

Another Roadmap School

Glossary

Un-doing Institutions

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**Figure 1:** A class of the ETPVP (School of Political Theatre and Popular Video) on April 10th 2018 at CAL. Personal archive.

The *Casa da Cultura da América Latina* (CAL) (House of the Latin America's Culture) is a museological space which is part of the University of Brasília (UnB) – one of the ten most important public universities in Brazil –, by means of the *Decanato de Extensão* (DEX) (Deanery of Extension) – a department below the Rectory, responsible for the social actions of the university with communities and publics out of the academic world.<sup>1</sup> It was created in 1987 – during the redemocratization of the country, after 30 years of militar dictatorship – after the *Festival Latino Americano de Arte e Cultura* (FLAAC) (Festival of Latin American Art and Culture) – an initiative of Laís Aderne, a very active Brazilian art educator at that time, who would be the first director of CAL (until 1989).

Since its first edition, FLAAC started to gather a collection of popular art and handicraft donated by the embassies of Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Equador, Mexico, Paraguai and Uruguai, as well as some Brazilian handicraft donated by different governmental programs and institutions. Together with those 150 pieces, there were

<sup>1</sup> Brazilian public universities are based on a tripod: Teaching, Research and Extension.

other 69 indigenous objects, selected from at least 07 different indigenous peoples who were born on current Brazilian territory. That ethnographic impulse was reinforced in 2002 by the donation of a collection gathered by the anthropologist and former UnB's professor Eduardo Galvão. Then other 346 objects were added from more than 09 different 'Brazilian' indigenous peoples. In the same year, other 315 items were added with the agreement to safeguard another collection of indigenous objects, this time gathered by the Centro Nacional de Referência Cultural (CNRC) (National Centre for Reference in Culture). Other 162 pieces from two 'Colombian' indigenous peoples were added in 1989, after the second edition of FLAAC. In parallel, an art collection has been formed since 1989, from different individual and institutional donations, more recently by former artist professors of the UnB (Acervo da CAL, 2016). Although the history of the collection may seem circumstantial, it is notable the effort of the initiative to build, since the late 1980s, a South-to-South politics in terms of art and culture exchanges.

Since 1988, CAL occupies a six floors commercial building in the city centre of Brasília, more particularly, at the *Setor Comercial Sul* (SCS) (South Commercial Sector). The building has an 80 square meters gallery on the basement, a small gallery like a showcase on the ground floor and another 80 square meters gallery on the second floor. It also has a same size multiuse room – generally used as a classroom or auditorium – on the ground floor. The other rooms or floors are used by the administration or other activities connected to the university but not necessarily related to CAL. One of the politics of the current director (2017-2020), professor Alex Calheiros, is to recover those spaces for the institution. As part of that politics, some rooms are now being used by invited collectives.

As part of the university, CAL has (in May 2018) around 12 officers who are stable public servants, distributed in areas such as administration, communication, conservation, production, and general services. There is nobody directly involved with education, although it has many educational opportunities. Moreover there are two or three trainees, besides the outsourced cleaning and surveillance staff, without any stability. Besides those resources and some maintenance provision, the institution has quite no budget or incomes. Only recently (in April 2018) its Association of Friends was constituted – from now on it is expected that some projects for funding can be applied. Meanwhile, its current programme of exhibitions is made possible with the partnership of different small supporters, and the collaboration of the own artists, other professors, as well as some volunteers. That is why most of the time its director is out of the institution, in search of support (from politicians, embassies, galleries, and so on), rather than involved with its everyday practices.

A different perspective in the short term is unlikely. The university (not mentioning the country) is going through some lasting financial crisis, with an expected debt of US\$ 26 millions by the end of 2018, a prospect of gradual strangulation for the next years, and some alleged threat of privatization, in the context of a drastic return of the neoliberal policies in Brazil. So, in relation to the UnB, CAL could be (not perverting its mission) an strategic means in defense of the public university. At least, it has the

potential to work as an interface with the city and, by extension, with some of its dynamics, interactions and controversies. Like many other campuses in Brazil, UnB is somehow detached from the city – considering the particularities of Brasília in terms of public space –, in a zone where the population in general does not frequent – what may corroborate a view of the university as elitist. On the contrary, CAL is located in a downtown square frequented by 200 thousand users per day, next to the crossing of the two main axis that structure the urban plan of Brasília – a context that suggests a variety of actions in terms of extension and research.

The SCS is actually not a retail quarter but a district with companies and offices distributed in a few more than a hundred buildings. A small number of restaurants, snack bars and other shops serves specially those who work in the area. According to the urban plan of Brasília, it is a zone for specific commercial purposes. That means the area cannot be shared with residential use. There are no neighbours around, except for the homeless. Hence the movement of people is concentrated on the regular business hours – which means that it is quite empty at night and during the weekends, when it is frequented by whores and junkies. Currently, there are two or three competing projects for the renovation of the sector. Some of them reserve a key role for culture in the process.

According to the imaginary of those who live in Brasília and know the institution, CAL is an art gallery more than a museum or a cultural centre. It is a place that presents mainly visual art exhibitions. But that scope is going through some changes right now. As an strategy to occupy the spaces recovered within the building, the current direction invited different collectives to be temporary residents at CAL. They are one poetry group (*Assum Preto*), two theatre groups (*NEM – Núcleo de Experimentação em Movimento* and *Terra em Cena*), a LGBT activist group (*Instituto de Memória LGBT*), and a group of architects and party producers (*Voxel Lab* and *Coletivo Labirinto*). The relationship between the collectives as well as between each collective and the institution is not so clear. Apparently they are like tenants, but without paying any rent. The School offers the place, some appliances, barely some communication. As a result, the activities of those collectives are not always addressed to the public. One of those activities, however, is the *Escola de Teatro Político e Vídeo Popular (ETPVP-DF)* (School of Political Theatre and Popular Video), a project of *Terra em Cena*.

The School is a free specialization-like course, restricted to students previously selected, but it eventually offers some open classes to the general audience. The calls for students are open, but they have to be militants of any social and/or cultural movement, teachers of public schools, or members of other political theatre groups. The course is made of three modules, that alternate between school and community terms. In the first module (in the second half of 2017) there were 25 students from: *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)* (Landless Worker's Movement), *Levante Popular da Juventude* (Youth Popular Uprising), *Movimento das Trabalhadoras e Trabalhadores por Direitos (MTD)* (Worker's Movement for Rights), popular, feminist and peripheral houses of culture like *Casa Frida*, *Casa Ipê*, *Comuna Panteras Negras* (Black Panthers Commune). Its goals range from

developing and practicing technical, theoretical and historical knowledge on political theatre and popular video with the students, to strengthening or even building a cultural circuit between different social movements. Eventually those goals can be more pragmatic, taking theatre and video as tools for political organization (mobilization and education).

The course, however, is not only (from the perspective of the institution) *addressed to* social movements. Among those involved with the School, some of the teachers militate for the social movements; some indeed have leading positions within it. For their turn, some students alternate with teachers in their roles. As militants, most of them are voluntarily taking part of the School, but some movements recognize their attendance as part of their tasks as kinds of movement's 'clerks'. The School itself has no clerks; all the secretary tasks are made by the coordinators, who are teachers, militants or students. As we can see, the positions overlap and alternate – what is typical of self-organized initiatives.

The School is a project of *Terra em Cena*, one of the residents at CAL. At the beginning there was an expectation that the different collectives could work somehow articulated. At the end, neither CAL takes part of the School, nor the School seems to take part of CAL. Their relationship is basically operational, limited to the circumstances of using the space; booking the common rooms, delivering releases, dealing with keys. Some conflicts with the exhibitions have been reported; in a place where spaces are limited, the occasional use of some reversible rooms by the exhibitions – which can be empty most of the time – might seem purposeless. In summary, it is a pending question how the School is part of CAL. On the other hand, to be at CAL is also to be at the university, as well as (metaphorically) in Latin America, as a network and legacy of social struggles – and maybe that is a CAL's cultural function.

In a context like that, the social movements are not necessarily willing to move the structures of cultural institutions. Of course there are questions that they could put forward. Although public universities in Brazil are based on Teaching, Research and Extension, the latter is the less appreciated of them. But the School is an opportunity to think the university in relationship with communities and publics out of the academic world. Why does not Extension lead the university activities? It is also an opportunity to rethink certain formats of the art field. Residencies, for instance, are not part of the movements' vocabulary, at least not in the same fashion. So a pending question could be: how are the next calls for residents going to be?

[to be continued and reviewed]