

Modern facades of Post and Telegraph Agencies

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Received: September 12, 2023

Accepted: November 30, 2023

Online Published: August 28, 2024

ABSTRACT

Until not too long ago, postal and telegraph services were the means of communication that connected people throughout the Brazilian territory. Initially, both services were provided by separate entities and operated in distinct buildings, often in rented, loaned, and precarious spaces. The construction of proprietary buildings began from the 1st Republic (1889) onwards, following the eclectic style, the prevalent architectural style of the time. After 1930, with the unification of those two public services into a single department, the construction of proprietary buildings gained a new momentum. This study focuses on that new moment, providing examples of the new architecture of Post and Telegraph agencies, with standardized projects built throughout the country. Such structures featured "modern" facades following the rationalization of Art Deco for reflecting the new era in Brazil and the modern image desired by the federal government for the country. The study concentrates on iconographic analyses of agencies built before and after 1930 towards demonstrating the transition of an important period in Brazil, reflected in its Post and Telegraph agencies, but extending to all national public services.

KEYWORDS: Post and telegraph. Architecture. Public service.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Brazil underwent a structural transformation. The coffee crisis led to a certain exodus from rural areas to cities, causing numerous problems. Simultaneously, in the political arena, the breakdown of an agreement for the presidential succession between politicians of São Paulo and Minas Gerais resulted in Getúlio Vargas assuming central power in the 1930 Revolution. His government project aimed to transform the country, modernize its infrastructure through construction, and improve public services. The desire for modernity was reflected in the architecture of public buildings: schools, hospitals, railway stations, and post and telegraph agencies began to be constructed with architectural styles that showcased the progress envisioned for the country.

The neoclassical and eclectic styles present in buildings constructed during the 1st Republic (1889-1930) gave way to Art Deco, a style that began to be employed in various public facilities from 1934 and the trend reflected in several forms of art, representing contemporary life, modernity and the speed of machines.

As expected, Art Deco was adopted in the construction of numerous Post and Telegraph agencies, in variations that still can be seen in the cities' landscapes.

This study showcases the new vision of modernity intended during that period focusing on post and telegraph agencies.

2 OBJECTIVE AND JUSTIFICATION

This study showcases the modernity envisioned by Getúlio Vargas for public services in the early years of his government through a rational and standardized architecture, focusing on the facades of the agencies of the then Department of Post and Telegraph. Such understanding is crucial for the demonstration of the use of architecture by the new government concerned over conveying a fresh image to the country, i.e., one of advancement and progress. The Art Deco style employed in those constructions was considered modern and widely used in public buildings constructed during that period.

3 METHODOLOGIES

A bibliographic analysis on the topic addressed, i.e., the agencies of the Department of Post and Telegraph and the Art Deco style applied, was conducted. The aforementioned Department was contextualized as a public company and its constructions during the Getúlio Vargas government period (1930-1950) were examined. The Art Deco style was briefly analyzed with a focus on its main architectural characteristics and application in Post and Telegraph buildings.

Following the theoretical foundation, an iconographic comparison of images of agencies built before and after the analyzed period was made and the main characteristic elements of the Art Deco style employed were identified in models constructed after 1930.

4 THE POST AND GETÚLIO VARGAS

The postal service has a history of over 360 years in Brazil. We might go even further back, pointing to Pero Vaz de Caminha's letter written in 1500, informing the Portuguese Crown on the arrival of Pedro Álvares Cabral's fleet in Brazil and the discoveries made, thus serving as the first correspondence issued in the country. However, from the beginning, the postal service in Brazil followed the regulations and systems of the Portuguese administration, with no official postal activity in the territory before 1798 (Costa, 2017). The services were run by private individuals under concessions from the Crown and, in Brazil, they were authorized **by** João Cavaleiro Pessoa, in 1663 - although controversial, the date is accepted as January 25th and considered the one of the creations of postal services in Brazil (Costa, 2017). In the mid-18th, the Portuguese Crown took over the postal services and, since then, their administration has been under public control - it is currently managed by the Brazilian Company of Post and Telegraphs, created in March 1969. However, before becoming a public company, the Post was part of the Ministry of Industry, Transportation, and Public Works of Getúlio Vargas' Government, under the Department of Post and Telegraphs when the two services were unified.

Getúlio Vargas assumed power in 1930 through a military coup against the existing policy, which favored the coffee elite of São Paulo and Minas Gerais. Brazil was undergoing a significant transition from rural to urban living and, in his speeches, Vargas advocated for the valorization of workers, modernization, and integration of the country, emphasizing education and improving infrastructure with the construction of new schools, hospitals, railway stations, and communication and postal services. The latter sector was crucial for the country's integration. Distances were shortened through the exchange of letters and telegraph messages, which was also important for the agreements of the Revolution. In this sense, improving that infrastructure was essential.

From 1930 onwards, the government has implemented standardized building projects for reducing costs and expediting the installation of those facilities. Vargas' government aimed

to mark the presence of the State in the lives of the population and cities, giving the modern touch he had preached and imprinting a mark of his administration.

Reis (2015) highlights some public building projects constructed during Vargas' government and featured in the Public Servant Magazine (e.g., the monumental nature of some constructions inspired by the architecture then in vogue in the United States, which was starting to culturally influence Brazil and was described as modern (later categorized as Art Deco and its variations, sometimes called protomodern). Such buildings are still prominent in the current landscape; they often serve as road references and locational markers and are part of the daily lives of cities and many citizens.

The agencies of the Department of Post and Telegraph did not deviate from the idea of their representation as public buildings. They made their presence felt in the city, being relatively large buildings that stood out in the surroundings, serving as locational landmarks and drawing attention with new construction techniques and materials in most locations where they were constructed. The Art Deco style constructions provided buildings with a modern look quite different from those seen shortly after the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, which adopted the eclectic style.

5 ART DÉCO AND THE BRAZILIAN POST

The idea of modernity prevalent from the 1920s was reflected in a movement called Art Deco, which emerged in the 1910s in Europe, spreading worldwide and influencing not only architecture, but also other fields of arts such as fashion, sculpture, painting, design, and cinema. It reached its peak between 1920-1930, declining in the late 1930s. Historically, it originated from the International Exhibition of Decorative and Modern Industrial Arts, held in Paris in 1925, from which it derived its name. Some national authors classify constructions in such a style as 'protomodern' (Correia, 2008).

Given the imprecisions of alternative denominations, in our view, Art Deco - despite its limitations - still stands as the most appropriate and comprehensive term to categorize a particular architectural trend that spread in the country between the 1930s and mid-1950s. It accounts for relevant characteristics of this production and is clearly linked to a specific period (Correia, 2008).

Art Deco architecture was widely adopted in public buildings in Brazil particularly during the first government of Getúlio Vargas, which intended to convey the ideology of the Varga's Estado Novo, an ideological instrument of the State, to the population (Kremer-Cabral, 2022).

Palotta (2015) showed the difference in architectural styles employed in public buildings. Art Deco incorporated the values of the industrial and technological world using current materials, new construction techniques with reinforced concrete, clean facades, visualization of structures, recessed or projected plans, and monumental, sober, and stripped-down character, thus symbolizing the progress intended for the country. Kremer-Cabral (2022) and Correia (2008) listed numerous elements that characterize the style (e.g., floor plans that

blend rectangular and circular shapes and use of corner windows and terraces). References to the speed of machines are found in the friezes of facades or the bows of ships through curved elements, masts, and railings (Kremer-Cabral, 2022) in the Streamline variant of Art Deco. Stepped cornices, vertical relief friezes, and symmetrical facades are present in the ZigZag variant. Another characteristic of Art Deco in Brazil applied in state constructions during the Estado Novo period (1937-1945) was the influence of the architectural style adopted by Italian fascism, a regime with which the Brazilian government flirted at that time (Oliveira, 2008). It was used to consolidate the political image of the government, serving as propaganda for the regime, and marking the new era of Brazilian administration (Kremer-Cabral, 2022). It featured classical references in the vertical division of the construction into a base, central body, and crowning, symmetry, vertical columns, and large window frames. Overall, the characteristics present in all variants are the monumentality of the constructions and the absence of ornaments, i.e., geometric shapes without major highlights. In Brazil, Marajoara art appears in the decoration of interiors and exteriors (Correia, 2008).

Although little valued, the Brazilian Art Deco architectural production has its importance and is still very present in the cities' landscapes in the country. Such importance is evident in the life of some cities where those buildings are protected by artistic and cultural heritage protection agencies (few, unfortunately), serving as visual landmarks in their locations. Moreover, this new style is present not only in institutional buildings, but also in several private typologies such as residences, commercial points, and industrial units, popularized in both large cities and small Brazilian towns and among all layers of the population (Correia, 2008).

In this context, Art Deco developed in Brazil from 1925 with global dissemination, and in the 1930s and 1940s, it consolidated itself as the style that embodied modernity in the country and provided access to a North American or European matrix for the different social strata of the national territory (Magro Júnior, 2021).

For a long time, the Post and Telegraphs operated in their own buildings, especially constructed for their activities, initially using imposing eclectic designs, true palaces in the landscapes of some Brazilian cities, and later following standardized projects within recurring architectural styles for each era. During Getúlio Vargas's government (1930-1945 and 1951-1954), the Art Deco style was present in the Post buildings in standardized models spread throughout Brazil.

Postal agencies initially operated in precarious facilities, close to port zones, facilitating the forwarding of correspondence by maritime means (Pereira, 1999). The first building occupied by the administration of the Post was the Imperial Palace, in Rio de Janeiro (1798). Only after 1878, when the first building exclusively for postal services was constructed on 1^o de Maio Street in Rio de Janeiro, did postal services become somewhat efficient.

After the Proclamation of the Republic, the style employed in Post and Telegraph buildings was eclectic. It was the one of the time, taught in architecture schools, providing imposing buildings, called 'palaces,' erected in new urban growth flows alongside hotels, theaters, and other public buildings, benefiting from the new means of transportation that were emerging. Towards a modern and urban Brazil not only to mark the new government taking

office in 1930, postal and telegraph services began to operate in buildings with new architectural styles. Art Deco, the focus of this research, was then employed.

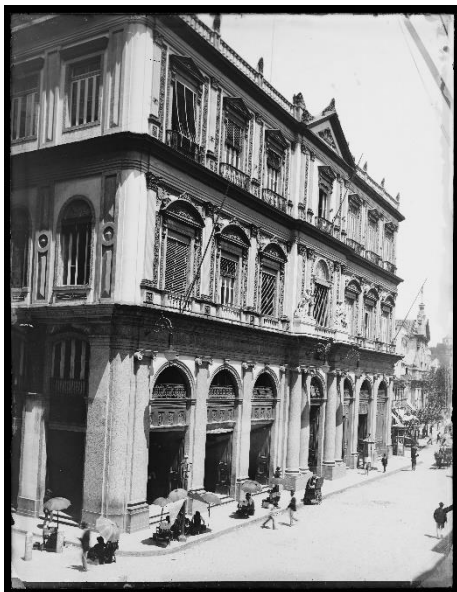
Pereira (1999) provided some examples of that change in the implementation of Post agencies. The service was under the responsibility of the Department of Post and Telegraphs (created from the merger of the two services within a same structure). At that time, the department's structure classified agencies by categories, reflecting their importance regarding service profitability. The classification was reflected in the buildings, separated by construction typologies according to the regions where they were built and their importance within the department's structure. They constituted families of agency projects with similar facade standards and sizes compatible with the unit category (Pereira, 1999) and were standardized projects created at the department's headquarters in Rio de Janeiro and distributed to the regional offices responsible for obtaining, from the municipalities, the land for the construction of the agencies. Similarly, to standardized projects built in several parts of the country, regional standard projects were used in Post offices (Rodrigues, 2000), **which are not the objective of this study.**

6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study addresses the modernization of the agencies of the then Department of Post and Telegraphs, in the period between 1930 and 1950, when the country was largely governed by President Getúlio Vargas.

Since the first building specifically constructed to function as a Post office in 1877, initially in the neo-renaissance style (Pereira, 1999), on 1º de Março Street, in Rio de Janeiro (Figure 1), the styles employed were mainly neoclassical and eclectic (Figure 2). They were grandiose buildings, the so-called 'palaces' of the Post office, followed the formalism taught in architecture academies, and were considered standards to be employed in constructions.

Figure 1 - Post Office 1º de Março St. - Rio de Janeiro RJ



Source: Acervo Instituto Moreira Salles – Marc Ferrez/Coleção Gilberto Ferres (c. 1885) - <https://acervos.ims.com.br/portals/#/detailpage/102572> – accessed on July 17, 2023

Figure 2 - Post Office - Vale do Anhangabaú - São Paulo SP



Source: <https://arquivo.arq.br/projetos/palacio-dos-correios> (N/A) - accessed on July 17, 2023

Large volumes, classical columns, windows and doors alternating between full arches and straight lintels, and, especially, prominent pediments, numerous ornaments, small statues, and allegories are observed in such constructions and the Republic's coat of arms was always present. Despite the necessity and existing processes for the construction of other buildings, only nine structures were erected by the General Directorate of the Post Office throughout the country during that period. As separate entities, constructions for the telegraph service were almost non-existent in that time.

With the advent of Getúlio Vargas' government, standardization in the construction of public buildings became the norm, given the ease of design, cost reduction, and speed in implementing facilities. Postal and telegraph services were no exception and various models of agencies were created and built in different cities across the country.

The buildings of Type Special II (Pereira, 1999), constructed between 1934 and 1944 (Figure 3), clearly display a cleaner facade with minimal ornamentation, with a play of volumes on the main façade and a prominent central volume with a concrete marquee protecting and indicating the main entrance to the agency. In the recessed volumes, balconies can be seen on the upper floor, where a functional residence operates, and, as a decorative element, horizontal friezes follow the height of the windows on both floors. A notable feature is the solid base that gives height to the structure, incorporating a staircase for access to the unit. The name 'Correios e Telégraphos', or post and telegraph, is embedded in the facade with the mortar coating. Nineteen agencies of this model were built throughout the country and in a slightly simpler

variant, another 32 units were constructed (designated as Special Type I) and 2 units were built in a larger model (designated as Special Type III).

Figure 3 – Post office of Jaú, example of Type Special II, demolished



Source: Biblioteca IBGE (N/A.) - <https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/index.php/biblioteca-catalogo?view=detalhes&id=448359> – accessed on March 24, 2022

Another model from the period, whose construction started in 1934, features characteristics of the Streamline variant of Art Deco (Figure 4). In addition to the play of volumes on the facade, horizontal bands follow the height of the windows, also present in the small eaves, reminiscent of the rhythm of speed and modernity; a curved volume, terraces with railings, and a flagpole alluding to steamships are the most characteristic means of transportation of the time. It was a typical situation of many Post Office buildings located on the corner. The name 'Correios e Telégrafos' is also embedded with the mortar coating on the facade. Twelve units of this model were built throughout the country.

Figure 4 – Post office of Sorocaba.



Source: Biblioteca IBGE (s.d.) - <https://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/index.php/biblioteca-catalogo?view=detalhes&id=446461> – accessed on March 24, 2022.

Another example of an agency with a clean façade is the building constructed as a regional headquarters in the city of Ribeirão Preto, SP (Figure 5), in 1937. The main highlight was given to its corner angle composed of a stepped tower accentuated by vertical curved concrete strips, marking the main entrance, flanked by rectangular blocks, also vertical, with corner windows on all floors. The side facades are formed by lower blocks, with horizontal window lines ensuring balance to the ensemble. As a feature already present in other models, the name 'CORREIOS E TELÉGRAFOS' is engraved in the mortar coating on both facades. Since it was a regional headquarters, only one building was constructed; however, it followed the same features

of a regional headquarters in Belém, with a larger square footage.

Figure 5 - Post office of Ribeirão Preto.



Source: Carlos Eduardo Vieira (2022).

Finally, the Special Model IX (Pereira, 1999), built from 1943, encompasses examples constructed until 1973 (Figure 6). With cubist features and Art Deco elements, it showed a play of volumes on the facade, with the vertical corner block as the highlight, the tallest one that housed the staircase box. An access door was protected by a wide concrete slab and a narrow window, occupying almost its entire height, illuminated the interior. A shorter block with the same characteristics and no doors occupied the other end of the facade. The central block, the widest one, protruded more than the other blocks, had a masonry band resembling a solid base for the entire building, ensuring the desired grandeur of the ensemble. Five narrow windows with 'x'-shaped grilles extended from that base to the height of the ceiling and, in the three central ones, reaching the floor, the doors to the agency opened with a wide frontal staircase.

This set of windows was protected by a narrow marquee and the crowning of the central block was a cornice of various widths and projections. Metallic letters were installed above the structure of some constructions with the name 'CORREIOS E TELÉGRAFOS'.

With a strong influence from the widely spread fascist architecture in Italy (Pereira, 1999), there are classical concepts seen in the division of the ensemble into three horizontal parts (base, body, and crowning), vertical columns, and a certain symmetry of the central block are observed). 11 agencies were constructed specifically in that model. Smaller in size, but following the same approach (Special Type X), another 44 buildings were erected throughout the country.

Figure 6 – Post office of Marília– Type Special IX



Source: Correios-SE/SPI (N/A)

7 CONCLUSIONS

The examples provided enabled verifying the buildings of Correios e Telégrafos started to display a significantly different architecture from 1930 onwards in comparison to the units built during the First Republic. If unique, monumental, eclectic buildings resulting from schools that followed "fine arts" trends from renowned architectural offices and inserted into the cultural axes of the major capitals of the time were then constructed, standardized buildings, free from refined ornaments, embracing the rationality of Art Déco and still imposing a striking presence on the landscape of the new regional centers (Figure 7) are now seen. They have also been replicated, in its variations, in many other municipalities and designed at the headquarters of the then Department of Correios e Telégrafos, in Rio de Janeiro, the capital of the country at that time.

Figure 7 – Post office of Belém, PA



Source:<https://fauufpa.org/2022/08/01/a-sede-da-agencia-de-correio-e-telegrafos-em-belem-por-celma-chaves-pont-vidal/>. Accessed on August 28, 2023.

If the previous concern was to make the public department's presence felt, the idea was then to insert the postal and telegraph services as an efficient means of connection among all regions of the country. Not only was the external visual image a concern, but the intention was indeed a structural change in the provision of the service, modernizing it and making it more efficient.

This action was important for a change in the image of Correios e Telégrafos in society. Productivity, presence, and effectiveness in providing those services across the country increased and the standardization of constructions led to agility and cost reductions in the implementation of the new units.

The new buildings of Correios e Telégrafos, constructed in the Art Déco style, provided the modern image Getúlio Vargas' government desired to incorporate into both the services provided and the image of the government itself. Not surprisingly, they were always installed in central regions of cities, marking their landscapes and, in addition to the efficiency of the service, they acted as agents of propaganda for Vargas' administration.

8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to show the modernization of the agencies of the then Department of Post and Telegraph that occurred from 1930 to 1950, during Getúlio Vargas' government through the standardization of buildings and constructions in the Art Deco style, an architecture that appeared modern and introduced the idea of progress to the country. Other changes in architectural styles were part of the post units after its transformation into a public company. However, the significant expansion of the service. However, the significant expansion of the Post and Telegraph Office, in the provision of services and in the construction of new agencies, occurred during the period covered by this work.

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