

Alphabetizing the Museum.

Interventions by Lina Bo Bardi and the *Avant-garde na Bahia*

Catrin See Franz

Abstract*)



In July 1964, tanks were parked in front of the Museu de Arte Moderna, the museum of modern art in Brazilian Bahia that has been established in the half burnt down Teatro Castro Alves. Military forces guarded and celebrated the opening of an anti-communist propaganda exhibition, *Material Subversivo*, which united confiscated material of the Brazilian and global left and was supposed to prove why the recent military coup was necessary to prevent Brazil from becoming a second Moscow. Now the setting for the “documentation” of a Marxist world conspiracy, a few weeks earlier the museum and its surroundings has been still a place for rather innovative artistic, curatorial and educational drafts—under the direction of Italian architect, artist, curator, and more, Lina Bo Bardi, in collaboration with a strictly transdisciplinary "turma", a motley crew of collaborators, artists, educators or researchers.

*) You may find more details in my article *Northeasternized Modernism: Notes on an emancipatory modernist constellation in Brazil*, in: *Sweet Sixties*, ed. by Georg Schöllhammer and Ruben Arevshatyan, Berlin 2013, p. 70-80. (I attached the pdf)

The *Avant-garde na Bahia* was a kind of collective experiment, dedicated to fathom and boost the political potentialities of arts for the transformation of the society. Less through individual artistic practices but more through a collective labor of re-shaping and re-inventing institutions, whose symbolic orders was de-arranged consequently. First of all the order of the museum, making it a place of contemplation, harmony, hegemony. Instead of this Bo Bardi and her allies conceived it as a field of conflict and dissonance, fully aware of the colonialities of the arts and the symbolic and epistemic violence of the museum space. And they conceived it as a "school", addressing and engaging "o povo", de-privileged communities, confronting the local elites. Bo Bardi's museological, curatorial and educational propositions, somehow tested in the periphery in Bahia and transferred to São Paulo were obviously and productively informed and inspired by critical pedagogies like Paulo Freire's or Anísio Teixeiras; by the Movimento de Cultura Popular and its political alphabetization of the North East, by the students movement and its Centro Cultural de Cultura, by Antonio Gramsci and Mário Pedrosa.

My research is trying to re-construct the politics and practices of this "alphabetization" of the museum, contextualize them locally and historically and, particularly, re-frame them in the context of contemporary educational discourses and experiments. Somehow, it is about making an often ignored layer behind the acclaimed proposals by Bo Bardi visible, revealing hidden references. Like the hidden image behind Bo Bardi's famous display at the MASP, the "mar dos cavaletes", a sea of glass panels and, which has become an emblematic image in recent exhibition histories. The overlooked reference is an image of the "Escola Parque" in Salvador da Bahia, an experimental and pioneering modern school planned by Anísio Teixeira. Bo Bardi was enthusiastic about the Escola Parque and used an image of the newly opened school in an article about "School and Life", where she reflected on the necessity to create "a collective spirit of collaboration" in school.



Catrin See Franz

Catrin See Franz is a researcher based in Vienna. With an academic background in Latin American and cultural studies and practical experiences in the art world (e.g. documenta 12 or Viennale), her research interests range from Latin American, specifically Brazilian modernisms to today's art field and its institutions. She contributes to a critique of hegemonialities and colonialities within the field of arts and art education. She has published the book *Tupi Talking Cure* on Freud, Psychoanalysis and Brazilian modernism and is now researching the curatorial, museological and educational propositions for an "Alphabetization of the Museum" by Lina Bo Bardi and her allies in Brasil in the 1960es. She is head of the initiatives *kültür gemma!* and *oca: migrations, minorities, arts* in Vienna, promoting migrant positions in the art field.