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# Architectural Interventions and Symbolic Transformations: the case of Brazilian cultural complex

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## Abstract

*In an attempt to tend to the aspirations of contemporary societies, museums have undergone both physical and symbolic transformations. However, it is necessary to question whether or not this level of change is impacting on the role of the institutions themselves, that of conserving and exhibiting the material testimonies of mankind for societal pleasure, given that the interiors of the historical monuments that host these institutions are not exhibited in conjunction with the art itself. The striking architecture from past centuries, conceived to be a symbol and to silently convey ideals and principles, has more recently become an empty casing without history or meaning. This is the case of the old buildings that once hosted the administrative departments of the state of Minas Gerais in the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, which have recently been transformed into a sizeable cultural complex.*

**Keywords:** Brazilian Heritage; Architectural Interventions; Cultural Complex; Symbolic Transformations.

## Introduction

Both national and international cultural institutions have, in recent decades, undergone conceptual changes regarding the means through which they generate their material and non-material heritage, especially with regards to museums. In the material realm, the notion of internal space and the physical insertion of the museums in contemporary cities have taken on a dimension that goes beyond the materiality that once limited them, with an increasing tendency towards the search for an interconnection with other structures, aimed at producing cultural conglomerates. This is a phenomenon that was seen in nineteenth-century Europe, but which became more popular at the end of the twentieth century with worldwide dissemination. Today, added to this concept are a wide variety of media and technological resources that end up relegating historical architecture to the role of a mere functional support, despite its intrinsic eloquence.

In the words of Mila Nikolic (2012), museological institutions engage in multiple functions capable of satisfying the desires of a more discerning public, which the author translates into the concept of a “Museum Cluster”. Following this concept, the museographic structures are integrated within their cities by the appropriation of pre-existing eminent buildings. The decision to utilise these buildings as museum spaces is not solely based on the selection of their locations or the buildings themselves, but rather based on using groups of buildings that are potentially capable of promoting a greater influence, with increased impact, on the city and its citizens. This gives greater magnitude to urban forms, which extend their domains to the city blocks, streets, squares, neighbourhoods, parks, mountains, and islands of museums due to the construction of new cultural and urban spaces.

In Brazil, this phenomenon can clearly be seen in the current form of *Praça de Liberdade* (Liberty Square), an area of immense symbolic, historic, and architectural value in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. This space once represented, in the people’s minds, a locus of political memory, but has more recently been transformed from a single, solitary space into a multi-use cultural centre. The stated plan to place Minas Gerais within the international tourist route produced a bold project which stemmed from its need to ‘recover and preserve its cultural heritage’ (Iepha, 2003), and created a sizeable cultural complex, which offers twelve galleries for visitation, eight of which are already up and running.

This study will offer reflections on the characteristics of the spatial and symbolic appropriation of the grandiose historic buildings of Liberty Square in Belo Horizonte which, having been relieved of their original civic and administrative duties, were restored and adapted to host numerous museums and hands-on cultural activity centres, creating the *Liberty Square Cultural Circuit*.

This touristic superstructure has added great value to the historic architecture of the city, regardless of its original nature and functions, displacing the historical values that these tangible goods effectively prompt and express in the memory of Belo Horizonte, through its characteristic physical structure and urban implementation. Architecture, as defined by the Vitruvian principles of *utilitas*, *firmitas*, *venustas* (firmness, commodity, delight), appears to be no longer capable of attending to the many variables of communication that the current “memory managers” understand as adequate and practical enough to perpetuate the regional/national Brazilian culture.

### Museum, Cluster and Museum Cluster

The museum and the museum cluster appear almost simultaneously, though the latter was not perceived as such by not having urbanistic representativeness or critical mass (Nikolic, 2012). The cluster, on the other hand, is based on Porter’s (1998) recent theory, which defines it as the geographic concentrations of interconnected institutions in a particular sector. Thus, the postmodern city, globalisation and its economy will be the core of this spatial behaviour.

Choay (2011) states that this phenomenon will cause changes in the understanding of culture and identity and consequently in the organisation of territories. Spatially, globalisation is represented by a set of networks through which material and immaterial flows are transmitted, and gives a new identity to the various societies – globally to the planet (Choay, 2011).

In a globalised world, societies no longer own their cultural particularities, which are replaced by a unique identity. To belong to a global society, people need to know more about a society’s entire material culture, resulting in an increase in the range of visitors and, even more, in the number of cultural attractions in cities. This justifies the formation of cultural clusters, mainly under the banner of the revitalisation of degraded historical areas and economic development. Evans (2005) argues that culture-led regeneration is the feature of old and new cities, as they seek to revive and transform themselves into cities of culture.

Mommaas (2004) evaluated strategies of cultural clustering in the Netherlands and found that these are based on the ideologies of ‘enterprise culture’. Frantz (2005), on the other hand, analysing the formation process in Vienna revealed:

Under the pressures of increased economic competitiveness, political decision-makers are looking to cultural flagship architecture to combine competing images of economic regeneration and socio-cultural cohesion within a shared urban symbol of civic pride.

Irina van Aalst (2002), Ines Boogaarts (2002), Hans Mommaas (2004), Mariangela Lavanga (2005) and Allen J. Scott (2010) have all undertaken research that focuses on cultural clustering of distinguished global complexes. However, in the words of Forgan (2005):

We should be alert to the fact that while in the nineteenth century only capital cities or major provincial towns established prestigious museum building, this is happening today in a host of other places. In part this is driven by competition and by urban regeneration schemes, both in the United States and in Europe, although it should be noted that using museum as agents of urban development is nothing new, and sensitivity to the politics of urban growth may be suggestive of rather different civic attitudes to the value of museums.

Therefore, it is clear that the tendency is to form cultural clusters, but it is important to understand that, whilst each case will have its intrinsic specificity constitution, they will have similarities in relation to their social, political and economic objectives, and, in the last case, on the aspects of cultural development.

### The Beginning of the Phenomenon in Europe

The nineteenth century is considered by some to be the golden era of museums (Alexander, 2008). Inspired by growing nationalism, European capital cities brought an important element into their urban centres, the

museum. Bazin (1967) states that French Revolution promoted museums, considering that these institutions had an educational calling to instruct the nation and to educate its citizens through the dissemination of knowledge concerning its country's history (Alexander, 2008). In other words, this historical fact marks the point at which museums become official institutions in the public interest.

Royal collections and those that belonged to noble families and religious institutions are grouped into palaces to gradually transform the latest into public museums, as in the case of Hermitage Museum, opened in 1764, and the Louvre in 1793 (Bazin, 1967). The former is one of the largest art and culture galleries in the world, and has extensive collections of diverse range of peoples and cultures in a collection of historic buildings from the former Russian capital of St. Petersburg. Its origin go back more than two and a half centuries when Empress Catherine II (also known as Catherine the Great), an art lover, began compiling the Museum's current art collection with the acquisition of hundreds of Flemish and German paintings (Piotrovsky, 2003).

Currently, the Hermitage Museum includes a group of five buildings that are located between the Neva River and Palace Square. These were originally built for non-museum uses, with the exception of the New Hermitage building, which was erected in the nineteenth century specifically to host the imperial art collections (Soldatenko, 2003). Nevertheless, the conduct of this institution was consistently respectful and conservative as regards the art exhibition gallery, given that it was always viewed as not interfering with the collections hosted in this space but, rather, complementing them. It is clear that the concern over the integrity of the interior architecture, as well as of the traditional uses of the building, is hindered by the lack of environmental conditions that are appropriate for the storage and exhibition of the works of art (Lukin, 2003).

After the opening of palatial complexes, the construction of representative new buildings begins, as seen at the Hohenzollerns Museum in Berlin and the Deutsches Museum in Munich. These were founded between the first half of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the next century and are the first group of planned museums (Nikolic, 2012). Hohenzollerns, which is German for 'Museum Island', is set on a peninsula moulded by the meeting of the Spree and Kupfergraben rivers in Berlin. It is a complex consisting of five institutions, the Altes Museum (1830), the Neues Museum (1855), the AlteNationalgalerie (1876), the Bode Museum (1904), and the Pergamon Museum (1930). The first building was planned by the architect Karl F. Schinkel to host an extensive art collection donated by an art lover. However, a few years later, Friedrich August Stüler, under the King's orders, realised a plan for the commercial development of this region, which would become a 'sanctuary for the arts and sciences' (Alexander, 2008).

The first element of the construction was the Neues Museum. The next step did not take place until 1866, with the commissioning of the AlteNationalgalerie (or the Old National Gallery, finished in 1876). Another two decades passed before the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (today known as the Bode Museum or the Old Museum) would be built. However, the architectural project planned by Stüler would only be concluded in 1930 with the construction of the Pergamon Museum.

These two previous examples, Hohenzollerns and the Hermitage Museum, originated in the beginning of the clustering process, were used to symbolically highlight the traditional centres of power. However, whilst the Hohenzollerns was designed for museum purposes, the Hermitage Museum had its origins in a main building but grew inordinately around a square, attaching buildings to the existing structure, rather than adding new buildings. Both have gone through periods of extensive destruction, loss of their art collections, social and political neglect and lack of resources but, despite this, have adopted an attitude of respect towards the historic building that houses art.

## Europeans Effects on the American Continent

The first boom of museums took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. This occurred simultaneously with the industrial revolution, the urban growth and the consequent development of major urbanistic projects, which, together with the taking place of international exhibitions, created a propitious environment for the emergence of new clusters in Europe (South Kensington, London, Museumplein, Amsterdam) and other continents (Nikolic, 2012).

The effects of the European phenomenon also occurred in the United States, and were the basis for the development of the Washington Mall (Smithsonian Castle 1855), Museum Mile with the ordering of Central Park in 1870, and the Grant Park (Plan of Chicago 1909). The latter manifests the ideas of the cultural planning that became known as City Beautiful. However, this continued due to the Great Depression of the 1930s, which

coincided with the plans for Washington, the centre of which is the national mall. The centre of power of the most politically powerful country is surrounded by major national museums, as an expression of absolute prestige (Nikolic, 2012).

In New York, the Museum Mile, on the other hand, despite being founded in the same period (with the construction of Central Park and the emergence of the first public cultural institutions, the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Natural History and Central Park Zoo), currently communicates richness, luxury and art as it progresses along Fifth Avenue in Manhattan and among numerous historic mansions and imposing modern buildings. In the later part of the 19th and early 20th centuries the MoMA, the Guggenheim museum, Whitney, Frick and Neue Galleries, and the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, were founded and, together with those cited above, created a common cultural program, forming this cluster (Nikolic, 2012).

The first half of the twentieth century is marked by world wars and a major economic crisis; however, despite these chaotic world events, new museums clusters around the world can be identified from this time. In South America, the phenomenon arose in the 1940s, and was associated with the manifestos of modern Brazilian architecture. Designed by Oscar Niemeyer, the Pampulha Architectural Complex in Belo Horizonte can be considered the first group of buildings aimed at a collective and social purpose (Nikolic, 2012). The work includes five buildings: a casino (Museu de Arte da Pampulha), an elite club, a dance hall (Centro de Referência da Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Design), a church, and a hotel, around an artificial lake. Over time, this complex did not manage to achieve the necessary density to become a cluster of museums but became a space for culture and entertainment (Castriota, 1998).

Another urban project that enabled the development of a museum cluster in Brazil was the Cultural Corridor of Rio de Janeiro. In the 1980s a project in Rio with preservationist character began to conserve the remnants of urban complexes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which had passed through successive modernist interventions, caused largely by the verticalisation process as well as by increased automobile traffic (Pinheiro & Del Rio, 1993). A group of planners proposed the creation of a project that reconciled historic preservation, cultural development and economic sustainability through the implementation of design guidelines for new construction as well as restoration of old buildings and revitalisation of public spaces congruent to the central area of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, the plazas, sidewalks and streets received new paving, street furniture and street lighting appropriate to the historic architecture (Del Rio, 1991).

Thus, in the 1990s there were already cultural centres at regenerated buildings and the presentation of new cultural practices in public open spaces, all being restored and managed by federal, state and local agencies (Del Rio, 1991). Some cultural spaces have been the result of private partnerships, like Bank of Brazil Cultural Centre, Brazil France House, the cultural space of the post office, the Imperial Palace, and the Naval Oceanographic Museum, The Municipal Theatre, The National Library, The National Museum of Fine Arts, the recent Justice Cultural Centre, as well as, the traditional and elegant renovated Odeon and Pathé cinemas, along with the Tiradentes Square emerge the Art Center Hélio Oiticica (Pinheiro & Del Rio, 1993).

In recent decades, Brazil has produced cultural complexes that aimed to promote the recovery of abandoned industrial areas, such as the Sea Dragon Centre for Art and Culture in the city of Fortaleza. This space underwent a series of transformations after port activities that were once carried out in this area had been transferred. The government of the state of Ceará drafted a project aimed at democratizing access to culture, providing spaces for cultural exhibitions by the local population, and catalysing the development and renewal of the area, with the set-up of new uses within its immediate surroundings. This cluster has manifested as a contemporary and monumental-scale architectural building, distributed over a massive square created by the demolition of nineteenth-century townhouses that once occupied this space (Gondim, 2007).

### The Complex of Liberty Square

The architectural and landscape complex of Liberty Square consists of gardens, boulevards, lakes, fountains, sculptures, busts and monuments, in addition to a metal frame gazebo. The construction of Liberty Square began together with that of the new capital (Belo Horizonte) and was inaugurated together with the city. Hosting the main government offices of the state of Minas Gerais, this square creates the juncture between four major avenues. The avenue that leads the entrance gates of Liberty Square is lined with imperial palm trees (Castriota, 1998).

At the beginning of last century, when the square still retained its original layout, its use was limited to the coming and going of the government workers employed in the state department offices, as well as the couples who did tours on the weekends. In the 1920's, Liberty Square underwent changes, inspired by French architecture, to receive the King and Queen of Belgium, which produced the square's present-day format (Castro, 2006). In the 1950's and 1960's, verticality and modernism brought the Niemeyer Building, the Public Library, and the Mape Building. During the military regimes, the square served as the gathering ground for civil protests, a use which was repeated many times throughout the history of Minas Gerais. This space was also used for fairs of different kinds – arts and crafts, antiquities, typical regional food, and even flowers and plants (Castriota, 1998).

Throughout history, the meaning attributed by the general public to Liberty Square gradually began to change. From the political centre, and the space to fight for democracy and liberty, this square was gradually transformed into a social space, used for the social life and leisure of the local population. Nevertheless, the value attributed by society to this public space and its current consolidation is currently passing through another wave of changes (Lopes, 2006).

These changes are referent to emergence of the Liberty Square Cultural Circuit in an area of great symbolic, historic, and architectural value for Belo Horizonte. Its institutional presentation reveals that this is the largest cultural complex in Brazil and the only one of its kind in the world to be the product of public-private partnerships. The objective of this initiative is to expand the public's access to the old government buildings of the state of Minas Gerais, which were vacated due to their transference to the new State Government Offices in the Administrative Centre located in the Serra Verde district of Belo Horizonte (De Oliveira, 2007).

The intention was also to promote the recovery and maintenance of the historical heritage of Minas Gerais through the execution of firm partnerships, given that it is the role of private companies to invest in, and administrate these cultural spaces (De Oliveira, 2007). The projected plan also has the intention of placing Minas Gerais on the international tourist route, through the events of the Confederations Cup and the upcoming World Cup in 2014, both of which will host soccer games played in the *Mineirão* stadium in Belo Horizonte.

Tourism as an alternative to increase economic development generates a demand for major cultural projects in areas that concentrate historical monuments (Van Aalst & Boogaarts, 2002). Therefore, investments originated from private companies looking for visibility for their brands are captured and justified as the only alternative to promote the restoration of extensive heritages, degraded by the lack of public funds. The eminent risk of destruction and the inevitable frustration of local societies in their daily activities that end up being excluded are not even considered. The Cultural Circuit turns out to be just another product of the cultural industry as noted by Frantz (2005) at the case of Museumsquartier Vienna.

From 2010, the year in which the Cultural Circuit was inaugurated, to date, eight galleries have already been opened with another five in the implementation process. The first to open its doors to visitors was the Tim UFMG Gallery of Knowledge, which occupies the old main building of the Dean's Office of the State University of Minas Gerais, constructed in 1961 in a modernist style. The adaptations completed to implement this cultural venue include the envelopment of its façades, with the façade's front wall structured in a large projection panel that exhibits interactive contents. The displays are distributed throughout the five floors of the building and present the main discoveries of humankind, using museological scenarios, planetariums, observatories, and 180° cinema (Iepha, 2012).

The universe of metals, minerals and their components are exhibited in the EBX Mines and Metals Museum, which was installed in the old building of the State Department of Education. This building, which has an eclectic style with a predominance of French neoclassical elements, underwent remodelling aimed at improving accessibility, such as the installation of an outside lift and the construction of a steel staircase, which provides access to all floors. Paulo Mendes da Rocha created the architectural project, while the museography was created by Marcello Dantas, the latter making use of virtual environments to document the history of mining and steel working in Minas Gerais.

The main actors involved in the development of cultural complexes are: curators, stakeholders, architects and politicians. These actors, each with their own personal interests, have particular characteristics, especially the architects, mainly those who have a specialism in designing museum space. These specialised architects are described by Evans (2003) as "Star Architects" and known as the one whose signature brand is sought globally.



This worldwide trend extends to national and regional designers such as Oscar Niemeyer who, in the 1990s, designed an art gallery in Niteroi that simulates a flying saucer with curved walls and no clear divide between floor and walls – ‘a curator’s nightmare’ (Evans, 2003, p. 429). Also included in this group should be the architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha, who is responsible for a wealth of projects relating to cultural institutions in historical buildings, which are known for their interventionist style, as noted in their proposal to the EBX Mines and Metals Museum.

José de Magalhães, an architect from the Belo Horizonte’s Construction Commission, was responsible for drafting the blueprints for the state’s Department of Education and Treasury Department. Throughout its history, the latter building, which today hosts the Minas Gerais – Vale do Rio Doce Memorial, has undergone a series of modifications and additions that were removed in the most recent restoration which recovered the original features of the building (Figure 1). However, contemporary elements were incorporated, such as the suspended garden, which is located in the empty central portion of the building, and a panoramic elevator and metallic walkways, which connect the two sides of the building. Distributed throughout the three floors of the museum are the thirty-one exhibition rooms, which have the museographic theme of the history of Minas Gerais and its traditions in art and music (De Oliveira, 2007).



Figure 1 Minas Gerais - Vale do Rio Doce Memorial © Iepha

As it is an ‘experience museum’, its environments have been adapted to offer interactive experiences, which attempt to provide the visitor with the chance to live the experience presented in each exhibit, which is markedly different from the way in which traditional museums exhibit their collections (Iepha, 2006). The large concentration of museums of experience in this cultural complex can be understood as a result of what Choay (2011) considers an electro-teleomatics revolution. This is caused by the emergence of electronics instruments and telecommunication networks added together to a set of activities and contemporary social behaviours. Societies have been increasing their contact with virtual worlds, and reducing the duration and use of real living

memories in favour of the immediacy of virtual experiences, and this change can be also noticed in museological practices, as suggested by Jeudy (2005).

The largest and most well-equipped building within the Circuit is the Banco do Brasil Cultural Centre, a six-floor building in the old state Department of Social Defence. With branches in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasilia, the institution will fill these spaces with wide-ranging exhibitions and other projects, to be defined by public announcements. The restoration work began in 2009 and is still ongoing, mostly due to its complexity and to the extent of the architectural planning, which in sum contains a theatre with capacity for over two hundred people, one thousand two hundred square meters of exhibition area, a cafeteria, multimedia rooms, and an ample administrative area.

It is obvious that the completion of this complex demanded demolitions of parts of the building, such as concrete slabs, pillars, and beams so that the metallic structure of the theatre box seats and its Italian-style stage could be constructed. The same occurred with the execution of the exhibition room, which contains more than one thousand square meters, and of all the bathrooms within the building, which were adapted to the new number of users. The internal patio, which used to be open to allow sunlight to enter the building's rooms, now has a retractable cover made of glass and metal (Iepha, 2012).

This 1930's building, in neoclassical style, was built to host the Department of Public Safety and Assistance. Therefore, other public services have occupied this space throughout its existence; nevertheless the main characteristics were maintained, including its façade as well as its interior design in coloured mortar, its concrete structure, marble floors, and the presence of stained glass in the staircase hall.

In addition to the cultural equipment presented here, other institutions were also incorporated, which are located close to Liberty Square and carry out similar functions. These include the Luiz de Bessa State Public Library, planned by Oscar Niemeyer in 1954, and the Minas Public Museum, with its sacred art collection and art works from dozens of collections from institutions and private donors. Next to this museum is the Public Archive of Minas Gerais, the oldest of the institutions in Minas Gerais, conceived to store, conserve and make available documents from the colonial, imperial and republican periods of the state. Both buildings were constructed in an eclectic style, given that the museum is hosted in this building, which had originally served as the Treasury Secretary's residence since 1897. To make the connection between the two spaces, the Cultural Circuit proposed the construction of a café, which is being developed beneath a large lawn, in an attempt to promote internal circulation (Iepha, 2003).

Undoubtedly, the highlight of the Cultural Circuit is the Governor's Palace (Figure 2). Constructed in 1897 in an eclectic-style as the residence of the governors of Minas Gerais, this building brings together the sophistication of the Frederico Steckel paintings on the ceilings, walls, and cornices, with the nobility of the furniture, rugs, crystals, porcelain, and silverware, mostly from France (Castro, 2006). The structure of the roof and the iron staircase were imported from Belgium, the roof tiles from Marseille, and the pine wood floors from Latvia, which demanded contracting a workforce who were specialists in this type of construction (Iepha, 2003).

However, throughout its more than 100 years of existence, the Governor's Palace has undergone a series of adaptations and changes in an attempt to satisfy the taste and needs of the governors and their respective first ladies. Thus, in the 1980's, the building was forced to undergo extensive restoration, as its structure demanded solidification, with a number of interventions occurring later.

In recent years, the building has been restricted to the administrative functions of the state government and has only been used to receive official receptions. However, the walls tell numerous stories, which is one of the main attractions of the palace. Former Governor Olegário Maciel suffered a massive heart attack while bathing in a bathtub and died. Tancredo Neves gave his acceptance speech on the palace's balcony after having won the first direct election to the state governor's seat. These stories are told by the guides who accompany visitors through the rooms and bedrooms of the Governor's Palace; however, this will be altered later this year, as the Cultural Circuit has determined that this is a museographic space and, for this reason, changes are necessary. In addition to the collection that is already in exhibition, picture frames and interactive mirrors that tell the story of personalities from Minas Gerais and that generate representations in real size that can be seen using 3D glasses will be incorporated into the museum. Informational and technological resources will be installed to satisfy the ideals of the project, which is intended to attract a younger public and better serve the tourist in general (Iepha, 2012).





Figure 2 - Governor's Palace. © Iepha.

Another gallery that has already been inaugurated is the Popular Art Centre, which occupies the old São Tarcísio hospital. The adaptation and restoration works began with the demolition of all of the structures that had not been contemplated in the original layout drafted by Luiz Signorelli. After having freed up the space around the house, two underground floors were excavated and an annex was constructed, consisting of a 3-storey building that connects to the existing building by means of a structure containing staircases and an elevator. It was also necessary to demolish the entire inner structure of the building so that this could be adapted to the needs of the exhibition areas and to store the art collection. This building offers rooms for workshops, auditoriums, and a shop that sells pieces of art from the Jequitinhonha Valley and Minas Gerais in general (Iepha, 2010).

The addition of this building to the cultural circuit is intriguing, considering its historical and aesthetic insignificance to the heritage of Minas Gerais. It is noteworthy that the old hospital is not even listed as heritage by the state or municipality. This is understood as a holdover of the Noah's ark, which tends to house in the patrimonial ark all types of construction (Choay, 2001). Still in relation to this building and with almost the others from the complex, the presence of a cafe and a shop that sell souvenirs are of note. It is the cultural mercantilisation to make consumers that can buy flowers in the boutique of Bagatelle's garden in Paris or watercolour paper in National Library, in other words, the image of the monument is associated with the sale of consumer products and as an advertising medium.

In addition to these eight cultural galleries, which are to be opened in 2014, four other cultural galleries are in the process of being implemented. Buildings chosen to house other cultural institutions are: *Rainha da Sucata*; *Palácio dos Despachos*, which is located beside the Governor's Palace; Dantas Mini-Palace and the Norbona Solarium; Old Department of Transport and Public Works and the main building of the Social Security Institute of the Public Workers of the State of Minas Gerais.

The Automobile Museum is also the fruit of the partnership between the state of Minas Gerais and Fiat, which will host a permanent collection of 150 rare automobiles from the Veteran Car Club of Brazil. This gallery demands that this type of exhibition contains high-scale dimensions and, for this reason, will be installed in the old parking lot once used by the vehicles of the Governor's Military Liaisons, located behind the Governor's Palace.

### Modernisation or Transformation?

Since the implementation of the Cultural Circuit, the historic buildings that make up Liberty Square have been undergoing a transformation process. Externally, there are cases of the old Dean's Office of the State University of Minas Gerais, which had its entire façade covered so as to create the Tim UFMG Gallery of Knowledge; of the State Department of Education building, in which a lift was installed outside of the body of the main building and

a steel staircase was constructed to serve the Mines and Metals Museum; and finally the Popular Art Centre, which changed its frontage by introducing an annex building.

It can be argued that the most impactful of these interventions were the changes made to the old Dean's Office, as they permanently modified the perspective of the Liberty Square architectural complex. On the other hand, the insertion of new elements to the façades of the buildings also caused harmful effects to the old complex, altering their architectural volumetry and generating an inevitable loss of the intrinsic grandeur of these buildings.

The inner space of these nineteenth and twentieth century monuments and the composition of their decorative elements have defined representative historic environments, which reinforce the unity of the complex in each architectural example. In this manner, any change that should challenge this ensemble may well create a split in perception, which is the case of the Minas Gerais Memorial. This building was once characterised by its abundance of decorative linings, polychrome walls, and ornaments. However, as it was planned to be a 'experience museum', the environments also underwent a metamorphosis, transforming into show rooms of a wide range of spectacular scenarios. The materialisation of this museum was executed by covering the existing walls with dry-wall and, consequently, reducing the visibility of the linings, which provoked obstructions in the aesthetic reading and hindered the historic comprehension of the gallery.

The building that once hosted the State Department of Social Defence underwent a different type of change, justified by the typology of the building itself. The demolitions of a large portion of the building's structure to install the Bank of Brazil Cultural Centre caused the loss of the original spatiality. For many, this damage is recklessly disregarded, as it does not deal with elements of artistic importance. However, this building loses its order, harmony, and technical reference, which demonstrated the time period's innovative use of large reinforced concrete spans. This same structural condition offered the possibility to create the current ideal for exhibition galleries, the white cube, a modern temple that separates the work of art from society so as to allow for the possibility of an aesthetic perception of the artistic work.

The case study presented in this paper sought to demonstrate the fine line that exists between conservative and destructive interventions, which take place because of the need to change these museological institutions in an attempt to cater to the current societal demands. These institutions are required to undergo a constant modernisation processes, making them current and adapted to new requirements, which is different from transformation, which implies a radical change from one state to another (Evans, 2005). It is believed that this extensive and expressive architectural landmark, as well as the works of art exhibited within them, can and must coexist, and the more intrinsic this symbiosis is, the more holistic this sensorial experience will be for the visitor (Forgan, 2005).

The cultural complexes can be viewed as novel icons in the majority of big cities worldwide, Brazil containing a few of these examples. The Liberty Square Cultural Circuit in Belo Horizonte falls within this select group mainly due to the creation of a new centrality which is connected to the existing historic and cultural heritage, as well as the use of a symbolic dimension to form itself. The exploration of this symbol is based on the perceptions of these buildings, which have been intensely modified by interventions over time.

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