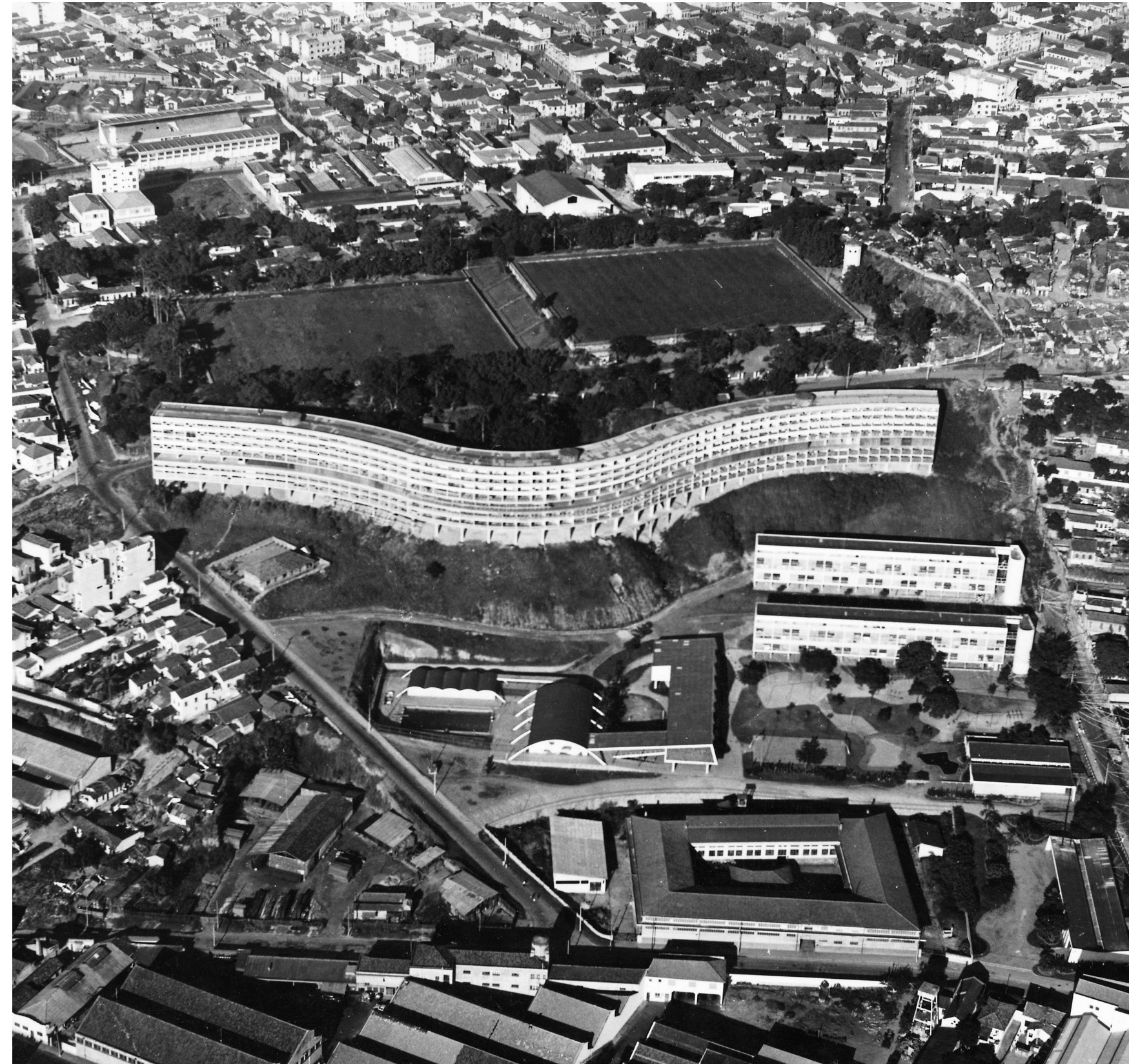


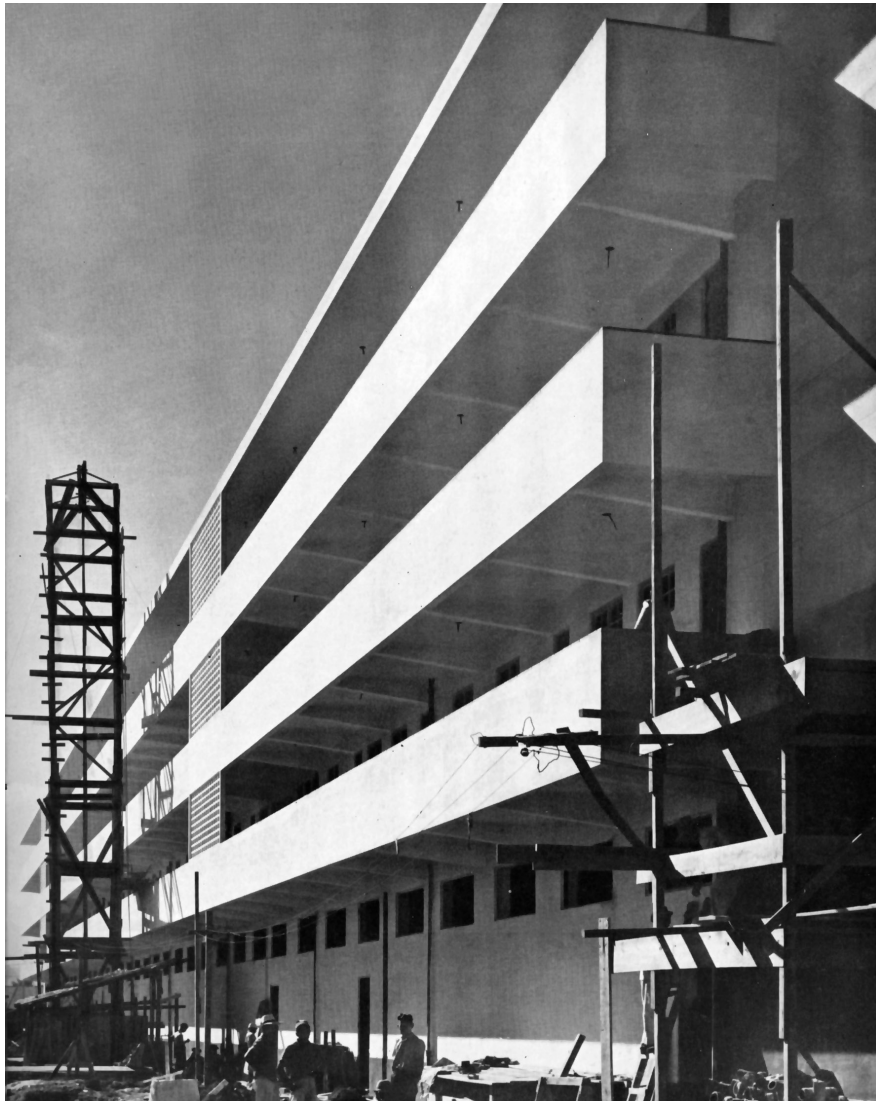
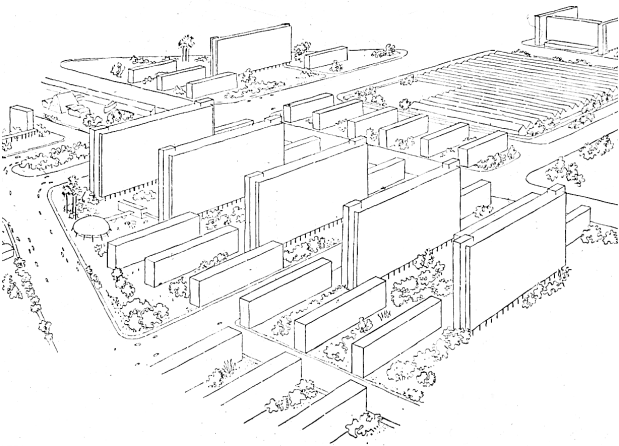
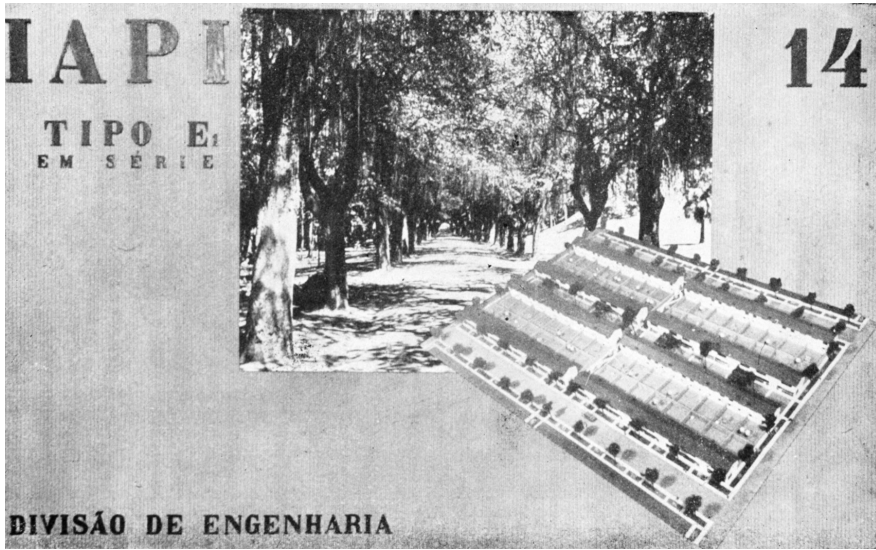
MODERN ARCHITECTURE AND THE PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL HOUSING IN BRAZIL (1930-64)¹ NABIL BONDUKI

"THE FACT THAT TODAY BRAZIL OCCUPIES AN OUTSTANDING PLACE IN THE GENERAL PANORAMA OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE MUST BE DUE, FIRST OF ALL, TO THE SPIRIT AND GREAT FREEDOM OF CONCEPTION DEMONSTRATED BY A NUMBER OF ARCHITECTS IN THE AESTHETIC FIELD. THE WORLD'S ATTENTION WAS VIVIDLY DRAWN TO THIS ORIGINALITY AND TO THE VIVACITY OF INSPIRATION THAT BROKE THE CHAINS OF A MUCH STRICTER RATIONALISM. THE SUCCESS OF OSCAR NIEMEYER, UNQUESTIONABLY THE UTMOST REPRESENTATIVE OF THIS TREND, HAS COME TO SUCH A POINT THAT INTERNATIONAL OPINION HAS, AT TIMES, REDUCED BRAZILIAN ARCHITECTURE EXCLUSIVELY TO HIS WORK."² —YVES BRUAND, 1981

According to Yves Bruand, author of the most complete history of Brazilian architecture, formal plasticity and the capacity to generate a new and original work that selectively references traditional elements have been singled out as the most remarkable features of Brazilian modern architecture.

This partial yet dominant reading of Brazilian modern architecture has been consolidated through a series of specific references. Led by Oscar





accepted and disputed. The project's recent cameo appearance in the Brazilian movie Central Station had further exaggerated the building's association with the fringes of law and order. The disrepair of the building's façade and the unkempt condition of the landscape underneath the pilotis were notable.

Yet the elementary school and the lower portions of the site were accessible and, in part through Carmen Portinho's efforts, had been recently restored. The continuous landscape design led us easily from the play areas and outdoor classrooms underneath the school, past Portinari's mural, and onto the entry ramp to the school. In the school's open-air hallway, the framed concrete openings, set within perforated ceramic tiles, created a dynamic play of light and shadow. The western façade, in which clay tiles diagonally filtered the sun, seemed almost ephemeral. The classrooms, which were in session, had individual terraces overgrown with vegetation. Fully integrating climate, program, and site, these spaces presented a clear and compelling expression of Reidy's vision of the public role in the creation of the private dwelling. - Irina Verona

NOTES

1. This article is a synthesis of a longer research carried out by the Department of Architecture and Urban Planning of the São Carlos Engineering School at the University of São Paulo. From this research emerged the books *Origens da Habitação Social no Brasil* (Editora Estacao Liberdade, São Paulo, 1998) and *Afonso Eduardo Reidy* (Editorial Blau/Insituto Lina Bo e P.M. Bardi, Lisboa, 2000).
2. Bruand, Yves. *Arquitetura Contemporânea no Brasil*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981.
3. Goodwin, Philip L. *Brazil Builds Architecture New and Old 1652-1942*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1943.
4. Mindlin, Henrique. *L'Architecture Moderne au Brésil*. Paris: Vincent et Freal, 1956.
5. Bruand, Ibid.
6. Bonduki, Nabil e Sampaio, M. Ruth Amaral. *Habitação Econômica e Arquitetura Moderna no Brasil*. Thematic research project for Fapesp. São Paulo: mimeograph, 1995.
7. Vargas, Getúlio. *A Nova Política do Brasil* (Volume VI). Rio de Janeiro: José Olímpio, 1942, pp. 99-100.
8. Kopp, Anatole. *Quando o moderno era uma causa não um estilo*. São Paulo: Studio Nobel, 1991.
9. Lima, Atílio Corrêa. "Parecer sobre o plano da cidade operaria da FNM" (elaborated 8/24/1943) in *Arquitetura* 14, Aug. 1963.
10. Kopp, Ibid, p. 14.
11. Two of the most important architects of this pioneering generation, who were also sympathizers of the Communist Party, resisted the idea of social housing: Niemeyer ("this idea of cheaper housing did not appeal to me") and Artigas ("affordable housing was a sign of the anxiety with which the bourgeoisie threw into the battle its last resources in order to survive for a few more years").
12. Lima, Atílio Corrêa. "Várzea do Carmo IAPI (Second Part) Residential Project" in Revista Municipal de Engenharia 4, vol.X, October 1942:325. For the Várzea do Carmo project, see also Lima, Atílio Corrêa, "Várzea do Carmo IAPI Residential Complex, São Paulo," in Revista Municipal de Engenharia 6, vol.IX, November 1942.
13. IAPI. *O seguro social. A indústria brasileira. O Instituto dos Industriários*. Report by President Alim Pedro. Rio de Janeiro: IAPI, 1950, p. 300.
14. IAPI, Ibid (1950), p. 292.
15. Porto, Rubens. "O problema da habitação operária," in *Boletim do Ministério do Trabalho, Indústria e Comércio* 30, February 1937.
16. In an interview, Ferreira gave details about the implementation of the first factories of pre-fabricated components in the country: "The research on minimum cost led me to consider some materials that had been less frequently used among us, [such as] blocks of pressed concrete. The economic advantages were considerable, and as for the technical qualities of the materials, the building of a mock-up entirely confirmed my predictions."
17. IAPI, Ibid. (1950), pp. 291-378.
18. Ferreira, Carlos, Ibid., p. 77.
19. IAPI, Ibid. (1950), p. 292.
20. IAPI, Ibid., (1950), p. 292.
21. Testimony given by Carmen Portinho in Calvacanti, Lauro. *Casas para o Povo*. Dissertation presented at Museu Nacional. Rio de Janeiro; mimeograph, 1987, p. 72.
22. Bruand, Ibid., p. 224.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Aerial view of the Pedregulho residential complex by Affonso Eduardo Reidy. Built in 1947 in Rio de Janeiro, the project was based on the idea of creating a self-sufficient neighborhood. The housing units, comprised of one long, serpentine slab and two smaller blocks, are supported by an array of collective services that include an elementary school, a gymnasium, a health center, and a market.

FACING PAGE

TOP LEFT: Baixada do Carmo residential complex by Atílio Correa Lima. Seeking the maximum economy and density, the design proposed blocks ranging between four and twelve floors in height.

CENTER LEFT: Várzea do Carmo residential complex, São Paulo. The project was designed by Atílio Correa Lima under the auspices of the IAPI.

BOTTOM LEFT: Vila Guiomar residential complex, in Santo Andre, by Ferreira/IAPI.

TOP RIGHT: Typologies developed by IAPI and used in the Realengo residential complex by Carlos Frederico Ferreira. Built in 1939 in Rio de Janeiro, Realengo is considered the first modern housing project to be built in Brazil.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Housing blocks of the Realengo residential complex under construction.

FACING PAGE

TOP LEFT: Designed in 1952, the Gávea residential complex by Affonso Reidy proposed 748 dwelling units of various types and an array of collective facilities that included an elementary school, a playground, a market, a health center and sports fields. The project develops some of the same formal and organizational concerns as Pedregulho.

CENTER LEFT: Gávea residential complex, under construction. The long curved apartment slab was the only part of the design to be realized.

BOTTOM LEFT: Gávea residential complex, under construction. The middle floor is an open-air level that provides access to the vertical circulation cores.

TOP RIGHT: Pedregulho residential neighborhood. View of the curved housing block from the lower portions of the site, in 1999.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Pedregulho residential complex, rear façade. On alternating floors, the duplex units extend over the public hallways with sleeping and study areas.

light, elegant, and innovative line and by Lúcio Costa’s seductive theoretical argumentation, these references include: the first manifestations of modernism in São Paulo in the 20s; Costa’s nomination to direct and “modernize” the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes immediately after the 1930 Revolution; Le Corbusier’s invitation to assist in the project for the Ministry of Education and Health in 1936, a milestone in the development of modern architecture in Brazil; Niemeyer’s Pampulha projects in Belo Horizonte at the beginning of the 40s, showing a refined and artistic command of the technique of reinforced concrete; and the international recognition of Brazilian architecture through the book *Brazil Builds* by Phillip Goodwin, and the subsequent exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1943, which opened a space for the acceptance of the new architecture by both local elites and public opinion and led to an increasing number of commissions that would eventually culminate in the experience of Brasília.

These events have been the primary focus of critical attention and have dominated accounts of the history of modern architecture in Brazil. Initially launched by Phillip Goodwin³, reinforced by Henrique Mindlin,⁴ and consolidated, not to say crystallized, by the far-reaching and analytical work of Bruand,⁵ the dominant history has consistently emphasized works of monumental and unique character that, in some way, distanced themselves from the original presuppositions of the modern movement – mainly from the objectives that associate economy, technique, and aesthetics in the design of the inhabitable space of the city.

As a result, this history has obscured another architectural development that took place in the country between the 30s and 50s, namely a production of affordable housing and public facilities that hold significant architectural, urban, and social value. Of this housing production, only Pedregulho and Gávea, two projects by Affonso Eduardo Reidy, were included in the hegemonic history of Brazilian modern architecture.

To fill this gap, we at the University of São Paulo devoted extensive research to the development of an inventory of affordable housing projects from 1930 to 1964.⁶ This research showed us the qualitative and quantitative importance of the housing production undertaken by various *Institutos de Aposentadoria e Pensões* (Retirement and Pension Institutes), or IAPs, created in the 30s; by the *Fundação da Casa Popular* (the Popular Housing Foundation), or FCP, created in 1946; and by the *Departamento de Habitação Popular da Prefeitura do Distrito Federal* (Department of Popular Housing of the Federal District).

In this essay, I shall try to situate this housing production within the framework of the project of national development implemented by Getúlio Vargas’s regime. Established through the 1930 Revolution, this regime – authoritarian until 1945 and then populist until the military coup of 1964 – was based on

pacts between social classes and promoted the intervention of the federal government in the economy and in social issues.

Vargas and the Origins of Social Housing in Brazil

I instructed the Labor Ministry to . . . study and design large groups of modest and comfortable dwellings. For this, I recommended that vast areas of land be acquired and, if necessary, advantageous areas of land be razed; that the evaluation of these areas proceed; that the means of transportation to these nuclei be taken into consideration; that construction methods be thought out; that building materials be bought straight from the producers; and, thus, that the best dwellings be obtained at the lowest price.⁷

This speech was delivered by President Vargas in 1938 when his government began to elaborate plans for the first residential complexes. His words show that the architectural solutions adopted did not result only from technical decisions but were formulated from within the government itself.

Placing emphasis on large multifamily nuclei, as opposed to the single-family dwelling that constituted up to that point “the model of the hygienic home,” Vargas was motivated by the same presuppositions as the modern movement pioneers for whom “the modern was not a style but a cause”⁸ – namely, the search for production methods on a large scale to meet the huge demand for social housing generated by industrialization and urbanization.

Vargas was inclined to make the housing issue a new element of his popular program, thus fostering the creation of labor laws and the incorporation of social issues in the duties of the government. Although in the rapidly growing Brazilian cities, the housing production during the populist era (1930-64) fell considerably short of demand, this production contributed to the consolidation of Brazilian architecture, generating technical and formal solutions adequate to the social reality of the country.

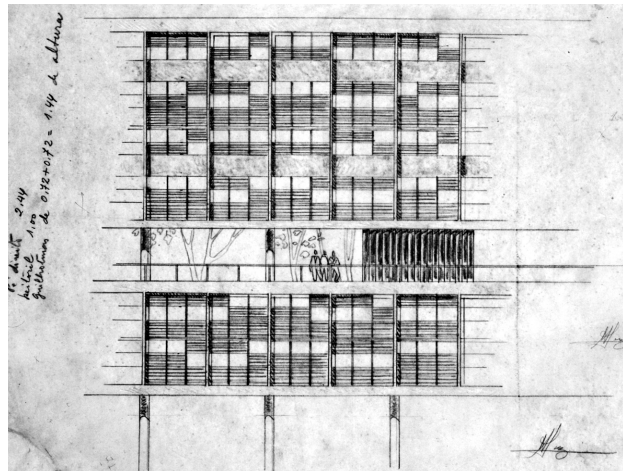
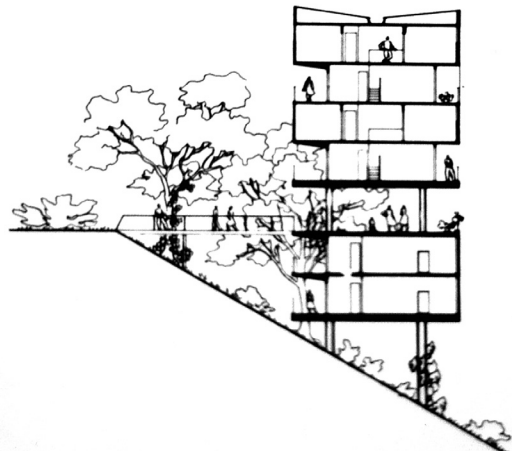
Form and Commitment in the Architecture of Social Housing in Brazil

The industrial era, which has recently begun in Brazil, and of which the *Fábrica Nacional de Motores* is one of the most daring pioneers, must not advance and climb to new heights without bringing everything necessary along with it. New spirit! Create a new industry! In a new environment! This should be the criterion.⁹

It is worth questioning if the professionals engaged in this housing production shared the convictions of their European peers of the 1920s, according to whom “modern architecture was not simply pure shapes and contemporary techniques but, above all, the attempt to participate – at the level of the built environment – in the transformation of society.”¹⁰

The answer is positive: Brazilian modern architecture articulated itself as a model of national development, stressing the construction of new cities and of housing projects in which





social facilities were understood as basic cells of an urban organicism. If in Europe the vanguard perspective was associated with socialist ideals, in Brazil, different political objectives gave rise to a Neue Wohnkultur – a new culture of living. This new attitude was concerned with bringing down the cost of construction through rationalization, industrialization, and vertical production, as well as with defining new typologies promoting the concept that housing could be more than an individual unit.

Playing a decisive role, the modern movement entered the country in three different ways: through Brazilian professionals who apprenticed abroad – including Atílio Correa Lima, who studied urban planning in France in the 20s, and Carmen Portinho, who practiced in England after World War II; through the direct influence of world-renown figures such as Le Corbusier; and through up-to-date books and magazines, imported on a regular basis. In 1931, during the First Housing Congress held in São Paulo, Ernst May’s thesis from the Second International Congress for Modern Architecture (CIAM) was frequently mentioned. When Costa became the director of the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes, the central theme of the Second CIAM – “Wohnung für das Existenzminimum” – was recommended as the topic for research, thus signaling a new way of posing the problem of housing that stressed the importance of function and of such spaces as the bathroom and the kitchen that had been, up to that point, absent from the curriculum.

The most cited example of the participation of architecture in the project of national development is the project by Costa and Niemeyer for the new capital of Brasília, executed between 1956 and 1961. Yet housing complexes for the industrial working class were another way of making visible the country’s development. The Vargas government welcomed the modern and rational environment as a space where the “new Brazilian man” could flourish. In this context, the state-run social facilities worked as instruments of control and normalization of behavior. From a different perspective, many architects saw in social housing the possibility to modify the living conditions of the worker by introducing new habits and a “modern” way of life that would counter the underdevelopment and social injustice of the nation.¹¹

The project of national development and the new conception of housing were frequently related. To Costa, the modernization of housing would have a strong influence on society: “The modern house should be a tool for liberation of the workers.” Reidy and Portinho proposed a relationship between social housing, modernization, popular education, and the transformation of society. During the First Brazilian Congress of Architects in 1945, the concept of housing as a public service was related to social transformation based on the nationalization of property and collective facilities. Portinho believed that housing was “a social service for public use, whose main function was the

complete re-education of the Brazilian worker, and that [as such] it should be included in the basic services which the government offers such as water, electricity, cooking gas, sewage and so on.”

In the projects promoted by the various IAPs, the creation of rental units as a way of making housing more affordable and the concern with economic aspects of production generated housing blocks with social and community facilities that stood in contrast to the concept of the isolated house with a backyard, vegetable garden and livestock.

The Baixada do Carmo complex is representative of the IAPI projects. Designed by Atílio Correa Lima, the project proposed a strict, rationalist composition that recalls Hilberseimer’s proposals in *Arquitetura da Grande Cidade* (Architecture of the Big City) and the diagrams presented by Gropius during the Third CIAM. Considered one of the most significant projects of the period, the Baixada do Carmo expresses some of the most important concepts of the modern movement. Lima sought the maximum of economy and density in order to make low-income housing feasible in an area close to downtown São Paulo. The blocks result from a solution of “reducing the cost of construction as much as possible, without interfering with the hygiene and the comfort of the dwelling, that is, with the disposition, orientation and dimension of its rooms.”¹² In order to make the most efficient use of the land, Lima proposed blocks ranging between four and twelve floors in height, positioned for optimal orientation, and an array of social facilities.

The magnitude of the Institutes’ production was extraordinary compared with what was built in the country and even abroad at the same time. Between 1937 and 1950, IAPI – one of the six Institutes – alone elaborated projects for 36 housing complexes (some of them with more than 5,000 units), totaling 31,587 units in 13 Brazilian states. Until 1950, the volume of work built or financed by the Institute was probably the greatest ever produced in the country: 17,725 units in housing complexes (in addition to schools and community facilities); 7,940 buildings financed by neighborhood associations; 4,942 units (in 663 apartment buildings) financed by middle-class condominiums; 1,161 units financed in residential complexes for employers; and 20 hospitals, 15 union headquarters, 26 commercial and office buildings, and ten schools. Between 1948 and 1950, for the construction of the housing complexes alone, IAPI imported around 1.33 million sacks of cement.¹³

These numbers reveal the extent of the social housing production of the period, contrary to what appears in the hegemonic narrative of Brazilian architecture. Bruand deals with only two projects by Reidy and does not take into account the housing production of the IAPs, which he classifies as “not valid.” Due in part to erroneous analysis and a lack of research, the exclusion of these works reinforced the divorce between

FACING PAGE
TOP: Pedregulho residential complex. View of elementary school (foreground) with the serpentine housing block under construction. To ensure their execution, Reidy built the collective services before the housing blocks.

BOTTOM LEFT: Pedregulho residential complex. In the curved housing block, the third floor is an open street-like level that is accessible from the upper portions of the site. This level holds various administrative and collective services.

CENTER RIGHT: Pedregulho residential neighborhood. The curved housing block is integrated with the landscape in both plan and section.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Façade sketch by Reidy of the main housing block in Pedregulho.

architecture and social housing that has predominated in the country.

The IAPs' Approach and the Contributions of the Architects Rubens Porto and Carlos Frederico Ferreira

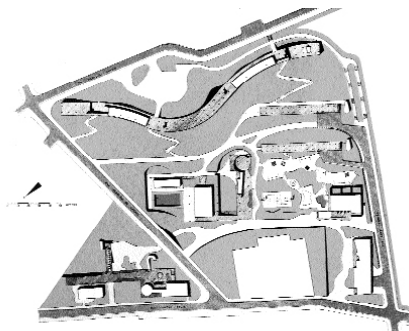
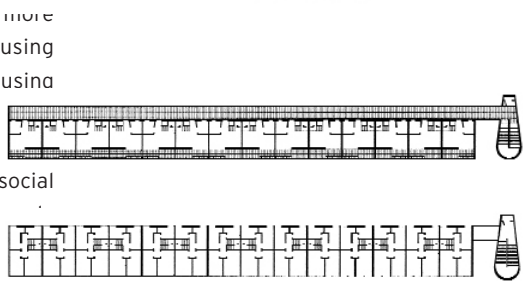
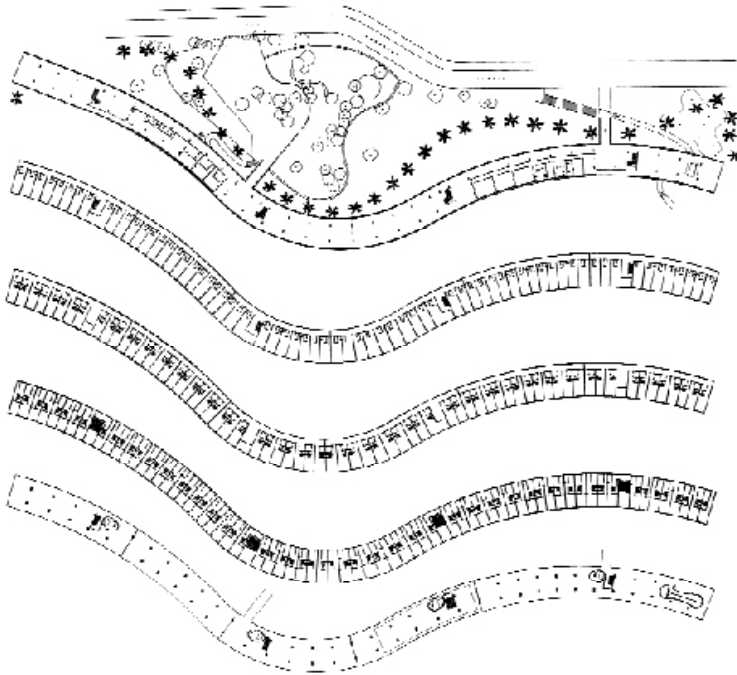
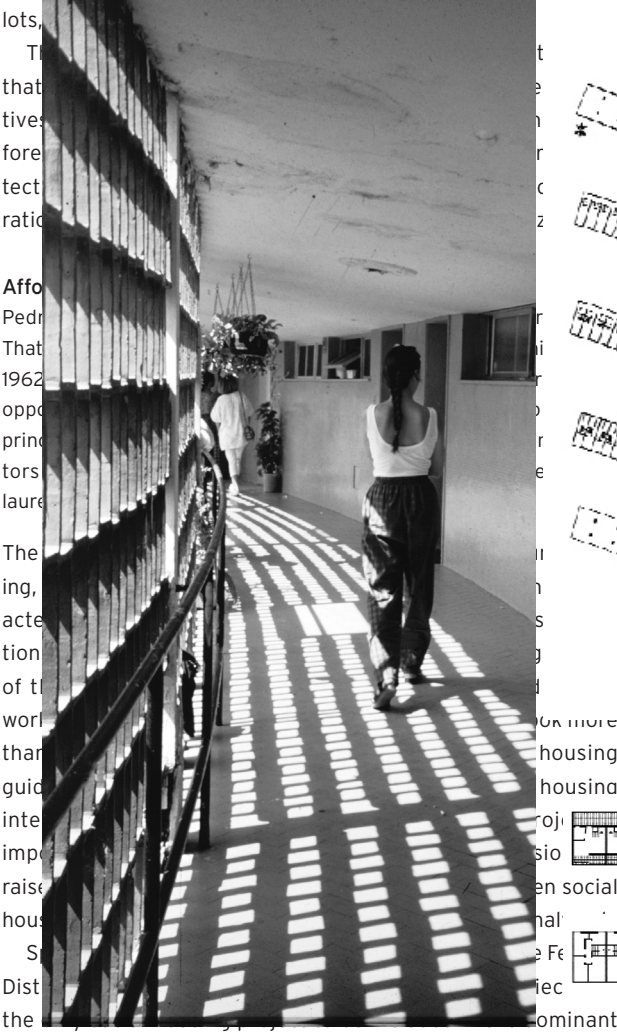
The projects should be standardized... aiming at economy in every point that is non-essential to the dimensions of the house.... The constructions should be simple, standardized and durable and the structures permanent, avoiding short-term solutions that may compromise the invested capital.¹⁴

The quality of the IAPsD projects is due to the existence, in those Institutes, of an emerging state bureaucracy that formulated project guidelines and analyzed the possibilities of the housing production in relation to economic restrictions. The normalization of projects and the search for more rationalized construction processes were necessary steps in order to make viable the desired mass production of housing.

In the development and approval of the IAPsD guidelines, architect Rubens Porto played a significant role. Linked to the Catholic Church, Porto emphasized the relationship between the house and the family and revealed an inclination towards modern solutions such as the functional plan, standardized construction elements, the rational use of materials, the elimination of superfluous decoration, and "a logical and sincere architecture that searches for perfect internal solutions."¹⁵ For the residential projects he promoted the development of areas isolated from the existing urban fabric, the creation of four-story multifamily buildings, the use of pilotis and duplex apartments, the articulation of urban plans for housing complexes, and the furnishing of the dwelling in a rational way.

Another architect who played a pivotal role in the housing production is Carlos Frederico Ferreira, head of the architecture sector of IAPI. Although he is little known in Brazil, Ferreira designed the Realengo Residential Complex in Rio de Janeiro in 1939, the first modern housing project to be built in Brazil, in addition to several other projects throughout the country. Consistent with the IAPsD emphasis on construction materials and procedures that "rationalize and reduce costs,"¹⁶ Realengo was an experimental site for the development of new materials, such as cement blocks. In addition, the complex also contained several typologies developed by IAPI, namely two-family houses, row houses, stacked houses, and multi-family blocks. These typologies would serve as points of reference to other housing projects of varying urban and economic characteristics.

Providing a structured approach to affordable housing, the IAPI led the housing production of the period. As the InstituteDs 1950 Report reveals, the IAPI attained institutional maturity through both theoretical knowledge and concrete experience.¹⁷ In order to make low-income housing accessible to the masses,



ABOVE LEFT: Pedregulho residential neighborhood. View of rear façade of main housing block.

ABOVE CENTER: Pedregulho residential neighborhood. In the elementary school, each classroom has an outdoor terrace.

ABOVE: Pedregulho, housing block type B. View of front façade.

FAR LEFT: Pedregulho, view of public hallway in the serpentine block.

LEFT: Pedregulho, plan of housing block type A (above) and block type B (below).

BELOW: Pedregulho residential complex. Site plan.



history of Brazilian modern architecture. Widely disseminated and celebrated by numerous awards and publications, Pedregulho stood out for the brilliant solution of the 250-meter long serpentine block, whose great plastic form was vividly integrated with the mountainous and paradisiacal landscape of Rio de Janeiro and for the integration of the housing blocks with various collective facilities. Masterly designed in a modern architectural language, the project suggested an architecture that had broken from the limits of a “too narrow rationalism,” in Bruand’s words, and attained originality, vivacity, and plasticity.

Pedregulho won first prize at the Architecture Biennial in São Paulo in 1951 and drew praise from important architects and critics, such as Walter Gropius and Max Bill, who “did not hide their preference for Reidy’s social accomplishments in opposition to the formal gratuity of Niemeyer.”²² Due to its international acclaim, Pedregulho and its architect became important references in the history of Brazilian modern architecture.

As previously mentioned, Pedregulho’s influence obscured other significant accomplishments in the field of social housing – contemporary or earlier. Specifically a cycle of housing projects of great relevance to Brazilian modern architecture because they were responsible for both the beginning of social housing politics in the country and the relationship, at an international level, between the modern movement and social concerns. The suppression of this group of projects reinforced the mistaken notion that Brazilian modern architecture was distant from programs intended for the majority of the population.

The prominence attained by both Reidy and Pedregulho (as well as by Reidy’s subsequent project for the Gávea Residential Complex) is due in part to factors previously charted by the dominant history of Brazilian modern architecture: the origins of the architect as a member of a select group chosen by Costa for the Ministry of Education and Health project; the strong influence of Le Corbusier, and in particular, of a piece of the master’s proposal for the urbanization of Rio de Janeiro that united architecture, urbanism and landscape; and, lastly, the exemplary resolution of form, construction and program in the design of the social facilities and serpentine block, resulting in an original proposal of social housing at an international level. Breaking loose from the strict rationalism that predominated in the European production, Reidy’s solution represented the possibility – more artificial than real – of facing the social problem with the same conceptual and aesthetic elements that were producing original works in other typologies of Brazilian architecture, such as the curve and other sensual shapes, the integration of the arts, and the generous spatial proportions seemingly unhindered by economic restrictions.

Related to this last aspect is one of the most important ques-

tions to be asked concerning Pedregulho: To what extent was it possible to implement the proposal on a large scale and thus to adequately meet the massive housing demand? Although Pedregulho remained an isolated project, a group of critics tried to use Reidy’s housing projects as a counterpoint to the much celebrated individual and expressive forms of Neimeyer, the principal representative of Brazilian architecture.

Reidy’s partner, Carmen Portinho, was the founder and director of the Department of Popular Housing of the Federal District, an office that subsisted on budget transfers from the capital’s municipal government. By contrast, the Institutes received financial contributions from employees, such as the retirement funds in which workers had to invest. This aspect is of great importance in explaining not only why it was possible to carry out Pedregulho, but also why the project took so long to be completed and why the Department produced just a few housing projects (a total of four projects were completed).

The goal of making Pedregulho feasible – and of making it known – became Portinho’s personal campaign. Without her determination, Reidy’s housing projects would not have been possible. Portinho conceived the program, oversaw construction (of great structural complexity), and, above all, used her relationship with the authorities to obtain the necessary funds.

In this sense, the fact that Pedregulho distanced itself from the economic preoccupations of the IAP’s projects is significant because it allowed it to incorporate – unlike any other housing project – the rich architectural language that made the Brazilian production prominent on the international scene. At the same time, both Reidy and Portinho were deeply engaged with the social housing debate. With the exception of economic restrictions, Pedregulho puts into practice all of the principles that guided the cycle of housing projects in the 40s and 50s, among which are modern siting, autonomy of the housing complex in relation to the traditional city, and the strong presence of collective facilities.

The Pedregulho project was built in 1946-47 on a steeply sloping site in the neighborhood of São Cristóvão, Rio de Janeiro. Consisting of 522 units and of an array of collective equipment and services, Pedregulho was meant to house low-income municipal workers.

Able to make use of the topography, Reidy proposed a great serpentine block measuring about 250 meters that respects the surrounding physical environment and landscape. The project was inspired by Le Corbusier’s utopian proposal for Rio de Janeiro, formulated when he visited Brazil in 1929 and based on a single, long, linear building located between the ocean and the mountain. The influence of the French-Swiss master, with whom Reidy worked on the Ministry of Education and Health project, is remarkable at Pedregulho.

Located at the upper part of the site, the serpentine block is a

true Unité d’Habitacion, consisting of an internal suspended street located on the third floor, or the level of access into the building. At this floor, kindergarten and recreation areas were planned. The solution of placing access halfway up the seven-story building permits vertical circulation without an elevator. The first and second floors contain efficiency units for childless couples. Duplex apartments with two, three, and four bedrooms are located on the upper floors. Access to the duplex apartments takes place on the fourth and sixth floors through sinuous corridors, enclosed with hollow ceramic tiles, an element frequently used in Brazilian architecture. Allowing permanent shade and ventilation, this solution combines the environmental comfort necessary in a tropical city with an extraordinary plasticity that is reinforced by the chiaroscuro created by these elements along the corridors.

The lower part of the site consists of four-story housing slabs on pilotis, with duplex units, and all of the collective facilities and services for the complex, namely the school, gym, swimming pool, commercial center, clinic, laundry and kindergarten. This arrangement gave Reidy an opportunity to develop projects of great plastic richness.

For Reidy, the project’s social and urban strategies were connected to the integration of the arts, a notion materialized in Pedregulho with works of famous Brazilian artists: Portinari’s panel at the gymnasium, the mosaic panel at the school, the landscape by Burle Marx, and the azulejos by Anízio Medeiro at the clinic.

In spite of its exceptional qualities, or rather due to them, Pedregulho completes the cycle of housing projects produced in Brazil between the 30s and 50s. A correct housing program demands not only a massive production, but also paradigmatic projects, capable of launching technical, social, and architectural challenges that keep alive the utopian idea of a more just and beautiful city. Pedregulho represents this optimistic vision where even the impossible may be accomplished. The project becomes stronger when it is seen as the great star in a constellation of many other stars – honest projects of quality that give quantitative expression to the housing production. As Costa stated:

It may seem illogical that, in a city where popular housing problem is pressing, the municipality gives itself the luxury of building a residential complex with the characteristics of Pedregulho. Logically, the money spent there would be diluted in other programs of limited range provided that such dilution would have altered in its entirety (...) the overall picture of the conditions in which the majority of people live (...). Pedregulho is symbolic and its very existence is a question and a challenge, for the people’s money was not spent in vain; instead of being diluted at random, without a plan, it was concentrated, materialized, humanized in order to show us how the working class could live.

Translated from Portuguese by Wilson Loria Dias and Irina Verona.

FACING PAGE
TOP: Pedregulho residential neighborhood. View of elementary school from entry ramp, in 1999. The school and lower portions of the site had been recently restored, due in part to Carmen Portinho’s efforts.

CENTER: Pedregulho, view of the open-air hallway of the elementary school.

BOTTOM: A continuous landscape connects the play spaces and open-air classrooms to the gymnasium and the entry into the school.