

Risky space

> Otavio Leonídio

A short time ago, I wrote that one of the most stimulating features in the productions of Angelo Bucci is the complex relationship between structure and spatiality provided by his architecture. On that occasion, the matter to scrutinize was a specific project, a residence in Carapicuíba, designed in partnership with Alvaro Puntoni – in my opinion, it is one of the most interesting residential projects made in Brazil in recent years.¹ The analysis of some of Bucci's recent works (produced at the SPBR office, object of this text) suggests that the design of that small home embodies, somehow, the architectural design poetics of this architect from São Paulo.

I return to my argument: as typical Brazilian architects, that is, as legitimate descendants of Oscar Niemeyer and Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Bucci and Puntoni paid (in the Carapicuíba home design) great attention to the drawing of the structure. The architectural design operation is not restricted, however, to the interpretation of some major structural recurrences of modern Brazilian architecture.

Certainly, some of these recurrences are present in the project in question – namely, two of them: the exiguity, typical from Niemeyer, of support points (in this case, two major cylindrical pillars that elevate the bulk of the office over the set), and the release of structural porticos in rhythmic sequence, whose function is to hang floor and covering slabs, such as made by Reidy at MAM in Rio de Janeiro (in this case, two parallel porticos with rectangular section that suspend floor slabs from other living spaces of the house).

The bulk of the operation does not apparently lie there, however. The differential of the project is the exploration of the plastic and spatial effects of the unusual juxtaposition of these two structural gestures, which are treated here – and this is the essential – as two minimally autonomous entities.

Saying that the spatiality of the project coincides with or results from the structure is therefore insufficient, for it is the impure output, hybrid of the juxtaposition of structural entities not only endowed with its own

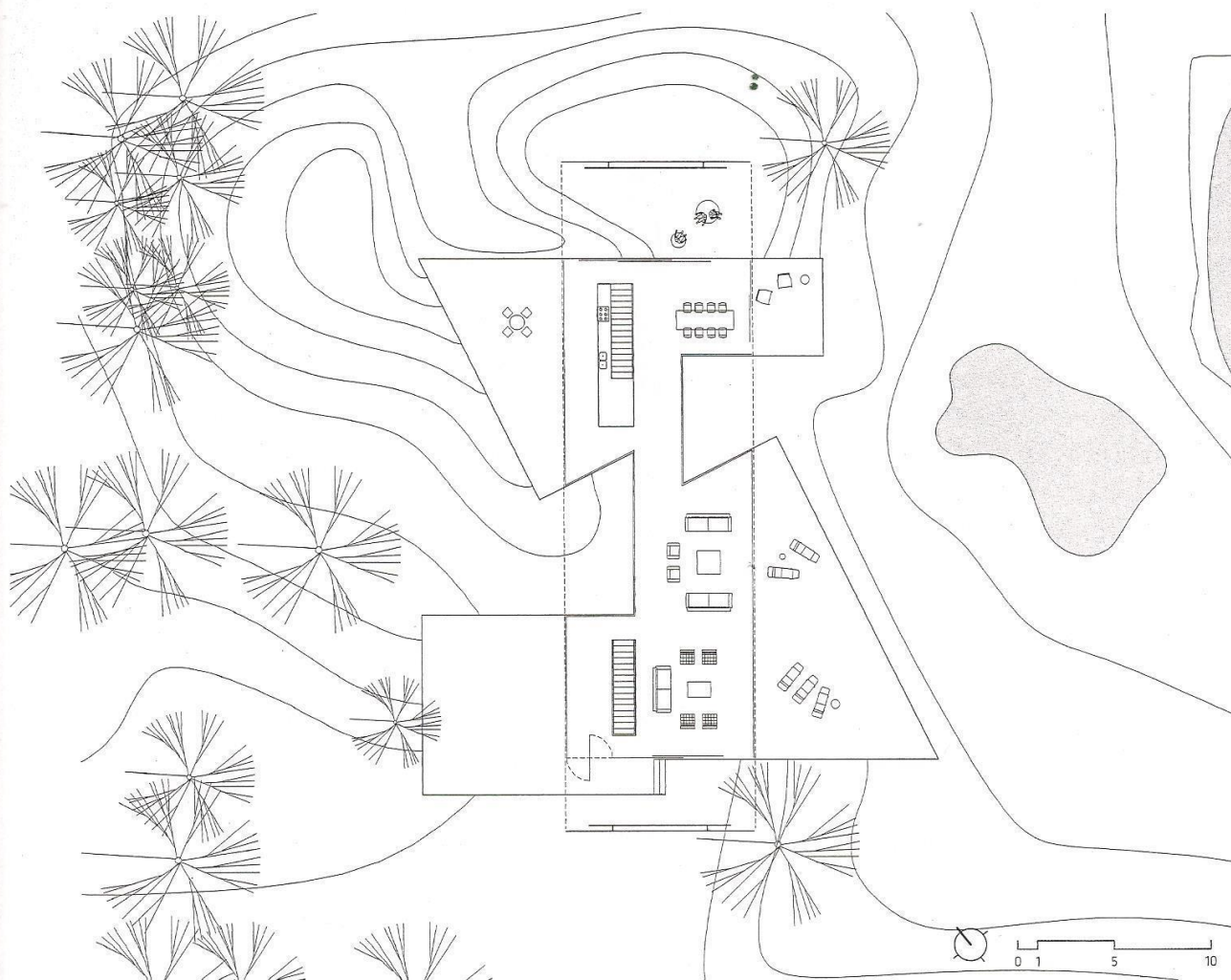
logic and morphologies, but also originating their own spatiality. The formal and above all spatial quality of the project is, hence, less in the juxtaposition of elements built than in the collision of the (empty) spaces that each of the mobilized structural entities individually generates.

The Carapicuíba operation is one of the most complex and sophisticated developments of a research started nearly two decades ago and that has proven to be very productive. The terms of the study seem clear: the point is, as I said, to verify the potential of the relationship between structure and spatiality. The theme is not new. It was from it that, since the years 1930s, Oscar Niemeyer and Affonso Eduardo Reidy constituted their seminal works. The “São Paulo architecture” – of Villanova Artigas, Lina Bo Bardi, Paulo Mendes da Rocha and others – was inspired by the formers and took shape along the second half of the 20th century. Bucci, of course, is part of this lineage. Each new project of his is, for this reason, an opportunity to rearticulate a structural and formal repertoire fairly limited and predefined. Hence the variant aspect that many of his projects, especially the latest, clearly assume.

Not all developments are as complex and imbricate as the house in Carapicuíba. In fact, some solutions are really quite simple – which does not mean less interesting. A good example is the project for the house in East Hampton, designed in 2007. Here, there is no impurity or hybridism of the structural design. It is primarily featured by two large inverted beams, positioned parallel and very close to each other, sustaining the flat roof slab. The distribution of items composing the program of needs is reasonably simple, with living spaces divided into two sections: the living room and kitchen occupy the upper level, while bedrooms, garage, family room and other components are located on the lower floor, half-buried.

Immediately, the project evokes two great icons of modern Brazilian architecture of the 1950s – MASP, by Lina Bo Bardi, and

1. Otavio Leonídio, “O túmulo do samba”, *Projeto Design* 371, p. 96-7, 2011.



Casa em East Hampton (2007), com Ciro Miguel, João Paulo Meirelles de Faria e Juliana Braga

Casa das Canoas, by Oscar Niemeyer. From the first, Bucci's building inherits a particular unorthodox way of interpreting the principle of successive structural porticos, which, in both projects, unusually (bear in mind Reidy's MAM or Bo Bardi's Museu à Beira do Oceano), do not follow the direction of expansion, better yet, the spatial expansibility of the building. Hence, as with the Bardi's building, certain semantic vagueness whether it is a question of porticos or beams.²

From Niemeyer's residence, the home of East Hampton takes mainly the classic, but "modernized", compositional principle of the mineral socle (in both cases, half-buried; in Bucci's, fragmented, and partially hidden in Niemeyer's) topped not by an object, but by an empty area covered by a horizontal concrete slab. If the sections show a connection with the 1950s' house and the dependence on the classical model, floor plans make explicit a clear reversal of the terms of the composition:

if, in Niemeyer's, the freedom is the responsibility of the covering slab, and the formal restraint, of the socle (which, partially at least, tends to dissolve in the topography), in Bucci's the opposite occurs. This compositional parti (and I believe that in this case, contrasting what happens in Carapicuíba, it is suitable mentioning "parti" and "composition", meaning, respectively, academic and classical terms) leads others of Bucci's projects, particularly for the PUC-Rio Mediateca.

The evident links between the work of Bucci and the architecture of Niemeyer, Reidy and Lina Bardi draw attention to the aspect of continuity that it clearly holds vis-à-vis the tradition of modern Brazilian architecture. This is not an original remark. It was after all under suspicion of mere continuism, I assume, that the newly graduated Bucci found himself thrown suddenly, at the epicenter of the Brazilian architectural debate. The year was 1991 and it was necessary to select the

2. The theme was addressed in "O Museu de Arte de São Paulo: o museu transparente e a dessacralização da arte", Renato Anelli, on Vitruvius website, *Arquitextos* 112-01, 10th year, September 2009 (<http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/arquitextos/10.112/22>).

project for the Brazilian pavilion at the Seville Exhibition, to be held in the subsequent year. A tender was requested; 253 teams entered, many of which were integrated by renowned Brazilian architects. To the surprise of many, the winning team was formed by three young graduates: Alvaro Puntoni, José Oswaldo Vilela and Angelo Bucci.

The result caused controversy. In a polemic and now famous article, evocatively titled "Deu em vão", the critic and historian Hugo Segawa harshly censured the committee of the tender – of which Paulo Mendes da Rocha was part – for having chosen "a known, predictable, thus conservative architectural line [...]".³ Even today some see the outcome of the contest as the cornerstone of a supposed "modernist resumption", that since then has been prevailing in Brazil.

To read Bucci's work as key to continuity is misleading, however. For all the evidence, the Brazilian architecture in general and the São Paulo School in particular are, for an architect, a reference (certainly essential), not a destination. His most recent production is sufficient proof of how little interested the architect is in limiting himself to reproduce, at every new project, the formal and structural findings of our modern tradition.

Once again, it is worth reminding in the design of the structure, notably, the "Brazilian" tendency to reduce the support points and suspend the slabs⁴. There are several plausible explanations for this recurrence. In my opinion, I do not think it reflects the LeCorbusierian (and republican) principle of making the soil public. I suppose, alternatively, that it expresses, above all, the rather obsessive desire of modern Brazilian architects (who were involved in the project of modernization of the nation) to demonstrate the national ability to overcome the thousand and one ups and downs which, in architecture as in other fields of culture, had the power to prevent Brazil from achieving modernity. The obsession with the formalization of the structural effort would mean a type of "symbolic form" of the heroic cultural effort represented by the achievement of the enforced modernization project of the nation. Hence, the persistent and – for myself – annoying aspect of structural prowess and virility (I disregard

the existence of a more masculine building than that of Bardi's MASP...) featuring some of the most iconic modern buildings in Brazil. As if putting up virtuously a building meant raising not only our modern architecture, but the modern Brazilian culture as a whole.

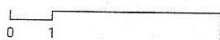
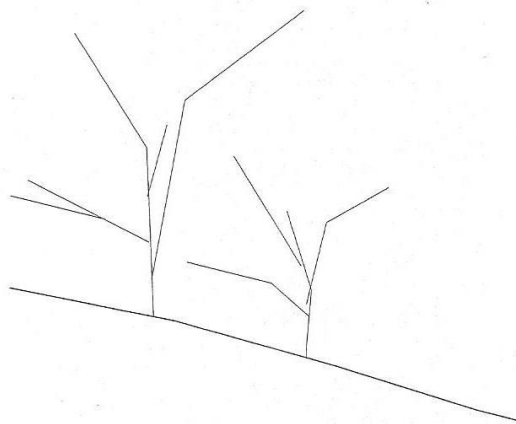
Now, if the need to assert power and virility could fit within the scene of our conservative modernization (and developmentalist and pro New State), it obviously no longer fits. Times have changed. Just repeating it, nowadays, would result not only in a grotesque and pathetic anachronism, as evidenced by the recent work of Oscar Niemeyer.

The use that Bucci makes of the national tradition exiguity of support points and slab suspension demonstrates how far the architect is from modern Brazilian architecture, as well as its symptomatic structural exhibitionism. This distance is precisely what allows for Bucci, making use of typically "Brazilian" architectural themes; to invest where possibly our architecture has gone the least far – space research.

3. Hugo Segawa, "Pavilhão do Brasil em Sevilha: deu em vão", *Projeto 138*, p. 34-9, 1991.

4. The argument is owing to the reading of modern Brazilian architecture that has been made, in varied contexts, by Sophia Silva Telles.

5. The main reason for this is the fact that, as everything that descends from Mario de Andrade's modernism, also the Brazilian architecture had to be thematic, that is, had to fit the theme of "brazility"; furthermore, of course, it is much easier pursuing the visible (the built) than the invisible (the empty).



In fact, ours was always a more object than space-oriented modern architecture, with more constructed areas than empty spaces, more iconic than phenomenological.⁵ Hence the conclusion by Giulio Carlo Argan, made in early 1950s, that it was an architecture visibly marked by the combination of technique and beauty – thus a beauty so excessively object-oriented and contemplative, worth calling classical.⁶ The very specific contribution of Paulo Mendes da Rocha's work to national architecture would dwell, therefore, in an unprecedented capacity for (once this quirk is overcome), drawing, as the minority of architects of his time, not just the built areas (the object of beauty), but especially the empty.⁷

Bucci, however, does not seem happy – anymore, at least – to continue where Mendes da Rocha stopped. His starting point is not even Artigas. By right (or by duty?) one ought to revert to Reidy and Niemeyer, which means, back to Le Corbusier.

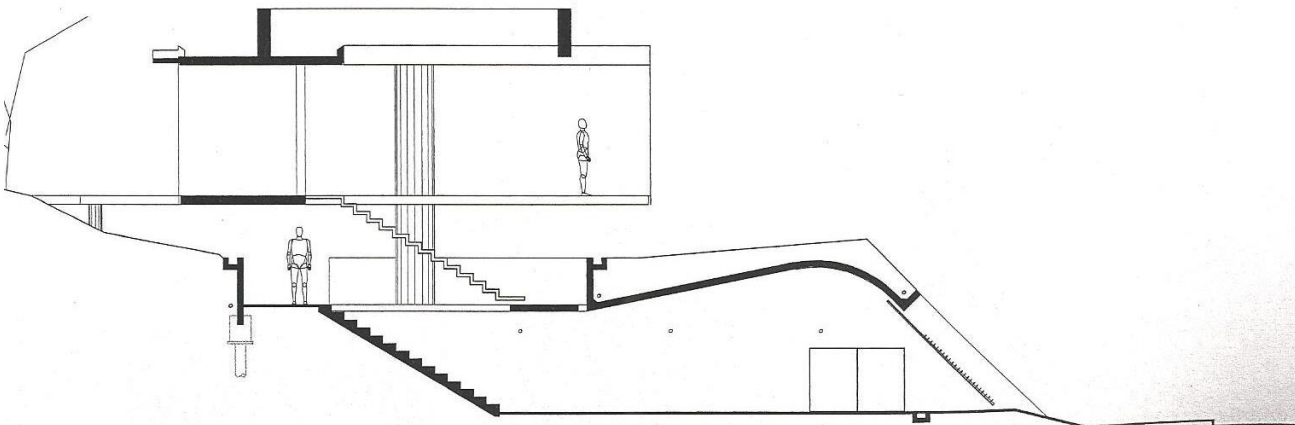
The comparison between the home in East Hampton and the Casa das Canoas is instructive, because the inversion Bucci performs here is significant. It is stated above that, different from Niemeyer's house, the plastic freedom is not (in Bucci's project) dependent on the coverage, but on the basement. The wording is vague. I would do better if I said that, unlike Niemeyer, freedom is not in the air, but on the floor. The reversal is radical.

As the principal Brazilian modern designer, Niemeyer was too focused on the task of demonstrating how vigorous, formal and especially structural, our architecture was. An architecture that, at each new project, for that very reason, had the obligation to show, with gestaltic clarity, its formal inventiveness and, furthermore, its structural virility. An architecture that, therefore, has always been monumental in both senses of the term, namely, as a march celebrating a historic achievement (in this case, the miraculous triumph of our modernization)⁸, as well as an exceptional

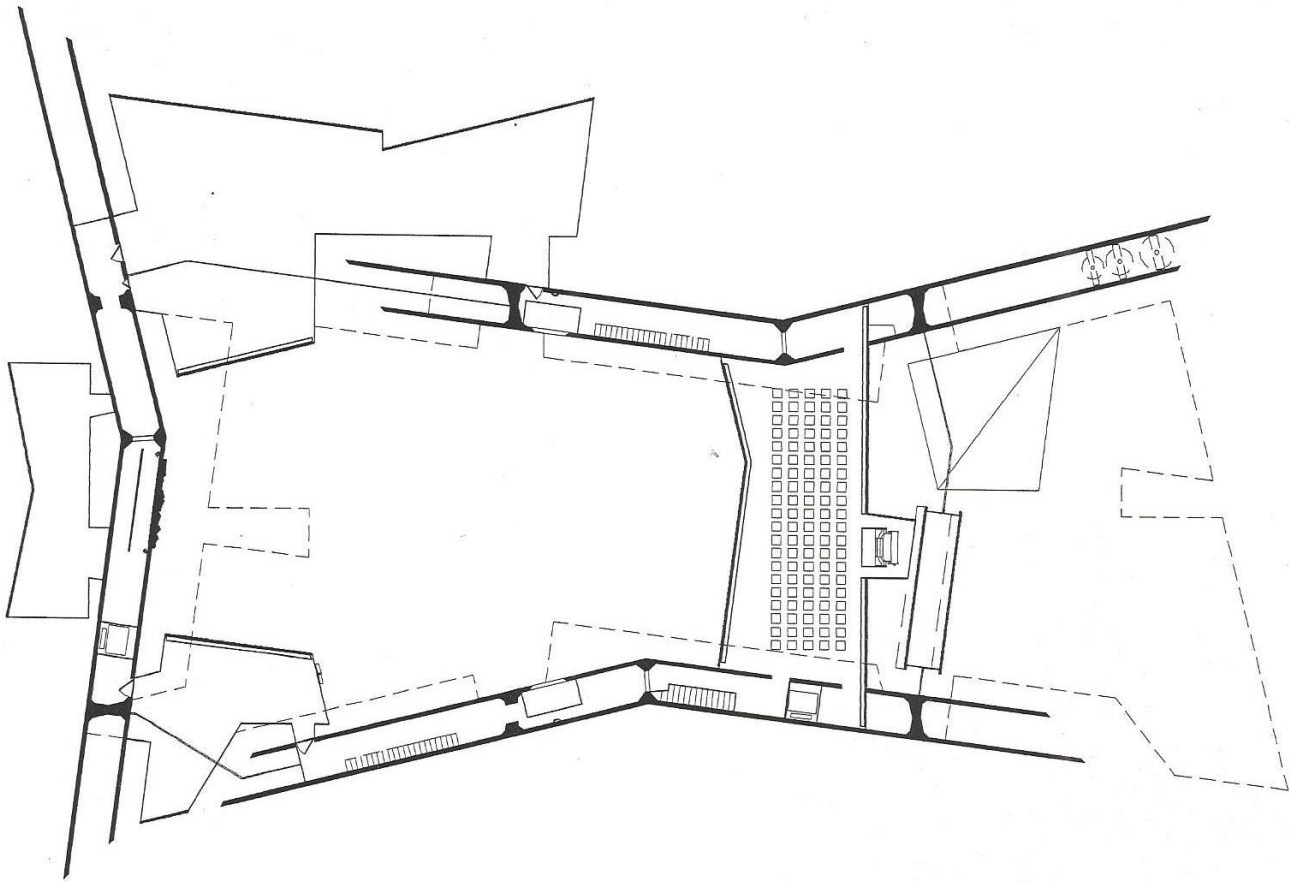
6. Giulio Carlo Argan, "Arquitetura moderna no Brasil", in Alberto Xavier (org.), *Depoimento de uma geração: arquitetura moderna brasileira*, São Paulo, Cosac Naify, 2003, p.158-63.

7. Sophia Silva V. Telles, "Museu da Escultura visto por Sophia Telles", *Arquitetura e Urbanismo* 32, October/November 1990.

8. What makes our modern architecture, rather than iconic, totemic.



Casa de Cotia (2008), com João Paulo Meirelles de Faria e Juliana Braga



Igreja da Natividade (2009), com João Paulo Meirelles de Faria



construction that is raised as much as possible from the ground and, seeking air (in Niemeyer's case, suspended in the air), stands out in the landscape – preferably against an open and clear horizon, just as it should happen to statues, obelisk and, in Niemeyer's favorite version, objectified women always ready for contemplation (It remains to be investigated what role the penetration, better yet, the entrance plays in buildings by Oscar Niemeyer...). An architecture, thus, that always tended to see the space from the viewpoint of a surrounding vacuum that serves for contemplation of an object-monument, whose spatiality, for this reason, rarely succeeded in reaching the post-Cubist spatial complexity of the architecture of its founder - Le Corbusier.

Bucci, on the contrary, seems particularly challenged by the space research; the enormous attention given to the design of the floor is concrete expression of this idea.

He knows that walking is an activity forever associated to (and within the project, pre-defined by) the design of floors; he knows that according to the lesson of Le Corbusier, "the floor plan is the generator; the floor plan brings the essence of sensation"⁹; although formally freer, his floor designs are not random, neither unreasonable. They reflect not only the LeCorbusierian finding (actually, Cubist): that life is walking and space, a construction that takes place in time of worldly life, but also the understanding that walking is exercising with liberty the choice between objective path and mere wandering.

There is therefore no reason to coincide or constrain the design of floor slabs with the design of the structure. On the contrary: it is pertinent, if not properly unlinking both (as for the home of East Hampton), making clear that these are separate bodies (and not by accident that, in principle, their cover slabs are not

9. Le Corbusier e Pierre Jeanneret, *Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret – oeuvre complete 1910-1929*, Zurich, Les Éditions d'Architecture Erlenbach, 1946, p. 33. My translation.

habitable). And if it comes to mark contrasts, nothing is more coherent than simplifying to the maximum the primary structure of the building, with pillar and beam woofs tending to orthogonality and coverage slabs tending to be of rectangular shape, as opposed to free flowing floor slabs.

The design of the house in Cotia is a good example of this interpretation. A superstructure comprised of two sturdy pillars and four large inverted hinged beams, supports two slabs – one cover, the other a floor. The roof slab is integral to the main framework, the floor slab suspended by pillars. The contrast of design of both is significant. While the cover slab tends to suit the design of the rectangular framework, never going beyond it, the floor slab exceeds frankly the projection of the roof, causing at the same time an overflow of space and dissolution of object-volume-integrity. The project for an apartment building in Lugano, Switzerland, certifies that the possible outcomes of that poetry are far from exhausted. On the other hand, the Igreja da Natividade seems to indicate that something is lost when antagonistic couples get diluted.

Just as for the house in Carapicuíba, I think one can see, in the house in Cotia, the articulation of two recurring structural gestures in Brazilian architecture – one more closely associated with Oscar Niemeyer; the other, with Affonso Reidy. Once again, I think the strength of the project is in the juxtaposition, causing a striking collision between the spaces generated by one gesture and another. However, if I'm not mistaken, I believe there is another modern master involved in both projects (not just these): the landscape artist Roberto Burle Marx. There is no reason for surprise. For if, as I believe, one of the hallmarks of Bucci's space research is the special attention paid to the design of the floor, nothing more natural than to turn to the work of the designer who was put in charge of the floor design – vegetal, but also mineral – of major works of modern Brazilian architecture. From Burle Marx, Bucci inherits not only a certain graphic style, marked by an agreement of geometric lines and plans, as reflected in his floor plans, ground floor or not. He inherits the tendency to some particular pictorial approach for the design of the ground floor, an approach that can be read as a desire to elevate the design of the floor – or what it represents – to the hierar-

chical level that art history has always devoted to painting, and never to floor designs.

Also, nothing seems more significant and auspicious than the tense coexistence of these three modern masters – Niemeyer, Reidy and Burle Marx – in the work of a contemporary architect like Brazilian Angelo Bucci. For, one knows, the relations between Niemeyer and Reidy & Burle Marx were always tense, if not downright contentious. I do not mean, of course, only the universe of personal relationships – the resentment that the episode of the CTA – Centro Técnico de Aeronáutica – tender in São José dos Campos, won by Niemeyer, generated in Reidy (that episode, at least in part, explains Reidy's boycott of the competition in Brasília, whose jury included Niemeyer); or the angry public breakup of Burle Marx and Niemeyer, that happened when the latter proposed the construction of a monument in the Parque do Flamengo, immediately disowned by the landscape artist. I refer particularly to the fact that, as a rule (and since, in the early 1950s, the influential architect and artist Max Bill opposed Niemeyer's formal gratuity to the social relevance of Reidy's architecture)¹⁰, the architecture of Niemeyer and Reidy were seen as two alternative paths, moreover incompatible at some extent; the first associated with the plastic freedom (Rio de Janeiro School), the second with the formal containment and the constructive rigor (characteristic of São Paulo School).

Subversively, Bucci does not see the work of Niemeyer and Reidy as antagonistic, or even as irreconcilable. His démarche is not, however, conciliatory. Instead, expresses confidence (in fact, suspicion) that from the tense juxtaposition of the two, I mean, three distinct approaches, an unusual, hybrid, impure – in a word, contemporary – unfolding of modern Brazilian architecture may arise. It is idle to say how far it is from the revived pendants of modernism, with its easy, photogenic and boring architectures. Indeed, if there is one lesson to be drawn from its practice, it is in demonstrating that a productive relationship with the modern tradition does not need to be either neomodern (i.e., nostalgic, reverent, melancholic), or postmodern (of mere imagery citation or linguistic deconstruction); and may be of the critical reactivation order, which means, problematic. Naturally, such an attitude implies taking risks. It shall be seen. ■

10. "Max Bill critica a nossa moderna arquitetura", interview with *Manchete* Magazine 60, June 13, 1953, p. 38-9.

colaboradores contributors



Didiana Prata

Arquiteta, deixou a arquitetura para se dedicar ao design de livros, jornais e revistas. Mas a arquitetura não a deixou: seu escritório faz livros e exposições sobre o tema e agora desenha também a *Monolito*.

An architect who has abandoned the field of architecture to dedicate her time to the design of books, newspapers and magazines. However, architecture has not abandoned her. Her office is responsible for publishing books as well as presenting exhibitions related to the topic. She now also designs for *Monolito*.



A. Rogakou

Erieta Attali

Fotógrafa, nascida em Tel Aviv, criada na Grécia, educada em Londres e residente em Nova York (onde leciona na Colúmbia). Mas ela se autodefine como "sem casa". Suas fotos em preto e branco ganharam um lar na *Monolito*.

A photographer who was born in Tel-Aviv, raised in Greece, educated in London, and resides in New York (teaching at Columbia University). She is a citizen of the world but defines herself as "homeless". Her black and white pictures have found a home in *Monolito*.



Denis Moses

Fernando Serapião

Editor da revista *Monolito*, ele trocou traços por palavras: seus textos estão em livros, jornais e revistas (é colaborador da *Folha de S. Paulo* e da *piauí*). Neste número, equilibrou-se para escrever o perfil de Angelo Bucci.

Editor of the *Monolito*. He has exchanged lines in a drawing for words. His articles can be found in books, newspapers and magazines (like *Folha de S. Paulo* and *piauí* magazine). In this issue, he strove to write Angelo Bucci's profile.



Tuca Vieira

Nelson Kon

Arquiteto que preferiu criar sua obra atrás das câmaras, o fotógrafo tem imagens incluídas na coleção Pirelli e analisadas por Simonetta Persichetti (Senac, 2004). Ele coloriu este número de *Monolito*.

An architect who chose to portray his work from behind the lenses, this photographer has some images included in the Pirelli collection and analysed by Simonetta Persichetti (Senac, 2004). He was responsible for the colors in this issue of *Monolito*.



Otavio Leonídio

Crítico e projetista de mão cheia, fez da arquitetura mais que tudo objeto de reflexão: leciona na PUC do Rio de Janeiro e é autor de *Carradas de razões* (Loyola, 2007). Na *Monolito*, refletiu sobre a obra de Bucci.

An amazing critic and project designer, Otavio has transformed architecture into something to reflect upon. He teaches at PUC in Rio de Janeiro and is the author of the book *Carradas de razões* (Loyola, 2007). At *Monolito*, he has reflected about Bucci's work.

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