemens-Martin system) back in England in the late 1800s, this ore certainly came out of some deep hole in the planet, dug by human hands.

At another point, we inadvertently learned that the Morro Velho Mine, located on the outskirts of Nova Lima, in the state of Minas Gerais, close to where Belo Horizonte is today, collapsed on November 10, 1886. With an eloquent 570m in length, the shoring of its tunnels collapsed over the heads and bodies of a reasonable contingent of enslaved Africans, freed blacks, and some Englishmen. With 1,154 workers employed in its exploration, according to a count made in 1884, the owner of the mine distributed them in three shifts – which made it difficult to accurately count the victims of the accident. It was called *Saint John Del Rey Mining Company* – a British company that certainly contributed to the supply of the ore needed not only for the construction of the Baker bridge, but also for the radical industrial development experienced by England in that period (TROCATE; COELHO, 2020).

Baxandall reports that, in the construction of the bridge, “3 million pounds and the lives of 57 workers” were consumed (BAXANDALL, 2006 p.56). But it does not realize how much resources, labor, and people were consumed in the entire web of production involved in the tracks of that enterprise. Observing the object from this wider network would also expand the regime of historical implications, transcending

British space and time in the late 1800s. He would make his material and historical explanation a universal issue.

VI

The elements and conjectures listed here, as I said, are only an approximation of the problem of defining a field of studies that is intended to be called *Production Studies*. Certainly, there must be other aspects, not identified here, that will help to shape this field. However, I think it is correct to state that, in order to envision a research approach with the characteristics listed here, both historical and on processes and practices in architecture, we must start following the considerations of Adrián Gorelik:

“Few disciplines have a greater impact on the transformation of culture, social, and economic life than architecture. And yet, the most common versions of its criticism and historiography have endeavored to make it a self-absorbed, esoteric universe, losing any complex relationship with the world.” (GORELIK, in LIRA, 2011 p.21)

For Gorelik, “architecture needs this cross-eyed look to be fully understood”: one eye on itself and the other on “the different contexts in which architecture intersects and gains intelligibility” (idem).

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Presentation of John Ruskin's Shells

Apresentação de John Ruskin's Shells

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Brief explanation of the relevance of the relationship John Ruskin, 19th century English art critic, and Sérgio Ferro

Christopher Donaldson is currently the coordinator of the Ruskin Library, Museum and the Research Center at the University of Lancaster in the United Kingdom and has kindly sent us his work on John Ruskin.

But the reader must be asking: why would John Ruskin be part of Sérgio Ferro's theme? The answer possibly lies in the theoretical foundations that inspired Sérgio Ferro to build his Theory of Architecture, based not only on Marx's Theory, but also on the proposals of thinkers, such as William Morris and John Ruskin, who somehow, agree with Ferro's proposal for the architectural production process.

And the reader must be asking, where and how does this convergence take place?

Let's see: all of John Ruskin's production is based on a Philosophy of Nature whose logic is also his ethics explained by the relationship of mutual help between natural elements.

For Ruskin, no one lives alone, everyone needs to help each other to exist individually, we are interdependent. This conception of ethics is explained here by Chris-

topher in Ruskin's shell collections, but this ethics is also present in Ruskin's Theory of Architecture.

It is in architecture when Ruskin, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*, imagined a construction site whose work ethics was the ethics of mutual aid. That is, a type of relationship between the members of the productive process where people who think, do; and people who do, think. This is different from the Renaissance and contemporary way of dividing labor where someone thinks and others do what someone thought.

Ruskin approaches Sérgio Ferro here, whose proposal for the architectural construction site is based on a type of democratic relationship where people who think, do; and people who do, think. This eliminates a hierarchical command.

In the article, Christopher shows us how this ethics occurs in one of nature's elements, the shells.

John Ruskin's Shells

As Conchas de Ruskin

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Abstract

John Ruskin (1819–1900) assembled an impressive collection of shells over the course of his life. During his final years he displayed some of the fruits of his labours at Brantwood, his home overlooking Coniston Water in the northwest of England. Ruskin valued these shells for their beauty. He put them in a glass cabinet alongside geological specimens, historical artefacts and works of art. But Ruskin's interest in his shell collection was not just superficial. In this essay, I ponder the deeper meaning Ruskin discovered in the shells he collected, both marine and terrestrial, and I suggest how his shell studies reflect principles developed in his writings on art and architecture, as well as his attitude towards the natural sciences. In order to stake an approach to these issues, I begin this essay by considering the remarks of other writers who have commented on the beauty and curiosity of shells. I then proceed to contrast these aesthetic appreciations with Ruskin's more ethically informed contemplations.

Resumo

John Ruskin (1819–1900) formou uma coleção impressionante de conchas ao longo de sua vida. Durante seus últimos anos de vida, ele expôs alguns dos frutos de seu trabalho em Brantwood, sua residência com vista para o lago Coniston Water, ao noroeste da Inglaterra. Ruskin estimava suas conchas por sua beleza. Ele as colocou em um armário de vidro junto com espécimes geológicos, artefatos históricos e obras de arte. Mas o interesse de Ruskin em sua coleção de conchas não era superficial. No presente artigo, pondero a respeito do real significado encontrado por Ruskin em suas conchas, tanto marinhas como terrestres, e reflito sobre como seus estudos sobre as conchas mostram princípios de seus escritos sobre arte e arquitetura, bem como sua atitude quanto às ciências naturais. A fim de definir uma abordagem para essas questões, começo este artigo considerando as opiniões de outros autores que escreveram sobre a beleza e peculiaridade das conchas. Procuo então contrastar tais apreciações estéticas com as contemplações mais eticamente esclarecidas de Ruskin.

John Ruskin's Shells

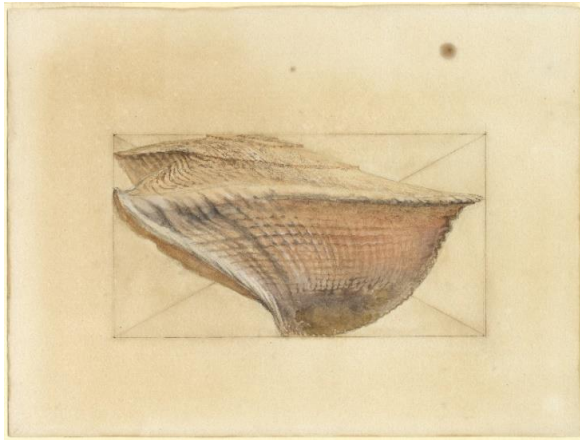


Figure 1. John Ruskin, "Shell study" (spiral of *helix gualteriana*), n.d.; pencil, watercolour and bodycolour, 145 x 24 cm. Inventory no. 1996P0993 © The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre, Lancaster University

I.

What can shells show us? —potentially a great deal. Their shapes and contours make them objects of wonder, but they are also enigmatic. They reveal to us worlds at once immanent and mysterious, and therein lies a part of their appeal. As the Abbé de Vallemont once observed, shells are more than just "the delights of great men"; they are also "sublime subjects of contemplation for the mind." (1705, p.648)¹

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard devotes a chapter to enumerating such contemplations, including those of Vallemont. His aim in doing so is to develop an understanding of the shell as a specific spatial type: one defined by the interplay of opposing ideas such as large and small, seen and unseen, soft and hard. (1961, p.111) Bachelard's approach is more poetic than systematic, but in pondering these binaries he underscores the persisting image of the shell as both a secretive space and a room secretively shaped by the body of its solitary inhabitant.

¹« Qu'il nous soit permis de jeter un moment les yeux sur cette ravissante variété de Coquillages, qui sont les délices des grands hommes [. . .] de sublimes sujets de contemplation pour l'esprit. » Unless otherwise credited, all translations are my own.

Bachelard's thoughts, in this latter respect, build on Paul Valéry's meditations in "L'Homme et la coquille". Shells, as Valéry points out in this essay, are secretive not just because they are places of concealment. They are also secretive because they were secreted by the creatures they first concealed.

Put simply, shells are exoskeletons composed of crystallised calcium that has filtered (or, as Valéry has it, "oozed") through the tissues of molluscs and other invertebrates.² (1937, p.68) The results of this process of slow, continual formation are perceptible enough. But the process itself is imperceptible to the unaided eye.

This fact goes some ways towards accounting for the wonder shells inspire in us, who grow our skeletons inside our bodies. As Valéry puts it, "[a]lthough we ourselves were formed by imperceptible growth, we do not know how to create anything in that way." (1937, p.15; trans. MANHEIM 1977, p.113)³

The implications of this assertion are plain enough. Were we to build a shell, we would do so not as a mollusc does. For starters, we would likely carve our shell. We would work from the outside in, instead of from the inside out. But this is not the only, nor even the most important difference. For whereas molluscs build their shells unreflexively, with perfect unity of purpose, we would build a shell intentionally and deliberately, and the work we would produce would be at best indirectly related to (what Valéry calls) "our underlying organic activity". (1937, p.65; trans. MANHEIM 1977, p.122)⁴

II.

This much, I think, can be said of the aesthetics of shells. But there is also an ethics of shells that both Valéry and Bachelard broach, but on which neither of them expounds. Valéry's assertion about our inability to build as molluscs build is indicative. He does not ponder the ethical implications of this claim, but it does not take much to see how his remarks accord with the moralising of early modern natura-

²« Une coquille émane d'un mollusque. *Emaner* me semble le seul terme assez près du vrai, puisqu'il signifie proprement: *laisser suinter*. » (The italics are Valéry's.)

³« Bien que faits ou formés nous-mêmes par voie de croissance insensible, nous ne savons rien créer par cette voie. »

⁴« [C]'est pourquoi nos desseins *réfléchis* et nos constructions ou fabrications *voulues semblent très étrangers à notre activité organique profonde*. » (The italics are Valéry's.)

lists like Vallemont, who counted shells among the marvels that “humiliate and mortify proud minds.” (1705, p.634)⁵

Such observations are noteworthy, but the ethics I have in mind relates to another marvellous property of shells: namely, the way they can pass from one life to another.

Shells may seem solid enough, but they also flake, break and dissolve, and as they decompose they become the minerals ingested and secreted by other organisms. In this sense, shells form part of the continuous cycle of organic exchange that has shaped the ecology of our planet.

The British artist Janet Manifold has recently explored this aspect of shells in her sculpture, *Time Unfolding*. In her description of this work, Manifold reflects on the formation of the alabaster of which her sculpture is composed.

This substance, she explains, was “part of a living ocean 23 million years ago.” It was formed from the calcium deposits left behind by “evaporated seawater”, which “flowed through” creatures “secreting their shells” over aeons. “So, [in] opening up this stone to create a sculpture [. . . w]e are looking back in time to the origin of the material itself and to the life it once sustained.” (MANIFOLD 2019)

Viewed in this way, Manifold's *Time Unfolding* illuminates the interconnectedness of all things, past and present, animate and inanimate. As a sculpture, it is an exquisite meditation both on the nature of the material from which it is made and, by way of analogy, on nature as a whole.

One can, of course, find more commonplace examples of the way shells pass from one state to another and from one life to the next. Take fertiliser, for example. Humans have long made lime from shells in order to enrich manure. The practice is recorded by Pliny the Elder and in other Roman sources,⁶ as well as in more recent agricultural manuals. Thus, *The American Muck Book*, a classic mid-nineteenth-century work on the subject, advises that “the farmer will find a valuable manure in procuring the shells of oysters, clams, and other shell fish, and reducing them to a powder by burning them in kilns, or grinding them in mills.” (BROWNE 1852, p.313)

⁵« Dans la Nature on est rarement en pays de connaissance. Il y a à chaque pas de quoi humilier, et mortifier les Esprits superbes. »

⁶PLINY 1962, p.77–78.



Figura 2. Janet Manifold, *Time Unfolding*, 2019; carved alabaster, 25 x 25 x 40 cm. © Janet Manifold. Image courtesy of the artist.

And lime is good for much more than just manure. It is also an essential component in concrete and mortar, and in making iron, steel and plate glass. So, in sum, shells not only help to feed us, they also form our built environment. In both ways, the use of decomposed shells has fundamentally shaped the modern world.

But decomposition is only one way that shells get recycled. Shells can, after all, become second homes. One thinks of the shells hermit crabs scavenge and of the

way fossilised shells can provide a shelter for later lifeforms. In each case the study of shells reveals the importance of cooperation and interdependence as forces at work in nature.

This is not something that Valéry and Bachelard discuss, but it is certainly an aspect of shell studies that appealed to John Ruskin. His account of collecting shells during his summer holiday in Boulogne in 1861, to which I shall turn presently, provides a remarkable case in point.

III.

Ruskin began gathering shells as a boy, and he assembled an impressive collection by the end of his life. During his final years he displayed some of the fruits of his labours in the drawing room at Brantwood, his home overlooking Coniston Water in the English Lake District.

Ruskin valued these shells for their beauty. He put them in a glass cabinet alongside geological specimens, historical artefacts and works of art. A visitor to Brantwood in 1884 described this assemblage in detail. He recorded seeing “[c]ases of shells of infinite variety, of great rarity and equal beauty, and a few minerals of various formation”, with “superb examples of cloisonné enamel”, as well as “[e]xquisite examples of Prout’s pencil drawings, of Burne-Jones (‘Fair Rosamund’), and of Ruskin’s own beautiful studies [. . .] of St. Mark’s”. (SPEILMAN 1900, p.133)

A photograph (Fig. 3) taken around the turn of the twentieth century provides a visual record of this very scene.

Now, this may seem less like the storeroom of a scientist than the *Wunderkammer* of a connoisseur. But it would be wrong to think that Ruskin’s interest in these shells was merely superficial. Like the other objects displayed in his drawing room, he was drawn to them because he felt they reflected moral laws.



Figura 3. Walmsley Bros., “Drawing Room – Shell Cabinet, Brantwood” (c.1900); photograph © The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre, Lancaster University

Ruskin’s remarks on the fossil shells he collected while combing the beach in Boulogne in June 1861 are indicative. He described this find in a letter to his father the following day:

I was out a long while yesterday on the beach,—and carried a heavy block of stone five miles home—one mass of casts of shells in clear carbonate of lime, all their hinges and delicatest spirals preserved—shells of which the fish lived long before Mont Blanc existed, and while the crest of the Aiguille de Varens was soft mud at the bottom of [a] deep sea; yet the ripple mark of the sandstone that encompasses them is as fresh as that within fifty yards of it, left by the now retiring tide, and the modern living whelk and mussel hide in the hollows of shells dead these thirty thousand years. (RUSKIN 1905^a, p.xxxvii)

This passage is noteworthy for a number of reasons, not least because it gives a sense of the lengths Ruskin was willing to go to collect interesting specimens. Lumbering “five miles home” with that “block of stone” must have been a chore. Then, too, there is the way Ruskin’s reflections register an awareness of geological processes. His casual reference to the orogeny of the Aiguille de Varens is particularly striking.

But what is really notable about this passage is how Ruskin's remarks both throw open and collapse deep time. On the one hand, the "modern living whelk and mussel" and the fossilised "casts of shells" are eons apart. On the other hand, they coexist: the former finding a home in the remains of the latter. Like "the ripple mark" worn into "the sandstone" and the line of "the now retiring tide", the co-presence of these ancient and modern organisms heightens our awareness of the temporal difference between them at the same time as it resolves that difference into an image of continuity.

For Ruskin, then, the wonder of that "mass of casts of shells" would seem to have lain less in its dizzying antiquity than in the way that it had created the conditions for a later world. The "hollows" made by those "fish", "dead these thirty thousand years", were valuable for they had provided a hiding place and a preserve for future life.

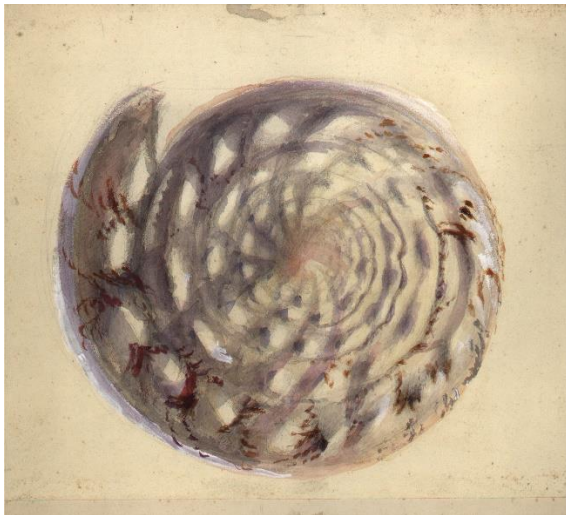


Figure 4. John Ruskin, "Shell: A Spiral" (marbled cone shell), n.d.; bodycolour and white, 34.3 x 47.6 cm. Inventory no. 1996P2047 © The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre

IV.

Ruskin's interest in shells was, as I have hinted, guided by his belief that nature reflected moral laws. Bearing this in mind helps elucidate further the import of his remarks about the fossil shells he found in Boulogne in 1861. Those shells were, after all, a striking manifestation of a principle he had elaborated just a year earlier. I refer to "The Law of Help".

Ruskin had introduced this principle in the fifth volume of *Modern Painters* as one of the "elementary laws of arrangement" discerned in the composition of true works of art. (RUSKIN 1905^b, p.204) Such "composition", he explains, "may be defined as the help of everything in [a] picture by everything else". And such "help", he continues, mirrors the cooperation found in healthy organic life:

In substance which we call "inanimate", as of clouds, or stones, their atoms may cohere to each other, or consist with each other, but they do not help each other. The removal of one part does not injure the rest.

But in a plant, the taking away of any one part does injure the rest. Hurt or remove any portion of the sap, bark, or pith, the rest is injured. If any part enters into a state in which it no more assists the rest, and has thus become "helpless", we call it also "dead".

The power which causes the several portions of the plant to help each other, we call life. Much more is this so in an animal. We may take away the branch of a tree without much harm to it; but not the animal's limb. Thus, intensity of life is also intensity of helpfulness—completeness of depending of each part on all the rest. (RUSKIN 1905^b, p.205)

The thrust of these distinctions is reasonably self-evident. They clarify that although Ruskin's interest in "The Law of Help" in *Modern Painters* was chiefly pictorial, the principle of "help" was, in his mind, necessarily linked to an ethically informed understanding of ecology: of the way all life forms depend on one another.

Reflecting on this passage goes some way towards explaining why those fossil shells appealed so strongly to Ruskin's imagination. They were, after all, a vivid embodiment of the way the long dead have helped to shape the world of the living.

But this is not all. For, in typifying the dependence of the living on the dead, those shells recall another significant aspect of Ruskin's thinking about cooperation: his characterisation of the power of architecture to form a bridge between the past and the present.

Ruskin had developed this idea eleven years earlier in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, where he reflected on how historic buildings are capable of connecting successive ages. The passage is one of the more often quoted portions of Ruskin's oeuvre, but it is still worth recalling here:

For, indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness [. . .] which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity. It is in their lasting witness against men, in their quiet contrast with the transitional character of all things, in the strength which, through the lapse of seasons and times [. . .] maintains its sculptured shapeliness for a time insuperable, [and] connects forgotten and following ages with each other[.] (RUSKIN 1903, p.233–34)

The “sculpted shapeliness” of such buildings may, at first, seem a far cry from the hollows left by the shells whose fossils Ruskin found in Boulogne. But the two are analogous. Each connects “forgotten and following ages with each other.” Each illustrates the importance of “help” as a principle of inheritance. Each demonstrates the enduring dependence of the present upon the past and, implicitly, of tomorrow upon today.

V.

Recalling these passages from Ruskin's published works illuminates the moral dimension of his interest in those fossil shells, and this, in turn, reveals a good deal about his attitude towards the natural sciences. Namely, it reminds us that science for Ruskin had as much to do with the study of nature as it did with devotion.⁷

Recognising this aspect of Ruskin's thought helps explain why, though a collector of shells, he was dismissive about conchology. In an article devoted to this subject, Stanley Peter Dance has surmised that Ruskin felt that conchologists spent too much time on trivial details.

In letter 63 of *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin provided an amusing demonstration of this point by revealing the difficulty of using Jean Charles Chenu's *Manuel de conchyliologie* (1859) to answer a simple query about snails.

“Assuming my shell to be *Helix virgata*,” he writes:

I take down my magnificent French—(let me see if I can write its title without a mistake)—“Manuel de Conchyliologie et de Paléontologie Conchyliologique,” or, in English, “Manual of Shell-talking and Old-body-talking in a Shell-talking manner”. Eight hundred largest octavo—more like folio—pages of close print, with four thousand and odd (nearly five thousand) exquisite engravings of shells; and among them I look for the creatures elegantly, but inaccurately, called by modern naturalists Gasteropods; in English, Bellyfeet (meaning, of course, to say Belly-walkers, for they haven't got any feet); and among these I find, with much pains, one [shell] that is rather like mine, of which I am told that it belongs to the sixteenth sort in the second tribe of the second family of the first sub-order of the second order of the Belly-walkers, and that it is called “Adeorbis subcarinatus,”—Adeorbis by Mr. Wood, and subcarinatus by Mr. Montagu; but I am not told where it is found, nor what sort of creature lives in it, nor any single thing whatever about it, except that it is “sufficiently depressed” (“assez déprimée”), and “deeply enough navelled” (“assez profondément ombiliquée,”—but how on earth can I tell when a shell is navelled to a depth, in the author's opinion, satisfactory?), and that the turns (taken by the family) are “little numerous” (“peu nombreux”). On the whole, I am not disposed to think my shell is here described, and put my splendid book in its place again. (RUSKIN 1907, p.552–53)

From here, Ruskin describes scouring the “sixteen octavo volumes” of Griffith's translation of Cuvier's *The Animal Kingdom* for an answer. (1907, p.553) Again, however, his search proves in vain.

This sort of buffoonery about the babel of science is part and parcel of Ruskin's engagement with the sciences during the latter half of his career. But with respect to the study of shells in particular, these comments help clarify why he later cautioned Henrietta Carey that conchology was “no good whatever as a study”.⁸ (qt. Dance 2004, p.43)

Ruskin may have had copies of Chenu and Cuvier in his study, but he was evidently most interested in the ‘exquisite engravings’ these books contained. He considered their delineations of specific classes, orders, genera and species to be of secondary interest, and he treated their discussions of anatomy with disdain.

One of Ruskin's letters to Carey, dated 11 February 1883, makes these facts plain. Here, he describes having ‘cut’ his copy of Cuvier into pieces:

⁷See BIRCH 1981, O'GORMANN 1999 and HEWISON 2020.

⁸Carey (c.1844–1920) was an early Companion of the Guild of St George with whom Ruskin shared a considerable portion of his shell collection, along with other materials, during the early 1880s. See Dance (2004) for an account of their correspondence.

The first thing I've found for you are the main part of the plates of mollusca, starfish, medusae, and corals, given in the last edition of Cuvier's *Regne Animal*. The shrimps and crabs follow[. . .]. I cut the whole book up in order to burn its disgusting anatomical plates[. . .]. Some of the [other] plates were framed for my Oxford schools, but I can't think where the rest of the shells have got to. However, these plates, kept in nicely pinched bundles of the different sorts, might admirably be used for drawing copies, which when good enough, should be kept in accumulation for service at the seaside or in museums. (qt. Dance 2004, p.43)

A few days later, Ruskin also sent Carey his copy of Chenu's manual with a letter informing her that the book, 'though wretchedly dry in the text, has lovely plates'. (qt. Dance 2004, p.43)

In his discussion of this correspondence, Dance has surmised that Ruskin's interest in shells was more artistic than scientific. Ruskin collected shells, he writes, in order to sketch them, and "[h]e sketched them partly because he liked them and partly because he wanted to prove that he was equal to the task." (2004, p.37)



Figura 5. John Ruskin, 'Cockle shell' (1876); pencil, watercolour and bodycolour, 14.5 x 24 cm. Inventory no. 1996P1510 © The Ruskin – Library, Museum and Research Centre

VI.

There is certainly merit in these claims. Ruskin, as Dance points out, regularly exercised his eye and hand by drawing shells, and he repeatedly stressed how

challenging it was to draw shells well. He commented on this difficulty in both his published works and his private letters.

Notably, in *The Laws of Fésole* he described the "cockle-shell" as being "in reality quite hopelessly difficult, and in its ultimate condition, inimitable by art". (RUSKIN 1904, p.410) Similarly, in a letter thanking Sydney Carlyle Cockerel for sending him a box of shells in 1886, Ruskin remarked that "there are few things I care more for [. . .], or vex myself more with trying vainly to paint." (qt. MEYNELL 1940, p.20)

Despite, or perhaps because of, this difficulty, Ruskin persevered. In all, he is known to have completed around two dozen shell studies, and he used many of these drawings as models for his students. He clearly regarded the ability to portray a shell well as a marker of virtuosity.

For proof, one need look no farther than a letter Ruskin sent to his father in March 1859. "Shells", writes Ruskin:

are [. . .] easy up to a certain point [and] they look pretty as soon as you have rounded & patterned them. But to paint them in quite true perspective—and with their exact pearly lustre or grain, is beyond all skill but the highest—and I believe it is generally [as] a Tour-de-force rather than a mere entertaining object in his foregrounds, that Titian so often introduces a snail shell. In the *Entombment* there are two—perhaps to mark the dampness of the rock. (qt. BURD 1969, p.108)



Figura 6. Tiziano Vecellio (Titian), 'The Entombment of Christ' (c. 1520); oil on canvas; 148 x 212 cm. Musée de Louvre, Collection de Louis XIV, inv. 749. CC-PD-Mark. Digitised by The Yorck Project (2002)

Ruskin refers here to Titian's *Entombment of Christ*, a painting which he admired on his visits to the Louvre in 1844 and 1849. There is in fact only one snail shell in that painting (in the lower right-hand foreground), and Ruskin had noted as much in 1844. Presumably, his intuitions about the importance of this detail multiplied its presence in his memory.

Symbolically, of course, the appearance of this solitary shell in Titian's painting does much more than suggest the "dampness" of the ground. Notably, the shell is upturned, and it is empty. It plainly serves as a prefiguration of the tomb from which Christ will rise, and as such it invites us to reflect on the promise of the resurrection.



Figura 7. detail from Titian's 'The Entombment of Christ' (Fig. 6)

For Ruskin though that shell was also a sign of Titian's excellence as an artist. — And this was an excellence Ruskin sought to emulate. He copied that snail shell repeatedly, including in a sketch in his letter to William Ward on 15 February 1863.⁹

In Dance's interpretation, this sketch affirms that Ruskin viewed the 'shell motif' as a marker 'of genius', and I would agree. But, in conclusion, I would also like to

propose that we can connect this artistic appreciation of the form of the shell with the moral implicit in Ruskin's observations about the mass of fossil shells he found in Boulogne.

If we do, then I think we can see how shells, for Ruskin, could be much more than just a motif. They could be a sign of a type of cooperation that—like the covenant of the resurrection — held out the promise of enduring life.

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⁹See Dance 2004, p.44.

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