

## Culture, art and politics in an authoritarian context Brazil, Brasília: 1967 – 1979

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“Talk about art in Brasília is to talk about art inside art.”

Frederico Morais

The transition from the 1960s to 1970s in Brazil is very relevant to the field of the arts and particularly to visual arts. Time had come to surpass the abstract vs. realism debate and to put aside the modernist criteria of purism and good finishing. It was time to embrace, instead, a dirty aesthetic, made of cockroaches, garbage and blood. Coming from the hegemonic concretism of the 1950s, this generation of artists is interested now in political art, be it in the front of a new pop figuration, be it in the form of a powerful conceptual art represented by artists such as Nelson Leirner and Cildo Meirelles. Both artists are important references for the study of the field of the arts in Brasília, subject of my present work, part of a wider research, called “Migrating capitals, peregrine power, nomadic representations.”

I am concerned with the topic “Representations”, looking for the Artists’ Itinerary and the way the field of visual arts has been constructed, in Brasília, from 1958 to now. So, I am also concerned with contemporary art and I intend – while dealing with my empirical data – to advance theoretical (and I hope, relevant) questions related to art and its complex social process of mediations. Art and language, as a collective heritage.

Those reflections are based on the first results of the second part of the research which aims at mapping and analyzing the construction and the consolidation of the field of visual arts in Brasília. My whole project is divided into three significant moments of the city’s history: the fifties, when the rationalist model in architecture and urban design, and concretism in the field of the arts became hegemonic; the late sixties, when conceptualism was strongly affirmed on the Brazilian art scene; and finally, the two last decades, which brought big changes to patronage and to art

market strategies. At this point of the research, I feel the need to emphasize some theoretical and methodological remarks.

About the object itself, this is not the first time I am dealing with the city and the arts: the city as an artifact collectively idealized and built; urban culture, particularly the youth musical culture from the seventies on.

According to previous conclusions (Madeira, 1997), cities, in all times, can be considered as a place of mixtures, confrontation of differences, space of cultural exchange whose synthesis, in form of any art life and art works, represents the collectivity's frailty or vigour. Citizens should be able to recognize themselves in the city, in its cultural practices, in the urban space and in the artist's expressions.

Unfinished by definition, a city is a cultural artifact, a work of many generations who inscribe, on these places, their hopes and interests, the landmarks of their history. Being a place of convergence of ideas, in the cities one can see the consolidation of cultural practices, sometimes coming from distant regions, brought by the nomads, itinerant people who constitute the ethnic diversity of the urban landscape.

Stemming from the modernization boom, which quelled-fuelled the country in the fifties, Brasilia is special in many ways. Not only was it projected specially to become a capital but also it was designed on an empty space, with little previous cultural reference. Traditions from all over Brazil were transplanted. Along, with the "migrant powers", the workers, technicians, artists and intellectuals arrived, impressing on the city's landscape the utopian and aesthetic values of modernism and modernization.

Important social changes, specially for Latin American countries, came up with the end of World War II. The shift of European hegemony to the United States, which became the most significant reference in both economical and cultural fronts has, certainly, played a major role in the new style for Brazilians. Not only American cultural industry was at its apex, exporting films, music, and other cultural items, but also this influence could be viewed through the great number of industrial supplies, home appliances, bringing a new way of life, identified with modernity and the country's development.

The emphasis in development can be considered the most significant argument and the very warranty of the success of the Capital's building and transfer from Rio de Janeiro to the center of Brazil. Brasília is the utmost symbol and the evidence that Brazil should be faced now as a modern country, a winner against the colonial remains and economical delay. Politically, Brazil was going through its greatest "democratic experience" between the end of the first Vargas government, in 1945, and the 1964

military coup d'état. Optimism and belief in the future were ideas spread out through the whole society, gathering strong feelings to speed up the industrialization and urbanization project, headed by President Kubitschek (1956-1960).

Nowadays, Brasília shares the increasing complexity of contemporary cities – violence, ghettos, use of hi-tech control, unchecked growth of its population. On the other hand, it is also a place where one can see the process of creative synthesis between local and international references, where up-to-date cultural information circulates.

All the data gathered on the fifties bear witness to a decade of great changes in the arts in Brazil, when the first important museums of modern art were consolidated and the Biennials inaugurated. The first São Paulo Biennial, in 1951, presented officially to the public Max Bill's sculpture "Tripartite Unity", which got the first prize and is considered as the act of introduction of Concretism in Brazil. Concretism<sup>1</sup> and especially its consequences, the following disruptive movements, were very important in a moment of political changes, and still now, one can say, it is a permanent reinvigorating reference to Brazilian art.

Two years later, 1953, in the second Biennial, Mary Vieira got the first prize for sculpture. Born in São Paulo, in 1927, but having gone to school in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, under Alberto Guignard's teaching, she was so impressed by Bill's work that she moved to Zurich and became his disciple. She also participated in an important Swiss group, "Alienz", and she managed her brilliant international career entirely from abroad.

Influential critics also played an important role in the consolidation of the concrete movement. Concretism is highly theoretical. The artists elaborated a strong basis to this new aesthetic, arguing the ambiguity of the notion of "abstract art" which intends to break – make a sharp rupture – with figurative reality and is, as a contradiction, conceptually linked to it. *Abstraction* will always be related to *reality*.

"Concrete painting, and not abstract, for nothing is more concrete, more real than a line-drawing, a colour, a surface (...). A woman, a tree, a cow are concrete in their natural state, but (in state of) as a painting they are abstract, illusionary, vague, speculative-philosophical; instead of them, a plan is a plan, a line is a line, no more nor less", according to Van Doesburg (apud Pedrosa, 1986, p.25 ss.).

Following his Dutch master Mondrian and the ideas of neo plasticism, Theo Van Doesburg and other artists criticized the exhibition *Cercle et Carré*, organized by Michel Seuphor and Torres Garcia in Paris; at the same time the Dutch artist launched the influential periodical *Art*

*Concret* in 1930. His ideas would be taken up by the Swiss architect and sculptor Max Bill, who was enormously important for all subsequent Latin-American art, especially for Argentina and Brazil, as was already pointed out.

The concretism in Brazil must possess a strong theoretical basis; it was necessary to break the figurative and documentary tradition, deeply rooted in Brazilian art, and not questioned by the modernist artists and art critics of the twenties, the key decade of Brazilian *avant garde* movements.

Concretism grew up in an ambivalent threshold. On one hand, it was linked to modernist aesthetic principles, such as the call for the right of permanent research or expressing itself through manifestos, revealing the approximate orthodoxy shared by the group. On the other hand, it proposed a disruption with representative tradition, based on the works of influential painters from the twenties, such as Lasar Segall and Candido Portinari, still active, at that time.

The reference to this Concretism versus Realism debate is due to its enormous proportion and deep resonance in the shaping of Brasilia. With concretism, architecture acquired prominence – to build was more than a metaphor! – over all artistic languages. Sculpture, drawing, painting, engraving tried to find a way of being more architectural, more modulated, serial, embedded, in a word, more constructive.

The capital-city could be considered the synthesis and the apex of a modernizing project and an urban planning process attuned with international values, in art as well as in politics.

The modern sensibility of the fifties established Brasilia as a parameter of its utopia. Exact and rational, the city is conceived through orthogonal lines, with a dominance of horizontality, separating, precisely, nature from civilization, the *cerrado* from the *urbs*.

The city's monumental character and its modulated urban plan are attenuated facing the landscape's immensity; the express-ways, like a car race road, projected to speed up and to control the automobiles' displacement in the Pilot Plan, if seen at a certain distance, are also attenuated, like a designed toy. Even architectural design, which is shocking and tensioned, with its blocks, squares and super-squares became modulated cubes, good to play at inventing cities on different scales. One can perfectly distinguish, by its sectors, the architecture built to hold the state bureaucracy, like the buildings of the Ministries' Mall, on the East-West axis, or the other one, where people live, which is spread out through the two wings, in the North-South axis. Both are neutral and sober. Buildings occupy a precise place according to a rational use of space. There is also the architecture aiming to fulfill symbolic functions, such as the

Episcopal Cathedral and the many churches and chapels, or as the seat of the government, culminating in the Praça dos Três Poderes (The Three Powers Square). The democratic meaning of the new capital should be granted by the symbolic weight of its main icon: the National Congress. Its centrality, its spatial relationship with the other Houses should be able to synthesize the entire Brazil.

In its urban design, architecture, and even in the inside of many buildings and residences, one notices the importance the elites gave to the arts, a way to endow the city of the nobility required to be a capital-city: architecture conceived as works of art, punctuating the landscape, and the art works embellishing the architecture. Sculptures, tapestries, and panels can be seen in public buildings in general although they are concentrated in the government buildings, fulfilling the role of giving to architecture more beauty and distinction. Many artists were invited to contribute to this project. Among them, Alfredo Ceschiatti, who left a strong mark on Brasília's visual landscape, constructing civic and religious statues in front of some palaces and churches. Linked to Niemeyer's staff since the forties, Ceschiatti adopted different aesthetic languages, according to the function and destination of his sculpture. He is the sculptor of all the statues of the Episcopal Cathedral: the Evangelists, outside, at the entrance, and the baroque angels hanging from the ceiling, inside. Both are citations of Aleijadinho's work.<sup>2</sup> Ceschiatti is also the author of the Statue of Justice, in front of the Justice Palace, and numerous other pedagogic sculptures located in public spaces. This last works share a modernist taste: compact volumes, blocks not very well defined, hieratic figures, a preference for symetric proportions and conventions. His references vary: baroque, when dealing with religious iconography, and synthetic, art-deco, more eclectic, when dealing with civil public sculpture. Frederico Morais heavily criticizes his displaced baroqueism, 200 years after its time, and his eloquent and academicist style. According to the same art critic, also other artists working under commission produced pieces of art of doubtful quality, like the *Meteoro* by Bruno Giorgi, placed in the lake of the Palácio dos Arcos, or the *Path of Calvary*, late paintings by Di Cavalcanti, on the walls of the Cathedral.

The Baroque is a strong category to interpret Brazilian art, and it can be attested in Brasília not only in official statues but also in the very conception of the city.

*"...if the idea of Brasília is constructive, much of what it contains is baroque."* (Pedrosa, 1981, p. 28)<sup>3</sup>

The statement by Mario Pedrosa synthesizes the perception of Brasília's urban space, stressing the importance of the visual revolution

represented by an abstract urban design and its inner baroqueism. He keeps pointing the city's baroque characteristics:

*"...its monumentality, its contradictions and conflicts, its scenographic aspect, its vagrants- wanderings perspectives, fugues and counter fugues, a certain ambience of pomp and exuberance."* (Idem)

Despite the rational lines of the urban design, Brasília represents the resumption of a rhetorical architectural tradition, attesting the capacity of the monuments for persuasion, characteristic of all baroque cities: the imposing design of the avenues, gardens containing numerous sculptures and floodlit fountains.

Brasília also represents the resumption-remaking of an old Brazilian tradition: the State patronage of the arts. The commissioning of monuments and landmarks by famous Brazilian artists – mainly sculptures of different forms and dimensions –, should fulfill a double pedagogic role, promoting, at the same time, civic and aesthetic education. Art should be able to appeal to aesthetic values, the beauty concentrated in works of high culture – and Concretism represented the most *avant-garde* art form of the time. Art should also be able to fulfill a civic function through sculptures of heads, the building of tombs and memorials, dedicated to the founding fathers' cult, enhancing nationalistic values.

For that reason, in Brasília's public places one can find sophisticated and anti-realistic art works, empty of ideologies, side by side with past heroes and present leaders' statues, fuelling a well-known mechanism of building the official history, based on the coherent narrative of the famous men and of their deeds. For that reason, figurative artists, specialized in casting naturalistic statues, were called to create works capable of teaching civic values and religion. Horácio Peçanha, skilled in bronze heads, and José Pedrosa, specialist in soap stone sculptures came to immortalize the capital's builders and their lineage. Kubstchek, Israel Pinheiro, Santos Dumont, Don Bosco e Marechal Rondon. Homage, (thankfulness-gratefulness), gratitude but also the enforcement of the personal leaders, as a political strategy of the official history of the nation.

Victor Brecheret, Sérgio Camargo, Bruno Giorgi, Maria Martins, Mary Vieira, Franz Weissmann are only a few of many artists invited to participate in this boom of public art endowing the main buildings and gardens of the city with more beauty and distinction. Three palaces deserved works of great aesthetic value: the Palace of the Arches (Itamaraty), the Alvorada, the president's residence, and the Jaburu Palace, the vice-president's residence. Their gardens and verandas are decorated with valuable sculptures and panels by the artist Athos Bulcão. Athos is a remarkable artist, who contributed to model Brasília's visual shape,

principally in his partnership with the architects Oscar Niemeyer and João Filgueiras Lima. His internal and external panels, such as the white and modulated side walls of the National Theatre, or the playful panel of the Palace of the Arches, and in many other public spaces such as the Cine Brasília, hospitals, schools, churches and chapels, Athos created unique visual plans, tiles of high poetic significance, icons inseparable from the city. No other artist had such a rich opportunity to build so important and meaningful an art ensemble in only one city, as Athos had in Brasília. The city possesses more than one hundred works by him. His innovative work can be considered the synthesis old tile panels traditions and the most up-to-date constructivist values, building modulated prototypes, on industrial scale, which should permit the random play with the pieces, many times left to the workers' taste and skill.

A few words to remind us that there is work to be done on the painter and landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx. Recognized worldwide as one of the most creative and interesting Brazilian artists – he designed many private gardens and public spaces in Brazil and abroad. He designed 13 gardens in Brasília, among them, the internal and external gardens of the Palace of the Arches, The National Theatre and the Military sector's gardens. Most of his originality has to do with the mingling of traditionally cultivated flowers with wild species, and the new value he assigned to tropical flora. Mário Pedrosa said about him that he was a painter who painted with flowers (Pedrosa, 1981), so deep were Burle Marx's concerns with plastic and color problems when designing gardens, as much as he put in his own paintings.

### ***The artists' itinerary: art and migration***

A first approach to the artists' biographic itinerary is surprising and convincing about their nomadism. The more they are internationally known more nomadic they are. They travel for many reasons: to specialize themselves, to show their work, to participate in Salons and Biennials, to give lectures and teach in ateliers, besides all the mundane performances traditionally associated with the job. This nomadic condition, at the same time, may correspond to the need to be in a permanent state of mobility; the metaphor goes beyond the moving of cities, and points out the artist's existential position, transversal to the consensus and to the hegemonic ideologies. The recent rediscovering and interest for the literature of the exiled and foreign writers, like Samuel Rawet, for instance, who was born in Poland and died in Brasília, in the eighties, let us know a little more about the poetics that emerged on the threshold of cultures, hybrid

languages, experiences in conflict. This exile can be considered as one more metaphor to the existential condition of the artist, who has a commitment with the language, with a specific practice in it, dealing with it in a strange way, always as a foreigner.

Only superficially can it be considered contradictory that nomadism can be part of the artist's wishes for a place, the choice of a city to establish himself, a base. Brasília, in the fifties, represented a promising project. The ideological composition made of rationalism, nationalism and humanism, as well as mystical and religious ideas, wove, together with real jobs and attractive work posts, an ensemble where it was possible to construct a work identified with the destiny of the nation and the utopia of a new civilization. This ideology united not only employers, managers, engineers and workers but it also acted on the artists who saw in Brasília new possibilities of work and self construction.

The first part of the research dealt with data related to the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, when Brasília seemed to gather political and intellectual elites, attracting an expressive number of artists who circulated in two institutional groups: "Novacap", a special secretariat linked to the President of the Republic, where Oscar Niemayer's team was based, arrived in Brasília in 1958, two years ahead of the inauguration of the city. The second institution was the ICA, Central Art Institute, which was called on to be the first new academic approach to arts in Brazil, coming in the same utopian and democratic, and even socialist, impulse for the foundation of the University of Brasília.<sup>4</sup> This institutional project brought to Brasília, in different periods of time, artists such as Amélia Toledo, Marília Rodrigues, Gastão Manuel Henrique, Vicente Rego Monteiro, Maciej Babinski, Glênio Bianchetti. Almost all of them were invited by the architect Alcides da Rocha Miranda, director of the Institute. Since the military coup d'état in 1964, the University had been under military control, but only in 1965, the group scattered, going, forced or voluntarily, into exile, resigning from their posts. There were about 250 professors already living and teaching in Brasília. 1968 was the year of the reinforcement of the ruthless dictatorship, with the publication of the AI-5, an Institutional act which established censorship over all cultural products before their divulgation. The University of Brasília, until then a place of resistance, was invaded by military police and became the scene of confrontations between civilians and military forces.<sup>5</sup> (Note on Wladimir de Carvalho's movie Barra 68).

A second group of professors and artists started to arrive, after 1972, to fill the posts left by the previous team, for most of them returned to their native cities, Rio or São Paulo. It must have been an awful experience to be



in Brasília in the seventies. Narratives are eloquent about the pressure of living in the capital city, often compared to a prison, always lacking air, despite its huge horizons. Artists who came as children to Brasília, such as Cildo Meireles and Luis Aquila, to take only two as an example in the field of the visual arts, or Herbert Viana and Renato Russo, in pop music, went to Rio or São Paulo, in search of peers and professional chances. Many artists, in all domains, and many other intellectuals left Brazil for Europe (London, Paris, Rome) and New York, apparently by their own decision. Artists who stayed in Brasília and the first generation of youngsters born in the capital city produced a highly contestatory kind of art, particularly in the field of pop music, generating more than 300 radical rock groups (punk, heavy metal, gothic), in the eighties. This generation was on the opposite side of their parents' values. For them, Brasília isn't a utopia anymore – the concrete broke down – is already broken.

All the references to these three decades, the fifties, the sixties, and the seventies, try to bind the artistic and political field, underlining the two different frames of relationship between the artists and the State, be it gathered in a same project, in a democratic period (1957-1964-67); be it radically separated from official patronage, in the seventies and eighties (1967-1984). The dates also refer to facts occurring inside the field of visual arts and they still echo in Brasília.

An important rupture, brought by this generation of artists who were active in the fifties, radically changed the Brazilian art scene. Since the early sixties, they included and assigned a high value to “experience” or to the “proposition”, as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica called their own works respectively. Art was seen as a ritual that should involve-wrap the participant as a whole, not only the spectator-viewer, displacing the emphasis on the work of art and on the eye of the public and to other senses. The *object* or the *ambience* or even the *action* mediating them, most of the times, was purposefully badly finished (see the Lygia Clark's “Transitional objects” (1967), made of no noble material, but of transparent or black industrial plastic and hospital breathing tubes that should be used by those who decided to take part in the experience. It could shake old and crystallized truths, provoke the emergence of quiet emotions by the activation of the other sense organs. Lygia Pape, after weird sensorial experiences, sent to an exhibition her “Box of cockroaches”, which is an acrylic well finished box, containing 18 dead and big cockroaches, carefully disposed in right lines, equaling an art object, or art itself. Barrio prepared many bloody pillows attached to strings, left in the corners of the main streets and in covered passages, scaring people and making them remember this was a time of military arbitrariness and torture.

The most interesting theater experiences of the seventies engaged the public in an active form, questioning the very meaning of the representation. Groups such as *The Living Theater*, from New York, stayed in Brazil in the seventies, or from London, the *Liquid Theater*. In one of the sequences of one of their “Plays”, each actor conducted a member of the public, blindfold, – there were exactly the same numbers of actors and of attendants – through perfumed corridors made of different touches and fabrics, finishing with small groups tasting different kinds of tea.

In Brazil, at the same time, radical experiences took place such as *Gracias Senhor*, by the group Oficina, in 1972, which proposed a new wish (Re-volution, instead of revolution), a wish to act directly on the public declaring the death of commercial theater. A musical like *Roda Viva* by Chico Buarque, or the plays by José Agripino de Paula which provoked a real impression on the sophisticated audience of Rio de Janeiro. People must enter – in *The rite of savage love*, for instance, from 1970 –, through the ruins of a burnt building and across a dirty and dimly-lit corridor, full of dung and live animals, chickens, pigs, the public should escape (*driblar*, *burlar* are the used Portuguese words). *Driblar* (cheat, dupe) was the artists and intellectuals’ speciality. They were very active, particularly in Rio, and they found curious means to deal with the censorship. This was particularly true for popular music and its lyrics made of metaphors and allegories.

Art in Brazil, under the military dictatorship, acquired an enormous strength. According to a leading literary critic of the time, Roberto Schwarz, from 1964 to 1968, Brazil was more intelligent than it had ever been before. Indeed, the effervescence in all fields – music, theatre, movies – reached an apex in 1966-67, with many relevant cultural facts, such as *Terra em Transe*, by Glauber Rocha, *Tropicalism*, in music, *Opinião* and *Nova Objetividade*, important art shows which launched in Rio and São Paulo new tendencies in art scene, and the 4th National Salon of Modern Art of Brasília. This remarkable 4th Salon was referred to by Mario Pedrosa as the confirmation of the huge perspective seen from Brasília which could encompass Brazil as a whole. He made this statement impressed by the vital strength of Brazilian art translated into 1028 art works, and 363 artists, from all parts of Brazil, enrolled in the 1967 Salon. Then, it was possible to recognize a big fight between the more universal *avant-garde* tendencies and the regional pole, sustaining a specific and dialectal art (Pedrosa, 1981). This confrontation also divided the board of critics, who decided to share the first prize between Hélio Oiticica, from Rio, one of the most original Brazilian artists of the time, and João Camara, from Recife, who showed politically charged figurative panels.

Actually, these salons should have marked the first generation of young artists who studied and lived in Brasília at that time like, Luis Alphonsus, Luis Aquila, Guilherme Vaz, and Cildo Meireles. They went to school and studied art in Brasília, but they had to go to Rio to manage their careers. Brasília became a pole of irradiation of talents, escaping the suffocation of the city, and, at the same time, a pole for the reception of radical tendencies in the field of the arts.

The 1967 Salon, was a landmark in Brazilian art also because it assigned a special prize to the “sculpture-object” “Porco empalhado”, sent by an already famous artist, Nelson Leirner. It was a dead, dried big pig, filled with straw and embedded in a wooden box. The prize it got provoked an important polemic, led by the artist himself, and this fact could be considered – together with the work by Oiticica and Cildo Meireles – the stand that Brasília against the flow of the Brazilian “clean” art. “Purity is a myth”, is written on the “installation” called Tropicalia, by Oiticica, presented in the same year of 1967.

Despite the strong control over it, Brazilian art had an enormous vigor in these moments of transition. Together with these radical tendencies, emerged also a new pop figuration, renewing the links with the kitsch aesthetics, urban, mediatic landscapes, sustained by artists such as Duke Lee, in SP, and Rubem Gerschmann in Rio. In Brasília, the dichotomy between the clean and modernist principles (represented by the city itself) and the new avant garde, its dirty and disturbing propositions, became clear. Nelson Leirner, since the sixties, had shocked the public with both: installations and happenings with references to Dada and pop- kitsch, erotic and political figuration. In 1970, he wrapped the building of the Faculty of Urban Studies and Architecture in São Paulo (FAU-USP) up in five thousands meters of black plastic. He had an exhibition cancelled in Rio in 1998, accused of obscenity and of offending morality. His views on the contemporary art scene are very critical: “Art didn’t escape globalization. Even Eastern art was sucked in by the new markets (...) Latin American art is treated with a certain prevention, a sort of racism dictated by the first world”, said he in his interview (Bravo, November, 2001). He is also a severe critic of the art market: “The projection in the media is directly proportional to commercial interests.”

Cildo Meireles is an artist linked to Brasília, where he lived during the sixties, as a child and teenager. In Brasília, he had his first art classes, in public schools and in artists’ ateliers.<sup>6</sup> As a teenager he met intellectuals and artists related to the University of Brasília, in short courses and workshops. In 1967, at the age of nineteen, he went to Rio and, once there, he joined the most active art group constituted by the aforementioned

Oiticica, Pape and Clark. Like these artists coming from the neoconcrete movement, he was also interested in the mechanics of perception, in internal problems of art and space, always related to the public. *Espaços Virtuais: cantos* (Virtual spaces: corners), from 1967, is an example of an apparent architectural detail which creates a strong rupture between perception and reality. Since this first exhibition he revealed the consistency of his views and the innovation of his art projects, creating participatory works, forging unexpected responses to Brazilian cultural and political conditions of the time.

But his more disorienting works came later, in 1970, when he invented a most simple and surprising idea: *Insertions in ideological circuits*, with the “Coca Cola project”, and “Bill’s project”. Both intended to have a political effect. He used silkscreen to print on the empty Coca Cola bottles political messages, which could only be read when the bottle was full again. The same he did with the bills. He used a rubber stamp to put short questions about torture and disappeared people such as “Who killed Herzog?”, at the same time that an official version said this eminent journalist, taken prisoner, had committed suicide. This was a kind of guerrilla warfare, since this process of using previous and official circuits could be spread out and repeated by anybody.

“*Insertions in ideological circuits* concentrated on the idea of isolating and defining the concept of circuit, taking into account the preexistent system of circulation. In this sense, the slogans on the bottles and on the bills acted as a kind of mobile graffiti.” (Meireles, 2000, p. 13)

Also in 1970, another very impressive happening was proposed by Meireles: *Tiradentes: totem-monument to the political prisoner*. He attached 10 live chickens to a stake, brought gas and burnt them in front of the completely astonished public. This was a powerful demonstration against the military violence and a homage to a Brazilian eighteenth century political leader, hanged drawn and quartered by the Portuguese Crown.

His capacity of creating dense metaphors is also present in the installation “Sermon on the Mount: fiat lux”, which is a mountain made of boxes of matches, suggesting the possibility of explosion. This volume was encircled by strange men, their hands in a suspicious position, wearing suits and sun glasses, suggesting, by their posture, gestures and clothes, they were information agents, increasing the idea of danger, in a time of dictatorship.

*Tendency to the red* is composed by two ambients, completely covered, in their minimal details, by the red color, which provokes a strong feeling of terror, particularly when the public arrive in the second room,

where a bloody liquid was permanently pouring from the tap to the sink and from there to the floor.

His contemporary works are also very politically oriented, but now he is much more concerned with criticizing the contemporary conditions of the production of the arts, the mediators, art curators, and the explicit entrance of commercial interests in the field of the arts.

Despite his critical views on contemporary ways of dealing with art and the market impostures, Meireles' more recent works, such as *Marulhos*, return to his concerns about poetic spaces and reproduce in the whole floor of the gallery a dry Ocean, made of previously printed paper in different shades of Blue. There is a deck where the public walk and a sound installation with the word *water*, which is pronounced in many different languages.

Indeed, an important change in this balance has come out since the eighties, with the so called "democratization" and the prevalence of financial capital, new strategies of the art market and the entrance on scene of the big banks and multinational enterprises.

Until the fifties and mid-sixties, the Government was the most important institution to sponsor visual arts, in a confluence of interests between artists and the State ideals. In the seventies, despite the adhesion of a few group of consecrated artists to the official projects, the most significant artistic scene kept a distance from the Government, creating new specific spaces and alternative ways to show the irreverent conceptual works produced by that generation. In the eighties, the equivalence between art production and stock markets became clear. If pop art, during the sixties, blurred the limits separating serious art and mass culture, it kept its status of high culture, producing the fetishist "Distinction". Contemporary art argues the very dogma of high culture, exhibiting the commodity status of art works without any guilt or prejudice. Commercial art has no more a pejorative connotation, and it was proposed by artists such as Keith Haring, who opened an art shop in New York, Soho, in 1985, to sell his art in form of wallpapers, bottoms, t-shirts, bringing the Warhol's idea of a factory to its last consequences. Communication, media and art market became the investors' targets, values responsible for the redesign of attractive spaces and new institutions which are conceived as centers of consumption.

## Notes:

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1. Concretism emerged, at the same time, in poetry and in visual arts, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jean Arp, Kandinski, Van Doesburg) in Europe, particularly in Germany, Sweden and Switzerland where it flourished in exhibitions and manifestos. In Brazil, the group from São Paulo, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, Brothers, and Décio Pignatari were the first poets to adopt this poetic revolution of the fifties, searching for an agreement with the new urban industrial landscape. They were also seeking, in formal terms, to stress in poetry visual, and also vocal, values.

2. Aleijadinho, living and working in the second half of the eighteenth century in Minas Gerais, was a remarkable architect and sculptor, responsible for the most important sculptural ensembles in the rich mining zone.

3. Mário Pedrosa (1900-1982) was an eminent professional art critic, responsible for many important Salons and seminars. He was a member of the Communist party, going to exile in the forties, and in the sixties. In between he had a key role in the consolidation of both concretism and conceptual art.

4. Conceived by the notable pedagogue Anísio Teixeira, the University of Brasília has as its first Dean Darcy Ribeiro, a respected anthropologist who became a political personage.

5. Barra 68 is the last movie by the moviemaker Wladimir de Carvalho and narrates –with fragments of takes gotten at the time– the invasion of the University by the police. Wladimir de Carvalho's work is documentary and highly politically engaged. He was a professor at the University of Brasília until the nineties.

6. Cildo Meireles often refers to Felix Barrenechea, a Peruvian artist who came to Brasília in 1958 as his master. He organized the first art show in Brasília, in the same year, in the recently inaugurated Brasília Hotel (later destroyed by fire). He lived in Brasília until the eighties and then moved to New York.

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