

... that all great world-historic facts and
personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add:
the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.

Karl Marx¹

1960 - Tragedy. Brazil's new capital city is dedicated as part of the on-going project of occupation and domination dating from colonial times, in the 16th century. The “modern palaces” — *Planalto* [presidential headquarters] and *Alvorada* [presidential residence] - were built on foundations drawn from Portuguese-tropical colonial mythology. Their architecture repeats the horizontality of the plantation estate homes with their wide porches or verandas, surrounded by a teeming vegetation and guarded by uniformed henchmen.² The alleged modernity was structured on the tragedy of underdevelopment and dependence, evincing the absolute prerogatives and privileges of the mighty landowners.

The design of Brasília picked up on a perverse process of “domestic colonization,” conveyed by the installation of military barracks all along what is known as the city's monumental axis. Why have barracks within the city limits? What would be the specific functions of these troops, when the “New Capital” was geographically protected [in Brazil's central plateau] from an unexpected enemy attack? The only plausible justification was that these troops were not meant to defend the nation against foreign enemies, but rather to parade their military apparatus along the monumental axis of the city, “to make an impact on the residents and to weigh [...] on the deliberation of one or more powers of the Republic. But then why relocate the capital? Why Brasília? Why dream about utopias?”³

¹ MARX, Karl. “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”. In: ADORNO, Theodor W. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. Henry W. Pickford (Trans.). New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 388.

² The art historian Luiz Renato Martins quoted Niemeyer having stated at that time: “The Palace of the Dawn [...] suggests elements from the past - the horizontal order of the façade, the wide verandas that | designed with the aim of protecting this palace, the little chapel rounding out the complex as a recollection from our old plantation estate homes.” (NIEMEYER, Oscar. “Depoimento.” *Revista Módulo*, Rio de Janeiro, no. 9, pp. 3-6, Feb. 1958, cited in MARTINS, Luiz Renato. “Pampulha e Brasília, ou as longas raízes do formalismo no Brasil.” *Crítica Marxista*, no. 33, pp. 105-114, 2011. Our translation. Available in Portuguese at: https://www.ifch.unicamp.br/criticamarxista/arquivos_biblioteca/artigo242merged_document_252.pdf).

³ In 1957, art critic Mário Pedrosa already noted that “something contradictory is hidden in the very modern wrapper of the conception” of Brasília, comparing the capital to Maracangalha, the Bahia district immortalized by Dorival Caymmi, and questioning about what in fact was in play in the moving of the capital to the country's Center-West (PEDROSA, Mário. “Reflexões em torno da nova capital.” In: ARANTES, Otilia B. F. (ed.). *Acadêmicos e modernos: textos escolhidos*, v. III. São Paulo: Edusp, 1995, pp. 394-401, cited in MARTINS, 2011).

2020 - A farce. President Jair Messias Bolsonaro has been in office for nearly two years. Supported by the imperialist United States, the double articulation - external dependence and social segregation - has been definitively set as a basic foundation for the accumulation of capital.⁴ The fascist counterrevolution topples not only the developmentalist ideas of the construction of Brasília but also the socialista dreams of some of its designers, to the shouts of an antisocial, anti-national and anti-democratic society. Poverty, misery, and death have been definitively turned into the Brazilian elite's goose that lays the golden eggs. The Army once again is brought to bear against those it should protect, and the president's hidden uniform becomes increasingly visible. There is no illusion that civilized capitalism could be on its way. The veil of modern utopia has been definitively removed, revealing the precarious and farcical structures it was hiding.

And so what? Haven't we stopped dreaming about utopias for some time now? Hasn't national politics always been obscene? What is the reason for this somewhat gloomy text in a catalogue of an exhibition of works by young artists?

Beware! Transported from the mythic Brazilian West by Talles Lopes, the farce of Brasilia's utopian modernism has come to haunt this exhibition⁵.

Dora Longo Bahia

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⁴ Cf. SAMPAIO JR., Plínio de A. "Desenvolvimentismo e neodesenvolvimentismo: tragédia e farsa." *Serviço Social & Sociedade*, São Paulo: Cortez, no. 112, Oct./Dec. 2012. Available at: https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0101-66282012000400004.

⁵ Text written for the catalog of the 7th EDP Arts Prize. Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, Brazil. 2020.