



On Tuesday 19 April 2011 at 20:00 hrs, If I Can't Dance presents its third Performance in Residence research project in Frascati Theatre in Amsterdam. Curator Inti Guerrero will give a theatrical presentation on the work of FLAVIO DE CARVALHO, to mark the beginning of his research period with If I Can't Dance. Flávio de Carvalho (1899 – 1973) was a Brazilian artist and architect who is perhaps best known for his *Experiências* (1931-1958), a series of actions mostly carried out on the streets of São Paulo. If I Can't Dance shares with Guerrero an interest in these practices that would later be recognised as 'performances avant-la-lettre'.

With the *Experiências*, de Carvalho explored his interest in anthropology and psychology by staging situations that explored crowd psychology in public space. The first of these to be recorded was *Experiência* no.2 in 1931. De Carvalho walked in the opposite direction to a Corpus Christi procession, disrespectfully failing to remove his cap and leering seductively at women, and was almost lynched by an angry Catholic mob as a result. In the book he wrote about this experience, he analyses crowd behaviour and its limits of tolerance. With *Experiência* no.3 (1956), de Carvalho launched a futuristic new costume for men. Designed for the contemporary office worker in the tropics, his 'New Look' consisted of a miniskirt and a short sleeved blouse. This had holes cut into the armpit and was separated from the body by an inner corseting structure, which improved air circulation and prevented sweat from soaking the clothes. De Carvalho modelled his outfit on the streets, and his action was widely covered by the Brazilian and international press, including *Time* magazine. His last known action, *Experiência* no. 4, was based on the first encounter of an indigenous population with white people and was made into an unrealized film.

Besides his *Experiências*, de Carvalho was a prolific writer and journalist whose columns covered subjects from art, architecture and dance criticism to political opinion. He wrote, directed and made all the costumes for a play that was performed in the *Theatro da Experiência (Experimental Theatre)*, which he founded in 1933. He also set up the Clube dos Artistas Modernos (*Modern Artists' Club*), which became an important meeting place for São Paulo's artists and intellectuals. He painted probing expressionistic portraits and in the *Tragic Series*, he documented the painful death of his mother in a series of drawings. He was also a keen architect, though very few of his designs were ever realized.

In 2010 Inti Guerrero organized the exhibition *A Cidade do Homem Nu (The City of the Naked Man)* at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo. The exhibition, which included works by contemporary artists, was a curatorial translation of an urban plan drawn up by de Carvalho in 1930, in which he proposed the building of a new city in the tropics that would have no God, no property and no marriage.

For Performance in Residence Inti Guerrero will focus on the relationship between the body, the psyche and architectural space in de Carvalho's projects, departing from *Experiência* no.3, of 1956.

<p>PRESENTATION</p> <p><i>Flávio de Carvalho – a lecture performance by Inti Guerrero</i></p> <p>Tuesday 19 April 2011, 20:00 hrs</p> <p>Frascati Nes 63 1012 KD Amsterdam</p> <p>Bookings +31 (0)20 626 68 66 Tickets: EUR 10</p> <p>www.theaterfrascati.nl</p>
--

In 1929 Flávio de Carvalho interviewed Le Corbusier for the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Diário da Noite*. What did they talk about?

When Le Corbusier first visited in 1929, Brazil already had an active community of modernist architects who were well aware of his architectonic proposals, and had already constructed a number of their own projects. This is important to bear in mind when thinking of this encounter, in which de Carvalho seemed to question the nature of both Le Corbusier's ideas and those of architecture as a whole.

"Do you think architecture is a philosophical problem? Should architecture be logical? What logic? Should architecture have colour? Which is the predominant factor: colour, form or the functional idea? What constitutes pleasantness in colour and form? Is that pleasantness subjective or objective? How can one introduce the psychic factor in architecture? Should the idea of the structure be sacrificed to the psychic factor or not? Should the desire for progress grasp humanity or should mankind grasp the desire for progress?"

Looking at these questions, put to the man whose work we now consider the paradigm for modernist architecture, one can sense that de Carvalho understood architecture, not as 'a body (building) in space' but as a cultural structure that acts 'upon the body'; upon the subjectivities of those who inhabit it. No real dialogue came out of this philosophical interrogation however. In the printed interview it seems as if their positions were too dissimilar, to the extent that Le Corbusier patronizingly called Flávio de Carvalho a 'Romantic revolutionary', a title which has, paradoxically, been celebrated in Brazil as a way of highlighting de Carvalho's intriguing practice, but which I've always thought of as a way for Le Corbusier to avoid questioning the rational functionalist architecture and urbanism that he promoted worldwide.

Le Corbusier's impression of Flávio de Carvalho as a 'Romantic revolutionary' does indeed suggest that their architectural approaches were very different, though both were concerned with the experience of the body in space. How did de Carvalho develop his specific interest in subjective experience in his architectural proposals, and was this indeed revolutionary at the time?

As an architect de Carvalho built very little, but among the

buildings which remain today are his modernist house in the outskirts of São Paulo, known as *Fazenda Capuava* (1938), and the residency complex of *Alameda Lorena* (1936-1838), though only a few of its seventeen houses are still standing.

In the case of the *Fazenda*, his inquiry into the subjective experience of architecture translated into a very sensorial atmosphere in the interior of the house. The ceiling in the living room is made from a sheet of shiny aluminum, which reflects and distorts images of the reality below, creating a sort of 'psychedelic' visuality. The fireplace incorporates a complex system that allows small droplets of water to evaporate over the lit fire, producing vapour that would further orchestrate a certain uncanny ambience for the inhabitants. De Carvalho even designed specific furniture for this house, including a dinner table made out of a single thick sheet of clear glass, with lights below it directed at the seated guests. The blinding effect of this forced guests to experience their food mainly through its taste, leaving them to imagine what they were actually eating.

With the housing complex of *Alameda Lorena*, the experimental aspects seem to be more subtle, but it was built so that its inhabitants would experience it in a specific way, following an instruction manual. It was a house-as-a-machine that was mostly concerned with the leisure of its users. The question of colour and its psychological implications was addressed directly. While explaining the details of the house to the media, De Carvalho stated: "These colours were chosen in order to prevent irritation or melancholy, leaving the inhabitant in a state of anaemic equilibrium, meaning free to jump towards one emotional pole or the other, without any provocation from the walls of the house. Both the introverted and extroverted inhabitant will feel equally good here".

These two projects are of a small domestic scale however, perhaps the more truly 'revolutionary' works, with regard to his interest in 'the individual's subjective experience of architecture', are the urban utopia master plans such as *The City of the Naked Man*, envisaged for a mankind of the future.

<p>LECTURE</p> <p><i>Flávio de Carvalho by Inti Guerrero</i></p> <p>Friday 27 May 2011, 17:30 hrs</p> <p>Performance Studies International conference #17</p> <p>CBK Utrecht Plompstorengracht 4 3512 CC Utrecht</p> <p>Registration: www.psil7.org</p>

Many modernist urban utopian visionaries of the time (Le Corbusier, Ebenezer Howard, Oscar Niemeyer) lost sight of the individual in their drive to stimulate collective or communal ways of living. You mention that de Carvalho's specific concern in his masterplan for *The City of the Naked Man* was very much the experience of the individual. Can you expand on that?

He envisaged an urban scenario for a 'naked mankind' that would have stripped itself of its cultural constructs, or in his words, a man without 'scholastic taboos, free to reason and think' in order to begin a painstaking process of wonderment, change and self-transformation within the city. *The City of the Naked Man* would be composed of a constellation of centres and laboratories with specific functions, such as the Laboratory of erotica, thought of as a place where 'the naked man would select his own erotic forms. [...] where he could orientate his energy in any direction, without repression', where he would 'fulfill his desires, discover new desires.' In other words, this was to be an architecture that stimulated the libido without having a predetermined perspective, that is, without a pre-determined constructed desire, and therefore a place where the experience of sexuality could constantly bifurcate according to the individual's subjectivity. Bearing in mind the context of his time, such a proposal clearly challenged the institution of monogamy, but his transgressive words resonate further today, challenging perhaps all heteronormative behaviour.

Laboratories defined the blue-print of de Carvalho's urban utopia. But it was the Research Centre of the city that played the main role of the 'State'. The Centre would be a place where citizens could discover the wonders of the universe, the pleasures of life, the 'enthusiasm to produce things, the desire to change'. Bearing in mind that the majority of any population uses most of its energy, its pulse, working within an unjust organization of labour, where the many are exploited for the enrichment of the few, de Carvalho's projection is of a new kind of city for a future where people would be in a constant state of self-emancipation, through creative processes that can be found outside of the mechanisms of capital production. This is interesting to think about today, when at this very moment Northern-African and Middle-Eastern societies have risen up, precisely because, for generations, their 'State' has biopolitically repressed their desire to transform the ways in which the individual and the social tissue is represented and governed.

De Carvalho's unfulfilled radical urban plan now lies in the archives of the Congress of Architecture in Rio de Janeiro, where in 1930 he delivered his thesis to fellow architects. His plea for the disenchantment of people from their normalised social behaviours would come to light again however, through the *Experiências*, his series of street actions and performances.

How do you relate *The City of the Naked Man* to the *Experiências*?

What they share is the artist's interest in individual and crowd psychology. With the impossibility of radically modifying the social codes of his contemporaries by building a new city from scratch, de Carvalho took to another, perhaps more immediately effective, strategy, the *Experiences*. By performing them in public space they had the potential to bring about an awareness in the minds of pedestrians of the historical, cultural and ideological institutions that disciplined their bodies. The *Experiência* no. 2, the one of the Corpus Christi procession, bears the aesthetics of an anarchist dandy gesture, but it is an individual act that may well have made people question their sense of belonging to a society whose values, at that time, were strictly controlled by the ideologies of the church. In this way the artist's action contained the possibility to disenchant people, to let them see the external mechanisms of their subjectivization. In *Experiência* no. 3, the public showing of his New Look, what was to be deconstructed was the cultural layer that lies physically closest to us, our clothing. In this case, what was to be challenged was both the cultural domination of a homogenous Western type of male fashion, and also the gender specificity of clothes. The trousers and jacket suit code, to which most of the world has adapted, was seen by de Carvalho as an absurd and unhygienic convention when used by men working in a tropical metropolis like São Paulo. Seeking to design a rather more appropriate male fashion where the body's sweat could dry rapidly, a mini skirt and a t-shirt with holes in the armpits were for him the best option for his New Look. This look was not a big commercial success, but that was not the point. In the *Experiência* of the catwalk of the streets where he presented his costume, there was a micro-political moment that for an instant did emancipate the crowd's psychology, perhaps making them ask themselves what the real dress code for men in the tropics should be? Should it be a mini-skirt? And if it is possible to modify the use of something with such definite gender connotations as the suit, then what does actually con-

In his *Experiências* as well as his architectural plans, de Carvalho exhibited a theatrical sensibility that corresponds to Dadaist and Surrealist practices. Like them, de Carvalho experimented with performance using unconventional formal languages and questioning ruling societal ideologies. He studied in Paris and in London between 1910 and 1922. Was he familiar with or in touch with figures like Tristan Tzara or André Breton?

stitute one's maleness?

In the final experience, *Experiência* no. 4, he filmed an indigenous tribe in the Amazon being introduced to white women for the first time. This is a particular and different case from the other two. It was not performed within an urban context and it did not implicate the artist's own body. Nonetheless it still belongs to de Carvalho's inquiry using the staging of uncanniness within a crowd so as to observe, analyze and later write on the psychological shift of people when they encounter such alterity to their reality.

It is actually only after 1934, when he travels back to Europe that he would be directly connected to figures from the historical avant-garde. De Carvalho actually interviewed Tristan Tzara and later published their conversation in a newspaper in São Paulo. What is important to point out however, is the peculiarity of de Carvalho. Although his practice does share the absurdity and the social disobedience (more than the theatrical sensibility) that one associates with Dada, he was at the same time a functionalist architect, always seeking a utilitarian reason for his proposals. So although his works were painstaking attempts to stimulate or catalyse something in people's unconscious, in relation to their social behaviour, he created artistic practices that afterwards had to be 'scientifically analyzed'. It is perhaps this artistic-scientific practice which offered him mobility across so many different fields.

In fact, the reason he came to Europe in 1934 was because he had been invited to speak at the International Congress of Psychotechnique held in Prague. I find it more interesting to consider the encounters he had there, with, for example, the Nazi commission representing Germany at the Congress, than to wonder who he knew from what we now consider the canon of Euro-American art history. His notes and memoirs of this trip were published in 1935 under the title *The Bones of the World*. A significant part of this book is dedicated to his journey through central and eastern Europe in search of the King of the Gypsies: a monarch of a nomad throne, which fascinated de Carvalho.

The play was called *Bailado do Deus Morto (Dance of the Dead God)*. It is de Carvalho's response to Freud's book *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913). The iconoclastic script narrates the abolishment of a tribe's holy patriarchal figure, thus revoking religious tradition, heritage and social order, and replacing it with a social body led by the visceral desires of individual members of the tribe, rather than by a myth.

The play did have some traditional structure, with acts, which started with the animallistic origin of God, who is placed on stage breeding amongst the beasts, and ending, literally, with the line "Psychoanalysis killed God!...". The most radical aspects of the play however lie in both the experimentation with language and the visuality of de Carvalho's art direction. He uses aluminum again, in both the primitivist masks worn by the actors, whose shiny reflections were intensified by an orchestrated light sequence, and for an aluminum column and a chain suspended from the ceiling to the floor, which was broken in the middle of the play, representing the moment when humanity detached from God.

Another important transgressive gesture in the play, in relation to the context of its production, is that it performed a kind of organic ambience amongst black, white and mixed-race actors. It is perhaps this theatrical catharsis, against the values of a segregated catholic metropolis, that caused the play to be censored, after only four presentations, by the Getulio Vargas military government, whose populist, proto-fascist anti-communist regime was strongly grounded in the support of the Catholic Church. As all newspapers stated the day after its closure, a whole battalion of military men assisted the piece until the end, they enjoyed what they noted as its 'strangeness', but nevertheless saw it as a threat to family values and to their own identities.

Linguistically, the name of the theatre and the title of the street actions share this idea of a catalyst within social and cultural paradigms. There is no doubt though, that by performing in the street, there is a broader utopian dimension to the intention to actually modify people's subjectivity towards their current reality, in comparison to the enclosed bourgeois theatre space.

One should not historicize the work of de Carvalho, his intriguing and fascinatingly diverse body of work should not become a series of historical objects. Rather, his thinking, his philosophy of understanding the world and people through art, should become a tool for thinking about our own contemporary surroundings and our own behaviour.

Dance was very important to him. He interviewed and befriended many dancers, including Josephine Baker. He incorporated special dancing rooms in some of his architectural proposals and in others dancing silhouettes formed part of the design for interior mosaics. Dance movements were for him a form of dissent from daily gestures and bodily movements, those which 'trap' subjectivity within the theatricalized roles that one performs throughout life. Un-choreographed frenetic dance was then an individual catharsis, which de Carvalho seemed to understand as having revolutionary potential.

Endnotes

1. Pericles do Amaral, 'São Paulo truly has seventeen houses of its own for people to live in', originally published in: *Problemas*, ano 1, no 8, São Paulo: May 1938, p.56. Quoted in: Rui Moreira Leite, *Flávio de Carvalho, O Artista Total*, São Paulo: SENAC, 2008.

<p>PARTNERS</p> <p><i>Flávio de Carvalho – a lecture performance</i></p> <p>is a production of If I Can't Dance</p> <p>If I Can't Dance is financially supported by the Culture Programme of the European Union and the Mondriaan Foundation</p>
--

If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution produces art projects and thematic programmes. Departing from a spirit of open questioning and long term enquiry with artists and associate curators and researchers, If I Can't Dance is dedicated to exploring the evolution and typology of performance and performativity in contemporary art.

In fall 2010 If I Can't Dance set up a programme titled *Performance in Residence*, which aims to research performances as case studies. *Performance in Residence* 'hosts' a performance-related (body of) work for a substantial period of time, allowing the researcher to engage in an in-depth inquiry. If I Can't Dance proposes to connect archival research to practice, by asking the researcher to present their conclusions at the end of the period in the form of an essay, exhibition, performance, or other.