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interview

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Abstract

Walls are fundamental constituent elements of urban spaces, when setting or determining designs, uses and flows in the city. They are viewed in a predominantly negative way by space scholars, due to their segregating nature: they function as a division of areas, but also of realities; prevent access; harass the user to the point of making their appropriation of space impractical. But is there an underestimated potentiality in those components? This paper seeks to understand the influences of the walls in the urban quotidian, pointing out their role in the weaving of the city and their virtuality that instigates in diverse ways different social groups, classifying themselves as in-between places.

Keywords: City; Walls; Security; In-between places; Appropriation

Introduction

More than simple territorial delimitation or protection of private property, this element symbolizes a spreading social behavior: the individualization of men and his disconnection from the collective, which aggravates the shredding of urban fabric.

The urban fabric is composed of a set of interrelated spaces, intertwined with barriers, which fulfill the functions, among others, of organizing atmospheres, tracing flows and delimiting public and private areas (Figure 1). Among these obstacles, daily life takes place, in its classic activities of living, working, having fun and moving around. They thus fulfill an ambiguous task: at the same time they prevent (or hinder) displacements, they also indicate (or enable) connections. Walls¹ are the clearest physical manifestations of urban barriers. More than simple territorial delimitation related to the protection of private property, this component symbolizes an increasingly widespread social behavior: the individualization of contemporary man and his detachment from the collective, aggravating the shredding of the urban fabric.



Fig. 1: Urban *dérive* in São João del-Rei, by Maira Ramirez and Fernanda Martins, during the study "The city and its walls". Source: Maira Ramirez, 2016.

This may be the reason why urban barriers are usually linked to their segregating characteristic and the first impact generated by addressing the issue is generally negative. This is because when thinking about the wall as an object (and thus will be approached initially so that it can later be dissected into symbolic characterizations), the image created has in itself the indication of something insurmountable, or at least difficult to pass, having thus a break of potential communication between parts. By itself, the wall is linked to the idea of division.

But is it possible to think of walls and other urban barriers as potential spaces of appropriation? When vertical, they can be used as communication murals (Figure 2); when horizontal, in the form of streets, bridges, or train lines, for example, they can offer possibilities for use by different groups and in different ways. In order to understand those potentialities, thinking about the dual function (segregation and appropriation) of urban barriers, one must understand the emptying process of urban spaces that has led to the present state of insecurity in the cities.

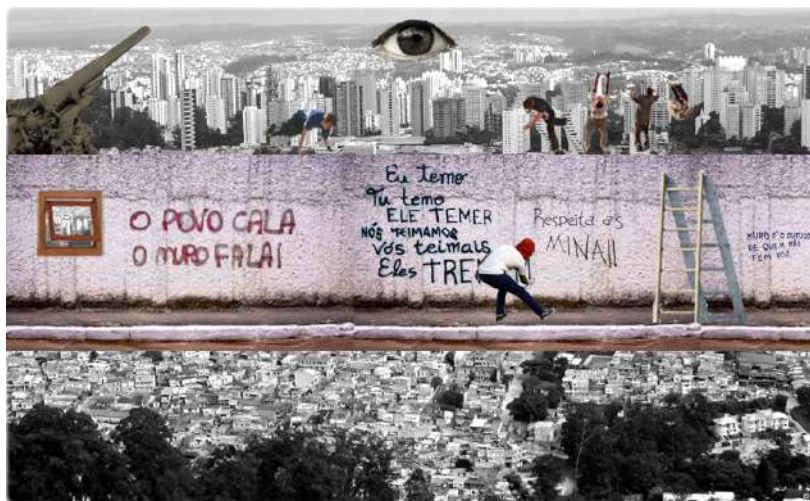


Fig. 2: Collage 1. Source: Maira Ramirez, 2016.

Walls and social discourse

Cities are not mere scenarios or random construction clusters. Even if it is not always noticed in daily life, the city is the result of social actions and discourses. According to Cortés (2008), the built space is not totally responsible for the oppression or liberation of society, but it plays the role of conditioning, leading to different ways of social practice. Therefore, the built elements help in the maintenance of a certain order and, inevitably, in the creation of a certain spatial identity, directly related to the ideas of authority and symbolic capital. The author goes on to note that urban forms act as social mirrors, influencing the construction and transformations of social reality. This becomes clear in some iconic barriers, such as the Berlin Wall (figure 3), which materialized an ideological polarization that, translated into space, meant not only the division of a country, but the separation of families and affections.



Fig. 3: The Berlin Wall Memorial. Source: Maíra Ramirez, 2011.

Even the illuminist city was based on an ideology of surveillance and social control that would cut through space in order to sustain power structures and to regulate life and flows in a way that would optimize production and consumption (Cortés, 2008). Old and dark alleys were torn apart or illuminated, setting up clear (sanitized) spaces where security was granted by the eyes of the powerful. This was usually set in place in order to counteract popular movements seeking improvements in conditions generated by capitalism's social contradictions. Many examples of this situation happened during the 18th and 19th centuries, such as the paramount urban plan for Paris by Haussmann² and are still present in contemporary cities. To Débord (1955, cited in Jacques, 2003) the effort of the newly established powers to maintain order on the streets after the French Revolution ended up suppressing life in them.

It is important to emphasize that the incorporation and concretization of the modernist ideals, quite contradictory to what they originally preached, contributed significantly to the maintenance of guarded and "protected" cities through sectoral and programmatic urban plans. The 20th century is even more marked by the suppression of streets and public spaces, due to the advent of the automobile and its prioritization over pedestrians. For Bourriaud (2011), the geometrization of space is closely linked to the fact that walking does not generate profit, which stimulated this activity to be performed as quickly as possible. The strategy used by Henry Ford to keep his workers from "wasting time" shifting was to subject this movement to "a rational organization based on the geometrization of space" (Bourriaud, 2011, p.15). Just over a century later, this measure is totally absorbed by society and walking is denied by urban planners, oblivious to the fact that the emptying of streets as spaces of use and permanence is directly linked to important issues of urban violence.

The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that people tend not to come into direct contact with the city, hiding inside their cars, which, for Jacobs (2011), is part of the second technique of coexistence with urban insecurity. It points to the existence of three techniques to date: let the danger happen freely and reach those who are most vulnerable to it; hide in cars; and cultivate institutions of the territory, which occurs when a certain group appropriates part of the city and prevents members of another group from entering this place being subjected to beatings, as in the case of the ghettos of New York addressed by the author.

It is clear, then, the existence of ideological determinations that act on the construction of space and indicate how and when it should be used. Cortés (2008, p.108) says that "architectural control of social barriers has become the true spirit of urban restructuring; residential and commercial security has been able to take the place of any form of social integration." The stiffness in spatial organization strives for a perfect world with no room for "ugliness" and disorder in favor of security based on restricting access. According to Argan (1998, p.214), "the city which in the past was the closed and safe place by antonomasia, the maternal breast, becomes the place of insecurity, of the inevitable struggle for survival, of fear, of anguish, of despair".

Nowadays, what attracts people to the use of public spaces are commercial relations, which influence the characterization of contemporary society as a society of consumption. Especially in big cities, the old shopping streets have been replaced by shopping centers: closed, air-conditioned and well-lit spaces that deny urban space and seek to welcome a select target audience (which is guaranteed through architectural strategies such as pompous façades, intimidating walls and priority access for cars). The streets of the contemporary city thus became mere transit space, in which the main flow is what connects the residences to other restricted spaces as the ones previously discussed. This is a symptomatic reduction of the possible uses of the city, since its streets serve (or should serve) "for several purposes besides holding vehicles; and the sidewalks - the part of the streets for pedestrians - serve many purposes besides holding pedestrians." (Jacobs, 2011, p.29) Even recreational places are marked by segregation, either by the physical walls surrounding them, by the entry fees or by conditioning permanence to buying and selling relationships - which makes that certain social strata not have conditions of appropriation.

The social non-integration (or disintegration) and the difficulty (either by lack of will or incapacity) in making general population sensitive to diversity and to extreme social inequality greatly facilitate the maintenance of order and power by the ruling classes, generating an illusion of a safe society, guaranteed by socio-spatial segregation. According to Jacobs (2011, p.29), when people claim that a city, or part of it, is dangerous, they are basically saying "that they don't feel safe on the sidewalks." That is, the notion of safety or violence in a city relates directly to the population's urban lifestyle and to its coexistence in

public space. Jacobs stresses the importance of sidewalks in urban relationships when she states that "sidewalks or those who use them are not passive beneficiaries of security or helpless victims of danger", since when people fear the streets, "they use them less, which makes the streets still more unsafe" (Jacobs, 2011, p.30). Cortés (2008, p.65) recalls that "public space ceases to be a meeting place, the center of social life, to become something more closely related to strict regularization, where everything is controlled and the individual feels safe and considers guaranteed such security".

Urban violence is, therefore, a fundamental point in the discussion about the city and its barriers, considering that it has become the central element in what concerns the contemporary justifications for the creation of spaces of segregation. It is in this context that Jacobs (2011) reminds us of the walls, often used to form urban islands. In an opposite way to conventional, where security is directly linked to the construction of ever higher walls, the author affirms that the best way to combat urban violence is the eyes of the streets³, that is, "the eyes of those who can call the natural owners of the street" (Jacobs, 2011, p.35). The smaller the walls and the more permeable the cities, the greater the contact between people and the occupation of the streets, reducing the factors that cause urban violence - one takes care of the space of the other and everyone watches what is common. More important than the police and the cameras is the constant pedestrian traffic in the cities. Informal public life boosts formal and associative public life. That is, for Jacobs (2011), the security of a street or neighborhood is guaranteed by democratic self-management, based mainly on the creation of a network of relationships.

The idea of security is often linked to surveillance, as indicated by the installation of cameras on the streets throughout many cities as a promise to minimize violence. As discussed earlier, this type of strategy is recurrent from the beginning of urbanistic thinking, when planners intended, by widening the streets and making of their drawings orthogonal traces, facilitate the sight and, consequently, control over the activities performed in those spaces. The great difference between the type of surveillance applied today and the one proposed by Jacobs (2011) is precisely an idea of hierarchy and control. The eyes of the street only work by the impulse of human curiosity, and this becomes clear when the author describes how each event in the neighborhood takes all the residents to the sidewalks and windows. However, in spite of being a "judge", this observation is more of a care than a fascist and oppressive attitude.

Walls as in-between places

Moving towards the notion of security addressed by Jacobs (2011), starting with an idea of surveillance based on the logic of trust, it is possible to think about the appropriation of streets and public spaces. Many of the neglected spaces in the city present a significant potential for use and gathering individuals. Although they are often considered as dangerous areas, these regions have the quality of multiplicity that can be enhanced through appropriation proposals.

These marginal areas, endowed with innumerable possibilities of experience and creation, are named by Guatelli (2012) as in-between spaces, that is, what is between the programmatic spaces. Unlike the latter, the in-between spaces, have no function *per se* and are not consciously built for or by anyone and that's precisely why they allow appropriation in different ways and by different audiences. These places are often found along urban boundaries. They are spaces capable of breaking with the notion of inside/outside, or, being outside, of being occupied, enjoyed and recreated as if it were not important to be inside. Referring to these residual spaces, Guatelli (2012, p.22) states that "they would always be open to the constant process of different appropriations, free from the influence of any imposition caused by a precondition". It is a thing among things, which is neither one nor the other, which can be many, being able to reinvent itself on a daily basis of different uses. It is the "articulation of the defined towards the undefined" (Guatelli, 2012, p.23).

Infrastructure spaces such as walls, avenues, train tracks - some of them classified as urban barriers - are in-between places⁴, because they can remain, unlike predetermined spaces, impassive and indifferent even in the face of momentary figurations (Guatelli, 2012). They function as support, being open to different interventions that do not act directly on their structure, and can be transformed as many times as desired.

Articulating these concepts to Lefebvre's (1999) theories, one can say that in-between places are spaces in which there are possibilities of appropriation and, since they do not arouse the interests of the capital, they are not inserted in the logic of the value of exchange, having great potential for use value and, consequently, as spaces of creation, of the virtual, of the *oeuvre*⁵.

It would be in space, not predetermined space, but "in-between", in spaces free from pre-configuration, that we could experience this "moments of invention" and create conditions for a *devenir autre*, moving beyond the limits imposed by the "natural", by history constructed by dominant discourse (Guatelli, 2012, p.32).

In order to understand these spaces and processes, traditional rational and analytic modes of investigation become insufficient, calling for methodological reinvention and innovative approaches. One possible path is to recover the situationist *dérive* (Jacques, 2003) to a contemporary context, using it as a strategy for perceiving and occupying urban spaces. This derivative of the *dérive* (a squared *dérive* or *dérive*²) calls for a being in the city that is, at the same time, attentive and carefree, awakening new sensitivities and connecting the body to the urban.

The diagram in figure 4 shows exactly how this connections between the objects of study, the concepts addressed and the chosen processes talk, aiming to to promote a broad debate about urban barriers in the scale of body, wall and city.

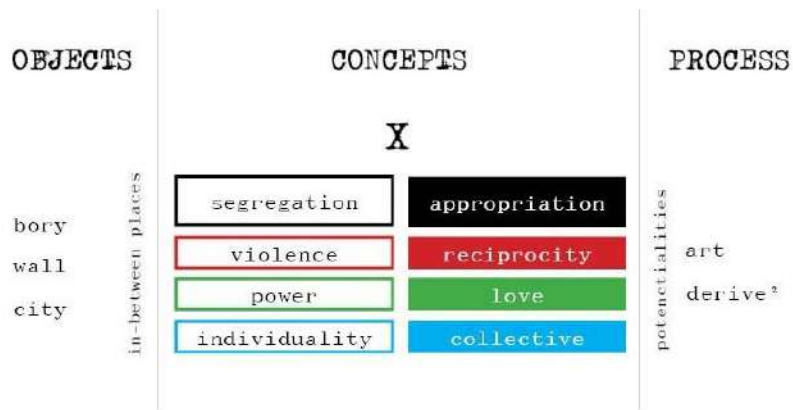


Fig. 4: The investigation of the urban barriers (here called the 'wall') and its relationship with the body and the city was developed during the Final Graduation Paper 'The City and its Walls', through an analysis of dialectical concepts and the realization of *dérives*². This experience transcended the conventional techniques of architectural research, allowing the space of the body, the individual and the subjective in the perception of the city and the way the walls act over them. Source: Maíra Ramirez, 2016.

According to Benjamin (1982), construction occupies the place of the unconscious, in view of the inherent potential of the architecture to confirm latent logic not yet perceived (Figure 5). The innumerable potentialities of appropriation of space, ranging from instigating the user to surpassing the architect's desire, are proof that the object generated is independent of the will of a single author and dialogues with the relations of several individuals. The in-between place is thus the main space for receiving different interventions and that may, in itself, have the mark of multiple desires. It is a confrontation between places immediately perceived, which promote quick appropriation, and other spaces, where the process of perception and use is slower because it is a perversion of the original meaning that goes through the potentiation of indirect and inventive readings.



Fig. 5: *Dérive*² held in Barbacena, on August 22, 2016, by Maíra Ramirez and Jeniffer Maia, during the development of the Final Graduation Paper "The city and its walls". Source: Maíra Ramirez, 2016.

What is important here is to understand how these spaces function as instigating instruments of performance and questioning through users who appropriate an open structure overcoming functionality - while its classic definition linked to the idea of direct utility. It is here, from an almost ode to the useless, thinking of an appreciation of what, in essence, serves no purpose (thinking of serving as a mere productive function) and which will be appropriated in ways that escape what is considered useful. Thus, the appropriation of the in-between place has in itself the potential of marginality, since it can generate uses that flee to the logic imposed by the market and capital.

Unlike formal architecture, in-between places bear the mark of the author user and not of the artist architect, since the power to determine appropriation has shifted from the hands of the latter to the desires of the former.

Thus, the multiple possibilities of space construction generate different forms of invention by the own individuals who are projected (Figure 6). Guatelli (2012), then, says the existence of a "man to do", that is constantly in construction, can always go beyond what is offered to him, in whom the impressions of sensation, arising from free appropriations in space, can become a reflection, an important condition for the transition from a passive subject to an active one" (Guatelli, 2012, pp.126-127).



Fig. 6: *Dérive*² by Fernanda Martins and Luís Firmato, along the course Architecture in Process, taught by Professor Flávia Nacif, at the Federal University of São João del Rei. Source: Fernanda Martins, 2016.

The main strategy to break with the segregation imposed by the urban barriers is the appropriation of these in-between places through art and party. Art not in the sense of hanging works around the city, but of making it the work itself. Guy Débord (2006) reminds us that "if we are willing to practice and study a creative change of the urban environment, linked to a qualitative change of behavior and way of life, this means a true collective creation in the field of art." It is proposed, then, another way of perceiving and practicing the city, based on collective and art, as shown in Figure 7.

Necessary as science, not enough, art brings to the realization of urban society a long meditation on life as drama and enjoyment. Moreover, and above all, art restores the meaning of the work; It offers multiple figures of times and appropriate spaces: non-taxes, not accepted by a passive resignation, but metamorphosed into work (Lefebvre, 2016, p.116).



Fig. 7: Performance walk acted on September 15, 2016, in São João del Rei, and coordinated by Luís Firmato, during the development of the Final Graduation Paper "The City and its Walls". The proposal had other ways of perceiving and appropriating the city, through a sensorial and collective contact with space. There were performances along the *dérive*². Source: Fernanda Martins, 2016.

The city isn't just an involucres or a concentration of people and artistic products exposing place. It is also art itself. That explains, for instance, its transformation into product just in the same it happened to Post Industrial Revolution productions in general, bearing in mind that "as the general production system has changed, what was an artistic product is now an industrial one" (Argan, 1998, p.73).

Hence, it seems clear how art and urbanity are connected in a movement of appreciation and mutual growth. It relies on the meeting moments promoted by residual urban spaces with the most possibilities of diversity. As an example we can mention the street carnival, which is raising in the big cities, mainly in the latest years, as one of the greatest meeting places in Brazil. During this party, public spaces retake their main function, which are ownershiped again. It can be seen on figure 8, an image of Tico Tico Serra Copo carnival block from Belo Horizonte.



Fig. 8: Belo Horizonte's carnival. Source: Rafael Brandão, 2017.

The main use of the city, that is, of streets and squares, buildings and monuments, is the Party (which consumes unproductively, with no other advantage but pleasure and prestige, huge opulence of objects and money) (Lefebvre, 2016, p.12).

As a consequence of cities privatization process, where we note a growing tendency of space to belong to individuals or specific groups instead of being ownershiped by citizens, Bourriaud (2011) affirms that contemporary man is a dispossessed being. The reason why it occurs, according to the author, is capitalist economy desterritorializing condition, besides its dislocating process of existence forms, encoding and decoding lifestyles in accordance with its interests. Therefore a way of acting against this process is defended by Guattari and cited by Bourriaud (2011), whereby is created an existence practice which returns subjectivity through creativity and new experimentations of space. The "only acceptable purpose of human activities is the production of a subjectivity that continuously and by its own means enriches its relationship with the world" (Guattari, 1992 cited in Bourriaud, 2011, p.69). Art plays, thus, a fundamental role in deterritorialization movement as being an element capable of retaking subjectivities and generating a new relationship between men and space and returning the city to a place of appropriation.

The proximity between art and daily life is part of the same movement where art and city dislocate one another as a mutual incorporation relationship. Assuming Lefebvre's (2016) definition that the main use of the city is to be the locus of party, the use of streets for encounter and appropriation as well as the convergence of elements, daily life, art and the city, it means a possibility of plain use of space through the practice of diversity. Thus occupying the city with art means to elevate the potentiality of in-between places and break up with many forms of urban segregation through the retaken of public spaces by the citizens and the questioning of private, social contacts, acceptance of differences and, at last, the subversion of entertainment by withdrawing its concentration on consumption and dislocating it to movements of art and culture.

Conclusion

One may conclude that urban barriers, intertwined within the urban fabric, built by drawings or remnants allow the materialization of an ideal of city/society. Wishing urban spaces of diversity, plurality and celebration, more than striving for the end of walls, is to glimpse a society that incorporate autonomously and critically/reflexively these concepts on its daily life. Urban form always establishes a dialogical relation with social forms and, for that reason, any intervention purely based on

form risks to be irrelevant. Transformations must then grow from multiple subjects' perception and sensibility who are willing to be gathered and act.

The challenge is to explore the potentialities of the barriers, the in-between places, the non-used spaces as possibilities of encounter; to use the emptiness created by the walls as a weapon against themselves, turning fear into safety, anguish into social meeting and giving back to the city its well deserved characteristic of art.

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1 Walls are defined here as anything that serves as a boundary between spaces. According to the book *Muros, territórios compartilhados*, they have been "used since ancient times to defend and protect cities and, even to this date, in the great urban centers, they have the function of separating one space from the other, establishing a limit and demarcating a territory, often becoming the border between public and private space. They constitute barriers for the circulation of people in urban space, in addition to delimiting the view of passersby" (Muros..., s.d., s.p., our translation).

2 Haussman's plan for Paris (1853) proposed to rebuild the city using large and well lit boulevards. However, it was not a project of improvements that would reach the entire population, but a segregation proposal, in which few had the right to access the equipment created. More than an urban plan, Harvey (2008) says that it was an economic project to get Paris out of an economic and social crisis in which it was sunk. The plan granted employment for many workers and secured investment space of capital surplus, ensuring that it did not become stagnant. However, a little more than a decade later, the lack of capital for new investments led to economic stagnation, unemployment and a new crisis, which made the social division of Paris even more obvious.

3 The concept, created by Jane Jacobs (2011), was first published in 1961 in the book *Death and Life of Great Cities*. The idea of the eyes of the streets is still one of the most elaborate when it comes to urban security. For her, people feel safer among the different ones and the eyes of the streets are the conscious or unconscious action of people who, using public spaces or contemplating them from their homes, end up watching over them. Cities become safer as the common spaces are within reach of everyone's eyes, so one cares for the other and all for the city. Jacobs (2011, p.32) states that public security rather than the police is done "by the intricate, almost unconscious network of spontaneous controls and patterns of behavior present among the people themselves and applied by them."

4 In-between places is a concept created by Igor Guatelli (2012) from the idea of "between", present in Jacques Derrida work (especially from the concepts of *l'entre, l'espacement e Khôra*). The in-between places are perceived as gaps or "idle" spaces that rest between designed spaces and usually work as connections. If one compares architecture and writing, as proposed by Guatelli, the in-between places are not phrase subjects (or object and form of architecture), but are the links that give different meanings to the constructions of writing and the city.

5 *Oeuvre* (work) is a term widely used by Lefebvre (2016) that relates to creation. According to the author, the emergence of the industrial city ended the work, given that production ceases to be imaginative and unique and ends up becoming massive, with the sole purpose of creating as many equal elements as possible in order to fulfill the needs of the market and generate profit. For the author, gearing the city towards money and the technique towards product goes against its own characteristic of work. The city, by itself, is a work. This contradiction is very significant since the work has use value, while the product, exchange value. Lefebvre argues that, even in oppressive societies, there was the production of *oeuvres*, that is, there was use

value. This changed when society ceased to be oppressive and became exploitative. Exploration kills creation. This is because it focuses on the process of making and not inventing, making it practical and mechanical. Exchange value, generalization and mechanization focus to the product, attacking the city at its core: use.