

'THE POMPIDOU OF IGUAÇU': CULTURAL IMPACT AND RECONFIGURATION OF THE ART SYSTEMS IN SOUTH AMERICA

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Abstract Exploring the history of Centre Pompidou and its global influence within 21st-century art systems, this article analyses its museological model and expansion strategy, focusing on plans to establish a Brazilian outpost in Foz do Iguaçu, located in the triple border area between Argentina and Paraguay. Drawing on recent literature and media coverage, the study addresses soft power relations and the so-called Bilbao Effect as key concepts in this operation. It highlights similarities with the global rise of private art museums and examines the hybrid public-private nature of the enterprise in Brazil. The article compares this initiative to other Centre Pompidou expansions in Spain, China, and the United States, discussing concerns raised by academics in these regions regarding the display of major private collections and public art policies in contemporary South America. Finally, the cultural impacts of this expansion are explored, focusing on the potential homogenisation and exoticisation of local cultures, framed as part of a re-colonial process that commodifies cultural differences.

Keywords: Centre Pompidou expansion, global art systems, Foz do Iguaçu art museum, museological models, cultural impact.

The Centre Pompidou arrived in the Americas! This was the headline featured in the newspaper *El País* in 2021 (Vicente, 2021), giving an epic tone to the news in the culture section. This headline could be about a French explorer, 'Pompidou the Great conquered the Americas!', or announcing the installation of a large automobile factory in the early 20th century: 'The Pompidou Bigode2 will be the first car produced in the country!'. But this conquest is somehow different. The newspaper refers to the arrival of the first branch of the Parisian art museum in the state of New Jersey, United States, representing the first outpost of Centre Pompidou across the Atlantic. In the same article there was a reference to the brand's subsequent expansion plans, concerning Latin America, considering Colombia and Mexico as hosts.

In a turn of events Brazil came to be the probable destination as the next outpost. The protocol of intention, an instrument that aims to establish initial negotiations between the parties to promote scientific and academic collaboration, was signed in June of 2022 by

the governor of the Brazilian southern state of Paraná. The official press of Paraná announced the agreement between the State and Centre Pompidou (AEN, 2021), foreseeing the construction in Foz do Iguaçu under the name of International Museum of Art of Foz do Iguaçu, a city on the Brazilian side of the triple border with northwestern Argentina and Paraguay, also the location of the Iguazu Falls. This will be the first art museum in the 300,000 inhabitant city and a staple of contemporary art in the most populous border region in South America.

New Jersey and Foz do Iguaçu are part of an extensive expansion plan of the French state-owned brand. Currently, outside of France there are Pompidou units operating in Málaga, Brussels, and Shanghai, with indication of a new branch in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in the next few years. Since the 2010s, Pompidou has been installing units in different strategic points around the world. The public discourse attached to the projects' promotion is often tied to the tourist, economic, and urban development of the regions that host them, with an emphasis on the expansion of contemporary art, which aligns with the mission of Centre Pompidou. These establishments mean a significant reconfiguration in the contemporary art system's weave of the host countries involved, with a strong knot of binding to the French art systems and its global influence.

Concerning South America, this specific triple border of Foz do Iguaçu (BR), Puerto Iguazú (AR), Ciudad de Leste (PY), is a unique point of intersection. The region has a long history of border conflicts, migrations, free trade areas, organised crime and land claims by indigenous peoples. Foz do Iguaçu also houses a National Park listed as a world heritage site, and is the Brazilian headquarters of Itaipú Binacional, one of the largest hydroelectric dams in the world, which, when constructed between the 1970s and 1980s, caused a total urban and social reconfiguration, wherefrom local communities still face the adversities caused by the environmental impact and exclusionary practices emerging from a construction of that size. This situation will be exacerbated in some respects, such as the inflation of the property market and the gentrification of areas where museums are installed, which directly affects socially vulnerable populations. In addition to these historical circumstances, the worsening climate crisis has also been transforming the art world and its engagement with society. Climate activists have been targeting valuable and iconic works of art to draw attention to the message that there is no art on a dead planet. The development of major museum projects today needs to be rethought in order to align with environmental emergencies in trying to keep the integrity and future of the art world itself.

In terms of art systems, this region is located outside the high-flow axis of Brazilian, Argentinian and Paraguayan contemporary art. This is not to form a centre-periphery

relationship, which in itself reaffirms colonialist traditions, but to point out that in this region there are few initiatives aimed at producing, exhibiting, debating and marketing works of art. Despite the region's commercial potential as a trade zone and the presence of museums dedicated to other sectors of culture, there are no significant spaces dedicated to art. This situation favours the building of an art project from the ground. Therefore an even more significant reconfiguration of the art systems, as further addressed.

In the 21st century museums have been progressively tasked with enabling the examination of themes related to control, influence, possession, as well as the inclusion/ exclusion of particular stories or perspectives. In times of instability and severe world conflicts, the decolonial turn in Brazilian arts (Paiva, 2021) and the global rise of private art museums (Kolbe, 2022), what are the opportunities, risks and consequences to the creation of a new international art museum in that area of South America? Considering the current debates concerning the integration of Latin America as a political and cultural autonomous block (Rubim, 2023), how should a public museological plan be presented to be able to corroborate with the public interest? Can the 'Pompidou of Iguazu' be considered a public museum?

By approaching these questions this article analyses the possible cultural impact and reconfiguration the installation of the museum may cause to South American contemporary art systems in that region. Through a review of the recent theory, public media sources and news outlets, this research observes how the French state-owned museum keeps establishing the parameters for contemporary art-making and cultural heritage worldwide, and the contrasts with decolonial scenes of resistance and public policies for the arts in South America today. The choice to focus on South America rather than Latin America was made in order to ensure better geographical, political, social and cultural precision based on the historical relations established between the countries of this bloc rather than a wider approach, given that Latin America involves parts of North America and the Caribbean that would need special attention with regard to systemic art issues.

The Model Pompidou

The Centre national d'art et de culture Georges-Pompidou is a French state-owned enterprise popularly known as 'Beaubourg', referencing the Parisian region where its main headquarters is located, given the significant impact of its creation on the urban landscape of the French capital. Beaubourg is also the title of the film by Italian film-maker Roberto Rossellini, released in 1977, the year of the museum's inauguration and coincidentally the film-maker's death, making it his last produced film. The 16 mm film showcases the

magnitude of the modernist building's architecture, constructed by a team of architects selected through a public competition, which interestingly had the renowned-Brazilian modernist architect Oscar Niemeyer as one of the judges. The high-tech architectural project led by Richard Rogers aimed to make the metallic structure of the building apparent, revealing its interior, blending the inside and outside of the construction. This is also a central aspect in Rossellini's film. The film is filled with long shots contrasting architectural details of the new building with the classical landscape of Paris, emphasising the dawn of new times for the city. It also depicts the audience interacting with art works from the first exhibition, featuring pieces by French artist Marcel Duchamp. The film is a tribute to urban development, cosmopolitan culture, and French modern art, illustrating the patriotic sentiment that surrounded the cultural complex's inauguration. The construction of Centre Pompidou was the result of a policy proposed by the French Minister of Culture André Malraux. Approved by President Charles de Gaulle in 1968, the project was adopted by his successor Georges Pompidou, who completed and named the work. For the French capital, the opening of the cultural complex brought together in one space a state-of-the-art library and a modern art museum, along with numerous cultural and artistic activities housed in the building. The success of the project boosted the Beaubourg region, placing it as central on the tourist itinerary and establishing it as another iconic landmark for the city. Currently, the museum boasts the largest collection of contemporary art in Europe and one of the largest globally³. It is also one of the most visited art museums⁴, solidified as a powerful influence in the field of contemporary art worldwide.

The construction of the French complex in Paris took place almost 30 years before the emergence of what is known as the Bilbao effect, alluding to the iconic building of the Guggenheim Museum designed by architect Frank Gehry in the Spanish city in 1997, which generated a wave of similar constructions around the world from the beginning of the 21st century. The US museum's initiative is similar in terms of using architecture as the flagship of its operation. However it generated an innovation in terms of expanding influence, occupying territory and as a funding strategy. The city, provincial, and regional governments where Bilbao is located would cover construction expenses, and would assist with acquisitions and operational costs. The Guggenheim Foundation would provide its name, artworks from its permanent collections, and oversee management and curatorial services.

The Pompidou model is not limited to, but incorporates market trends that have emerged since the Bilbao Effect, and it has served as a blueprint for previous generations of French politicians. In 1981, Jack Lang, Minister of Culture under François Mitterrand, known as a superstar of French Culture (Bernstein, 1985), was so inspired by this success that he

famously declared 'Culture is the oil of France'. Nowadays, forty years later, Lang's oil analogy sounds problematic before the tension raised by soft power structures in the art world, and exemplifies how art matters are connected to the biggest political issues of our time. It certainly resonates with the numerous attacks on famous artworks that have happened in the last decade in French museums and around the world. In 2023 for instance, protesters from the British environmental activist group Just Stop Oil committed a new attack on Diego Velazquez's 17th century painting *The Rokeby Venus* (c. 1644 - 1648) at the National Gallery in London, which was famously slashed by suffragette Mary Richardson in 1914.

These attacks on artworks, not intended to harm the physical pieces which are protected by glass, are aimed at the symbolic relevance art has as cultural goods and as monuments of soft power, a term introduced by Joseph Nye in 1990. Nye emphasised this alternative concept of power, which involves persuading others to align with your viewpoint through the cultivation of empathy, admiration or self-recognition. According to Nye, 'Culture both high and low reflects a society's meaning and signals its values, which together with its practices and policies comprise its core soft-power resources' (Nye 2008, pp. 95–96). Art museums therefore have increasingly been perceived as establishments of international soft power in the 21st century, considering their weaving with institutions and governmental instances and the potential of their collections to define main aspects of culture.

The Pompidou model has been refined since its establishment, incorporating new market trends and aligning itself with a Neo-liberal policy of territorial expansion that has become common practice in the global art systems of this century, identified as the global rise of the private museum wave (Kolbe, 2022). Although other similar initiatives already exist in South America, the arrival of Pompidou represents a new format. Considering various aspects such as the ownership of the building, the management model, the ownership of the collection and the different funding sources, it operates in a constant dynamic relationship between the public and private sectors, making the International Museum of Foz do Iguaçu more suitable to a private-public hybrid model (Ibidem, 2022).

The public-private relationship in the museum sector has been the centre of debate over the last decade, pointing to the difficulty of establishing a unified nomenclature. The existence of a hybrid public-private museum blurs the boundaries between these sectors and hinders the transparency of financial operations, making it more difficult to enact public funding policies and putting the interests of the public sector at stake. Although this model is common in countries like the United States (Kolbe, 2022), transferring it to South America risks conflicting with the public policies emerging in the region, which is going

through a time of conflict over the return of democratic interests in the face of the advances of the extreme right, with its strong anti-democratic stance over the past decade (Rubim, 2023:22).

The path leading to South America

The Centre Pompidou's mission is stated as making culture and creation accessible to as many people as possible. However, we must broaden our perspective when considering the concept of culture beyond national borders. In this article the notion of culture is aligned with the scholar Antonio Rubim, a sociologist and professor at UFBA – Universidade Federal da Bahia in Brazil.

The concept of culture used in the text has an expanded dimension, involving not only heritage and the arts, but also popular or digital cultures, world conceptions, ways of life, world-views, values, etc. The proposition of the expanded notion of culture at the World Conference on Cultural Policies (Mondiacult), held 40 years ago in Mexico City, has made this term increasingly evident in cultural policy studies and practices around the world. The institutional strength of Unesco made this expansion possible, even though expanded notions of culture were already in force in some areas of knowledge, such as anthropology, and had even been developed in some countries in the region (South America) (2022:13).

This concept of expanded culture is relevant to the fact that the Pompidou model is being presented in regions of the world that are very different from each other, with diverse geographical, historical, social and cultural characteristics. In order to avoid the flattening and homogenisation of local cultures, the point of view of expanded culture becomes a necessary transversal analytical tool for the application of this model in such varied areas, as it has been happening.

In 2010 Pompidou opened its first branch in the city of Metz, east of Paris, where it currently exhibits excerpts from its permanent collection. Between 2011 and 2013, there was a project for a mobile art gallery that travelled through regions of rural France in a circus-inspired model, where a tent remained set up for several months at each location, showcasing selected pieces from the museum's collection. In 2015 the operation arrived in Spain. The museum set up a steel and glass structure called El Cubo in Málaga. According to the Spanish newspaper *El País*, the project cost one million euros per year and was funded by the city of Málaga, in a five-year contract granting the French brand's use and the loan of its collection (Cañas, 2018).

In 2017, the KANAL-centre Pompidou was created in Brussels, Belgium, with financial support from the Belgian government and the French car manufacturer Citroen, as reported on Centre Pompidou's website. This time, the ten-year contract, in addition to granting the brand concession, was supported by an urban revitalisation project in the Brussels region. In a similar format, a branch was established in Shanghai in 2019, the Centre Pompidou x West Bund Art Museum. Both projects are still in operation, thus achieving their initial objectives and strengthening the French Museum as a reference in the contemporary art market.

The West Bund Museum became a significant contemporary art venture in the new century. The project is celebrated by the Chinese government as an important affair with France, as we can read on the West Bund Art Museum website.

In this perspective, the Centre Pompidou and the West Bund Museum signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2017. It was taken as the highest-level cultural cooperation project between China and France, and was included in the Joint Declaration between the People's Republic of China and the French Republic in 2018. And in 2019, it opened to the public at the special moment of the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and the 55th anniversary of the establishment of Sino-French diplomatic relations (West Bund Museum, 2024).

The museum is located in Shanghai's West Bund Cultural Corridor (WBCC), a cultural project involving private and public initiative, with massive participation from the Chinese government. The construction of the mega-project, which involves several cultural centres and museums, has had a significant impact on Shanghai's real estate industry, and has raised criticism from local scholars regarding its ambiguous public-private partnerships, the granting of land for the buildings and the central nature of the cultural project, showing private and/or foreign collections (Tu, 2022). These concerns raised about the showing of massive private collections in public spaces resonate with how symbolic power is built within the art systems and its influence on the economic value of the art pieces.

Analysing the Pompidou West Bund Museum's exhibition projects from 2019 onwards, there have been three consecutive semi-permanent exhibitions of highlights from the Pompidou collection, each lasting approximately two years and one year for the current display. These semi-permanent exhibitions were interspersed with exhibitions of contemporary Chinese artists, among other shows. In this format there is a very important aspect of soft power, which is that of comparison and self-recognition. The fixed or semi-permanent reference point is the Pompidou's collection. The entry and exit of other

shorter exhibitions proposes an inevitable comparison, validating Chinese art against the standards set by that collection.

When it comes to the overall value added to cultural goods, including monetary, the biggest profit is on the French side, even if the collection itself is made of international art works. The acquisition of art pieces created by Chinese artists by the Pompidou collection reinforces the logic of soft power, since in the long term it validates the collection more than the artist in relation with their original culture. The Chinese government pays for the production of the works when it supports its artists, it pays for the construction of the museum and the concession of the French brand, and it grants the symbolic value attached to Chinese cultural goods to the Pompidou's collection, which continues to grow and expand its influence.

In 2021 and 2022 respectively, the contracts for brand concession or intention were signed in New Jersey and Foz do Iguaçu. The AEN - Paraná State News Agency announced the partnership with Centre Pompidou in July of that year, as in Brazil the agreement was made by the southern state government, not the national government itself. The article outlines the following:

Brazil will be the first country in Latin America to establish an agreement with the Centre National d'Art et de Culture Georges Pompidou, from Paris, France, for the construction of an international museum. One of the acting governor's greatest aspirations will come to fruition in Foz do Iguaçu, in the western region, where, on the afternoon of this Monday (27), protocols of intent were signed with representatives from Renault of Brazil, Itaipu Binacional, and the municipality of Foz do Iguaçu (AEN Paraná, 2022).

The process is similar in New Jersey, where there were also issues related to the operation. Community leaders have spoken in the media of the disconnect between the building plans of the museum and local needs. Some information about the funding of the project was published by the New York Times in 2021.

In signing on to host the Pompidou satellite, Jersey City has agreed to assume the financial burden of renovating the building and operating the museum, which will be called Centre Pompidou x Jersey City. The city will also pay the museum an annual fee that covers project development, branding and the organisation of exhibitions. A spokeswoman for the city said that the city has agreed to pay the museum an annual fee that phases up to \$6 million over the course of the contract to cover project development, branding, educational programming and the organisation of exhibitions (Jacobs, 2021).

Similarly to Málaga and New Jersey, in Foz do Iguaçu the Pompidou's proposal is to licence its brand and collection rights for five years in a building constructed with public funds from the host country, with partial funding of private French multinational companies and Itaipú Binacional. The contract renewal is not guaranteed and is tied to the success of public engagement in the project's initial stage, as seen in Málaga. Although not all agreements involve an urban revitalisation project as it did in Belgium, the host cities are subjected to a significant change in the real estate landscape. In Foz do Iguaçu and its region, considering the still-developing urban situation, historically reported social disparities, and the position of triple border, the accelerated increase in housing costs would certainly have a problematic impact on the emergence of new migratory processes. Probabilities such as this must be taken into account since the discourse supporting the museum's establishment is focused on urban development. But here we are faced with the risk of a common historical repetition of the displacement of local communities for the modernisation of urban centres in South America. Urban reconfiguration in favour of development is part of the scope and one of the taglines of the project, but who will be responsible for dealing with the consequences of implementation if the project operates on the blurred boundaries between public and private? In good 'South American' French this feels like a *déjà-vu*.

The cultural impact in the triple border area

Foz do Iguaçu is a city that was restructured around the construction of the Itaipu Dam just over 40 years ago, an epic project unprecedented at the time. Its construction took place during the 1970s, coinciding with that of the original Centre Pompidou. There is also, similar to the Beaubourg, a government-commissioned film about the dam's construction created by French filmmaker Jean Labib, called "Les Grands travaux du monde: le barrage de Itaipu" (1979). In a cinematic style similar to Rossellini's approach to photographing Pompidou in 1977, Labib's film takes a patriotic look at the grand work of the hydroelectric plant and praises development, a common trait in the propaganda of that decade.

This period encompasses accelerated and disproportionate population growth, massive deforestation, the death of thousands of animal species, climate changes, expropriation of land from riverside populations, numerous environmental crimes reported, and neglect of the region's culture impacts. The construction of a museum is very different from a hydroelectric plant, but forty years is not a lot of time when it comes to cultural recovery from such impactful events which have formed the landscape where the museum is supposed to be constructed, bearing in mind that Itaipu Binacional is one of the project's announced investors.

Historically, the triple border of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay has been impacted by political, economic, ethnic, social and environmental conflicts that give it a unique degree of complexity. Brazilian social scientists have been pointing to interdisciplinarity as one of the main focal points in border studies, in dialogue with anthropology, geography and history, with the aim of finding an appropriate way of approaching these regions as unique places for the production of meaning, as a museum is fathom to operate.

(...) In this sense, a relevant starting point is to approach border regions as unique spaces built from multiple relationships of transit and belonging. Border regions between national states can therefore be seen as specific places where meanings, relationships and representations are produced. These places, especially urban spaces, are territories of power, social experiences and movements crossed by short distances between countries and legal limits between territorial sovereignties. They are not isolated places and closed border communities, but spaces of experiences and memories articulated with various scales of regional, national and global interactions (Cardin, E. G.; Albuquerque, 2018).

The border as a place is an intercultural space for the production of identities. Border dwellers constantly live with multiple relations of inequality, and a development project for these areas should seek to minimise the consequences for the community, not strengthen them. As an exhibition plan, keeping an art collection like the Pompidou's on permanent display sets a standard to which temporary exhibitions will be measured against. When South American art is presented in this context, it is placed in a situation of comparison, which in the long term can result in aesthetic homogenisation and the exoticisation of local culture as a side effect. The involvement of curators, artists and creative communities from diverse and representative backgrounds in the triple border area could alleviate this situation. However, the structural problem remains the same, namely the need to use the French brand and collection to propel art in the region. State investment in building a museum, creating educational programmes and acquiring a collection could be implemented directly, without the participation of foreign multinationals. A project based on a decolonial matrix and historical reparation needs more time to prepare and implement, but would have better results.

An important aspect concerning the art system's reconfiguration is the role of exoticism in the homogenisation of culture in the era of globalisation. The Brazilian Studies Magazine at the University of São Paulo, published a text by Kujuk Yun pointing to this topic. "We wonder then if exoticism, generated by cliché and stereotype, acts as an aesthetic criterion in the contemporary art world, allowing peripheral artists to be more easily discovered by the Western world." (Yun, 2018:316). She refers to how important institutions in the world

of contemporary art, including the Centre Pompidou, began to promote, after the boom in globalisation in the 1980s, exhibitions that showed a blending of cultures that promised a horizontal vision between countries and continents, a flattening of the cultural landscape. This flattening or homogenisation occurs through what the author defines as exoticism, which reveals a particularly ethnocentric attitude that distinguishes the centre from the margins. The representation of the cultural specificity of "the other" is created by a Western point of view that reduces different cultural landscapes to a tourist vision fantasised by mass media. The installation of a contemporary art museum on the triple border of Foz do Iguaçu needs to set clear goals to prevent the culture of local people being exoticized in favour of tourist propaganda.

Centre Pompidou Foundation's most recent acquisition of work by a Brazilian artist was in 2021. *Carta ao Velho Mundo* (2018-2019) and *Na Terra Sem Males* (2021), from contemporary artist Jaider Esbell, of Macuxi origin, have been added to the collection under the indication of Brazilian curator Paulo Miyada, assistant curator for Latin America at the institution. As much as this acquisition should be recognised as important for contemporary Brazilian art, it is worth highlighting the words of Brazilian visual artist and author Jota Mombaça on the re-colonial scenes of valuing difference and how these purchases can represent re-signified colonialist postures.

Recently, after the 2019 Paraty International Literary Festival (Flip), a headline was repeated several times on Brazilian social media: "Of the five best-selling authors, four are black and one is indigenous". The meaning attributed to this narrative was one linked to the Politics of Representativeness, in which this fact appeared as a sign of the collective "empowerment" of black and indigenous people within the framework of contemporary knowledge production systems. For me, this headline did not fail to evoke, with each appearance, the ghost of value as a device deeply implicated in the arsenal of Raciality (Mombaça, 2021:7).

The author goes on to talk about re-colonial scenes of valuing difference, which include the buying and selling of cultural goods produced by racialised people, or people of origins other than those of Western Europe. It feeds the art systems and is definitely necessary to the survival of the art economy, but the final and biggest profits from these operations and, above all, the added symbolic value, which represents an important part of validation within art systems, continue to be attributed to the museum's maintaining institution. The South American countries are footing the bill to create a new international art museum, but in the long run, what narrative remains in the archives of art history for future generations?

Reflecting on the future, whether in artistic or theoretical practices, is a necessary political action. Brazilian philosopher and anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro often criticises the Western model of progress and development, proposing that we learn from indigenous cosmologies, which have a more balanced and respectful relationship with the world (Viveiros de Castro, 2002). This awareness can facilitate new strategies for handling present-day problems and foster the rise of art museums that incorporate a forward-thinking epistemology for emerging art.

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