Discussion Questions (10/09)

Discussion Questions on Vale: (submitted by Abe)

1. Vale claims that the modern capitals differs from the “natural” capitals in several aspects, particularly in their symbolic role. Some of the things the modern capital must do are 1) legitimize the power of the ruling individual or group, 2) act as mediators in a collection of people that have become a single sovereign state (and thus their locality may favor a certain political faction), 3) house and often be dominated by the “business of government”. In light of these observations, why was Brasília built when it was, where it was? What in the Brazilian situation of the mid-century provided the means and motivations to bring about Brasília (why not earlier, if there had been interest in moving the capital since 1761)? Were there different factors other than those described by Vale playing in the construction of Brasília?

2. Vale spends some time explaining the function of subnational, personal, and supranational identities, stating that “what is passed off as a quest for national identity is in reality a product of the search for subnational, personal, and supranational identity” (48). How the search for these identified play out in the construction of Brasília? Was one more preeminent than the other?

3. Our readings talk about Brasília's equalitarian housing, buildings designed for the cohabitation of socio-economic classes, its architecturally sleek, rational modernity, which, as Vale explains it, are related to the fact that “rather than being a solution which grappled with the problems and patterns of existing Brazilian cities, the new capital was designed as a de novo alternative” (119). What does this tell us about Brazilians perception of the state’s role, vis-à-vis social rights and equality? How about the ideology and methodology of Kubitschek’s government?

Discussion Questions on Solt: (submitted by Amber)

1. Form is the essential and uniting factor of concrete poetry; Mary Ellen Solt presents us with this definition of concrete poetry: “form=content/content=form”(13). In their “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry”, poets Augusto de Campos, Decio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos expand on this definition saying, “In a more advanced stage, isomorphism tends to resolve itself into pure structural movement...at this phase, geometric form and mathematics of composition (sensible rationalism) prevail”(72) This idea of finding art in pure structure is similar to the ideas that Lúcio Costa is presenting in his article “Reasons of the New Architecture” where he calls for people to find beauty in the engineering and unembellished edges of buildings instead of in gaudy, outdated architecture. How do the “Pilot Plans” of these two movements relate and what interaction did these two movements have? What similar ideas do they express? Do they have similar effects on the people?

2. In class we talked about the importance of technology for spreading the idea of national identity (the case of radio and how it helped spread samba). Solt mentions the
popularity of another technological advancement, the moving picture, as helping to create a world where people were more prepared for the new visual form of reading required by Concrete Poetry (60). João Cabral de Melo Neto, on the other hand, says in “On the Modern Function of Poetry” that the modern poet has been indifferent to the “powerful mediums of diffusion” like the radio. Is there a relationship between technology and Concrete Poetry? Did the similarities to this popular medium of television and movies make Concrete Poetry more accessible to a wider population? How could technology like the television have been used to transmit this to more people? Would something be lost in the attempt to make it mass culture, or would it have had an even deeper impact by transforming the structure of this medium as well?

Discussion Questions on Holston: (submitted by Mónica)

1. Holston continuously refers to the "Brazilianizing" of Brásilia. Do you believe that the design and organization of Brásilia actually transformed Brazilian society? What is the memory that is recorded by memorializing the city?

2. In Brazilian Corollary Le Corbusier personifies the city, "And the whole region would speak above the water, above the earth, in the air, it would express, 'architecture'; its discourse would be a poem of human geometry and natural fantasy". What vision or inspiration do you think the architects had for Brásilia? What led up to its creation? Do you feel contingency design, that it is "fixing the present based on an imagined future," is effective?