

HOW DO YOU SAVE AN ARCHIVE? – ADVOCACY IN ACTION

In 2020, Cinemateca Brasileira fights for survival



Introduction by Ray Edmondson

Cinemateca Brasileira in São Paulo, Brazil, with its irreplaceable collection, is one of the largest and oldest film archives in Latin America. Founded in 1949, it became a government institution in 1984 within the Ministry of Culture. Its website is one of the most authoritative sources on Brazilian cinema. Like the NFSA, it is a member of FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives).

Recent political events have placed the survival of the Cinemateca and its collection, along with other Brazilian film archives, at great risk – revealing, once again, the vulnerability of all cultural and memory institutions. Against the background of Brazil's current political turmoil and its raging covid pandemic, the international archiving community has come together to advocate for the institution's future. The following documents track what has happened to date.

The current crisis

*By Rafael de Luna with the collaboration of the ABPA
(Brazilian Association of Audiovisual Preservation)*

In January 2019, Jair Bolsonaro became the president of Brazil, terminated the Ministry of Culture, and turned it into a special secretariat.

In September, the press publicized that the new administration was using the Cinemateca Brasileira to hand out jobs to political allies and propagate the government's extreme-right ideology, with initiatives such as a program of military films.

In the same period, the public servants that were still part of the institution were moved to other federal positions, removing professionals with valuable experience in the field. The absence of employees with contractual stability further compromised the maintenance structure of the institution, which is now run exclusively by temporary workers.

In December 2019, the contract with ACERP that included the administration of the Cinemateca Brasileira, among other organs, was unilaterally revoked by the government. ACERP tried to sign an emergency contract. The government promised a call for proposals to create a new administrative contract no later than February 2020, but nothing was done.

In January 17, 2020, the special secretary of culture, Robert Alvim, was exonerated following protests for an official video broadcast on national television the day before with clear nazi content.

By the end of January, the Associação Brasileira de Preservação Audiovisual, ABPA (The Brazilian Association of Audiovisual Preservation) published an open letter in defense of the Cinemateca Brasileira (who was still without a valid administrative contract) and of the Cinemateca Capitólio (in Porto Alegre, which was threatened with privatization). The letter circulates worldwide.

In February 2020, one of the Cinemateca Brasileira vaults was flooded after torrential rains hit São Paulo. More than 100.000 DVDs of Brazilian films were destroyed by the water. There is speculation that film reels and equipment might have also been damaged, but no official report of the incident has yet been published.

It is only on March 4, 2020, that actor Regina Duarte, a Bolsonaro supporter without any previous experience in public administration, becomes the new special secretariat of culture, almost two months after Alvim's exoneration.

In May, ACERP declared they had not received any resources from the government since the end of their contract, in December. Press reports inform that the electricity bill of the Cinemateca Brasileira had not been paid for months, and would potentially be suspended. Employees of the institution said their wages are also on hold.

On May 15, professionals connected to previous administrations of the Cinemateca Brasileira published an open letter in defense of the institution. The ABPA sends a notification to the government asking for an explanation.

In May 20, 2020, Regina Duarte was exonerated from her position as special secretary of culture. In a video, the actor appeared next to the president saying that she would now be responsible for the Cinemateca Brasileira so that she could stay close to her family in São Paulo. However, press reports questioned the feasibility of that measure, since the government does not hold any control over the direction of an institution whose administration has been transferred to a private entity.

On May 29, a meeting between ACERP and the federal government failed to reach an agreement. ACERP asked to be refunded for 11 million Brazilian Reais (US\$2 million) for uncovered expenses relative to 2019. According to the press, ACERP had already spent another 4 million Brazilian Reais on the Cinemateca in 2020 which were also not covered by the government. Newspapers report that the government plans to break the contract and close the Cinemateca Brasileira altogether.

Following protests, the government publicly denied any plan to shut down the institution, and said it is considering reincorporating it to the State, even though it was never disconnected from the State to begin with. In this note to the press, no further plans were shared, and the growing debt, including the late wages, was left unaddressed.

Further press reports have stated that the government is no longer considering Regina Duarte for director of the Cinemateca Brasileira, but the rumors of the institution being shut down are persistent.

Unpaid since April 4, on June 4, the employees of Cinemateca Brasileira under contract with ACERP created an online crowdfunding campaign for emergency support.

Update on August 18, 2020

On June 10, Regina Duarte was officially dismissed. Without pay for three months, the workers of Cinemateca Brasileira went on strike on June 12.

Three days later, the Federal District Attorney's Office in São Paulo filed a public lawsuit against the Federal Government asking for the urgent renewal of the administration contract with ACERP until the end of 2020.

On June 19, the actor Mário Frias was nominated as the new Special Secretary of Culture, despite his lack of previous experience in public administration, and was sworn in on the 23rd. That same day, Mário Frias and Marcelo Álvaro Antônio, the Minister of Tourism, who oversees the Special Secretariat of Culture, visited Cinemateca Brasileira and met with representatives of ACERP.

A document published on June 27 by the São Paulo Association of Filmmakers (Associação Paulista de Cineastas, APACI) states that, during a blackout in the area where the Cinemateca is located, the temperature control system of the archive was shut down for a few hours, because the institution's generator was broken. The day before, the company responsible for the fire brigade that monitors the nitrate collection had sent their employees home due to lack of payment. The company responsible for the security of the institution threatened to do the same. That same month, eleven employees of Cinemateca Brasileira did not have their contracts renewed and were eventually dismissed.

On July 6, the crowdfunding campaign to support Cinemateca workers reached an end, having raised R\$125,000 (roughly US\$23,000). They remain without pay.

On July 8, Mário Frias sent a letter to ACERP demanding that Cinemateca Brasileira's keys be returned to the government. The association refused to do that until the contract with the government was formally terminated.

On July 15, secretary Mário Frias and minister Álvaro Antônio published a video on a social network stating that employees of the Ministry of Tourism had been refused entry at Cinemateca Brasileira by ACERP the day before. Following an idea by a senator, the press published that the government was considering "transferring" the Cinemateca from São Paulo to Brasília, a possibility rejected by the mayor and city councilors of São Paulo. The terms of the donation of the Cinemateca Brasileira patrimony to the state prohibit the move, and the later the government rejected having that intention.

The mobilization to protect Cinemateca gathers support from city councilors, congress people and senators, and another lawsuit is submitted to the Attorney General.

On July 30, there was a public hearing at the Congress concerning the Cinemateca Brasileira with members of the government who stated their commitment to urgently renew contracts on basic services (security, cleaning, electricity). They also informed that a public call was being formulated to select a new company to run the Cinemateca Brasileira, estimating that the process would take three to four months. They did not share how the technical staff was supposed to be maintained until then.

On August 3, the Federal Justice System refused the demand by the Federal District Attorney's Office in São Paulo for the renewal of the contract with ACERP, stating that the choice of how an institution was supposed to be administered belonged to the Executive. The District Attorney's Office stated that they would appeal the decision.

A new letter from Mário Frias to ACERP stipulated August 7 as the final date to return the keys. That day, representatives of the government and members of the federal police department visited the institution to get the keys and make an inspection of the

premises, which is monitored by members of the civil society, including the ABPA. The contract with ACERP is officially terminated. That same day, the contracts with the security company and the fire brigade were renewed.

On August 12, ACERP announced the dismissal of the 41 employees of Cinemateca Brasileira, who had not been paid wages for four months. The following day, ABPA held a meeting with the current Secretary of Audiovisual and staff. The meeting had been requested by the Association in order to gather more information concerning a request by the government to elaborate a public call for the inspection of the archive guarded by the Cinemateca Brasileira. ABPA reiterated that it was essential to keep the technical staff, and the government mentions the possibility of rehiring the staff using emergency funds that would be handled by the Sociedade Amigos da Cinemateca (SAC). According to the government, they are waiting for a letter from SAC to check on the viability of that plan. If that turns out impossible, the government promised solutions to hire a technical staff until the selection process for a new administration is finalized. As of now, Cinemateca Brasileira does not have a single employee in its technical staff. The government has not announced how they expect the knowledge of the institution to be transferred to new employees.

Open letter in defense of the Audiovisual Technical Center (CTAv) and the Cinemateca Brasileira – 21 September 2020

On August 7, 2020, the Audiovisual Secretariat (SAv), linked to the Ministry of Tourism, received the keys to the Cinemateca Brasileira after the managing contract with the social organization ACERP -Associação de Comunicação Educativa Roquette Pinto - was abruptly interrupted. Since then, even after meetings with associations and promises to resolve the administrative impasse, the institution's direction remains uncertain and the collection remains unprotected. On September 16, Edianne Paulo de Abreu was appointed to the General Coordination of Centro Técnico Audiovisual (CTAv), a federal entity also linked to the Audiovisual Secretariat. The two organizations belonging to the Ministry of Tourism and responsible for the preservation of the Brazilian audiovisual heritage have their management structures weakened. On the one hand, a film archive with no specialized command, nor resources to manage the largest audiovisual collection in the country; on the other, an institution that is led by a professional without specific technical knowledge and training to manage an organ with such complexity and importance.

CTAv was created in 1985 out of a technical cooperation agreement between Embrafilme and the National Film Board of Canada, with the mission of supporting, training, disseminating and preserving Brazilian audiovisual culture. Since then, CTAv has supported the production of films and series with the assignment of filming and finishing equipment in partnerships established through public notices. Its valuable audiovisual collection includes materials dating back to the 1930s and consists of around 6,000 titles and 30,000 reels of film, in addition to 20,000 photographic negatives and almost 2,000 posters. Among the works, most of the filmography of the pioneer Humberto Mauro and classics of Brazilian animation. The new technical reserve, launched in 2013, has the ideal climatic parameters for the conservation of films and has a capacity for 100 thousand reels. Its existence is fundamental for the

audiovisual community and, due to its specific competences, the institution needs to be led by a professional with experience in the sector.

The associations here subscribed come to express enormous concern with the direction taken by the Audiovisual Secretariat in relation to the institutions responsible for the preservation of the Brazilian audiovisual heritage and for supporting independent production. Producers, filmmakers, artists, curators, researchers and film programmers depend on access to these collections and institutions for the continuity of their work. It is not only the audiovisual preservation that is weakened at this moment, but the entire chain of Brazilian audiovisual production is at risk. The absence of concrete actions to resolve the administrative vacuum of the Cinemateca Brasileira and the appointment of an inexperienced coordinator for the management of CTA_v weaken the Brazilian audiovisual.

Public policies must be formulated with the productive sector and civil society -and never be in the wake of electoral interests. We therefore defend the importance of a fundamental principle of public management: the need for technical appointments for public bodies, with recognition of the technical, administrative and cultural characteristics of institutions linked to Brazilian audiovisual and the merit of specialized professionals in the area.

The letter was signed by:

ABPA -Brazilian Association of Audiovisual Preservation
ABRACI -Brazilian Association of Filmmakers APAN -Association of Black Audiovisual Professionals
ABRACCINE -Brazilian Association of Film Critics
SOCINE -Brazilian Society of Cinema Studies
ABCA -Brazilian Animation Film Association
ANDAI -National Association of Independent Distributors
API -Association of Independent Brazilian Audiovisual Producers
ABD-SP -Brazilian Association of Documentary Filmmakers and Short Filmmakers of São Paulo
ABD-DF-Brazilian Association of Documentary Filmmakers and Short Filmmakers of the Federal District
ABD-GOIÁS -Brazilian Association of Documentary Filmmakers and Short Filmmakers from Goiás
APTC-RS -Professional Association of Cinematographic Technicians of RS
SOS Cinemateca-APACI -São Paulo Association of Filmmakers
ABCV -Brasília's Cinema and Video Association STIC -Interstate Union of Workers in Cinematographic and Audiovisual -RJ
SINDCINE -Union of Workers in the Film and Audiovisual Industry of the States of São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, Tocantins and the Federal District
SIAESP -Union of the Audiovisual Industry of the State of São Paulo

CCAAA Declaration about the situation of the Cinemateca Brasileira - 6 October 2020

CCAAA is the peak body for all the international associations which relate to the profession of audiovisual archiving. It issued the following statement:



The Board of the **Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA)** wishes to add its voice to the many individuals and organizations, in Brazil and internationally, who have expressed their deep concern about the extremely difficult situation of the Cinemateca Brasileira in São Paulo.

The CCAAA traces its origins to UNESCO's Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images (1980). It represents the interests of nine worldwide professional archive organizations (AMIA, ARSC, FIAF, FIAT-IFTA, FOCAL International, IASA, ICA, SEAPAVAA, IFLA), whose main missions are to encourage, promote and celebrate the preservation and accessibility of the world's audiovisual heritage in all its forms.

The Cinemateca Brasileira has been one of the custodians of Brazil's rich film heritage since the 1950s. The quality of its work is recognized internationally, thanks to in particular to several generations of highly skilled professionals who have lent their expertise and dedication to the institution. However, over the last year the Cinemateca has desperately lacked the financial and administrative support it needs to carry out its missions effectively. As a result, its unique audiovisual collections, which are by definition very fragile and require constant and meticulous care, are at great risk of being lost forever. The recent news that the entire staff of the institution has officially been dismissed is particularly worrying, as this latest development can only have catastrophic consequences on the safety of those collections. We all still have in mind the many fires and floods that have affected the institution in the past, due to the endemic lack of resources.

We therefore urgently call on all relevant stakeholders, funding, policy and government agencies responsible for the stewardship of this priceless heritage to take the full measure of this dramatic situation into account and find an urgent solution. At a minimum we call for the funding needed to be made available to the Cinemateca Brasileira to carry out its essential missions *before it is too late*. The demise of this highly respected institution now would be an immeasurable blow to Brazil's cultural memory.

Video messages at the Sao Paulo International Film Festival – October/November 2020

Colleagues in the global FIAF community **recorded 32 short video messages celebrating the Cinemateca and its staff**. They were screened throughout the [São Paulo International Film Festival](#) (22 October - 4 November). Brazilian filmmaker Walter Salles, a strong advocate of the Cinemateca's cause, will be presented with the [2020 FIAF Award](#) trophy on the closing night of the festival. All those not delivered in Portuguese are subtitled for the benefit of the Film Festival audiences.

<https://www.fiafnet.org/pages/News/Cinemateca-Brasileira-video-messages.html>

Concluding notes: *We do not yet know how this story ends – hopefully with a restoration of the Cinemateca's normal operations with a skilled and dedicated staff.*

But it is sobering to remember that advocacy on this scale and duration can be necessary to protect an archive that does nothing more than provide an obvious and essential public benefit. No institution can take its permanence for granted.

Historically this is especially true of the NFSA itself, which faced an existential threat to its survival between 2003 – when it was unexpectedly merged with the Australian Film Commission – and 2008, when the sustained advocacy of the Friends of the NFSA, other

supportive groups and overseas colleagues finally achieved the statutory independence the NFSA enjoys today.

Just how tough and bitter that campaign proved to be is documented in the Friends' newsletters (from #5 in May 2003 to #20 in June 2008). You can read all about it at <http://www.archivefriends.org.au/index.php/events-news/newsletter>