

V!RUS12

RADICAL MODERNS

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s e m e s t r e 0 1 s e m e s t e r

revista do Nomads.usp | Nomads.usp journal
ISSN 2175-974x | CC BY-NC
DOI 10.4237/virus_journal

THE ARTWORK NOSSO LAR - BRASILIA AND THE MODERN MOVEMENT: PARADISE OR PURGATORY? Maria Fernanda Vegro

How to quote this text: Vegro, M.F.A.S., 2016. The artwork "Nosso Lar - Brasilia" and the Modern Movement: paradise or purgatory? *V!RUS*, [e-journal] 12. Available at: <<http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus12/?sec=4&item=5&lang=en>> [Accessed 00 Month 0000].

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the representation of architecture in the 31th São Paulo Biennial of Art, specifically the Dutch artist's work Jonas Staal 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia'. This proposal intends to create a dialectic reflection between the finitude of modern man and the reason domain in architecture and urbanism. Thus, ripping the veil that covers the social reality and is part of this action, the author's gesture revisits modernity critically and reveals the contradictions that do not appear visibly in the form. What is the legacy of modern design for postmodernity? This is the core of Jonas Staal's artwork 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia' which gives him the position of a 'radical modern' proposing a representation that denies the autonomy of art and architecture, reconfiguring their specificities with economic, political, social issues and creating a strange dialogue with the spiritual work of Francis Xavier 'Nosso Lar'. This perspective points to the fate of the abstraction of modern ideas in contemporary society. The 31st International Art Biennial of São Paulo took place between 06/09/14 to 07/12/2014 in Ibirapuera Park, it was considered by art critics and press as transgressive as it put into question the issue of 'conflict', clashes still unresolved between different social groups. With the title 'How (...) things that do not exist' the exhibition emphasized the translation of political invisibility and social phenomenon that transcends individuality in an urgent need of acting and thinking collectively.

Keywords: Conflict, collectivity, invisibility, dialectical reflection.

INTRODUCTION

The representation of architecture and urbanism in the 31th São Paulo Biennial of Art included some works of artists who used mediums such as moving images, maps, models and photographs. The interface between art and architecture instigates a deep reflection of the present situation and questions the boundaries of these disciplines. In this Biennial, interdisciplinarity builds a dialectical thought, where the number of questions were certainly expanded since modernism. Broad relations between architectural object, environment, city, world and planet are widely discussed, but the lack of a predominant view is characteristic of the current period where ambiguity also represents a new approach.

The prefix 'post', represents a rupture or a paradigm shift in historical contexts where cultural production emerges. For Andreas Huyssen, it is necessary to find today the modern movement ruins, therefore,

'[...] this contemporary return to an expanded concept of modern arts today owes much to postmodernism interventions. [...] Postmodernism gave visibility to the dimensions of modernism itself that had been forgotten or repressed [...]' (Huyssen, 2014, p.16).

The author also draws attention to a positive side of postmodernism that includes in its discourse other 'modernities', geographically displaced in the North Atlantic. This articulation between modernism and postmodernism is to Huyssen, the main aspect to think the contemporary cultural history and aesthetic issues and policies from other eras (Huyssen, 2014, p.17).

The artwork chosen for interpretation here is 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia' by the Dutch artist Jonas Staal (2014) who as Huyssen, points to a deeper reflection of modern utopia and fetishism. These concepts when articulated obscure social relations, capitalist dynamics of production and consumption of culture and feature a divergence between the aesthetic form, its symbology and the forces that are behind this operation, which exclude and neglect part of society subduing the belonging and identity of the subject to rules and alienating codes. Therefore, the visibility forms of 'Nosso Lar- Brasilia' in a negative key, denounced totalitarian procedures, question the reason as an instrument of domination and investigate space and time in a permanent tension, opposing times and historical spaces encapsulated in a rigid morphology where the unexpected subjective aspects, are subtracted from the architectural and urban design.

Before starting the artwork description it is appropriate to present a brief background of the modern movement and postmodern to move to utopia issues and fetishism involved in these contemporary works that revisit the modern past as an open work¹, or escape the literalness of sign and include a world founded on ambiguity, a dialectic between personal existence as a response to unresolved

¹ '[...] In the dialectic of work and opening up, continues the work is a guarantee of communicative possibilities and at the same time the aesthetic enjoyment possibilities. The two values are implicit in each other [...] whereas a conventional message [...] the communicative fact exist without the aesthetic fact [...]. The opening, in turn, is a guarantee of a kind particularly rich and amazing enjoyment that our civilization seeks to achieve as the value of the most precious, because all data of our culture, induce us to conceive,, feel and thus see the world according to the category of possibility' (Eco, 2003, pp.176-177).

social problems and a world founded in accordance with universally recognized laws.

THE MODERN IDEOLOGY: THE REASON ORDINATOR

Jonas Staal rescues the modern past with the approach of an artist inserted in his time, however, he takes the art receiver to strangeness and anxiety by proposing an inter-textualization between two particular cities as in the utopian project: 'Nosso Lar' (1944) and Brasilia Pilot Plan (1956). The thought of the art spectator at the same time familiarly recognizing the two cities and their idiosyncrasies represented graphically in architecture models and in a video that has a sound description leading it to question how the two development plans can evoke parallel narratives.

For this understanding, it is necessary to rescue the assumptions of the modern movement in architecture to link them with the critical issues of postmodernism and verify how ideology, utopia and fetish are amalgamated. Given this perspective, the patriotic narrative that the developmentalist national imagination provided to Brazilian society found its highest expression in the construction of Brasilia where modern design found space and a 'zero degree' of society to be transformed and modernized through the urban morphology, hiding industrial backwardness and its colonial origin.

According to David Harvey, the changes that lie behind the crisis of representation experienced in Modernism are associated with the issue of business development in capitalism, that is, a permanent tension between credit and cash and the formation of fictitious capital (Harvey, 1992, p.240). It was only after 1850 that the stock and capital markets were established, regulated and open to general participation. New ways of producing goods in factories with the division of Taylorism nature of work and the dissolution of the craft workers associated with technical inventions, trade expansion and new forms of credit helped to speed up the circulation of capital in the mass market. Imperialism and inter-imperial rivalry favored the 'capitalist forces to the track of globalism'. Innovations in transport and communication alter the relative space, boosting displacements. With the example of literature, the realistic novel, the author points out the asymmetry of the linear space narrated as a coherent temporality, because 'these structures were incompatible with a situation in which two events in very different places coming together could interrelate to change how the world works' (Harvey, 1992, p.241).

This condition triggered new ways of experiencing space and time that worked directly in the ways of producing culture. There were several propositions followed by modernist artists to subvert the order of the given reality, to question the similarity of the relationship timeline. The work as science emphasized the possibility of spatial and time control, increase of productive forces and the acceleration of social processes. Therefore for Harvey, it is only with the rationalization and organization of the public space that the senses of time and private interior space could be developed. Concomitantly, the body, the psyche and consciousness (repressed by the Enlightenment project) with the new discoveries of philosophy and psychology, would be released. Rationality at that time meant less time domain, space, and workforces, but that new 'sense of relativism perspectivism could be invented and applied to the production of space and the ordering of time'. The purity of architectural form, its functionality, extending to the metropolis as a machine with numerous gears and moving flows, represented the modern desire for seeking an entirely new cultural production that would break with the past. Hereinafter, 'the spatial rationality could be imposed on the outside world to maximize freedom and individual welfare' (Harvey, 1992, p.246).

Thus, the modern ideas, teleological, driven by the coming-to-be of a reformed and more egalitarian society has banned the contradiction and ambiguity of the contents of architectural design and urban planning. Space and society have become abstract, that is, anchored in a future prospect for society to meet the new requirements imposed by industrial capitalism celebrated the qualities and identity of the place, totally oblivious of the subject.

In the passages of Benjamin, the *intérieur* according to Olgária Matos,

'[...] Is the saturated bourgeois salon golden ornaments, mirrors, walls lined of damask fabrics and floral designs, carpets, furniture in the form of ships or Gothic cathedrals etc., where the 'bourgeois sees the world' with the illusory sense of security in the world's capital - [...]' (Matos, 2010, pp.178-179).

According to the author, for these new ways of living time and space, the *Interieur* was a *promesse de bonheur*. The loss of the meaning of work and consumption directed to meet the needs of the market and not the consumer 'is a state of exasperation of the real needs of society and a new kind of bewilderment of the mind, a consequence of contemporary capitalism and culture it engenders' (Matos, 2010, p.182).

From the abandonment of the 'Protestant ethic' in favor of 'capitalist spirit', the time is consumption and not the search for meaning and subjectivity. For the author, the time of modernity signals fear and insecurity and reduces the creative ability of the subject. 'The Benjamin is a revolutionary time Luddite, one that stops the ideology of progress [...]' (Matos, 2010, p.193). In this context we can understand the architecture and urban planning rationalization as a tool for the ordering of urban chaos, a revolutionary eagerness on the part of architects to submit the space to functional rules adhered to the development of technology and the ideology of progress.

Demolishing, ignite the *intérieur* to enable the bourgeois a new experience of dwelling, life in the city, architecture and urban planning rationalized that hold out to the masses, represented the transformative potential of the given reality order. Messianic desire of aesthetic of life, of the autonomy of form to design the future.

THE RESCUE OF MODERN RUINS: THE ARTWORK 'NOSSO LAR - BRASILIA'

With the end of modern ideas², without the soil of the future, how can we see the postmodernist architectural production?

Frederic Jameson, in his texts, characterizes the economic sphere fully attached to the architecture sphere and urban planning in postmodernity thus is established a new relationship with the future:

'[...] As a waiting space required for returns and capital accumulation - [...] the structural reorganization of the time in a kind of future market - this is the final link in the chain that leads from the financial capital through financial speculation to the aesthetic and cultural production [...]' (Jameson, 2001, p.200).

² According to Manfredo Tafuri, due to the failure of modern ideology, a crisis was installed in the 1960s attributed to the inability of the modernist ideology to face the facts of the economy. Modern architecture tried to solve problems beyond its reach as a discipline. 'For architects, the discovery of decline as assets ideologists, the realization of the enormous usable technological possibilities to rationalize the cities and territories, along with the daily observation of its dissipation, the aging of specific methods of design, even before power check your chances actually generate a climate of anxiety that hints at the horizon a very concrete outlook and feared as the worst of evils: the decline of the 'professionalism' of the architect and their integration [...] in programs where the role of 'ideological architecture is minimal' (Tafuri 1985, p.120).

In contemporary times, the volatilization and speed of financial capital, lead to new aesthetic forms that configure nostalgia, ephemerality and when associated with the neoliberal logic aimed at obtaining income while acting as potential magnets for attracting investments. However, it is when the aesthetics achieves a political dimension, as a critical review of the modern movement that postmodernism creates sense and articulates complex signs as it demystifies historical realities. In this context, it is necessary to think about the new role of the architect,

'[...] Technician, construction organizer [...] under the new forms of capitalist development. And therefore the possible tangency or the inevitable contradictions between this type of technical and intellectual work and the material conditions of the class struggle' (Tafuri, 1985, p.122).

In 'Nosso Lar- Brasilia', Jonas Staal subverts the order of a given reality and creates a stress field between opposing pairs as: characteristic / generality, individuality / collectivity, objectivity / subjectivity, heaven / hell. At the same time, it installs an new complete understanding of time and space. As already referred this reflection includes the issues of utopia and fetishism articulated the search for a negative coefficient, latent in the works. Also, it is important to understand how these issues like utopia and fetishism operate differently according to the geographical and historical context in which they are. As we have seen, the experience of space / time is reflected in society and the ways in which capital produces, reproduces, builds and diffuses itself.

The work of the Dutch artist Jonas Staal (2014) 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia' opens a reflective field for architecture. The transposition of the Spiritualist city idealized by the medium Francisco Xavier, 'Nosso Lar' on Lucio Costa's master plan for Brasilia, points to distant narratives in programmatic terms, but at the same time parallels inside the modern project, creating a possible site to question the resistance and the limits of the urban plan.

The exhibition featured two rooms, the first room exposed maps of the two cities and an austere model of the city 'Nosso Lar' (Fig. 01 and 02). The second room was the projection of a video that showed the two cities with a lilting narrative of a female voice over which informed the intentions of the artwork. As postmodernist artist Jonas Staal causes a reflection that refers to the construction of modern utopia on Brazilian soil.

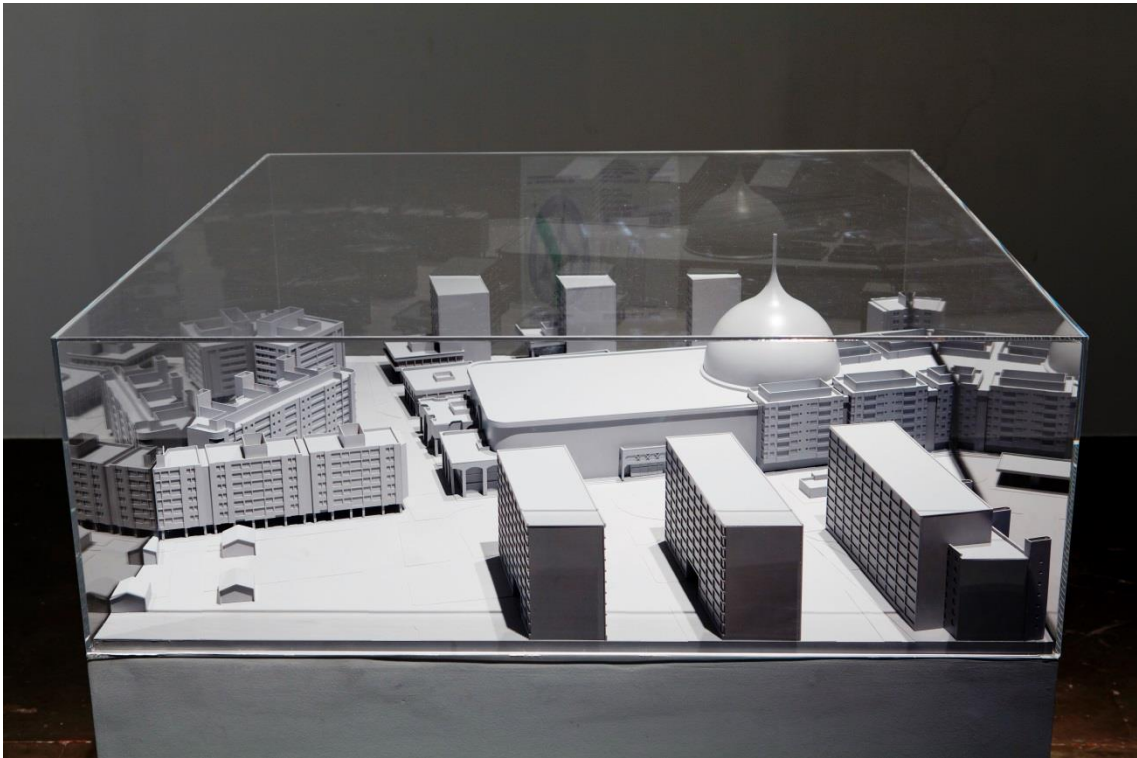


Fig. 01: Model of Francisco Xavier's city 'Nosso Lar'. Source: Collection Historical Archive Wanda Svevo/ Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.



Fig. 02: View of the first exhibition room with maps and models of the artwork 'Nosso Lar - Brasília' Jonas Staal. Source: Collection Historical Archive Wanda Svevo/ Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

It can be observe in Stall proposal (Fig. 03), in conjunction of two cities imposing an authoritative and abstract³ morphology, refractory to any possible contamination of chance. The overlap of urban planning in the Dutch artist's work includes the city 'Nosso Lar', represented in the form of circles and a six-pointed star and the Brasilia Pilot Plan designed in the shape of a cross or two wings. These are the contradictions that give the ambiguous character and complexity to the work. The map of the two cities (Fig. 03) establishes dialectical relationship between the eternity of spiritualism against modern bodies, understood here as materialized bodies in space.

³ Are the urban abstractions advocated by the modern movement that define a totalizing model of city, universalistic reform that flattens the historical differences. The revolutionary enthusiasm of intertwining architecture and life failed because the abstractions present in capitalism are the same present in the social plan that come with modern urban design. To discuss Otilia Arantes' s book named *Mario Pedrosa: critical route* Roberto Schwarz says: '[...] You had the good sense (and daring) to consider that this Brasilia, which carried out the program of artists arguably advanced as Niemeyer and Lúcio Costa, did not concern only the world of architects. It was the same from the point of view of social criticism, had represented a deepening of the authoritarian and predatory character of Brazilian modernization, in line with the trend that lead to the military regime' (SCHWARZ, 1999, p.200).

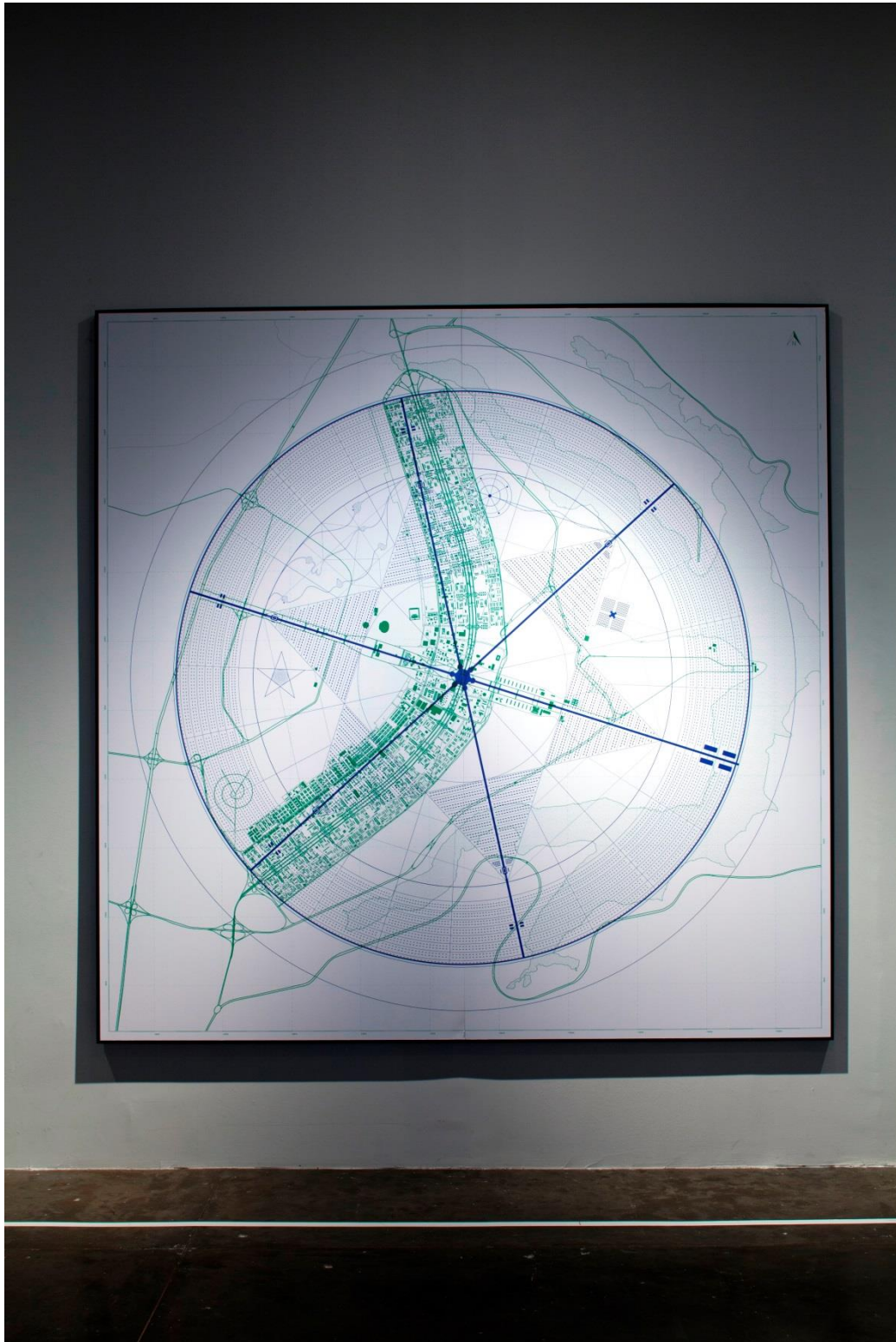


Fig. 03: Map with the overlay of the Brasilia Pilot Plan and Francisco Xavier's city 'Nosso Lar'. Source: Collection Historical Archive Wanda Svevo / Fundação Bienal de São Paulo.

'Nosso Lar' design has three circles spaced apart, the first break, the wider, stands out for the graphic construction of a star of six hatched tips in the form of a

hexagram with the insertion of small symbols such as a sphere, a small star and a square. The second interval, narrower, also has hatches and a small empty space with the design of a small spiral. However, the meeting of two diagonal axes with the horizontal axis of Brasilia Pilot Plan, refers to the centrality of the urban design, where it seems guarded a missile on hold imprisoned by the last round boundaries that dialogue with the Costa's wings in a harmonious way.

Where refers the ideas of two overlapping cities, where time and space different from each other, narrate parallel a story?

Let us remember the symbolic cities or even rebellious cities such as *Quilombo dos Palmares* and *Canudos* where the dialectic of 'inside' and 'outside', of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' characterizes the spatial organization of these spaces over a period of anxiety and uncertainty. 'Nosso Lar' reflects a time of individual, teleological and not transcendent development which aims to reincarnation, high working time of the spirit.

In unconventional preface of mediumship work, an author who simply signs as Emmanuel, shows the doctor André Luiz on their journey to another dimension, that after his earthly death, 'the biggest surprise of carnal death is to face with his conscience, which built the sky, parked in purgatory or huddled in the infernal abyss '(XAVIER, 1944 s / n ° p.). With its fight with his fleshly existence man learns to raise his spirit.

The lilting voice of Staal's video went on to assert: 'subaltern are away' of the centrality of the urban plan, however, 'we are free when we obey'. The exposed model in the first room, gave emphasis to the government palace stripped of ornaments, sober, relentless, with six ministries as Brasilia superblocks, morphology which symbolically represents a hierarchical society. Two religious symbols, the hexagram and the cross of the Brasilia Pilot Plan, overlapping involve an association between morphology (shape authoritarianism) and ideology.

In the preface of the work *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), Marx and Engels assert that the concept of ideology is not only a false view of reality, as they had discoursed in the German Ideology work (1845/1946), but mostly expressed the interest of the dominant class. Thus, the ideology is a class relation and shows the interest of the dominant class as if it were the whole society. The contradictions of society deserve a study of the real and material conditions of individual life, because:

'[...] does not judge what an individual is from their own consciousness; rather, it is necessary to explain this consciousness from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production' (Marx and Engels, 1996, p.80).

This is where the concept of ideology, in the case in the work of Staal (progress of a nation or an individual) is confused with the concept of utopia, already inculcated in their dystopias.

Zygmunt Bauman in his book *Life by Credit*, quotes Russell Jacoby discussing two traditions of utopian thinking that may sometimes coincide, but are not necessarily linked, 'the 'designer' ('the blueprint utopians map the future with inches and minutes') and the 'iconoclastic' (iconoclastic utopias 'dream of a greater society', but 'refuse to give its precise measurements')' (Bauman, 2010, p.70). However, the author proposes a shift in the iconoclastic utopia, shifting the idea of vagueness to the 'intention to deconstruct, demystify and finally unmask the dominant values

and life strategies of an era'. The purpose of this reflection is the possibility of 'another social reality', alternatively moved from a totalizing project. The possibility of a new era, certainly, doesn't go to

'[...] The drawing boards of designers, the advanced troops or the foremen of the future. It goes through a critical reflection on existing human practices and beliefs, unmasking [...] that 'something is missing' and thus inspiring the driving force behind its creation or recovery' (Bauman, 2010, p.71).

Given this perspective, Staal's artwork produces an explicit critique of the modern project of Brasilia, evidently a 'designer utopia', which represented the end of a semi-colonial society and its entry into the industrial economic activity, free from colonial stigmas. 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia' brings some concern superimposing the spiritualistic city design by Francisco Xavier to the Lúcio Costa's Pilot Plan, thus the artist draws attention to a contrast between the existential battles to achieve salvation and the construction of a new social imaginary in Brasilia that, according to Roberto Schwarz is the developmental nationalism for the first time referred to the entire Brazilian nation (Schwarz, 1999, p.157).

This tension between the earthly destiny of man, and their 'place' in another dimension, built in the form of hierarchies, spirit regeneration time for reincarnation and national developmental feel, expressed in the form of Brasilia, establishes a dialectic relationship between individual and collective, particularity and generality, time and space. So, in the spiritual realm, 'man destiny' is dependent on the recognition of their failure does not exclude a dominant class as the project to Brasilia, as the 'true understanding of Brasilia [...] born of the knowledge to ownership of space by the total population' (Meyer, 1978, p.159).

However, the two city plans, which occupy the same territory, the field of human conflict where existential and material battles are fought, the forces of reason and hierarchical way that they propose are decisive and its limits are questioned by Staal. The concept of 'iconoclastic utopia' proposed by Bauman is clearly present in the work 'Nosso Lar- Brasilia'.

Roberto Schwarz commenting Otilia Arantes's laudatory book, *A blind spot in Jürgen Habermas project*, says that the point of view of the author about Brasilia

'[...] Argues that it is precisely the absence of an industrial developed society that allowed the total experiments of architecture and new urbanism, which could only come in authoritarian conditions in the Third World, for example, India or Brazil' (Schwarz, 1999, p.201).

The author concludes that 'the monstrous and confusing combination of modernism and misery is in the process of logic', because this reflection does not address local barriers to Brazilian modernization process, but 'gives way to the theoretical reflection on the global modernizing dynamism [...] that the Third World teratology is part' (Schwarz, 1999, p.201). It is evident on Brazilian social contradictions - the delay technique, the late industrialization, the colonial legacy - reached the highest expression of architectural modernism that articulated its forms (as the beaches or Brazilian women) in an organic process of search for an authentic national culture.

According to Regina Meyer, Costa's Pilot Plan before its construction already configured in its forms, the-value exchange of urban land in the predictability of urban development, an issue that propelled segregation and speculation, as landowners within that area they won as expected (Meyer, 1978, p.160).

The accuracy of the urban plans of 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia', the design of strict limits and boundaries defined between the two cities exclude the unpredictability and the entry of the 'new', work of the two demiurges ideologues, Lúcio Costa and Francisco Xavier, in line with modern ideals. Tensions caused by the impossibility of the two cities ownership by society have been obscured in urban projects. For Meyer, the construction of Brasilia 'achieved [...] but was ignored time variable. The symptoms of an urban malaise arising in the production process were hidden, and the construction of the city could not incorporate these signs, expelled them to the periphery' (Meyer, 1978, p.161). These symptoms suppressed in the urban plan of Brasilia were not redirected to a transforming action for the whole society as proclaimed modern ideals.

In contrast, the city of Francisco Xavier does not consider material human existence process from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production, in the Marxist treadmill. It is human consciousness and its ability to handle material problems of existence to decide the merit to occupy the urban land of the city 'Nosso Lar', imposing urban design that prevents the development of new solutions or spontaneous actions. Brasilia and 'Nosso Lar', particular cities, but with stories that intertwine.

CONCLUSION

It is the conflict between opposing forces as individual and collective, local and global, spiritualism and modernism, man and society, inside and outside, social contradictions and urban design combined with political criticism where it is the density of Staal's artwork. Unmasking the fetishes, the false view of reality, is a task that is imposed on the Dutch artist's work, reviewing the meaning of utopia and ideology, finally, launch the missile contained in the new urban plan of 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia' to deconstruct the hard design of two cities and create a stress groundwork, are the issues that give the artist the character of a 'radical modern'. We could associate this vanguardism with questions from the periphery of capitalism, as Andreas Huyssen reminds us, the work 'Nosso Lar - Brasilia' transforms the critique of modernity, 'for a post-colonial globalizing world' this is a task that is imposed to post- modernism.

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