

Maurício Wellisch: A Forgotten Modern in Brazil

*This article aims to give visibility to the work of Maurício Wellisch (1904-1961). An artist active in the first decades of the 20th century, Wellisch stood out especially with his illustrations. He participated in exhibitions as a painter and was a prolific chronicler and critic of the arts. Graduated in law in 1925, he soon embarked on a political career, working continuously at Itamaraty. A career diplomat, he served in numerous cities, such as Antwerp, Prague, etc. During this period, he moved away from his brushes, remaining, however, faithful to writing in a continuous approach to culture and arts in the places he visited. For this work we will focus the analysis on two periodicals, *Phoenix* and *Boletim de Ariel*. The first, published between 1924 and 1926, whose proposal was to establish a direction, perceive and act in a post-war world, rising from the ashes through the arts. In addition to Wellisch, the periodical was illustrated by Ismael Nery, Oswaldo Teixeira, A. Voigt, Lleux, among others. In specific cases like Lleux or Voigt the aesthetic is close to that of Mauricio Wellisch.*

Foreword

This paper showcases the work of Maurício von Wellisch (1904-1961). The dates on the few remaining notes about the artist are full of controversies. In general, 1905 is considered his most probable birth year, and the year of his death has always been unknown. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives¹ point out that his date of birth was September 4, 1904. Wellisch was very active in the first decades of the 20th century, gaining particular prominence due to his illustrations. He was showcased in painting exhibitions and was a prolific chronicler and art critic. Nonetheless, his name does not appear in the annals or compendiums of Brazilian modern art history, despite being considered a major force by his peers at the time. This ostracism surrounding Wellisch's name is partially due to his professional choices. He graduated in Law in 1925 and soon embarked on a political career, working continuously at Itamaty, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was a career diplomat and served in numerous cities, including Antwerp and Prague. During this period, he laid the painting brushes down but remained faithful to his writing, which incorporated a less artistic vein; he kept drawing from his continuous exposure to the cultures and works of art from the places he visited.

The 1920s and 1930s were fundamental for Wellisch and his intense activity in the cultural scene. Two major periodicals described his interests and the characteristics of his work: *Phoenix* and *Boletim de Ariel*, which were undoubtedly the two that most often included the author's contribution in their pages. The first one, published between 1924 and 1926, sought to guide, perceive, and act in a post-war world, using the arts as the stepping stone to rise back from

¹Available in <http://memoria.bn.br/DocReader/764000/3237>. The confusion regarding the year 1905 is likely the result of some documents referring to it as a “probable date”.

the ashes. In addition to Wellisch, the *Phoenix* was illustrated by prominent names, including Ismael Nery, Oswaldo Teixeira, A. Voigt, and Lleux.

Wellisch's works are clearly linked to his peers, and in specific cases, e.g., Lleux or Voigt, in which the aesthetics are more similar; however, as we will discuss herein, his illustrations hold a certain degree of singularity. It is also possible to link the showcasing of Wellisch's illustrations in *Phoenix* with his writings for the *Boletim de Ariel*, which circulated between 1931 and 1939. His pieces mention renowned names, such as Murilo Mendes and Mario Pedrosa, among many others. In *Boletim de Ariel*, he published his thoughts on art, especially the European scene he experienced from 1925 onwards, as well as theater, dance, and politics; he also advocated for cinema at a time when it was not widely accepted and was still frowned upon as an art medium. Therefore, studying these two periodicals is essential to understanding Wellisch's work and his predominantly melancholic views.

First Appearances

As mentioned previously, Wellisch is rarely mentioned when thinking narrowly or even broadly about the arts and culture of the 1920s and 1930s. At the same time, it is important to highlight that his professional life distanced him from being perceived as solely an artist. Wellisch graduated in Law in 1925 and left for Paris that same year. His main intention during the trip, which lasted two years, was to advance his artistic studies. Upon his return, he wrote an article with clear nods to the modern views he was surrounded by during the period:

The moment is fleeting, time runs, time flies!... Let us live with intensity, the intensity of the present time!... Paris is still the beacon that shines a light on our current life. The "carrefour du monde" is the "rendez-vous" point of all intellectual currents and the faucet of pleasure of all sorts around the world. A formidable turbine that concentrates all energies and transforms them into the greatest forces².

His euphoric impressions of that environment, to which he adds, "The war, above all, dramatically increased the speed of our current lives", are aligned with the mechanical, productivity-focused, and modern way of thinking. And perhaps this image of Europe as a cultural catalyst remains ingrained in the author's spirit, as demonstrated by his brief relationship with Érico Veríssimo³. Wellisch seems dazzled and optimistic about the moment. At the time, the artist enjoyed a certain level of renown:

Mr. Maurício Wellisch is widely known in our society and our intellectual circles. His name is well-regarded among our cultured and elegant people. Mr. Wellisch is a lawyer and a writer, but above all an artist of exquisite sensitivity. Rio is very aware of the beautiful decorative drawings that he has spread across the colored pages of

²Wellisch, Mauricio. "A inquietação espiritual da Europa hoje". In *O Jornal*, July 3, 1927.

³This relationship will be addressed in subchapter V.

our magazines and is also familiar with his beautiful paintings, which are a clear testimony of an artist with a unique and personal temperament.⁴

In a certain way, his peers at the time shared a general and generous view of Wellisch. One of the more emblematic registers of this was written by Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco, who mentioned his relationship with the artist in his memoir titled *A alma do tempo: memórias*:

From St.-Gall, we went to Zurich, where I wanted to visit my long-time friend, Maurício Wellisch, who was acting as the consul there. In my view, Maurício is one of the most brilliant, albeit frustrated, intellectuals of my generation. His talent for painting was renowned around the 1920s. He wrote admirably, as demonstrated by his long letters to his friends. He was one of the early enthusiasts of the modernist revolution in the visual arts and literature. However, there was always some level of misalignment between him and his environment (including his family environment during his youth), and a *s'en fichisme* with more despair than disbelief. His complicated, sensitive, dissatisfied spirit might have interfered with his intelligence, which became hesitant before the spectacle of life, between mockery and revolt, an ancestral ache from his persecuted race. Maurício Wellisch was one of those who were more influential than productive; or rather, those whose influence is felt deeper than the importance of their production. He had talent, taste, and culture to a distinguished degree. He left nothing important after his long, painful death. I was one of the few who realized how much Maurício had to give; how much he shared what he never had⁵.

We will later comment on the overwhelming event of his "long, painful death". However, this aspect of non-conformity and his bright spirit seemed to be constantly associated with Wellisch's name. Afonso Arinos comments that Wellisch was more influential than productive, but such statements must be interpreted with some caveats. There is a certain consistency in Wellisch's works, especially from the 1930s onwards. His works of art were undoubtedly few and far between, but his presence in the culture of the time did not diminish. If, on the one hand, illustrations and paintings became increasingly rare, his texts about the state of arts, culture, and the political and cultural ways of life were very present until the last year of his life.

Regarding this aspect, Hernani de Irajá wrote a piece to *Fon-Fon* about Wellisch and painted a beautiful portrait of the artist.

⁴Idem.

⁵Melo Franco, Afonso Arinos de. *A alma do tempo: memórias*. Rio de Janeiro: TopBooks, 2018, p. 1004.

Figure 1. *Hernani de Irajá, Maurício Wellisch, 1930. Fon-Fon, January 18, 1930, p. 50.*



Irajá's work portrays a very young Wellisch with a conflict-ridden, restless expression, but he can keep it under control with much effort. Voluminous, scraggly hair. His deep eyes, shaded with melancholy, and a plump, stern mouth show a certain non-conformity reflected by his intense look toward the horizon. A potential future, reachable via winding paths, can be seen in Irajá's portrait of his friend. In the text that accompanies the drawing, the author states:

Without forfeiting the dismantling of excessive innovators, Mauricio Wellisch was always a "novice" in painting, a creator of unprecedented hymns to human plasticity. As an illustrator, his aesthetics soon unveiled a very personal trait, fragile in appearance but in fact very powerful as a concept, as *truth in art*⁶.

As Hernani de Irajá states, Wellisch had a moderate voice, "influenced by the two illustration schools: the Spanish and the German". However, the influence of these schools in Wellisch's works is up for debate; he is considered modern but does not fall under the pressure of exaggeration. Irajá describes him as an extraordinarily conscious and critical but also a powerful and precocious artist.

There is a certain pleasure in browsing the pages of periodicals like *Tico-Tico*, *O Beija-Flor* or *Dom-Quixote* to discover Wellisch as a precocious artist and also someone with a determined, strong will. At the age of 11, he began systematically writing to *O Beija-Flor*, requesting for his drawings or texts to be published. The section dedicated to the reader's letters proves how insistent the young aspiring artist was. There is a reply from September 15: "[...] your little drawing was handed over to the artistic censor of 'O Beija-Flor' and only he can

⁶Irajá, Hernani de. "Dentro da arte brasileira: Maurício Wellisch". In *Fon-Fon*, January 18, 1930, p 50.

say whether they will be useful for us⁷. Several issues later, Wellisch was still close to the periodical, as he participated in drawing competitions and sent his works directly to the editorial team.

In June 1916, he received a frustrating reply: "Here are the answers to your request: 1st) Currently, we have an excess of gracious offers [...]". With insistence, in August 1917, a first drawing by Wellisch appeared in the periodical, '*Marinheiros americanos*' (American sailors), accompanied by the following note: 'The drawing above was penned by our dear and distinguished little friend Mauricio Wellisch, an alumnus of the Collegio dos revmos. Barnabites Fathers – Catette – Rio de Janeiro'. In December 1917, they published two drawings and a short story by Wellisch himself, '*A perseverança ou História d'um regato*' ("Perseverance or The story of a stream"). That would be a mark in Wellisch's trajectory, who kept illustrating his writings and creating new works based on other texts.

Figure 2. Maurício Wellisch, *Marinheiros americanos*, 1917. *O Beija-Flor*, 1917



In addition to *O Beija-Flor*, young Wellisch sent a contribution rejected by *Dom-Quixote*, "the caption is good, but the drawings still lack firm lines. You drew a hand that looked more like a papaya."⁸. Moreover, after some public persistence, he was also published at the *Tico-Tico* drawing contest 1,287 on June 12, 1918.

The 1920s and 1930s

Wellisch's characteristic and peculiar lines indeed emerged in the 1920s, especially from 1925 onwards. His contributions let go of the experimental and

⁷*O Beija-Flor*, September 1915, issue 17.

⁸"*Correspondencia*" (Mail). In *Dom-Quixote*. December 24, 1919.

childish style of the final years of the first decade of the 20th century and helped establish him as a clear artist of his time, of a culture with *fin-de-siecle* and decadent tones. That is how he illustrates two of his texts, "Nocturno" (Nocturnal) and "Elegia para a que não retorna..." (Elegy to the one who will not return), for *Ilustração Brasileira*.

In the first one, the level of detail, the clothes, the trees, and the stars in the sky give the drawing a very accentuated decorative trait. The woman with the elongated neck and tired, drowsy eyes has long fingers; her elegance is doleful, and her thoughts seem to weigh her down and slightly curve her back. Powerful images have the power to convey the invisible, and the scene conveys the sense of being on another plane at another time. She seems to be walking and passing by a man wearing a floral cloak. Sitting, his right hand holds his face, while his left hand rests on a cane. His eyes are closed but facing the female figure, and they seem to share similar feelings. From Wellisch's text accompanying his drawing: "The silence... void... dark... amphoric... The night... the wind... the cold... – Far from Earth, standing on my marble balcony, I cast a vague and sad look around [...]". The atmosphere created in the drawing reverberates in the text; however, the illustration further strengthens the solitary and mysterious dimension.

Figure 3. Maurício Wellisch, *Nocturno op. 2*, 1924. *Ilustração Brasileira*, January 1925



In "Elegia para a que não voltara...". Two female figures are near one another. One sits on the piano bench, sad and facing downwards, while the movement of the lights in her black hair follows the sleeves of her dress. The heavy makeup is intense and jarring. The figure is surrounded by music, with the piano, and by paintings, with the easel facing towards her. None of these arts are evoked at this precise suspended moment; they are only indications. They are even ignored by the figures, who are trapped in their own thoughts. The standing figure

is intense and powerful, as shown by her very accentuated neck and chest lines. She uses her right hand to open the curtains a bit more and have a better look at something that the observer cannot, some event seems lost, while sadness and melancholy fill the environment. A side view of an oval portrait at the top-right corner suggests some reading. Published in December 1924, Wellisch's text showcases the relationship between music and melancholy in the illustration: "Afternoon fell, enveloped in veils of melancholy. / A sweet caress in the air... A monotonous cicada... a distant sigh... a star that shines under the light veil of the sunset... / In the silence of the park, the ancient flute of the fountain played silvery harmonies...". Although there are texts paired with these two illustrations, they are also independent, distant, and seem to tell different stories. In any case, they are elements of the same thought, expressed in different ways.

At the same time, since he illustrated several newspapers, Wellisch was also an art and culture critic. In *O Jornal*, in December 1927, he illustrated "Um conto de Natal" (*A Christmas Tale*) by Laura Margarida de Queiroz. A virgin and a boy in an art-deco style, with lights falling on the characters in a geometrical pattern, like theatrically arranged spotlights.

In the same periodical, in 1930, Wellisch published two reproductions of works he had sent to the *Salon d'Automne*, in Paris, *Retrato de Sr. Jack Sampaio, filho do Dr. Carlos Sampaio* (Portrait of Mr. Jack Sampaio, son of Dr. Carlos Sampaio), and *Algeriana* (Algerian woman). The text *Criticando a Crítica* (Criticizing Criticism) is a study, or rather, an essay according to Alain's definition, a type of text that is very present in Wellisch's writings.

Despite those who today attack or despise Wilde's "aestheticism", current critical pieces are permeated, albeit unintentionally, with Wilde's aphorisms. The role of the critic should not be to provide a synthesis but rather an analysis. He must not place himself before the art object 'as an artist before nature', but as a mathematician before a theorem⁹.

Thus, the artist and essayist assesses the work of contemporary critics and, suspicious of the quality of literature or fine arts, refrains from providing any tangible example. The text seems almost abstract. It advances with the same tone:

Alas, ours is a time when currents of opinion are like currents of air; the art is what flows inside it... And above all hover the critics, like a wind, swarming with all the microbes. Summarily supporting or condemning. And everyone deems themselves holder of the right to summarily approve or condemn¹⁰.

Such reading might find echoes today and is part of the very nature of the work of criticism. Wellisch cites some of Alain's books over these years; in fact, his writing is similar to the philosopher's. In *Propos sur les beaux-arts*, Chapter 69 of *La générosité*, Alain states:

⁹Wellisch, Mauricio. "Criticando a crítica". In *O Jornal*, March 30, 1930.

¹⁰Idem.

To freely judge the sciences, one needs effort; to freely judge the fine arts, one needs courage; because from the moment catalogs or labels no longer guide us, it feels a little too free; I feel sorry for the judge, he will have bad times ahead. [...] Or, let us walk through history; let us dance on the ruins, let us shave the beards of the Gods. The work is poorly paid; but we cannot have everything. Freedom or power, a choice must be made¹¹.

Alain, unlike Wellisch, makes the diagnosis and moves towards a prognosis. On the other end, the artist is left to face a dead end. There is not much salvation, and the artist is condemned to the commonly shallow work of criticism. This taste for a dysphoric world appears in Wellisch's texts from the mid-1930s onwards, as shown below. Over these years, he attended several balls, including the 2nd Spring Ball, the fine arts ball of 1927.

Figure 4. Maurício Wellisch, *Viver como os pássaros... ou como as flores do campo*, not dated. Ink on paper, private collection.



Drawings like *Viver como os pássaros... Ou como as flores do campo* denote a period of convergence. If, on the one hand, his works of the time carry a characteristic aesthetic strength and convey a sense of *fin-de-siecle*, they also coexist with geometric aspects of art-deco. The two figures glued together, an amalgam comparable to the strength of *Jupiter et Thétis*, by Ingres, from 1811, or *L'amour des âmes*, by Jean Delville, from 1900. The figures carry the same heavy eyes, filled with sluggishness and melancholy. The strength of the male figure is

¹¹ Alain. *Propos sur les Beaux-Arts*. Paris : PUF, 1998, p.69-70.

contrasted with a certain delicacy, with his right arm outstretched, ready to welcome the birds. The nature at the feet of the female figure is mingled with her dress, conveying a very close relationship with nature, a kind of lost Arcadia from a time that is not part of time itself.

Phoenix and Boletim de Ariel

As mentioned at the beginning, to better understand Mauricio Wellisch's presence, it is necessary to consider his contributions to the periodicals *Phoenix* and *Boletim de Ariel*. These periodicals encompass the artist's main contributions from the 1920s and 1930s, with his illustrations being published in the first and his various texts in the second. *Phoenix* was launched in the backdrop of a post-war world as a potential way of rising out of the rubble, starting, of course, with culture. The pessimistic, melancholic, and sometimes hopeless and cruel world where forces and efforts are useless and doomed to failure does not seem far off from the period and, above all, from Wellisch. The artist will explore this idea in several of his illustrations for the periodical. He illustrated several issues and was a constant contributor to the magazine in 1924, especially for the first one, published in January. He did not work for *Phoenix* when he went to Europe, in 1925, and only contributed to it again in 1926 (at a much lower frequency).

Wellisch worked intensely on the first issues. He illustrated texts, created the cover and *ex-libris*, as well as designs for sponsors, capital letters, etc. For example, in *Canto da Renúncia* (Renunciation Song), in March 1924, Wellisch drew from this feeling of living in a tired, melancholic, and hopeless world. The line embezzlement and the apparent luxury come close to the immeasurable weight of life or, more pragmatically, of living. This is an illustration of a text by Camargo de Macedo.

"Why do you come so late? I am the priest of the melancholic altars. I will no longer pray in the splendid Christmas masses. I no longer see weddings in my white chapel. The baptismal sponge of the innocent grows dry in my hands. The haloed hand of the Lord descends upon my bald forehead... Why do you come so late?"¹²

¹²Macedo, Camargo de. "Canto da renúncia". In *Phoenix*. March 1924.

1 **Figure 5.** *Maurício Wellisch, Canto da Renúncia. 1924. Phoenix, March 1924*



2
3
4 The image shows a tired, burdened priest, lost in introspection. He is weary of
5 the world and carries out his role without intent or purpose. His left arm hangs
6 with a ring on the long finger, and the immeasurable pressure of gravity is
7 perceivable. The figure is light and, at the same time, weighs heavily on the
8 ground. The right arm stretches towards the trident-like chandelier before him,
9 releasing smoke that transforms into decorative motifs.

10

11 **Figure 6.** *Maurício Wellisch, O homem da multidão. 1924. Phoenix, April 1924*



12
13

1 In *O homem da multidão* (The man in the crowd), Wellisch uses a particular
 2 tone and presents a personal interpretation of the short story by José Geraldo
 3 Vieira. At the center of the illustration, the man in the crowd is elegant and
 4 charming. He is surrounded by mysterious and suggestive characters, flanked by
 5 two naked female figures whose private parts are whimsically hidden by their long
 6 hair. Sitting on an improvised throne, his feet are next to women's heads or, more
 7 appropriately, entities from another plane, whose hair vibrates like flames. At the
 8 center is an effigy, an apparition that truly concentrates the lines and energies of
 9 the drawing.

10 Wellisch's illustrations in *Phoenix* also included texts that were not
 11 necessarily published. Like *O DOM* (THE GIFT), based on the homonymous
 12 short story by Marcel Schowb, from his book *Cœur Double*. The author – who to
 13 this day is little published – was one of the major forces of symbolist French
 14 literature, and the proximity of his writings to Maurício Wellisch is noteworthy¹³.

15 Even if Wellisch immediately left for Paris after his studies, the most
 16 prominent influence in his art did not come from the island of Saint-Louis. In the
 17 quote mentioned above by Hernani de Irajá, the author points out how Germany
 18 and Spain served as "inspirations" for the artist. It is, in fact, likely that they acted
 19 as his beacons. However, a closer analysis of von Stuck, Lovis Corinth, or
 20 Chicharro's engravings shows more differences than true convergences.
 21 Nonetheless, his work philosophy seems to find more like-minded individuals
 22 among the English. Due to their well-defined lines, ambiguous and mysterious
 23 figures could appear alongside the drawings and engravings of Adolf Gustav
 24 Mossa. However, compared to others, like Aubrey Beardsley, the drawings seem
 25 to brighten up. Works like *Venus between Terminal Gods*, of 1895, are proof of
 26 this. The engravings based on the *Tannhäuser* have more decorative elements,
 27 other cultures, and synthetic lines. However, in addition to Beardsley, who seems
 28 to be his main influence, artists like Jessie Marion King, Eric Gill, or William
 29 Thomas Horton (all active between the end of the 19th century and the first
 30 decades of the 20th century) are each intense in their own way and connected to
 31 what Wellisch accomplished in those years.

32 The yearnings of *Boletim de Ariel* were deeply literary, at least in the issues
 33 between 1931 and 1939 (resuming years later, between 1973 and 1977). The
 34 *Boletim* is one among several publishing houses that released their own
 35 periodicals. Tania Regina de Luca comments on the purpose behind the *Boletim*:

36
 37 Texts with a more general approach to painting, cinema, literature, and biographical
 38 curiosities, in addition to excerpts from chapters, also appeared with some frequency,
 39 as well as notes on awards, such as those offered by the Sociedade Felipe d'Oliveira
 40 or the prestigious Humberto de Campos, instituted in 1936 by Editora José Olympio,
 41 which selected one unpublished book per year. However, literary production was
 42 incorporated into the *Boletim* a bit later, from the sixth issue onwards (from
 43 October/1934 to September/1935); from that moment forward, four pages were

¹³Sylvain Goudemare's studies are the key to understanding Schowb's presence. More specifically, see the biography *Marcel Schowb or Les vies imaginaires, biographie*. Paris: Le Cherche-Midi, 2000. And the preface of *Oeuvres*, published by Phébus in 2002, "Comment était faite l'lampe d'Alladin?". Pp.12-21.

reserved for fictional works. Sometimes, part of the issue was dedicated to specific authors, whether due to death or a celebration of centenaries, e.g., for João Ribeiro or Goethe¹⁴.

Wellisch contributed to the periodical with essays, reviews, and chronicles. At an important period in the author's life, he established himself at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Itamaraty, and was constantly traveling. In one of his first chronicles in the periodical, writing on the topic of love and taking inspiration from João do Rio, he describes a pessimistic trajectory full of dead ends, like in his illustrations for the *Phoenix*.

All love is easily tyrannical. Wherever there is love, there is hidden hate, which will not fail to explode as soon as love turns into passion. For those in love, this soon becomes the truth or, at least, what they believe to be their truth [...] What is the biggest mistake of one who fell in love? Because, on the one hand, they focus their entire spirit towards it, thus generating love from an act of will, regardless of the fatality of passions; on the other hand, the person no longer sees their beloved "but, in its place, an idol, which they dress up, consider divine, and believe in..."¹⁵

However, in these somewhat troubled years and with an evident change of perspective for Maurício Wellisch with the advancement of his work at Itamaraty (notably the commercial relations between Brazil and several countries), the tone of his writings became more optimistic. Far from the hopelessness that marked the 1920s, his eyes were directed toward a brighter, more euphoric world.

Abroad, the evolution of Brazilian intelligence has been followed and referred to by sincere friends of our country (which are more numerous than we think) in books, articles, and reports written by the most renowned intellectuals. In France, Luc Dartain is our best advertiser [...] ¹⁶.

Wellisch's writings are also innovative and convey a crystal clear way of thinking. In the August 1938 issues, he discussed cinema in a text titled *O Filosofo e a lanterna mágica* (The Philosopher and the magic lantern). More specifically, cinema as art, a key topic for the medium that, not without controversy, was seen as a potential candidate of high praise. In the text, the author even opposes Alain, who, as we have seen, was one of his inspirations. While the French philosopher struggled to neutralize the artistic force of cinema, Wellisch had no doubts. "In truth, cinematographic and theatrical spectacles do not belong to the same plane; Cinema is not an essentially dramatic art, but a visual one [...] It is not about participation [of the spectator] but rather *communion*"¹⁷.

¹⁴Luca, Tania Regina de. "Periódicos lançados por editoras: o caso do Boletim de Ariel (1931-1939)". In *Revista História*. V. 36 issue 32. 2017, p.10.

¹⁵Wellisch, Mauricio. "Meditações sobre as causas e os efeitos". In *Boletim de Ariel*. December/1932.

¹⁶Wellisch, Mauricio. "Depoimentos estrangeiros sobre o Brasil novo". In *Boletim de Ariel*. September 1938.

¹⁷Wellisch, Mauricio. "O Filosofo e a lanterna magica". In *Boletim de Ariel*. August 1938.

1 Tenacious Writing

2
3 After growing accustomed to a different world, the Paris of the 1920s,
4 Wellisch took up another position in a diametrically different place, the United
5 States in the years between 1942 to 1945. He was invited by Stanford University
6 in Palo Alto to teach a Portuguese course¹⁸. He found himself in the United States
7 in 1944 with Érico Veríssimo. Veríssimo was invited to teach Brazilian Literature
8 at the University of Berkeley. He wrote two books about his stay, *Gato preto em*
9 *campo de neve* (Black cat in a field of snow, 1941) and *A volta do gato preto* (The
10 return of the black cat, 1947). In the latter, he wrote a few lines about Wellisch and
11 the antagonistic world between them seems clear:

12
13 March 6. Today, I was introduced to Maurício Wellisch, vice-consul of Brazil in San
14 Francisco. We talked for some time, and I found out that our opinions on politics, art,
15 literature, and life in general differ greatly. It's as if he was on one side of the San
16 Francisco Bay and I was on the other, trying to communicate in signs to no avail. [...] Wellisch is one of those intellectuals who saw Paris "in the good old days" – and this
17 enchanted vision still haunts him, preventing him from adapting to other lands, other
18 ways of life.¹⁹

20
21 Their opposite worldviews and very distant perceptions prevented them from
22 keeping in contact. Veríssimo is one of the few who described Wellisch as
23 someone we could consider alienated, trapped in a now impossible past. During
24 these years, Wellisch contributed to *A manhã* with several translations.

25 His collaborations with periodicals were unrelenting until the 1960s. On
26 January 31, 1960, in an article for the *Correio da Manhã*, he wrote some sensitive
27 and vivid reflections on Prague.

28
29 Unlike Paris and Zurich, Prague, a foggy, sooty, introverted city, welcomes visitors
30 with much more modesty. The city airport is timid, like someone who apologizes to
31 the well-dressed foreigner for welcoming him while poorly dressed. Prague reminds
32 us of an impoverished grand lord who, in his ancient mansion, only had two
33 modernized rooms left to accommodate his guests: two large hotels with a Western
34 level of comfort. And with a fashion show in one of them, over Sunday tea, to the
35 sound of a muted orchestra...²⁰

36
37 It is one of the last known texts by Wellisch. The notes from 1961 are not
38 encouraging: he was worn down by an illness and returned to Brazil in a hurry
39 after suffering for months.

40
¹⁸A MANHÃ. November 29, 1942, p.9.

¹⁹Veríssimo, Érico. *A volta do gato preto*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras. 2007, pp. 132-133.

²⁰Wellisch, Maurício. "Praga, a cidade dourada". In *Correio da manhã*. January 31, 1960. There is another essay published in *Jornal do Brasil*, July 12, 1961, titled "Ah! Como a vida é cotidiana!" (Oh! How mundane life is!), which uses a tone and tackles a topic that is somewhat reminiscent of a young Wellisch. This was Wellisch's last writing out of the ones that have been found.

Due to the need to hasten his return to Switzerland, from where he will depart on a Panair do Brasil SA plane on Wednesday, the 6th of this month at 9:40 pm, flight number 22, and due to the impossibility of saying goodbye in person to the countless friends and colleagues who would comfort him with their visits to the hospital where he spent four months in this city, he gives his sincere thanks for these manifestations of faithful friendship, which have deeply moved him²¹.

A note dated October 1, 1961, confirms the grieving: "Brazilian diplomat Mauricio Wellisch passed away. The deceased, who was 56 years old, was consul general of his country in this city from 1955 to 1959 [...] Mr. Wellisch passed away in a nursing home in this city after a long illness."²².

Wellisch's works in fine arts or literature compose a homogeneous whole. His trajectory was accompanied by transformations or paradigm shifts connected to the cultural moments he lived through. *Phoenix* and *Boletim de Ariel*, among many other periodicals, are a testament to the strength of his thoughts and his pencil, forged in a very personal way, without a clear-cut set of shared groups or ideals.

References

- ALAIN. *Propos sur les beaux-arts*. Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1998.
- ALAIN. *Vingt leçons sur les beaux-arts*. Paris : Gallimard, 1931.
- CORREIO DA MANHÃ. September 5, 1961.
- DOM-QUIXOTE, "Correspondencia". December 24, 1919.
- FUNCCIONARIOS DO MINISTERIO DAS RELAÇÕES EXTERIORES. Rio de Janeiro, issue 0001, 1938.
- GOUDEMARE, Sylvain. *Marcel Showb ou Les vies imaginaires, biographie*. Paris : Le cherche-Midi, 2000.
- IRAJÁ, Hernani de. "Dentro da arte brasileira: Mauricio Wellisch". In *Fon-Fon*, January 18, 1930.
- JORNAL DO COMÉRCIO. October 1, 1961.
- LUCA, Tania Regina de. "Periódicos lançados por editoras: o caso do Boletim de Ariel (1931-1939)". In *Revista História*. V. 36 issue 32, 2017.
- MACEDO, Camargo de. "Canto da renúncia". In *Phoenix*. March 1924.
- MELO FRANCO, Afonso Arinos de. *A alma do tempo: memórias*. Rio de Janeiro: TopBooks, 2018.
- NAVARRO, Saul de. *La danse des symboles*. Paris : Les éditions mazarines. Translation by Fran. MARWELL, 1936.
- O BEIJA-FLOR, September 1915, issue 17.
- SCHOWB, Marel. *Œuvres*. Paris: Éditions Phébus, 2002.
- VERÍSSIMO, Érico. *A volta do gato preto*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2007
- WELLISCH, Mauricio. "A inquietação espiritual da Europa hoje". In *O Jornal*, July 03, 1927.
- WELLISCH, Mauricio. "Criticando a crítica". In *O Jornal*, March 30, 1930.
- WELLISCH, Mauricio. "Meditações sobre as causas e os efeitos". In *Boletim de Ariel*. December/1932.
- WELLISCH, Mauricio. "Depoimentos estrangeiros sobre o Brasil novo". In *Boletim de Ariel*. September 1938.
- WELLISCH, Mauricio. "O Philosopho e a lanterna magica". In *Boletim de Ariel*. August 1938.

²¹CORREIO DA MANHÃ. September 5, 1961.

²²JORNAL DO COMÉRCIO. October 1, 1961.