

Arte Povera /Arquitetura Pobre

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I. INTRODUCTION: LINA BO BARDI

Despite the fact that they discuss the confrontation of European modernism with the culture of developing countries, and address Brazil specifically, canonical anthologies on modernism eschew Lina Bo Bardi and her considerable body of work.¹ Educated in Rome in the 30's and working in Milan until emigrating to Brazil in 1946 with her husband, Pietro Maria Bardi, an art critic and collector, she literally embodies the meeting of Italian rationalism with Brazilian modernism and popular culture. Perhaps it is because she was not the first. The seeds of the progressive and traditional aspects of Fascist mythology had already been sown in Brazil 20 years earlier by Gregori Warchavchik, a Russian who had studied with the Futurists in Rome. His partnership with Lucio Costa, who would later become the head of the School of Fine Arts, both cultivated and was cultivated by a favorable environment for modernism 1930's, post-revolution Brazil. Both Kenneth Frampton and William Curtis recount the brilliance of the "young Brazilian followers of Le Corbusier," particularly Oscar Niemeyer.² The emergence of Brazilian modern architecture, spurred by Costa's invitation to Le Corbusier to act as an advisor for the Ministry of Education design team in 1936, the Brazilian Pavilion for the 1939 World's Fair in New York and Niemeyer's Casino at Pampulha all pre-date Bo Bardi's arrival in So Paulo.

Niemeyer clearly expressed misgivings in 1950 regarding the imbalance of "the technical and social forces" in Brazil and his desire to achieve "a kind of work which reflects not only refinements and comfort but also a positive collaboration between the architect and the whole society."³ And so, when Lina Bo Bardi says that the "Trianon Complex [MASP] is to replace, in its monumental sim-

plicity, today's so unpopular themes of rationalism...I would like the public to go there to see open air exhibitions and discuss things, listen to music, see movies."⁴ she not only echoes Niemeyer's earlier desire, but registers the crisis that came to modern Brazilian architecture just on the heels of her arrival. The visionary building projects of the Juscelino Kubitschek Presidency, especially, Brasilia, and, particularly at that time, Niemeyer's Palace of Industry for So Paulo were condemned decisively.⁵

Though it is also likely that Lina Bo Bardi was reacting to this criticism directly, the desire for the reconciliation of modernist structural principles with cultural traditions was an inheritance of her Italian rationalist education, albeit one which served wildly different political goals. 1930's Milan, where she did drawings for Gio Ponti and wrote articles for Casabella, (edited by Giuseppe Pagano and Edoardo Persico) and Domus Quaderns (where she would editor be named editor in 1941) was the site of the Persico and Marcello Nizzoli's "Medaglia d'Oro" room for the Italian Aeronautical Show. Moreover, her husband had written the pamphlet "Report to Mussolini on Architecture" which accompanied the show in his gallery of the Rationalist "gruppo 7". It is these past and continuing associations with avant-guard art and artists which Lina Bo Bardi brings with her to Brazil in 1946 and to her work in So Paulo and Salvador de Bahia until 1992.

II. ARTE POVERA / ARQUITETURA POBRE

Lina Bo Bardi (1914-1992) challenged the formal and material functionalism of International Style Modernism through the use of everyday materials re-invented in her work. Discussing the use of industrial black rubber for the museum floors and pedra-goias stone for the Civic Hall at the Museo

de Arte de So Paulo (MASP) [1957-1968], she coined the term, "Arquitetura Pobre" after the Italian art movement, "Arte Povera."⁶ A curatorial term, "Arte Povera," referred to the work of thirteen artists who first exhibited together in Italy in the late 1960's.⁷ The focus and mode of exploration and open-ended experimentation of these artists, working against theory in favor of a complete openness towards materials and processes resonates with Bo Bardi's documented attitude: "What is Theory? Let's set aside the idealistic definition of Theory, which invents a vicious circle by trying to 'theoretically' define 'Theory' as a distinct theoretical form of practice. For us, Theory is one with Practice -..."⁸ The term is compelling, both for its explicit relationship to the Italian art movement, "Arte Povera", and for the architectural characteristics it implies, such as the use of unfinished materials, of indigenous materials and the unexpected re-invention of found materials. The built work of Lina Bo Bardi in So Paulo and Salvador de Bahia, Brazil records a trajectory of intense material experimentation sympathetic to this appellation, using simple, local materials in innovative assemblies.

The similarity goes beyond material and process. The "Arte Povera" artists, poised in economic and political instability, dealt with the confrontation between "Mediterranean life" and "Western modernity." They explored the relation between art and life made manifest through nature, matter or cultural artifacts, and experienced through the body. The work dealt with both the natural and the artificial, the urban and the rural. Bo Bardi's architecture, particularly her work in Bahia, explores very similar themes; it has been described as a "second nature, in direct and open confrontation with earth and climate, overcoming the architecture-nature boundary to create an ambience through which life could flow."⁹

It is clear from these buildings and the text of her 1958 course, "The Theory and Philosophy of Architecture," at the Visual Arts School of the Federal University of Bahia, that Bo Bardi was in search of an ethical discourse in architecture. In the first lecture she laments that three months is not long enough to "build the foundation of the profession of the architect: its ethical and moral content."¹⁰ This ethos she shares more with Brazilian avant-garde artists of the period [1957-1969] "descended" as they were from Max Bill, artist,

architect, and the director of Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. His exhibition at the MASP in 1950 is seen as fostering a new generation of artists and the "Concrete movement," indicative of the contemporaneous desire of the period to go "beyond the ideological limitations of Modernism in favor of an effective participation of art in the construction of a technological society."¹¹

LLL. "THE HOUSE OF GLASS (1950-51)

"Lina is interested in the ambiguous, transient, mutable aspects of glass... the glass doesn't have the strict sense of liberating transparency called for in the 20's..."¹²

In her own residence, the intense natural environment of Brazil co-mingles with "technological" elements. Round, reflective columns (pilotis) that raise the house to tree-top height mimic and are lost in a forest of identically proportioned tree trunks. Reflections of leaves and trunks collapse onto a dynamic field of curtains, paintings, etagieres, sculptures and occupants on glass. Oliviera notes that this effect is repeated in the "Crystal Garden House" of 1958, irregardless of the fact that it does not use glass. The traditional wooden structure with brick walls is covered with "stones and ceramic fragments in the form of a floral mosaic."¹³

LV. MUSEO DE ARTE DE SO PAULO (1957-1968)

The proposed Museum is to provide an atmosphere, a conduct likely to create in the visitor a mentality prepared for understanding the work of art, and in this sense no distinction is made between an old or a modern work of art. With the same objective the work of art is not located following a chronological criterion but is presented almost deliberately so as to produce a shock, to awaken reactions of curiosity and investigation.

LINA BO BARDI

Bo Bardi's expressive drawings and texts related to the Museu de Arte de So Paulo (MASP) demonstrate a close affinity with the Neo-Concretist notions of performative interactivity between the art object and the spectator. Every drawing of this space depicts a different event. Bo Bardi imagines the space of the city as a temporal event. In a drawing dated 3/4/1972 she depicts a circus tent on the Belvedere and writes "Circo Piolin No Museu

de Arte de So Paulo." The building is effectively displaced, negated temporally by the circus, the popular festivity that inhabits the space metaphorically undoes the elitism associated with a modern museum.

The Museu De Arte De So Paulo (MASP) project began in 1957 and was completed in 1968. True to the bequest of the Sao Paulo family for the land and its Trianon "Belvedere" to be forever preserved, the Museum was designed to maintain the open land and vista over the city. With a clear span of almost 240 feet, with 16-foot cantilevers on either end and 26-foot ceilings, the MASP is a monumental modernist building resting on four concrete pillars connected by two beams of pre-stressed concrete on the roof and two large central beams which support the floor of the Picture Gallery and from which is supported the first floor Hall of Temporary Exhibitions. The Trianon Belvedere, below the soaring building is a monumental space, for gatherings and a sense of the "collective," of "Civic Dignity", as described by Bo Bardi.¹⁴ The Belvedere was "surrounded by plants and flowers, paved with stones in the true Iberic-Brazilian tradition. Areas are planned holding water, small ponds with aquatic plants."¹⁵ She chose to forego the expensive materials like the travertine, juparana stone and pink glass and satin Niemeyer used in his Casino at Pampulha, and used instead indigenous vegetation. Her intentions are made clear in a colored pencil drawing and several watercolors which show not only plants but Amazonian snakes and fowl. In all aspects, Bo Bardi remarked, "the building is an experiment in simplification where I was always opting for direct, raw solutions."¹⁶

In a small diagram of the elevation, the simplicity and strength of the gesture is reinforced by a blood-red overlay on the structural concrete elements. The space below sliced in two, the floating glass box and its outdoor twin. Red marks are also evident in another small drawing of the side elevation, though not on the same elements. The red dye of the brazilwood tree, along with coffee and rubber was one of the main cultivated resources of Brazil in the 1920's. That Bo Bardi chose to highlight the major structural elements in red can be seen as a coded reference to this, most basic Brazilian resource and the simple people who cultivated it. It also may be dismissed as a decorative gesture, but her remarks in the text defend against

this charge: " I made the most of my experience of five years in the Northeast of Brazil, a lesson of popular experience, not as folkloric romanticism but as an experiment in simplification."

For Bo Bardi, the drawings are both representational and a kind of coded message. The use of red in other drawings may serve to test this hypothesis. In the very interesting drawing of the Trianon Belvedere which shows the underside of the MASP as a reflective surface, where words float backwards and spirals proliferate, the red reverberates, pouring past the edges of the building like some kind of liquid illumination. The drawings of the theatre and small auditorium illustrate the importance of the space and the event. The depictions leave out the building and delineate the event primarily, and secondly its setting. There is almost nothing there but the platform on which the theatrical event takes place. Bo Bardi refers to Antonin Artaud and his conception of the "farmyard" as precedents for the idea of the "bare theater."

V. THE PICTURE GALLERY

No doubt in response to recent "renovations" of the Museu de Arte de So Paulo (MASP) and plans for changes to several of Bo Bardi's other projects, including the Officina Theatre, Gustavo Gili has devoted a double issue of their journal, 2G, to Lina Bo Bardi's built work. Olivia de Oliveira, the guest-editor, makes a compelling case for the restoration of the Picture Gallery, discussing the many aspects which made it at once unique and valuable but vulnerable to the commodity-driven logic of museum directors and developers in whose hands it fell victim. Oliveira makes a strong case for the restoration of the panels in her article. She discusses Bo Bardi's desire to create an "atmosphere" or ambience of closeness to the artworks, to bring the everyday juxtapositions of life and art to the museum. In addition, she points to the forum of the museum as the place where Bo Bardi's "rupture with the hegemonic idea of progress and the western model of an historical linear time" was strongest. It is in this light that her exhibition panels are understood in their full radicalism. Art education was not the instruction of a guided mass through a linear sequence, but the cultivation of the spontaneous discovery of the free individual. The artworks were encountered on their own terms, uncategorized by art historians or museum cura-

tors. Comparing the conception to Le Corbusier's Mondaneum or Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim, she finds in the experience of MASP, a similar idea of "progressive time that is continually amplified, in which building, visitor and time advance as one." Oliveira rationalizes the emotional appeal concerning the vulnerability of the Picture gallery made by Aldo Van Eyck in the earlier text, "The Superlative Gift". In it, he eulogizes the lost openness of the 200-foot-long Picture Gallery:

...responding to the vast space below, literally spanning it and almost doubling it, there is that great interior accommodating a miraculous sea of paintings- a kaleidoscopic spectacle exemplifying each individual item and at the same time transcending the painter's name, culture, period or style.

In a comment reminiscent of the "Arte Povera" artists concerning the role of representation in painting and the schism that the modern movement created, Van Eyck continues, calling the design effect a liberation of the paintings from walls, which allows the paintings to be seen, "not as windows onto another world, but ...[as] the tactile reality of their painted surface... - IN SPACE."¹⁷ In addition, the paintings are freed from their captioned labels, which are on the back rather conventionally adjacent to each painting. Encountering a painting this way, simply, freed of its history and categorization by painter or country and freed of its white planar background- the museum wall. The Picture Gallery registers Bo Bardi's formative experience; the similarities between the Picture Gallery exhibition design and the Persico & Nizzoli room from Milan are evident, but it also is related to and perhaps informed the aspects of avant -garde art movements that radically questioned the status of art in society and the gallery context in which it was experienced. After the Picture Gallery was finished, Brazilian artist like Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Helio Oiticica began to make inquiries toward environmental spaces and interactive installations.

NOTES

1 For example, William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* and Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture, A Critical History*.

2 Frampton, p.254 ; Curtis, "In Brazil, Lucio Costa and

Oscar Niemeyer also took Le Corbusier as their starting point..." p.333.

3 Frampton, p.256; Curtis, p.334.

4 Bo Bardi is referring here to the MASP building, the open space below it ("The Belvedere") and the base over which it sits, which is comprised of a large Civic Hall and two auditoria.

5 "... a riot of anti-social waste, lacking any sense of responsibility toward either the business occupant or his customers..." Max Bill, "Report on Brazil," AR October 1954, quoted in Frampton, p.257.

6 Lina Bo Bardi, "Sao Paulo Art Museum" in *Sao Paulo Art Museum (Lisbon, Portugal and Sao Paulo, Brazil: Blau Lda. and Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, 1997)*.

7 The critic Germano Celant defined the term in 1967. REF

8 Lina Bo Bardi, "The Theory and Philosophy of Architecture" reprinted in 2G : Lina Bo Bardi, *Built Work* n. 23/24, (2002:3/4) Olivia de Oliveira, ed. pp. 210-214.

9 Olivia Fernandes de Oliveira, "Lina Bo Bardi: Modern Movement as political attitude; extracts of investigation". (Re) discussing Modernism." *Universality and Diversity of Modern Movement in Architecture and Urbanism in Brazil*. Luiz Antonio Fernandes Cardoso and Olivia Fernandes de Oliveira, eds. Salvador, Mestrado em Arquitetura e Urbanismo da UFBA, 1977.

10 Bo Bardi, "The Theory and Philosophy of Architecture," p. 210."

11 Milliet,—"From Concretist Paradox to Experimental Exercise of Freedom" *Brazil: Body and Soul*, Edward J. Sullivan, ed., The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York, 2001. p. 391

12 Oliveira, Olivia de, "House of Glass, Sao Paulo, 1950-51", 2G : Lina Bo Bardi, *Built Work* n. 23/24, (2002:3/4). p. 25.

13 ...ibid, p. 42.

14 Lina Bo Bardi, "Sao Paulo Art Museum" in *Sao Paulo Art Museum (Lisbon, Portugal and Sao Paulo, Brazil: Blau Lda and Instituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, 1997)*. p. _

15 ...ibid. p._

16 ...ibid. p. -

17 Aldo Van Eyck, "A Superlative Gift" in *Sao Paulo Art Museum*.