

The Taking of the Cinemateca Brasileira

Darlene J. Sadlier

On August 7, 2020, over one hundred supporters gathered in front of the Cinemateca Brasileira (CB) in São Paulo. There they watched members of Brazil's Federal Police, armed with machine guns, accompany government representative Hélio Ferraz de Oliveira, acting head of the Audiovisual Secretariat (SAv), to collect the venerable institution's keys from Francisco Câmara, director of the Roquette Pinto Educational Communication Association (ACERP), which had been officially contracted in March 2018 by the Ministries of Culture and Education to manage CB's operations.¹ In December 2019, less than one year into Jair Bolsonaro's presidency, which began with the dismantling of the Ministry of Culture, the government failed to renew the ACERP contract. New proposals for the CB's management would supposedly be considered in February 2020. This did not happen, nor did the government agree to an emergency proposal by ACERP to insure the CB's continued operation and safekeeping until a new organization could be named.

In February 2020, floodwaters in São Paulo struck one of the CB's units, which lost over one hundred thousand DVDs, film reels, and book collections to water damage. In May 2020, ACERP announced that it had received no government funds since December 2019 to cover utilities and staff wages, and to support the institution's mission as the nation's center for the acquisition, preservation, documentation, and exhibition of Brazilian audiovisual materials. That mission also involves projects and services in the areas of audiovisual research and information technology.

A week after the tension-filled handover of keys, ACERP was forced to dismiss the remaining members of CB's original sixty-two technical staff, who had stayed on for months without pay to safeguard materials, especially nitrate and acetate collections requiring strict temperature controls and regular checks. Security and general maintenance staff were let go until alarms were raised about the potential for fire and other hazards that could wipe out entire collections. In response, the government hired a small, untrained staff for basic services, including cleaning, fire prevention, and security needs.

Although Oliveira assured a group of staff members at the August handover that a new management organization would soon be named, repeated promises toward that end have yet to be fulfilled.² What hangs in the balance is Brazil's massive audiovisual memory—a legacy dating back to the turn of the twentieth century. Portions of that memory have already been erased by four fires in nitrate deposits, the latest in 2016. Over the last several years, cuts in specialist staff and untrained replacements have imperiled the CB's health and well-being. The current troubling scenario is far from unique. In 2018, a significant portion of the nation's patrimony went up in smoke when the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro burned to the ground. Losses there included irreplaceable artifacts documenting the history of Brazil's indigenous peoples and their rich heritage.

The potential losses at the CB, South America's largest audiovisual center, are significant: at risk are more than 250,000 reels of film representing some thirty thousand titles and an estimated one million documents. Archives of major directors such as Glauber Rocha, Carlos Reichenbach, and Ana Carolina; of film companies like Atlântida and Vera Cruz; of the state agency Embrafilme; and of CB founder Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes are among the many housed there. The CB's large newsreel collection includes newscasts of TV Tupi, the nation's first television network, created in 1950. Its conservation efforts and preservation facilities are world-renowned, with digital capacities alone enabling the transfer of 8mm, 9.5mm 16mm, and 35mm to HD, 2K, 4K, and 6K. Digitized materials include 6,322 films, 3,834 Brazilian



Figure 1. Cinemateca Brasileira headquarters. Image courtesy of the author.

and international film posters, 53,381 production stills, and 24,354 other items ranging from TV Tupi news scripts (1950–1980) to all issues of the prestigious journal *Filme Cultura*, first published in 1966.³

Occupying an area of over 250,000 square feet, the CB headquarters has two movie theaters; a café; a research library; four climate-controlled rooms, two for color and two for black-and-white films; four rooms in a





Figure 2. Facilities at Cinemateca Brasileira headquarters including (previous page) one of two movie theaters, and the video and digital vault; and (this page) the masters vault, and the nitrate vault. Images courtesy of the author.

separate area for nitrate films, each with a capacity of one thousand reels; plus office and exhibition spaces. Separate areas contain films with deterioration, copies of films for exhibition, and the vast video and digital collections. There are also laboratories with equipment for conservation and

preservation. A large outdoor screening facility with a forty-three by eighteen-foot screen offers 35mm and digital projection. All this and more has been taken and locked up by a splenetic government, with no sign of its release despite protests, film festival manifestos, editorials, letters, and petitions by hopeful yet increasingly anxious film communities in Brazil and abroad. The Brazilian public and the world have been denied the extraordinary holdings and work of this renowned institution, which is being held hostage for specious political reasons.

A Very Concise History of the Cinemateca Brasileira

The history of the CB is a tangled web of changing private organizations, government ministries, political disruptions, and disastrous accidents.⁴ Most scholars who write about the CB consider it post-WWII in origin with the 1946 founding of the Second Cine Club of São Paulo, although the short-lived First Cine Club of São Paulo, started in 1940 and banned in 1941 by Getúlio Vargas's right wing New State, is often cited as foundational. In Brazil, despite practitioners and enthusiasts of all political persuasions, film culture is on a rocky road anytime the right wing is in power. For the Vargas dictatorship (1937–1945) and the later right wing military regime (1964–1985), a close eye was kept over nongovernment filmmaking, and censorship and suppression were regularly carried out by agencies such as Vargas's Department of Press and Propaganda. The ban of the First Cine Club undoubtedly had to do with two of its founding members, Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes and Antônio Cândido, who were part of the Socialist Democratic Union and active in the underground anti-Vargas Radical Group for Popular Action. A young political militant, Salles Gomes had fled Brazil in the late 1930s, spending two years in Paris, much of the time in movie theaters and the French cinémathèque, which were foundational in his evolution into Brazil's foremost film critic and staunch supporter of the Second Cine Club of São Paulo.

In 1949, the Second Cine Club, a private entity, signed an agreement with the recently created Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo to establish the Museum's Filmoteca, also a private entity. Between 1949 and 1956, the Filmoteca was actively collecting materials with an aim to preserve the largest number of Brazilian films possible, beginning with the earliest days of cinema, along with a selection of international films. Returning to Paris in 1946, Salles Gomes was building relations between the Second Cine Club/Filmoteca and the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), to which he was elected vice president in 1951. (The Filmoteca became a member of FIAF in 1948.) Back in Brazil in 1954, he assumed the Filmoteca's directorship while continuing close ties with FIAF, whose donations, along with the Filmoteca's

own collecting, pushed the growing archive of over six million feet of celluloid beyond the space available in the Museum.

It was also apparent by 1956 that there was a difference between the museum's interest in film exhibition and the Filmoteca's desire to become a full-fledged cinemateque, which would require both state and federal support. In 1956, the Filmoteca left the museum to become the Cinemateca Brasileira, an autonomous institution whose administrative center and main collections, including the rare nitrate films, were moved to an office building in downtown São Paulo; other parts of its large film archive were stored across the city.

During the hot summer of 1957, a fire broke out in the highly combustible nitrate stock, consuming one third of the CB's films, along with its library of books and records, troves of documents, and camera collectibles. Nearly its entire collection of film copies for use in cine clubs and other venues was lost. Lost, too, were the papers donated by Alberto Cavalcanti, who left England to head the short-lived, Hollywood-style Vera Cruz Studios (1949–1954) in São Paulo. The CB received donations of films, books, and other materials from near and far, as well as small amounts of money, while keeping itself afloat with income from courses on cinema and film showings in the city and beyond. Its administrative center and remaining archives were relocated to a building and storage areas in the Parque Ibirapuera, one of the largest urban parks in Latin America. In 1961, the CB changed its juridical status to a foundation, enabling it to receive funds from the state of São Paulo. The following year, the nonprofit Society of Friends of the Cinema (SAC) was established to help finance CB activities and projects, which it continued to do into the period of the current debacle.⁵

Without a home under one roof, without secure storage for its collections, and with the inevitable ebb and flow of municipal and state funding, the CB struggled on. Yet it remained active in acquisitions and exhibition. The 1964 military coup that overthrew the democratically elected president João Goulart (1961–1964) did not bode well for “live culture” institutions like the CB, whose events attracted large and discerning audiences. The newly established Universidade de Brasília, with its first-rate faculty, was invaded by the military in 1964 and 1965; fifteen faculty members were dismissed as subversives and 223 of the remaining 305 faculty resigned in protest. One of the fields being developed there, and subsequently lost to this tragedy, was the audiovisual field under the direction of Salles Gomes, director Nelson Pereira dos Santos and film critic Jean-Claude Bernardet. The passing of Institutional Act-5 in 1968 by the right wing in the military, which launched a successful coup within the government that year, suspended all constitutional rights. Police and military torture of suspected dissidents became more prevalent. In 1969, the CB lost still another part of its collection to fire caused by the self-combustible nitrate.

Those dark days stretched into years, until the political opening in the late 1970s and the return to democracy in 1985. The CB's main activity from its modest base in the Parque Ibirapuera was providing films for cine club showings. Filmmaker Roberto Gervitz remembers as a teenager going to the CB on Fridays in 1974 to pick up films for his high school film club.

I asked myself how could a cinematheque function in such a precarious, humid and cramped space. The little room to check out films had a pair of old chairs, if I'm not mistaken from some movie theater, and there the kindly and patient Mr. Aloísio [Pereira Matos], longtime employee, handed me film reels, requiring their punctual return.⁶

The death of CB founder and leader Salles Gomes in 1977 at the age of sixty was a devastating blow.

There were some advances with the acquisition of used commercial lab equipment to copy and clean films, and the business of collecting audiovisual materials continued. Offsite storage agreements for archives were made as the CB office in Ibirapuera focused on administration, cataloging, and preservation. Occasional small windfalls from the state allowed the CB to add technical staff, and in 1980 a new film operations center for documentation and research opened in restored buildings in Conceição Park ceded by the municipality. But just two years later another fire caused by nitrate film broke out in an Ibirapuera storage building. In 1984, as an economic crisis loomed over the nation, the CB relinquished its long-held private status to become incorporated into the National Pro-Memory Foundation in the Ministry of Education and Culture, with guarantees given for its administrative and management autonomy.

As the country moved from a twenty-year dictatorship to democracy, ministries and their oversight changed. In 1985, the foundation and the CB were attached to the Ministry of Culture after the separation of Education into a separate ministry by José Sarney, the first civilian president after the dictatorship. The year 1988 was a banner year for the country and the CB. A new "citizens" constitution, created from scratch with popular input, was celebrated nationwide. In São Paulo, outgoing mayor Jânio Quadros ceded to the CB the buildings and land originally occupied by the municipal slaughterhouse in the borough Vila Clementino next to Vila Mariana.

Constructed in the late nineteenth century, the slaughterhouse helped to feed the city's fast-growing population, whose many immigrants, attracted by job opportunities, built homes in the farmland surrounding it. In 1927, as the two boroughs grew and prospered, the slaughterhouse closed and its facilities were used as storage. Beginning in 1988, the remaining red brick buildings with their beautiful arched doorways were preserved and restored

over a nineteen-year period, to become one of the world's largest cinema-theques and a leading center for audiovisual preservation.

Between 1984 and 2003, the institution had what might be called protected status as part of foundations and institutes designed to preserve the nation's heritage or patrimony. This was important protection during the conservative presidency of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–1992), who replaced the Ministry of Culture in 1990 with a Secretariat of Culture tied to his office, and who abolished the federal agency Embrafilme, created in 1969 for the production, funding, and distribution of Brazilian film. Collor also revoked the 1986 Sarney Law, which brought together public and private sectors in an agreement to incentivize cultural production. (In 1991, just prior to Collor's impeachment, the Rouanet Law was instituted, not without controversy, to provide tax incentives to companies and individuals sponsoring cultural production.) In 1992, the Ministry of Culture was revived under Itamar Franco (1992–1995), who succeeded the disgraced Collor as president. It was reorganized and strengthened under the moderate-liberal and left-liberal presidencies, respectively, of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2003) and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011).

With every shift of the political winds, changes occurred. In 2003, with the promise of greater assistance under the Ministry of Culture's Audiovisual Secretariat (SAv), CB council members agreed to relinquish the institution's long-standing association with the National Institute of Historic and Artistic Patrimony (formerly the National Pro-Memory Foundation) and join the Secretariat. It was during the Lula administration that the Society of Friends of the Cinema (SAC), which had long supported the CB, received Ministry of Justice approval to become an Organization of Civil Society with Public Interest (SO), allowing it to enter fundraising agreements and partnerships with the public and private sectors. The SAC was highly successful in this regard, and the period between 2008 and 2013 is generally regarded as the most stable and dynamic in the CB's history.

Fortunes began slowly declining when Minister of Culture Marta Suplicy and Leopoldo Nunes, the head of SAv, began a three-year investigation in 2013 of SAC bookkeeping and purchases.⁷ During that tumultuous period, monies earmarked in the ministry for the CB were frozen, the CB's longstanding Consulting Council was disbanded and around 140 CB staff members were dismissed. Ultimately the investigation found some administrative problems, but only one percent of its budgeted one hundred million reais remained under question. In February 2016, with diminished resources and staff, the CB suffered still another fire in an outdoor nitrate storage, which consumed just over one thousand reels representing more than 750 film titles, the vast majority being newsreels.

Misfortunes continued with the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016) and installation of Michel Temer (2016–2018), her vice president, who helped bring about her political demise. In May 2016, Temer abolished the Ministry of Culture, although public outcry was so great that it was reinstated later that same month. In the wake of that failed move, ACERP, under contract with the Ministry of Education, was named over longtime supporter SAC to manage the CB, which was in the Ministry of Culture. In 2018 the CB's decades-old geometric bright red logo with a straight line and two circles representing a transversal view of a projector was discarded without CB consultation by the Temer government, which thought the image was phallic. A somber 3D geometric logo replaced the vibrant original one by Alexandre Wollner, one of Brazil's first designers. The Ministry of Culture also did not survive and, along with two other ministries, was abolished by Jair Bolsonaro, as he prepared to enter the presidency in January 2019. The CB became part of the newly formed Special Secretariat of Culture (SEC), which is administered by the Ministry of Tourism. Seen as an economic vector, culture under Bolsonaro is officially classified as a vehicle to promote tourism.

In 2019 ACERP also fell out of favor with the government when Bolsonaro deemed the Ministry of Education a hotbed of left wing activism because of its programming. (Its education channel featured a documentary about Rosa Parks.) In December, the government did not renew ACERP's contract, the pandemic soon reared its head, the CB discontinued film showings and exhibitions, and like other cultural institutions it closed its doors to the public in March.⁸

SOS Cinemateca Brasileira and Its Manifestos

But the CB was not like other institutions. By March 2020 there were no funds for its specialist and other staff, for security and fire protection services, or even for utilities. Fortunately, electricity vital for temperature-controlled areas for film and other vulnerable materials was not cut off, although the bill was burgeoning. In May, noted film scholars and professionals who had been associated with the CB over the years, among them Carlos Augusto Calil, Ismail Xavier, Cacá Diegues, and Eduardo Morettin, wrote an open letter-manifesto titled "The Brazilian Cinemateca Asks for Help" to address the rapidly deteriorating situation.⁹ Nearly twenty thousand local and international supporters signed to register their concern and rally to the CB defense. That same month ACERP filed a lawsuit against the government for an unremunerated R\$11 million (US\$2 million) for CB expenses from 2019 into 2020. ACERP still retained control despite the government's decision not to renew its contract. The organization retained the CB's keys



Figure 3. Banner for the SOS Cinemateca Brasileira movement outside the CB headquarters (top), and the original logo for the protest, artwork by Victor Nosek (bottom). Images courtesy of the author.

and refused to hand them over until the government officially terminated the contract agreement.

On June 4, the CB's unpaid staff initiated a crowdfunding site for emergency support, which raised R\$125,000 (about US\$23,000) in thirty days. That same day, and with pandemic protocols in place, 150 people from the emerging movement SOS Cinemateca Brasileira gathered to protest in front of the institution. The "Manifesto Cinemateca Brasileira: Society's Patrimony" was read and copies were distributed to those in attendance. Thirty-nine entities, including national associations of film critics, directors, cinematographers, and screenwriters as well as state audiovisual unions, were among Brazilian signatories. Among the more than thirty international entities to sign was FIAF, representing over 150 cinemateques worldwide.¹⁰

With reporters in attendance, the event and manifesto received broad media coverage. Actors and directors from different generations and different parts of the country, many with celebrity status, joined their voices to the protest as representatives of over two thousand individuals who had deposited their films and other materials with the CB. The original red CB logo returned as a symbol of the ongoing protests, often superimposed by the black block-lettered initials "SOS" On June 12, CB employees went on strike, although a few volunteered to remain and safeguard the valuable contents.

On June 23, a new head of the SEC, actor Mário Frias, who had no public administration experience, replaced actress Regina Duarte, another Bolsonaro supporter without administrative expertise.¹¹ Roberto Alvim, the first to briefly head the Secretariat, was dismissed on January 17 after a public outcry over an official video broadcast on national television, in which he aped the language of Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Germany's Minister of Propaganda, proclaiming art as national and heroic. The video's background music was from Wagner's *Lohengrin*, an opera much beloved by Hitler.

Duarte's dismissal after sixty days for general incompetency, failure to react to deaths of renowned cultural figures, and use of a song associated with the military dictatorship, had none of the immediate high drama of the Alvim dismissal; that is, until Bolsonaro announced in May that Duarte's return to her São Paulo family (after a government "exoneration" of her in May) would be recompensed with another SEC appointment whose work could be administered from São Paulo: the CB directorship. However, Bolsonaro was soon made aware he had no ability to appoint a director of an institution under the control of a privately operated OS, in this case, ACERP. Frustrated, he lashed out publicly about the situation where the government, despite funding an institution, had no ability to remove or appoint its leadership.¹² A rumor that the CB would be relocated to Brasília was effectively countered by São Paulo city officials. A more real and pervasive fear was that the institution would simply be left without funds and ultimately closed.

On July 14, another demonstration of support took place before the CB. The word *abraço* (big embrace) was projected on the facade as protesters reached out their arms to another to form a circle around the building. Among the many to speak on behalf of the CB that day were directors Roberto Gervitz, Joel Pizzini, Marcelo Machado, and Tata Amaral, distributor Adhemar Oliveira, and editor Cristina Amaral. Large SOS banners, posters, and projected images calling for public support of the CB and staff strike were strategically placed around the city.

Tensions between ACERP and the government increased. On July 8, new SEC head Mário Frias sent a letter to ACERP demanding the handover of the CB's keys, which the OS refused to do until its services were officially terminated. Soon after, an attempt by Ministry of Tourism representatives to enter the CB was blocked by ACERP staff there. A police report was filed to complain that government officials were prevented from carrying out their duties. In late July, the District Attorney's Office in São Paulo filed a lawsuit with the Attorney General to demand steps be taken to protect the CB by issuing a new contract with ACERP—a request that was denied on August 3 by the Federal Justice Department, which stated that decisions about an institution's administrative management was in the hands of the executive. Four days later, on August 7, ACERP handed over the keys and dismissed its remaining staff, ending its contractual obligations.



Figure 4. Protesters outside the Cinemática Brasileira in July 2020. Projected on the CB building was the word *abraço* (meaning “the big embrace”). Image courtesy of the author.

Although lines of communication seem open between the SEC and SAC, which is well prepared to step into the management void, no signs of any agreement, even a temporary one, appear on the horizon. On October 27, World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, over two hundred people from various associations and support groups solemnly gathered outside the CB to protest its three hundredth day under federal lock and key.

The Waiting Game

Newspapers, TV broadcasts, and podcasts, along with webinars and small forums on social media outlets such as YouTube and Facebook, continue to carry word about the crisis. Live online discussions featuring academics, film directors, former CB council members, and SAC representatives survey the situation, providing updates and context for the urgent need to rescue the vast patrimony at risk. A Facebook site called Cinemateca Acesa (Cinemateca on Fire) functions as a calendar of events and space to watch recorded interviews with former CB specialists, who describe their work and urge public action in a series called “Without Workers Archives Cannot be Constructed or Preserved.”¹³ One dark and ironic video on the site shows two Ministry of Tourism officials talking about the CB’s importance and pledging their support to its continuation. The video is derisively labeled “Jogo de Cena” (Playing), the title of Eduardo Coutinho’s 2007 documentary that questions the ability to perceive whether what is said on camera is true or not.

The government’s strategic stalling tactic in negotiating the CB’s release, with its hollow-sounding promise to contract a new OS, has potentially kept more forceful and vociferous local action under wraps. Nonetheless, manifestos and open letters with long lists of signatories continue to circulate along with greater international attention. Among the first articles to appear outside Brazil was Isabel Steven’s brief but compelling “SOS Cinemateca Brasileira” for the British Film Institute’s September 2020 issue of *Sight & Sound*.¹⁴ *Cineaste* followed shortly thereafter with a news piece, “Cinemateca Brasileira Is in Danger,” by Dennis West.¹⁵ Representing 180 audiovisual institutions from sixty-five countries and six continents, the International Association of Cinema, Audiovisual and Media Schools (CILECT) issued its formal statement of support for urgent funding and swift resolution to the CB crisis. On September 21, the Brazilian Association for Audiovisual Preservation (ABPA) published “An Open Letter in Defense of the Audiovisual Technical Center and the Brazilian Cinemateca.”¹⁶ Its long list of signatories included unions representing the film industry in eight states. Brazil’s Society for Cinema and Audiovisual Studies (SOCINE), the country’s principal media

studies organization, adopted the ABPA manifesto and republished it in its entirety on their website.¹⁷

On September 25, Roberto Gervitz, one of the leading voices in the protest, read a statement at the Gramado Film Festival, which quickly caught attention and circulated as the “Gramado Manifesto.” A strong declaration, it forcefully posits what present circumstances and past events forebode for the CB’s future:

Will the country that impotently watches the burning of fauna and flora in the Pantanal and Amazonia tolerate the extinguishing of the images that constitute our identity as a nation? Will it accept the occurrence of a new shame that would join the long list of national shames, among them, the calamitous and predicted fire at the National Museum?¹⁸

The manifesto is scathingly critical of the basic services reinstated by the government, such as cleaning, maintenance, and fire protection, whose workers, it states, are totally lacking in the expertise required to keep the institution safe.

On October 5, days after Gervitz’s reading of the Gramado Manifesto, UNESCO’s World Memory Program for Latin America and the Caribbean (MOWLAC) issued an alert about the importance of film preservation and the need to return the CB to its primary mission of conserving the nation’s audiovisual memory. The statement cites as an example Mário Peixoto’s *Limite* (1930), the Brazilian silent classic preserved by the CB, which is listed on the World Memory registry.¹⁹ One day later, the Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives (CCAAA) published a declaration for a resolution with immediate funding to allow the CB to carry out its mission “before it is too late.”²⁰ An umbrella for nine worldwide professional archive organizations, including FIAF, the CCAAA called attention in its statement to the catastrophic consequences of past fires and floods resulting from the CB’s endemic lack of resources.

Mobilization in early October grew to include an online forum sponsored by the School of Communication and Arts (ECA) at the Universidade de São Paulo. It featured Gervitz, Eduardo Morettin (ECA), and Débora Butruce, president of the Brazilian Association for Audiovisual Preservation (ABPA), who discussed the impact of funding and staff losses on the CB’s preservation, production, and research activities.²¹ That debate coincided with the release of a manifesto signed by twenty-one Brazilian directors in the It’s All True international documentary film festival, now in its twenty-fifth season. In the manifesto, special attacks were launched against the government’s “low cultural and intellectual level” as exemplified by the substitution of the SEC, in the Ministry of Tourism, for the Ministry of Culture, which

had been eradicated. The manifesto urged filmmakers not to be intimidated by the Bolsonaro administration and “to find new forms of producing and registering [Brazil’s] memory.” It added: “A country without images of itself is like someone who does not know what they are.”²²

The government’s game of cat and mouse with SAC and its supporters continued to foster hope for a management contract to allow the CB’s reopening. But as weeks and months pass without an agreement, as the pandemic makes mass mobilizations more difficult, as myriad local and international denunciations seem unable to move a recalcitrant government, and as media attention turns to other domestic crises, one senses a pall gradually lowering over the situation. The question is whether anything or anyone can move a government to act when it has no interest in culture except as a tourist attraction and even so remains hostile to it.

A mournfulness is slowly making its way into celebratory demonstrations to honor the CB. Held online in late October and early November 2020, the forty-fourth São Paulo International Film Festival departed from its longstanding tradition of giving its prestigious Humanity Prize to an individual and bestowed the award on the entire staff of the CB. According to festival director Renata de Almeida, the idea for a collective recipient emerged after hearing Gabriela Sousa de Queiroz, head of the CB’s Center for Documentation, in an early online forum describe a literal obstacle course of a locked door, a failed generator, and no lights, that nearly prevented a scheduled meeting of workers in the CB to discuss the institution’s defense.²³



Figure 5. Cinemateca Brasileira’s Documentation Center. Image courtesy of the author.

The Humanity Prize was one of three major acknowledgments of the CB's significance at the festival. In a demonstration of audiovisual solidarity, FIAF sent to the festival a collection of thirty one-minute video commentaries in support of the CB by thirty of its representatives from archives and cinema-theques around the globe. These videos were featured one by one as introductions to films programmed for the festival.²⁴ Finally, as part of the festival closing, FIAF presented its annual award to Walter Salles in recognition of his films, his signal role in the preservation of Brazil's film heritage, and his solidarity with the CB. The presentation of the award reads: "[A]t a time when the very existence of the Cinemateca Brasileira, a historic member of FIAF, is increasingly under threat, giving the 2020 FIAF Award to Walter Salles (a former member of the Cinemateca's Board of Directors and recent signatory of an international petition in support of the institution) seems to us particularly timely."²⁵

The festival closing also coincided with a newspaper article by Salles appearing in the *Folha de S. Paulo*, which has regularly reported on the CB crisis and the many efforts to secure its reopening. The article titled "Threat to the Cinemateca Brasileira Touches Even Director Martin Scorsese" brings to public awareness not only the concern of the world-renowned director and Film Foundation President, but also what Brazilians risk losing.²⁶ Salles is very good at bringing public awareness to the enormity of the audiovisual memory at stake, as well as to specific moments of national pride that might never be seen again. "The first registers of Brazil's physical and human landscapes from 1899. The documentaries first to show Amazonia, the Northeast, the South of the country. Marshal Rondon's expedition from 1924 to 1932 [into the Amazon Basin]. The history of our soccer filmed by Canal (Channel) 100. Garrincha's dribbles. Pelé's goals. The faces of fans at Macará." To these words he adds Scorsese's own:

The arts are not a luxury—they are a necessity, as demonstrated by their incontestable role in the history of humanity. And the preservation of the arts, especially of one as fragile as cinema, is a difficult but essential task. This isn't my opinion. It's a fact. I sincerely hope that the federal authorities in Brazil abandon any idea of withdrawing financial support and do what is necessary to do to protect the archive and dedicated team at the Cinemateca.

Salles ends his piece with a direct call to the government:

The Special Secretariat of Culture promises an edict for selecting the next management of the Cinemateca. May it choose an institution with legitimacy and knowledge to lead it back to the prominent position it has held. Time is urgent. If something were to happen to its archive, it would be like losing our Library of Alexandria.

To his plea for a nation's past to survive and flourish into the future, one can only add: Amen.

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Postscript. In December 2020, the government announced that a temporary three-month contract would be signed in mid-January 2021 with longtime patron Sociedade Amigos da Cinemateca to manage the institution. Although discussions appear to continue and there are hopes for the Cinemateca's reopening, the temporary contract has yet to be signed.

The author wishes to thank the many individuals who sent updates from Brazil on the crisis at the Cinemateca Brasileira. English translations from the Portuguese are my own. Texts referenced in English are cited in their original Portuguese in the notes below. Names of Brazilian government offices and associations are in English with their Portuguese acronyms.

1. The government contracted ACERP in 2016, but the three-year agreement ending in 2019 was not signed until 2018.

2. A government decree was filed in November 2020 to reincorporate the CB, along with promises to call for applications to contract a new management, but for an emergency three-month period only.

3. The CB's Banco de Conteúdos Culturais website contains considerable data of this type. Unfortunately, the site went down in November 2020 because of a power outage and as of this writing has yet to be reconnected.

4. There are three important sources of information on the CB's history: Carlos Roberto de Souza, "A Cinemateca Brasileira e a preservação de filmes no Brasil" (M.A. thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 2008); Fausto Douglas Correa Jr., *A Cinemateca Brasileira: Das luzes aos anos de chumbo* (São Paulo: Editora Unesp, 2010); and Fabiana Maria de Oliveira Ferreira, "A Cinemateca Brasileira e as políticas públicas para a preservação de acervos audiovisuais no Brasil" (M.A. thesis, Brasília, Universidade de Brasília, 2020).

5. For more information on the history of SAC (Sociedade Amigos da Cinemateca), see "Nota sobre a Sociedade Amigos da Cinemateca," <https://abcine.org.br/site/nota-sobre-a-sociedade-amigos-da-cinemateca-sac/>.

6. Roberto Gervitz, "Imagens que nos revelam," *Estado da Arte: Revista de cultura artes e ideias*, Estado de São Paulo, August 1, 2020, <https://estadodaarte.estadao.com.br/imagens-revelam-gervitz-cinemateca-ea/>.

7. See Ana Paula Sousa, "O signo do caos: Como a Cinemateca Brasileira virou um cavalo de batalha do governo Bolsonaro," *Piauí Revista Edição 169: Folha de São Paulo*, October 2020, <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/o-signo-do-caos/>. The essay is one of the most comprehensive and informative on the CB crisis.

8. SAV technicians warned the Ministry of Education of the vulnerability of the CB without management, but the ministry did not budge in its disinterest in the partnership. ACERP remained in charge of the CB for six months without a legal contract.

9. For the manifesto and its signatories, see https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/po/governo_federal_secretaria_especial_de_cultura_sec_cinematca_brasileira_pede_socorro/.

10. For the manifesto and its signatories, see <https://cinematecaparaense.wordpress.com/2020/06/05/manifesto-cinematca-brasileira-patrimonio-da-sociedade/>.

11. The SEC discussion here is partly based on information in Rafael Luna's article "The Current Crisis" (<https://arturita.net/the-current-crisis/>), which he wrote in collaboration with the ABPA. An excellent overview of the period February to August 2020, the piece provided a valuable calendar of events that greatly supported the writing of the present article.

12. Ana Paula Sousa, "O signo do caos," <https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/materia/o-signo-do-caos/>.

13. "Cinematca Acesa," <https://www.facebook.com/CinematcaAcesa/posts/169676571450520/>.

14. Isabel Stevens, "SOS Cinematca Brasileira," *Sight & Sound* 30, no. 7 (September 2020): 14–15.

15. Dennis West, "Cinematca Brasileira Is in Danger," *Cineaste*, August 18, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/CineasteMagazine/posts/d41d8cd9/3298914250130979/>.

16. "Carta aberta em defesa do centro técnico audiovisual e da Cinematca Brasileira," <http://www.abpreservacaoaudiovisual.org/site/noticias/63-carta-aberta-em-defesa-da-cinematca-brasileira-sp-e-da-cinematca-capit%C3%B3lio-rs.html>.

17. "Carta aberta em defesa do centro técnico audiovisual e da Cinematca Brasileira," *Socine*, September 21, 2020, <https://www.socine.org/2020/09/carta-aberta-em-defesa-do-centro-tecnico-audiovisual-e-da-cinematca-brasileira/>.

18. A large part of Roberto Gervitz's "Manifesto Gramado" was published as "Desprezo pela história do país" in *O Globo*, October 13, 2020, <https://oglobo.globo.com/opiniao/desprezo-pela-historia-do-pais-24685998>.

19. "Alerta pela Cinematca Brasileira," MOWLAC/UNESCO, October 5, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/CinematcaAcesa/posts/169676571450520/>.

20. "CCAAA Declaration about the situation of the Cinematca Brasileira," October 6, 2020, <https://www.ccaaa.org/pages/news-and-activities/CCAAA-declaration-cinematca-brasileira.html>.

21. See also Eduardo Morettin's essay "O sequestro de nossa memória audiovisual," *Jornal da USP*, August 8, 2020, <https://jornal.usp.br/artigos/o-sequestro-de-nossa-memoria-audiovisual/>.

22. "Manifesto dos diretores brasileiros do Festival 'É Tudo Verdade,'" October 10, 2020, <https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Antifascismo/Manifesto-dos-diretores-brasileiros-do-Festival-e-Tudo-Verdade-/47/48933>.

23. Renata Almeida, "Prêmio Humanidades-Funcionários Cinematca," <https://www.facebook.com/CinematcaAcesa/posts/168701068214737/>.

24. "Video Messages Celebrating the Cinematca Brasileira," <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/News/Cinematca-Brasileira-video-messages.html>.

25. "Brazilian Filmmaker Walter Salles Recipient of 2020 FIAF Award," <https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/News/2020-FIAF-Award-Walter-Salles.html>.

26. Walter Salles, "Ameaça à Cinematca Brasileira sensibiliza até o director Martin Scorsese," *Folha de S. Paulo*, November 3, 2020, <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2020/11/ameaca-de-bolsonaro-a-cinematca-sensibiliza-ate-martin-scorsese.shtml>.

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