

## Human-Centered Design, Culture Within Everyone's Reach

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“Space concerns our relations with each other  
and in fact social space, I would say, is a  
product of our relations with each other, our  
connections with each other.”  
—Doreen Massey, “Doreen Massey on  
Space”<sup>1</sup>

Isaac Julien’s 2019 multiple-screen installation *A Marvelous Entanglement* celebrates Italian-Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi’s “public projects instead of private edifices.” Julien’s introduction to his powerful installation further emphasizes Bo Bardi’s working life devoted “to promoting the social and cultural potential of art, architecture and design” (1). This social and cultural potential is at the heart of this study.

This essay is inspired by Bo Bardi and her chief design objectives, which encompassed what bell hooks and others have termed a “spatial praxis.” In fact, Zeuler Lima underscores this sense of praxis—which for hooks links “narrative, social justice and affective power” to material geography (Zivkovic 64)—by stating that, in Bo Bardi’s architectural designs, “human beings are the protagonists of space” (Z. Lima, *Lina Bo Bardi: Drawings* 74). This essay aims to locate the essence of Bo Bardi’s collective spaces within a framework of human-centered geography, referencing the work of Doreen Massey, as well as that of bell hooks. Moreover, it will focus on the city of São Paulo, Brazil, to address issues of access and equity in terms of its urban, cultural landscape. To take as a point of departure Bo Bardi’s architectural methodology and philosophy is critical because, for her, public spaces were “places of

socialization.” To begin this way opens up space as a springboard to a wider reflection on the urban geography of culture, as well as on the democratization of culture.

In addition to bringing Bo Bardi’s own human-centered public spaces into focus, this essay will also examine other applicable models in São Paulo, a city that currently boasts close to one hundred cultural centers and cultural gathering spaces.<sup>2</sup> These cultural centers and gathering spaces range in scale from large, government, and/or corporate-sponsored units to smaller, private ones, such as the “urban quilombo” named *Aparelha Luzia*.<sup>3</sup> In examining different types of not-for-profit cultural centers, my goal is not only to demonstrate the existence of a variety of models, but also to signal how this diversity aims to confront social and geographical inequities, as well as socioeconomic barriers to inclusivity.

### Cultural Contexts

With the above goals in mind, and within the strict confines of this essay, I will reflect on four of São Paulo’s cultural centers from two distinct timelines. The two time periods parallel political moments of democratization: the first corresponds to the late 1970s and 1980s, during the years of political “abertura” that coincide with the beginnings of re-democratization at the end of Brazil’s military dictatorship. The second correlates to the more recent period governed by the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Worker’s Party, or PT), during the administrations of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and President Dilma Rousseff. These two periods are significant in terms of cultural practices and policies and serve as a starting point for a larger, more ambitious future study. I will reserve, therefore, more extensive considerations for the latter and reiterate that this study represents the initial portion of that work.

In a larger context, for instance, questions regarding cultural policy and sponsorship—which are decidedly complex—must be considered and prioritized, particularly when considering diverse political landscapes and climates from the 1960s to the early 2000s. Before turning my attention to the two periods outlined above, I wish to signal one essential study that examines these complexities on a larger scale and within a longer timeframe: *Políticas culturais no Brasil*, a volume edited by Antonio Albino Canelas Rubim and Alexandre Barbalho and published in 2007. This volume is useful because it captures a fluctuating cultural terrain, as well as conveys shifts over time in public policy, cultural incentives, and partnerships and sponsorships, consonant with different political tenets. In other words, the essays included in Rubim and Barbalho’s volume effectively portray these changeable formations in cultural

policy throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, according to varying methods and ideologies of governance.

Alexandre Barbalho's essay in the collection considers the period between the military dictatorship and Lula's presidency in a clear and concise manner. Two other essays in this volume are also pertinent to my investigation. Anita Simis's essay calls attention to the period immediately after the dictatorship, as a time when cultural policy first became public policy by instituting the Lei Sarney of 1986 as a pivotal statute that provided tax incentives for companies to invest in cultural sponsorships (152). Simis indicates another decisive moment under Lula's term, when Gilberto Gil was appointed Minister of Culture. In 2004, Gil launched the Programa Nacional de Cultura, Educação e Cidadania, or the National Program in Culture, Education and Citizenship, nicknamed "Cultura Viva." In his official words, Gil said Cultura Viva was created to produce the most expansive and far-reaching notion of cultural citizenship yet broached in Brazil ("Ministro da Cultura"). Simis argues that it was during Gil's ministry when "diversidade e desigualdade" (diversity and disparity) began to be addressed in tandem (152). In keeping with Bo Bardi's belief that culture should be "within everyone's reach" (Z. Lima, *Lina Bo Bardi* 122) a concluding essay by Marta Porto serves to underscore the process of democratization in providing access to culture, through her insistence on a more equitable system.

For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on four cultural institutions in São Paulo. To represent the 1980s, the initial post-dictatorship period, I have selected the Centro Cultural São Paulo (CCSP) and the SESC Pompeia (SESC, which stands for Serviço Social do Comércio, or Social Services for Commerce, was founded by a business federation to promote the social well-being of merchants and workers). Both represent key incarnations of cultural institutions, and demonstrate concerted efforts and practices aimed at making culture and recreation accessible to everyone. In her thesis for the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Luciene Borges Ramos cites Teixeira Coelho, who states that the first cultural centers in Brazil appeared precisely during this period, that is, the 1980s (Ramos 75).<sup>4</sup>

For the second timeline, which roughly corresponds to the political period governed by the PT, I have chosen two models as well: the Fábricas de Cultura and the privately-owned Apanelha Luzia, which Luciene Ramos defines as an "espaço cultural" (89–90). My selection of these two examples is based primarily on their deliberate commitment to decreasing specific forms of cultural underrepresentation. In the case of the Fábricas de Cultura, these state-funded centers aim to extend cultural access beyond the city's central axis to the periphery, drawing in at-risk youth from peripheral neighborhoods. In the case of Apanelha Luzia, this "urban quilombo" supports,

incentivizes, and provides a welcoming space for black artists and audiences. Similarly, a newly established Centro Cultural da Diversidade (CCD), founded in 2019, is designed to serve as a receptive space for artists and members of LGBTQ communities.

### **Taking São Paulo's Cultural Pulse**

Before embarking on an analysis of these individual cultural centers with the specific intention of demonstrating their roles in the democratization of culture in São Paulo, it is important to signal how the process of democratization is still a work in progress, even within South America's largest city. To recognize this ongoing process, this study has been informed by media sources that rely on the organization Rede Nossa São Paulo to measure the annual "cultural pulse" of the city, among other categories, through the lens of access and diversity. Not surprisingly, this yearly statistical analysis and mapping of inequality points to race, gender, and class biases as frequent drivers of inequities. For example, the 2018 study by political scientist Márcio Black calls attention to questions of race, class, and geographical location (specifically, zip code), evident in its title: "O acesso à cultura tem CEP, tem classe e tem cor" (Cultural access is contingent on zip code, social class and skin color). Rafaela Putini reported on the same study for the newspaper *O Globo*, writing that a quarter of the residents of the city of São Paulo did not frequent a single cultural activity in 2017. These reports were based on the research "Viver em São Paulo: Cultura" (Live in São Paulo: Culture), conducted by Rede Nossa São Paulo, together with the opinion poll, Ibope Inteligência. Household income, education, age, social class, gender, and race were all determining factors. According to the opinion poll, 68 percent of the population attended movie theaters, while 47 percent frequented Cultural Centers (Putini 2).

Graduate research completed by Livia Regina Midori Izumi in 2014 for the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) also points to the lack of cultural spaces dedicated to São Paulo residents who live in the periphery (11). Izumi's study reveals a lack of public policies geared to expanding the cultural franchise in the city and, consequently, the dearth of cultural resources for the whole of the population (14). Her study also conveys a lack of resources available to the city's youth. She articulates that, within São Paulo, the 2003 municipal statute VAI (part of the Programa para a Valorização de Iniciativas Culturais, a program to promote cultural initiatives) was designed to compensate for these deficiencies and incentivize cultural activities for youth in disadvantaged areas of the city. Her thesis brings to light the fact

that private institutions and the SESC organization are having to make up for what the local government is not doing (19).

Despite inexorable inequities in the city, some scholars have described recent strides that have been made in São Paulo's periphery to bring about some degree of cultural change to these outlying districts. These changes have occurred, for instance, by way of the "Movimento Cultural das Periferias," launched in 2013, and its subsequent enactment of the "Lei de Fomento à cultura da periferia" in 2016, a statute to promote culture more equitably in the city's periphery (Brito 38–39). These academic and media-based studies attest to the work that is on-going for the city of São Paulo to expand fully its cultural compass.

### **Lina Bo Bardi and SESC Pompeia**

Before returning to the general theme of São Paulo's cultural centers, I wish to bring to the fore the principal element of Bo Bardi's design thinking. Nick Compton regards Bo Bardi as a "cultural lightning rod," and this description is perfectly suited to the multidisciplinary role she played in Brazil's architecture and design spheres. Compton remarks on her "careful engineering of public places" in order to transform them into "sites for intervention, or ritual even" (1).

My analysis of Bo Bardi's architectural plans for cultural centers assumes as its focal point her design for the leisure center SESC, situated in the working-class neighborhood of Pompeia. The SESC Pompeia was begun in 1977, inaugurated in 1982, and further expanded until 1986.<sup>5</sup> Before Bo Bardi was invited to design this complex, she had already completed two important art buildings in the 1960s: the first, the construction of the new Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), or São Paulo Museum of Art, which was begun in 1956 and inaugurated in 1968. The second was a restoration project that transformed the Solar do Unhão, a historic 16th-century sugar mill that was later turned into a snuff factory and, subsequently, a warehouse, into the Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia (MAM-BA) in Salvador. MAM-BA was founded in 1960 and inaugurated in 1963.

In both instances, Bo Bardi insisted that her building designs not be regarded as "museums," which she viewed as traditional object-based repositories, but, instead, creative spaces that would foster the gathering of individuals to experience a broad range of cultural and arts-based activities. The distinction Bo Bardi made was significant because it allowed her public buildings—encompassing exterior as well as interior spaces—to revolve around human activities and events rather than be regarded as purely object-centered.<sup>6</sup>

## An Activated and Interactive Space

There are many ways to position Bo Bardi's human-centered designs within a conceptual spectrum of spatial frameworks. Scholars and critics have underscored Bo Bardi's commitment to what Nicholas Cecchi terms "the activation of space," indicating that buildings acquire meaning "once animated by inhabitants" (5). Nick Compton reinforces this concept of space when he describes Bo Bardi's "commitment to architecture as activated social space for all" (1). Additionally, Cecchi proposes that, in SESC Pompeia, Bo Bardi "found full and complete expression in the creation of spatial scenarios." Cecchi's use of the term "spatial scenarios" gives weight to the human "content" of buildings, which Bo Bardi viewed as structures "in process," dependent on their occupants' interactions (5).

Similarly, in *Architecture and Narrative: The Formation of Space and Cultural Meaning* (2009), Sophia Psarra emphasizes how people experience space in buildings and cities. For her, these individual human experiences in turn define aggregate cultural meaning (239). In giving significance to spatial configurations, architecture scholar Jane Hall situates Bo Bardi within this contextual sphere (1). Hall proposes that Bo Bardi's architectural practices present alternatives to more canonical, hegemonic ones because of this social dimension, which relies on human occupancy and interaction.

Borrowing from urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, another term that applies to Bo Bardi's designs is "third places." According to Oldenburg, third places (which are neither home nor work) provide the foundation for a functioning democracy and promote social equity, among other goals (Project of Public Spaces). In Philip Berger's article "The Architecture of Art," he quotes museum director Madeline Grynsztejn, who describes third places as "anchors of communities as place[s] where people gather, observe, interact, and have agency in their own learning and enjoyment." Grynsztejn adds that third places are "critical for civil society, democracy, and civic engagement" (qtd. in Berger 6). It is therefore befitting to situate Bo Bardi's architectural designs fully within these conceptual objectives.

In her article about SESC Pompeia, Laura Pappalardo emphasizes comparable social objectives. It is not by chance that Pappalardo links the inauguration of this Bo Bardi building to a period of "efervescência política" (political effervescence), giving rise to the *Diretas Já* movement that would call for direct presidential elections following a period of political repression (29). Pappalardo communicates Bo Bardi's conviction that the architect be in service to society. By insisting on this firm belief, Pappalardo argues that the "sociopolitical function" of Bo Bardi's work undeniably shaped her architectural vision (29).

In this way, Pappalardo underscores Bo Bardi's commitment to fostering a sense of collective community, which she achieved, in part, by seamlessly joining the cultural center's interior spaces to the public outdoor spaces of the city, for instance, by way of a "pedestrian thoroughway" (Lepik and Bader 104). Moreover, Bo Bardi maintained that public, socially functioning spaces be accessible to all: "Constitui-se, assim, com o projeto do SESC Pompeia, um espaço que visa uma vivência política, democrática, gerando a reflexão a respeito da concepção de um espaço público socialmente funcional, acessível para todos" (qtd. in Pappalardo 29) (Thus, in SESC Pompeia, a space was created to serve a political and democratic role, to spark reflection with respect to a public space designed to be socially functional and accessible to all).

According to Roberto Cenni, a cultural center is defined, above all else, by the human element: by its ability to bring people together and serve as a living space of shared experiences (97). Zeuler Lima concurs, stating: "Bo Bardi's SESC Pompeia project offers an essential key to understanding her quest to humanize architecture, to make it welcoming and collective, 'to dignify human presence'" ("A Bowl of Soup for the People" 159). This humanizing quality is also one of Massey's top considerations in her own approach to space. As the quotation at the beginning of this essay underscores, Massey defines space in terms of our relations to one another. Massey thus proposes geography as a space of human connectivity. She further emphasizes: "space is the dimension that presents us with the existence of the other; space is the dimension of multiplicity" (2).

Bo Bardi intended that her public buildings invite in a broad spectrum of the general public. Moreover, her designs relied heavily on close interactions with people—she often worked on-site, as was the case with the SESC Pompeia—in particular, with individuals who would then engage in such spaces (Lepik and Bader 266). Marcelo Ferraz—who was one of Bo Bardi's principal assistants at the time—describes this *in situ*, collaborative working environment as "architecture made real" (2). As many scholars have noted—most notably Zeuler Lima in his *Lina Bo Bardi: Drawings* (2019)—Bo Bardi's preliminary process for any project encompassed detailed sketches and meticulous research, which incorporated direct dialogue with builders, makers, users, and participants. She was also known to pay particular attention to two segments of the population that she considered to possess special characteristics and needs: the youth and the elderly. Ferraz recalls Bo Bardi's definition of the role of architecture: "Architecture for me is to see an old man or a child with a full plate of food walking elegantly across our restaurant, looking for a place to sit at a communal table" (8).

In this manner, Rowan Moore describes Bo Bardi's designs as "buildings shaped by love," underscoring the affective element essential to bell hooks's

social praxis. In the case of SESC Pompeia, Moore defines the complex as a “village assembly of spaces,” aimed at inviting users into shared areas and activities (2). Design elements, such as a central hearth or an interior pebble-lined stream, were meant to create an environment where participants “can feel at home” (Lepik and Bader 266). Bo Bardi also created a long, outdoor boardwalk with a waterfall shower to give city dwellers an urban beach experience.

In addition to these features, Herman Hertzberger highlights “the entire complex as a large leisure-time school with a theatre seating 1200, a library, studios for ceramics, painting, graphic art, woodwork, photography and weaving, a printing shop and a vast exhibition space,” in addition to a “large ‘living-space’” and “extensive sports facilities.” Hertzberger summarizes the complex’s welcoming qualities: “SESC is like a big house where you are welcome” (246). For years after the completion of the SESC Pompeia, Bo Bardi was involved, along with her team, in creating “cultural and pedagogical” activities and events, particularly in the exhibition spaces, in order to extend her affective relationship with the center’s participants (Z. Lima, “A Bowl of Soup for the People” 158). Bo Bardi infused the center with “theatricality at play” (Lepik and Bader 128). Gatherings, such as “music shows, circuses, *festas juninas*, multi-ethnic festivals, memorable exhibitions,” created “a citadel of freedom” (Ferraz 6–7).

### Reusable Structures

As had been the case with the MAM-BA in Salvador, Bo Bardi’s design for the SESC Pompeia complex also involved a significant amount of historic restoration and structural repurposing, components that became increasingly vital to her work. Before Bo Bardi arrived in Brazil, she had trained with Italian architects who, according to Zeuler Lima, instructed students “to research building history, techniques and materials in order to integrate architecture into urban restoration” (*Lina Bo Bardi: Drawings* 27). This attention to combining techniques, materials, and styles, as well as an insistence on reusing existing structures, is crucial to Bo Bardi’s methodology.

In the case of the SESC Pompeia site, the demolishing of a former steel-barrel factory to install the new building had proven to be too expensive, according to a preliminary plan drawn up before Bo Bardi came on board. She was then selected for the project precisely because she was enthusiastic about reutilizing and integrating portions of the factory into her design (Lepik and Bader 265). Pappalardo calls attention to the fact that, by purposefully reusing portions of a factory, Bo Bardi was intentionally paying tribute to its workers

(39). Furthermore, Pappalardo adds that this repurposing also paid tribute to the industrial history of São Paulo (49). Architectural critics, such as Rowan Moore, have asserted that the SESC Pompeia design, which *The Guardian* in 2014 classified as “one of the ten best concrete buildings in the world,” benefitted from Bo Bardi’s well-honed vision and practical, experiential approach (Baratto 1). Finally, Zeuler Lima describes this project as “her ultimate accomplishment” and “an endeavor that would produce the most complex and meaningful project of her career” (“A Bowl of Soup for the People” 158).

## Two Groundbreaking Models

Having considered Bo Bardi’s redesign of the SESC Pompeia, I now wish to situate this building in relation to its contemporaries by pairing it with another cultural center of the 1980s, when Brazil’s twenty-year dictatorship was waning and, as Rodrigo Mairink underlines, when cultural enterprises were no longer politically suppressed (90). Like SESC Pompeia, the city-funded Centro Cultural São Paulo (CCSP) was also inaugurated in 1982, yet it was not fully completed until 2004.<sup>7</sup> Both buildings influenced the course of subsequent cultural centers in the city. Moreover, they connect open-access spaces in contemporary vernacular architecture to a growing sense of cultural freedom (Lepik and Bader 126).

Whereas I have selected these two models, it is important to note two other contemporaneous centers that were established in São Paulo in the late 1980s, during the gradual trend toward political re-democratization. The first center is the second unit of the Conjunto Cultural da Caixa, now Caixa Cultural, which was established in São Paulo in 1989 (the first unit was founded in Brasília in 1980) (“Caixa Cultural São Paulo” 1). Another iconic center from this same period is the state-funded Memorial da América Latina, which was designed by Oscar Niemeyer and which was also founded in 1989 (“Memorial da América Latina” 1). These additional cultural spaces also helped to usher in new events and activities for the general public, free of cost or at affordable prices.

## A Democratic Space: Centro Cultural São Paulo

The Centro Cultural São Paulo (CCSP) was created as one of the first multidisciplinary cultural centers in the country. It was modeled after the Centre Georges Pompidou, which was inaugurated in Paris in 1977 and conceived as a “laboratory of new ideas” (Bastiancich 1). According to Neri Bastiancich,

the CCSP was planned as an extension of the Mário de Andrade Library. “The space,” he explains, “was conceived in order to have a relationship with the people using it, so it offers easily accessible and open areas” (1).

A public institution with municipal sponsorship and institutional partnerships, the CCSP was intended to provide a space in which everyone would have access to a variety of cultural, artistic, and educational activities, including free concerts and performances, as well as public libraries. The architects Luiz Telles and Eurico Prado Lopez purposefully “integrated the building into the topography of the local area” by creating an elongated and tapered structure that parallels a main thoroughfare in the urban center (Bastiancich 1). Currently, the CCSP includes libraries, exhibition galleries, performance amphitheatres, educational spaces, green spaces, and community gardens.

In describing the project, architect Telles stresses the center’s welcoming and inviting qualities, rather than its role as a monument (Cella 2). The center’s Web site reinforces this welcoming role when describing the public use: “Uso público: é seu e é de todos” (Our public space is yours and belongs to everyone). In his 2009 report on the CCSP, Bastiancich underscores the center’s profile as a “democratic space, free and easily accessible.” His report also states that 60 percent of the center’s daily visitors were youth between the ages of 15 and 30, an age group purposefully targeted by the center’s programming staff (Bastiancich 2).

According to Roberto Cenni, cultural centers such as the CCSP and SESC Pompeia are undertakings designed to offer “cultura sem barreiras,” or open, unhindered access to culture. In his detailed, critical analysis of these two centers—plus a third, the Museu Lasar Segall—Cenni argues that these architectural spaces exist to shelter its occupants from everyday tensions and disquiet, nurturing their dreams (214). Moreover, these centers serve as catalysts for the rights of all to participate actively and creatively (195).

### **Promoting Social Well-Being and Creativity: SESC**

As mentioned previously, SESC is a private institution founded in 1946 for the purpose of fostering the wellness of its workforce. It accomplishes this goal through a broad spectrum of cultural, educational, recreational, and health-related programs and activities. Health-related programs were at the core of SESC’s mission in the 1940s, when social centers were created to provide nutrition and wellness services to the population. The first SESC cultural center in São Paulo—Consolação—was inaugurated in 1967. An emphasis on social education and citizenship deepened in the late 1970s and 80s, around the time Bo Bardi was invited to design the new SESC Pompeia center.

Rodrigo Mairink's pertinent essay "SESC: O livre acesso à cultura" outlines SESC's objectives and sociocultural outcomes in relation to the city of São Paulo. Mairink also takes care to delineate the democratic scope of SESC's mission. Two key strategies were central to this democratic vision: the positioning of SESC's cultural centers in diverse, and often more vulnerable, parts of the city; and the commitment to community-building tactics designed to draw in disenfranchised users. These institutional objectives converged when SESC chose to invest in architecture, urban renewal, and cultural enrichment by selecting Bo Bardi for the SESC Pompeia project (Mairink 92).<sup>8</sup>

It is important to reflect on the Centro Cultural São Paulo and SESC centers within a cultural framework specific to the city of São Paulo. Both unquestionably set the stage for the contributions of many concurrent architects, urban planners, and designers, including Bo Bardi, as well as others who followed. These cultural centers create spaces that are distinctly human-centered, mirroring Massey's concept of human geography and giving rise to a multiplicity of community-driven activities. In sum, these centers envisioned from the start that they would cater to a large and diverse portion of the city's population by providing a variety of services and activities, ranging in areas of health, nutrition, education, sports and recreation, arts and entertainment, and the environment and sustainability.

São Paulo's Cultural Centers in the Twenty-First Century: Center and Periphery Gilberto Gil's role as Culture Secretary from 2003 to 2008 under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva correlates to a period of national cultural democratization, paired with civic initiatives, which ushered in a new century in Brazil. In terms of São Paulo, we must look to studies particular to the state, and, more specifically, to municipal data, to determine how well this tendency is reflected in the city's ever-expanding cultural skyline. The twenty-first century gave rise to several new cultural centers in the city (Gabriel 1).

Several of these new centers closely mirror Bo Bardi's egalitarian goals for the SESC Pompeia. One such building happens to be another SESC center—the 24 de Maio—designed by prominent architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha and his MMBB team. The SESC 24 de Maio was inaugurated in 2017, thirty-five years after the SESC Pompeia. Like Bo Bardi, Paulo Mendes da Rocha adapted parts of an existing building—the Mesbla department store—to the new fourteen-story design. According to the architectural team that designed the SESC 24 de Maio, it modeled itself on a sense of "educational ethics" that "enhances the democratization of cultural values as a form of individual autonomy and the practice of citizenship" (Rocha 131).

The SESC 24 de Maio is described as an open, glass-clad cultural and recreational complex that seeks to maximize the proportions of the original structure (Stevens 1) and to readapt the building to a "completely new set of

uses and specific programs” (MMBB 3). In the interest of placemaking, a public square at ground level invites people in by directly linking the interior to “the exciting surroundings of the neighborhood” (MMBB 3). The center’s spaces are defined by a library, dental clinic, gym, rock climbing wall, dance studios, gallery space, subterranean theater, restaurant, public lounge, café, garden, and roof-top pool. Thus, as in the case of SESC Pompeia, a site of urban heritage was updated and transformed, lending it a new, interactive, human-purposed identity.

Several new and old cultural centers along the Avenida Paulista, such as the Itaú Cultural on one end and the new Instituto Moreira Salles on the other, along with Bo Bardi’s MASP, the SESC Avenida Paulista, the Japan House, the Casa das Rosas, and others, serve to distinguish that thoroughfare as a major cultural nucleus in the city. And, yet, researchers like Livia Izumi have critically called attention to the need for the creation of street festivals and art events to extend cultural access to a portion of the population that is distanced geographically or financially from this nexus (20–21). Moreover, Izumi argues, smaller cultural gathering spaces positioned beyond the urban center must resort to collective crowdfunding to make ends meet and compensate for what neither the State nor the city is providing (22). In cultural terms, the contrast between center and periphery in São Paulo is discernibly striking.

Nevertheless, within Greater São Paulo, the binary division between center and periphery holds its own complexities. Although the area around Avenida Paulista, for example, has been a cultural (and financial) hub, the historic downtown over time has suffered from periods of neglect and disrepair. More recently, several cultural centers have been established to revitalize this deteriorated area. To name just a few, there is the SESC 24 de Maio, of course, and the Copan-occupied art center Pivô, as well as other independent, alternative, and collaborative spaces.

### **Expanding out to the Periphery: Fábricas de Cultura**

In 2012, the state of São Paulo began creating multiple centers called Fábricas de Cultura, or Culture Factories, to expand cultural access primarily to the city’s at-risk youth living in the peripheries. These centers were built in response to a scarcity of cultural and educational activities, as stated by USP Professor Luiz Bagolin in 2012: “of the 96 city districts, 45 do not provide a public library; 59 do not provide a single movie theater; 71 do not have a museum; 52 are without a performance or concert hall; and 54 are without a theater” (Aquistapace 2). Fábricas de Cultura provide free access in the form of classes, workshops, libraries, sound studios, practice rooms, and activities

in the visual arts, dance, capoeira, literary arts, music, theater, circus arts, and multimedia in areas East, North, and South, as well as in the Greater industrial São Paulo. There are currently ten centers in operation. Their Web site slogan is: “O espaço é seu! É tudo de graça” (The space is yours! It’s all free).

Kluk Magri Neto, who is one of the administrators of five Fábricas de Cultura centers, states that their work is primarily in the realm of arts and culture but that their commitment to social development is well defined (Observatório Itaú Cultural 4), stemming directly from public policy. The libraries, for example, provide borrowing services, as well as programming that includes storytelling, public readings, and other activities designed to encourage the act of reading. In 2015, they also introduced sound studios for recording and producing music (7). This full range of activities and hands-on group workshops and classes allows youth to acquire agency and to become makers and creators. Despite the range of enterprising opportunities the Fábricas de Cultura provide, critics such as Danielle Maciel reproach the unduly bureaucratic and policy-driven nature of the organization, which creates tensions with, and imposes limitations upon, these same creative and socially-conscious processes (573). Well-founded criticism aside, these cultural factories expand opportunities into parts of the city previously excluded from these possibilities.

### **A Cultural Gathering Space that Advocates for Diversity and Resistance: Aparentha Luzia**

I began this essay by examining the work of Lina Bo Bardi for SESC Pompeia, which was completed in 1986. I wish to end with the pioneering work of Erica Malunguinho, who is a black, trans woman and São Paulo state representative. Malunguinho is the founder of Aparentha Luzia, a cultural center founded in 2016, thirty-four years after SESC Pompeia. The two centers could not be more different in spatial terms and scale: one is an expansive 22,000-square-meter space, while the other is a more intimate gathering space. Yet, they both suggest, in distinct ways, the necessity for creating spaces that invite diversity, socialization, and creative freedom. The SESC Pompeia invites participation from a broad spectrum of society. Aparentha Luzia privileges the cultural and artistic production of black artists, who must often combat underrepresentation and discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

Following Beatriz Nascimento’s broader concept of “quilombo,” which encompasses spatial and cultural affirmation for contemporary black Brazilians, Malunguinho describes Aparentha Luzia as a collective place of resistance (Nascimento 124–25). It is a space intended to lend meaning and significance to Afro-Brazilian culture (Borges 1). According to Malunguinho, it is also meant

to be a haven where Afro-descendants (“povo preto,” in her words) can gather as a community in an urban quilombo setting (W. Lima 2). Originally conceived as a studio space (Borges 4), it is a center for Afro-descendent, indigenous, and women’s art, culture, and political resistance. After Malunguinho took office in March 2019—the first black trans woman to do so in the state of São Paulo—she celebrated her official “reintegração de posse” at Aparelha Luzia. That is, she reclaimed her rightful inclusion into a free, democratic society by equating her term in office to the emancipated space of a “quilombo” (Aun 1–2). Consequently, she designated the cultural center as “a place of black socialization,” and a place to define the “afro-center as the epicenter” (Dias 8).

According to Pedro Borges, two events that were held at Aparelha Luzia hold particular significance for Malunguinho. The first, in April 2016, was a response to a series by Brazil’s media network *O Globo* entitled “Sexo e as Negas” (Sex and Black Women) that hypersexualized black women. In response, Malunguinho called this first event, “Arte e as Negas” (Art and Black Women). The event was meant to serve as a means of reflection and resistance. The second event, in 2019, was called “Magia Negra,” or “Black Magic,” and its intention was to address the racist connotations associated with this term. The public event took as a starting point a poem by Sergio Vaz that transforms the theme of black magic into a celebration of black artistic achievements (Borges 3).

Aparelha Luzia is also the space in which teenage rap sensation MC Soffia made her “Barbie Black” music launch in 2018, accompanied by an art exhibition (“MC Soffia lança single” 1), among other events that MC Soffia has hosted to empower young black girls in the fight against racism (“MC Soffia reúne meninas negras” 1). Moreover, it serves as the rehearsal space and headquarters for the Afro-affirmative samba group Ilu Inã (Vieira 8). By establishing this space for samba, Malunguinho brings Barra Funda’s samba traditions back to the neighborhood (Vieira 7). These examples reaffirm the goals of this gathering space as community building and solidarity forming.

## Final Reflections

As this essay attests, the city of São Paulo has made great strides in expanding and diversifying its cultural landscape over the course of the past fifty years. The cultural centers represented here—innovative, broad reaching, community serving, and, in some cases, alternative—have fulfilled their part in contributing to the democratization of culture by creating multilateral spaces for human-centered activities and participatory interaction. When it comes to cultural expression and access, the process of opening spaces up to larger portions of the population and of prioritizing inclusivity are significant accomplishments

toward equality, social praxis, and justice. As Aparelha Luzia exemplifies, São Paulo's cultural centers and gathering spaces should also function as urban quilombos so that they might create open communities of resistance and intervention in a collective campaign for cultural agency.

However, in a country characterized by acute inequality and in a monumental city with vast geographical disparities such as São Paulo, equity and inclusion are still a work in progress. At present, there is plenty of work to be done for the city to narrow the cultural gap and increase cultural capital for many of its underrepresented constituents. Yet, architects, artists, designers, urban planners, and cultural thinkers are taking steps to create a more egalitarian system by underscoring the social dimension that art and culture serve in our communities. By doing so, these visionaries and makers collectively establish a "dimension of multiplicity"—as articulated by Massey—by spatially prioritizing our connections to others.

Bo Bardi continues to be a cultural lightning rod in this regard, as evident from Jane Hall's award-winning PhD dissertation. Hall studied how Bo Bardi practiced architecture "as a way of shaping society," in order to create "spaces of transcultural resistance" (1). Bo Bardi's goals of defining people as "protagonists of architecture" (Z. Lima, *Lina Bo Bardi: Drawings* 4), as well as her search "for buildings, objects and spaces that were straightforward and accessible to all" (Z. Lima, *Lina Bo Bardi: Drawings* 57), open our minds to a collective cultural consciousness.

Zeuler Lima reminds us of Bo Bardi's insistence that art be "within the reach of all people" (*Drawings* 106). As the 2020 "Lina Bo Bardi: Habitat" exhibition at the Museo JUMEX demonstrates, Bo Bardi was committed to "a rethinking of place, human relations, community formation, forms of conviviality and solidarity" (Azzarello 1). These human-centered goals—which this essay extends to other groundbreaking cultural centers in São Paulo—also place social praxis and citizenship at the core, opening space up for societal transformation.

## Notes

1. This essay is dedicated to Nat Harrison for expanding my knowledge of Brazilian architecture.
2. In Portuguese, the distinction between the two is less cumbersome, divided into "centros" or "espaços culturais." According to Luciene Ramos, the latter are smaller in scale, do not include holdings or collections, and are privately owned (Ramos 89–90).
3. The term "quilombo" is defined as a community formed by fugitive African slaves. In this contemporary, urban context, it acquires a broader definition that refers to a

space of African heritage, affirmation, community, and resistance, as delineated by Beatriz Nascimento, among others, who emphasizes both recrimination against social inequalities as well as public recognition of the racial and political role of black Brazilians in society. See Nascimento.

4. Luciene Ramos traces the history of cultural centers from a transnational perspective, without linking their emergence to Brazil's politics.
5. To celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of SESC-Pompeia, SESC produced a four-part documentary that incorporates many details about the project. See Delaqua.
6. There are multiple dissertations and theses on the subject of Bo Bardi's work produced between 1993 and 2015. A more recent academic thesis from 2017 by Renata Carneiro Bechara is instrumental in documenting the construction process for SESC Pompeia. She interviews important players, such as Marcelo Ferraz, who supplies up-close and personal information about working with Bo Bardi. See Bechara.
7. For an historic overview of the Centro Cultural São Paulo and examples of its use today, see Cella's article in *Casa Abril*.
8. Two other important studies about the SESC organization, produced by SESC, serve as overarching reference tools for understanding the institution and its service-based profile. The first study, written in 2013, is Yara Schreiber Dines's "Citadelas da cultura no lazer: Uma reflexão em antropologia da imagem sobre o SESC São Paulo." The second one is scholar Solange Ferraz de Lima's "As imagens da imagem do SESC," published in 2014. Both publications examine the SESC model from an imagetic standpoint to situate the institutional goals within the metropolitan profile of the city. Dines provides a broad overview of the institution from its inception in 1946 to the 1990s. Ferraz de Lima follows the institution's portrayal in periodicals, for the sake of tracing its media image and urban significance. Another valuable resource that chronicles the history of SESC is a series of short documentaries—"Sesc 70 Anos"—produced by SESC and accessible via the Internet, which were created for the seventieth anniversary of the organization. These documentary videos promote the importance of sports, wellness, recreation, entertainment, the arts, and even environmental sustainability to its constituents.
9. "Aparelha" is the feminine form of "aparelho," a term used during Brazil's military dictatorship to refer to clandestine accommodations that sheltered activists who fought against the dictatorship. The use of the word in the feminine is intentionally gender empowering. Aparelha Luzia's namesake was Brazil's first female of African descent, born 12,000 years ago (Prado 1).

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