



BRILL

FASCISM 7 (2018) 175-212

F A S C I S M

JOURNAL
OF
COMPARATIVE
FASCIST
STUDIES

brill.com/fasc

The Many Faces of a Para-Fascist Culture: Architecture, Politics and Power in Vargas' Regime (1930–1945)

Francisco Sales Trajano Filho

Instituto de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade de São Paulo

sales@sc.usp.br

Abstract

This article considers key developments in Brazilian architecture which occurred under the ambiguous and contradictory Vargas' regime (1930–1945), when it was exposed to both internal and external political contingencies, including the crisis of liberalism, which affected its ability to expand and consolidate itself. This situation was not unique to Brazil, since many interwar dictatorships, including the Soviet and fascist regimes, shared the same characteristics. In the Brazilian twentieth century, both during democratic and dictatorial times, whether dominated by left-wing or right-wing ideologies, architecture and the State constantly sought to take advantage of the relationship between them. The demands, projects and interests of both spheres set up an intricate web of relationships that shaped national identity and embodied its material representation. Investigating the place of architecture within a broader context, that of the Brazilian nation-building process, the article establishes that the architectural representation of the Brazilian state was never straight forward, combining a set of breakthroughs and setbacks, and always leaving the quest for a uniform and coherent aesthetic language unsolved. This anomalous situation has led scholarship to disregard the complex relationship between the State and architecture, between ideology and aesthetics and, simultaneously, to ignore the profound contradictions within Vargas's government, both in the political and architectural field, and to underestimate the role played by the modernism of European fascism in acting as one of the poles of attraction acting on how building projects were conceived.

Keywords

Brazil – architecture – fascism – para-fascism – the Vargas regime – state and nation-building – dictatorship

• • •

‘O milagre de Getúlio Vargas foi ter levantado, no Brasil, esse mundo novo, que adquire consciência de si mesmo’ [‘The miracle of Getúlio Vargas was to have raised, in Brazil, this new world, which acquires consciousness of itself’]¹

‘Ele [Getúlio Vargas] é, sem dúvida, o verdadeiro construtor da Nação, o único arquiteto do Brasil.’ [‘He [Getúlio Vargas] is undoubtedly the true builder of the nation, the only architect in Brazil’]²

• •

As a preeminently public manifestation of culture, one which imposes itself on the daily life of society, architecture, through its material presence in the urban scene, has historically constituted an ideal vehicle for the transmission of ideologies, worldviews and representations of all kinds.³

According to the architect Gerson Pompeu Pinheiro, this ‘splendid resource for political-social propaganda’ has obvious advantages compared to painting, literature, music and other artistic expressions that can also play a role in the dissemination of political-doctrinal ideals. While these require specific intellectual resources to be understood, thereby limiting their scope and effect, architecture can often dispense with the need for prior information or an educated response in its appreciation and understanding. Through its buildings, given ‘their eminently objective characteristics’ to those who see and use

1 Paulo Augusto de Figueiredo, ‘O Estado Novo e o homem novo,’ *Cultura Política* 1, no. 1 (1941).

2 Oswaldo Teixeira, *Getúlio Vargas e a arte no Brasil: A influência direta dos chefes de Estado na formação artística das pátrias* (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda, 1940).

3 Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, power and national identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 3.

them 'from the most ignorant to the most learned', architecture 'can express an intention, convey an idea, and glorify a doctrine'.

Gerson Pompeu Pinheiro expressed these thoughts in an article entitled 'The State and Architecture', published in the magazine *Architecture and Urbanism of the Institute of Architects of Brazil* in July-August 1938. It is one of the rare texts of the period which reflects on the prospects for Brazilian architecture in response to the new political situation that had had been imposed on the country when the Estado Novo was decreed by then President Getúlio Vargas in November 1937. Pinheiro, an architect who graduated from the National School of Fine Arts in the late 1920s, contributed to the formulation and dissemination of theories of architectural rationalism in the country, and was the creative driving force, in partnership with the architect Affonso Eduardo Reidy, behind the project to build the Albergue da Boa Vontade (1931), a night-shelter for homeless men whose design became paradigmatic for its avant-garde boldness. In the article, Pinheiro, without referring directly to the Brazilian situation, examines the architecture of European countries under authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, noting ambiguities and unpredictability in the reciprocal relationship between State and architecture, and between political ideology and aesthetic representation. Rejecting a linear and deterministic understanding of this relationship reveals, his analysis revealed an internal complexity to the dynamic between State and architecture that is far removed from the superficial pronouncements on this topic that persisted so long in the historiography of twentieth century architecture.

The centrality of the State as a decisive agent in the processes of modernization and nation-building, both in the Brazilian context and in Latin America, is already widely recognized in historiography and it is not necessary to repeat here.⁴ It is important, however, to emphasize that such processes often subsume contradictory impulses. Operating within the perspective of constructing the 'new', intrinsic to the program of modernity, these processes at the same time instilled deep links with the past, cultivating (often mythic) ties

4 Carlos Alberto Ferreira Martins, *Arquitetura e Estado no Brasil: Elementos para uma investigação sobre a constituição do discurso moderno no Brasil; a obra de Lúcio Costa (1924–1952)* (São Paulo: FFLCH-USP, 1987); Carlos Alberto Ferreira Martins, 'Identidade Nacional e Estado no projeto modernista,' *Óculum* 2 (1992): 71–76; Adrián Gorelik, 'Nostalgia y plan: El Estado como vanguardia,' in *Arte, Historia e Identidad en América: Visiones Comparativas, Actas del XVII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994); Lauro Cavalcanti, *Modernistas na repartição* (Rio de Janeiro: EdUFRJ; Minciphan, 2000); Ricardo de Souza Rocha, *Monumentos no Brasil: Arquitetura, autoridade e modernidade* (São Paulo: FAU/ USP, 2006).

with history and tradition. This is an aspect of the creation of modern Brazil highlighted in the formulation of the writer Cassiano Ricardo, one of the ideologues of the Vargas regime, when he explained the emergence of the Estado Novo from the 'confluence of two irrefutable truths: Brazil's unique position in the face of the modern world, and Brazil's return to its historical, ethnic, economic and political sources.'⁵

In the 1920s, Cassiano Ricardo was member of the Green-Yellow and Anta modernist groups, both of them (and in European terms paradoxically) conservative and advocates of an exalted nationalism, where he was in contact with the writers Plínio Salgado and Menotti del Picchia. In the 1930s, Ricardo would enter a relationship first of growing accommodation with, and then of increasing participation in the Vargas State, assuming various positions in the public administration and the state propaganda structure, such as the position of director of the newspaper *A Manhã*, an official government organ.⁶

Significant but not exceptional, Ricardo's trajectory, which takes him from the aesthetic modernism of the 1920s to the inner machinery of the state led by Vargas in the following decade, is emblematic of the proactive collusion demanded of intellectuals, men of letters and technique, artists, writers and architects within the framework of a discourse specially devised to encourage creativity in favor of national (re)construction. It centered on the call for the 'necessary symbiosis between men of thought and action',⁷ as Vargas himself would put it in his inaugural speech as a member of the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* [ABL; Brazilian Academy of Letters] in 1943.

Presenting itself as the most effective representation of the idea of a nation, in the 1930s the Brazilian state would become under Vargas the space of convergence *par excellence* of individuals of different intellectual and ideological mindsets, organizing itself in the bowels of the state bureaucracy into an unusual intelligentsia,⁸ in a constant state internal tension due to deep-seated disputes over the access to spaces of legitimacy and power. The members of

5 Cassiano Ricardo, 'O Estado Novo e o seu sentido bandeirante,' *Cultura Política* 1, no. 1 (1941): 111.

6 Monica Pimenta Velloso, 'Os intelectuais e a política cultural do Estado Novo,' in *O Brasil Republicano 2- O tempo do nacional-estatismo: Do início da década de 1930 ao apogeu do Estado Novo*, ed. Jorge Ferreira and Lucília de Almeida Neves Delgado (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2017), 145–179.

7 Discurso de posse de Getúlio Vargas na Academia Brasileira de Letras, 29 de dezembro de 1943, accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.academia.org.br/academicos/getulio-vargas/discurso-de-posse>.

8 Luciano Martins, 'A gênese de uma "intelligentsia": Os intelectuais e a política no Brasil, 1920–1940,' *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 2, no. 4 (1987): 65–87.

this intelligentsia would go on to shape the nation in symbolic and material terms, setting out to mould a nationwide cultural identity⁹ that, according to the premises of the new post-crisis state reorganized in 1929, would be comprehensible to the whole of the nation under construction, one that was, in contrast to the state before Vargas, intact and without internal divisions. 'A State . . . that distanced itself from the outmoded liberal order',¹⁰ and assumed instead an interventionist, centralizing and modernizing character openly flirting with the Nazi-fascist ideology of interwar Europe.

In concrete terms, the consolidation of the nation-state necessarily depended on the constructive sphere, and it will be through architecture that such constructive effort will fully flow, geared mainly to endowing the country with a vast supply of social and governmental hardware and technical resources. As the architect Lúcio Costa put it in the mid-1930s, Brazil was the place where 'everything is practically to be done.'¹¹ Through architecture, the regime sought to translate itself into forms and materials, and while doing so to resolve uncertainties intrinsic to the medium of architectural expression, and subject to different interpretations and meanings that often elude rational formulation. It is within the scope of the modernizing policies that Brazilian architecture was able to expand its range and deepen its impact during the 1930s and 1940s. This is the reason why it is so appropriate to analyse the Vargas regime through the lens of Brazilian architecture.

In the Brazilian twentieth century, whether in democratic or dictatorial times, and whether left-wing or right-wing ideologies prevailed, architecture and State constantly sought to take advantage of each other. The demands, projects and interests they pursued set up an intricate relationship that would shape national identity and leave their mark on their material representation in artistic expression and the built environment. Involving simultaneously political and aesthetic fields, this association is often acknowledged for the 1950s, linking the golden age of the Bossa Nova, Brasilia and the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira (1956–1961), as well as for the period between 1964 and 1985 under the military dictatorship. Whether under progressive or conservative governments, architecture had always been involved in the modernization projects underway in Brazil throughout the twentieth

9 Martins, 'Identidade nacional e Estado no projeto modernista,' 71–76. As the author states in his conclusion, 'the state will be, in post-1930 Brazil, not only the arbiter, but the privileged promoter of cultural production.'

10 Paulo Augusto de Figueiredo, 'O Estado Novo e o homem novo,' 135.

11 Lúcio Costa, 'Razões da nova arquitetura,' *Revista da Diretoria de Engenharia do Distrito Federal* 3, no. 1 (1936): 5.

century.¹² However, it was during the first government of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945), and overall in the Estado Novo, between 1937 and 1945, that this relationship acquired a degree of consistency and an own *modus operandi*.

Given the idiosyncrasies of the head of the nation, and the ideological, political and cultural heterogeneity present at every level of the government that drives the architecture produced for the state, it was inevitable that buildings would reflect, in imagery and discursive terms, the peculiarities that characterized politics under Vargas. Hence, any analysis of the architectural period of these years that starts out from the premise that it is possible to identify a clearly defined, a priori aesthetic is bound to produce misleading results of low scholarly value. To seek to identify a state aesthetic is to answer a false question, in fact, whose main effect is to divert attention from what is more relevant, the functioning of the field of architectural activity in its relationship to the Vargas state despite the diversity of ideological and aesthetic directions accommodated within its structure. The architectural representation of the Brazilian state was never straight-forward, which meant a series of breakthroughs and setbacks for town-planners and architects, while leaving the quest for a uniform regime style and aesthetic language unresolved. This has led scholars to disregard the complex relationship between the State and architecture, and between ideology and aesthetics under Vargas, and, at the same time to ignore the profound contradictions at the heart of his administration, both in the political and architectural fields.

Without simply mirroring the conflicted dynamics of the political sphere, architecture could not be immune to its most radical results of the regime's development. Architecture can be seen as serving as a sort of litmus test for evaluating what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz called 'the cultural balance of power':¹³ examining the architecture of the period throws into relief strategies for doing politics and governing under Vargas, as well as casting light on the complex relationship that formed at the time between architecture and State, and between aesthetics and politics.

This article explores the ambiguous and contradictory nature of the Vargas regime, which was exposed to both internal and external political contingencies, including the international crisis of liberalism and rise of European fascism. In particular, it argues that its aim to expand and consolidate itself as an alternative to parliamentary government was not unique to Brazil, since many interwar dictatorships, including the Soviet and fascist regimes, pursued the

12 Raymundo Faoro, 'A questão nacional: A modernização,' *Estudos Avançados* 6, no. 14 (1992): 7–22.

13 Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 245.

same goal on a scale that was much more comprehensive, totalitarian even. It will thus investigate the place of architecture within the broader context of Brazilian nation-building in the era of fascism.

Vargas Regime: Power and Culture for a New Nation

Getúlio Vargas came to power for the first time in October 1930 through a military coup, after his defeat in the fraudulent presidential election that took place some months earlier. Vargas had been backed by a significant part of the Brazilian population regardless of its political convictions. Bringing together representatives from traditional politics, disaffected elements of the military, particularly the *tenentes* [lieutenants] and other radical groups who came from the middle class, as well as intellectuals of varying ideological backgrounds, the coalition that supported Vargas gathered heterogeneous political forces that had little in common other than their opposition to the previous government¹⁴ and the longing for a strong, centralized state capable of unifying and strengthening the nation through economic progress and modernization.

The government that came to power in 1930 had not only broken with the *República Velha* [Old Republic], but had also invested a great deal in strengthening and consolidating the nation-state, a process in which architecture play a key role. In the face of what Brazil was in those days, with a weakened central government limited by regional oligarchies, the demand for a strong and centralized state became a consensual policy across class divides in Brazil. And it was this longing for decisive, even autocratic, leadership from all sides that provided the basis for Getúlio Vargas' government, which could initially rely on support from both the radical right and the radical left.¹⁵

In Brazil, exactly as in other parts of the world – such as in Italy, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Romania, Poland, and Japan – movements of anti-liberalism and anti-parliamentary populism would come to power in the 1930s. Indeed, the political, economic and societal initiatives of Vargas' regime reflected what was happening in interwar European dictatorships, where the prospect of a strong state led by a strong leader who established the supremacy

14 Robert M. Levine, *O regime de Vargas, 1934–1938: Os anos críticos* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1980), 15. The original title is *The Vargas Regime: The Critical Years, 1934–1938* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

15 Thomas Skidmore, *Politics in Brazil (1930–1964): An Experiment in Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robert M. Levine, *Father of the Poor? Vargas and his Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

of the nation as a whole over individual interests established itself as a credible alternative to a failing liberal democracy and the threat of communism. This international mood of optimism in authoritarian and militaristic nationalism as the solution to the crisis of civilization created the conditions for the establishment of the Estado Novo.

In the decade that followed Vargas' leadership underwent several transformations, but the period in which the regime came closest to resembling European interwar dictatorships began in 1937, after a coup d'état which allowed the leader to establish 'a personal authoritarian and repressive system'.¹⁶

Seen by the ideologues of the regime as a necessary correction to the direction taken by the democratization of Brazil after 1930, after some questionable policies had been adopted along the way, the Estado Novo would be, as the lawyer Francisco Campos observed, 'the final link in a long chain of experiments'.¹⁷ It would be the culmination of the schemes initiated in the October coup d'état, which could not be realized at the time, but which were then resumed, leaving behind the procrastination, anarchy and chaos that had resulted from by concessions to liberal democracy. The sense of bringing the country into step with times, of overcoming the wasteful and inefficient character of the liberal State in responding to the demands of the nation, pervade Vargas's proclamation to the Brazilian people on national radio on the night of November 10, 1937, addressed to a population alienated from the political process which was only at that moment being made aware of the facts:

The existing governmental structure did meet the demands of national life; rather it hindered its growth and inhibited its movements. When establishing legal obligations, it did not prioritize the public interest as it should have done. Responsibilities were distributed among the various political institutions in such a way that the effectiveness of the state apparatus was reduced to a minimum, and its efficiency suffered irreparable damage, since it has been continually exposed to the influence of personal interests and a variety of political forces.¹⁸

16 Helgio Trindade, 'Fascism and Authoritarianism in Brazil under Vargas (1930–1945),' in *Fascism outside Europe*, ed. Stein Larsen (New York: Columbia University Press, Boulder Social, 2002), 470; Margarida de Souza Neves and Maria Helena Rolim Capelato, 'Retratos del Brasil: Ideas, sociedad y política,' in *Ideas en el siglo: Intelectuales y cultura en el siglo xx latino-americano*, ed. Oscar Terán (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores, 2008), 146–162.

17 Jarbas Medeiros, *Ideologia autoritária no Brasil, 1930–1945* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1978), 26.

18 Getúlio Vargas, *A nova política do Brasil*, vol. 5 (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, 1938), 24.

In the process of concentrating power and promoting broad administrative reforms through the creation of new ministries and a streamlined state bureaucracy, many powerful individuals within the Vargas government professed their admiration for fascism. This attitude was common among countless Brazilian intellectuals and artists, who were particularly receptive to fascist and Nazi initiatives for national regeneration between the 1920s and 1940s, especially within the German and Italian communities.¹⁹ Vargas himself did not hide his personal admiration for fascism, in particular for Mussolini and Hitler.

One example of this is Francisco Campos, jurist and author of the text of the Constitutional Charter of 1937 and Minister of Education and Health during the provisional government (1930–1932). He openly expressed sympathy for the Führer's work and wrote *apologias* for Europe's totalitarian regimes in his writings, writing, for instance: 'whoever wants to understand the process by which political decisions are actually arrived at, should study the German masses, spell-bound by the charismatic performances of the Führer, and whose faces, marked by traces of tension, anxiety and anguish, nevertheless betray a state of fascination and hypnosis.'²⁰ Campos was one of the main representatives of the authoritarian nationalist thinking which was central to the discourse of support expressed for Vargas' Estado Novo.²¹ Along with intellectuals such as Oliveira Viana and Azevedo Amaral, he formed the hard core of what Bolivar Lamounier called the state ideology, according to which the State, not civil society, is the true agent of national construction.

In spite of the idiosyncrasies of their political analyses, these intellectuals shared the conviction that the establishment of the New State was an unavoidable necessity, one which made sense given the dysfunctional historical process of the country's social and political formation which had been characterized by the failure of way territory had been colonized and occupied to create an integrated nation bound together by the strong communal ties which would be essential to the establishment of a cohesive social structure. Above all, in the thought of some commentators, such as Oliveira Viana, the Estado Novo was seen as the result of a historical destiny whose roots could be traced back to the beginnings of what would become the nation. It was as if the New

19 Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, 'Fascistas à brasileira: Encontros e desencontros,' in *Tempos de fascismo: Ideologia, intolerância, imaginário*, ed. Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro and Frederico Croci (São Paulo: Edusp; Imprensa Oficial; Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo, 2010), 435.

20 Francisco Campos *apud* Boris Fausto, *O pensamento nacionalista autoritário (1920–1940)* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2001), 52.

21 *Ibid.*

State corresponded perfectly to the essence of the nation and its people, unlike democratic liberalism, which would be foreign to the Brazilian's character, an exotic import that did not bear fruit in this country.²²

Neither Oliveira Viana nor Azevedo Amaral shared Francisco Campos' enthusiasm for German Nazism. Instead, both strove to formulate explanations that, on the one hand justified the establishment of the authoritarian regime of the New Vargas state – called 'authoritarian democracy' by Amaral – but on the other sought to differentiate it from the totalitarianism of the Italian and German regimes. In *The Authoritarian State and the National Reality* (1940), Azevedo Amaral argued that in the 'authoritarian Brazilian state the state organization did not encompass the whole collective life of the nation, as it did in fascism.'²³ A year before, Oliveira Viana, in his study of the psychology of the masses, *The Idealism of the Constitution* (1939), had explained the difference between the Estado Novo and the fascist regimes in these terms:

In our collective psychology, the preconditions are absent for the constitution of a living and organic ideological mystique, a mystique that takes possession of the national soul and moves it in a predetermined direction towards a precise goal, such as the imperialist nationalism of Mussolini's Italians or the racist nationalism of Hitler's Germans. In our country, a small cohort or phalanx of elite men may succumb to such a mystique and work towards the political goals it sets, but not a party, even if it represents a minority of the nation and is the only militant party.²⁴

In fact, the Vargas regime was never a totalitarian project and never sought the full mobilization of the masses to achieve a new type of dynamic national community or *Volksgemeinschaft*.

However, in spite of the commitment to demarcating the regime of Vargas from European Nazi-fascism – as when the writer Cassiano Ricardo insisted at the beginning of the decade of 1940 that 'the New State is not a copy of any imported constitutional arrangement'²⁵ – this ideology would find wide dissemination and prestige among authorities, intellectuals, and certain sectors of Brazilian society, with direct repercussions in the politics of the Brazilian State. Although their influence was never officially acknowledged before, and especially after, the Estado Novo, a wide range of ideas, practices, and forms of social

22 Neves and Capelato, 'Retratos del Brasil,' 150–151; Fausto, *O pensamento nacionalista*, 52.

23 Neves and Capelato, 'Retratos del Brasil,' 154.

24 Fausto, *O pensamento nacionalista*, 11.

25 Ricardo, 'O Estado Novo e o seu sentido bandeirante,' 111.

and governmental organization of Nazi-fascist inspiration, and absorbed from Germany, Italy, and other European countries with similar ideologies, such as Portugal and Spain, would prove fundamental to the restructuring of Brazil's State, political system and society undertaken by Vargas and his ministers.

For example, even if this topic calls for further studies, it is possible to hear in certain pronouncements of New State ideologues echoes of the myth of the nation's rebirth, of the idea of palingenesis, so central in the Nazi-fascist ideology.²⁶ Dissociating itself both from the fragile Old Republic, eroded at its base by the narrow interests of the regional elites, and from the early 1930s, the time of frustrated attempts to break away from the excesses of a decadent liberalism, the New State would not just inaugurate political change, but bring about a true rebirth, 'a phase of redemption . . . of Brazil's encounter with itself.'²⁷ It marked a deep caesura in the regular unfolding of events and the establishment of a new, distinct and completely new reality in which 'history itself indicates a new course, . . . life itself imposes new adaptive tendencies and new guidelines for the future.'²⁸ Moreover, this whole new reality reconnected with elements present in the very origins of the nation centuries before, vestiges of the original political and social formation of the country that had been truncated in its historical development and were now being renewed, providing the organic roots of an alternative modernity to liberal democracy.

This train of thought appears as much in the thought of Oliveira Viana as in the work of Cassiano Ricardo, as well as in that of other intellectuals of the period. The notion of a long historical arc uniting past and present is central to Cassiano Ricardo's most famous non-fiction work, the historical essay *March to the West: The Influence of the Flag in the Social and Political Formation of Brazil* (1940), which constructs a mythical narrative of the formation of the Brazilian national state by forming an analogy between the movement of occupation of the territory known as *bandeiras* [flags] in the sixteenth century and the constitution of the Estado Novo.

Many similarities between the Brazilian Estado Novo and the fascist regimes can be found.²⁹ First, all these states were driven by a similar search for

26 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

27 Velloso, 'Os intelectuais,' 154.

28 Almir Andrade, 'A evolução política e social do Brasil,' *Cultura Política* 1, no. 1 (1941): 5. Almir Andrade was director of *Cultura Política* magazine, one of the most prestigious publications during the *Estado Novo*. It circulated between 1941 and 1945, bringing together in its pages contributions from several Brazilian intellectuals of the period, not always ideologically aligned with the regime, but nevertheless attached to it through work in the institutional sphere.

29 Trindade, 'Fascism and Authoritarianism,' 483.

an anti-democratic and anti-communist social and economic order, for a new type of modern state that rejected liberalism with its plutocrats and corruption as well as communism with its longing to destroy the existing social and material order, a political ideal that would lead in practice to authoritarianism, state repression, propaganda, and censorship.

Brazilian admiration for fascism was qualified by some idiosyncrasies of the nation's history. Racial purity, for instance, never received extensive support. Instead, given the extreme ethnic diversity of Brazilian society, some intellectuals even considered miscegenation as a distinctive quality of the national character. Such is the case of Plínio Salgado, an admirer of European fascism, who in 1932 created the *Associação Integralista Brasileira* [AIB; Brazilian Integralist Action). Salgado would campaign for Brazil to become a single, indivisible society despite classes and races. He even criticized the 'racist imperialism' of Nazism, recognizing ethnic diversity as a defining feature of the Brazilian soul that should be further developed in order to strengthen social cohesion.³⁰ What would prevent the rise of a Brazilian fascist regime was the government's rejection of the revolutionary impulse behind the AIB movement that Vargas considered too radical, fearing its capacity for mass mobilization, its paramilitary organization, as well as its links with Nazi and Fascism.³¹ As a result, immediately after the 1937 coup d'état, Vargas ordered a series of successive 'purges' of the AIB's social support, finally banning it altogether.

Vargas regime's attraction to fascist experiments with the state corporatism promoted by Italian Fascism and the British Union of Fascism was another common feature. In fact, the book by the corporatist theorist of the Romanian Iron Guard, Mihail Manoilescu, was translated into Portuguese in 1938 by Azevedo Amaral and published as *O século do corporativismo* [The Century of Corporatism]. Another feature common to fascism was the modernizing impetus of the regime, which in its propaganda claimed to be promoting economic autarchy and the material conditions for the emergence of a new man and a new society, a myth distinct from communist and democratic ideals, though a deeply ambiguous one which could be articulated in terms of racial purity just as much as a multi-ethnic society.

A further element that links the Vargas regime to the 'fascist era' is the mythic ideal of the new uniquely Brazilian man, someone who, whatever his age, demonstrated the new national character, fruit of the successful symbiosis of a variety of historical and ethnic cultures. Such a myth was promoted

30 Natália dos Reis Cruz, 'A miscigenação racial na doutrina do sigma: O discurso velado do racismo integralista,' *Dimensões* 18 (2006): 221–235.

31 Trindade, 'Fascism and Authoritarianism,' 479.

both by fascist movements (notably the Romanian Iron Guard) and by para-fascist ones (e.g. in Vichy France), and in the Third Reich acquired eugenic and biological connotations of racial purity. This ideal would be realized through a totalitarian approach to the national educational system, which would be dedicated to the formation of the integral personality of adolescents as the primary purpose of secondary education.³²

Blending conservative and progressive economic, political, and cultural traits, Vargas' regime would be driven by a constant search for an equilibrium of opposing forces in order to successfully maintain political stability. But this search for compromise only underlines the parallels of the Vargas regime with other interwar European and Latin-American dictatorships of the time: Fascism, for example, was forced to make a series of compromises with traditional politics and interests for pragmatic reasons to stay in power, and even Nazism made concessions to some vested interests. As happened elsewhere under para-fascist regimes, Vargas' supporters included advocates of Aryan eugenics for the creation of a racially dominant white population, while at the same time, there were other intellectuals, such as Gilberto Freyre, the disciple of the sociologist Franz Boas, who defended racial and cultural miscegenation.³³

A similar heterogeneity and hybridity had its counterpart in cultural terms, which makes the 1930s, and particularly the *Estado Novo*, the richest and most complex in which to investigate the relationship between intellectuals and the state, and between the political sphere and culture. The variegated political-ideological composition of the Vargas state certainly helps to explain the accommodation of a broad artistic and intellectual spectrum within the regime: avant-garde and traditionalist, conservative and progressive, nationalist and cosmopolitan, left or right-wing political, communist, liberals and sympathizers of Nazi-fascism, paladins of traditional history and radicals proposing new narratives precipitated by the historical imagination's engagement with modernity.

It may be illustrative of this at first glance schizophrenic positioning of the Vargas government within contemporary history to cite two public instances concerning Brazil's past and its artistic and cultural patrimony: the National Historical Museum and the *Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional*

32 Angela de Castro Gomes, 'Ideologia e trabalho no Estado Novo,' in *Repensando o Estado Novo*, ed. Dulce Pandolfi (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1999), 61–66.

33 Ricardo Benzaquen de Araújo, *Casa-Grande & Senzala e a obra de Gilberto Freyre nos anos 1930* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1994).

[SPHAN; National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute].³⁴ While the former was directed by Gustavo Barroso, an anti-Semitic intellectual, Nazi enthusiast and integralist affiliate of the AIB, with a deeply conservative mindset, SPHAN was headed by Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade and brought together in his intellectual cadres and artists representing the most progressive milieu of Brazilian writing of the first half of the twentieth century, such as the writer, ethnographer and essayist Mário de Andrade, and the architect Lúcio Costa, advocate of the architectural modernization in the country, which he approached from an avant-garde point of view.

The official discourse presented this convergence of such disparate components as stemming from the recognition of a communal consciousness and a common national spirit that transcended class divisions and embraced idiosyncrasies of every kind.³⁵ It was the result of the 'balance between the leading creative forces, conscious of their respective responsibilities, all of which are integrated within the shared spirit of the same political order'.³⁶ All this was possible thanks to the efforts of reconciliation made by Vargas, the architect of a policy that was also the 'authentic expression of our true social spirit'.

In this social spirit, the needs of our present have been harmonized with the achievements of our past, providing politics with a threefold license: to act, to think and to create, both in Brazil, and in the eyes of the rest of the world, and to do so by associating the national, which marks out the activities of a people, to the universal, which constitutes the aspiration of intelligence.³⁷

Conjugate the past with the present, the national with the international, the time of the nation with universal time: these would be the demands made of intellectuals. As a corollary of rejecting the image of intellectuals as mere cultivators of a self-sufficient aestheticism, oblivious to the movements of political and social life, and absorbed in their ivory towers, the regime begins to ask of them an active involvement in the life of the nation: moving from disinterested reflection to the construction of fact from immediate reality; from writing the story, to making the story. Whether because of genuine ideological affinity, the

34 On the role of SPHAN during Vargas regime, see Daryle Williams, *Culture Wars in Brazil During the First Vargas Regime, 1930–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

35 Neves and Capelato, 'Retratos del Brasi,' 161: 'the collective national identity so intensified after 1937 was based on ideas of order and harmony, understood as guaranteeing the promises of a prosperous future. The Estado Novo welcomed the modernization that would lead the country to achieve the status of a great nation, fulfilling the role that destiny had reserved for it from its origins.'

36 Lúcio Costa, 'Influência política sobre a evolução social, intelectual e artística do Brasil,' *Cultura Política* 1, no. 1 (1941): 227.

37 Costa, 'Influência política sobre a evolução social,' 228.

prospect of professional advancement, simple opportunism, or identification, however partial, with aspects of the constructive-modernizing agenda of Vargas, the fact is that a significant percentage of intellectuals, artists and technicians would be put at the service of the State under Vargas, and organically inserted into the workings of the regime.

Vargas' cultural policy was organized from within two main spheres of production and diffusion, conflicting in their directives and composition: the Ministry of Education and Health under the direction of Gustavo Capanema, between 1934 and 1945, and the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* [DIP; Department of Press and Propaganda]. These two centers for the construction of discourses and images designed to legitimize the regime are symptomatic of the polarization reigning at the heart of the Vargas state.³⁸ Under the direction of Gustavo Capanema, the Ministry of Education and Public Health would actually assume a prominent position in the power structure of the Vargas's regime. Capanema maintained close contacts both with the traditional Catholicism upheld by influential intellectuals at that time, such as Alceu Amoroso Lima, and with a group of artists, architects and poets, such as Carlos Drummond de Andrade, his chief of staff during the period in which he led the ministry (1934–1945). It could be argued that it was through Drummond that a complex network of relations between Capanema and some of the most progressive figures Brazilian culture in the 1930s and 1940s was forged, with the minister having close dealings with Gilberto Freyre, Cândido Portinari, Mário de Andrade and Lúcio Costa, among others.

The DIP was born in 1934 as a subsection of the Department of Propaganda and Cultural Diffusion which had been set up by the Ministry of Justice and modelled on the Ministry of Propaganda of the Reich conceived by Joseph Goebbels. Answerable directly to Vargas, and directed by Lourival Fontes, the DIP brought together on its multiple fronts of cultural action and political propaganda several names identified by the historian and critic of Brazilian literature, Antonio Arnoni Prado, as representatives of a 'false avant-garde':³⁹ intellectuals like Cassiano Ricardo and Menotti Del Picchia, who in the 1920s experimented with forms of aesthetic modernism in the arts and literature, but who in the following decade were converted into supporters of authoritarianism and defenders of a strong central government, as personified in Vargas.

38 Ibid., 149.

39 Antonio Arnoni Prado, *Itinerários de uma falsa vanguarda: os dissidentes, a Semana de 22 e o integralismo* (São Paulo: Ed. 34, 2010).

Geared to the service of specific 'clienteles', the ministry of Capanema contributed to the formation of an erudite culture and high level of formal education under Vargas. From the issues of historical heritage raised by SPHAN, the publication of essays on the national past by famous scholars, and studies of folklore and popular culture, the ministry's initiatives provided a focus for its main audience, the country's intellectual elite. Paradoxically, though dedicated to the study of the 'people' and its cultural, religious, ethnic composition, the ministry's publications were not generally intended for this 'people'.

In addition to the strict control of the media and the press, the DIP, with some areas of interest which overlapped with the remit of the Ministry of Education, was fundamentally responsible for determining the images through which the regime presented itself to the mass of the Brazilian population, and for deciding the strategies to win over and seduce public opinion through the radio, theater, newspapers, magazines and official publications. Prestigious intellectuals held key positions in organs of cultural transmission of direct interest to the DIP, such as the newspaper *A Manhã*, published in the federal capital, Rio de Janeiro, directed by Cassiano Ricardo, and the magazine *Cultura Política*, under the direction of Almir Andrade, both official spokesmen of Estado Novo. Intending to 'mirror everything that is genuinely Brazilian,' the journal *Cultura Política* did not place restrictions on the political messages of the authors that it published; which is why its pages present a jigsaw puzzle of the complex Brazilian intellectual geography of the time, providing a voice to representatives of the entire ideological spectrum.

DIP contributed to building up Vargas' image as the great national leader absolutely identified with the country's culture and people. As happened with many other dictatorships of the interwar period, Brazil's head of state would be endowed with the (consciously manufactured) personality of a charismatic leader, with a strong popular appeal enhanced by being celebrated in propaganda as the embodiment of the new Brazilian 'cordial man'. The figure of Vargas, or 'Gegê', as he was affectionately nicknamed by the people, would be the object of numerous representations in the daily press, in music, theater, and other cultural productions; all circulated under the watchful eye of the DIP, and according to the parameters defined by the state bureaucracy. What recurs in these representations are the images of a friend of the people, father of the nation, but also of someone like everyone else, a popular one like any other, a *carioca rogue!*⁴⁰

40 For Velloso, the image of the Zé Carioca character, created by Walt Disney and released in the animated film *Alô amigos* (1942), in the vein of US neighborly policies for Latin

United by a sense of closeness, familiarity, one of the most popular metamorphoses of Vargas' image would be that of the 'laughing president': Mr. Getúlio Vargas is a man who laughs: 'He laughs openly and heartily. The photographs and the snapshots have captured him countless times laughing pleasantly, without embarrassment and effort, in a sincere expansion of the whole soul. This laughter of the President is undoubtedly an asset that he has with the masses, and helps him maintain his popularity.'⁴¹

The image gave rise to a samba theme composed by Adalberto Ribeiro and Alcir Pires Vermelho, *The President's Smile*, 1935, and was immortalized in the iconic Raymond Neilson painting of 1943, appearing next to Franklin D. Roosevelt, both smiling as a demonstration of the friendship between Brazil and the United States. The image of Vargas smiling with 'all the soul' conflicts with the images constructed by other heads of authoritarian and totalitarian states of the period, often captured in stern and serious poses. As pure ideology, the friendly image of Vargas contrasted with, and worked to cover up, the regime's radically repressive and violent character.

Likewise, this friendly representation of Vargas, constructed by the propaganda machine set up by the DIP, would project the image of a leader benevolent towards the arts and tolerant of artists, who were free to develop their creativity without ties and without official control over the content of works, that is, without 'state dirigisme'. In the lapidary phrase of Carlos Cavalcanti, a specialist in plastic arts and museum curator of the Ministry of Education and Health, in Brazil 'the government takes care of art incessantly and Brazil has no state-controlled art.' With an intense but disinterested preoccupation, 'the Government now protects him [the artist], as he has never done before, but he protects him without coercion, without imposing on him the knife of "directed art", which kills spontaneity.'⁴²

As Velloso reveals, among other authors, and contrary to its claim to exercise no official control over artistic and cultural production, the regime imposed restrictions and censorship on cultural production, 'directing' or conditioning the content of works for the purposes of ensuring that all art was 'adequado', or

America, 'perfectly expressed the Carioca way: trickster, hat, umbrella, cigar and humor with a tendency to solve everything in a joke.' According to this author, the Brazilian prototype represented by Zé Carioca 'suggests the very figure of Vargas: friendly, smiling and even trickster when it comes to solving the difficult political plays'. Velloso, 'Os intelectuais', 167.

41 Gilberto Amado cited by Aline Lopes de Lacerda, 'A Obra Getuliana ou como as imagens comemoram o regime,' *Estudos Históricos* 14, no. 7 (1994): 244–245.

42 Carlos Cavalcanti, 'Artes plásticas,' *Cultura Política* 1, no. 1 (1941): 283.



FIGURE 1 *Vargas and Brazilian youth such as presented in The Booklet of Youth (A Cartilha da Juventude), published by DIP (1941).*

‘in line with’ the objectives of the State, and was ‘certain’ in its message, namely committed to the greater task of contributing to the construction of the nation in the terms defined by the state ideologues.⁴³ A sophisticated example of the mythical discourse in which Vargas’s action in the cultural field was expressed is Getúlio Vargas’s *Getúlio Vargas e a arte no Brasil* [Getúlio Vargas and Art in Brazil], written by Oswaldo Teixeira, director of the National Museum of Fine Arts, and published by DIP in 1940. The hyperbolic tone is already suggested in the book’s subtitle: ‘The direct influence of the heads of state in the artistic formation of the homelands’. It offers an account of the place which Vargas occupies in the epic history of the role of benefactors in the production of great art. Moving from Pericles in Greece to Augustus in Imperial Rome; from the Renaissance of the Medici to the France of Francisco I and to Spain under the governments of Felipe II and Felipe IV, the narrative continues in a crescendo to culminate in the Estado Novo, which is thus compared directly with the glorious epochs of the western art. In Teixeira’s account, Vargas and his regime were in the process of endowing the country with the material and spiritual conditions for a new dawn of the arts. Not only had the chief of the nation instituted a favorable environment for the artists and their work, he personified

43 Velloso, ‘Os intelectuais e a política cultural do Estado Novo,’ 162–166.

the catalyst of the whole creative process: 'If it were not for Getúlio Vargas, Brazilian art would be striding towards complete and disastrous decadence, which would be truly regrettable for the nation has in its artists the immortalizers of its most significant historical facts, throwing into relief its most characteristic features that best epitomize the true soul of the nation.'⁴⁴

Architecture and Nation-Building under Vargas

In early 1943 the exhibition 'Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1642–1942' was opened at the New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).⁴⁵ Part of a set of measures taken by the United States of America to foster good neighbourly relations with Latin America, and particularly with Brazil, the exhibition aimed at bringing together the two countries during the Second World War within a scenario in which Getúlio Vargas was still hesitating about which side to align with.

As its title claims, the exhibition proposed a comprehensive historical reading of Brazilian architecture from the colonial up to the contemporary period. The material presented at the exhibition and its catalogue was the result of a survey carried out by the architect Philip L. Goodwin accompanied by the photographer G. E. Kidder Smith in Brazil during the previous summer. At some point, the catalogue highlights the social integration of the Brazilian people of the *Estado Novo*, which was symbolized by the construction of impressive new buildings to house the departments for all the complicated public services.⁴⁶ Goodwin also emphasizes what seems to be the unique quality of Brazilianness in terms of official architecture: 'While Federal classic in Washington, Royal Academy archaeology in London and Nazi classic in Munich are still triumphant, Brazil has had the courage to break away from the safe and easy path, with the result that Rio can boast of the most beautiful government building in the Western hemisphere.'⁴⁷

44 Teixeira, *Getúlio Vargas e a arte no Brasil*, 51.

45 For a detailed survey of this topic, see Zilah Quezado Deckker, *Brazil Built: The Architecture of the Modern Movement in Brazil* (New York; London: Spon Press, 2001); an analysis of this MoMA exposition in the context of the US Goodwill Policy for Latin America was made by Jorge Francisco Liernur, "'The South American Way": El "milagro" brasileño, los Estados Unidos y la Segunda Guerra Mundial (1939–1943)', *Block 4* (1999): 23–41.

46 Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1642–1942* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943), 91.

47 Goodwin, *Brazil Builds*, 92.

In this section of his 1943 exhibition catalogue *Brazil Builds*, Goodwin is alluding to the architectural style used in the headquarters of the Ministry of Education and Health, designed by a team of modern architects coordinated by Lúcio Costa. It is taken from a passage which shows the author's personal commitment to avant-garde architecture in the period 1930–1940, which he shared with those responsible for the Ministry project. His assessment was to have far-reaching influence on the way later historians would read buildings produced under the Vargas government, in particular helping to establish the myth that there was a state predilection for this style, or that it had somehow been chosen as the official aesthetic, something that never happened. This misunderstanding is largely due to simplistic interpretations that Goodwin offers in the text of the *Brazil Builds* catalog. The most significant of these fallacies was to extend a particular interpretation of a project as exceptional as the building of the Ministry to the totality of Vargas architectural production, which led to the misapprehension that all the architecture made for the state at that time was modern. In fact, the avant-garde lines of the Ministry were out of step with the conservative aesthetic that predominated in Vargas's public works. By failing to appreciate the exceptionalness of the Ministry building, Goodwin homogenizes the Brazilian architecture of the period, whose diversity of strands and expressions is obliterated by the projection of an image of modernity and uniformity.⁴⁸

As well as reducing the stylistic variety of Brazilian architecture into a faceless homogeneity, Goodwin performs a similar disservice to the architecture of the United States, England and Germany, all of which are flattened in complexity and reduced to synecdoche: the stripped classical of Federal buildings representing all American public architecture, the Royal Academy performing the same role for English architecture, and Nazi classicism summing up German architecture under the Führer. As has been shown by serious historiography concerned with the relationship between architecture and state in the twentieth century, even in the most emblematic cases of societies with totalitarian governments such as Russia, Italy, and Germany, any attempt to establish a stylistic homogeneity in architecture is doomed from the start.⁴⁹ Far from revealing a single stylistic ideal or some sort of purported aesthetic purity, the analyses have revealed the existence of a variety of forms, genres, and solutions

48 Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Diane Ghirardo, *Italy: Modern Architectures in History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

49 Ibid.

adapted to the symbolic and functional needs of the States, despite the eventual commitment of a later government to establish a certain uniformity of architectural image. In this sense, the Brazilian case also suffers from what Kenneth Frampton calls 'stylistic schizophrenia' when describing the architecture of the German Reich under Hitler.⁵⁰

The Brazilian reality in this point was not far from what was happening in Europe's two fascist states. Indeed, along with the resurgence of classical monumentality, Nazi Germany also approved contemporary re-readings of vernacular matrices, and sought to invoke the deepest bonds to the homeland, an architecture of blood and soil. The inconsistency became even deeper in face of avant-garde solutions adopted for public buildings, as was the case with the building for the *Deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Luftfahrt* [DVL: German Research Institute for Aviation] commissioned by Goering. According to functionalist aesthetics, the DVL building was in flagrant contradiction with the traditionalist preaching of the *Kampfbund für Deutsche Kultur* [KfDK; Militant League for German Culture].⁵¹ Similarly, contradictory discourses were also found in Fascist Italy, although in this particular case the *Duce* was clearly more receptive to rationalist architecture alongside the modernized versions of classicism ('stripped classicism') which were a feature of Marcello Piacentini's works, both of which contended to become the official aesthetic adopted by fascist state.⁵²

The relationship between architecture and power in Italy became the topic for the article 'O Estado e a Arquitectura' by the Brazilian architect Gerson Pompeu Pinheiro cited earlier in this article. Referring to architectural developments in Europe, the author considered the German and Soviet pavilions at the 1937 Universal Exhibition in Paris as representative of a conservative style which contrasted with Fascist architecture, in which he saw an auspicious sign of what was occurring on the global architectural stage. Pompeu Pinheiro even contrasted the 'solid academicism with pretensions to architectural

50 Kenneth Frampton, *História crítica da arquitetura moderna* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003), 262.

51 Barbara Miller Lane, 'Arquitectura nazi,' in *La arquitectura como simbolo de poder*, ed. Albert E. Elsen, Barbara Miller Lane and Stanislaus von Moos (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1975), 71–114; Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany*, 30–56.

52 For more details about the Italian situation, see Paolo Nicoloso, *Mussolini architetto: Propaganda e paesaggio urbano nell'Italia fascista* (Torino: Einaudi, 2011); Giorgio Ciucci, Francesco Dal Co, *Architettura italiana del '900* (Milano: Electa, 1995); Rosario De Simone, *Il razionalismo nell'architettura italiana del primo novecento* (Roma: Laterza, 2011); Diane Ghirardo, *Italy: Modern Architectures in history* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013).

nationalism' of Soviet Russia, with Italy, where the so-called modern architecture with international characteristics had been promoted. For Pinheiro, thanks to generous governmental support under the watchful eye of the *Duce*, constructions of the highest contemporary taste were being built in Italy, clearly demonstrating that totalitarian states are not always against modern art and culture. Praising Mussolini for removing obstacles to the free expansion of the intelligence and art, Pinheiro's article can be understood as a message to Vargas' Estado Novo, that had been established less than a year before the article was published.

In concrete terms, the consolidation of the Brazilian state led to the proliferation of transport, education, health, housing, public buildings programs.⁵³ Airports and stations for seaplanes, buildings for post offices, hospitals, schools, penal colonies and thousands of houses sprang up throughout the country. One enthusiast of the regime was proclaiming at the turn of the 1940s that 'In architecture, there has never been such great movement in our land. All the architectural solutions are found and discussed and there was enormous energy devoted to the art of building.'⁵⁴ One immediate result of the Vargas regime was that architects were called upon to provide the state bureaucracy with adequate working conditions, given the deeply engrained practice that had been passed on from the Empire to the Old Republic of using rented and improvised buildings to house public administration offices. The inadequacy of the accommodation of the state administration was inevitably read, in the eyes of the New State ideologues, as yet more evidence of the weakness of the Brazilian State under the Old Republic.

If the lack of space and structure had already been problematic before, the scenario would become even more alarming in view of the unprecedented extent of state intervention in national life throughout the 1930s, especially after 1937. The engineer L. H. Horta Barbosa, director of the Works' Department of the Ministry of Justice observed:

The vertiginous growth in the country's administrative life, reflecting the general aggrandizement of our homeland, created, as from 1937, a desperate anxiety over the lack of space for the location of ministries, departments and various other services; an anxiety that has been diminished by the major constructions already undertaken, and the continuing

53 Hugo M. Segawa, *Architecture of Brazil, 1900–1990* (New York: Springer, 2013), 15–78.

54 Teixeira, *Getúlio Vargas*, 52.

pace of new construction, exceeding all expectations and outdoing all forecasts.⁵⁵

Rather than instituting the physical and institutional presence of the State in concrete terms, architecture has fundamentally contributed to shaping the public visibility of that State, an indispensable contribution to the construction of its image as a dynamic agent in the process of transforming reality, in a continuous action of modernization of all spheres of national life. More than a charismatic leader, Vargas would then appear to be ‘the true builder of the nation’, the only architect in Brazil.⁵⁶

Contrary to what this statement by the director of the National Museum of Fine Arts suggests, there is little evidence that Vargas devotes more attention to cultural issues than previous heads of state, and even less to architecture. The testimony of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, chief of staff of the minister Capanema, is quite revealing in this regard:

He [Vargas] did not care about anything. This legend of great public man, an extraordinary man, I find absolutely false. Getúlio was a good man, an honest man, yes, very scrupulous. He was up all night, signing decrees, appointments, servant exonerations, because at that time everything was very centralized. He was, yes, a great bureaucrat. . . . In the same way that he allowed an old-fashioned building for the Ministry of Finance, he authorized a very modern building for the Ministry of Education. His concern was to sign the dossier and make policy.⁵⁷

Bureaucrat and politician, Vargas’s apparent disinterest in cultural and artistic matters certainly helps to understand the lack of a consistent discourse in the architecture of state works. The copious production of the president’s writings, published in several volumes under the title *The New Brazilian Politics* does not contemplate reflections on this topic. And the references to the scope of architecture on the very rare occasions in which they arise are too indirect and vague to see a discourse forming, as in the case of his speech on the first anniversary of the Estado Novo, in a passage dealing with the role of the *Institutos*

55 Adalberto Mário Ribeiro, ‘Edifícios públicos,’ *Revista do Serviço Público* 2, no. 2 (1944), 71–72.

56 Teixeira, *Getúlio Vargas*, 52.

57 Carlos Drummond de Andrade *apud* Daryle Williams, ‘Gustavo Capanema, ministro da cultura,’ in *Capanema: O ministro e seu ministério*, ed. Angela de Castro Gomes (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 2000), 259.

de Aposentadorias e Pensões [IAPS; Retirement and Pension Institutes] in social housing:

I have given instructions to the Ministry of Labour, without prejudice to individual construction projects where advisable, to study and design large groups of modest and comfortable houses. To this end, I have recommended the acquisition of large areas and, if necessary, their expropriation; that means taking into account transport infrastructure, the rationalization of construction methods; and the acquisition of materials directly from producers. Everything should be done in order to obtain the best housing for the lowest price.⁵⁸

By incorporating in his discourse a subject dear to the heart of the Modern Movement, namely the rationalization of construction methods, historians of Brazilian architecture have ended up misinterpreting such a declaration as evidence of Vargas' preference for modernism. Rather, the criteria he specifies in such a passage reflect the concerns of engineers and architects working in the state bureaucracy who were involved in the modern debate—figures such as Carlos Frederico Ferreira and Rubens Porto. However, there is nothing to indicate 'that they were debated in the inner sanctum of the *Estado Novo*'⁵⁹ as has been claimed.

The lack of stylistic uniformity resulting from the absence of an official position concerning the regime's ideal architectural image would produce ample space to accommodate diverse aesthetic and political interests within the scope of a decision-making process which had never been centrally coordinated. A multiplicity of agents with differing ideological and cultural connections fought to occupy positions that would allow them to implement their competing agenda. In a 'story of individuals',⁶⁰ ministers, advisors, intellectuals, artists, architects and so forth continuously circulated in the corridors of power within the Vargas' State in search of openings for the implementation of their own projects.

On the one hand, the aesthetic fragmentation stemming from this situation helped to dismantle the idea of a 'monolithic state', shaped from top to bottom according to the totalizing vision of an omniscient head of government. On

58 Getúlio Vargas, *A nova política do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1942), 102.

59 Nabil Bonduki, 'Otra mirada sobre la arquitectura brasileña: La producción de vivienda social (1930–1964),' *Block 4* (1999): 113.

60 Lauro Cavalcanti, *As preocupações do belo: Arquitetura moderna Brasileira dos anos 30/40* (Rio de Janeiro: Taurus Editora, 1995), 20.

the other, it reflected just how little attention was paid by Vargas to architecture, who seemed to disregard the potential of ‘words made in stone’.⁶¹ Hence, while the Spanish architect Victor D’Ors felt inspired to proclaim that, after the Spanish Civil War, a new politics would give rise to new architecture,⁶² there were no such declarations in the Brazilian case. Similar to what happened in countries such as Germany and Italy, in Brazil the hegemony of any architectural strand over the others did not occur, but rather a ‘hegemonic pluralism’ prevailed.⁶³

The absence of an official aesthetic is fully demonstrated by the new ministerial and public buildings erected in Rio de Janeiro from 1935 onwards. These new facilities expressed in built form the reorganization of bureaucracy and the rationalization of work implemented during the 1930s by the *Departamento de Administração do Serviço Público* [DASP; Department of Administration of Public Services]. This situation is clearly illuminated by the competition process for the Ministry of Education and Public Health, one of the two new ministries created in 1930 at the height of the revolutionary hour, together with the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce.

The competition to construct the headquarter of the Ministry of Education and Public Health in the former area of the recently demolished Morro do Castelo was launched in April 1935. The competition attracted a large number of architects operating in the federal capital and embracing quite different aesthetics. It was won by the proposal ‘Pax’, presented by Archimedes Memória, professor of the National School of Fine Arts and already famous for other public works in the same city such as the *Palácio Tiradentes* (1922–1926).

Memória, a militant fascist and member, from 1936 onwards, of the House of Forty, the highest deliberative body in the organizational structure of the AIB, was friends with Vargas. In his project Memória stood for a particular stance regarding the search for a uniquely Brazilian architecture, proposing its even deeper rooting in the historical layers of the country. Memória even went back to the Marajoara art produced by natives living on Marajó Island, in the north of the country, before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500. Memória composed

61 The name of the famous documentary-manifesto of Nazi architectural renewal.

62 Xavier Sust, ‘Prólogo,’ in *La arquitectura como símbolo de poder*, ed. Albert E. Elsen, Barbara Miller Lane and Stanislaus von Moos (Barcelona: Tusquets, 1975), 7.

63 For a discussion of the concept ‘hegemonic pluralism’ see Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State: Culture & Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); and Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, ed., *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).



FIGURE 2 *Diagram of the activities of the Ministry of Education and Health. The modernist project for the headquarters of the ministry appears underneath this as a photo, and on the right of the image, as a maquette (1938).*

SOURCE: CPDOC-FGV.

motifs and decorative features invoking this indigenous people while choosing classical monumentality for the structure.

Formally heavy and monolithic in its appearance and somehow echoing *Littorio* style as defined by Marcello Piacentini in works such as the University of Rome, the winning design neither pleased modern architects nor the minister, with Capanema arguing that Archimedes Memória's project was a monstrosity.⁶⁴ This led to an impasse, which clarified the functioning of the web of connections woven between Capanema, Carlos Drummond de Andrade and the group of architects gathered around Lúcio Costa, former director of the National School of Fine Arts and former adherent of the neo-colonial but whose work was deeply influenced Le Corbusier from the early 1930s onwards. The minister end up dropping Memória's proposal and invited Lúcio Costa to carry out a new project, together with other modern architects who had unsuccessfully entered the competition. Le Corbusier himself would act as consultant,

64 Gustavo Capanema, 'Depoimento sobre o edifício do Ministério da Educação,' in *Arquitetura moderna Brasileira: Depoimento de uma geração*, ed. Alberto Xavier (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2003), 124. Originally an interview held on December 12, 1968.



FIGURE 3 *The Palácio do Trabalho building in stripped classical style, and, on the left, the headquarters of the Ministry of Finance (1944).*

SOURCE: *REVISTA DO SERVIÇO PÚBLICO* 3 (1944).

making a second trip to Brazil after his brief stays in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in 1929.

Astonished by the beauty as well as revolutionary character of the project presented by Lúcio Costa, Affonso Eduardo Reidy and Carlos Leão, Capanema wrote to Vargas, in February 1936, expressing his enthusiasm about the team's work that would also include Jorge Moreira, Ernani Vasconcelos and Oscar Niemeyer: 'We could experiment with a new architecture in Brazil using those first rate lads we have available. Let us do something bold, interesting. It's worth it. Let's commission these boys and give them freedom in putting a project together for the Palace of the Ministry of Education and Public Health. Let's give them an opportunity to do something advanced.'⁶⁵ However, as Capanema himself had stated, the building of the Ministry of Education and Public Health was a secondary task: 'the main issue for me was the university campus, which was progressing with more vigour, enthusiasm and interest.'⁶⁶

65 Capanema, 'Depoimento sobre o edificio,' 125.

66 Ibid.

The minister had already invited Marcello Piacentini, a modern and highly respected architect and a 'genius' on the topic of university campus, whose project for the University of Rome, still under construction, attracted the attention of many members of the Vargas government. Interest in Piacentini's architecture in particular and in the fascist architectural production in general was common to all the dictatorial regimes at the mid-1930s. Germans, Russians and Brazilians, among others, closely followed the latest events on the Italian scenario. Piacentini, both as architect and editor of the magazine *Architettura*, which was published by the *Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Architetti*, acted as a fascist architectural agent.⁶⁷

Such was the prestige of Piacentini, that together with his assistant Vitorio Mopurgo he was invited to plan the new university campus at Rio de Janeiro. Arriving in Rio de Janeiro in December 1935, where he stayed just for a couple of days, Piacentini's visit had only been possible due to the good will of the Italian government since the architect was overwhelmed with state commissions. Eventually he completed the plan for the campus, which was reproduced on the front cover of the Italian Fascist magazine *Architettura*, September 1938 issue, and the scale model of the project was exhibited at the Brazilian embassy in Rome before being sent to Brazil in 1938. As Capanema appreciated Le Corbusier's sense of modernity, it is no wonder he had asked the Swiss architect for his assessment of Piacentini plan, despite the aesthetic distance between the two architects.

In the same vein, in 1937 the Brazilian magazine *A Casa*, when appreciating the 1936 competition bids for the Ministry of Finance headquarters, acknowledged the existence of two distinctively modern architectural trends: the classical modern ('stripped classicism') and the revolutionary modern (avant-garde modernism), the latter in line with what was claimed by Le Corbusier. In the case of the Ministry of Finance, the more avant-garde one, which was designed by Wladimir Alves de Souza and Enéas Silva, ended up winning the competition. But the truth is the proposal is far from being imagined in revolutionary modern style. On the contrary, its general organization conformed to a classical matrix, with axes of symmetry structuring the distribution of the functional blocks. Monumental without being historicist, rationalist without radicalism, the proposal is somewhere between subtle avant-gardism and compromise with tradition, in other words a form of 'rooted modernism' more akin to stripped classicism than to the experimental modernism of Constructivism

67 Harald Bodenschatz, 'Urban Design for Mussolini, Stalin, Salazar, Hitler and Franco (1922–1945)', *Planning Perspectives* 29, no. 3 (2014): 384–385.

or *De Stijl*. The project was no more than a timid modernizing attempt carried out by architects trained by the National School of Fine Arts in which the teaching of *beaux-arts* architecture was still prevalent.

In procedural terms, it happened in the case of the Ministry of Finance what already had occurred in the competition for the main building of the Ministry of Education. The Minister of Finance A. da Souza Costa did not award the construction to the winner, finding a way to discard the project by changing the plot of land chosen for the ministry's main building. Apart from discarding the winning proposal, the Minister of Finance had also directly interfered in the new project, this time prepared by a technical commission and without competition. The team brought together the architect L. E. Frias de Moura and the engineer Ary Fontoura de Azambuja, who was the head of the commission and also friends with the minister.

The minister's interventions in the building process are well illustrated by the description of a meeting held by the architect Alcides da Rocha Miranda with Frias de Moura when the proposal was still being drawn up: '[Frias de Moura] was very annoyed because he had spent, along with the whole team, sleepless nights finishing the design and, when everything was almost ready, the minister had arrived at the office and taken a photo of an Italian neoclassical building out of his pocket and stated: "That's how I want the façade". The entire façade ended up being remade to satisfy the minister's desires.'⁶⁸

During Vargas' regime, the neo-classical style pleased many decision-makers, particularly those in charge of public works in Rio de Janeiro.⁶⁹ The rejection of competition designs and the imposition of personal taste were very common, a pattern facilitated by the absence of a common architectural denominator and the authoritarian nature of the regime.⁷⁰

An article published by the *Revista do Serviço Público* in 1939 set up a discourse associating the Brazilian New State and Getúlio Vargas with the construction fever that gripped Brazil:

68 The detailed knowledge of what went on behind the scenes in the design and construction of the ministerial main building comes from interviews conducted by Lauro Cavalcanti with many of those involved in the process. See Cavalcanti, *As preocupações do belo*. The excerpt from Rocha Miranda's account appears on pages 109 and 113.

69 Daryle Williams, 'Civicscape and Memoryscape: The First Vargas Regime and Rio de Janeiro,' in *Vargas and Brazil: New Perspectives*, ed. Jens R. Hentschke (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2006), 55–82.

70 Hugo Segawa, 'Arquitetura na era Vargas: O avesso da unidade pretendida,' in *Moderno e nacional*, ed. José Pessôa et al. (Niterói: EdUFF, 2006), 93.

Breaking with the traditional disregard of the previous administrations for the ministries' facilities, Mr. Getúlio Vargas' government has consistently arranged for the branches of the federal administration to be housed in buildings in compliance with their aims and the degree of culture we have already achieved, providing, along with aesthetic and economic concerns and administrative interest, a favourable environment and comfort for the employees. . . . Such guidance results from the clear and perfect conception the President of the Republic has of the factors that contribute to the good and rapid progress of the public services, which must accompany, if not precede, the accelerated march of the nation's progress.⁷¹

This text preceded a long report on the recently built *Palácio do Trabalho* [Palace of Labor], headquarters of the newly created Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce. Without organizing an architectural competition, the building was erected between 1936 and 1938 in the vicinity of the Ministry of Education, which would only be finished in 1944. The building was designed by the architect Santos Maia following the so-called Manhattan style, and it became a hallmark and an inspiration for future works built in the Rio de Janeiro center. The *Palácio do Trabalho* occupied the block in which it was set in a way which emphasized the imposing mass of its structure. Its large horizontal base diminishes the sense of verticality induced by a sequence of pilasters defining the compositional rhythm of the façade. The building is halfway between the neo-classical Ministry of Finance and the rationalist Ministry of Education, for it contains both modern and academics traits. A similar combination can be found in several public buildings erected by the Vargas' regime, whose style echoes both North American and Italian Fascist architecture.⁷²

Stockler das Neves's project for the Ministry of War is more clearly inspired by the North American architecture of the 1920s and 1930s. Restrained in terms of decorative elements, the architect more intensively explored the effects of verticality and monumental grandeur, a result that was achieved by Santos Maia. The central volume conferred the building a vertical emphasis, highlighting the main access to the building, flanked by two lower volumes accompanying the entire perimeter of the block and defining a huge inner courtyard. This architect graduated at the University of Pennsylvania in which the French

71 'O Palácio do Trabalho: O majestoso edifício onde se acha instalado o Ministério do Trabalho,' *Revista do Serviço Público* 2–3, no. 1 (1939): 69.

72 Cavalcanti, *As preocupações do belo*, 128–130.

beaux-arts were popular. His Ministry blended these characteristics with those of Chicago and New York skyscrapers, namely those of Raymond Hood and William van Alen, whose role in the creation of the metropolitan architectural imagery based on art deco is undeniable.

Praising the modern American style of the Ministry of War, an article was published in the *Revista do Serviço Público* considering it the most appropriate for public buildings that required monumentality and majesty. According to the same article, the effect was obtained without repudiating aesthetic criteria, as it had been conceived in the 'so-called utilitarian "Soviet style"' that some considered the revolutionary artistic cannon per excellence.⁷³ Inaugurated in the early 1940s, the Ministry of War is one of the art deco buildings flanking the monumental Presidente Vargas Avenue. Running through a densely historic area of the federal capital, creation of this avenue required the demolition of hundreds of buildings, age-old churches, streets and squares, radical large-scale intervention common to other dictatorial regimes, and indelible expression of the modernist élan of 'creative destruction'.⁷⁴

The ministerial offices and new public buildings built to meet the needs the demands of the administrative authorities were, undoubtedly, consistent representations of the power of the Vargas state in the urban setting of the federal capital, which was replicated to a lesser extent in numerous Brazilian cities in the 1930s and 1940s. Composing new urban perspectives, as in the case of Avenida Presidente Vargas, or articulating urban areas still sparsely occupied, such as the Esplanada do Castelo, the set of works carried out in such a short space of time projects a strong symbolic domain of state power and an undeniable visibility of the relationship between the regime and society.

At the same time, the diversity of aesthetic tendencies characteristic of this set of works contributes, to a certain extent, to confirming the idea, not altogether mistaken, of the existence of creative freedom in architectural production, of the lack of 'directed architecture' under the regime of a 'tolerant' leader, thereby dispelling the fears of some as to the 'devious basis for of the state's interest in the arts'.⁷⁵

73 'O novo edifício do Quartel General do Exército,' *Revista do Serviço Público* 2, no. 4 (1938), 105–107.

74 On this subject, see Harald Bodenschatz, Piero Sassi and Max Welch Guerra, ed., *Urbanism and Dictatorship: A European Perspective* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2015); Williams, 'Civicscape and Memoryscape,' 55–82.

75 According to Carlos Cavalcanti, museum curator of the Ministry of Education, 'more clearly than in the past, modern existence is showing us the dubious motives behind the state's interest in the arts, music, theater and painting.' Cavalcanti, *As preocupações do belo*, 283.

The haphazard way the market operated to decide how public contracts were awarded conditions, and the apparent stylistic arbitrariness that runs through the works of architecture certainly resonate with certain fundamental ambiguities peculiar to the Vargas regime. The myriad ideological links between its ruling elites, the diversity of intellectual strands and national projects it hosted, combined with simultaneous drives for the past and for the future, for tradition and for modernization, was reflected unavoidably, in the architectural expression of the State, producing often contradictory resolutions and compromises that have not always been able to resolve themselves in satisfactory aesthetic terms.

Although it may be a major issue for historians, the heterogeneity of built forms that emerge from this situation of aesthetic *laissez-faire* was actually not one whose solution preoccupied the state. Indeed, the contrary was true, as is underlined by the revealing passage in a speech by the Minister of Finance, Alexandre Marcondes Filho, in 1944: 'Your Excellence (Getúlio Vargas) is presiding over the renaissance of Brazilian official architecture by encouraging and promoting the establishment of norms which represent us, and through the eclecticism of the forms and the variety of influences adapted to our transformative time in history and the peculiarities of our climate.'⁷⁶ For the 'transformative time' of the *Estado Novo*, whose physiognomy was largely still an open process, there was nothing more convenient, therefore, than a plural, indefinite architectural face. If the question of a single aesthetic for the state was posed perhaps it would not be a problem for the present, but rather for the future, as the product of a gradual crystallization of a cohesive and uniform image of the regime, capable of satisfactorily symbolizing a state which by then was already stabilized.

Apart from the contradictions that crisscross the regime controlled by Vargas, it may be productive to seek in the Brazilian architectural field other reasons which shaped the picture we have referred to earlier as the hegemonic pluralism which is evident in the multifaceted architecture of the *Estado Novo*. For this it is important to recognize straightaway the first decades of the last century in Brazilian architecture as an interregnum. In simplified terms, this interregnum would be characterized by the crisis of authority of the prevailing order and by uncertainty about the future order. It was a period of instability, marked by the absence of a clear hegemony regarding the values to follow.

This interregnum was broadly contained between the 1920s and 1940s, and was essentially defined by deep questions about the relevance of the historicist

76 'O sexto aniversário do Departamento Administrativo do Serviço Público: A Exposição de Edifícios Públicos,' *Revista do Serviço Público* 3, no. 3 (1944), 178.

academic canon, the prevailing order, dominant in the teaching of the *Escola Nacional de Belas Artes* [ENBA; National School of Fine Arts] which became increasingly discredited throughout this period. These questions were posed on two main fronts: on the one hand, the campaign for a national architecture rooted in the past and in the colonial tradition embraced by the neocolonial movement of Ricardo Severo, José Marianno Filho and followers; on the other hand, the pressure exerted by initiatives promoting the renovation of architectural language in line with the European avant-garde of the inter-wars, which began in the 1920s through the work of the Ukrainian architect Gregori Warchavchik, and would gain new impetus through action of Lúcio Costa and the group of young architects around him.

Reinforced by being expressed in highly innovative architectural initiatives, these two fronts acted together to delegitimize the academic model represented in the ENBA by highlighting its double inadequacy to reflect the unique time that the nation and the world were going through. Within the national context, the neocolonial movement and the program for creating an authentically Brazilian architectural style forced a break with the prevailing European classicism promoted by the ENBA and a fresh look at the unique reality of Brazil reality, its nature, history and culture, as the basis of a new modern aesthetic, another variant of 'rooted modernism'. As for developments in the wider world, in other words 'modernity', architects with avant-garde ambitions criticized the academic canon as a no more than a passing fashion for stylistic historicism, a static cultural response completely out of step with the ever-changing demands of a 'machine civilization', as Le Corbusier put it. In the same vein, modern architecture also exposed the inconsistencies of contemporary neocolonial research, which was considered well-intentioned, but promoting an ill-concealed eclecticism which weakened its contribution to the overriding goal of establishing a national architectural identity. On the other hand, modern architecture itself appeared, for people inside and outside the State, as perhaps nothing more than an imported stylistic fad, which should be welcomed with caution, not as a cogent role-model, but as an inchoate trend with no deep roots in the nation's soil.

In short, what came about in the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the period of the Estado Novo which saw a marked increase in state-commissioned projects, was a situation of impasse in an architectural profession experiencing deep tensions over what aesthetic direction to work towards: the academic model no longer retained the hegemony it enjoyed at the turn of the century, but was still held in esteem for its ability to respond to socially accepted formal and symbolic demands. The neocolonial project was pursued in privately funded projects but made occasional inputs into state commissions, but it lost more

and more ground to modern architecture in the international style. As for this aesthetic choice, the distrust of its foreign character would diminish in the passage from the 1930s to 1940, and its deployment would increase in the construction of several types of public works, being more common in projects of a more utilitarian character (social housing, schools, hospitals, etc.) than in the more symbolic-representative state buildings: the Ministry of Education and Health building is a notable exception. It is easy to remember, as Frampton states, that it is precisely the 'iconographic inconsistency' of modern architecture, its tendency to 'reduce every form to an abstraction [thereby generating] an unsatisfactory way of representing the power and ideology of the state' which explains 'the survival of a historicist approach to the construction in the first half of the twentieth century'.⁷⁷

The result was the appearance in the work of architects influenced by both the neocolonial and avant-garde currents of multiple stylistic hybrids: modernized versions of classical idioms à la La Piacentini, or a simplified and conventional neoclassicism; neocolonial regionalisms and local reworkings of the American 'missionary' style; essays in architectural modernity based on Le Corbusier's aesthetics juxtaposed with art deco variations of several styles, from streamlined to stripped classicism, and so on. Such was the flora and fauna of Vargas' architecture in the occasion of the Exhibition of Public Buildings, realized in 1944. Organized by the DASP and occupying the entire mezzanine of the Ministry of Education while the building was still being finished, the exhibition celebrated the sixth anniversary of the creation of the DASP, offering a comprehensive overview of the State's architectural activity. Launched by Vargas in the presence of all the Estado Novo senior offices, the Minister of Labour, Industry and Commerce, A. Marcondes Filho, gave the following speech:

Public buildings bear witness to people's lives, a document written in time. Their purpose is not only serving the State. It is, of course, a memorial to the civilization that informs it. An epoch that is not characterized by its own architecture, by the significance and value of its constructions, especially in matters of public buildings, is an epoch that did not produce anything new, a generation that could not entrust its message to the future, a community that did not know how to perpetuate itself through the eloquent symbolism of the monuments raised by the collective effort.⁷⁸

77 Frampton, *História crítica da arquitetura moderna*, 255.

78 Adalberto Mário Ribeiro, 'A Exposição de Edifícios Públicos,' *Revista do Serviço Público* 3, no. 3 (1944), 90.

Coinciding with the opening of the exhibition, in July 1944 Vargas signed a series of Decree-Laws on the construction of public buildings for civil ministries, aimed at standardizing the design and construction process. From then on, the *Divisão de Edifícios Públicos* [Public Buildings Division] of the DASP became the entity responsible for the public works' system of the federal administration.

Besides the impressive number of public works carried out by the Estado Novo from the early 1930s onwards, the stylistic diversity was the most remarkable characteristic of the exhibition. A variety of styles, such as neoclassical, art deco, Manhattan style, avant-garde and neo-colonial architecture, were displayed in the mezzanine of the Ministry of Education and Public Health, often in contrast with the modernity of the building that hosted the exhibition.

Modern architecture predominated in the buildings promoted by the Ministry of Education and Public Health. Schools, hospitals and other functional programmes under the supervision of the ministry, followed a modernism and rationalism uncompromised by historicism. The buildings erected by the Ministries of Labour and Justice were designed in a modern and monumental classic style to create a monolithic effect. The Ministry of Agriculture largely adopted the 'vernacular' neo-colonial style aiming at expressing its territorial roots and national history. The same occurred in some isolated initiatives, such as the *Cidade das Meninas* [Girls' City], a philanthropic project promoted by the First Lady, Alzira Vargas. But even within the scope of each ministry, inconsistencies revealed internal contradictions. Such is the case of the Ministry of Finance, which adopted a classicist appearance in Rio de Janeiro, whilst in Recife the modern design of the Ministry of Education had clearly been the source of inspiration.

Though extensively covered by the national press, the Exhibition of Public Buildings turned out to be somewhat superficial and repetitive for an event of this size, and its impact did not reflect its true importance as an illustration of the achievements of the New State in the field of architecture. Moreover, practically the only voice of an actual architect to be heard was that of Jose Marianno Filho, patron of the neocolonial style and fierce critic of modernism. He attacked the exhibition. In an article entitled 'State Architecture', Filho unleashed his criticism against Minister Capanema, who was considered a supporter of the 'Futurist Grêmio', by which was meant the group of artists, intellectuals and architects attached to the Capanema ministry.⁷⁹

79 José Marianno Filho, 'Arquitetura estatal,' *Jornal A Gazeta* (1944) in *Colunas da educação: a construção do Ministério da Educação e Saúde (1935–1945)*, ed. Maurício Lissovsky and Paulo Sérgio Moraes de Sá (Rio de Janeiro: MINC/IPHAN; Fundação Getúlio Vargas/CPDOC, 1996), 199–200.



FIGURE 4 *Unrealized project for the Palácio da Justiça in an eclectic blend of stripped classical and monumental modernist styles.*

SOURCE: *REVISTA DO SERVIÇO PÚBLICO* 3 (1944).

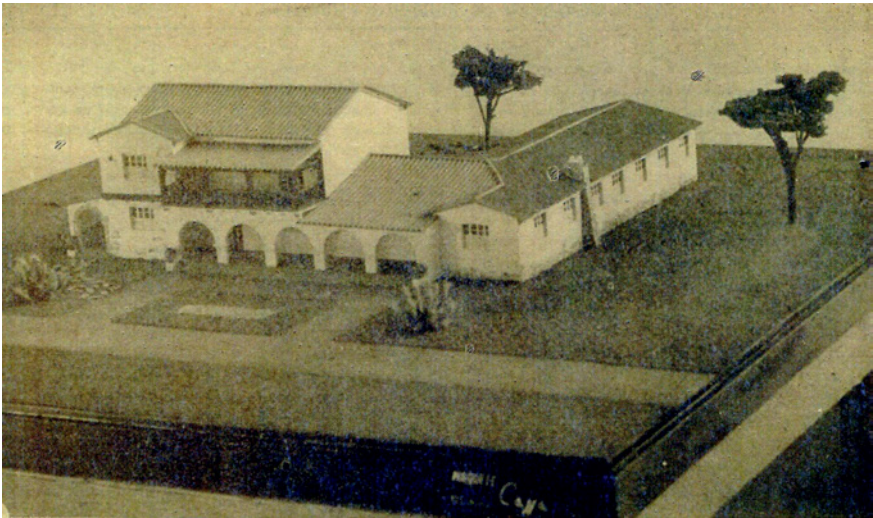


FIGURE 5 *Maquette of the neo-colonial (mission style) project for an Experimental Farm of the Ministry of Agriculture shown at the Exhibition of Public Building.*

SOURCE: *REVISTA DO SERVIÇO PÚBLICO* 3 (1944).

Then he raised the question of a genuinely Brazilian architectural style: 'The visitors' general impression is that newly constructed public buildings do not conform to a particular style, which proves that today, as yesterday, the nation has not yet bothered to define its sympathies for this or that architectural

expression.⁸⁰ Calling the exhibition a kind of architectural fair, he considered absurd the chaos that reigned in public works, and which could only be avoided through state control and censorship: 'Is this unbridled struggle between new and old styles of any interest? Would it not be more prudent for public authorities, once and for all, to submit the official buildings to the scrutiny of a commission of persons whose aesthetic judgement and professional expertise are actually recognized?'⁸¹ Without sparing modern architecture and pointing out neo-colonial misappropriations, Marianno Filho clearly exposed the impasse which Brazilian architecture reached in the first half of the twentieth century, implicitly alluding to expectations and frustrations regarding the role Vargas' regime could have had in breaking out of it.

In contrast to his personal wishes, the public architecture sponsored by the Estado Novo never ceased to be the architectural Babel that Vargas' Estado Novo exhibited one year before he fell from power in October 1945. This is partly due to the fact that Vargas, whether before nor after consolidating his power, never treated architecture with a zeal comparable to that of Hitler, Mussolini or Stalin. He did not make any *a priori* stylistic commitment to any of the architectural trends that in the 1930s and 1940s competed for official commissions coveted by academic, neo-colonial, and modern architects. Apparently, he was more interested in showing off the sheer quantity of works he could take credit for than their quality.

Conclusion

Because of, rather than in spite of, Vargas' obvious lack of interest in imposing a uniform regime aesthetic, it is clear that architecture faithfully reflects three important features of the Estado Novo of interest to comparative fascist studies. Firstly, its acute stylistic eclecticism and heterogeneity underlines the fact that it was not a fascist regime. In other words, applying the criteria of such scholars as Emilio Gentile, Roger Griffin, and Aristotle Kallis, it lacked any consistent or radical palingenetic commitment to the construction of a new society, a new 'total culture', or an alternative modernity brought about by socially engineering a new order based on a temporal and anthropological revolution. Second, the architecture of the New State provides a material symbol of the para-fascist nature of the Vargas regime, with its muted and incoherent

80 Filho, 'Arquitetura estatal,' 200.

81 Ibid.

variants of the fascist new order, the fascist new man, the fascist national community, and fascism's 'rooted modernism' which resulted from various experiments in synthesizing national traditions with modernity. Finally, though the physical, geographical, and temporal boundaries of the fascist era may have been set by Fascism and Nazism at the height of their territorial and imperial expansion. Yet, its cultural and political boundaries extended far beyond Europe, with perceptible influence in countries as far-flung as Japan, China, India, South Africa, Chile, and Brazil, even if the political space for movements of revolutionary nationalism was too limited by a powerful traditional or conservative right-wing establishment for a fascist movement to conquer state power.