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MODERN ARCHITECTURE FOR THE BRAZILIAN DICTATORSHIP: AMBIVALENCES IN THE SÃO PAULO MILITARY HEADQUARTERS, IBIRAPUERA PARK (1965)

ARQUITECTURA MODERNA PARA LA DICTADURA
BRASILEÑA: AMBIVALENCIAS EN EL CUARTEL MILITAR
DE SÃO PAULO, PARQUE DE IBIRAPUERA (1965)

ARQUITETURA MODERNA PARA A DITADURA
BRASILEIRA: AMBIVALÊNCIA NO QUARTEL MILITAR
DE SÃO PAULO, PARQUE DO IBIRAPUERA (1965)



Figura 0. Second Army HQ
internal facade photo (1969)
Source: Paulo Bastos Archive.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la relación entre arquitectura moderna y Dictadura Militar brasileña (1964-1985), en el caso de un cuartel militar diseñado por arquitectos comunistas para un régimen violentamente anticomunista: el Segundo Cuartel General del Ejército, en Ibirapuera, proyecto de un equipo dirigido por el arquitecto Paulo Bastos, un caso con fuertes enredos simbólicos, en el corazón de la ciudad de São Paulo. Aunque los arquitectos eran contrarios al régimen y estaban en el punto de mira de la represión, una mirada atenta a este caso revela matices en las reacciones de los actores ante ese contexto, así como una relación más compleja entre arquitectura y autoritarismo que va más allá de las lentes binarias de resistencia o colaboración. Este caso es un nodo importante para reflexionar sobre las complejas relaciones entre arquitectura y política, especialmente bajo regímenes autoritarios. También ayuda a reflexionar sobre la propia arquitectura moderna, las contradicciones inmanentes de sus objetos y las ambivalencias de las propias apuestas epistemológicas que la sustentaron.

Palabras clave: arquitectura moderna, arquitectura militar; brutalismo, cuarteles generales militares, dictadura

ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between modern architecture and the Brazilian Military Dictatorship (1964-1985) in the case of the military headquarters designed by communist architects for a violently anti-communist regime: the Second Army Headquarters in Ibirapuera, a project by a team led by the architect Paulo Bastos, a case with strong symbolic entanglements in the heart of São Paulo. Although the architects were against the regime and were the target of the dictatorship's repression, a close look at this case reveals nuances in the actors' reactions to that context, as well as a more complex relationship between architecture and authoritarianism, which goes beyond the binary lenses of resistance or collaboration. This case is an important node to reflect on the complex relationships between architecture and politics, especially under authoritarian regimes. It also helps to reflect on modern architecture itself, the immanent contradictions of its objects, and the ambivalences of the epistemological investments that underpin it.

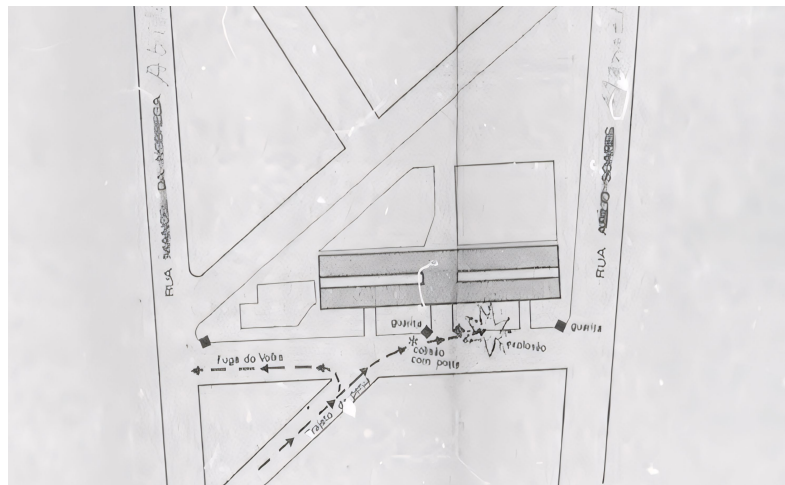
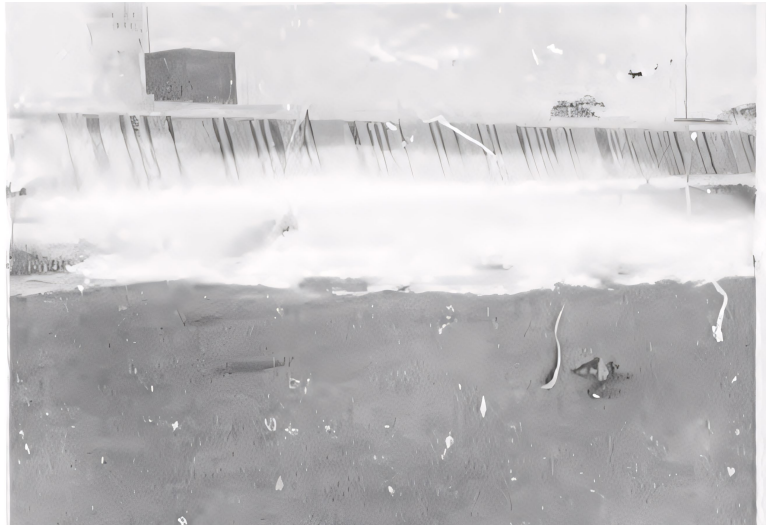
Keywords: modern architecture, military architecture, brutalism, military headquarters, dictatorship

RESUMO

Este artigo examina a relação entre a arquitetura moderna e a Ditadura Militar Brasileira (1964-1985) no caso do quartel-general militar projetado por arquitetos comunistas para um regime violentamente anticomunista: o Quartel-General do Segundo Exército no Ibirapuera, um projeto de uma equipe liderada pelo arquiteto Paulo Bastos, um caso com fortes envoltimentos simbólicos no coração de São Paulo. Embora os arquitetos fossem contra o regime e alvo da repressão da ditadura, um olhar atento a esse caso revela nuances nas reações dos atores a esse contexto, bem como uma relação mais complexa entre arquitetura e autoritarismo, que vai além das lentes binárias de resistência ou colaboração. Esse caso é um nó importante para refletir sobre as relações complexas entre arquitetura e política, especialmente em regimes autoritários. Ele também ajuda a refletir sobre a própria arquitetura moderna, as contradições imanentes de seus objetos e as ambivalências dos investimentos epistemológicos que a sustentam.

Palavras-chave: arquitetura moderna, arquitetura militar; brutalismo, quartéis militares, ditadura

Figura 1. Images from the police inquiry opened to investigate the attack on the HQ in 1968. On the left is a photo of the moment of the explosion, and on the right is a map describing the attack. Source: National Archives, Ministry of Justice



INTRODUCTION

(COLD) WAR ARCHITECTURES OF THE BRAZILIAN DICTATORSHIP

In June 1968, a pickup truck, accompanied by a red car, entered the Second Army Headquarters' (HQ) access area in São Paulo while a second car waited outside. The truck sped towards the building as the driver jumped free. A soldier attempted to shoot at the advancing vehicle, but his weapon jammed. The vehicle, loaded with fifty kilograms of explosives, shot across the gap in the trench that protected the HQ's main building, collided with a wall, and exploded, killing an eighteen-year-old soldier: **1** (Figure 1)

1 The description of the attack was reported by the press in detail (See *Folha de S. Paulo*, June 26th, 1968), and the restricted investigations can be accessed at the National Archives of the Ministry of Justice through the inquest and documents made available by the National Truth Commission.

The São Paulo Army HQ, located in Ibirapuera Park, in the southern part of the city, was targeted just a few months after it opened. Brazil was then living under a military dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985, inserted within a global Cold War context. The Popular or People's Revolutionary Vanguard (VPR), an armed resistance movement against the regime, would claim responsibility for the attack.

The HQ had been moved from an “old mansion” to a brand-new modern building in a flat, military-controlled area, far from all of the city’s highest points that could pose a danger to its personnel. Besides its strategic characteristics, it was clearly a symbolic move, with the new HQ serving as affirmation for the regime that would approve the Institutional Act number 5 that same year, thereby assuming itself as an even more well-polished dictatorship. **2**

During the following year, 1969, the military zone of Ibirapuera Park saw the creation of Operation Bandeirante (OBAN), a centralized political police body within the army focused on more direct techniques of repression (Napolitano, 2014).**3** However, the OBAN operation at the Second Army HQ generated certain issues, such as recruits witnessing detainees being tortured daily and the openness and exposure of the new building not appropriate to the kind of activity of the new operation. It was therefore considered essential to transfer the OBAN operation to a location that was safe and discreet while still being close (Gaspari, 2002).**4** However, the monumentality and openness of the HQ’s new architecture imposed limits on such unsavory practices of the regime.

More than revealing this symbolic character of the new HQ, the incident involving the VPR attack demonstrated the core features of this modern project. The HQ had been built on a surrounding exposed and strategically defined plain, isolating itself and guaranteeing its security by making any approach visible. Here, architecture was intrinsically linked to strategic demand and didactically exposed the armed conflict event. A war project built under and occupied by conflicts.

This article examines the relationship between modern architecture and dictatorship in the case of a military headquarters designed by communist architects for a violently anti-communist regime. The case in question is the Second Army Headquarters in Ibirapuera, designed by a team led by the architect Paulo Bastos, a case with strong symbolic entanglements in the heart of São Paulo. Although the architects were against the regime and were targeted by the dictatorship’s repression, a close look at this case reveals nuances in the actors’ reactions to that context, as well as a more complex relationship between architecture and authoritarianism, which goes beyond the binary lenses of resistance against collaboration.

Brazilian modern architecture historiography has usually treated the military dictatorship as an “interruption” in the progressive project and, consequently, in the politically charged architecture emerging in the early 1960s. However, a close analysis of the period shows the contrary. Although the optimistic hopes for social transformations were frustrated, the number of commissions and contracts to architects saw a boom, the result of progress in the construction industry and state-led initiatives and infrastructure enterprises. Therefore, the architectural field was deeply entangled in the very production and reproduction of that regime once its moments of economic success were produced by investments in the construction business sector (alongside repression and control of labor unions, guaranteeing a lowering of wages as

2 Known as AI-5, this was the fifth of seventeen major decrees issued by the military dictatorship in the years following the 1964 coup d’état.

Among other things, AI-5 abolished habeas corpus and closed the National Congress, resulting in greater repression and censorship, constituting the regime’s darkest period. See (Motta, 2018)

3 The demands of the operation even had a support network which would help through occasional aid or a small collaborative “petty cashbox”, such as donations by the São Paulo Mayor’s Office, from the municipal area of the new HQ through to the State, or with contributions from representatives within the Brazilian economic power with “funds for equipment to confront subversion”, not to mention the help of TV broadcasters and newspapers.

4 This was a space provided at the police station on the corner of Rua Tutóia and Rua Tomás Carvalho by the State Governor, Roberto de Abreu Sodré. The DOI CODI [The Department of Information Operations - Center for Internal Defense Operations] had its operations there. The building has been recently listed in memory of its torture and extermination center and as a landmark of the dictatorship (Process 66578/12; Resolution 25 12/05/14).

inflation control). In this scenery, left-wing architects were primarily searching for ways to work professionally within that regime, even while also seeking ways of resisting or conspiring against it.

Thus, the case helps to reveal the ambivalent roles of architecture during authoritarian regimes, done here through a combination of methodologies from political history, aesthetic theory, and archival research. On the one hand, the approach to left-wing architects and their expectations of a politically charged architecture is read in dialogue with notions such as Serge Bernstein's "political culture" (2009) and also Raymond Williams's "structure of sentiment" (2011). Both help thinking about the circulation of ideas in the studied period, between political notions and architectural procedures. On the other hand, an approach from critical aesthetic theory underpins the analysis of architecture: the immanent critique of the object extracts from its reading aspects of the social realm's dialectics and contradictions (Adorno, 2012; Tafuri, 2011). However, it is important to consider the agency of architecture and how it intervenes rather than only representing a reflex or result of its social context (Avermaete, 2011). While documents of the design process help in this reading of the object, their content is crossed with different sources, such as written documents, competition edicts and reports, and press material, to complexify and historicize the architectural object within the period's political history. This article, therefore, addresses one single case, but seeks to open reflections that are urgent for a broad architectural production during the Global Cold War and the multiple authoritarian regimes installed worldwide at the time.

THE ARCHITECTS AND THE DICTATORSHIP

Modern architecture was at the heart of political events during the military dictatorship, from Brasília to Ibirapuera and from palaces to basements. An association between modernist aesthetics and the State with modernizing aspirations was nothing new in Brazil. This relationship had been cultivated since the *Estado Novo*, another authoritarian period led by President Getúlio Vargas from 1937 to 1945, setting the tone for the positive aims of the national architectural avant-garde: building a national identity, affirming a "tradition" based on the modern, and boosting development. From Vargas through to President Juscelino Kubitschek's government (1955-1960), the relationship between architects and government officials was fundamental in consolidating the architect's image as an artist who built state symbols. Technical and formal experimentation was fostered through a form of patronage, with cutting-edge professionals also legitimized by the cultural field's autonomous criteria (Gorelik, 2005). Nevertheless, this fundamental relationship between public commissions and the professional field of architecture would take different forms outside the country's capital over the following decades.

In the state of São Paulo, during the 1950s and 1960s, while witnessing the construction of the new federal capital, Brasília, the Brazilian Institute of Architects (IAB, in Portuguese) managed to negotiate a contract of over one hundred architecture offices with the State government to meet the demands of projects across the state, involving the construction of public schools,

university campuses, courts, health centers, and infrastructure (Camargo, 2016). This productive context was fundamental for consolidating and affirming the profession, culminating in architects mobilizing to formally propose a solid political agenda for the country through the Seminar on Housing and Urban Reform in 1963. This agenda was associated with the Basic Reforms plan being proposed by President Goulart's government at the time (Koury, 2013). In addition to technical experimentation on the drawing board for the commissions of public equipment, in the Urban Reform debate, architects highlighted intervention in the legislation, forms of financing, and institutional design so that addressing housing and urban problems could become perennial. Part of the solutions designed in this debate were even incorporated by the military dictatorship established after 1964, with the creation of the National Housing Bank (BNH, in Portuguese) and the Federal Service for Housing and Urbanism (SERFHAU, in Portuguese), despite their partial and inefficient application in many aspects (Lucchese & Rossetto, 2018).

Besides responding to many technical demands, new generations of architects were also called to symbolically represent the regime's "conservative modernization." One relevant way this kind of commission occurred was through IAB-guaranteed competitions. This points to an essential element for an historiographical approach to the dictatorship period: the necessity to look at the accommodation processes (Motta, 2016), negotiations, and forms of insertion of architecture within the authoritarian regime, overcoming the binary lens of resistance versus collaboration.

Since the 1940s, the Institute of Architects had been working to defend the autonomy of architecture as a profession and making clear efforts to present to different kinds of institutions the role of architecture competitions. The army was one of those institutions. In 1964, right after the military coup, the Institute presented a guiding document to several institutions about how to organize a competition and a list with a national jury body selection to legitimize and inform future choices.⁵

It is often said that few competitions took place during the dictatorship, but research on the topic reveals this is not exactly true. Some relevant buildings were the result of public competitions, such as the National Oil Company (Petrobras) Headquarters in Rio de Janeiro (1969), the Santo André Civic Center (1967), the National Development Bank in Brasília (1970), Salvador City Library (1969), and the Brazilian Pavilion at the Osaka World Expo (1969), maybe the most famous case where some contradictions of that period appeared. Besides being part of a cultural arena, implying legitimation processes among peers, and changeable hegemonies, architecture competitions had an important role as a breach of democratic procedures during a time of political persecution and authoritarianism. In such a context, the design competition for the Second Army Headquarters was announced due to a partnership between the Ministry of War and IAB São Paulo in 1964.⁶ The new HQ would be located next to the Legislative Assembly, the result of yet another competition held in 1961 (Dedecca, 2012).

⁵ Documents found at the IAB Archive in São Paulo.

⁶ The edict for the competition was published in December 1964, and the details were issued at the beginning of the following year. The edict, published by the Ministry of War in partnership with the IAB, was consulted in the collection owned by the architect Paulo Bastos.

Here, mention should be made of the importance, at this particular time, of the IAB's São Paulo branch, which was under the leadership of a group of like-minded members who were — in part — military regime enthusiasts. Presided over by Alberto Botti, the group had won one of the very few tense elections for the institute's São Paulo branch, marked by a dispute between left and right, with the losing group under the leadership of Carlos Millan, an architect linked to the Catholic left and the Popular Action Movement (Matera, 2005). Always marked by the centrality of the agenda of professional affirmation and in defending the profession, the alignment of the IAB to the regime seems to have been necessary at that moment for two reasons: in addition to maintaining an intermediary role for public commissions, in competitions such as that for the Army HQ, the institute would also act as an important mediator in defending architects who had either been arrested or whose professional licenses had been revoked.⁷

The jury for the HQ competition, comprising military personnel and architects,⁸ chose from twenty-eight proposals. The winning team included the young architects Paulo Bastos, Léo Bomfim Jr., Oscar Arine, Ubirajara Ribeiro, and Paulo Sergio Souza e Silva. It is noteworthy that part of the team had members of the Communist Party of Brazil, and this fact was cited in an appeal made by one of the contestants in the bid, as the architect Paulo Bastos recalled decades later:

We won the contest and afterwards learned that one of the other bidders had gone to General Amaury Krueel, the commander of the then Second Army, and said that they could not give the project to a team of communists. Moreover, Krueel had asked: Are they architects? They are. Did they win the architecture competition? They did. Thus, they will carry out the project. (Rodrigues, 2008)

General Krueel, commander of the Second Army and, prior to that, Minister of War for President João Goulart, supported the 1964 coup by sending troops from São Paulo to Guanabara after—according to various interpretations—wavering and negotiating with his colleagues and the coup's leaders (Toledo, 1985). According to the testimonies of fellow soldiers, the commander was a friend and companion of the deposed President João Goulart (Gaspari, 2002). Such a fact is important to note given the apparent contradictions of a military regime hiring communist architects—one that had been established, among other reasons, to eliminate them. Krueel's involvement exposes the need to consider the armed forces as a heterogeneous, complex entity within itself (Martins Filho, 2019; Cunha, 2020).⁹

The competition program was written in December 1964 by IAB and the Ministry of War; but, according to the news, it took two months to get published, only after “an understanding of both parts.” In April 1965, the results were announced, and 28 entries were exhibited at the headquarters of the *Diários Associados* newspaper.¹⁰ In that event, the new Minister of War, General Costa e Silva—who would become the next president of that regime—gave a speech celebrating the (communist) awarded architects, calling

⁷ Testimony given by Botti at an event at IAB-SP in 2018; and also in a statement by Alberto Botti to Rodrigo Kamimura (2016).

⁸ Col. Augusto Osório, Major Hans Altenburg, Col. José Barreto, and Major Maurício Moreira from the military, and the architects Ary de Queiroz, Salvador Candia, Israel Sancovski, and Jon Maitrejean—the latter having been removed from the School of Architecture and Urbanism at the University of São Paulo (FAU/USP) in 1968 for being considered subversive, even without belonging to any political organization.

⁹ Documents, such as the edicts for the competition and the contract signed by General Amaury Krueel, were consulted at the architect's office, Paulo Bastos Archive

¹⁰ Revista *Acrópole*, n.316

them the “new Niemeyers.” General Kruehl also highlighted the good work and partnership of IAB’s good work and partnership in the ceremony. Besides the symbolism of Costa e Silva’s speech, it is important to note that the projects for the new São Paulo Military Headquarters were exhibited for the first time in a newspaper’s head office, which seems telling about the press’ role both in supporting the new regime and in disseminating the architecture competition as a face of the country’s modernity. **11**

What is striking, furthermore, is the type of nuances these relationships were subject to between the established power and those who rendered services to it. In 1970, shortly after the inauguration of the São Paulo Army Headquarters, the architect Paulo Bastos was reportedly kidnapped by paramilitary groups who were on the hunt for communists. His previous contact and good relationship with the Second Army—a relationship which had strengthened after he was invited to produce a series of other projects for the armed forces, including being awarded by them in 1978 for his services **12**—was essential for the family to locate him and get help to rescue him (Rodrigues, 2008). In 1975—a year when Bastos worked in many public and military commissions—his whereabouts were again unknown for several days after being taken from his office by men who had presented themselves as OBAN representatives. This led to his wife filing complaints, eventually reaching Minister General Figueiredo, then Head of the National Intelligence Service (SNI, in Portuguese) **13**. It was then clarified that, indeed, Bastos and his colleague Léo Bomfim Jr had both been arrested and charged and had appeared among 19 others charged from PCB, including the congressman and central committee member Marco Antônio Coelho, through the so-called *Operation Radar*. **14** Bastos had, in fact, been linked to the party since 1960 and had provided shelter at his home to João Vilanova Artigas during his clandestine moments, who, besides being his professor, was a prominent member of the party. Both individuals, moreover, also signed a manifesto in the early 1980s for the “refoundation” of PCB, by this point strongly demobilized and fragmented, with the prospect of reopening the regime and legalizing the parties. After his arrest, Bomfim Jr, like so many others, moved away from party militancy **15**.

During the dictatorship, the PCB had an official position of not making public its evident opposition—considering its members were the target of state repression since the 1964 coup—and the party established in its congresses also a stage-based reading of history that led them to a position for the support of the development of productive forces, which would lead the country to its capitalist revolution, and then, in the future, to a social one (Secco & Pricás, 2022). Considering all that—as a strong “political culture” within left circles at the period—the architects’ positions should be read with the nuances they call for. Bastos believed their project for the HQ was improving a fundamental national institution, the Army, “regarding its validity and permanency.” He condemned the 1968 VPR attack on the building, emphasizing that momentaneous conflicts moved it and would destroy the architectural efforts of “humanizing that institution” with a design of a military building with “no walls.” **16**

11 The event was broadcast by TV Tupi, and its recordings are in Cinemateca Brasileira.

12 Award presented to Paulo Bastos by members of the military Fire Department, Paulo Bastos Archive.

13 General Figueiredo would become President from 1979 to 1985. These documents attest to his persecution and can be found at the National Archives, Ministry of Justice—Process DICOM n.53-424 - 04/03/1975, and records at the State Department for Social and Political Order (DEOPS) File.

14 *Folha de S. Paulo*, May 7th, 1975. This had been an offensive against the party, initiated during the General Geisel government with the aim of ultimately eliminating communists, considering the moment of inevitable growth of the congressional opposition and the early stages of constructing the opening process. The operation had discovered a clandestine party printing press operating in the basement of a country home, under a trapdoor at the bottom of a water tank, where the newspaper *Voz Operária* [The Worker’s Voice] had been produced (Gaspari, 2005).

15 Interview with Léo Bomfim Jr conducted by the author in 2019.

16 *Revista Acrópole*, n.351 (1968).

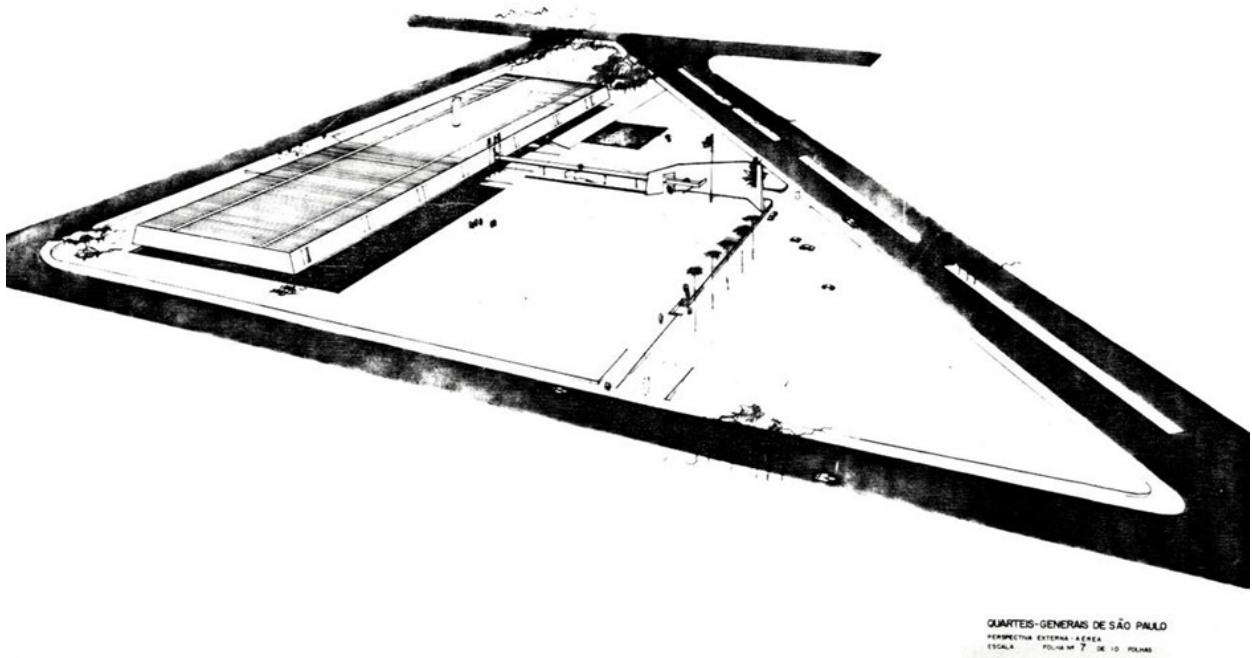


Figura 2. Second Army HQ
 First Prize Perspective Drawing
 (1965). Source: Paulo Bastos
 Archive.

Figura 3. Second Army HQ
 internal facade photo (1969)
 Source: Paulo Bastos Archive.



THE SECOND ARMY HQ DESIGN: BETWEEN STRATEGY AND MONUMENTALITY

In the Second Army Headquarters, architecture takes on a historical significance that journeys beyond the representation of national developmentalism in modern Brazilian production. In this case, several plots of the regime's inner conflicts cross the building's history, from General Kruel defending the competition result in 1965 to the birth of OBAN in 1969, shortly after its inauguration. In their nuances and contradictions, those moments are constitutive of the building and its presence in the city.

The jury minutes from the competition, published in the journal *Acrópole* No.321 in 1965, highlight the clarity of the spatial, volumetric rationale of the

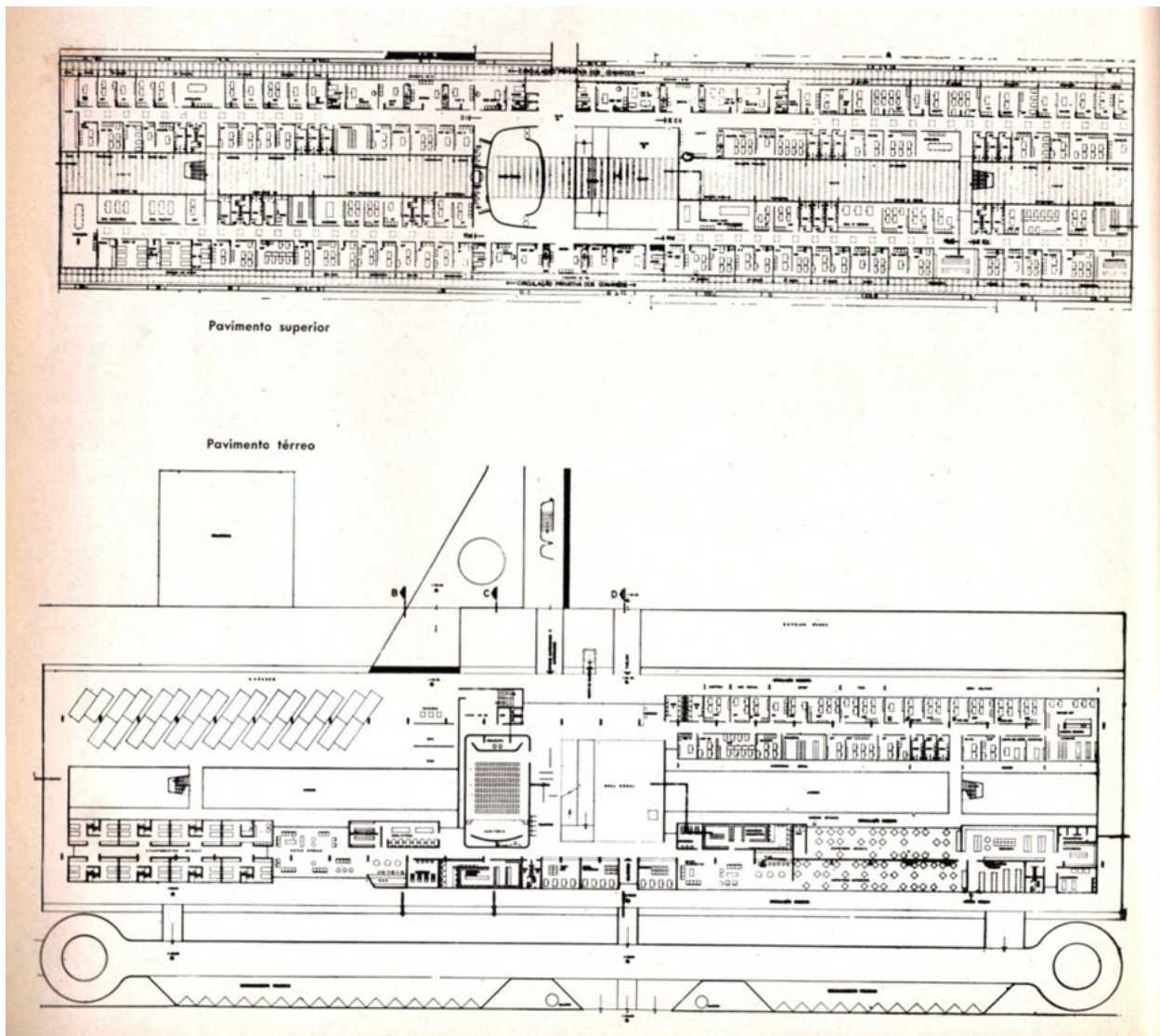


Figura 5. HQ main building floor plans: upper floor and lower level. Source: Revista Acrópolis 321, 1965

Indeed, besides its strategic qualities, a vital design procedure of the HQ was its dialogue with the urban complex into which it was inserted: the Ibirapuera Park region. Inaugurated in 1954 as part of the 400th-anniversary celebrations of the city of São Paulo, the main appeal of the park was the ensemble of modern buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer, set across the landscape. Built prior to the construction of Brasília, this was the largest group of buildings by the famous Brazilian architect at the time. Moreover, the region around the park harbored important public spaces such as the Legislative Assembly and the Gymnasium designed by the architect and sports expert Ícaro de Castro Mello, which—as mentioned above—was highlighted by the horizontality of the HQ. (Figure 6)

A look at the other prizes reinforces the jury's reasons for choosing the winning project, especially considering the relationship between the local landscape and the security approach. The second prize project proposed a traditional, modern building, highlighting the austerity of the army as an institution and dialoguing with the Legislative Assembly aesthetics. The building



would be, nevertheless, too unprotected. The third prize, in contrast, presented a brutalist and prefabricated solution in which the external walls of the building itself established some protection, whereas the ground floor remained open. Besides not resolving the security issues, the dimensions of the building were in clear conflict with the monumental complex of the Ibirapuera buildings.

Returning to Paulo Bastos' project: Although he and his team were immersed within the esteemed context of the so-called "São Paulo School" of architecture, it is possible to note a consistent connection between the design of the Second Army Headquarters and the architecture of Oscar Niemeyer, combining certain aspects from different phases and projects of the Rio architect.

In the HQ, the setback made by slopes, which protect the building and serve as a central design operation, is overcome by one walkway access. This access constitutes the central axis defined by a canopy stretching from the main building to the public ceremonial square, marked by an exceptionally organic form. It is an open, raw concrete "monument-wall," as termed in the jury minutes and the architect's descriptions, that defines the ensemble's highest plane, marking the headquarters' entrance. This exceptional form, particularly the perspectives and elevations of the project, brings to mind Niemeyer's solution to the Chapel of the Alvorada Palace, the presidential residence in Brasília. At the HQ, this monument-wall is a defining element of the building,

Figura 6. Ibirapuera Park and the complex public infrastructure surrounding it. In the bottom right-hand corner, the Gymnasium; above it, the Army Headquarters, and then the Assembly room. The Niemeyer museums may be observed outside the park. Source: Aerial image from the 1970s.



Figure 7. Photograph of the newly opened Second Army Headquarters (the Gymnasium appears immediately behind it). Source: Paulo Bastos Archive.

Figure 8. Sketch of the HQ with monument wall, marquee, and the main building. Source: Paulo Bastos Archive.

despite being in its external part. The discreet monumentality of this complex somehow provides the formal organicity that is lacking in the main building. It is not a curved wall that encases a closed environment, as in the Alvorada Chapel, but an open structure designed as a monument that defines the open spaces. The curvilinear ascendant movement delineated by such a wall is directly connected to a visual culture of Brazilian modernization being settled in that period. Nevertheless, what seems essential here is a flagrant symbolic connection between the main military building in the state of São Paulo and the Presidential residence in Brasília. A connection that is made directly through architecture. (Figure 7 and Figure 8)

Inside the building, the outward-to-inwardly sloping facade formally approaches the brise-soleil employed by Niemeyer and Affonso Eduardo Reidy. In Bastos' Headquarters, however, the cross-section shows a substantially different structure, since it mainly exploits the span of cantilever slabs, with a recessed structure, to make room for the slopes on the lower level, generating



Figure 9. Photograph of a military celebration in 1973 at the Ibirapuera Army HQ. The monument-wall defines the open spaces for the parades and gives a monumental character to it. Source: Public Archives of São Paulo State.

a discrepancy of fundamental levels for the solution that differentiated the project from those of other competitors. Above the cantilever slab, the upper level is encased by alternating loco molded concrete panels, which provide shading and protection for the internal areas, with a landscaped strip in between. As indicated within the jury's guidelines, it protected the internal area and brought unity to the entire building, with its facade defined by gardens and the inclined concrete elements functioning as brise-soleil and defining the external plane of the facade. The architects also took advantage of the military vocabulary to describe these design procedures, not only by implanting it into a trench, but also through the control and protection provided by the open borders between the brise-soleil, thereby assuming the function of a casemate, a low fortification with strict control over communication with its exterior:

Beyond its flagrant symbolic connection to Brasília, representation of the brand-new position of the military with the central government, and even beyond its function as a strategic design to defend the dictatorship, some of the ambiguous characteristics of the project seem to be precisely what makes it so singular: a casemate on pilotis, a trench within a span of cantilever slabs, a discreet monumentality. An extremely exposed building implanted onto a vast open field, while at the same time semi-buried, protected, introverted, defined as a fortification without walls. This type of duality between spaces of war and freedom stands as an acute representation of the conservative modernization of that moment (Figure 9).

CONCLUSION

The Second Army Headquarters case is an important node for reflecting on the complex relationships between architecture and politics, especially under authoritarian regimes. It also helps to reflect on modern architecture itself, the immanent contradictions of its objects, and the ambivalences of the epistemological investments underpinning it.

Concerning the architectural professional field, this case shows how the Brazilian Institute of Architects had a fundamental role as a nurturer of a cultural arena in the professional field and as a mediator between architects and institutions, especially by promoting architecture competitions. The competition was here—at once—a vital device of democratic access to a public commission and a way of giving the contractor a vast set of possible choices for its symbolic representation, in that case, the regime itself. On the one hand, this opened space for those “subversive” architects to present a building design that they considered representative of dignity and emancipation through its openness and constructive ethics. On the other hand, the regime chose this same aesthetic to represent its values of security and conservative modernization through its sobriety and austerity. Although competitions might have helped soften political tension in some cases, the immanent contradictions within the architectural object remain as testimonies of the period. As for the open spaces of the Ibirapuera headquarters esplanade—and the optimism of Bastos regarding the possibility of humanizing the army through architecture—it is worth remembering Michel Foucault (2000): “No matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience (...). On the other hand, there is nothing that is functionally—by its very nature—absolutely liberating. Liberty is a practice.”

To conclude, it is worth remembering how the São Paulo Military Headquarters building has been appropriated during the past decade. Since 2015, far right-wing movements started publicly celebrating the army as a political agent, asking for “military intervention”; in other words, for another military coup d'état. The HQ's building became one of the places for public demonstrations, especially with the public emergence of a former military officer who would later become Brazil's president. At the end of his mandate (2018-2022)—when realizing he would not be reelected—the extremists' demands for a coup were intensified, and in January 2023, an attempt was made. While unprecedented destruction and invasion of Brasília's Palaces took place, two modern “palaces” were preserved and served as shelter to the conservative rebels: the Central Military HQ in Brasília (designed by Oscar Niemeyer in 1969) and the São Paulo HQ in Ibirapuera. Both buildings were materialized in rigid lines and strict rhythm, creating an image of solidity and austerity. Designed by communists, they ended up becoming symbols of another “political culture”: the far-right anti-democratic will within the very core of the national state. (Figure 10)

The seeming contradiction between architecture and politics, revealed through Paulo Bastos' HQ case, is part of a broad context of the Global Cold War, where modernity identities and modernization investments were entangled with hopes for emancipation and sovereignty or authoritarian



arrangements and regimes. The optimistic roles attributed to architecture—especially within a left-leaning “structure of sentiment” and in moments of national-development expectations such as the Brazilian early 1960s—were put through a stern test when faced with conservative modernization processes. The case of Ibirapuera Military Headquarters is illustrative of how architectural design responded and intervened in the very inside organization of military power in Brazil, whereas the dictatorship used the architect’s power to assemble modernity imaginaries to seek symbolic legitimacy. Such an analysis—among several other cases of the period—helps one remember the limits of architecture’s autonomy and its intrinsic and conflictive relationship to politics.

Figure 10. Far right-wing demonstrations against democracy in front of the São Paulo HQ (2022), asking military forces for a new coup d’état; the image evidences the wall created to separate the HQ from the street, created after the VPR attack, against Bastos’ project. Source: Photo by Miguel Schincariol and Alan Santos.

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