



The Brazilian effect

When the local mayor introduced a law banning outdoor advertising in São Paulo, landmarks disappeared and citizens lost income from renting out the walls of their homes. However, **Michael Canturi** thinks it could spark a resurgence in creativity

AT THE END of 2006, the Brazilian city of São Paulo imposed a city-wide ban on all outdoor advertising. It also restricted the size of external signage in the city. Known as 'Lei Cidade Limpa', or the Clean City Law, it was an initiative of mayor Gilberto Kassab, intended to cleanse the city of what he dubbed its 'visual pollution'.

I was curious about the challenges posed by such a restriction, which produced an environment where the creative industry is forced to deliver beyond the traditional attitude of 'bigger is better'. So, after winning Coley Porter Bell's Blue Sky competition, I had two weeks to find out what had happened since the billboards came down.

São Paulo is massive. Looking at the city before Cidade Limpa, you can see how out of control the situation was. Sign upon sign, piled high and stretching into the distance. It came as no surprise that locals used billboards as reference points for navigating around the city.

Today, walking around the city for Paulistanos is a different experience. You can feel the buildings breathe a sigh of relief – if rather chokingly. The evidence from that bygone era of big bad advertising isn't completely gone though. Quick fixes, by way of graffiti, half-torn signs and inventive touch-ups have shown the creative side of many small businesses adapting to the new law. But, what has it meant for those 'established' names in the world's third largest city?

On the whole, the results are optimistic. For some, it was a huge wake-up call. A simple resize of the company logo would only go so far. For others, it affirmed their graphic approach and provided an opportunity to bring that to life through colour and materials.

Perhaps one of the best examples of this is shoe brand Melissa. Using plastic as an 'ownable' material, the brand brings a huge sense of fun and creativity across everything it does. The store's exterior functions as a blank canvas for local artists, while inside offers a space

designed by Karim Rashid and creative collaborations with people like Vivienne Westwood, the Campana Brothers and Zaha Hadid. It's a brand that embraces its creative essence and isn't shy about it.

Talking to people, it's easy to see their enthusiasm for Cidade Limpa and the huge changes it has brought to the city. The delight of the positive, however, becomes a sharp contrast to the negative, which quickly ventures into the territory of social issues.

For many living in multistorey apartments, advertising on the exterior of their homes provided an income which afforded them a reasonable standard of living. Now this is gone, it puts many of them in a compromising situation. Some think that once you start to show the problem, you can begin to solve it, while others question the relevance of the law compared with the city's many other problems.

The Brazilian design brothers Fernando and Humberto Campana say, 'There are two interpretations of the "Brazilian way of doing things". The first is the way that can lead to corruption. But the second is a genuinely positive quality – a way to solve things, to juxtapose the contraries and to create something imaginative.'

It's an attitude that remains focused on future possibilities, while emphasising the importance of typical Brazilian attributes. Concepts like strategy and regeneration may still be in their infancy, but it's an exciting thought to consider what the vibrancy and spontaneity of a Brazilian attitude may bring to established methods. The implementation of Cidade Limpa made some of us take notice and see the possibilities of a world without billboards. Imagine that. ●

Michael Canturi is a designer at Coley Porter Bell. This visit to São Paulo was his prize for winning CPB's Blue Sky competition, which is intended to inspire creativity.

1 and 4 Billboard sites in São Paulo, stripped of posters

2 and 3 Melissa shoe store and McDonald's outlet in São Paulo, showing contrasting ways of dealing with the Lei Cidade Limpa restrictions