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COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND TRIANON: FROM THE BELVEDERE TO MASP

Bianca Molina Reis

Aline Nassaralla Regino



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Abstract: This research aims to explain and exemplify the definition of collective memory in urban spaces, following the definition of Maurice Halbwachs (1968). To achieve this objective, the site at number 1578 on *“Avenida Paulista”*, where the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP) is located, will be analyzed, commenting on its history in order to observe its physical and social changes throughout the decades from 1910 to 2000.

Keywords: memory; belvedere; masp; urban space.

INTRODUCTION

Just as the city is a living organism that changes, creating different ways of experiencing its space, memories also reformulate themselves over time, acquiring new characteristics with each generation. Their relevance, however, remains in the local community.

The definition of the concept of “collective memory” has been proposed by several authors, with their varied theoretical references. This project aims to discuss this concept in relation to the physical space, specifically on the grounds of the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP, 1968), from the Belvedere, built in 1910, through the period when it was occupied by the São Paulo International Biennial (Museum of Modern Art, 1951).

This land has the necessary characteristics, defined by Maurice Halbwachs (1968) to establish this relationship between collective memory and urban space, namely: the relevance of the site in the city, which since its inauguration has served as an area of convergence and observation; its unchanged public use, from the Belvedere to MASP. According to Lucas Mascarenhas de Miranda (2019, n.p.): “When there is a memory that was experienced by a person – or passed on to them – and that concerns a community or group, this memory becomes a heritage of that community.”

To understand how this memory was created and reformulated over time, these spaces built on the aforementioned land were reconstructed, with the aim of recovering and discussing how each generation observed and experienced that place, establishing relationships in a visual way.

Since this is a broad debate, we must begin by understanding the divisions of the concept of collective memory, even if briefly, and then address, separately, the history and experiences that occurred in each building. At the end of this article, relationships are established between the experiences and collective memory in urban spaces using the place studied and virtually reconstructed.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Throughout the 20th century, several theorists discussed the definition of memory. In this research, we will approach this concept based on the discourse of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1968), who sought to understand how this phenomenon occurs individually or collectively. At the same time, we will use some studies by the historian Pierre Nora (1993), especially the one in which the author classified the places of memory, which can occur in geographically concrete or intellectually constructed locations. In the book entitled *Collective Memory*, written in 1968, Maurice Halbwachs explains this concept based on its division into three main ideas: memory and history; memory and time; and memory and space. Regarding the definition of the concept itself, the author clarifies that it is formed from places and social interactions, that is, the individual, who is never completely isolated, when remembering something, always has a point of reference in the outside world (HALBWACHS, 1990).

The main definition presented by the author is that collective memory is formed from places and social interactions, that is, the

individual, who is never completely isolated, when remembering something, always has a point of reference in the outside world.

It is not enough to reconstruct the image of a past event piece by piece to obtain a memory. This reconstruction must function based on data or common notions that are in our minds and also in those of others, because they are always passing from one person to another and vice versa, which will be possible if they have only been and continue to be part of the same society, of the same group (HALBWACHS, 1990, p. 39).

In a society, collective memory is constructed with a set of individual memories, each person having their own point of view, but always sharing at least one common reference, the place.

[...] memories remain collective and are remembered by others, even if they are events in which only we were involved and objects that only we saw. This happens because we are never alone (HALBWACHS, 1990, p. 30).

To illustrate, we will use one of the objects of this research, the São Paulo Museum of Art. Let's say two people meet in the open space below the building. In their individual memory, one of them may remember a happy moment, such as meeting an old friend, but the other may have been robbed there. These are their points of view, but they have the external reference in common, the location, the open space of MASP.

This example is directly related to the definition established by Pierre Nora (1993), who also makes this correlation between coexistence and space.

Even a place that appears to be purely material, such as an archive, is only a place of memory if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura. Even a purely functional place, such as a class manual, a will, or an association of veterans, only falls into this category if it is the object of a ritual. [...] It is material because of

its demographic content; functional by hypothesis, because it guarantees at the same time the crystallization of memory and its transmission; but symbolic by definition, since it characterizes an event or an experience lived by a small number of people, a majority that did not participate in them. (NORA, 1993, p. 25).

It can be concluded that memory is the result of a collective process inserted in a specific context. This happens to the extent that the individual is always subject to a location, which is proven when people are able to gather their memories and describe facts, objects and places with great accuracy, even though they have never interacted with each other.

Maurice Halbwachs's discussion (1968) also raised the distinction between collective memory and history. He states that the main difference is the continuity of memories. For the author, the presentation of history is discontinuous, as it divides the facts, or time, into segments such as centuries and decades, due to the need for teaching in a schematic manner. In collective memory, this interruption does not occur, as it has a continuous flow of thought and the awareness of the event does not go beyond the group involved. In addition, it presents a set of individual experiences, unlike history, which presents itself in a unique way.

History can be presented as the universal memory of the human species. However, there is no universal memory. Every collective memory is supported by a group limited in time and space (HALBWACHS, 1990, p. 106).

The time and space mentioned in the quote are formed by a relationship between the past and the present. Remembering an event from a current perspective generates a resignification of the same, which is characterized by the continuity of thoughts, that is, memories of the past will always be remembered by the

current group that contains them. According to Halbwachs (1990, p. 90): “The divisions of time, the duration of the parts thus fixed, result from conventions and customs, and because they also express the ineluctable order according to which the various stages of social life follow each other”. From the theoretical framework presented, it is possible to note that the decisive element for the creation of a collective memory is the place. For this reason, ‘‘Avenida Paulista’’, with a focus on the lot number 1578, will be used as the object of this study. To this end, we will begin our understanding of this place by studying the first building that occupied this place: The Belvedere, and we will continue on to the construction of MASP; a symbolic building that is still there nowadays.

FROM BELVEDERE TO MASP

BELVEDERE

With its viewpoint and panoramic terraces, the Trianon Belvedere, also known at the time as “*Miradouro da Avenida*” or simply “*Belvedere da Avenida*”, was inaugurated on June 12, 1916. The architectural project, designed by the renowned Ramos de Azevedo firm, gave the site great prominence in the city for the first time, a fact that transformed it into a meeting place for those with the greatest purchasing power in São Paulo society.

Today, at 8:30 p.m., the mayor of the capital will open the “Belvedere” terrace on ‘‘Avenida Paulista’’ to the public. The President of the State, government secretaries, councilors and other representatives are invited to attend the event. After this, the “Trianon Room” and the ground floor areas of the terrace will also be inaugurated, a party to which we have received an invitation. (‘‘O Estado de São Paulo’’, edition of 12/6/1916).

From the moment its doors were opened, it was configured as a space built for social gatherings, therefore collective memories were formed from the experiences in that place. We can see the construction of these memories, as activities entered people’s daily lives, mainly the exquisite afternoon teas, called “five o’clock tea”, concerts, “soirées” and balls.¹

The occupation of the Belvedere was associated with events involving the São Paulo elite for only four years, as the coffee crisis that occurred at the end of the 1920s and the urban development of ‘‘Avenida Paulista’’ caused changes in the public that used that space. Therefore, the new social functions performed by that building changed.

The outdoor space became a tourist destination, a landmark in the city, attracting people with diverse interests; while the indoor halls still hosted the most “refined” events, such as the Dance Academy that occupied the lower hall, run by Mrs. Poças Leitão, who was responsible for the art and etiquette classes at the Des Oiseaux Academy. This gave rise to a polarization of the public, the internal versus the external, or rather, the tourist versus the private. In the early 1920s, the image associated with “Avenida Paulista” or the “Belvedere Trianon” referred to the elegant high-society neighborhood full of aristocratic and beautiful residences. This “mental scenario” changed, in the following decade, to a place understood as a social stage for São Paulo. By transforming itself into a space for public use, a center of experiences and culture, that place began to establish relationships and create a sense of belonging for the population of São Paulo, as it became a meeting point for community events.

1. Mentioned in the newspaper ‘‘Estadão’’ of days, 12/16/1916 page 17; 04/28/1918, page 5; 08/19/1916, page 2.

The start of the internal championship of the Brazilian Sports Club, the 'Initium' tournament, the internal cycling championship of the Brazilian Sports Club... São Paulo – Rio route. The start will be on ``Avenida Paulista``, in front of the Trianon (``Folha de S. Paulo``, edition of 12/7/1925).

By relating the change in the use and audience of the Belvedere to the findings previously presented by Halbwachs (1968) and Nora (1993), we can understand that memories were constructed within the structure of private groups, that is, the so-called elite of São Paulo at the time, but only reached the collective level when a larger number of people participated in that space, that is, when society shared the same “mental scenario” of the Belvedere.

The collective memory, therefore, accompanied this change in the mental description of that place, adapted to new images, and accommodated itself to the facts, beliefs, and needs of that time.

In the mid-1940s, another change in the use of the land began to take shape, as architecture linked to the Modern Movement began to be widely disseminated and accepted by São Paulo society. This fact led to the non-acceptance of buildings that were once understood as representative of society, such as the Belvedere, which began to be frowned upon by the population, seen as a symbol of a decadent elite.

At that time, although the building remained restricted to club costume balls, meetings, conventions and general private parties, it gradually stopped being frequented. It is interesting to note that the relationship had been reversed; it was no longer the space that excluded certain social classes because they did not belong; it was society that excluded that place because it saw it as a symbol of a past that no longer existed. Therefore, the importance of the collective mental scenario can be seen, as it is this that creates the sense of representation, which influences the use of that place. With the Belvedere Trianon harking back to times long gone, it was decided to hold a farewell ball for the venue, which was affectionately named “The Triumph of Bad Taste.”

Held on February 11, 1950, it was presented as “the ridiculous, recent past, in which elderly ladies could create their fantasies of massive doses of bad taste and shine at the farewell to the Trianon” (``Folha``, edition of January 24, 1950, p. 6).

A good dance, only at the Trianon! ... and now after years and years of being forgotten comes the news: The city hall is going to renovate the Trianon. **The old halls where so many young people evolved in foxtrots, waltzes, sambas... will be used for political groups.** (``Folha``, January 24, 1950 edition – this excerpt was highlighted by us).



Figure 1: The Trianon as a stage for popular demonstrations against Prince Aimone.

Source: ``O Estadão`` – 1920

But with surprise, I see the dear artist smile, very satisfied with life, and declare that the Trianon is full of public, that business is going very well, that the season looks great and that on October 3rd he will be in São Paulo... – (``Folha``, edition of April 7th 1931).

Despite all the controversy and its little use, the importance acquired by that land in the eyes of São Paulo society was never forgotten or underestimated. A collective memory had been created. However, the decline of the Belvedere intensified with the lack of financial incentives for its conservation. Without being understood as a place of importance to the population of São Paulo, it was demolished in 1951.



Figure 2: The demolition of the Belvedere.

Source: ``Acervo Estadão``



Figure 3: The demolition of the Belvedere.

Source: ``Acervo Estadão``

THE BIENNIAL

After the demolition of the Belvedere, the strategically located and highly influential site in the city received great interest to take on the construction of the MAM, but it was surrounded by controversy over its authorization, widely verified in Daniele Pisane's book "The Trianon from MAM to MASP" (2019).



Figure 4: Biennial announcement.

Collection: ``Folha``; edition May 8, 1951.

[...] **The preservation of that space seemed to us as important as the building itself.** The influx of the public to the site will meet the high objectives of the enterprise, stimulating ever more the interest of our people in things of art, in manifestations of spirit. [...]. (Letter from Belluci of May 16, 1952, can be found in FCSP, number: 191, Protocol, number: 999, 1952).

In particular, we are seeing that the grand strategies for building the MAM's permanent headquarters on the Trianon site precede any choice regarding the I Biennial Pavilion. [...] that is, **it chooses the most suitable land to build the permanent headquarters and, in the meantime, establishes a provisional headquarters there.** [...] (PISANE, 2019. Page: 57; this excerpt was highlighted by us).

In the midst of this dispute over the concession of the site, the Biennial presented itself, albeit temporarily, as a solution to the problem. Inheriting the importance that the Belvedere gave to the site, it incorporated the architectural language understood as correct for that moment, thus reconciling the image of a progressive city with an event of international relevance, since until then only the Venice Biennial had existed.

In addition, it presented itself strategically as an opportune means of "guaranteeing" adequate occupation and established a "provisional headquarters" for what would later be called the Palace of Arts.



Figure 5: Construction of the pavilion for the first International Art Biennial, 1951.

Source: Collection: biennial



Figure 8: Facade of the pavilion of the first biennial.

Source: picture: Hans Gunter Flieg, 1951
[Collection: ``Instituto Moreira Salles``]

The first International Art Biennial, held by the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo (MAM-SP) in 1951 between October 20 and December 23, was held in São Paulo and featured 1,854 works of art from 23 countries. Created by Ciccillo Matarazzo, the biennial placed Brazil on the international stage of major artistic events.

FIRST SAO PAULO BIENNIAL

The São Paulo Museum of Modern Art informs its members that the inauguration of the first São Paulo Biennial will take place at 4:00 p.m. today.

Exhibiting artists will be able to enter the Biennial venue from 3:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m., upon presentation of their exhibitor card, in order to await the opening ceremony.

The opening ceremony will only be attended upon presentation of a special invitation issued by the competent committee.

From 5:30 p.m. onwards, visits will be open exclusively to members of the Museum of Modern Art, who will be allowed to enter upon presentation of their membership card with the current month's ticket. By special concession of the Jockey Club of São Paulo, tomorrow, members of the Museum will have free access to the grandstands of ``Cidade Jardim`` racetrack, where the São Paulo Biennial award will be held.

The Biennial ticket office will open to the public at 8 p.m. today. Starting tomorrow, the Biennial will be open from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Figure 6: The announcement of the opening of the first biennial.

Source: collection: ``Folha`` – October 20, 1951

The First Biennial of the Museum of Modern Art

SAO PAULO WILL BE PROJECTED TO THE WORLD AS THE ARTISTIC CENTER OF THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

Figure 7: Article of ``Folha de São Paulo``.

Source: collection: ``Folha`` – edition April 29, 1951

The mental scenario of the population chose the building located at 1578, ``Avenida Paulista``, the first Biennial to represent the expression of modernist art in architecture, therefore, establishing the affirmation of culture in the metropolis of São Paulo.

São Paulo, therefore, began to be understood as the artistic center of the country, as it hosted an international exhibition, with several modernist artists, of national and international renown, being seen as the only artistic expression plausible for acceptance, it was welcomed with pride by the population.

The space that was already significant for the collective memory, from the moment that this “honor” of hosting this event was consolidated, was preserved, even more, in the memory of society as a “place of great importance”, now with more emphasis, as it was less exclusive.

It rained heavily on the opening day of the first biennial, getting equally wet, while the gates did not open, **the diplomats and their wives and the humblest representatives of the people, all united in the same interest in art in the world, represented for the first time in that way in São Paulo.** Artists protested in 1951 (``O Estado de São Paulo``, 1967, page 9; this excerpt was highlighted by us).

Thus, the biennial was doubly significant for the time, because in addition to the importance of the building itself, it also presents the greatest expression of human

sentimentality: art. The emotional charge brought by the exhibitions that took place there reinforced the feeling of representation of São Paulo. The exhibitions, with almost two thousand works, had a great impact on the world art circuit.

By its very definition, the biennial was to fulfill two main tasks: to place Brazilian modern art not in simple confrontation, but in live contact with art from the rest of the world, while at the same time seeking to establish São Paulo as a world artistic center. Reference to Venice was inevitable; far from avoiding it, it was sought to be used as a lesson worthy of study and also as an encouraging stimulus. (MACHADO, 1951, p.14-15).

With the crossing of ideas, points of view and receiving around 70,000 to 100,000 visitors² the Biennial, as an environment, further instigated the creation of collective memories, even if in a short time. The first Biennial closed its doors on December 23, 1951 and the pavilion, being temporary, quickly lost its importance. Then, a new struggle began for the use of the land, now immensely targeted. The Museum of Modern Art (MAM) and the Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP), José Augusto Bellucci, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Oscar Niemeyer and Lina Bo Bardi, began their proposals.

THE MASP

After the demolition of the pavilion, the land remained unoccupied for the next seven years.

The MAM, which was planned to be built right after the end of the Biennial, encountered several obstacles to its authorization,³ leaving aside proposals given by José Augusto Bellucci, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, and even Oscar Niemeyer.

2. MIRANDA, José Tavares of. 100 thousand people visited the first biennial. ``Folha da Noite``, São Paulo, December 24, 1951, page: 3.

3. Widely discussed in Daniele Pisana's book – from MAM to MASP; but not the subject of discussion in this research.

4. Discussion of memory change over time, presented earlier.

It must be noted that, despite never having been observed, in the years between the failed attempt of MAM (1952) and the successful one of MASP (1959-1960) **the land never ceases to arouse interest.** (PISANE, 2019, p. 154. (this excerpt was highlighted by us).

After almost a decade without activities at the site, the memories created there were changing, becoming less vivid in the popular mental scenario, as the population that experienced the space was no longer the same⁴, the land needed a significant building to regain its importance in the city.



Figure 9: Lot 1578 on ``Avenida Paulista`` after the demolition of the first biennial pavilion

Source: Luiz Hossaka: MASP Library Archive and Documentation Center

The design of MASP is a great example of how collective memory must not be considered synonymous with facts, since it is usually propagated verbally and can lose or incorporate events over time.

Let us demystify two important myths about the construction of MASP: that the concession of the land required that the view of Anhangabaú be left open and that there was a direct dispute between MAM and MASP over the use of the land.

The first myth arose in the form of a rumor, based on a statement by Pietro Maria Bardi, when he was asked about the rejection of Affonso Eduardo Reidy's project, stating that the project did not require the view of the valley to be left open.

Pietro Maria Bardi, as we shall see, would state that **the non-acceptance of Reidy's project was due precisely to the lack of knowledge of such a condition.** Both Beck and Niemeyer, and both Bellucci and Reidy, are, however, aware of the need to allow panoramic views from the Trianon. **(no, but due to a legal imposition, linked to the donation of the land)** [...] if we add to this that neither of the two projects will be submitted to the authorities for approval and, therefore, cannot be rejected, **we are forced to admit that Bardi's words are curiously misleading.** (PISANE, 2019. p. 75 – this excerpt was highlighted by us).

The second is misleading because MASP only entered the proposal seven years after the failed attempt to grant the other projects. MAM had already been declared unviable and the city government was planning to install a public garden on the site, with inferior rooms for conferences⁵. In the meantime, Lina Bo Bardi's proposal was chosen.



Figure 10: Queen Elizabeth II at the inauguration of MASP.

Source: ``Acervo Estadão``

With its design completed in 1957, MASP was inaugurated on November 7, 1968. Lina Bo Bardi's project was an exemplary representation of modern architecture in South America, and was, for its time, a major architectural and structural challenge. It easily gained popular acceptance, since the modernist expression had already been presented and welcomed during the biennial, and since its inauguration it has served as a major representative of São Paulo⁶. According to Daniele Pisane (2019, p. 168): "Lina's is considered better because it offers more generous spaces; the city hall's, according to technicians, has the quality of a less intensive use of the available space".

If Lina's project were approved without considering the view of the Anhangabaú valley, the land and building would most likely blend into their surroundings and go unnoticed by the population, potentially losing the entire construction of the mental landscape developed by society in that location.

One of the reasons why the jury prefers Reidy's design is its lower height; the main defect attributed to Bellucci's design is, on the contrary, that it is "a large curtain that will undoubtedly take away the character of the small square and will blend in with the mass of buildings that will be built on ``Avenida Paulista`` in the future". (PISANE, 2019, page: 74; this section was highlighted by us).

The changes to ``Avenida Paulista`` also influenced the importance that MASP has today in society. Events such as the Paulista Open or even the opening of other cultural centers nearby have brought even more interactions to the site, thus giving more visibility to the space, which contributes to the creation of collective memories of the population.

5. PISANE, from MAM to MASP. Page 154, in the morning newspaper of 12/12/1952, economy and finance section, p. 8. And quote taken from SIMPROC, process, number: 0.107.701/52.

6. It is understood because it is the place chosen for the popular presentation of Queen Elizabeth II, joining the date of her visit to Brazil for the inauguration of the museum.

However, the construction of these memories is still ongoing, therefore, the discussion about their mental scenarios cannot be completely concluded, since they are currently being reformulated.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present time is a consequence of past times and one does not go without the other, since the past can only live through memories. Maurice Halbwachs (1968) mentions that the memory of a society extends as far as the group that contains it remains alive, because of this it is so common to forget events and figures, because memories disappear along with individuals, except when there is a material nature that interferes in this process.

The image of the external environment and the stable relationships that one maintains with oneself come to the forefront of the idea that one has of oneself. [...] The image of things participates in their inertia. It is not the isolated individual, but the individual as a member of the group, it is the group itself that, this way, remains subject to the influence of material nature and participates in its equilibrium. (HALBAWCHS, 1990, p. 133)

The physical space maintains the importance of a place in the community's memory. When the material is available, the mental scenario constructed in the space is difficult to forget, since a memory of the events occurs each time we visit the place.

An example of this situation occurs with photographs. When we take a photo, it is because we want to make sure that we will remember an event vividly. This happens when we look at the photo again and the memory of the event arises automatically. In this case, the photograph is very visible and significant, since the buildings were widely visited and documented in their respective eras.

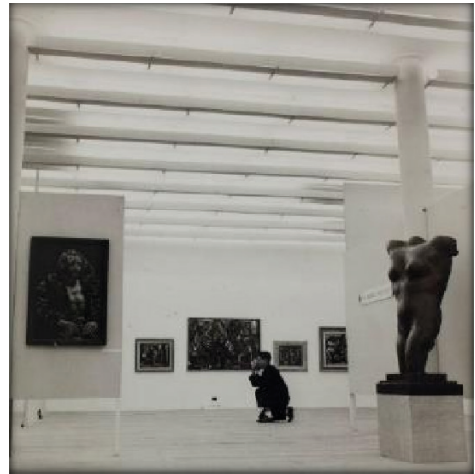


Figure 11: Photographer records the first biennial.

Source: São Paulo Biennial Foundation Collection.

Why do we become attached to objects? Why do we wish them not to change, and to continue to keep us company? [...] Our culture and our apparent tastes in the choice and arrangement of these objects are largely explained by the links that always bind us to a large part of society, whether they are tangible or invisible (HALBAWCHS, 1990, p. 131-132).

Emotions cannot be completely ignored in the creation of memories, since they are the main factors in the importance given to an experience. All memories are acquired in the context of a specific emotional state, and this state directly affects the retention of new memories.

Emotions are important for the proper functioning of memory, since the brain needs to make choices to preserve itself, since it would be unbearable to remember everything. Thus, it chooses what to store based on the emotional value of the events.

This is why buildings are so important, since they have always presented recreational proposals that generate considerable emotional reactions, such as the Belvedere Balls and the art exhibited at the biennial.

A plot of land alone does not bring benefits to the city. It can carry symbolism, but it does not have the capacity to provide experiences, which are the basis for the creation of memories and mental scenarios. These can only be experienced from a planned space and with social interactions, which have always been favored in the choice of building types of use.

When we are accustomed to a place and change environments, the images and social constructions brought by the past space affect the way we see the current space.

When we leave a painting gallery and come across a river pier, the entrance to a park, or the excitement in the street, we still experience the influence of the society of painters and we see things not as they are, but as they appear to those who are dedicated solely to reproducing images of them (HALBAWACHS, 1990, p. 144).

Therefore, we can conclude that MASP stands out today because it is located in a strategic and valued location, but at the same time, the importance of the site only remained because the buildings that previously occupied the land respected the history of the place. Remembering the past, seeing the changes of a site over time and its considerable notability, only this way can one understand why and how the current building, the São Paulo Museum of Art, became the icon that it is today. To visualize this change, a virtual reality reconstruction of these scenes was created along with this work. This experience can be viewed using the QR code below.



Figure 12: QR CODE visualization Belvedere, Biennial and MASP
Source: Own elaboration

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