

The multistory parking garage and Square Alfredo Issa: from Brutalist architecture to brutality

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ABSTRACT

The article shows the government recurring practice of neglect the assets under its responsibility which are the subject to significant modifications, random transformations, most often not considering the permanence of assets and their property values, cultural and aesthetic principles. The discontinuity of administrations and the absence of continued public policies lead to immediate actions causing the loss of memory of emblematic places in cities. To illustrate this situation, we describe the transformation of the Square and the Alfredo Issa garage building, built-in downtown São Paulo in the early 1970s, through historical research into primary and secondary sources and on-site analysis.

KEYWORDS

Multistory parking garage. Public space. Modern architecture. Brutalist architecture. Place. Non-place.

1. Introduction. The multistory parking garage as a car traffic solution

The multistory parking garages started to be built at the beginning of 1920, as an answer to the increasing lack of space for parking cars, especially in the downtown area of major European cities. The first one was built in Berlin in 1925, the city with the largest car fleet in the continent by then. The system used elevators to move cars from one floor to another. This kind of building, however, starts spreading worldwide after the Second World War, as Europe resumed its economic gains.

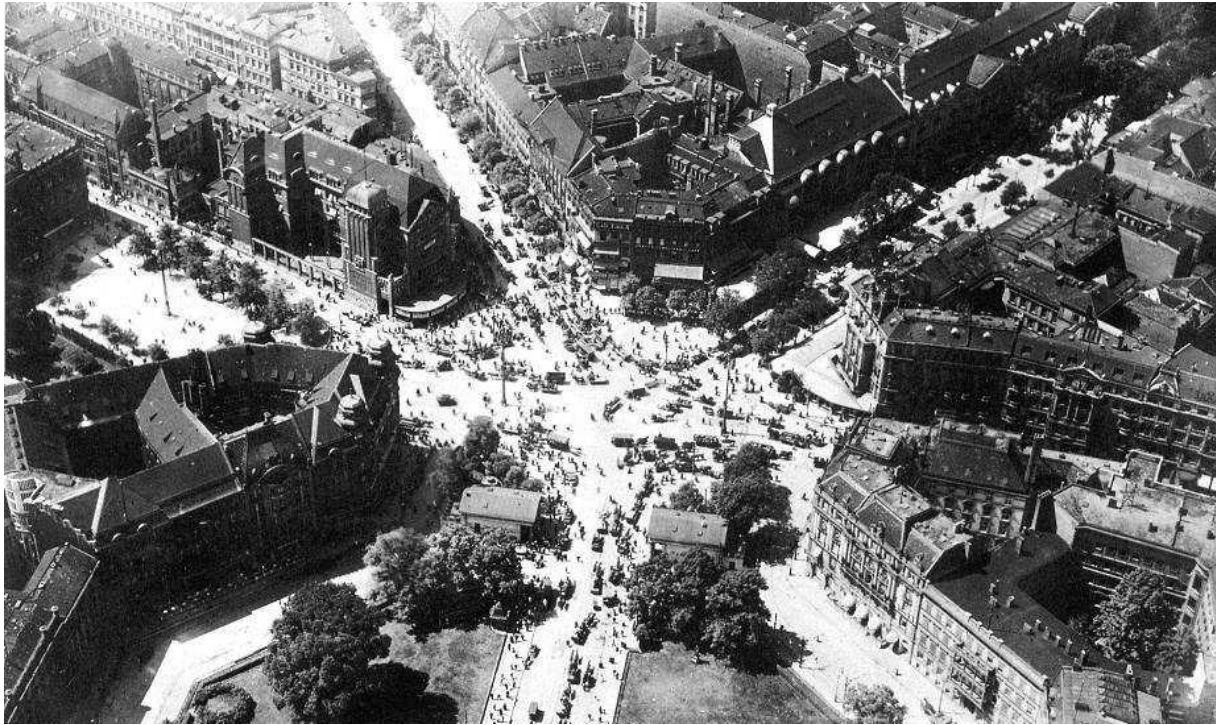


Figure 1. Potsdamer Platz in Berlin in 1919. Source: <https://sammlung-online.stadtmuseum.de/Details/Index/243490>. Photography: Aero Lloyd Luftbild GmbH. Accessed on March 06, 2020.

In Brazil, the first multistory parking garage was built between 1954 and 1956 in São Paulo. Named Garagem América (America multistory parking garage), it was built in Riachuelo Street at a plot near the Law School at Largo de São Francisco. Designed by the architect Rino Levi, the 15-story building also caught people's attention because it was the first building with apparent steel profiles supporting concrete slabs (Bruand, 1981, 17). This large building was carefully studied to provide support to the major road traffic system. The plot, with nearly one thousand square meters and built in a fan shape, had space for 500 cars (Acrópole, 1955, 302). It is still working. Later, other similar buildings were built in the city and other cities around the country, as a consequence of the exponential increase of car fleet and the quick decay of traffic road infrastructure.

2. Downtown changes (1965-1979)

The Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage was built between 1970 and 1971, while Paulo Maluf was the mayor (1969-1971), the time when there is an intense flow of changes in São Paulo downtown area and of which the main purpose was to adjust it to the new size of the city.

During that time, deep infrastructure changes in the traffic road system arising from the implementation of railway transportation occurred, which not only affected the downtown area but the surroundings as well. During this time the State has solid participation in suggesting restructuring projects, aiming at adjusting the circulation of cars and pedestrians downtown to the new urban scene (Simões, 1994). While Olavo Setúbal (1975-1979) was the mayor, central public spaces are reinserted into the urban scene, connected to the stations that crossed the so-called Old Downtown Area (Toledo, 1996). These interventions required an integrated work between the Subway and the Urban City Company – EMURB, and both are in charge of designing the surface and underground areas of Praça da Sé, Largo de São Bento, Largo da Liberdade, Largo de São Francisco, and Pátio do Colégio.



Figure 2. Berlin was the first city to have a multistory parking garage (1925). Photograph: Robertson.
Source: <https://sammlung-online.stadtmuseum.de/Details/Index/578672>. Accessed on March 06, 2020.

3. The multistory parking garage and Alfredo Issa Square

The area was chosen to shoulder the building was located in Alfredo Issa Square, which, at the time, looked like an abandoned area because of water pools resulting from the unfinished work of the so-called Police Palace, of which works started in 1944, but were interrupted three years later when they just finished building the foundation. Because of the area's water table, located only less than 20 feet away from the surface (Perelmutter, 1972), the place became some kind of pool, which caused lots of complaints because of the dirt and bad odor, which was announced by part of the press services at the time.

In the corner of Ipiranga Avenue and Senador Queirós Street, there is a place called Alfredo Issa. In the City Hall's official blueprint this place appears as a square, but for the area dwellers, it is just an absurd right in the middle of the city of São Paulo. It is a huge 'artificial lake' comprising rotten water. It was only recalled by authorities a little while ago and because a young person died after drowning there. (FSP, August 25, 1969).

In another passage of the article, the situation of the place was described:

[...] There are mosquitoes, rats and the bad odor dominates the entire area. [...] This situation has been like this for over thirty years now. This plot belongs to the State and they were supposed to build the Police Investigation Department there – in fact, they drilled the plot to place the beams, but the works stopped, and nothing happened since then. [...] During a long time there were fences [...] and the City Hall pumped the water from time to time, [bringing] to the area the so-called “miners” by the dwellers. They were just poor people who [took advantage] of that time to enter the lake [searching for lost objects]. This activity provided them some kilos of marijuana, some guns, blades and knives and, sometimes, even some money, lost by those who were persecuted by police searches which often happened in the surroundings [...]. Poor people built paper and wooden houses around the ‘lake’. (Same article, ibid).

At the beginning of the 1970s, the agreement executed between the State and the City to use the area by the latter to build a multistory parking garage put an end to the discussion. The idea was to minimize the effects of the lack of parking spaces downtown. To carry out the work, a bid was created for the building of a multistory parking garage in the squared area comprising Avenues Casper Líbero and Ipiranga and Andradas and Timbiras Streets.



Figure 3. View of the plot where Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage was going to be built. Since the 1940s, with the abandonment of the works of the Security State Department, the place was abandoned and turned into an artificial lake, which caused lots of complaints. Collection: Benno Perelmutter Arq e Plan Ltda.

The winners of the bid were the architects Benno Perelmutter and Jorge Nasser. Their proposal aimed at adjusting the building to the road designed for the area, especially for Senador Queirós Avenue, which became a passage for cars coming from the north area of the city towards downtown.

The round area had a built area of 22.5 thousand square meters distributed along two underground floors, seven floors and a terrace that was also used for parking cars (Acrópole, 1970, 15).

The car access was through two 13%-inclined ramps, being one in the center and the other one, in the perimeter. Two elevators, in the core of the building (10-meter diameter), were used for the users to move around. Its full diameter was 45 meters, closed with vertical brise soleils built-in pre-molded concrete plates about 3,28 feet from each other, shaft to shaft. The building becomes complete with a 15-meter width circular ring with 12 concrete beams nearly 50 feet away from each other, allocated in the cylindrical

structure of the main ramp and, 12 pillars in the building circumference. This ring is divided into 12 segments distributed in a radial shape, with a grilled structure (Acrópole, 1970, 15).

From the point of view of its implementation, its round shape combined perfectly with the Montreal building (1950-1954), the first building designed by the architect Oscar Niemeyer in São Paulo, located in the front corner and of which round shape stands out in the landscape.

A dry square was part of the surroundings of the multistory parking garage, finally offering the public come open space that did not exist by then.

By watching the blueprint designs and comparing them with the building today, we can notice that the building pattern followed the proposal made by the architects almost entirely.

Aesthetically, the Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage is part of the so-called New Brutalist Architecture, which was a major trend in São Paulo in the years between 1960 and 1970 (Xavier, Lemos, Corona, 1983). Invented in Great Britain, this Modern trends incorporated into the structure of buildings the truth and purity of form, which would be translated into the highlighting of major elements comprising the design, from the structure to the facilities.

In the period, the influence of Brutalist Architecture in São Paulo becomes very evident, given the difficult political scenario in 1960-70, was connected to a means of resistance and architectonic identity because the Brazilian architects believed their aesthetic and ethical were capable of making deep social changes (Fuão, 2000).

Among the Brutalist architecture characteristics seen in the Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage, the following stand out: the use of apparent concrete in its nude structure, the plastic valuation of functional elements, such as the major volume that concentrates vertical circulation, machinery room and the water reservoir, which stood out as it was above the terrace.

Mayor Figueiredo Ferraz (1971-1973), who took office after Paulo Maluf, did not want the building to be managed by the city and gave it back to the Public Security Business Department of the State, which started using the building to park their own car fleet. Still, during the 1970s, the Department closed the ground floor and built two extra floors to open up some space to build management departments in the building.

That extra construction significantly changed the volume of the building, invalidating the emphasis given to the central volume, as it became an in-house element. A helipad was built above the terrace and it worked until the beginning of the 1990s.

The building structure was also changed because a glass wall was put as an external finishing to the new floors, which interrupted the placing of brise soleils, an impression that is highlighted as they were included in the building's finishing.

In 1991, these two floors will shelter the main offices of the Armed Group for Repression of Robberies and Muggings - GARRA, the Tactical Air Support - SAT and the Special Hijacking Team Response - GER, all of which subordinated to the State Department of Criminal Investigations - DEIC, the Civil Police of the State of São Paulo. In 1998, the ground floor was modified to shelter a unit of Poupatempo - A place where you can take several documents at once.

Closing the ground floor to adjust it to its new function and closing the entire surrounding area and eliminated the integration of the area with the nearby streets and the square disappeared again.

By the time it was about 50 years, the Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage had serious preservation issues, especially the dislocation of the concrete from the structure caused by the rusting of the armor structures of the inside beams, the supporting beams and also the vertical brise soleils. Also, water was penetrating the soil because of leakages and lack of care with the terrace, which should be impermeable. After several changes in the schedule, which caused many delays, the recovery works, which should have started in 2013, finally started in 2019.

Despite the additions made during the 1970as, which definitely compromised the original project design, suspending many premises defined by the architects and have its function compromised, the building was declared a heritage site by the city as it is in the so-called Special Cultural Heritage Site Area - ZEPEC.

Because of that, the intervention works in the building must follow today's volume and composition, which means its external appearance will be preserved in its entirety, that is, the brise soleils and other structural and architectonic elements that make the building a classic example of the Brazilian Modern Architecture.

The faulty changes that transformed the Brutalist architecture's elements and poorly implemented and that suffered from serious deterioration because of the lack of preventive maintenance, which is something quite common in Brazilian public properties, is clear evidence of lack of care with modern architecture heritage sites.

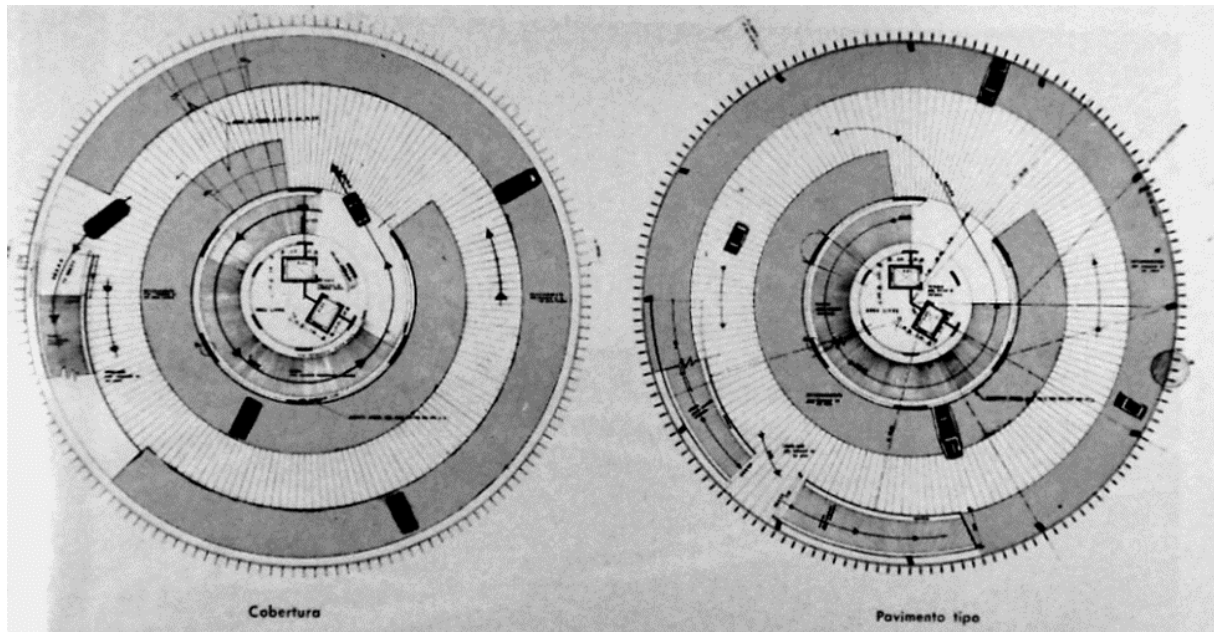


Figure 4. Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage – Terrace blueprints and typical floor. Source: Magazine Acrópolis, 378. October 1970, p.15.

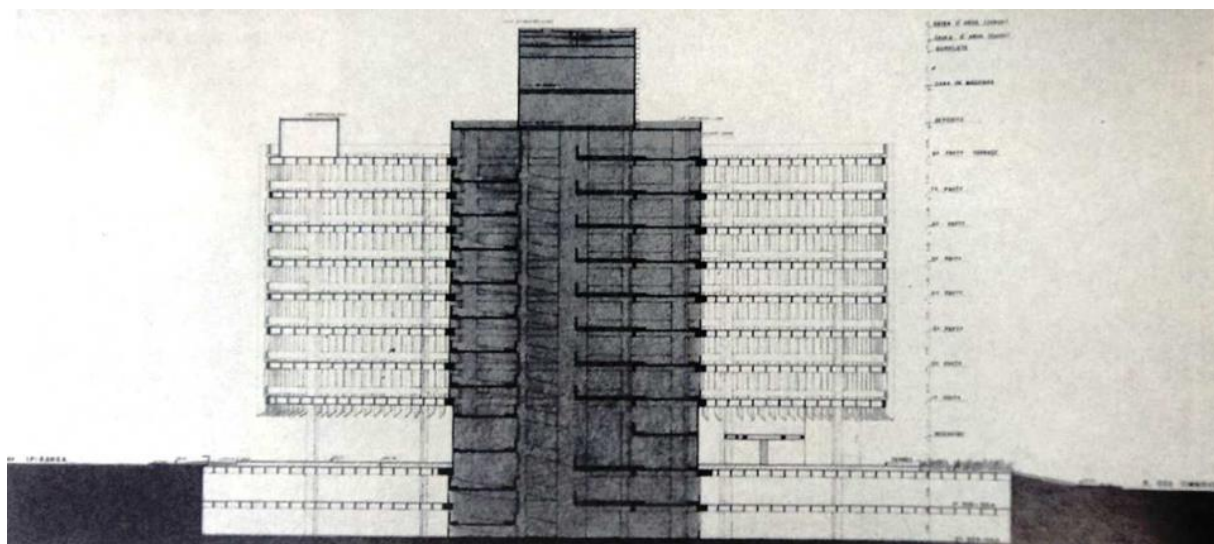


Figure 5. Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage – Transversal view. Note the free ground floor which allowed it to be reintegrated to the Square. Source: Magazine Acrópolis. (1970, October). 378, p.14.



Figure 6. Postcard sold in the 1970 decade showing the newly opened Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage. Its location created an architectonic connection with the Montreal Building, which was designed by the architect Oscar Niemeyer, which stands out because of its curved shape covered in horizontal *brise soleils*. Notice the integration between the public space and its connection with the square and the entire surroundings.



Figure 7. Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage as a State property already, but without any changes that disfigured the modern aesthetics and the square, which was still integrated to it. Collection: Benno Perelmutter Arq e Plan Ltda.



Figure 8. Air view of the Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage in the 2000s before preservation issues became more and more serious. Please notice the change in the volume with the inclusion of two other floors, a new top design that preserved the idea first conceived plus a helipad, which was soon deactivated. Private Collection.



Figure 9. Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage in 2013. Notice the concrete plates dislocated from the brise soleils, Photographed by the author on February 27, 2013.

4. Conclusion

The Alfredo Issa Square has been historically denied to become a public space. At first, because its use was forbidden by fences that isolated the public from an unfinished construction that turned into an artificial lake and lasted for almost 30 years.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the building of a multistory parking garage of which proposal was ideal to be included in the Modern Movement that integrated architecture and city, creating a fluid, integrated space that enabled the connection and interaction of the public with the surrounding areas, finally turned into reality. The photographs of the newly built garage let us see a free ground pavement connected to the square, without any obstacles that prevented free circulation and expanded horizons by allowing people to see the entire built surrounding.



Figure 10. Alfredo Issa multistory parking garage recently built. Notice the visual integration of the entire surrounding area, the fluidity of public space and the square being actually used, with benches and other furniture. Collection: Benno Perelmutter Arq e Plan Ltda.

However, this scenario only lasted for a few years. When the management was transferred to the State, the building's function was changed still in the 1970s to include elements that poorly changed the modern principles of the architecture. Keeping the finishing with the vertical brise soleils as described in the original design turned the building into a poor imitation of itself, which made it disagree with the relationship proposed with the building designed by Niemeyer.

The closing of the ground floor used today as a Poupatempo unit – A place where you can take several documents at once – definitely suspended all ideas of the original design. The fluid connection with the square was lost, which was surrounded by fences and a randomly distributed large-size vegetation was added to it. The space volume was lost once again when the idea of a closed space was resumed, which is sadly so common and so poorly managed in public spaces that should be integrated into the urban space. The lack of continuity of public management and the lack of planning maintenance actions plus the lack of awareness

of the value of the property regardless of its artistic construction led to its degradation, which loses identity because of a series of interventions that only consider immediate, culturally isolated measures.

This way, the population loses its aesthetic memory – in this particular case, a building representing the Brutalist architecture, which shows how brutal the measures of the public authorities can be. The expectation of having a public space that had been denied for so long, after a brief period of fusion when it became a place that could be enjoyed, without any obstacles and connected to the entire surrounding area, once again strengthens the public production method of a place that does not belong to the city and cannot be integrated into any spaces or used by the people.



Figure 11. Alfredo building today, undergoing structural remodeling works. Please notice how fragmented the public space was when they put fences around it and the square became a private place. Photographed by the author on November 11, 2019.

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