

Architecture & the State:
Brasília as a Political Instrument

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Abstract

Previous research indicates that states seek to construct identities of a "nation" to legitimize the existence of that state as representative of that nation. Similarly, the state may attempt to alter an already existing identity. Building on previous studies, this thesis first provides an overview of the general ways in which states construct these identities. Following that there occurs an examination of the use of architecture by the state. This thesis then examines the use of architecture by the state in Brazil through the construction of the capital of Brasília. A "tour" of the city is provided through narrative text and accompanying photographs to illustrate the manner in which architecture was used in an attempt to reconstruct the national identity of Brazil.

Essentially, this thesis argues that the necessary conditions for the construction of a national identity must also exist for the reconstruction or alternation of a national identity and that the absence of these conditions resulted in the mixed success of Brasília as a political instrument.

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Adam Wygodny
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Chapter 1 – Introduction: Politics and Architecture

Introduction

Examining the relationship between architecture and the state provides interesting insight into the mechanisms of social and political control. Generally, to date there is a neglect of such an examination, with a few exceptions.¹ Although there currently exists a body of literature examining architecture through the lenses of social and political theory, and there exists a body of literature examining architectural projects originating from the state, much of the literature neglects to examine the relationship between the two.

Noting that "...critical contemplation of [the] concrete cities [of ancient Greece]..." was prominent during the Hellenistic period in which political philosophy emerged, Bickford comments that political theorists since then:

...focused on elements like the state,
the nation, the social contract, the

¹ For a concise critique and overview of this neglect regarding the French Revolution see: Leith, James A. "The Terror: Adding the Cultural Dimension," *Canadian Journal of History*. Vol. 32, No. 3 (December 1997): 315-337. Examples of texts that do examine the relationship between architecture and the construction of national identities include: Moyano, Steven Francis. *Karl Friedrich Schinkel and the Administration of Architectural Aesthetics in Prussia 1810-1840*. Ph.D. Dissertation [2 vols.]. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1989). Dent, Jonathan A. *Constructing the Modern Utopia: Soviet Architecture and Urban Planning, 1917-1932*. Ph.D. Dissertation. (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University, 1994). Shapiro, Ellen Ruth. *Building Under Mussolini*. Ph.D. Dissertation [2 vols.]. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1985).

individual, or the community...[while] the study of cities within the discipline of political science has been too often left to those who focus on the policy process and the efficient delivery of services.²

Furthermore, as Bickford notes, such was not always the case.

Indeed, in ancient times a relationship between governance and cities was clearly recognized. For example in the preface to the oldest surviving text on architecture, Vitruvius Pollio comments:

Imperator Caesar... I saw that you were giving your attention not only to the welfare of society in general and to the establishment of public order, but also to the providing of public buildings intended for utilitarian purposes, so that not only should the state have been enriched with provinces by your means, but that the greatness of its power might likewise be attended with distinguished authority in its public buildings...³

Within this brief passage from Roman times lies a truth that continues today. It is not just in the regal splendour of monuments through which the state reaffirms its authority; equally important are the often-overlooked

² Bickford, Susan. "Construction Inequality: City Spaces and the Architecture of Citizenship." *Political Theory*. Vol. 28, No. 3 (June 2000):355-376. p. 355.

³ Vitruvius, Pollio. *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture*. Vitruvius. Morris Hicky Morgan (ed.). (Cambridge: Harvard University Press. London: Humphrey Milford and Oxford University Press, 1914). Available online at [<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Vitr.+1.preface+1>].

works of basic infrastructure that make the governance of a people possible. As such the purpose of this thesis is not simply to examine monuments of the state, nor is it to simply examine the functional use of public works by the state. Rather, this thesis recognizes that every monument is a public work; and that every public work is also a monumental articulation of the state. Furthermore, this thesis will illustrate that the utility of such works does not remain within the domain of the functional—in the architectural sense of the term—but also occurs within the political spheres of colonization and the construction of collective and individual identities.

Architecture as Communication

The idea that architecture can serve as both a record and a guide is recognized by Roth, who notes in his introductory text titled *Understanding Architecture*:

Architecture is a nonverbal form of communication, a mute record of the culture that produced it. [One should recognise] the totality of the built environment as architecture, and the environment as a form of dialogue with the past and future...⁴

This idea of architecture as a form of communication—a form of collective memory—is of particular importance to the

⁴ Roth, Leland M. *Understanding Architecture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), p. 3.

ideas expressed herein. Indeed, if one accepts architecture as a form of communication then it becomes difficult to understand why those who seek to understand politics and the manner in which political systems are inculcated have long neglected such an examination.⁵

Indeed, it is impossible to gain a rudimentary understanding of a political system without an examination of the architecture produced under that system. Commenting on systems in general, Niklas Luhmann wrote:

The state of the system is always the result of its own operations [...] *it produces itself and, thereby, determines its own state.*⁶

Consequently, one can imagine not just the existence of a state as a political entity but also the existence of a state system, which is conceptually distinct from the system of states as posited in the field of international relations. Thus, this inquiry begins with the premise of the state as a system—that is, a structure that has agency—

⁵ In this light it is interesting to note that Vitruvius argues that it is the forum that should be the primary structure of a city with the treasury, prison, and courthouse being secondary to the forum and orientated in relation to it as well as to the relative "importance of the city." Following these in stated importance is the theatre although it is worthy to note that he allocated one chapter to the forum (Book V, Ch. 1) (in which he also discusses basilicas) and one chapter to the secondary buildings (Book V, Ch. 2). In comparison, Vitruvius dedicates five chapters (Book V, Chs. 3-8) to discussion all aspects of the theatre including its acoustics. In particular, see Vitruvius. *Op. cit.*, Book V. Available online at [<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Vitr.+5.preface+1>].

⁶ Luhmann, Niklas. "Why Does Society Describe Itself as Postmodern?" in William Rasch and Cary Wolfe (eds.), *Observing Complexity*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 37. Emphasis original.

and concomitantly it is self-constructing. The myths of state construction assume structural characteristics that affect the individual design of buildings under that system. Further explaining systems, Luhmann continued:

[The system] needs a *memory function* to discriminate forgetting and remembering. Its past is given as a highly selected present and, in this sense, as reality.⁷

As such, architecture precisely serves as a memory function of the state. The State selects projects and provides the means to bring them to fruition. These projects may mark great victories or even great defeats as a form of remembrance. Alternatively, the state may also decide not to produce a particular project or may abandon or demolish a project and in doing so forgets that which no longer serves its purpose. In this context, one can argue that architecture serves as one of the most important and powerful memory functions of the state.

Although one may argue that the documents of the state—its constitution, laws, orders and policies—serve as the most important memory function of the state, such is not the case. Such documents are often inaccessible to populations. Even though many are capable of obtaining the text of such documents, very often their meaning is

⁷ *Ibid.*

inaccessible even to the literate. Even documents deemed to be of significant importance--such as the constitution of a state--often have their content unknown by the populace.⁸ Furthermore, an examination of such documents will only reveal those laws that became codified and speak little of those laws, rules, norms and ideas that--although not codified--nevertheless govern the behaviour of people. Alternatively, one may consciously choose to remain ignorant of such matters and voluntarily refrain from educating oneself on such matters. Indeed, the same can be said of literature, art and music sponsored by the state.

Unlike documents that one can make inaccessible or readily destroy, architecture is to some degree accessible to all and has concreteness--the Vitruvian *firmitas*--that makes it difficult though not impossible to erase permanently. The built environment, however, is virtually unavoidable, as it constitutes the near totality of ones surroundings.⁹ Particularly within a city, one cannot step outside without encountering a structure of the state.

⁸ All too often students enrolled in introductory level classes in political science in Canada cite "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as guaranteed to them in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms when, in fact, s. 7 of the Charter guarantees "peace, order and good governance."

⁹ One may even argue that the built environment encompasses the totality of ones surroundings because even those aspects of the environment that one may consider "natural" have become altered to some degree by humanity. For example, even the atmosphere that surrounds us is altered by human actions. Although one may argue that the early

Although one can largely avoid encountering the laws and other arts of a state, one cannot readily avoid its streets, buildings and other infrastructural works. Indeed, recognition of this occurred in 12th century Europe when and where the highly decorated Gothic churches "...became a bible for the illiterate, [...whose] visual imagery was known and accessible to all—lord, merchant, servant, and serf alike."¹⁰ In modern times, Hitler viewed architecture as a way to "transmit his time and its spirit to posterity" as well as a way in which he could "fire his nation with the idea of a modern empire."¹¹

Thus the architecture of the state participates in the intimidation of the populace while reaffirming the legitimacy of the prevailing order. In this context, the architecture of the state possesses the essential characteristics for what Michel Foucault terms the "gentle way in punishment."¹² Specifically, Foucault identifies the essential characteristics of this approach to the governance of individuals as the following:

alterations to the atmosphere were unintentional because of ignorance of the effects of humanity's actions; the continuation of this behaviour despite its effects being known is a conscious alteration of the environment. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis the term "built environment" will refer solely to the deliberate construction of physical structures.

¹⁰ Roth, *op. Cit.*, p. 294.

¹¹ Speer, Albert. *Inside the Third Reich*. [Trans.] Richard and Clara Winston, (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company), pp. 55-56.

¹² Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*. [Trans.] Alan Sheridan (2nd Edition). (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. 104-131.

- 1) It must be as unarbitrary as possible;
- 2) It must use inducements as well as constraints;
- 3) It must be temporally modulated;
- 4) It must be seen as 'the natural result';
- 5) It must encode a pattern of self-correction into the populace;
- 6) It must replace old narratives with new ones.¹³

It is clear that the architectural projects of the state satisfy these conditions. Public buildings are present and all in their vicinity encounter them irrespective of age, economic status, race, religion, or any other factor often used to differentiate heterogeneity from a populace. The spatial orientation of public works provides rewards for obeying the 'proper paths' and disincentives for disobeying—e.g. walk here and you will reach your destination fastest; walk here and you will receive no protection from harms. As a result, those encountering the work correct their behaviour appropriately. Although public works largely lack locomotion, the movement of the populace through and around them provides them with temporal modulation.¹⁴ The building is tangibly present when one is in its presence and becomes iconic when one is not. Finally, public works form part of the continuing narrative of the state.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ For example, "moving sidewalks" although moving, lack locomotion but provides its users locomotion without movement.

Furthermore, the concreteness of architecture provides a long-term memory function of the state and the society in which what is remembered occurred. Indeed, this was something recognized as long ago as in ancient Greece as is evident when Critias, while telling of a conversation between Solon and a priest, quotes a priest as saying:

To get a view of their laws, look at the laws here; for you will find existing here at the present time many examples of the laws which then existed in your city.¹⁵

Although it might appear that his reference is to be taken literally, the passage that immediately follows implies otherwise. Specifically, he then goes on to say:

You see, first, how the priestly class is separated off from the rest, next, the class of craftsmen, of which each sort works by itself without mixing with any other, then the classes of shepherds, hunters, and farmers, each distinct and separate. Moreover, the military class here, as no doubt you have noticed, is kept apart from all the other classes, being enjoined by the law to devote itself solely to the work of training for war.¹⁶

In the passage above it is apparent that the priest is not referring literally to an examination of the laws but is

¹⁵ Plato. *Timaeus*. Perseus Project. 24a. Available online at [<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?lookup=Plat.+Tim.+24a>]. But see: Plato. *Timaeus*. Benjamin Jowett [trans.], The Internet Classics Archive (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Daniel C. Stevenson and Web Atomics, 1994-2000). Available online at [<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html>]. For a translation that lends itself tenuously to this interpretation.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

instead calling upon Solon to cast a glance upon what surrounds him—to look to the structure and organization of the city for an indication of not only the laws of that city but of those that "...then existed in [Solon's] city."¹⁷

Echoing this belief, Mumford wrote:

...buildings speak and act, no less than the people who inhabit them; and through the physical structures of the city past events, decisions made long ago, values formulated and achieved, remain alive and exert an influence.¹⁸

Indeed, Mumford precisely identifies the role of architecture as a component of the memory function of the state. More importantly, Mumford concurs that not only does architecture perform the role of a memory function but that its performance serves to keep those memories alive.

Another necessary component of a system is what Luhmann describes as the:

[O]scillator function to be able to switch from marked to unmarked states in all kinds of distinctions, in particular to switch from hetero-reference to self-reference and vice versa.¹⁹

In this context too, architecture serves as a function of the state system. Specifically, the architecture of the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History*, (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p. 113.

¹⁹ Luhmann, *op. cit.*

state acts to define the identity of the state and, by consequence, of the nation it purports to represent.

Whether it is a church, a statue, an administrative building or even something as apparently banal as a road or a power line, one cannot escape the buildings of the state. Citizens and aliens alike experience such works. These buildings pattern our lives and shape our perceptions of our roles within the state and the role of our State within the world at large. Ideally, citizens see the works as their own and take pride in the accomplishment of their state; or, they become alienated and threatened by the buildings and become supplicant. Contrarily, aliens look upon those works as alien to themselves. Thus the discreet components of the state system differentiate between sameness and other. In this manner, architecture also serves as an oscillator function of the state. Or, to return to Luhmann:

All these conditions apply to the societal system. The [societal] system is a nontrivial machine[...]an autopoietic system that produces and reproduces itself. It is a [sic] historical machine that has to start all its operations from a self-produced present state. [...] It constructs distinguishable identities to reimpregnate its memory and to limit the range of possible futures. *But it operates always in the present, never in the past and never in its future and*

*always in the system and never in the environment.*²⁰

That the system operates in the system and not in the environment does not exclude an ecological impact resulting from system operations. More specifically, one must differentiate between 'environment' as something that by definition surrounds a system and 'ecosystem,' defined erroneously as a "...biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment."²¹

Consequently, this thesis aims to shed light upon the manner through which the state uses architecture as a component of its system to construct identities of the nation. More specifically, this thesis examines the manner by which the construction of Brasília was used by the state to (re)construct the identity of the 'Brazilian nation'. As such, this thesis aims to bridge the gap between concepts discussed predominantly in political theory and

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 38. Emphasis added.

²¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Revised Eighth Edition. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996 [1924]), p. 275. Such a definition is erroneous because it considers the physical environment surrounding an ecosystem as separate and distinct from the ecosystem. However, such a view ignores the multiplicity of feedbacks that occur between organisms and the 'physical environment.' For example, the dropping of needles by conifers increases the acidity of the soil supporting them which in turn affects the ability of the soil to support the conifers and other biological organisms. Thus, the organism and what the definition in question considers its "physical environment" (that by definition surrounds the system) are not separate systems but rather sub-systems of a larger system.

those structures that people shape and which, in turn, shape peoples' conceptions of themselves.

Secondly, the increasing concern regarding the status of the living environment in general—and the role that the built environment plays within that greater milieu—and the traditional roles attributed to states and historic exploiters and more contemporarily (though far too infrequently) stewards of the ecosystem supports an examination of the manner in which the state manipulates locations to suit its purposes and objectives. In addition, the large or potential role that states can play in altering locations through the types of zoning laws it enacts, its ability to finance projects unrealizable through other means, and its ability to undertake projects that require planning under dramatically longer time horizons than is possible by private entities further supports an examination of this aspect of state activity. Finally, this thesis will construct a theoretical foundation upon which one can build further inquiry into the subject.

To accomplish these fundamental goals, an historic examination of the relationship between architecture and politics with a particular emphasis on the literature examining the use of architecture by the state follows.

Such a review reveals that there already exists an acknowledgement that architecture has been used in a political manner by the state. It will also become evident that those linkages are organic to the relationship between architecture and the state rather than a pathological instantiation of state policy. Finally, such a review will illustrate that the state uses architecture to not only control space over time, but also as an instrument in the mediation between populations and the state as well as between individuals and/or groups and themselves through the construction of identities.

The principal purpose for undertaking an examination of the general relationship between architecture and politics is to further the understanding of the methods that the state uses to construct the concept of 'the nation' in its populace. Secondly, it lays a backdrop for the examination of how these mechanisms operated in Brazil specifically. Brazil provides an interesting and unique case study for these because of the predominance of modernization projects in its political history—especially during the Vargas era. In this context the purpose of Brasília becomes clear as it speaks not just in the language of architecture but also in the language of modernization.

A more specific purpose for this examination is to provide context for the subsequent discussion on Brasília, which will shed light upon the specific relationship between the state and the populace of Brasília and between citizens and states generally. Brasília provides an interesting case study for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, it represents an attempt to construct a post-colonial identity, which presents unique challenges that much of Europe did not have to overcome. Secondly, it is a modern attempt at the construction of a nation. Although nationalism is a modern phenomenon, much of Europe possessed historical conditions that facilitated pre-modern proto-nationalist movements. Thirdly, Brasília provides an interesting case study because it attempted to construct an identity based on a prospective future rather than from a retrospective past or reflective present. Finally, Brasília is appealing as a case study because of its origins: carved out on a plateau and built as a single giant project.

Chapter 2 – The State & Architecture

The Concept of the State

This thesis concerns itself with the instrumental use of architecture and urban design by the state to achieve social and political objectives. Unfortunately, there is much confusion regarding the use of the word 'state.' Largely, this is because the term is often used to describe a number of different concepts. Although the different concepts described by the term are often similar, important nuances exist between them that are contingent upon the context in which one uses the term. Consequently, a clear explication of the term within the context of this work, by briefly examining the concepts of the nation, the people, and the state is imperative.

Noted historian Eric Hobsbawm distinguishes between nation, people and the state. Specifically, Hobsbawm insists that philologically the linkage between 'the nation' and 'the state' is relatively recent and that originally the nation was viewed as being distinct from 'government' or 'the state.'²² In particular, the nation was attributed to what one would consider 'a people'

²² Hobsbawm, E. J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: programme, myth, reality*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1990]), pp. 14-15.

whereas the state was seen as the mechanism of governance distinct from the nation.²³ Thus, a nation-state would occur when there is a correlation between the boundaries of the nation and the state in which the people composing that nation reside. However, Nettl is critical of the concept of the nation-state commenting on the emergence of what he terms "...almost a rule of nonnation-states."²⁴ However, this thesis takes issue with Nettl's statement. Specifically, such a statement presumes that there exists an objective notion of 'nation.' Instead, this thesis argues that the conception of nation is a construction resulting from active projects of the state. Furthermore, this thesis contests Nettl's claim that only in "... a limited continental part of Europe..."²⁵ has the state engaged in nation-building projects. Indeed, it will become evident that in Brazil the state engaged in a nation-building project through the construction of Brasília.

The Construction of Identity

If one is to argue—as this manuscript does—that the state uses architecture to construct the identity of the nation, then it is prudent to first establish that states engage in such projects generally before one asserts the

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

²⁴ Nettl, J. P. "The State as a Conceptual Variable." *World Politics*. Vol. 20, No. 4 (July 1968), p. 560.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 565.

specific use of architecture in such projects. In examining the origins of national consciousnesses, Benedict Anderson notes a number of contributory factors. In particular, Anderson argues that "popular national movements" began in the 1820s and that state projects "...developed *after, and in reaction to* [these]".²⁶ Fuelling the early popular proto-nationalist movements was the increased number of publications published in the vernacular.²⁷ However, Hobsbawm observes that "a proto-national base" was not a sufficient condition to the development of such identities and that "...nations are more often the consequence of setting up a state than they are its foundation."²⁸ As such, Hobsbawm illustrates through historical examination that states often preceded the conception of the nation that they claim to represent. Nevertheless, Hobsbawm also notes that:

While governments were plainly engaged in conscious and deliberate ideological engineering, it would be a mistake to see these exercises as pure manipulation from above.²⁹

Thus, the realization of neither a proto-nationalist movement nor the state was a sufficient condition for the

²⁶ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London, UK & New York, NY: Verso, 1991 [1983]), p. 86. Emphasis original.

²⁷ Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution*. (London, UK: Phoenix Press, 2000 [1962]), pp. 136-7.

²⁸ Hobsbawm 1992, p. 78.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

development of nationalism in a given people. Nonetheless, we can discern that the general sequence of events was that a proto-national movement first emerged, which was then followed by the development of a state in reaction to that movement. In turn, the state engaged in a nation-building project which portrayed itself as the protector and guardian of the nation. Thus one saw the development of emergence of new surveillance mechanisms, the augmentation of existing mechanisms and the expansion of those areas towards which the use of those mechanisms occurred.

Arnold further argues that it is necessary to differentiate between the projects of the new (post-colonial) and the old (European) states. Characterizing the former he observes:

...both a genuine, popular nationalist enthusiasm and a systemic, even Machiavellian, instilling of nationalist ideology through the mass media, the educational system, administrative regulations and so forth...[making]...many of these nations as projects of achievement of which is still in progress, yet projects conceived more in the spirit of Mazzini than that of Uvarov.³⁰

³⁰ Anderson, B. *op. Cit.*, p. 114. The essential difference between the two approaches is that Mazzini took a bottom-up approach that begins with the nation and leads to the development of a state representative of that nation. In contrast, Uvarov's approach (explained further in the body text) begins with an existing state and proceeds to construct a concept of a nation 'naturally' represented by that state.

That is, the foundation of these new states' nationalist policies were derivatives of the "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationality" policies proposed by Count Sergei Uvarov as a guide for the construction of a Russian nation.³¹ In nearly all instances of 'official nationalism' (that is, nationalism 'from above' rather than as a popular movement) and irrespective of whether it occurred in a 'new' or 'old' state, a defining characteristic of it was:

...an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community.³²

Arnold illustrates that the enactment of these principles occurred frequently during the major period of nation-building and these resulted in today's countries of Japan, Russia, Hungary, Indonesia, Peru, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia amongst others.³³

Architecture as Political Instrument

To better understand the use of architecture as a political instrument it is prudent to examine its implementation historically from the earliest times through

³¹ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 87. Although Catholicism substituted for Orthodoxy in the case of Brazil (as well as the rest of Latin America), it nevertheless served the same function as a homogenizing veneer, or as Hobsbawm writes, "...a paradoxical cement for proto-nationalism..." (*op. cit.*, p. 68).

³² *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

³³ *Op. cit.*, *passim*.

modernity. It is known that the use of architecture and especially monumental architecture as a political instrument has roots in antiquity. For Harold Innis, the motivation for these projects—particularly those of monumental capitals—"...reflected a concern with the problems of control over time and over space."³⁴ Specifically, Innis comments:

Cultural activity, evident in architecture and sculpture, capable of impressing peoples over a wide area, is designed to emphasize prestige. It becomes an index of power. A concern for continuity, the biological limitations of the patriarchal system as a basis for dynasties, and the difficulties of maintaining a high cultural level over a long period of time will involve an emphasis on types of architecture calculated from a control over time as well as over space.³⁵

Thus, the kings of ancient Egypt built temples and pyramids to symbolize "...the power of the absolute monarchy reflected in the monumental architecture of the pyramids..."³⁶ The Ishtar Gate through the walls of Babylon served similarly. The choice of stone for both resulted from the need to have the building exist through long expanses of time although the availability of stone as a choice was a result of

³⁴ Innis, Harold A. *The Bias of Communication*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1991 [1952]), p. 131.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 133.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

social and technological factors such as the availability of slave or low-cost labour as an example of the former and the invention of the wheel as an example of the latter. Architecture proved particularly suitable for such tasks as its longevity far surpassed other options such as writings, performances and paintings. Although the monumental architecture that occurred in Neolithic Europe preceded that of Mesopotamia and Egypt, the significance of those European works to the societies that built them is lost.³⁷ As well, the impulse to continue building such projects was lost too—at least until the idea was re-introduced by Rome. Thus, Karatani argues that the concept of state sponsored building projects in Western thought was likely imported to ancient Greece from Egypt.³⁸ For the ancient Greeks, the orientation of buildings in cities was around the *agora* (market), which served as the hub of social, economic and political activity with a temple overlooking the city from the highest ground possible. Furthermore, the buildings of the city were generally harmonious to the existing location with temples "...aligned on axes leading out to mountain

³⁷ For example, the remains at Carnac, France (~4500 BCE); Ggantija, Malta (c. 4000-2700 BCE); and Stonehenge (c. 2000-1500 BCE) predate or coincide with the intensive building periods of Mesopotamia (c. 3500-250 BCE) and Egypt (c. 4000-500 BCE). See Roth, *Op. Cit.*, ch. 9.

³⁸ Karatani, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7 citing Popper, Karl. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. (London, UK: Routledge, 1945).

peaks in the landscape..." and the surrounding buildings
"...were adjusted to the topography of the site."³⁹

The use of architecture by the state continued with the Roman Empire which also used public buildings—especially theatres, circuses and baths—to provide employment through their construction and distraction through their use.⁴⁰ Later, the Church of Rome continued the use of such projects in its struggle against "barbarism" with Gothic cathedrals whose stone construction "...emphasized permanence and durability"⁴¹ and this trend of building in style suitable for defensive fortifications continued throughout the Middle Ages.⁴² In Europe, church construction continued to be the dominant form of politically motivated works from the Byzantine period until the late Gothic period when the growing volume of trade and the population growth in cities along those trade routes created conditions that allowed civic (such as town halls) and commercial buildings (such as trade and guild halls) to become "[i]mportant expressions of municipal prestige and power..."⁴³ Although the building of churches remained significant, the increasing significance of the

³⁹ Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 235.

⁴¹ Innis, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁴² Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

⁴³ *Op. Cit.*, p. 313.

construction other public buildings would continue from the late Gothic period onwards.

The baroque period is of particular importance to the historic examination of the political use of architecture. For it is in this period that one finds constructs of grand opulence such as Château Versailles and more importantly, when a substantial militarization of cities occurred. This militarization expressed itself through the new city walls constructed to counter cannon fire and the promulgation of barracks, arsenals and parade grounds to house, supply and train soldiers.⁴⁴ In turn, a military approach to planning cities developed whereby whole areas were razed to make way for 'newer and better' designs.⁴⁵ As well, the influence of military building on civic building resulted in the incorporation of new materials (such as iron) and new (often mathematical) approaches to design.⁴⁶

Two important events occurred in the 18th century that are particularly relevant to the present discussion. The first came with the revolutionary ideas of the *philosophes*, namely Diderot, who argued for the restructuring of society

⁴⁴ Mumford, *op. cit.*, pp. 360-62.

⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 389.

⁴⁶ Collins, Peter. *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*. 2nd Edition. (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998 [1965]). p. 187, 196-97.

through "...deliberate and rational design..."⁴⁷ One may fairly question the degree to which such thoughts were revolutionary rather than evolutionary as, at their core, they merely extended the Baroque logic of the practices of the *ancien régime* in the areas of building and city planning to society as a whole. Nevertheless, they sufficiently spurred those whom the splendour of the *ancien régime* escaped to do away with it through the French Revolution.

The second major event was the American Revolution and with it came a new concept of what form a government should take. In turn, this gave rise to questions as to what structural forms best embody the spirit of the revolution. Chief amongst these questioners was Thomas Jefferson, who received the request to design the capitol of Virginia at a time when he was enamoured with Roman Classical design.⁴⁸ Similar attempts to create public buildings representative of the American "national character" would follow Jefferson's lead in adopting Classical Greek and Roman influences.⁴⁹ Indeed, Classical influences abound in the design of Pierre Charles L'Enfant for the buildings of Washington though the city plan itself was thoroughly

⁴⁷ Roth, *op. cit.*, p. 398.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 414.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 425.

Baroque in its grid-pattern and grand avenues facilitating movement and mobilization.⁵⁰

The mixing and matching of styles in L'Enfants's design for Washington could not have occurred much earlier than it had as it required the concept of eclecticism, which Jefferson developed through the *choice* of the Roman classical style ultimately selected.⁵¹ Previously, one built according to the style in use at the time one designed the building. One would not ask a medieval builder why they built in a Gothic style. If asked such questions the anticipated response was simply, "That is how one builds today." However, with eclecticism the style of a building became a more overtly conscious choice and the choice of which style (or even styles) to incorporate into a given design was "...chosen relative to the purpose of a building..."⁵² Nevertheless, this eclecticism is different from formal Eclecticism, or what some term Indifferentism as rationality rather than whimsy guided the decision.⁵³ That is, the choice to build something in the Classical style Rome was grounded by the belief that the principles of the Classical period—for example, democracy or

⁵⁰ Mumford, *op. cit.*, pp. 403-04.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 414-15.

⁵² Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁵³ *Op. cit.*, p. 117-18.

imperialism-guided the functions of the building it adorned.

The emergence of eclecticism as a concept greatly expanded the possibilities for the political utilisation of architecture. Previously, choices available to those wishing to use architecture politically were rather limited. One choice regarded the quantity of buildings for a specific purpose as well as their location. Examples include the decision to build sufficient numbers of forums to entertain the majority of the populace or whether a church or a castle will occupy the highest ground. A third option available was whether to adorn a building or leave it unornamented. Such questions often revolved around churches and the appropriateness of whether they should be simple or 'entertaining' in style, though in those instances when adornment was chosen it was not questioned as to what form the adornment should take. With eclecticism a new avenue of choice opened. As such, styles and adornments were selected according to the values and purpose of the building. Thus, Jefferson could and did choose the classical style—with its roots in the democracies of Athens and Rome—to represent the ideals of the new republic, though he need not accurately reconstruct

a building from that time: it was instead permitted to simply adopt its style.

Furthermore, the purposes for adopting a given style need not be the same for different buildings. As such, Classical influences would also occur in the work of Karl Friedrich Schinkel who became head of the *Oberbaudeputation* in October 1810 and sought to refine the Prussian nation through didactic exposure to cultural artefacts and refined aesthetics, which in turn served to transfer the culture of the state capital to the provinces.⁵⁴ Schinkel, who administered over all the projects of the Prussian state while he headed the *Oberbaudeputation*, believed firstly that Berlin, the capital of the Prussian state, was culturally superior to the provinces⁵⁵ and secondly, that the buildings of the state located outside the capital served as the artistic representative of the state to the provinces.⁵⁶ Thus, we have here two adoptions (by Jefferson and Schinkel) of the same style though for fundamentally different reasons. For Jefferson, the Classical style represented democracy; for Schinkel, it represented the cultural sublime. Of additional significance is that the approach Schinkel took served as a general model for state

⁵⁴ Moyano, *op. Cit.*, p. 12, 192.

⁵⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 85.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

building projects during Modern times generally, though this was most pronounced in the totalitarian regimes.

Indeed, totalitarian regimes utilized architecture as a political instrument at levels previously unseen. For example, artists sympathetic to the October Revolution in which the Bolsheviks successfully overthrew the Tsarist regime in Russia almost immediately called for a new architecture that broke with the aesthetics of the old feudal and capitalist regimes and better reflected the communal ideology of the revolution.⁵⁷ Though these early calls emanated from artists, the state soon echoed their calls and became an active user of architecture in 1920s as a constructor of identity with competitions for the construction of the Palace of Labour, the Lenin Mausoleum, and the Lenin Central Library.⁵⁸ Though many designs of this period of Soviet history claimed Marx as well as Engles and Lenin as sources of ideological inspiration, Dent notes that their origins are just as much a result of the general themes of the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution that ran through European society.⁵⁹ It would be

⁵⁷ Lizon, Peter. *The Palace of the Soviets—Change in Direction of Soviet Architecture*. Ph.D. Dissertation. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1971), p. 28.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp. 10-14.

⁵⁹ Dent, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

these principles of "rationality, economy, and efficiency" that would mark (or mar) the Internationalist Style.⁶⁰

However, it was the first attempt to construct the Palace of the Soviets—designed by Boris Yofan—which ushered in a new era of propagandistic building in the Soviet Union.⁶¹ Though its construction began, the onset of war interrupted it. Notwithstanding a new design competition—whose result Stalin approved—the Palace of the Soviets was never built. Indeed, the Palace of the Soviets may be one of the most significant buildings that was never built. Nonetheless, the neo-classical spirit of the Palace of the Soviets would be reflected in the Soviet Pavilion of the 1937 World's Fair in Paris (also designed by Yofan) as was the Stalin Plan for the reconstruction of Moscow.⁶²

Just as in the Soviet Union, the fascist states of Europe would engage in substantial building projects, most pronounced in Germany under the National Socialist (Nazi) regime as well as under the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini in Italy. During the 1920s, there was competition as to which style best represented fascism. On one side were people such as Antonio Sant'Elia who vociferously attacked neoclassicism and instead argued for

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Lizon, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

⁶² *Op. cit.*, pp. 145-6.

a modern approach.⁶³ On the other side were those who advocated neoclassicism as representative of the grandeur of the ancient empires that fascism sought to restore. Although Mussolini began by favouring modern futurism, a conflict arose in 1937 between the futurists and the fascists who eventually dismissed the former as "anarchic, modern and arbitrary...[that is,] fundamentally un-Italian and anti-Fascist."⁶⁴ As a consequence, the debate ended in the 1930s with neoclassicism the style of choice in fascist European states.⁶⁵

For Hitler the choice was an easy one and prevarication was unnecessary. Neoclassicism was inherently Germanic in Nazi racial mythology while the Internationalist Style—whose inspiration came from 'the Jew Karl Marx'—was little more than another instance of abstraction and perversion resultant from incapacities to appreciate Nordic conceptions of beauty and art.⁶⁶ In both Italy and Germany, a marked tendency towards gigantomania

⁶³ Sant'Elia, Antonio. "Manifesto of Futurist Architecture." in Luciano Caravello and Alberto Longatti (eds.), *Antonio Sant'Elia, the complete works*. (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 1998): 302-03.

⁶⁴ Fraquelli, Simonetta. "All Roads Lead to Rome." in Dawn Ades, Tim Benton, David Elliott and Iain Boyd Whyte (eds.), *Art and Power: Europe under the dictators 1930-1945*. (London, UK: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p. 133, n. 21.

⁶⁵ Shapiro, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁶⁶ *Der Ewige Jude*. Dir. Fritz Hippler, Deutsche Filmherstellungs- und -Verwertungs- GmbH, Berlin (DFG), 1940. Although a venomous propaganda piece, it illustrates—particularly in the latter half—the Nazis' perceived relationship between Jews, Marxism and modern art and architecture.

prevailed, which was strikingly similar to the architectural tendencies of the Soviet Union at the time.⁶⁷ To add another twist to the disjunction between style and ideology, it was the United States which seized upon the Internationalist Style, particularly during the post-WWII Cold War era for its embassies that "...became symbols of the United States and its desire to be perceived as an energetic and future-oriented nation."⁶⁸

Although the notable practitioners of the International Style such as Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), Walter Gropius, and Ludwig Mies (van der Rohe) were socialists, their advocacy of revolution was entirely limited to the artistic sphere. Nonetheless, the sympathies of Gropius and Mies were reason enough for denying them work in Nazi Germany. Furthermore, the proponents of the International Style irrespective of their ideology could not escape the quagmire of what Jacques Ellul terms "technical universalism."⁶⁹ The guiding principles at the core of the Internationalist Style were firstly, that a normatively optimal architecture exists;

⁶⁷ One cannot help but notice the similarities between the German and the Soviet pavilions at the 1937 World Exhibition in Paris. See plate 210 in Frampton, Kenneth. *Modern Architecture*. 3d ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992 [1980]), p. 219.

⁶⁸ Loeffler, Jane C. *The Architecture of Diplomacy*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), p. 8.

⁶⁹ Ellul, Jacques. *The Technological Society*. [Trans. John Wilkinson]. (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 116.

secondly, that the rational application of technique would result in such architecture; and thirdly, that the discovered technique was applicable to all. Although indicative of technical universalism, the Internationalist Style was not a result of what Ellul terms "automatism" or the inevitable elimination of choice by technique.⁷⁰ Thus, Roth comments critically of the International Style:

It was not the inevitable result of new materials, but simply another style; not a radical new conception of architecture, but an iconoclastic image of the modern age which as often as not was unbuildable. And it was rooted in ideas that had nothing to do with architecture. From capitalist industrial production it had adopted the notion that lean and maximum efficiency was *always* best...Because of the implicit faith in technology, architects in the mid-twentieth century stopped bothering to think about the relationship of a building to its climatic or environmental setting...⁷¹

Nevertheless, such an attitude was in complete concordance with the thinking of the time. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between the aesthetics of the architecture and the ethical ideals forming the foundation of that work. However, this thesis adopts the position of "moderate autonomism" or the belief that:

...moral criticism of works of art is legitimate as is, of course, aesthetic

⁷⁰ Ellul, *Op. Cit.*, p. 80.

⁷¹ Roth. *Op. Cit.*, p. 480.

criticism...[but]...it is never the moral component of the criticism as *such* that diminishes or strengthens the value of an artwork *qua* artwork.⁷²

In this light, the criticisms of Roth *vis a vis* the Internationalist Style are unjust because the moral and ethical foundations of the movement's works are not sufficient grounds to dismiss those works in their totality. Indeed, one can apply the same principle to the analysis of architectural projects undertaken by the state. That is, moral criticism neither of an architectural project by the state nor of that state itself, is insufficient grounds to dismiss the political strength of the work. One can find the moral principles underlying the construction of Nazi death camps, Crusader strongholds, or even contemporary highways reprehensible but that does not detract from their efficacy as political instruments. Moreover, multiple groups may look to the same work as provided moral legitimation to their cause.⁷³ Nonetheless, the moral association of a work can impact its political efficacy. A prime example of this is the Statute of

⁷² Anderson, J. C. and J. T. Dean. "Moderate Autonomism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (April 1998): 150-166, p. 152.

⁷³ See for example, Robert J. van Pelt, *The Case for Auschwitz*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002) for the extreme case of those who negate the existence of the Holocaust looking to Auschwitz as legitimizing their views. Van Pelt demonstrates the opposite contention: surviving architectural evidence confirms the existence of industrialized murder and raises further questions about modernity and human values.

Liberty, in which the moral association of the monument abroad increases its political efficacy domestically.

Summary

What is evident from the above examination is that the state is understandable as a system that uses architecture as an operand in its functions. More specifically, the state uses architecture as an instrument to construct identities of the nation and that it began to do this as a reaction to early proto-nationalist movements that threatened the legitimacy of the existing orders. To this extent, one can speak of a:

...will to architecture that is renewed with every crisis—a will that is nothing but an irrational choice to establish order and structure within a chaotic and manifold becoming, a will that is only one choice among many.⁷⁴

The basis for early uses of architecture by the state derived from the construction and function of the buildings themselves. After all, what was Rome without its baths, forums and other works? However, with the onset of modernity a series of fundamental events occurred that opened new possibilities. Firstly, principles of engineering originating from the military became introduced

⁷⁴ Karatani, Kojin. *Architecture as Metaphor*. Sabu Kohso (trans.), Michael Speaks (ed.), (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1995), p. 18.

into architecture. Secondly, the concept of 'rational design' entered architecture. Thirdly, the concept of eclecticism entered architecture thereby disaggregating form from function—at least until the rise of the Internationalist Style would bring about purified function as form. As a consequence of these events the state could utilize architecture not simply to construct an identity of the nation but could consciously choose the characteristics it would take (though the ideology of the state rarely corresponded to the ideology of the architects whose designs it appropriated). Conjunctively, these factors gave rise to the Internationalist Style of the 20th century. This style was unlike previous approaches to building as it looked forwards (rather than backwards) and embraced a technologically dominated future guided entirely by function. Thus, if one accepts that architecture is used as a political instrument of the state and one accepts that the state is conscious of this when deciding upon whether and which projects to engage in, then one can safely presume that the architecture produced through such projects in some way represents an ideal of that state.

However, merely stating that such architecture represents an ideal does not provide any indication of what sort of ideal that state is attempting to represent to

observers of the structure. Consequently, the examination of Brasília that follows will both explore the moral foundations of Brasília as well as provide an aesthetic tour of the city while illuminating the interplay between the two. Following this exercise it will be evident that Brasília was, in fact, an attempt by the state to construct the identity of what is 'Brazil'. Furthermore, it will be evident that foundation of the identity that the state attempted to construct was not based upon what Brazil was before the city's construction. Nor was the basis what Brazil was at the time of the city's construction. Instead, the basis for the identity was what Brazil was to become. However, it will be clear that Brazil has not come close to approximating the ideals embodied in Brasília and consequently the city stands as a monument to the failed instruments of the state.

Chapter 3 – Touring Brasília

With the requisite background of the relationship between the state and the architectural projects undertaken by states it is now possible to cast a glance upon the city of Brasília. A brief discussion of why the city is worthy of examination precedes a discussion of the historical context in which the decision occurred to build Brasília. Following the historical examination of the events leading up to the city's construction is a tour of the city, which attempts to illuminate the essential qualities of Brasília. Finally, a discussion of the city's efficacy as a social and political instrument is offered. Following this chapter is a photo-essay that further expands upon the ideas discussed herein.

Reasons for Examining Brasília

Brasília is an interesting case to examine for a number of reasons. Firstly, as a monumental capital city Brasília was to serve functionally—as the location of the federal organs of governance and administration—but also symbolically as a referent for the nation. However, unlike other monumental capital cities such as Ottawa, St. Petersburg, Washington or Canberra, Brasília is unique because from its very inception its design looked forward

into the future rather than backwards into the past.⁷⁵ Thus, while Washington 'speaks' in the language of the classic republic, Ottawa and—until recently—Canberra 'speak' the language of gothic parliamentarianism, and St. Petersburg largely 'speaks' the language of baroque eminence; Brasília speaks the language of modern futurism.⁷⁶

A second reason for examining Brasília is that its purpose was not simply to serve as a monumental capital, but to serve as monumental capital of a new state whose past—as a Portuguese colony with an economy run on slavery—left little to acclaim.

The Significance of Brasília

The significance of Brasília is two-fold. Firstly, it is arguably the ultimate concretization of a modernist project both in terms of architectural style as well as urban design. Examples of the former include the major buildings of the city that were designed by Oscar Niemeyer while Lucio Costa's design of the Plano Piloto exemplifies the latter. Along both axes it exemplifies modern building

⁷⁵ Although the current Parliament House in Canberra features an international modernist design, the building is relatively recent having only come into use in 1988. Before then, the government sat in what is now Old Parliament House, which is decidedly Classical in its exterior appearance but with an interior that clearly refers back to the British parliamentary tradition.

⁷⁶ Other capitals also "speak" but some, such as London or Paris, largely existed before their status as capitals and consequently are not as appropriate as a basis for comparison with Brasília.

and planning techniques. Secondly, it too is exemplary of a thoroughly modern attempt at nation-building. It both illustrates a Jeffersonian attempt at constructing the identity of the nation through the nation's constructions and also an example of what Virilio terms "endo-colonization", which is the colonization by the state of its own territory and citizens.⁷⁷

The Context of Modernism

As an instantiation of modernism, Brasília is an example *par excellence*. Indeed, Brasília has been called "...the most complete example ever constructed of the architectural and planning tenets put forward in [Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM)] manifestos."⁷⁸ As such, Brasília received the status of being a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1987 thereby reaffirming its pedigree.⁷⁹

However, an examination of Brasília illustrates that the city is not merely a concretization of modernist architectural thought but instead transcends architectural

⁷⁷ Virilio, Paul and Sylvère Lotringer. *Pure War*. [Trans.] Mark Polizotti (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1983) p. 19.

⁷⁸ Holston, James. *The Modernist City: an anthropological critique of Brasília*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 31.

⁷⁹ World Heritage Committee. *Report of the World Heritage Committee*. 11th Session. UNESCO Headquarters. 7-11 December 1987. (Paris: UNESCO, 1988). SC-87/CONF.005/9. Available online at [<http://whc.unesco.org/archive/repcom87.htm>].

modernism as a symbol of modernism in the grander meta-theological meaning of the term. Brasília is not just an instantiation of the modernist principles of planning and architecture; rather, the construction of Brasília, the decision to engage in the construction, and the city itself represent a significant instantiation of the political and social principles of modernism. In particular, Brasília represents an attempt to construct an identity of a nation through the construction of a capital for that nation's state.

Moreover, Brasília represents an attempt to construct an identification of the nation as modern and separate from its 'under-developed' past. For example, noted Brazilian diplomat and writer José Osvaldo de Meira Penna⁸⁰ argued that Rio de Janeiro was obsolete as a capital; its appropriateness limited to "a Brazil without substantial road, rail, nor air transportation networks and wholly dependant upon ship transport that would (in the near future,⁸¹) no longer exist."⁸² Penna also considered the

⁸⁰ An immensely interesting individual who has a website is available at [<http://www.meirapenna.org>].

⁸¹ Although bus and (for the wealthy) air travel are commonplace in Brazil at the time of writing, railways there are largely abandoned. Nevertheless, signs on the highway into Brasília's Plano Piloto (Pilot Plan) continue to read "*Ferrodoviária*" (Bus & Train Station) despite the heavy rust on the tracks and the general absence operations.

⁸² My own translation from Portuguese of: Penna, José Osvaldo de Meira. *Quando Mudam as Capitais*. (Rio de Janeiro, 1958), p. 15. The original follows: "Num Brasil sem transportes ferroviários, rodoviários aéreos e

desire to stay in Rio an organizational weakness likening the behaviour to "crabs grasping for the beach [against the forces of the tide]." ⁸³ There are a number of interesting points here. Firstly, one sees clearly that Brasília was to represent all that Rio did not. Secondly, one also sees that the notion of Brasília was, from its very inception, prospective in that it was to project what Brazil was to become.

The Context of Nation-Building and (Endo-)colonization

Closely tied to the context of modernism is Brasília's position with the context of nation-building projects. Epstein notes that in addition to believing that moving the capital from the coastal city of Rio de Janeiro to the interior of the country would aid in asserting the sovereignty of Brazil over the states of the west and north of the country, Rio de Janeiro was seen as a problematic capital:

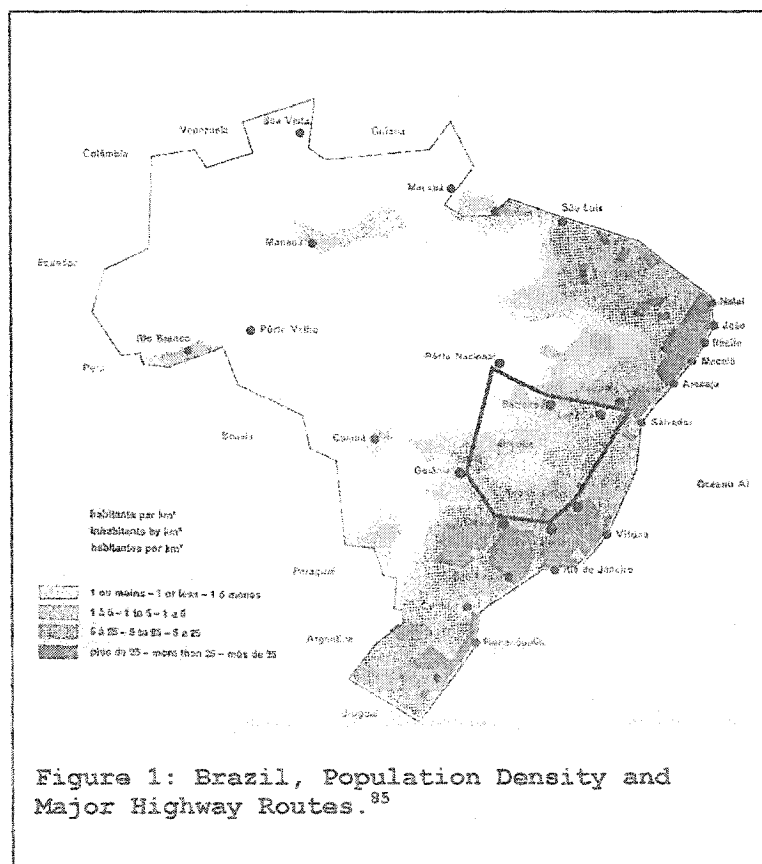
Rio, a port and cosmopolitan center, was always the point of contact with foreign influences, both from the political point of view and from that of high culture (Pfeifer 1964: 389-

dependendo inteiramente da cabotagem, o Rio de Janeiro é evidentemente mais próximo das Capitais estaduais do que o Planalto de Goiás. A cabotagem como meio de transporte e não a potencia naval é, em tais casos, o fator decisivo. O ponto é importante na apreciação do problema da mudança da Capital do Brasil pois sabemos que uma das fraquezas de nossa organização reside em continuarmos, "como caranguejos", agarrados as praias."

⁸³ *Ibid.*

390). The desire to possess a distinctively Brazilian capital, a city immune to the less constructive forms of foreign influence, was important.⁸⁴

Thus, the need to move the capital to a location nearly equidistant to the state capitals as well as to one with readily accessible transportation routes served to rationalize the project (see Figure 1). Another argument made by Penna in favour of a new



capital was that the location of a capital central to and independent from the existing territorial components of the country was a necessary condition for the proper functioning of a federation.⁸⁶ Furthermore, he attributes

⁸⁴ Epstein, David G. *Brasília, Plan and Reality*. (Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1973), p. 28; citing Gottfried Pfeifer. "Quelques remarques a propos de Brasília." *Caravelle* 3: 386-390.

⁸⁵ Source: Costa, Lucio, et al., *Brasília*, (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Divisão Cultural, 1970).

⁸⁶ My own translation from Portuguese of: Penna, *op. cit.*, p. 23. The original follows: "...a criação de uma Capital artificial, especializada, situada em posição mediana e independente da configuração territorial

the early recognition of this to the Inconfidência Mineira⁸⁷ (Mineiran Conspiracy) of 1789 when declining markets for metals and gems in combination with the colonial elite's dislike of then Governor Luis da Cunha Meneses' tendency to favour his friends rather than themselves and the increase of the annual tribute to the crown; all of which threatened the existing Mineiran elite.⁸⁸ Later events in the political history of Brazil give added weight to the argument. These include the competition between São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul for the pre-eminent position within the federation beginning at the turn of the 20th century and culminating in a full scale revolt throughout the country's regions and the revolution of 1932, which began as a revolt of São Paulo against the federal government.

Historical Background

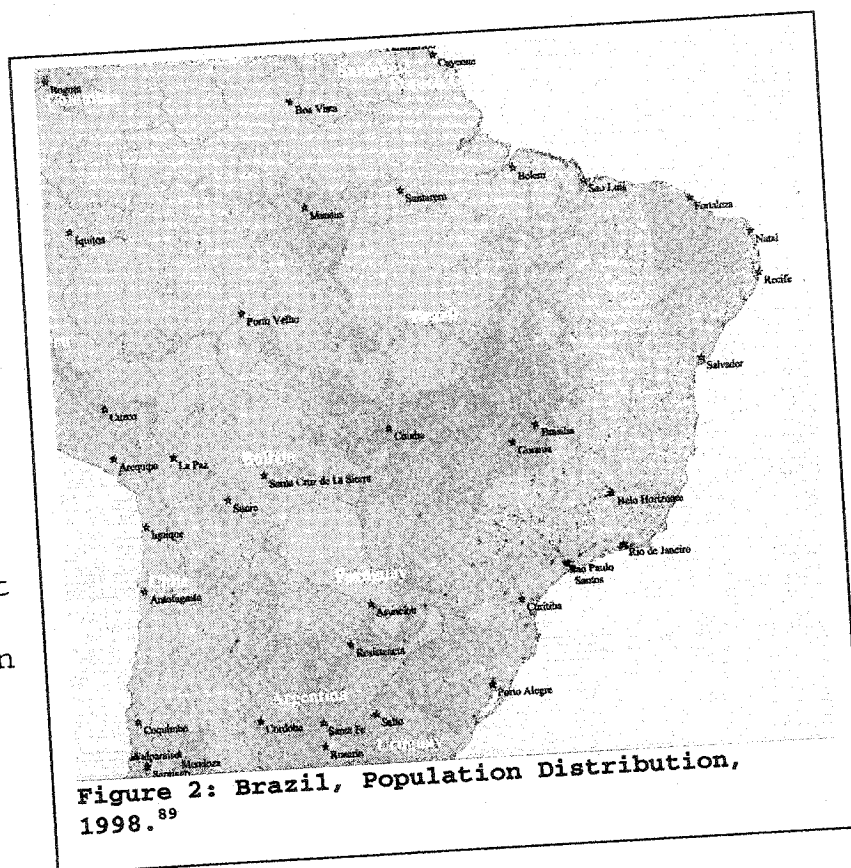
Preceding the conception of Brasília the creation of an ideological and mythological foundation occurred.

do conjunto do país, e condição *sine qua non* para o funcionamento normal de uma Federação."

⁸⁷ Penna. "Brazil builds a new capital." in Costa, Lucio, et al., *Brasília* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Divisão Cultural, 1970), document not paginated.

⁸⁸ Fausto, Boris. *Historia do Brasil*. 10th Edition. (São Paulo, SP: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2002), p. 115-6. It is also noteworthy that the Inconfidência Mineira resulted in the creation of the mythic figure of Jose Joaquim da Silva Xavier—better known as Tiradentes (the tooth-puller)—who was the only member of the conspiracy executed and is often depicted as resembling Jesus Christ but sometimes like George Washington.

Although Brazil is vast in size, like Canada, it had much of its population concentrated in a geographical area that is but a small fraction of the total area of the country.



Largely and still to this day, much of the population resides near and along the coast in the centre-south region of the country with much of the western and central areas of the country relatively uninhabited (see Figure 2).

The remoteness of the western and central regions and their lack of European inhabitants gave rise to two distinct visions of these lands. Firstly, there existed the mythical vision of the interior as a Garden of Eden or El Dorado created by writers such as Henry Walter Bates,

⁸⁹ Source: Hearn, P. Jr. et. al. *Global GIS database. Digital Atlas of Central and South America* [CD-ROM], (Flagstaff, AZ: USGS Flagstaff Field Survey, 2000).

the Baron of Marajo, Juan Martinez, and Tavares Bastos.⁹⁰ Secondly, there existed visions of the territories as what Alberto Rangel termed *Inferno Verde* (Green Hell).⁹¹ Or, as a place that "...in the end manifests nothing but fatal hostility to those who foolishly defy its mastery."⁹² Even as late as 1970 Penna continues to describe Goiás and Mato Grosso as "still inhabited by savage Indians or covered with impassable forests."⁹³

Yet another reason given was the need to integrate the territory with the nation. In this context Brasília would serve as a catalyst for the colonization of the interior as well as a base supporting that project. Thus, Steiger notes that Brazilian geopolitical thinkers such as Martins de Almeida argued that the creation of an integrated territory required that the coastal states recognize the

⁹⁰ Steiger, William Raymond. *What Once Was Desert Shall Be a World: Getúlio Vargas and Westward Expansion in Brazil, 1930-1945*. Ph.D. Dissertation. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1995), pp. 13-16. Citing: Henry Walter Bates, *The Naturalist on the River Amazons* (London: J. Murray, 1863; reprint ed., New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1989). Jose Osvaldo de Meira Penna. *Utopia brasileira* (Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia Ltda, 1988). Aureliano Cândido Tavares Bastos. *O Valle do Amazonas*, 2a Edição (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1937). José Coelho da Gama e Abreu, Barão de Marajó, *As regiões Amazônicas: estudos chorographicos dos Estados do Gram Pará e Amazonas* (Lisbon: Imprensa de Libanio da Silva, 1895).

⁹¹ Rangel, Alberto. *Inferno Verde: scenas e scenarios do Amazonas*, 2ª Edição (Rio de Janeiro: Typographia Minerva, 1914), p. 109. Cf. Steiger, *Op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

⁹² Steiger, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁹³ Penna, *op. cit.*, document not paginated.

centrality and importance of the interior to the Brazilian state.⁹⁴

Constitution of 1891

Although Brazil became independent in 1822, it remained a monarchy under the rule of Dom Pedro I, after his father, Dom João IV, returned to Portugal once Napoleon's armies no longer posed a threat to his crown. It would not be until 1891 when the Republic of Brazil formed following the deposing of Dom Pedro II. The revolution that led to the creation of the republic was met with resistance by the Monarchists who went so far as to argue that the Republicans were "...inept, selfish, and dangerously unBrazilian."⁹⁵ What is particularly interesting in the Monarchists reaction was the characterization of the revolutionaries as being "unBrazilian." Here one sees the precise pattern of state expropriation of popular proto-nationalist movements discussed earlier. The issue of the capital's location emerged after the—this time successful—revolution with Article 3 of the Constitution of 1891 setting aside a large

⁹⁴ Steiger, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁹⁵ Skidmore, Thomas E. "The Historiography of Brazil, 1889-1964: Part I." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*. Vol. 55, No. 4 (November 1975): 716-748, p. 722.

area of land for the future capital.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the laying of the first corner stone for the capital did not occur until 1922 whereupon the project languished.

Vargas's Territorialization

Although Brazil's Constitution long called for the movement of the capital; Steiger identifies two significant stages that made possible the construction of Brasília.⁹⁷ The first stage occurred under Vargas (1938-1945) and involved the engineering of the myth of Brasília. The second stage occurs much later under Kubitschek. Although the construction of Brasília would not occur until after Vargas' time as President, and even though much of the ideological and mythological groundwork necessary for the construction of the city was laid before the Vargas Era, it was under Vargas that the ideological and the mythological conjoined with an active project of state- and nation-building in what was termed the *Marcha ao Oeste* (March to the West). Or as Steiger writes in his investigation of Vargas' policies to territorialize Brazil:

Connecting with the universal will to find the new world and conquer the last frontier, the March to the West celebrated the possibility of Man's triumph over nature with the aid of the

⁹⁶ Penna. "Brazil builds a new capital." in Lucio Costa, *et al.*, *Brasília* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Divisão Cultural, 1970), document not paginated.

⁹⁷ Steiger, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

state, "the absolute victory of man in the forest with the help of the Estado Novo."⁹⁸

That is, the interior was a standing reserve of resources realizable only through the application of technique and statist corporatism, which combined were powerful enough to transform the Green Hell into an earthly paradise.

Concomitantly, Steiger describes the *Estado Novo* (the New State) as:

A unified plan of government capital investment, import-substitution industrialization, and strategic nationalization [that] not only revitalized and diversified the Brazilian economy, but also permitted the "inculcation of the ideology of development" among the population.⁹⁹

Finally, Steiger notes that it was during this period that "...for the first time a president [of Brazil] had spoken of a crusade that linked westward expansion with the solidification of the state."¹⁰⁰ Vargas also used architecture politically with "...the Modern style of building [representing] a national standard, both stylistically in terms of its design and as expression of

⁹⁸ Steiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27. Citing Francisco Galvão, "O homem e o deserto amazônicos," *Cultura Política*, June 1941, 50.

⁹⁹ Steiger, *op. cit.*, p. 148, citing Richard Bourne, *Getúlio Vargas of Brazil, 1883-1954: Sphinx of the Pampas* (London: Charles Knight & Co., Ltd., 1974), p. 210.

¹⁰⁰ Steiger, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[his] political intentions to modernize Brazil..."¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, Vargas' attempts were largely unsuccessful in redistributing the population towards the western areas.

In fact, much of the internal migration during that period was from the north to the centre-south states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and beginning in 1933 to São Paulo.¹⁰²

Kubitschek's Decision

The second stage, occurring under Kubitschek, involved the construction of Brasília by operationalizing the ideational groundwork laid by Vargas. More specifically Kubitschek "...took Vargas' myths and turned many of them into reality, institutionalizing myth and the pursuit of History as part of the role of the Brazilian state."¹⁰³ In particular, this involved the construction of the myth of Brazil as a singularly integrated territory under the control of the federal government that is in contrast to its colonial condition of scattered settlements (primarily) in the coastal region; or power struggles between regions whose oligarchs competed with each other. To this end, the movement of the capital from the coastal city of Rio de

¹⁰¹ Wright, Steven David. *Brasília in context: The dissemination and character of modern architecture in Brazil*. Ph.D. Dissertation. (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000), p. 83.

¹⁰² Fausto, *op. cit.*, p. 389-90.

¹⁰³ Steiger, *op. Cit.*, pp. 33, 34.

Janeiro to the central location where Brasília stands today served as "...a means to create not only the polity of a centralized state but also the civilization it will rule."¹⁰⁴

The relative absence of myths in Brazilian history made their creation necessary. Specifically, Evanson notes that the settlers of other former New World colonies such as the United States "...arrived in...family groups...intent on permanent settlement."¹⁰⁵ Continuing she writes:

Brazil, by contrast, was settled by men with no ideological quarrel with the old world, no set of new ideals or principles to separate them from their countrymen in Portugal. Brazil tended to attract, not families seeking a permanent residence, but single men intending a temporary sojourn before returning to Europe. In Brazil, the transition to political independence was made without the extended and violent crisis which might have compelled a conscious examination of national identity and purpose.¹⁰⁶

As such, it was necessary to construct the idea of Brazil and Brazilian: as a state, as a nation and as a people. However, such a myth was not just a retrospective of what Brazil was but rather was prospective of what Brazil was to become. Affirming this Braund writes:

¹⁰⁴ Holston, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁵ Evanson, Norma. *Two Brazilian Capitals: Architecture and urbanism in Rio de Janeiro and Brasília*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p.73.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Indeed, the new capital was conceived, in the spirit of its foundation, as a symbol of Brazil's development and national unity, as an affirmation of the grandness and vitality of the country, of its abilities and its confidence in the future.¹⁰⁷

That Brasília was part of a prospective myth is in complete concord with Kubitschek's approach of borrowing an emphasis on "development and order" from the Partido Socialista Democrática (PSD) and the Partido Trabalhadores Brasileiro (PTB) emphasis on social planning and bureaucratic unionism.¹⁰⁸ In addition, Kubitschek made the construction of Brasília one of the six goals of his *Programa de Metas* ("Program of Goals") along with energy, transportation, agricultural development, industrialization and education.¹⁰⁹ Automobile production was a key component within this plan and Kubitschek successfully increased domestic production as well as consumption of automobiles and related goods.¹¹⁰ In fact, many of these goals mutually supported each other and Brasília's design reflects its context in relation to the 'automobilization' of Brazil. Kubitschek approached these goals through policies of import substitution, the promotion of foreign direct

¹⁰⁷ My own translation from Portuguese of: Braund, Yves. *Arquitetura Contemporânea no Brasil*, 3d ed. [Trans.] Ana M. Goldberger. (São Paulo, SP: Editora Perspectiva S.A., 1999), p. 183.

¹⁰⁸ Fausto, *op. cit.*, p. 424.

¹⁰⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 425.

¹¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 428-29.

investment by multinational corporations and investments by state-owned corporations into less profitable sectors of the economy.¹¹¹ Although strongly opposed by the right-leaning União Democrática Nacional (UDN),¹¹² the mechanisms to build the new capital began to turn with the appointment of Dr. Israel Pinheiro da Silva as head of the Campanhia Urbanizadora da Nova Capital (NOVACAP) in August of 1956.¹¹³ Pinheiro also went on to serve as the first mayor of the completed city.

Costa's Plan & Niemeyer's Vision

With the decision made to move the capital to a new location, the task of its design and construction necessarily followed. As Brazil's constitution at the time limited the presidency to a five year term and prohibited the serving of two consecutive terms, it was necessary for Kubitschek to build Brasília quickly. Kubitschek approached Oscar Niemeyer to be the director of architecture for the project though Brazilian law required that all public building projects be open to competition. Though many protested the absence of an open architectural

¹¹¹ Lima, Paulo-Tarso Flecha de. "Liberalism versus Nationalism: The Prodevelopment Ideology in Recent Brazilian Political History (1930-1997). *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 29, No. 2 (June):370-388, pp. 375-6.

¹¹² Fausto, *op. cit.*, p. 430.

¹¹³ Wright, Steven David. *Brasília in Context: The dissemination and character of modern architecture in Brazil*. Ph.D. Dissertation. (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2000), p. 165.

competition, the protests were ignored by Kubitschek.¹¹⁴ However, the decision regarding city plan was left to open competition.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, Niemeyer was to begin designing some of the buildings immediately.¹¹⁶

The decision of the judging panel resulted in immediate controversy. Along with Niemeyer, the panel included one representative from the Institute of Brazilian Architects, another from the Society of Engineers, and three foreign judges.¹¹⁷ Although Costa's plan won first prize in the competition, the representative from the Institute of Brazilian Architects refused to sign the decision and accused Niemeyer of conspiring with the foreign members of the panel.¹¹⁸ The allegations of bias had some foundation because Costa and Niemeyer had a long-standing working relationship and, in fact, Niemeyer was at one time a student under Costa.

Costa's submission to the competition clearly illustrates the whole project of constructing Brasília. In particular, he acknowledges the project as:

...an act of conquest, a gesture after
the manner of the pioneering colonial
tradition, and the competitors'

¹¹⁴ My own translation from the Portuguese of: Braund, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹¹⁵ Wright, p. 165. Evenson, pp. 117-8.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

¹¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 166.

conception of what such a city should be would [sic] most important.¹¹⁹

From its inception, Costa attempted to frame his plan as a religious or mythological vision. For example, the foreword to his plan references Jose Bonifacio, who claimed that in 1823 he saw the plan for Brasília laid out in a messianic dream. Another tie to Christianity is embedded within the plan itself; that is, the layout of the city formed "the sign of the Cross itself."¹²⁰ In this way, Costa continued the approach of Kubitschek that linked "...New World mythology and development theory in linking the foundation of a capital city with the foundation of a new Brazil."¹²¹

Also noteworthy is that Costa framed the plan as essentially self-constructing. Thus, there was no planning in the placement of key sectors and zones; instead they "automatically fell into place..."¹²² Furthermore, Costa envisioned that just as the sectors of the city fell into place automatically, so too would the development of the interior necessarily follow. This is one of the more striking examples illustrative of how Brasília fit into the modernist mentality.

¹¹⁹ Costa. "Report of the Pilot Plan for Brasília." in Costa, *op. cit.*, document not paginated.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Holston, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹²² Costa, *op. cit.*

Costa neither saw Brasília as just another city nor as just another capital. Instead, he viewed the city as a "...civitas, possessing the attributes inherent in a Capitol."¹²³ As such, Brasília was to serve as the cornerstone for a civilization rather than just as the capital of the country. Moreover, it was to serve not just as the capital of a civilization but rather of a Christian civilization. Thus, the cross-design was to serve as beacon beckoning the civilizing of the un-Christian inhabitants of the untamed land—the Green Hell.

Although Costa acknowledged that the design for the *Plano Piloto* (see Figure 3) found inspiration in the Cross, to many

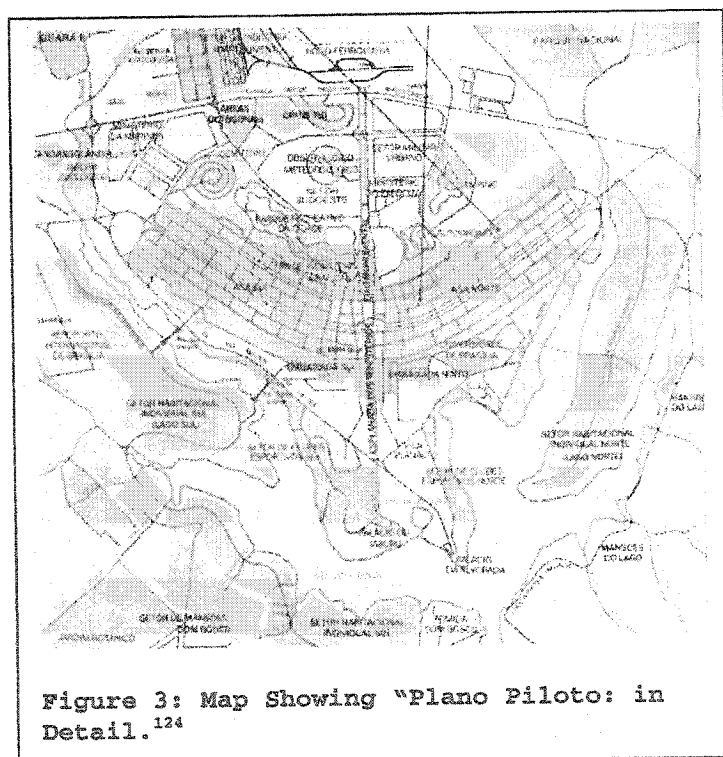


Figure 3: Map Showing "Plano Piloto: in Detail."¹²⁴

observers it also resembles an airplane though Costa makes no such mention of a relationship between the two. Nevertheless, a comparison of the placement of buildings

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Source: TeleBrasília, Accessed online at [http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/3416/mapa2.jpg] on 6 August 2003.

within the plan contextualized within Brazil's social and political condition at the time and the functional role of an airplane's components results in an uncanny resemblance.

Thus, one finds the *Praça dos Três Poderes* (Plaza of the Three Powers)—containing the buildings for the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the federal government—in the cockpit position, from which orders to control and steer the plane (and metaphorically, the country) emanate. Forming the fuselage of the plane are the ministerial buildings, with those of the military, the Ministry of Justice, and Itamaraty (the foreign affairs ministry) occupying the first-class positions closest to the cockpit. The sectors for embassies and the residential "superquadras" form the wings of the plane, whose role is to keep the plane aloft and allow it to roll to the left or the right.¹²⁵ Finally, the tail section, which actually steers the plane, contains the military barracks as well as industrial buildings. Although the design for Brasília occurred during Brazil's brief period of democracy between 1945 and 1964, its layout unintentionally portended what

¹²⁵ The superquadras were designed by Niemeyer along socialist principles. Each superquadra featured units of different sizes and layouts so that each building could easily accommodate persons of different social and economic classes. Rather than deny the existence of these classes, the superquadras sought to bring them together under one roof so that it would not be possible to determine from which group an individual belonged solely by the building in which they resided.

was to come with the seizure of power by the military in 1964 that led to approximately 20 years of rule by the military regime.

While Costa's layout that tied Brazil to a (Christian) mythology of the past, the architecture of Niemeyer tied Brazil to a mythology of the future. A life-long socialist, Niemeyer designed the buildings of Brasília as a reflection of those values. In this regard, Niemeyer wrote:

I thought—and I still think—that without equitable distribution of wealth, spread over all sections of the population, the basic aim of architecture, that is, its social foundation, was bound to be sacrificed and architecture reduced to merely satisfying the whims of the leisured class.¹²⁶

It is in such a spirit that Niemeyer sought to design the buildings of Brasília. Furthermore, Niemeyer:

...understood the significance of past creations as symbolic of a civilization's epoch and, principally, a permanent mark of its beauty, as opposed to the transitory character of functionality and utility.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Niemeyer, Oscar. "About my work" in Costa, Lucio, et al., *Brasília* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Divisão Cultural, 1970), document not paginated.

¹²⁷ My own translation from Portuguese of: Braund, *op. cit.*, p. 181 citing *Módulo*, No. 4 (March 1956), pp. 37-45. The original follows: "...ele compreendeu o significado das criações do passado enquanto símbolo do estagio de uma civilização e, principalmente, o valor permanente de sua beleza, oposto ao caráter transitório dos fatores funcionais e utilitários."

In conjunction with Kubitschek's aforementioned goals for both his presidency and for Brasília it is clear that there occurred a conscious attempt to use architecture for the purposes of the state and that Niemeyer was well aware of this. Kubitschek was also aware of Niemeyer's style and approach when he asked him to design the buildings of Brasília as Niemeyer had designed buildings for Kubitschek while he was governor of Minas Gerais. As such, Niemeyer was in the enviable position of having his fame precede him.

Niemeyer's distinct style is apparent in all the buildings of Brasília he designed. Bruand identifies three themes amongst Niemeyer's buildings in Brasília: patio palaces (*palácios de pórticos*), buildings of simplicity and volumetric play (*edifícios compostos por jogos de volume simples*), and religious buildings of the pilot plan (*edifícios religiosos de planta centrada*).¹²⁸ Examples of the first type include *Palácio da Alvorada* (Palace of the Dawn), the *Palácio do Planalto* (Palace of the Plateau), the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* (Federal Supreme Court), the *Palácio do Itamaraty* (Palace of Itamaraty), and the *Palácio da Justiça* (Palace of Justice). The works of the second type include the *Palácio do Congresso* (Palace of the

¹²⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

Congress), the *Praça dos Três Poderes* (Plaza of the Three Powers), the *Eixo Monumental* (Monumental Axis) itself, the *Teatro Nacional* (National Theatre), and the residential *Superquadras*. The religious buildings of the Pilot Plan include *Capela Nossa Senhora de Fátima* (Chapel of Our Lady of Fatima) and the *Catedral Metropolitana de Nossa Senhora da Aparecida* (Metropolitan Cathedral of Our Lady of the Appearance).

Walking Brasília

Although the examination of a map of a city permits one to have a general idea of that city, a map is no substitute for a tour. Specifically, Michel de Certeau differentiates between 'maps' that provide "spatial directions" and 'tours' that provide "operational descriptions".¹²⁹ Whereas a map identifies the spatial organization of a location, a tour attempts to convey what are the essential qualities of a place. The provision of a tour of Brasília will facilitate the understanding of its special role as a social and political instrument.¹³⁰

Brasília contrasts starkly with the other large cities of Brazil such as São Paulo (see Figure 4) and Rio de

¹²⁹ Certeau, Michel de. *The Practice of Everyday Life* [Trans. Steven F. Rendall]. (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 119.

¹³⁰ This tour of Brasília is based on research notes taken during a visit there in July and August of 2002.

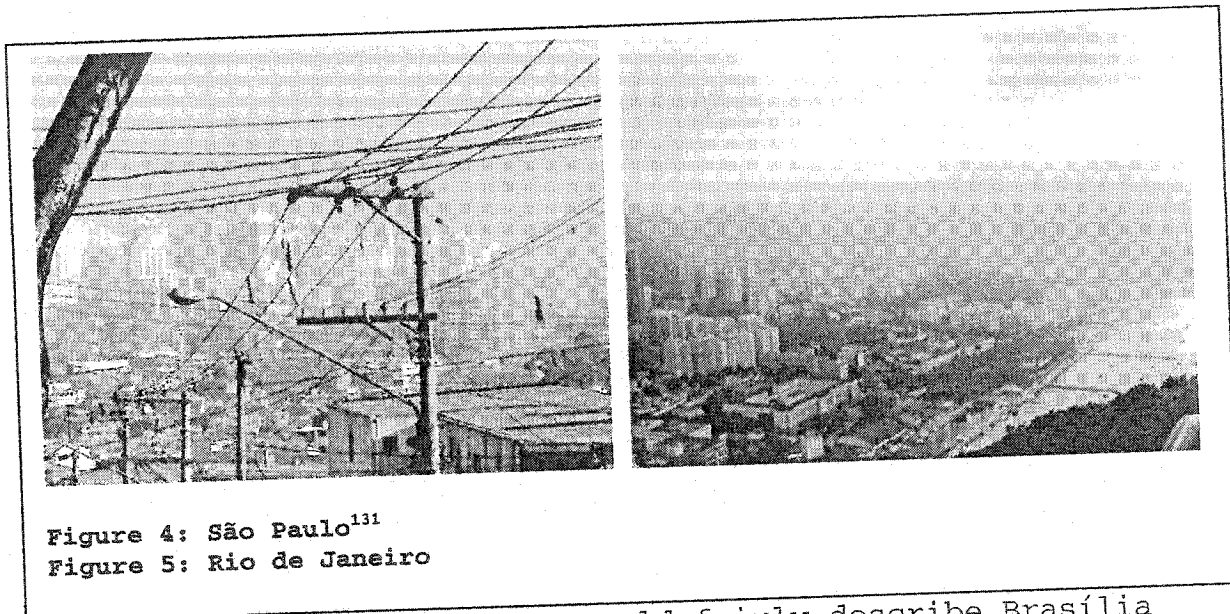


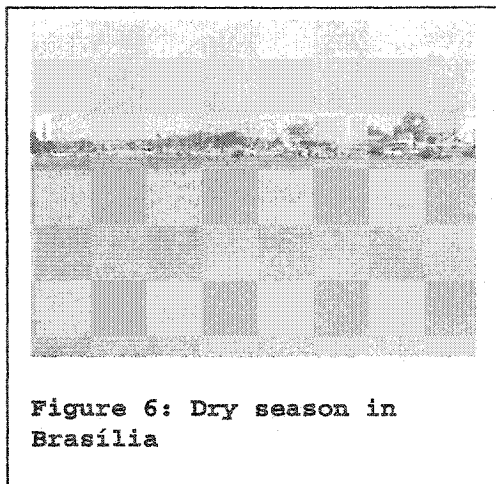
Figure 4: São Paulo¹³¹
 Figure 5: Rio de Janeiro

Janeiro (see Figure 5). One could fairly describe Brasília as one of the most lifeless cities in the world. During the dry season the sun scorches the earth daily. Surrounding the city are grasslands so parched and yellow that they appear as though they will spontaneously ignite at any moment.

The dead fields around the city provide a most appropriate tableau for the dead space of the city itself. The emptiness of the sky above is the only thing that matches the vastness of the geography on the plateau. The emptiness surrounds oneself on the drive from the bus terminal to the *Plano Piloto*—a trip whose most prominent feature is a large oddly located Petrobras facility where there is neither an oil field nor a port anywhere nearby. Even stranger is the highway sign pointing the direction to

¹³¹ Photographs by Adam Wygodny.

the *Rodoferroviaria* (Train and bus station) where there are no trains running and the tracks have long rusted over. In this sense, Brasília continues to claim its legacy of perpetually representing a future still to come.



Here, in Brasília, the streets seem devoid of life. It appears impossible to live in this city and, in fact, many of the people that came here never had any intention of living here. Rather, those that came here did so—and still do—to earn enough money to enable them to live *elsewhere*.

Whereas the air of São Paulo chokes with ash and exhaust, the air of Brasília chokes with heat and dust. Although one can escape the heat, one can never escape the dust. The infernal red dirt is everywhere (see Figure 6). It tints sidewalks, shoes and clothes. It coats the nostrils, hands and face. And over time, it erodes the buildings here too. In some way, it is the land claiming back stolen space.

Driving along the *Eixo Monumental* we first encounter the *Capela Nossa Senhora de Fátima* and shortly after that, the *Memorial Juscelino Kubitschek* (JK) (see Figure 7), which is a later addition to the city. The latter—with a statute of Kubitschek looking out over the city he was responsible for building—is far more impressive than the former. So too does the *Memorial dos Povos Indigenas* (Memorial of the Indigenous Peoples) fall victim to the scale of the JK Memorial.

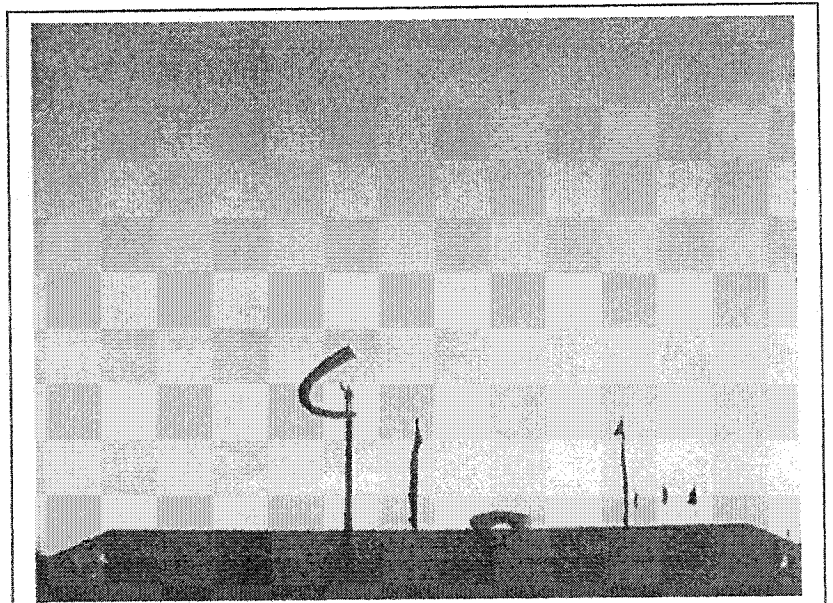
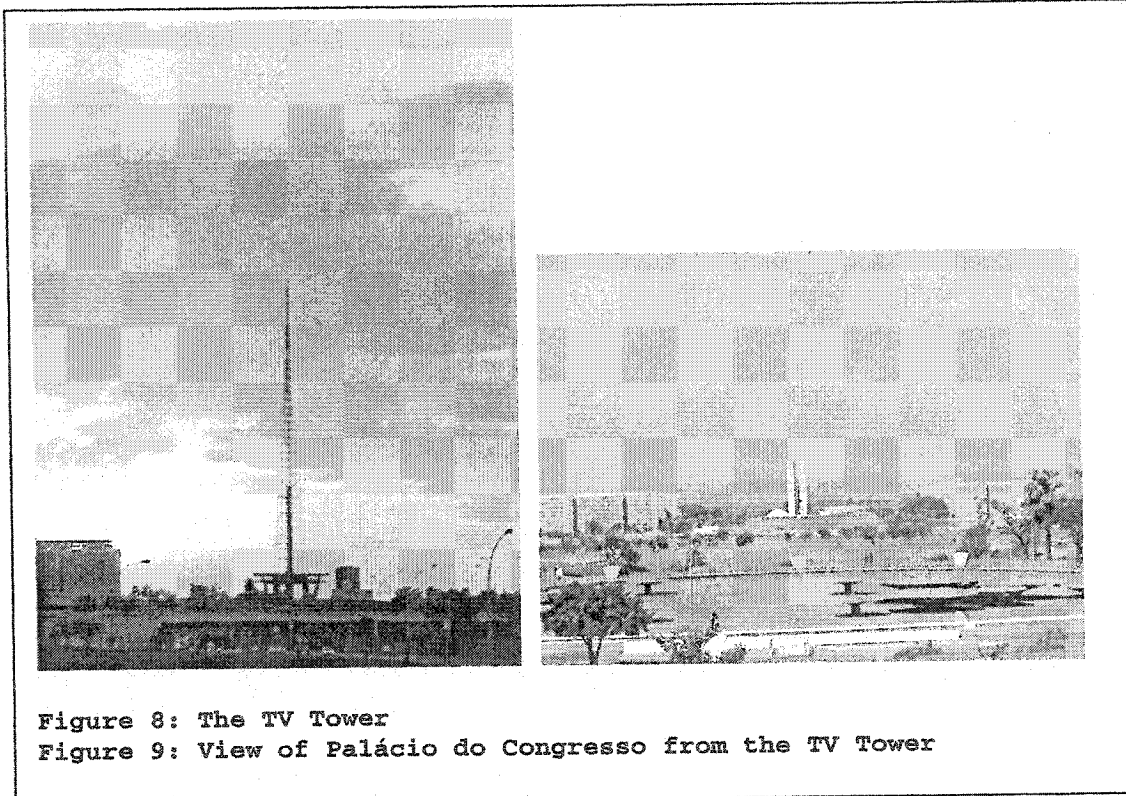
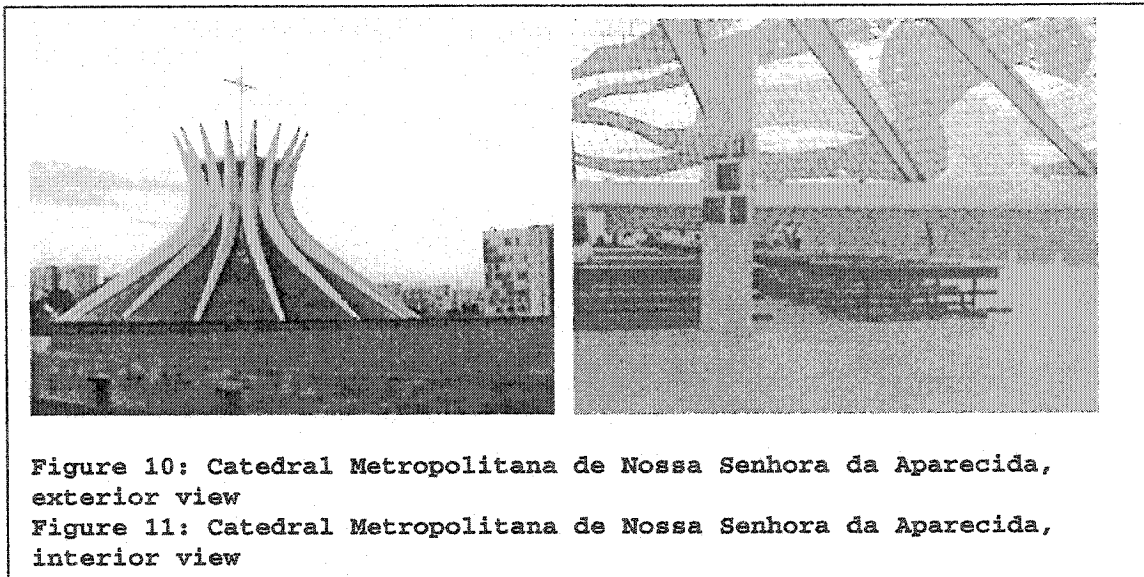


Figure 7: JK Memorial



Further on we reach the TV Tower (see Figure 8), which is at the approximate mid-point of the *Eixo Monumental*. From there we can look down upon the grassy promenade that stretches towards the *Palácio do Congresso*, its towers reaching up to the horizon (see Figure 9). Although most promenades invite one to stroll casually, the near absence of trees in combination with heat of the sun make walking along the *Eixo Monumental* an arduous task. From this location the ministerial buildings orderly line up while visually progressing inwards towards the *Palácio do Congresso*.

Moving closer to the *Palácio do Congresso* we next encounter the *Teatro Nacional* and the *Catedral Metropolitana de Nossa Senhora da Aparecida* (see Figure



10). We need not walk up stairs to enter the cathedral, but must walk down a darkened ramp as if to signify that the divine status of the city is so great that one must go downward to reach God. With its white marble interior and a stained-glass window predominantly coloured in white, blue, turquoise and green forming the near totality of its ceiling, the cathedral conveys the clinical emotions of technicism rather than the warmth of Christian charity (See Figure 11).

Between the south embassy sector and *Eixo Monumental* stands a playground for children (see Figure 14). With outer space as its theme, the playground features the skeletal outlines of a rocket and a satellite on which children can play. Perhaps it is the provision of materials for autodidactic pedagogy on the benefits of technology. Nevertheless, not a single person is around-

let alone children playing—and the surrounding buildings appear more commercial than residential.

Should we continue along *Eixo Rodoviário Sul* and crosses *Eixo Monumental*, we reach the *Teatro Nacional*, which resembles a square pyramid (see Figure 12). Entering the theatre we are greeted with granite floors and reinforced concrete walls create smooth curves (see Figure 13). It also becomes immediately apparent where the vegetation of the city disappeared to: placed throughout the lobby of the theatre is tropical greenery that starkly contrasts the lobby of the theatre to the barren city outside.

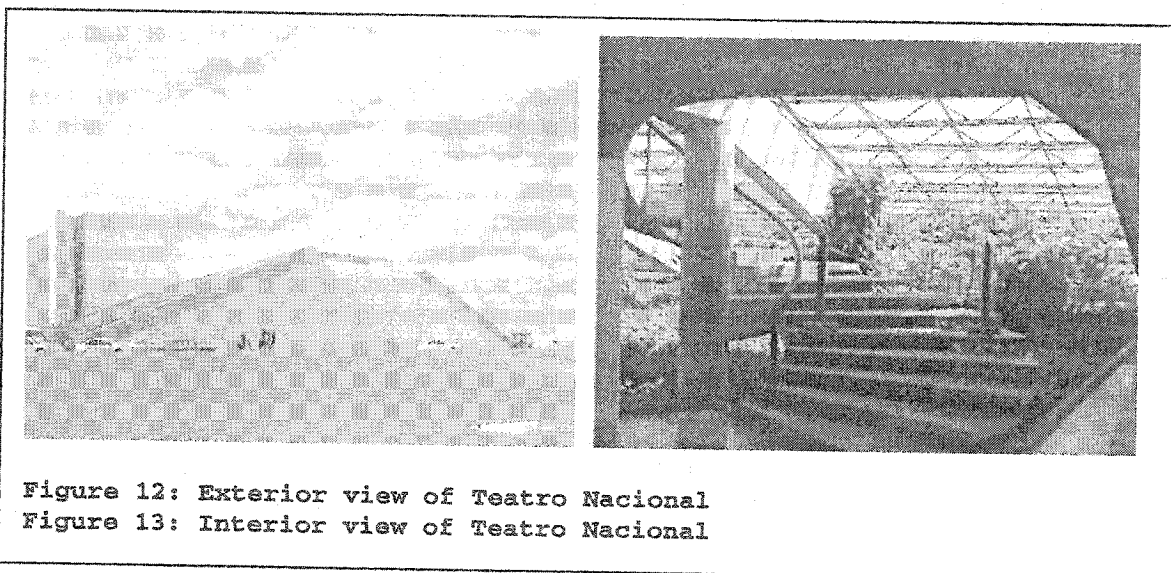


Figure 12: Exterior view of Teatro Nacional

Figure 13: Interior view of Teatro Nacional

Walking at normal
pace from the TV Tower to
the *Praça dos Três*

Poderes takes a couple of
hours as we make our way
along the promenade and
slowly approach and then
pass the identically

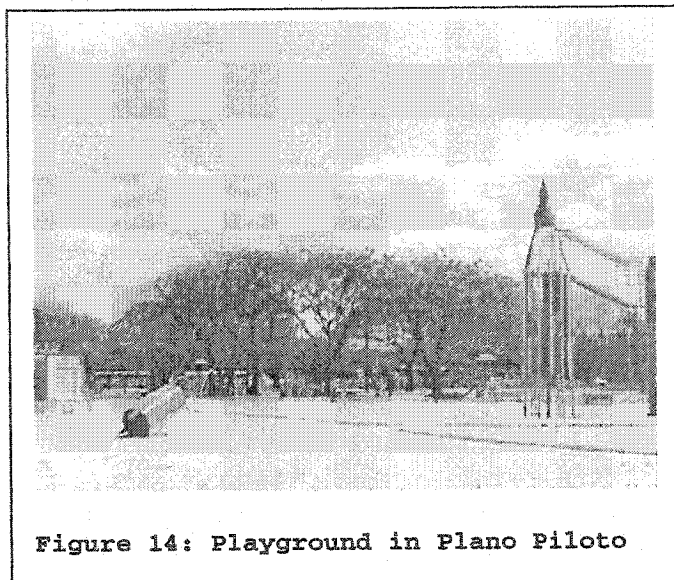
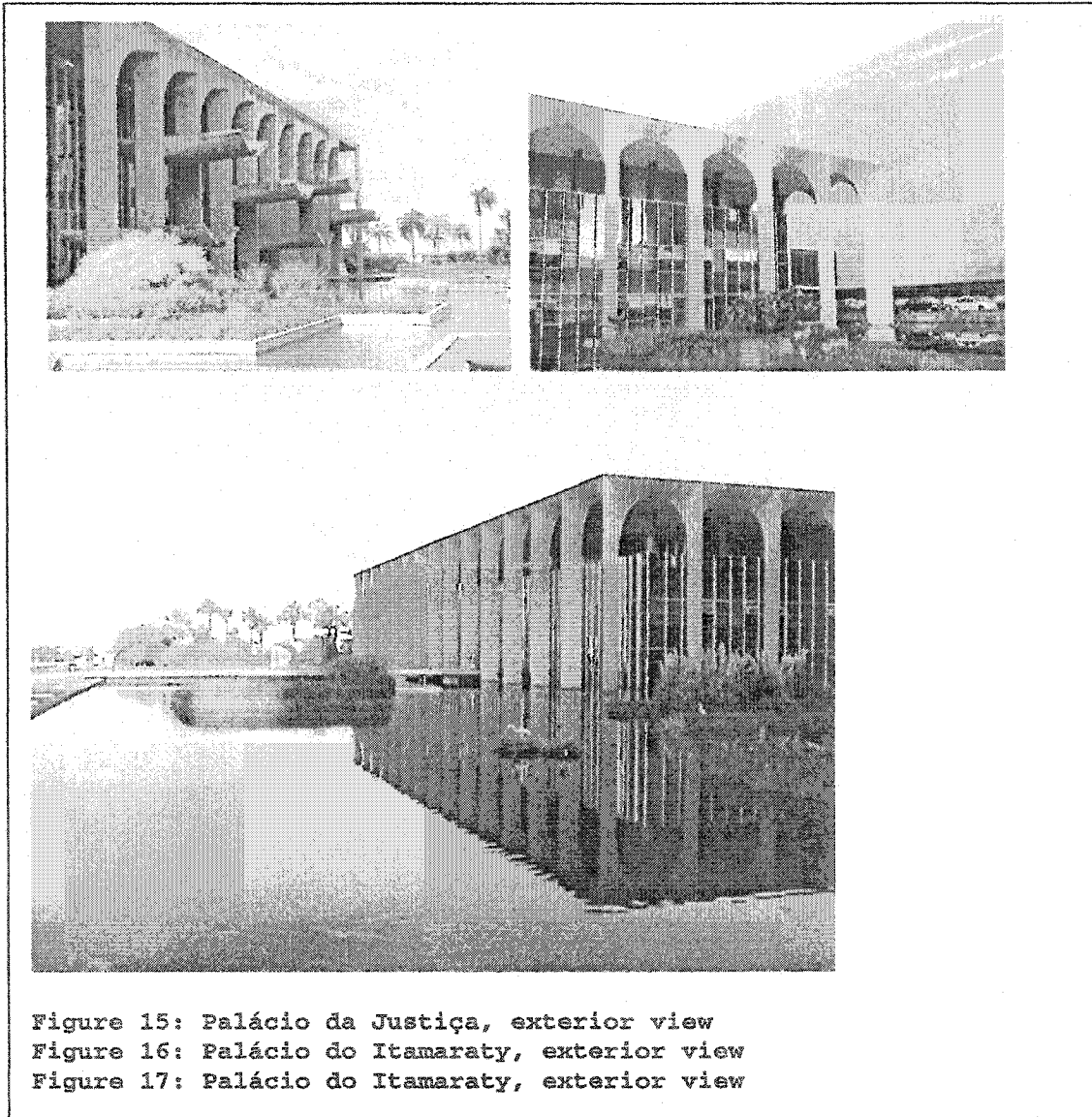


Figure 14: Playground in Plano Piloto

designed ministerial buildings. Walking is not
recommended, however. Sidewalks—where they are present—
generally lack any form of shelter from the sun in the dry
season or protection from the rain during the rainy season.
Places to rest are non-existent as too are the presences of
bodegas, coffee shops or vendors of refreshments. Only
with great determination and discomfort can one move about
the city without some form of vehicular transport.



Signalling the end of the journey along the *Eixo Monumental* is the *Palácio do Itamaraty* (on the south side of *Esplanada das Ministérios*) (see Figure 15) and the *Palácio da Justiça* (on the north side) (see Figure 16). Water surrounds the *Palácio da Justiça* and vertical slats of reinforced concrete serve to block the sun from the building walled with dark glass while concrete overhangs serve a similar purpose and in the rainy season also create

waterfalls that collect in the artificial pond surrounding the building. *Palácio do Itamaraty* also features water surrounding the building, which one must cross to enter. The concrete arches of its exterior reflect on the surface of the water with the resulting illusion that the foundation of the building appears to exist in the same way as the mythological foundation of the city: virtually (see Figure 17).

As one approaches the esplanade in front of *Palácio do Congresso* (see Figure 18) the grass changes from being dead with large patches of red showing to a lush, green, manicured lawn. The water separating the *Palácio do Congresso* from the promenade

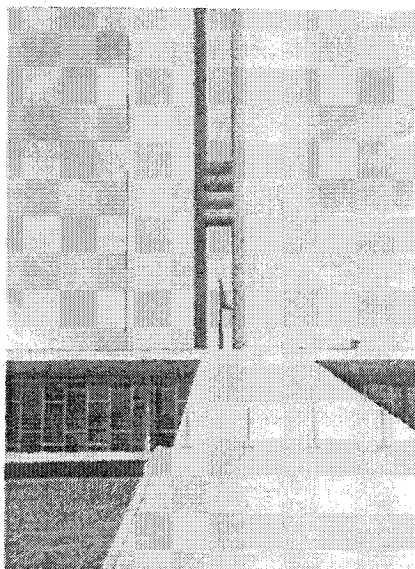
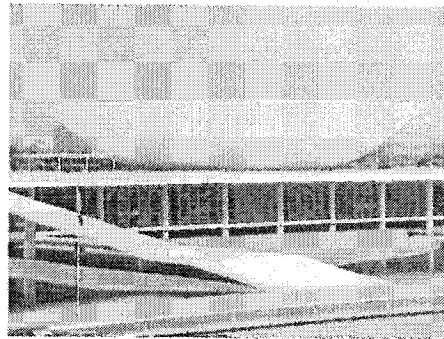
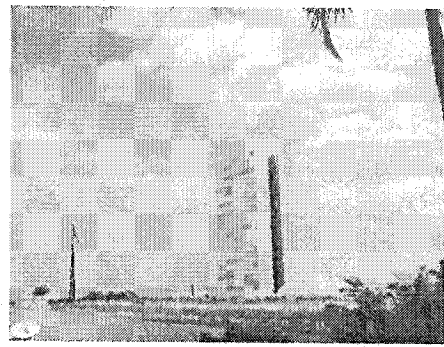


Figure 18: Palácio do Congresso, exterior view

Figure 19: Palácio do Congresso, exterior view

Figure 20: Bandeira da Republica seen from the ramp into Palácio do Congresso

conjures the sensation of being on a golf course (see Figure 19). Crossing a white stone ramp over the water leads us into the actual building though not before we see the giant *Bandeira da Republica* flying between the two towers housing the politicians' offices (see Figure 20).

Entering the *Palácio do Congresso*, one feels as though one is walking on Kubrick's vision of the obelisk and in the hallway ringing the Senate one expects to hear HAL ask if something is wrong.¹³² In fact, within the *Palácio do Congresso* one finds the entirety of Brazil's modern political history. Examining the Chamber of Deputies, with its warm theme of wood accented with green, one receives the impression of legislative debate between people. It speaks of spontaneity. This is contrasted by the cool blue of the Senate—where rules of order dictate (or the dictated orders of the ruler require) that those wishing to speak make a request to do so at least three days in advance. In this manner the fiery passions of the people become mediated and moderated through the technical-rationalism of the Senate. Here lays a portent: as its design preceding the military regime that found rationally legitimated bureaucratic authoritarianism to be highly efficient for minimizing popular dissent. In fact, here we see a

¹³² The reference is to *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Polaris, UK/US, 1968.

concretizing of precisely what Guillermo O'Donnell refers to when he wrote:

Through its institutions [the bureaucratic-authoritarian state] endeavours to "depoliticize" social issues by dealing with them in terms of the supposedly neutral and objective criteria of technical rationality.¹³³

Abutting the back of *Palácio do Congresso* is the *Praça dos Três Poderes*. The plaza features a single bench for sitting. Clearly it is a space for passing through rather than loitering. The surrounding buildings consist of the *Palácio do Congresso*, the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* (see Figure 21), the *Palácio do Planalto* (see Figure 22) and the *Panteão da Pátria*, which serves as a memorial to Tancredo Neves (the president elected following the military regime who died prematurely) and features a bronze bust of Tiradentes. In front of the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* sits a statue representing justice (see Figure 23). Cast in concrete, the blindfolded woman has only a sword in hand as if to make clear that (a) balance is unnecessary when meting out justice with a blindly swung sword. Contrasting the mood of Lady Justice is the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* itself. If a blindly swung sword evokes arbitrariness, the cold appearance of the *Supremo Tribunal Federal* building

¹³³ O'Donnell, Guillermo. "Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State" in David Collier (ed.), *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 293.

evokes the rational application of binary logic: yes or no, guilty or not guilty, black or white.

In contrast to the *Catedral Metropolitana de Nossa Senhora da Aparecida*, we must ascend stairs to enter the *Palácio do Planalto*, which houses the offices of the President of Brazil. The *Palácio do Planalto* stands across the plaza from the

Supremo Tribunal Federal but is elevated to a much higher level as if to illustrate that rational justice sits below the decrees of the President. Indeed, such was the case under the military regime whose Institutional Acts suspended basic democratic rights and resulted in the application of arbitrary justice through torture—particularly following the Fifth Institutional Act, which

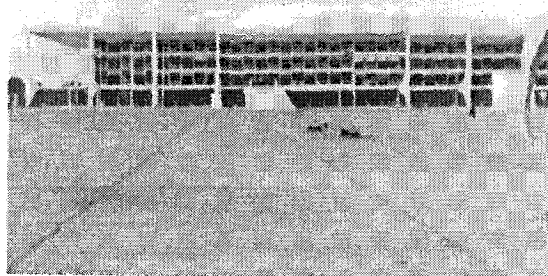
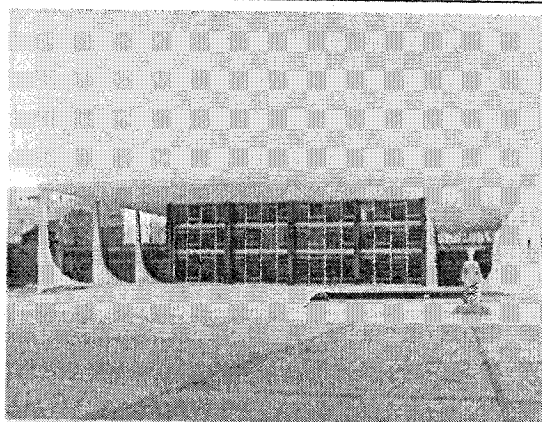


Figure 21: Supremo Tribunal Federal, exterior view
Figure 22: Palácio do Planalto, exterior view

indefinitely suspended
habeas corpus and
criminalized actions
contrary to economic and
social order.¹³⁴

For a city
supposedly modeled on
humanistic principals,
experiencing Brasília is
an incredibly alienating
experience. One feels as
though one is part of
world that one cannot
choose to live in. The

scale of the streets, the aura of the buildings and the
emptiness of the surroundings make one feel utterly alone.

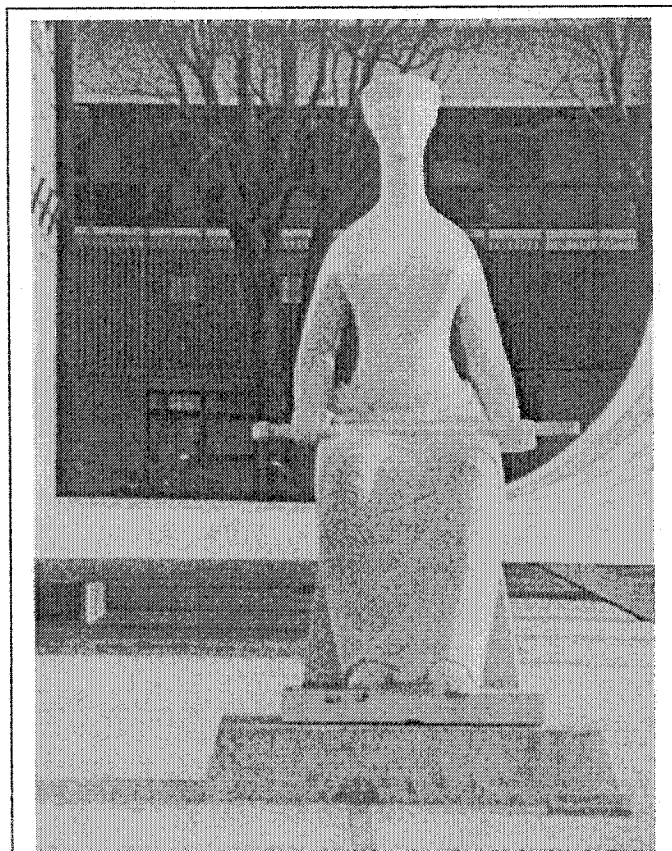


Figure 23: Statue in front of the
Supremo Tribunal Federal

¹³⁴ Fausto. *op. cit.*, p. 480.

Chapter 4 – Conclusion

Assessing the efficacy of Brasília as a political and social instrument should primarily occur in the context of the purposes for which it was intended. Specifically, one must first examine whether Brasília accomplished the goals it intended to accomplish. These goals, identified earlier, include promoting the colonization of the centre-west region; the movement of the capital from the densely populated coastal city of Rio de Janeiro to the more easily secured inland location of Brasília; and, the creation of an iconic capital city as a projection of what Brazil was to become.

Along the axis of colonizing the centre-west region of the country, Brasília was of mixed success. Although the population of the city today stands at over one million and far exceeds the planned population of the city, beyond the city and its outlying areas (the 'satellite' towns) the land is relatively uninhabited. The drive from Goiânia to Brasília takes one through sparsely populated farmland and the majority of the country's population continues to reside in the south-centre region along the coast. Despite the presence of tax incentives and numerous newly built but

empty industrial properties, Brasília failed to spur development in the region beyond the city itself.

Furthermore, Holston observes that the growth of the satellite towns surrounding Brasília:

...subverts [Niemeyer's socialist and Kubitschek's democratic socialist] intention profoundly: it reproduces the distinction between privileged center and disprivileged periphery that is one of the most basic features of the rest of urban Brazil, of the underdevelopment Brasília planners wanted to deny in building their new world.¹³⁵

As such, Brasília inadvertently transformed from being a prospective icon of what the country was to become to being an "indelible shadow"¹³⁶ of the failed developmental policies of the past that did little to rectify the inequalities of Brazilian society.

Examining Brasília from the perspective of having a more secure capital, it too appears that the results are of mixed success. Although Brasília's distance from the major population centres and the open spaces of the city ameliorate those factors that could lead to riots, when it comes to controversial policy questions riots can and do still occur as they did recently over the issue of

¹³⁵ Holston, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹³⁶ To borrow a phrase from Eugenio Barba. See Barba, Eugenio. "A Chosen Diaspora in the Guts of the Monster." *The Drama Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Winter 2002):147-153, p. 152.

reforming public sector pensions.¹³⁷ Moreover, in an age when aerial bombardment—particularly using cruise missiles—has replaced shoreline bombardment using battleships, the movement of the capital from the coast is of little consequence as protection against the external threat of gunboat diplomacy.

As to whether Brasília represents a uniquely 'Brazilian' capital, it is possible to argue both for and against such a proposition. On the one hand, the modern futurist style of the layout and buildings of Brasília are inherently international in origin. In considering Brasília a "distinctively Brazilian capital" one must consider that the modernist architectural and design principles were European and Soviet in origin, socialist in ideology and international in intention. On the other hand, it is argued that:

What made Brazilian architecture nationally distinct was its lightness (the use of stucco, glass, and tile to achieve an airy effect), its covered walls (protected from the sun by various sorts of screens), its use of reinforced concrete (cheaper and more

¹³⁷ See for example, British Broadcasting Corporation. "Protesters attack Brazil's Congress." Accessed online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/3130561.stm> on 25 August 2003, last updated on 6 August 2003.

plentiful than steel), and the overall plasticity of its forms.¹³⁸

Furthermore, the readiness of Brazilians in general to accept cultural imperialism without the slightest concern is, in and of itself, uniquely 'Brazilian'.¹³⁹ As such, the adoption and appropriation of a foreign product—in this case an architectural style—and the transformation and manipulation of it to suit the character of Brazil without discarding its essence is a uniquely 'Brazilian' approach. Few other places so readily integrate foreign cultures without a second thought. Although the origin of the style of the layout and buildings of Brasília is not inherently 'Brazilian' in nature, the very notion of appropriating and transforming another culture's approach is, at its essence, a particularly 'Brazilian' approach. In this way, one can regard Brasília as representative of the 'Brazilian nation'.

However, if the integration of foreign elements into Brazilian culture is a uniquely Brazilian approach; the end result of Brasília is definitely not. Instead of the street life that marks other Brazilian cities such as Rio

¹³⁸ Loeffler, *op. cit.*, p. 64, citing Smith, Carleton Sprague. "Architecture of Brazil," *Architectural Record* 119 (April 1956), 187-94.

¹³⁹ Allen, Roger M. "Cultural Imperialism at Its Most Fashionable." in Robert M. Levine and John J. Crocitti (eds.), *The Brazil Reader*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 447-453.

de Janeiro and São Paulo, one finds a pronounced absence of such life in Brasília. No more perfect example than Brasília exists to support Mumford's criticism that:

Instead of bringing life into the city, so that its poorest inhabitant will have not merely sun and air but some chance to touch and feel and cultivate the earth, these naïve apostles of progress had rather bring sterility to the countryside and ultimately death to the city. Their 'city of the future' is one levelled down to the lowest possibility of active, autonomous, fully sentient life: just so much life as will conform to the requirement of the machine.¹⁴⁰

Of course, this should come as no surprise as the will to actually build Brasília came from Kubitschek who included it amongst his fundamental goals as president along with industrialization through expanding the automotive sector. Notwithstanding the context in which it was built, the city fails to capture the essential aspects of Brazilian life.

The earlier tour of the city attempted to capture this essential quality of the city as best as it is possible to convey this aspect to one who never visited the city. The question of its success is answerable only by those who have visited Brasília. More importantly, it attempted to illustrate the instrumental quality of the city and to bring forth what, in the words of Foucault, are some of its

¹⁴⁰ Mumford, *op. cit.*, p. 527.

"...hundreds of tiny theatres of punishment."¹⁴¹ The city layout that necessitates mechanized transportation, the segmentation of the city into distinct zones, the rationality encoded into the building design, and the symbolic play with space and place make Brasília an iconographic portraiture of the country that adorns its flag with the words: *Ordem e Progresso* (Order and Progress).

Most importantly, Brasília superbly illustrates the use of architecture by the state on a grand scale. In Brasília one does not find individual instantiations of the application of this instrument. Instead, the embedding of political and social codes in Brasília occurs by way of the totality of the city thereby creating an experiential field. In that field one purposefully experiences alienation. Brasília was built as a representation of neither what Brazil was, nor what Brazil is but, instead, as a representation of what Brazil is to become. Thus Brasília is a portentous example of O'Donnell's observation that the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime:

...may evoke the other mediation—the nation—but only as a "project" (and not as an actual reality) which it proposes

¹⁴¹ Foucault, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

to carry out through drastic surgical measures.¹⁴²

In this way, the city was ready-made for the bureaucratic-authoritarian regime that latter came to power. As such it necessarily sought to alienate Brazilians from themselves and their past to construct a new narrative of economic development and technological progress. Although Brasília was built in the spirit of the "pioneering colonial tradition"¹⁴³, it destroys the mythological narrative of the triumph of human will and replaces it with the triumph of technology over the individual human.

Certainly, the city succeeds in alienating the individual from any sense of community. However, the tomorrow it presented never arrived. Even today—more than forty years after its planning—much of the country remains in a state that would be considered 'backwards' or 'undeveloped' in North American and Western Europe. Highways do access the capital but railways are nearly non-existent and air travel is economically inaccessible to much of the population—a far cry from what Penna envisioned.

This then raises the question of why Brasília succeeded in some areas but was unsuccessful in others—the

¹⁴² O'Donnell, *op. cit.*

¹⁴³ Costa, *op. cit.*, document not paginated.

most important being its primary purpose of being an iconic reference for the nation. The most probable explanation is that in constructing Brasília, the state neglected to consider whether the faith in technological futurist progress already existed in the population. In this sense, the reconfiguration of identities by the state has similar requirements to the construction of an initial national identity. In other words, just as the formation of a national identity requires that an already existing proto-national movement exist, so too does the re-configuration of a nation's identity require that there exists some foundation of that identity that the state can germinate.

The identity that Brasília aimed to construct was not one that derived from a "nationally-imagined community" to use Anderson's words.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, the entirety of the project could not be "...an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion..."¹⁴⁵ Rather, Brasília was a project enacted by a dominant elite that sought to impose its vision upon the vast majority of the populace. Instead of preemptively avoiding the alienation of the dominant group, it was an alien identity the dominant group sought to impose

¹⁴⁴ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

upon the nation. The result is understandably alienating for the populace.

Brasília stands absent the referents known to most of the Brazilian people: the chaos of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the predominance of poverty in the north-east and the underdevelopment that plagues the lives of many. Though these conditions continue to exist, they were even more pronounced when the city was built. Thus, no matter how iconic the city may be, it does not correspond to the everyday reality faced by most Brazilians.

In this sense, Brasília was a break in the societal system. No longer was the state system "operating in the present".¹⁴⁶ Rather, it was operating in an undetermined future and the identity it constructed was distinguishable only from the entirety of what actually existed. In this context, Brasília was a memetic virus though in this case the reality of most Brazilians' existence was adequate immunization against its effects.

This examination permits a number of conclusions. Firstly, it appears evident that the requisite conditions for the formation of a national identity must precede the reformation of a national identity. Thus, if a state wishes to engage in reformulating the identity of its

¹⁴⁶ Luhman, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

populace, it must understand that its choices are limited to identities which have roots already in the populace. Absent that condition it appears highly improbable that a project of any scale will succeed.

Secondly, architecture can be a powerful instrument in such projects. Presuming that the identity selected meets the requisite criteria then architecture can provide powerful reinforcement of the ideas the state wishes emphasized. Determining the efficaciousness of different types of architectural projects is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, longitudinal and cross-cultural studies would be a worthwhile investigation to better understand the reception of architectural symbols by the populace. Such analysis will provide greater insight into the ways in which states can foster desirable identities.

Finally, Brasília illustrates a superb use of architecture and urban design for alienation at the micro-level. A better understanding the processes of alienation permits the possibility of understanding the ways in which architecture and urban design can promote the opposite feelings of community and belonging. Even absent a nation-building project, states can use architecture to strengthen local identities that already exist but only if they recognize the patterns in which these instruments operate.

In achieving such understanding, one not only better understands the modern processes of nation-building but also the lengthy use of architecture politically.

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