

V!RUS13

para tempos difíceis
Boas notícias
Good news
for hard times

ano 2016 year
semestre 2 semester

revista do nomads.usp | nomads.usp journal
issn:2175.974x | CC BY - NC
DOI 10.4237/virus_journal

Metropolitan mutations: road system structures as place of appropriation, reinvention and use in the contemporary city

Luísa Gonçalves

How to quote this text: Gonçalves, L., 2016. Metropolitan mutations: road system structures as place of appropriation, reinvention and use in the contemporary city. *V!RUS*, [e-journal] 13. Available at: <<http://www.nomads.usp.br/virus/virus13/?sec=4&item=4&lang=en>> [Accessed 00 Month 0000].

Luísa Gonçalves is Master in Theory, History and Critic of Architecture and researcher at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. She studies the relationship among architecture, city, public space and infrastructure, collective use spaces at Sao Paulo metropolitan area.

Abstract

This paper analyses urban road structures that have undergone transformations of appropriations different from what they were originally designated, with focus in three viaducts. Subversions of use, incorporation of architectural structures to existing contexts, and multiple relationships between circulation and permanence contribute in order that the contemporary metropolis offers a particular aesthetic experience. The possibility of facing the unknown and occupying public spaces rescue the notion of city as a place of exchanges, freedom and unpredictability. Concepts of heterotopia and *terrain vague* are discussed in the approach to interstitial spaces, of the "non-places", and infrastructures in relation to the metropolitan context. The work analyses three viaducts located in distinctive contexts: the High Line in New York, the Eichbaum Oper in Munich, and the Madureira viaduct in Rio de Janeiro. In difficult times, they are signs of power of simple but precise interventions, and of the relationship between the local popular organization and the implanted projects. In common they share the initial situation of interstitial space and the interventions that transformed them into spaces of collective use, with an intense and particular relationship between the public and urban space.

Keywords: Road structures; Infrastructure; Metropolis; Contemporary city; Public space.

Introduction: places at the edge

This article discusses urban structures that have undergone transformations in its original condition, their processes of reinvention and repercussions. This situation can start from several points, be it from the abandonment of the structure or from a need for appropriation of a remaining space. We are interested in highlighting these places and pointing out these experiences as successful in creating spaces for welcoming, fostering their appropriation as public spaces, for the collective use of the population of these places; Cases which are well received by the population.

The cases present in common the demand to incorporate the city spaces that were disconnected in the sense of its use from the context of its environment. In this sense, they appeared as space emptied of meaning and occupation, which refers to the concept of *terrain vague*, presented by the Spanish architect Ignasi de Solà-Morales. According to this author, from the decade of 1970 on, this "obsolete" place gains the attention of photographers in search of an atypical urban landscape, out of the apothecic model of architectural objects or large metropolitan infrastructure (SOLÀ-MORALES, 2012, p. 02). In the work of John Davies, David Plowten, and Olivio Barbieri, for example (some of the photographers mentioned by the author), residual places emerge in the city, as strange relationships between production and obsolescence, inviting the city's inhabitant to confront himself with the unproductive, imprecise, uncertain, but nonetheless urban. Solà-Morales uses various etymological roots to define the term *terrain vague*, ranging from the precise urban land extension of a "land" to fluid concepts of vacant, vague, available, empty, imprecise, indeterminate. Though contradictory and conflicting, the term also relates to the city's spirit of modernity's beginning, when the unpredictable was unveiled in the urban space, which fed the bohemian spirits and the habit of strolling:

The romantic imagination that remains in our contemporary sensibility is nurtured by memories and expectations. **Foreigners in our own country, strangers in our town, the metropolis habitant feels the spaces not dominated by architecture as a reflection of its own insecurity**, its vague ramble through unlimited vacant spaces that, in its position outside the urban system, of power, of activity, constitute, at its turn, physical expression of its fear and insecurity, but also an expectation of the other, the alternative, the utopian, the future. (SOLÀ-MORALES, 2012, p. 04, *emphasis added*).

The negative, empty and unproductive space, inside the metropolis' intense production system exposes the inability to plan and occupy orderly all the territory in the same way that sculptors, photographers, contemporary artists have found places in the city to expand their expression, outside controlled boundaries and limited freedom of the metropolis, may also architects feed themselves of this condition and produce spaces that absorb this subject and the needs of their time. The established relation between inhabitant-space which emerges cannot be previewed, constituting a rich process: the city is built like a palimpsest, in tangled layers of urban texts, overlapping temporalities in different appropriations.

Metropolis, circulation and permanence

Mobility infrastructure



Throughout the transformations in transportation systems, some incompatibilities appeared between road structures and urban contexts. The presented cases point to three types: in relation to transition of models - with the resulting abandonment of railway structures as in the case of New York; in relation to scale, when the structure does not follow the consolidation of an urban context, as in the German case; or when the structure overpasses existing urban areas without articulation between them, as in the case in Brazil. In all situations, the voids created by these incompatibilities remained for some time in this state, before their incorporation to urban life through, notably, the creation of conviviality spaces.

The increase of population in urban areas - the beginning of the urbanization process that culminates in the metropolis - appears in several narratives that discuss the scenario of confrontation of the "modern man" with the crowd spread through the streets of the city, as they saw daily life transforming by increasingly strong industrial development. The modernization enters the 20th century and the machine is claimed as man's ally in the process of society's development, reflected also in urban design and in housing projects. Reyner Banham (1979, p. 384) remembers too that in "Vers une architecture" Le Corbusier "begins choosing what appears to be at first glance only a secondary consideration in the planning of cities: straight paths versus curved ones". The relationship of Le Corbusier and architects of his generation with the machine and the development of civil construction and engineering in the early 20th century is more complex and has surpassed numerous areas of his design and theoretical work. Analysing this First Age of the Machine, however, Banham (1979, p. 17) points out that this development between "futuristic and academic dynamism" featured this first phase, but that many ideas and aesthetics of this time still persist in the Second, meaning that the "cultural revolution that occurred around 1912 was surpassed, but was not reversed."

The state of crisis that hit most American cities in the late 20th century brought with it a change in the general approach to the metropolis theme. The progressive and developmental spirit that marked most of the XX century gave place to a more critical view of the congested city that coexists with increasingly intensified traffic jams, and situations of housing and basic infrastructure crises. The "modern metropolis" gave place to the "contemporary metropolis", reinforcing its character of expression of capital's spatial production. According to Professor Regina Meyer (2000, p. 4, emphasis added by the author) "everything that 'gets' shape in metropolitan life *expresses* the relations established in all its spheres of social and productive life, becoming *expression* and not a *reflection* of these relations." The contemporary metropolis, associated with information society, is imputed the "dissolution of the territorial, functional and spatial traces of the modern metropolis". This definition is also used by Paul Virilio (1993, p. 12), which relates urban boundaries to the symbol of ancient cities doors, explaining that "if, despite promises of postmodern architects, the city is deprived of doors from now on, it's very urban limits have enabled an infinity of openings, breaks and closings".

Mobility and location

In this context of fuzzy perimeters, both authors point out to the support that infrastructure systems offer as *locators*, aggregators, not only guiding principles but elements with a nodal characteristic. Thus, Virilio (1993, p. 16, capitalization emphasis by the author, *italic*) places transport and transmission systems in a same structural level, to the detriment of the representative effect which, as explained above, is assigned to the monument: "today is even more likely that what we call URBANISM is



composed/decomposed by these transfer system, of transit and transmission, these network of transportation and transmigration whose immaterial configuration renews that of cadastral organization, that of building of monuments". Meyer also brings as an important aspect of the contemporary metropolitan organization the role of activity nodes generated by infrastructure systems:

To work around these difficulties and get an approximation of the new urban order and in order to the **dilution's degree of activities in the territory and in the urban space** does not remain as an **obstacle to our perception**, it's possible to make use of a methodological resource based on the combination of aspects of metropolitan life: **to consider that the organization** – formal and functional – of the contemporary metropolis **is set simultaneously by metropolitan infrastructure** systems, by the nodes that support society's activities in the territory and by their daily shifts within and its territories and spaces. (MEYER, 2000, p. 4, *emphasis added*)

During the intense metropolitan urbanization process (especially in the case of Brazil), the mobility infrastructures were configured as rough and significant urban interventions, justified by growth models that in many cases favoured the circulation of automobiles. Monumental structures of bridges and viaducts have become outdated and degraded with the abandonment of that planning vision and by revision of the problem of metropolitan circulation, sometimes replaced by other types of transport systems. Besides the bearing structures themselves, transitional spaces begin to give form to an intense movement of passage and circulation through the city, in the abstract architecture of terminals and stations that would at first aim only support the flow. In the late twentieth century, these spaces began to appear in specialized critics, mainly linked to the problem of large cities and metropolises, global cities and the substantial increase of movement of persons.

Passage and permanence

In 1996, at the opening speech of the International Congress of architects, the architect and critic Ignasi de Solà-Morales acknowledges the limitations of Architecture to promote solutions to urban contexts as a whole. With a provocation on the need to think of new categories of analysis for the recent architectural phenomena, Solà-Morales will explore five situations that the discipline faces in the face in new situations. One is concerned about spaces of flows, of transition, to mobility:

Not a flow - such as the road or the telephone - but the juxtaposition of a multiplicity of flows is the first realization that the reality in which we live is formed by meshes that accumulate interconnections before which the idea of simple driving or via is reductive and insufficient. (...) That these forms of interconnection are international or, as we have said recently, global, extended to everything throughout the world, part of the experience, also specific in the last thirty years, that information and transportation flows no longer exclude any part of the world from their networks. Cities and architecture do not escape this situation, on the contrary, they constitute the nodal places in which this global interaction finds the most powerful interconnections. (SOLÀ-MORALES, 1996, p. 13, *our translation*)

About this kind of project, there is also the important interpretation of the anthropologist Marc Augè, that, when analysing transport stations and spaces whose main theme is the flow of passengers, coined the concept of "non-place" as "both facilities necessary to



accelerated movement of persons and goods (express roads, roadblocks, airports) as well as the means of transport itself or the large shopping centers" (AUGE, 1994, p. 36). This concept is doubly important here: it embraces the category of spaces of flows and transition, but also about the unfolding of the notion of place in the realm of human relations.

In his definition, Augè (1994, p. 54) explains that the "non-places" hosts the movement of goods and people, disrupt the connection of the habitant with the territory, and distanced themselves from a historical dimension of the city. The author denounces in relation to "non-places" the absence of non-programmed spaces; as they are regarded as places of transition, specific platforms targeting a specific activity (mostly of displacement), however, if the "non-places" of the supermodernity preaches the impersonal by means of fragmentation mechanisms and space specification, the approach of individuals causes a short circuit in the system. At the presented cases, the appropriation of both the road structures and the metro station transform the space by use, gaining new dimension and meaning.

Appropriation and reinvention

In Foucault's conception (1984), once surpassed the heterotopias of crises (places reserved for individuals in crisis situation in relation to their community), we deal with the heterotopias of deviation in the city, those spaces that are home to people in conflicting situations with the pre-established social norm (nursing homes, psychiatric clinics, prisons, etc.). The cases presented here operate within a specific aspect of the city: mobility. If the purpose of its construction, in all cases, was to connect people and places – through the railroad, subway station or the viaduct –for different reasons they went through a process of degradation, of its own structure or creating vacuums, voids without movement of people, adequate lighting, conforming situations of little urbanity.

These spaces can be read as places *other* – *heteros* – in relation to its surrounding, through the conflict between structure and urban context and also the conflict of use, the separation between vehicles' and pedestrians circulation. Their appropriation, adaptation and transformation, however, removed them again from a place of estrangement, reconfiguring its logic of use and relocating them, though temporarily, in its quality of appropriation.

In New York, the High Line railway structure was considered like a scar that crossed old industrial neighborhoods of the city. Built to transport goods and abandoned for more than forty years due to the change of economic cycles (MENDES, 2013), it was through the residents union, who conducted a study based on its possible reuses, that an architecture competition for the project was promoted, turning it into a park. The extension of the linear park created various environments presenting particular situations by extending itself in between the buildings, including, at one point, a moment when it crosses one of the buildings.

As terrain vague and as a heterotopia, the High Line project has operated a transformation: in the landscape, in the history, the scar-like railroad becomes part of the circuit of leisure and culture not only of the residents, but a large number of tourists who can now use it as an element in the landscape and in a more connected relationship,

displaying its extension, which reveals other perspectives of the metropolis at different heights and scenarios.

With the opening of the second session of the High Line, pedestrians can cross 19 blocks, from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, without being in contact with a single vehicle, while you can see the city from a privileged point", says the Planning Coordinator. (Diller Scofidio + Renfro published in Vitruvius portal Projects. VITRUVIUS PORTAL, 2008, p. 02).



Fig. 01: High Line, NY. Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/shankbone/14082063968>. Accessed on 23 11 2016.

Despite the contradictions regarding the valuation of the soil around the course of the High Line, the intervention reaches a crucial point regarding urban mobility and on political and technological transformations that reached the transport systems: the obsolescence of the railway structure (due to reasons aside those addressed here) was overlaid a pedestrian structure. Although no longer part of the transportation system, its adaptation to pedestrians' everyday use (and non-motorized, as highlighted in the above quote) marks the demand for these kind of spaces in the context of metropolitan density.



In another context, in southern Germany, the use of pedestrian space and meeting places also marks the transformation of a subway station away from an urban context that could already present this usage and features, albeit more punctually than the High Line case. The Eichbaum subway station is at the base of the highway that connects the cities of Essen and Mülheim, in an urban context dissected by roads and subway lines. It was built in the 1970 in a connection node between German industrial cities that went into decline, and left residual spaces that presented high rates of violence.

The intervention was designed by the Raumlabor Collective, a German architecture office located in Berlin, whose work trespasses the fields of architecture, city planning, art, and urban intervention, in a collaborative way. The focus of their work is, however, in conflicting urban situations: abandoned locations relevant to the process of urban transformation, overlapping systems, velocities, and proposals. By understanding that urban renewal occurs procedurally, the group faced the subway station project with simple but significant intervention measures, temporarily transforming it in a stage for popular operas without halting its operation.

The proposal presented itself by the architects as to give a use to the station, and which would be connected with the local population. A big outdoor was installed at the top of the station with the inscription "EichbaumOper" ("Eichbaum" Opera) and it was built a grandstand and a small support center with containers. In addition, workshops were organized to collect stories that would be told during the operas, and for a time, the architects moved to the site to interact with the young people and create music and graffiti. Partnerships were made with theatres nearby to start rehearsing at the subway station itself, so that the people who were passing by would learn about the project. The complete subversion of the station had a positive impact in the area, In order to reduce insecurity by encouraging use and occupation.



Fig. 02: Subway station adapted to function as a stage for Opera: a grandstand and a small set of containers were the built interventions needed. Source: Rainer Schlautmann, 2009. Available at <http://raumlabor.net/eichbaumoper/>. Accessed on 24 10 2016.

In both cases analysed above, the level of constructive intervention was variable and determinant for their activities: from a complex renewal project in New York to a small structure of support of activities in Germany. In the next example, however, the intervention is even smaller: in Madureira, in Rio de Janeiro, there is a multi-purpose appropriation of a viaduct in a key location next to the train stations of Madureira and the popular *Mercadão de Madureira*. The Viaduct *Negrão de Lima* is home to the headquarters of CUFA (Central Única das Favelas), an organization created by young people from various shanty towns of Rio de Janeiro, in search of spaces to express their identity through, mainly, hip-hop music and dance. There, workshops, cultural and sports activities were offered (at the Sports and Cultural Centre in the CUFA, opened in 2006), as well as the famous Ball Charm, which happens on Saturdays, and became an emblematic case of cultural expression in a public space of the city. It reinforces the tradition of black culture in the neighborhood, which already housed samba schools Portela, Serrano Empire and Tradition, as well as Jongo da Serrinha, an NGO also linked to culture. The dance, music and costumes are particular to the ball, which gained visibility when portrayed in the telenovela "Avenida Brasil" in 2012. In addition, once a month the jongo and ciranda project "Companhia de Aruanda" takes place and, street vendors occupy the area during daytime.

By analysing the influence of hip-hop in reframing the use of the viaduct, RABBIT and TAKAKI (2008, p 131) also bring the concept of "non-place" to characterize the initial condition it was the lower part of the structure, as a place of transition without permanence or identity value for the population:

It is important to note that the "non-place" is structured by people in transit that do not create identity with the place, and it is in this sense that the *Negrão de Lima* viaduct, better known as "Viaduto de Madureira" opened in early 1960, has its bottom part between train lines from Madureira13 and Magno14 (also known as the Station Mercadão de Madureira), characterized as a simple public space transition, residual space, and that encounters, in part, re-signification through the hip-hop Movement. (RABBIT and TAKAKI, 2008, p. 131)

With the implementation of the cultural activities, the viaduct has consecrated itself as a changeable space par excellence: the activity, whether cultural, leisure or sports, changes according with the week day or at night, and establishing an epiphyte relationship with its structure, once those activities do not interfere with the vehicles above - but the fact that the car lane covers a wide area is fundamental. Again, the subversion of space has transformed it physically, culturally and socially; an overpass that could set up another interstitial space in the city came to life through cultural events.



Fig. 03: Ball Charme. Source: Isabela Kassow/Diadorim Ideias, 2014. Available in: <http://mapadecultura.rj.gov.br/manchete/baile-charm-2#prettyPhoto>. Accessed on 22 10 2016.

Final considerations

Indeed, it is necessary to understand that access to universal culture must be combined with the appreciation of the creative processes of groups and cultural movements of the community, so that their experience, their knowledge and their view of the world interpenetrate the social fabric and

generate a new quality of life, different from the dryness of "modernity" driven by cultural homogenization (RABBIT and TAKAKI , p. 127).

It is important to emphasize that the three cases touch on the theme of urban mobility, and it is only by its state of abandonment - of the structure, in the case of the High Line, or the place because of low circulation of people, as in the cases of Munich and Madureira, at the same time of importance for the region, that demands for transformation have emerged. In this process, the motorized mass circulation, so dear to the metropolitan dynamics, gave way to the conviviality of pedestrians, intense scales in small intervention actions.

If, by difficult times, good news bring winds of lucidity and incentive to resistance, good projects feed the importance of intervention on a local scale even within a metropolitan scale. As a result of collective action, this aspect is even more in evidence. Although in very different contexts, the three analysed examples illustrate situations where the subversion of uses has transformed obsolete or residual urban structures and spaces, modifying the relationship of users with these spaces, and allowing the creation of a new landscape.

Formerly symbolically marginal spaces, they assumed the character of the heterotopy of an urban mobility project that superposed structures in a conflicting way, and constituted urban voids similar to the terrain vague in their spatial determination. In this sense, they stand out for the aesthetic experience that they offer, when claiming a new urban dimension for the places of intervention, and emphasize, in the metropolitan urban condition, possibilities of intervention from the use. The spaces were produced through their appropriation, and reaffirmed by the intense reintegration of these spaces to their contexts.

This kind of space could always be present in urban contexts, since they speak of this condition of non-planning or of inadequacy, characteristics of the complex environment that the city in metropolitan scale presents. In these interventions, where a significant change can occur through little construction, it is conventional urban planning that must be questioned, since such spaces have a character of memory, overlapping of activities, absences and ambiguities that are part of its essence; and show that the reach to the urban experience is more subtle and allows a multiplicity of re-readings.

References

Augé, M. **Os não lugares**: introdução a uma antropologia da supermodernidade. Campinas/SP: Papirus, 1994.

Banham, R. **Teoria e projeto na primeira era da máquina**. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1979.

Coelho, G., Takaki, E. A experiência da Ação Cultural Hip-Hop sob o Viaduto de Madureira no Rio de Janeiro. **Risco**: Revista de Pesquisa em Arquitetura e Urbanismo e Urbanismo. nº8, 2008.

Foucault, M. *Outros espaços*. Architecture, movement, continuité. n5, out 1984, ps. 46-49.



Mendes, A. C. Transdisciplinaridade na construção dos territórios públicos urbanos: conversões. Elevado Costa e Silva (SP) e High Line (NY). **Minha Cidade**, São Paulo, ano 14, n. 160.02, Vitruvius, nov. 2013. Available at: <<http://www.vitruvius.com.br/revistas/read/minhacidade/14.160/4945>>. Accessed on 09 jun. 2014.

Meyer, R. Atributos da metrópole moderna. **São Paulo em Perspectiva**. Revista da Fundação SEADE. São Paulo, n. 4, v. 14, out.-dez. 2000.

Solà-Morales, I. **Presentes y futuros**. La arquitectura en las ciudades. XIX UIA Congress Catalogue, 1996, p. 10-23.

Solà-Morales, I. **Terrain vague**. 2012. Tradução Igor Fracalossi. Available: <http://www.archdaily.com.br/br/01-35561/terrain-vague-ignasi-de-sola-morales>. Accessed on 09 jun. 2014.

Virilio, P. **O espaço crítico e as perspectivas do tempo real**. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. 34, 1993.