

**Architecture** / Since 1964, the relationship between the Modernist Master and the French capital has grown, at a time when exile forced him to settle in France. The Parisian encounters with artists, poets and philosophers -which included many Communists-, influenced not only the life of the Brazilian genius, but his work as well.

# The Paris of Niemeyer



Jacques Benoit / "Construção! Ministères" 2010



Jacques Benoit / "A Ausência (The Absence)" 2013



Jacques Benoit / "Trois Traces d'Oscar - L'Humanité" 2005



Jacques Benoit / "Trois Traces d'Oscar - Rio" 2005

## Niemeyer in Paris

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**ART AND CONCRETE**  
Daily L'Humanité's headquarters in the vicinity of Paris are signed by Oscar Niemeyer. Above, the works of French artist Jacques Benoit inspired by the architect.



Martin Bureau/WFP - 11/3/04

Paris - On the one hand, the Brazilian Military Dictatorship's repression, which openly gave the communist architect a status of a public enemy. On the other hand, the freedom and the liberalism of Paris in the early Sixties. Parties, discussions, uncensored debates with an existentialist tone, in the cafés and on the Grands Boulevards. Very soon after the Military coup, the heart Oscar Niemeyer was found torn between these two worlds. The Militaries forced him to exile, thus deciding him to leave for France in 1964. But the glare of the Parisian life did not make him forget the fate of his fellow Brazilians. This duality marked Oscar's stay abroad, and greatly influenced his life and work.

This week in Paris, opens the largest exhibition ever held about Oscar Niemeyer's works outside of Brazil. CORREIO BRAZILIENSE explores the footsteps of the Modernist Master in the French capital, to show how the Ville Lumière has influenced the work of the architect in his post-Brasília period. And how Oscar has become an icon that has influenced generations of Parisians, mesmerized by his genius. The exhibition «Brasília. A Half-Century of the Capital of Brazil», yesterday opened to the public at the headquarters of the French Communist Party -built by Oscar-, is a tribute to the greatest Brazilian architect of all time. This beautiful building, erected in the north of Paris, was his first project abroad, and perhaps one of the most celebrated outside Brazil. Oscar's French period in France was successful: he designed several buildings around Paris and down other French cities.

Europe happened to be a natural destination for Niemeyer, whenever he realized that the Military Dictatorship would stifle his work. «I decided to go abroad, taking with me my pain, and my architecture. Those who meant to neutralize me, actually did give me,

unintentionally, my whole life's best opportunity. They made the world aware of my work as an architect, and made it understood within its soft and unexpected forms », says Niemeyer in his autobiography «The Curves of Time ». The great optimism nurturing his Parisian life, however, was overshadowed by concerns about what was happening then in Brazil, namely the hardening of Military repression. «This did create an atmosphere of threatening gloom over me in Paris, quite a painful one ». However, Oscar was not systematically persecuted by the Military regime. But he still had to report regularly to the Police, in order to justify his relationship with personalities considered to being subversive, such as Prestes. Dictatorship did strip him off mostly of what was most important to him : his work. Niemeyer's project of an airport for Brasília was boycotted, then ultimately rejected by the Militaries, which caused Oscar a deep sorrow. The episode precipitated his departure into exile. Known for his detestation of the aircraft, the architect embarked on a journey of 10 days of ocean

crossing to Europe. Same transportation was used when he later left France to return to Brazil.

### Celebrities

Arrived in Paris in late 1964, Oscar met Miguel Arraes, as well as an older acquaintance, Heron Alencar, someone from the University of Brasília's era. Both the politician and Oscar used to theorize revolution at the time, and how to take up arms. He claimed more than 6,000 men mobilized in the state of Pernambuco. The revolutionary dream was no longer appropriate by 1964, but Arraes and Niemeyer went on seeing each other steadily in the French capital, and after in Algeria.

In Paris, Oscar frequented great personalities, like Sartre, by participating to political events. Already in Brasília, the architect and the philosopher appreciated each other : «I admired his intelligence, devoted entirely to the support of the Third World peoples, also its rejection of dogma and values of Bourgeoisie», the architect commented about

the Existentialist philosopher. Oscar loved the provocations of the writer, such as when Sartre attended a party entirely in the bare. «A posture that would have caused a scandal within our Brazilian circles, but in France, within this Surrealistic context, was finally nothing more than mundane». Niemeyer also kept up contacts with the famous French poet and playwright Jean Genet, who occasionally lunched at the equally famous brasserie La Coupole.

### Communist

Among these new friends of the Old World, figured the French Minister André Malraux. It is to him that Niemeyer attributes the interest that France showed to its architecture. Thanks to Malraux, the architect received some special permission that allowed him to work in France, and in the wake Oscar was chosen to conceive the project of a French new town in Grasse. «It was so nice to chat with Malraux, to listen to him, to discuss everything. A real pleasure », enthused Oscar. Another very important contact was Raymond Aron, who did sponsor Niemeyer's application to the very institutional College of France, and to the Academy of Arts. The architect was to attend different interviews all conditioned by these applications -but never showed up, certainly because this process was one that Oscar despised, due to his hatred of the competition system which aimed to the promotion of elites... The link with the French Communist Party was really strong right from the beginning. Niemeyer was granted a total freedom to design the project for the Party's Headquarters.

### Addresses

Project figuring among those that he preferred. «This work was a great success, and the building now

receives on going visits ». Oscar did not hide his pride. He liked to recall what former French President Georges Pompidou said about the Party's headquarters (over the lunch with the architects who were part of the jury responsible for selecting the winning project of the Centre Pompidou) : «This is the only good thing these Commies have ever done », said jokingly the former president, according to the architect. Oscar befriended with members of the French Communist Party. «It was not only the success of this work that brought us together, me with all these comrades from the Party, it was above all our political struggle, that was the most important to us », Niemeyer liked to recall. One of the architect's great joys in Paris were the Humanité Festival, some big annual September event organized by the French Communist newspaper « L'Humanité ». Oscar stood alongside his friends, at the stand of the Communist Party. «How beautiful were these festivals, three days of joy with thousands of people embracing each other, solidarity, the celebration of a better world that was emerging,» reports the architect. The headquarters of « L'Humanité », located in a suburb of Paris, near the Stade de France, is a project signed by Oscar as well.

The Brazilian man loved the old continent's manners, and always referred to Europe. When the French Communist Party's building was ready, the legend says that some comrade called Niemeyer to ask permission to install some old desk in the room where he was working. «What a pleasure to see this respect for others' work! When will we hear in Brazil such a thing? » questioned Oscar when evoking the episode, years later.

Niemeyer lived in two apartments in Paris : first, rue François 1er, then on Boulevard Raspail, on the southern left bank of the capital. The architect appreciated

particularly this last address, which he considered to be more authentic, free from the tourist crowds overwhelming the other high spots of the city. From his apartment on Boulevard Raspail, Oscar could walk to the cafés, those legendary meeting points for all the artists and the Existentialists.

This world was one of the greatest fascination for the architect. «I loved Paris. The Paris of Gide, of Baudelaire, of Malraux and Camus. The Paris remembering the Revolution and loving freedom. The Seine, this old river, flowing indifferently to the lives of men. The Champs Elysées with its wooden terraces, its storefronts and cafés, its beautiful women. The Boulevard Raspail in Paris, where I lived then. Buildings of the same height, high windows and balconies often in bloom. The Paris of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Aragon and Nizan. The Paris « Rive Gauche » surveyed by Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Grey and Cocteau, the Paris of the Rotonde, the Flore and the Deux Magots ». Paris' Palaces and Parks and its rich intellectual life, made this period of exile a season that gave its colors to the architect's life and work.

But homesickness prowled constantly, despite the glare of Paris. One day, at his friend and designer's Louis Sunday, Niemeyer heard a samba, «The teacher» by Ataulfo Alves. «I do not know why, but this music, so Brazilian at heart, made me suddenly think so deeply of my country, of my friends, of my family, all so far from me, and to my shame, I could not hold back my tears. I did try to hide them. So I left onto the terrace, and there my tears could flow, freely and abundantly ».

From our correspondent, on the exhibition spot at the invitation of the French Communist Party.

### A legion of French Fans

### THE ARTIST

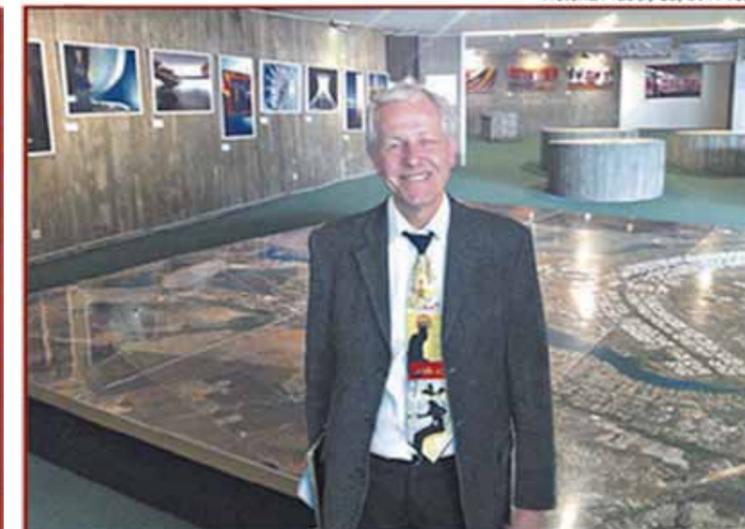
Jacques Benoit: «It was a productive period for him, that he shared with the Existentialists and other Parisian celebs.»



Helena Mader/CB/DA Press

### THE COMRADE

Gérard Fournier: «The contacts and friendships that Niemeyer made in Paris have certainly changed his perception of the world.»



Helena Mader/CB/DA Press