The Modernization of Brazilian Urban Space as a Political Symbol of the Republic

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This article examines the creation and planning process of two Brazilian cities, taking place during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. For this analysis we chose Belo Horizonte and Goiânia, capital cities of the states of Minas Gerais and Goiás respectively, along with the urban region of Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, developed in 1942. As the push toward modernization after the proclamation of the republic in 1889 is central to the genesis of these events, we also focus on how the state participated in this process.

The question of planned cities in Brazil is at the very least a curious one. If processes of architectonic and urbanistic preservation in Europe sought to maintain structures and urban patrimony, in Brazil these processes were frequently absent or interrupted. In this sense many cities possessed absolutely no urban infrastructure. Large cities were supplied with only partially adequate urban infrastructure. Often plans for architectonic or urbanistic renewal were not enacted completely. At other times projects and plans were not put into operation, "forgotten" by the responsible authorities.

Throughout this century, architectonic scenarios, as well as urban landscapes of Brazilian capitals, underwent a rapid evolutionary cycle. Considering the fragile conditions of these patrimonies, the absence of actions designed to preserve them led them to age prematurely. As the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss aptly observed, while the passage of centuries represented enhancement for European cities, for those in the so-called New World, like South America, the mere passing of the years represented a decay.¹

Not only during the provisional government (1889–1891) but also during subsequent governments, the problem of urban chaos and the inadequacy of capitals such as Rio de Janeiro (the federal capital), Ouro Preto (the Minas Gerais state capital), and Goiás Velho (the Goiás state capital) brought leaders face to face with the dilemma. Socioeconomic and political transformations after the proclamation of the republic resulted in substantial modifications in both the appearance and the makeup of the cities.² It fell to state governments to upgrade their capitals to meet new demands or to plan new ones compatible with the ideological and cultural values of the republican era. In the case of Belo Horizonte, and later of Goiânia, state governments opted for creating new cities rather than restoring to older capitals the capacity to grow and age.

Fig. 1. Affonso Penna Avenue, Belo Horizonte, 1930. Belo Horizonte municipal archive.
with dignity. In this context, the process of renewal of urban space and the formation of new cities during the first decades of the republic are the result of a search for modernization. Planned cities were emblematic of that search. Construction of the new came to be considered the fundamental condition that would guarantee the future.

The traditional social elite, whose fortunes were based on the export of raw materials during the empire, were learning to coexist with emerging groups. These groups were tied to financial and industrial sectors forming primarily in Rio de Janeiro, spurred by economic policies adopted during the First Republic (1889–1930). Redefinition of the economic picture and changes in urban society, along with innovations inherent in European modernization, were producing a particular social mentality in the country. Progress, industrialization, and modern life became an obsession for the emerging bourgeoisie.

This collective mentality, having as its principal point of reference the federal capital of Rio de Janeiro, was ruled by the idea of “regeneration,” meaning not only urban regeneration but also, in the broader sense, regeneration of the country in social, economic, and political terms. The idea was widely disseminated in newspapers during the first decade of the republic. It “illuminated the spirit that presided over the movement for the destruction of the old city, complementing the dissolution of the old imperial society, in order to bring about a new urban structure.” Cities such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo could be characterized by a series of deficiencies: obsolete spatial organization, housing shortages, and the absence of urban infrastructure. The rising bourgeoisie, allied with new political leaders and positivist ideas, “cried out” for social and urban “sanitation” and “hygienization.”


5. Ibid., 31
The spirit of “urban renewal” was part of the ideological climate, principally in the southeastern region, uniting under one objective the states of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Minas Gerais. Inspired by the industrialized urban spaces of Europe, these groups knew that the moment had arrived to prepare the cities for modernization. Their theoretical plans would function as “proto-cities,” models for changed expectations of land use, of the economy, and of administrative and political order.⁶

The Belo Horizonte project, defined by the Constitutional Assembly of Minas Gerais in 1894, became a reference point, synthesizing the desire for change that circulated in Brazil at the end of the century. In response to the yearnings of the political and economic elite of Minas Gerais, the creation of the new capital sought to unify the state, guaranteeing its development and prosperity. Plans for transfer of the capital from Ouro Preto⁷ had become a priority because its mission was political and economic innovation, besides being a stimulus for modernization. In the same way that “the Republic was born marked by the influence of the United States, the idea of regeneration had its references in the most recent urbanistic innovation in the United States as well as in Europe.”⁸

Aarão Reis⁹ was director of the building commission for the new capital, having been appointed in February 1894 by the president of the state of Minas Gerais, Affonso Penna. Reis was charged with completing the construction of Belo Horizonte in four years. In fact, he directed the construction until 20 May 1895; then, during the ensuing presidency of Crispim Jaques Bias Fortes, he was asked to resign and was replaced by the engineer Francisco Bicalho. Bicalho directed the project until the dissolution of the commission in 1898 after the inauguration of the new capital.

The project developed by Reis (fig. 2) effectively addressed the intentions of the political leadership of Minas Gerais. By integrating an orthogonal grid defined by the streets with a diagonal grid defined by the avenues, the author reiterated modern neoclassical urbanism. The creation of monumental axes, ordered topographically by use, relates the profile of the new capital to the urban plan of 1791 for Washington, D.C. as well as to the reconfiguration of Paris from 1853 to 1859. The French urbanist Pierre Charles l’Enfant, working in the United States, first put into practice some of the rational neoconservative principles that Haussmann later implanted in Paris. The plan for Washington adopted the concepts and perspective of the baroque, made viable by a double network of orthogonal and radial grids. Just as in the plan for Belo Horizonte,

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7. The old colonial capital of Ouro Preto lies about one hundred kilometers from the location chosen for the new capital. Originally called Vila Rica de Albuquerque, it was the result of the integration of numerous villages that began with the mining of gold in the early eighteenth century. These villages, set out linearly, eventually grouped together spontaneously so that in 1720 Vila Rica, already consolidated, became the capital of the Capitania das Minas Gerais. See Sílvio Vasconcellos, Vila Rica (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1977).
9. The engineer Aarão Reis was born in the state of Pará and completed his academic studies at the Polytechnic School of Rio de Janeiro. Before assuming the task of building the new capital, he had distinguished himself as designer and executor of several federal government projects. See Celina B. Lemos, “Determinações do espaço urbano: a evolução urbanística e simbólica do centro de Belo Horizonte” (master’s thesis, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 1988).
by means of this concept the city gained a different character. Haussman’s plan for the renewal of Paris during the empire of Napoleon III was characterized by vistas in perspective, implemented through a long series of streets. “This corresponds to the tendency repeatedly observed in the nineteenth century of ennobling technical necessities by making them artistic objectives.”10

Searching for perfect efficiency, in a detailed study of local topography the building commission foresaw a functional organization for Belo Horizonte that was strategically distributed in space. Following the order and rationalism of that spatial and functional conception, Reis adopted positivist and sanitary innovations.11 They shaped the living conditions, comfort, and beauty of the city through sanitation projects, lighting, and road and transport systems. Initial zoning was foreseen in the primary urban grid, a proposal containing the genesis of discrimination and segregation inherent in modern urban capitalism.

The three types of social and spatial segregation defined by Lojkine are represented at the level of housing, public services, and home/work transportation.12 A large part of the population from the earlier village of Belo Horizonte was composed of low income groups. Since they resided in houses of poor quality, the compensation they received for moving was laughable. They were then forced to live outside the first urban zone in temporary structures. As if this were not enough, both the remaining population of the earlier village and

11. Positivism appeared among the guiding principles of the Belo Horizonte plan through Aarão Reis. As a spatial planner, Reis acted as an authentic “social hygienist.” He conceived of the environment as being responsible for the health of the social body and of each individual. One of his primary intentions was to contribute to the formation of an industrial society in Brazil by means of urban planning. As a positivist, he considered the role of the individual and of private property relevant only when integrated with a social function, in other words, a collective representation. See Lemos, “Determinações do espaço urbano.”
the imported workers lost their communal life based on relationships with neighbors. Additionally, entry into the urban zone — where public services were concentrated — was made difficult because of a lack of transportation between urban and suburban zones.

Nonetheless, Reis had reconciled and reinterpreted modern conceptions of urbanism, defining a new urban paradigm for the country. Belo Horizonte was inaugurated on 12 December 1897, when the repertory of an eclectic architecture actually reinforced Reis’s intention (fig. 3). The first public buildings, strategically situated, functioned as virtual sanctuaries. Thus values, stability, and form were brought to life in an urban image — an allegory for a political ordering (fig. 4).

The republic as idea and image of progress — a practical version of the homologous concept of civilization — preoccupied the nation’s bourgeoisie. The creation of the new capital may be considered the first concrete realization of the belo horizonte (beautiful horizon) promised by the republican future. Thus the capital of Minas Gerais became emblematic of the viability of this new world (figs. 1 and 5).

By the early 1900s the capital was showing signs of consolidation on every level. Created to symbolize present tense action and the arrival of the twentieth century, its future was becoming more assured. At that moment it possessed the ability to “shape” a space for transformation, progress, and history.

13. At the time of its inauguration, Belo Horizonte was known as Cidade de Minas (City of mines). The president of the state, Crispim Jaques Bia Fertes, declared the seat of the government of Minas Gerais transferred with Decree No. 1,085. Only in 1901 did the city receive the name of Belo Horizonte. It was intended to shelter two hundred thousand inhabitants. Today the population of the capital is almost three million.


15. Ibid.
The 1930s represent a second phase of socioeconomic and political change in Brazil. This period was strongly marked by Getúlio Vargas who, supported by the Liberal Alliance,\(^\text{16}\) took power during the Revolution of 1930. The nation was undergoing enormous social and political upheaval, based principally on a redefinition of the interplay of political forces and the emerging organization of urban society. The sociopolitical reality of oligarchic domination based on the hegemony of the coffee bourgeoisie was breaking up, while at the same time the urban lower classes were organizing themselves in search of political representation. Along with these factors, the formation of different parties able to express varied social interests was accompanied by a broad reconsideration of cultural issues. In this way, numerous cultural events of the 1930s are particularly tied to innovations implemented at the beginning of the Second Republic (the Vargas era). Based on changed political alliances, the Second Republic viewed construction of a modern national state as its principal goal.

Among the numerous activities of the Vargas government, the idea of creating a new capital for the state of Goiás received total support at the federal level. The option to move the capital was the result of the vision of then governor Pedro Ludovico Teixeira. The certainty for success of such an undertaking came principally from the fact that Belo Horizonte had corresponded so completely to the political and economic interests of the leaders of the First Republic.

\(^{16}\) The Liberal Alliance consisted of a regional front, including the vast majority of political representatives from Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais, joined by the Democratic Party of São Paulo. The objective of the Liberal Alliance was to launch the candidacy of Getúlio Vargas for the presidency against the existing government in 1929. See Boris Fausto, *III. O Brasil republicano—2. Sociedade e instituições (1889–1930)* (São Paulo: Difel, 1985).
As the fourth largest state, even larger than Minas Gerais, Goiás was far from having the same economic vigor. It did not possess any deep sense of unity and only the southern region had seen any development, first with gold mining in the eighteenth century and more recently with the growth of an extensive flourishing agriculture.

The city of Goiás, then the state capital, was mired in decadence because of the depletion of its gold reserves. Therefore the planning of a capital was a concrete action to include the state of Goiás in the modernization process heralded nationally by the Vargas government. The modern configuration of space, together with closer proximity between the capital and the southeastern region, showed signs of guaranteeing dynamic socioeconomic interchange. Thus the primary objective for the plan of Goiânia was the representation of a new status quo, in other words, the arrival of progress in the interior.

The area selected for the capital lies about one hundred kilometers from Goiás Velho (Old Goiás—the name under which the former capital was known). Governor Teixeira invited Attilio Correia Lima from the state of Rio de Janeiro to develop the plans. An architect specializing in urbanism, Correia Lima brought from France the guiding principles of spatial conception and urban organization for the city. The plan was reshaped by the urbanist Armando Augusto Godói, who partly altered the architect’s intentions.

Narcisa Abreu Cordeiro emphasizes that “initially Goiânia was planned by the architect Attilio Correia Lima, with central, north, south, west and east (university) sectors, [and] with parks and wooded areas.” When Godói took over the project, he removed the east sector and redesigned the south sector. He also altered “the zoning of intra-urban uses, [and] defined the urban outlines of the planned sectors as well as the suburban ones. He also redefined the wooded areas and parks projected by Attilio Correia Lima, highlighting them as a greenbelt surrounding the planned nucleus, since Armando Godói’s intention was that future settlements should occur as satellite cities at some convenient remove from the projected center.”

According to Correia Lima, the city’s avenues and streets followed the topography, with the administrative center located on one of the highest sites. Further, the layout avoided creating spaces where water might accumulate, since the region is subject to periodic heavy rainfall. The administrative center’s preeminent location was reinforced by the convergence of the city’s three most important avenues. Quoting Correia Lima, “within proper proportions, the monumental effect desired was the classical principle adopted at Versailles and later at Karlsruhe and Washington” (fig. 6). Correia Lima’s plan meshed with the intentions of Godói, who planned the arborization of the roads foreseeing “for the three avenues that converged on the administrative center, besides the arborization of the pathways, large central reserves also filled with leafy trees” (fig. 7).

17. Yves Bruand, Arquitetura contemporânea no Brasil (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981), 349
18. N. A. Cordeiro, Goiânia, evoluções do plano urbanístico (Goiânia: Instituto de Planejamento, 1989), 11.
19. The plan for Versailles was begun in 1661 with the enlargement of the royal palace under the direction of Louis Le Vau (1612–1670). The layout for the gardens was based on a system of radials and rond-point, in such a way that both parts were characterized by infinite perspective and had the palace as their center. Versailles represents the essence of a seventeenth-century city: authority and borders, dynamism and openness. The city of Karlsruhe, Germany, was conceived in 1715, with the palace situated at the distributive center of a system of radial streets. The development of the baroque palace was reinforced by projects of Balthasar Neumann. See Christian Norberg-Shulz, Meaning in Western Architecture (New York: Praeger, 1975).
Fig. 6. Attilio Correia Lima, plan of Goiânia, 1933. Photograph from Edgar A. Graeff, 1983—
Goiânia: 50 anos (Goiânia: Universidade Católica de Goiás, 1985).

Fig. 7. Attilio Correia Lima, plan of Goiânia, 1933. Photograph from Edgar A. Graeff, 1983—
Goiânia: 50 anos (Goiânia: Universidade Católica de Goiás, 1985).
Along with these measures related to the environment, Correia Lima pro-
gramed functions by sectors, integrating them into sanitation, water supply, 
and urban road systems. In terms of zoning, the urbanist foresaw the implan-
tation of both a politico-administrative and a commercial center. The adminis-
trative center lay outside the densely traveled areas, providing a connection 
between commercial and residential sectors. Also, the city's functional organi-
zation into sectors was endowed with flexibility. This facilitated not only the 
interchange between areas but also the possibility of their expansion (fig. 8).

According to the above description, it can be seen that the plan for the city 
of Goiânia was characterized by a conjunction of modern tendencies in urban-
ism that recalled experiences occurring in Europe during the seventeenth, 
eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, their basis being the revival of baroque 
perspective at Versailles. From Civic Square, center of state government, 
spring three main avenues that structure the spatial conception as a whole. 
This spatial organization, adopted in Washington and later in Belo Horizonte, 
takes as its focus the governing or administrative center. All these examples 
sought primarily to guarantee the monumental nature of the principal axis, 
in other words, the Governor's Palace (figs. 9 and 10). Though it was planned 
fifty years after Belo Horizonte, some of the historical urbanistic references 
for Goiânia derive from the seventeenth century. In this way Goiânia superim-
poses two concepts, situating the plan historically at some distance from the 
ideas spreading among the modernists in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Alongside these neoclassical tendencies, the project of Goiânia under Godói 
derived its conclusive characteristics from the "garden cities" of Ebenezer 
Howard. These contained not just expressive landscaping but created bucolic 
environments that characterized the residential units. The outline evolving 
from the monumental axis had rings of ideal settings for the implantation of res-
idential sectors or neighborhoods. The serenity facilitated by the landscape, as 
well as the natural geometry inherent in "garden cities" (like Letchworth and
Fig. 9. The Governor’s Palace during construction, Goiânia, 1940s. Planning Institute archive, Goiânia.

Fig. 10. View of the Governor’s Palace, Goiânia, 1940s. Planning Institute archive, Goiânia.
Welwyn near London), are in contradiction to the baroque principal axis. The planting of trees, together with a non-monumental architecture, principally in public buildings, minimized the role of symbolic function, reducing the visual effect of urbanism at Versailles (fig. 11). While urbanists rejected this contradiction, formed by historicist fragments in the plan for Goiânia, they highlighted the benefits of modernization in the name of the future of the state: "[T]oday, thanks to social evolution and to the fact that humanity has entered fully into the industrial era, the modern city is a center for work, a great school in which to educate, develop, and improve the main elements of man's physical and spiritual nature, and a source for the powerful energies without which the people would not progress or prosper. It is from modern cities that vigorous collective impulses emanate and in which the movements and activities of a nation are coordinated."  

The city of Goiânia was based on these intentions, but its expansion was principally guided by the plan’s initial contradictions. Thus, in terms of design, Goiânia represents the superimposition of temporalities, alternating between the neoclassical style and the preprogressivist and preculturalist models of the nineteenth century. Accidentally or not, these characteristics, taken together, did suit the tropical climate of Central Brazil.

Referring to the former capital, Lévi-Strauss commented that “it was all too small or too old. A completely virgin territory would have to be found for the establishment of the gigantic scheme that was now envisaged.” But when he visited the new capital in 1937, he opined that Goiânia “was built on an endless plain, half vacant lot, half battlefield…. Nothing could be more barbaric or inhuman than this appropriation of the desert.”  

Given these circumstances, he indicated that the risk of Goiânia was greater than that of Belo Horizonte. Despite the contradictions existent in the plan, and the testimony of the anthropologist, Goiânia corresponded to the aims of its creators, performing the role of pioneer frontier for the Brazilian Central West. Combining tradition and artifice, the construction of Goiânia intensified the contrast between the interior and the city.

Before the creation of Goiânia, the modernist experiment in architecture and urbanism had not yet taken effect. But soon after the inauguration of Goiânia and its repercussions, the modernist experience in Brazil struck a chord in the federal capital. The first manifestations of the modernist movement in architecture relate to the construction of the Ministry of Education and Public Health in Rio de Janeiro, under the direction of architect Lucio Costa, and also the construction of the tourism and recreation complex in Pampulha, Belo Horizonte.

21. Lojkine, Le marxisme. We should note that when Godói adopts the idea of the “modern city,” he is referring to urban industrial society. This concept was widely disseminated in Europe during the nineteenth century, when urbanism sought to solve the urban chaos generated principally by the industrial revolution. See Françoise Choay, L’urbanisme, utopie et réalités: une anthologie (Paris: Editions Seuil, 1965).

22. Lévi-Strauss, Tristes Tropiques, 125–126.

23. Pedro Ludovico Teixeira signed the decree transferring the capital on 23 March 1937.

24. It is worth noting that when we speak of modern urbanism we are referring to nineteenth-century experiences based on neoclassical, preculturalist, and preprogressivist modern urbanisms. When we think of modernist architecture and urbanism, we situate this experiment created by the modernist vanguards in the twentieth century, after World War One. For more information consult Choay, L’urbanisme.
With Juscelino Kubitschek in the city hall of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais had the chance to lead the modernist experiment so cultivated in the federal capital. The illustrious mayor understood that it was not enough to create an industrial park to direct his city toward the future. To this end, he assumed the heroic posture befitting modernist urbanists, seeking to modernize the famous “beautiful horizon.” As history tells us, Belo Horizonte, created and planned as a symbol of progress, was again demanding innovations. The modern spirit that dominated the city, together with the interest of its dynamic mayor in defining his administration by bringing about modernization, found their principal goal in Pampulha.25

In 1938, in Pampulha, a dam and a water reservoir had been inaugurated. Mayor Kubitschek and Governor Benedito Valadares believed that the Pampulha area had greater potential, warranting the special attention of public authorities. Determined to modernize Belo Horizonte and reinject it with prosperity, they

25. At the beginning of the century, Pampulha was an agricultural area of farms and ranches. Located in the northern vector of Belo Horizonte, the area corresponding to Pampulha Velha (Old Pampulha) showed the first signs of urbanization at that time. Portuguese and Italian tenant farmers settled the area, calling it Santo Antônio da Pampulha. These settlers, upon acquisition of the land, formed one of the first supply points for Belo Horizonte. Pampulha is located eleven kilometers from the town center or original urban zone.
decided that Pampulha would delimit a new age in the capital. Considering intervention in urban space to be a strategic act of renewal, the mayor invited the French urbanist Alfred Agache to offer his diagnosis of the city and to evaluate the merits of Pampulha. Agache determined that Belo Horizonte was an urban chaos, requiring expansion in order to solve a severe housing shortage.

Nonetheless, both leaders sought a design for Pampulha that would transform it into Belo Horizonte’s principal center of tourism. Kubitschek invited architect Oscar Niemeyer to plan the tourism and recreation complex. Niemeyer, who had just begun the design of a casino for Belo Horizonte, transferred this initiative to Pampulha. Along with the casino, Niemeyer proposed the development of a yacht and golf club, a dance pavilion, and the St. Francis of Assisi Church. In order to increase the stature of the projects, he invited landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, painter Cândido Portinari, and sculptor Alfredo Ceschiatti to collaborate. Designed and built in a short period of time, the three buildings were completed in 1942. The inauguration of this complex announced not only the installation of a sophisticated center of tourism and recreation but also the innovative action of public authorities, crystallized in the daring modernist architecture of Niemeyer and his collaborators.

According to Niemeyer, Pampulha was what Belo Horizonte needed most. “The construction of the casino took place at the same time as the dance pavilion, the yacht and golf club, and the church; I remember them with particular affection because they were my first completed projects and those that made a decisive mark on my professional orientation.”

The architecture of Pampulha brings together certain rationalist principles, based on the experience of Le Corbusier. For example, the use of the independent structure created with reinforced concrete was crucial for Niemeyer to be able to manifest an expressive plastic imagination. Additionally, the architect sought to reaffirm the modernist legacy left by Le Corbusier in the 1930s by means of the independent structure and the use of columns, glass walls, marquees, and brise-soleil. As we shall see, Niemeyer grasped the teachings of the rationalist master with ease, having explored thoroughly the plastic possibilities of reinforced concrete.

On the casino project (figs. 12 and 13) Niemeyer chose the juxtaposition and interpenetration of volumes. “The rigor of the straight lines that predominate in the structure is attenuated by the curved glass wall on the patio and by the irregular form of the marquee, whose apparent instability confers a dynamic element and a composition marked entirely by its equilibrium.” The casino was conceived out of energetic contrasts, based on the opposition of materials and of curved and plane volumes.

The yacht and golf club (fig. 14), as the principal recreation center of Pampulha, has an autonomy in relation to the casino based on its pure geometric forms. Niemeyer highlights oblique lines, beginning with the incline of

26. Known as “Professor Agache,” the urbanist had been working in Rio de Janeiro since the end of the 1920s.
27. Oscar Niemeyer was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1907. He studied architecture at the National School of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro from 1929 to 1934.
30. Ibid.
Fig. 12. Oscar Niemeyer, casino, Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, 1942. Photograph by Ricardo Nogueira, 1994.
the slab, facilitating movement in the facade. The longitudinal elevation, made up of two rectangular trapezoids interconnected by a smaller base, allows for spatial continuity between the exterior and the interior, strengthened by the glass walls. Out of this formal option is born the organization of internal space that is at the “same time unique and diversified in its essential elements.”

The restaurant and dance pavilion (fig. 15), a meeting and recreation center, was built on a small island. The conception of the project highlighted the island’s natural gifts, and the neutrality of the space incorporates the beauty of lake and landscape. Nature was reinterpreted based on the curve and the concrete, highlighted in the circular building and the sinuous marquee. Both the glass wall and the outdoor marquee suggest lightness and transparency.

The project for the St. Francis of Assisi Church (fig. 16) was based on the configuration of four free spans distributed around a central parabolic dome. This dome is divided into two parts, covering the entire nave and altar. The spans cover the sacristy and the annexes. In the church’s domed interior, a play of light juxtaposes the dark wood paneling of the nave and the fresco by Portinari, located in the presbytery. Externally, the building is carried by curved and oblique lines providing points of tension in space. “The systematic asymmetry and the flexibility of both the whole and the details translate into an extraordinary impression of lightness, harmony, and clarity of conception.”

There is a distinct contrast between the dome and the tiled walls, situated opposite the main entrance, eliminating the transparency between interior and exterior. This is recaptured in the glass wall of the entrance and in the wooden latticework of the bell tower.

With reinforced concrete allowing flexibility of form, and “indifferent to criticism and veiled insinuations, such as gratuitous baroque,” Niemeyer “penetrated confidently into the world of new forms, lyricism, and creative liberty that Pampulha opened for modern architecture.” For the architect concrete suggested “something different,” or rather, “an architecture made entirely of dream and fantasy, of curves, grand free spaces of extraordinary balances.” Thus he chose an architecture that expressed “the boldness of new technique and the revolution that would mark the history of construction.”

Conceiving of architecture as esthetic object, shown by the purity of forms and the renowned landscape, Niemeyer sought in the baroque of Minas Gerais the “montage” of a tradition. The recuperation of a baroque vocabulary was decisive for the legitimation of the modernist scenario in Minas. This attitude did not mean a return to the past, as had occurred during the neoclassical and eclectic periods. The baroque was refigured, conceptually, by means of “a knowing play with the most essential characteristics of the free and rich composition of spaces, in the best and purest interpretation of the principles that can be recognized in baroque architecture in Minas.”

Fig. 13. Oscar Niemeyer, interior of casino, Pampulha, Belo Horizonte, 1942. Photograph by Ricardo Nogueira, 1994.

31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
Fig. 15. Oscar Niemeyer. Restaurant and dance pavilion, Fampulha, Belo Horizonte, 1942. Photograph by Ricardo Morgental, 1944.
In the opinion of Yves Bruand, the sculptural quality of Niemeyer’s works in Pampulha shows a break with rigid rationalist vocabulary. The critic admits that there was simply a spiritual kinship; in other words, a formal imagination endowed with “features reminiscent of baroque taste.” With this reasoning Bruand concludes that Niemeyer incorporates “spiritually a brilliant fusion of the great permanent tendencies of art history with the elements that inspired them: reason and intuition.”

The opinions of Mello and Bruand affirm that Niemeyer’s inspiration from the eighteenth-century baroque experience of Minas Gerais was fundamental. In a detailed observation of the architectonic whole of Pampulha, we can discern a possible analogy with Heinrich Wölflin’s classic study of the baroque. For Wölflin the baroque devalued the line as outline, multiplying the edges and denoting pure visual movement. Niemeyer, with the parabolic curve of the church and the curved form of the dance pavilion and the casino, enriched and confirmed this analysis. Further considering the baroque esthetic, Wölflin states that the curve is a plastic break with limits as such, creating an image in motion. Reaching the optical dimension, the walls vibrate, the space trembles in all its corners. The vigorous and mysterious baroque spirit is also discernible internally because of the tension between points of brightness and points of depth. The mirrored walls and the glass panels enlarge spaces, creating depth and eliminating interruptions. The intentional luminosity both clarifies and

35. Ibid.
obsures interior spaces, suggesting ambiguity, ordered disorder (fig. 13). All these characteristics were reinterpreted by Niemeyer’s modernist architecture in which the search for movement, for the non-limit, and for beauty was transmuted through signs, in a stimulus to life. The search for the “always new” as a condition of the modernist attitude was actualized in the works of Pampulha. Niemeyer’s modernist architecture was legitimized by finding in the baroque tradition a key to the present.

In conclusion, Pampulha signified the first step in the construction of a national identity in architecture. The success of the undertaking assured the next heroic step for the team of Oscar Niemeyer and Juscelino Kubitschek — the construction of Brasília. Alongside Belo Horizonte, Goiânia, and Pampulha, the plan of Brasília (figs. 17 and 18) represents the will to “construct” a modern country, which had consumed the Brazilian social imagination since the First Republic. The very plans for these cities and neighborhoods are a living archive of the progress from intention to realization. The arrival of modernism, allied with an effective program of modernization, showed an intention to construct a Brazil in accordance with a civilizing vision.38 In that context, architecture and modern urbanism perfectly anticipated the future. Then the modernist experience, eliminating historical references from its corpus, opened a wide range of possibilities by means of the rationalization of functional principles. The real applicability of those principles corresponded in some cases to the dreams and goals of urban societies still in the process of development.

In Brazil’s case, the idea of the modern was associated with values such as progress and civilization, constituting an “ideology of development.” Today, the future hinted at by these cities is nothing more than a past. With their melancholy air, the planned cities, now aged by time, are visual remains of the intentions of those who dreamed of a different Brazil.

Fig. 17. Lúcio Costa, first design of Brasília, 1957. Photograph from Módulo (Rio de Janeiro), no. 18 (1960).

Fig. 18. Lúcio Costa, pilot plan of Brasília, 1957.

1) Three Powers Square
2) Ministers Esplanade
3) Cathedral
4) Cultural Sector
5) Entertainment Sector
6) Service Sector
7) Commercial Sector
8) Hotel Sector
9) Radio and Television Tower
10) Sport Sector
11) City Hall Square
12) Military Quarters
13) Railroad Station
14) Light Industry and Warehousing
15) University City—Campus
16) Embassy Sector
17) Dwelling Sector
18) Mansion Sector
19) Horticulture and Floriculture
20) Botanic Park
21) Zoo
22) Golf Club
23) Bus Station
24) Yacht Club
25) Presidential Residence
26) Jockey Club
27) Open-Air Market
28) Airport
29) Cemetery

Photograph from Módulo (Rio de Janeiro), no. 18 (1960).