Consuming Heritage

Counter-uses of the city and gentrification

Rogerio Proença Leite

Abstract

Based on research in the old Recife Quarter in the city of Recife, capital of Pernambuco state, Brazil, this study examines processes of gentrification in areas of heritage value. The article focuses on the way in which these urban policies have transformed cultural heritage into a commodity, and urban space into social relationships mediated by consumerism. I argue that heritage sites that undergo processes of gentrification create strong spatial segregation and generate an appropriation of space by the excluded population that takes the form of counter-uses, undermining the uses imagined by urban and heritage policy makers.
Keywords: consumption, gentrification, heritage, counter-uses

Resumo

Este artigo analisa os processos de gentrification em áreas de valor patrimonial, tendo como referente empírico o bairro do Recife, em Pernambuco, Brasil. O tema central recai sobre as características predominantemente mercadológicas dessas políticas urbanas que têm transformado o patrimônio cultural em mercadoria, e o espaço urbano em relações sociais mediadas por práticas de consumo. Pretende-se argumentar que os sítios patrimoniais que passam pelos processos de gentrification criam forte segregação socioespacial e geram formas de apropriação do espaço por parte da população excluída na forma de contra-usos, subvertendo os usos esperados e o espaço disciplinar criados por essas políticas urbanas e patrimoniais.
Palavras-chaves: Consumo, enobrecimento, patrimônio, contra-usos

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The architectural and urban interventions known as *gentrification* still arouse numerous conceptual controversies. After several decades of use, the term remains somewhat controversial, lending itself to the analysis of quite different empirical situations (Rubino 2003).

Since its first enunciation by the British sociologist Ruth Glass in her work *London: aspects of Change* (Glass 1964), the term has been used to describe different forms of urban intervention, ranging from processes of 'regeneration', 'rehabilitation' or 'revitalization' of patrimonial areas and sites of high historical value – whether residential or not – to contemporary practices of urban restructuring in non-heritage areas, the megaprojects housing the offices of transnational corporations in so-called intelligent buildings, or the construction of luxury condominiums for the middle and upper classes (Smith 1996, Less et al. 1998).

As I have suggested in a recent text (Leite 2010), there are many reasons for the growing interest in studies of urban gentrification, as Loretta Less, Tom Slater and Elvin Wily have also argued. Academic interests in the phenomenon are diverse. Some authors argue that gentrification practices are an expression of neoliberalism in urban planning and of globalization processes. Others observe a dispute between the academic fields of geography, sociology and architecture (Less et al. 1998).

From another perspective, gentrification practices have been understood as postmodern expressions of contemporary urban planning. Authors like Harvey (1992), Zukin (1995), Featherstone (1995) and Jameson (1997) elaborate this hypothesis from the observation of certain aesthetic and functional characteristics prevalent in these processes, such as the perceived visual attractiveness of the sites, the juxtaposition of architectural styles, an emphasis on monumentality and a recognition of the importance of market forces.

The process of gentrification in urban conservation areas involves a

specific model of intervention that alters cityscapes by accentuating architectural features or transforming them to generate a heightened visual impact, adjusting the new landscape to the demands of the real estate market, safety, planning and urban cleanliness intended to promote the use or reappropriation of the area by the middle and upper classes. This process results in the emergence of socio-spatial boundaries that exacerbate social segregation by fragmenting space into distinct *places* (Leite 2007).

When these urban areas are historical sites or centres, gentrification processes add real estate value and contribute to the symbolic strengthening of a sense of belonging through the enhancement of local culture. At the same time they attract visitors by promoting a sort of detraditionalization of cultural heritage (Fortuna 1997), turning it into a spectacle through its absorption by consumer culture (Featherstone 1995). I return to this point later.

In Brazil the predominant form of non-residential gentrification follows what Bidou-Zachariasen (2006) has termed 'gentrification for visitation.' This type of intervention, which largely centres on attracting tourism, does not involve the restoration of low-income housing. The only residential interventions involve the construction of luxury hotels in the place of decrepit town houses. This form of gentrification, common in Brazil, takes place in the context of the physical/architectural deterioration of historical sites and the tendency for the poor to migrate to outlying areas of the cities.
One of the main differences between residential and touristic forms of gentrification tends to be the intended destination the area's traditional residents. In some projects rehabilitation of housing is designed to allow local residents to remain in the area. Others prevent the original inhabitants from staying by changing the uses of spaces to tailor them to market demands.

In this paper, I discuss one of the first interventions of this kind in the city of Recife in northeastern Brazil: the gentrification of the *Bairro de Recife*, which I shall refer to hereafter as the Recife Quarter.

Old Recife: the foundation of the *MauritsStadt*

The original urban core of Recife was a small settlement of about 10 hectares, built on the isthmus of Olinda. The natural reefs (in Portuguese arrecifes) formed a safe harbour for ships transporting brazilwood and sugar to the Iberian Peninsula. The Village of Reefs grew as a trading port.

According to the historian Evaldo Cabral de Mello (Mello 1997), Rua do Bom Jesus (Bom Jesus Street) – the main focus of the 'revitalization' work undertaken in the late 1990s – was one of the most important areas of the early urban centre. Another street, Rua dos Judeus (Jew Street), was home to a Jewish community that had fled persecution in Europe. They built the first synagogue in the Americas, Kahal Kadosh Zur Israel, probably between 1640 and 1641 (Dantas 1999).

With the arrival of the Dutch, who invaded Brazil in 1630, Recife gained its first urban plan. The Dutch built walls, gates and trenches to surround and protect the small village and port. According to historian Vanildo Bezerra Cavancanti (1977), one of the gates, the Land Gate (*lantpoort*), was situated in the Bom Jesus Street. It was later replaced by the Bom Jesus Arch.

The Dutch subsequently constructed the Maurício de Nassau Bridge, the first to connect the old isthmus to the mainland. This allowed the increasingly populous city to expand. An area called New Maritius – today the district of Santo Antônio – was built on the island of Antonio Vaz. The subsequent transfer of the seat of the Dutch government and the residence of Count Nassau to New Mauritius boosted the importance of this new area (Cavalcanti 1977: 149).

Figure 1. Lithograph of Bom Jesus Street, author unknown. Collection of the Museum of the City of Recife.

Figure 2. Drawing of the old Land Gate on Bom Jesus Street. Author unknown. Collection of the Museum of the City of Recife.

By the end of the 19th century what remained of the *Mauricéia* of Pernambuco State was an image of an unhealthy, profane and beautiful place. This spurred a major project of urban reform of the historic centre and port zone, the Recife Quarter, in 1910. Following a trend seen throughout Brazil, the authorities began their work by destroying what were identified as insalubrious buildings. The reconstruction of the Quarter began in 1909 under the responsibility of the *Societé de Construction du Port de Pernambouc*, and later the *Societé de Construction de Batgnolles* (Lubambo 1991: 77). Reflecting the modernizing ideas of cleanliness and beauty, the new constructions followed the French-inspired eclectic style. The plan included landfills to augment the size of the port area, construction of warehouses and, more drastically, the alteration of the road network, widening roads to facilitate transport to and from the port. With all these changes, the old colonial civil architecture was destroyed.

The emphasis on social hygiene led to the disappropriation of at least 480 buildings (Lubambo 1991: 123) which were pulled down to open up the new roads. Based on the ideas of Hausmann, the introduction of wide avenues sanitised cities, literally and metaphorically. The reforms undertaken in Rio de Janeiro and Recife were intended to eradicate outbreaks of diseases like smallpox and yellow fever, particularly rife in port areas. Disease and the associated fears were major obstacles to any development reliant on

international investors: Fabris (2000) has documented the apprehension people had merely of disembarking at the port of Brazil's Federal Capital.

The wide-ranging urban reform of Recife devastated the old Dutch district. The narrow streets with their overcrowded slum tenements and brothels, so vividly depicted by Gilberto Freyre in *Sobrados e Mucambos*, can no longer be seen. Two long and broad avenues sliced through the Recife Quarter: the tiny houses were substituted by monumental buildings modelled on the liberal eclecticism of contemporary French architecture. The neighbourhood that sprang up over the rubble of the burned Olinda was also the setting for a major renovation that transformed it into another cultural document, this time of the French Belle Époque.

The reform of the Recife Quarter was particularly significant in terms of the economic history of Pernambuco. At the time, Recife was the most important capital city in the Brazilian northeast, the centre of the region's 'new urban elites.' As Perruci (1978) has shown, from the end of the late nineteenth through to the early twentieth, Pernambuco's sugar industry was transformed by the replacement of the old sugar mills with industrial plants. This economic shift contributed to the consolidation of predominantly urban-based industrial capital at the expense of the rural areas.

The reforms not only improved the port's operating conditions, they also created a new image for the city, reflecting the ambitions of the State's new elites (Cátia Lubambo 1991).

The opening of large avenues was about more than an architectural landscape: it obeyed the political imperative of building a landscape of modernity. As well as being a work of sanitary engineering, it was an operation of social segregation, limiting the free flow of people. Eclecticism – a hybridism scorned by the modernists, characterized by the free use of overlapping styles from the past – amounted to an architectural representation of the new lifestyle of the emerging bourgeoisie, marked by the monumentality of the buildings. Nevertheless, this modern Brazilian landscape also harboured what this new class saw as a more shameful element. As Carvalho (1999) remarked concerning the reforms in Rio de Janeiro: "*In renovated Rio the world of the Belle Époque was fascinated with Europe but ashamed of Brazil, particularly poor and black Brazil*" (Carvalho 1999: 41). The discourse on urban planning reproduced the same 'eugenic stigmas' that permeated the debate on national character in Brazilian thought during this era (Lira 1999).

Figure 3. Photo of Bom Jesus Street in the colonial style. Author unknown. Collection of the IHGB, Rio de Janeiro.

Figure 4. Photo of Bom Jesus Street in the eclectic style. Author unknown. Collection of the IHGB, Rio de Janeiro.

Figure 5. Photo of he major reform of the Recife Quarter, 1910. Author unknown. Collection of the IHGB, Rio de Janeiro.

Figure 6. Central Square of the Recife Quarter, rebuilt in the eclectic style following Haussmann's urban design for Paris. Author unknown. Collection of the IHGB, Rio de Janeiro.

After the reform, the area was mostly taken over by insurance companies, banks and organizations involved in the import and export trade. This 'elitism' had a political consequence for the district's image and use. Following the concentration of commercial activities, housing functions came to be considered as residual and the district was projected instead as a business zone, an image that remained linked to the quarter until the 1950s when other central regions acquired more commercial importance. Between the 1950s and 1980s, the Recife Quarter fell into a slow decline, typical of central areas of big cities, until this situation was reversed with the implantation of the Revitalization Plan, the third phase in the political and visual reimagining of the Recife Quarter.

The process of gentrification of the Recife Quarter

From the 1990s the so-called Revitalization Plan for the old Recife Quarter began to be implemented: this was a detailed proposal for short and medium term action, including the physical dimensions and estimated costs of the planned works, presented as part of the Northeast Tourism Development Program.

The proposal set out three different sectors of intervention, and also defined areas of interest and a spatialization of activities based on the concrete

Figure 7. Bom Jesus Street during the Belle Époque, mid-1930s. Author unknown. Collection of the Museum of the City of Recife.

possibilities for intervention. The main objective of the revitalization proposal was to develop activities related to the services of the Revitalization Sector, turning it into a kind of anchor of the entire Revitalization Plan. The type of use of properties, circumscribed by sector, also facilitated the area's delimitation as a privileged zone for the deployment of more dynamic services associated with leisure and entertainment. This Revitalization Sector contains the highest concentration per square meter of built area, service, housing, and retail trade, while other sectors have a higher concentration of large buildings linked to wholesale trade, utilities and industry.

The technical details of the plan had a clear justification. As already outlined in a previous study (Leite 2007), it was not just a proposal for the restoration of heritage buildings, but an integrated idea of urban intervention in the form of a long-term *enterprise*. Reflecting the assumptions of market-led city planning (Vainer 2000), the Plan had three main goals, the operational framework for which was the set of Intervention Sectors: 1. transform the Recife Quarter into a "regional metropolitan centre," making it a centre of modern services, culture and recreation; 2. turn the area into a 'space of leisure and entertainment,' aiming to generate a "space that promotes the concentration of people in public areas, creating the feeling of a vibrant urban

space"; 3. turn the area into a "centre of national and international tourist attraction." These objectives indicated just how much the proposal was directed towards expanding the local economy, transforming the Recife Quarter into a complex mix of consumerism and entertainment.

This view of an *economy of culture*, which apprehends culture in terms of its economic results and the city as a commercial enterprise, anticipated the concentration of offices of big companies and corporations, boosting the Recife Quarter's "image as a central and noble space of the city." The 'animation blocks' of Bom Jesus Street have been made possible not only by reforms to the area's physical structure, but especially by the program of events that the City Hall organizes throughout the year, which delineates a range of distinct forms of using urban spaces. The *cultural turn* of the entrepreneurial urbanism described by Otília Arantes (2000) functioned in the Recife Quarter as a mechanism for legitimizing an image attractive to consumers and to potential new investors. Remodelled houses transformed the area into a bustling meeting place where people mingle under the glimmer of the street lights and the noise of many voices, *frevo* songs and jazz music. Strategically positioned to enhance the restored facades, these beams of light reinforced the feeling of a film set, the impact of which contrasted hugely with the rest of the neighbourhood. After six in the evening, traffic was barred from these streets and wooden trestles were set in place, accompanied by public and private security guards, which helped transform this quarter of the city into an artificial boulevard. Gradually the streets were taken over by people and the sidewalks by bar and restaurant tables. It was estimated that during large events at least 15,000 people would take to the streets in search of fun and relaxation. With the support of local business people, the Recife City Council began to promote an intense cultural program: concerts with local musicians, dance performances, art exhibitions in street, *seresta* festivals. Various activities staged throughout the year ensured the area remained a vibrant centre of cultural entertainment, integrating the Recife Quarter with the city's cultural calendar. During carnival, a varied and intense program maintained the area's profile as one of the newest options for tourists visiting Pernambuco. The parade of groups in the quarter was a show in itself: *blocos*, *troças*, *reisados*, *maracatus* and *caboclinhos*. Aside from the numerous roving events, the City Council maintained the traditional São João festivities in its official program, two typically large-scale street events.

Figures 8 and 9. Bom Jesus Street during the gentrification process, 1998. Photo by R.P. Leite

Figure 10. Retraditionalization process involving presentations of the local culture. 1999. Photo by R.P. Leite

These investments provoked a substantial change in the urban landscape of the Recife Quarter, the new mixture of consumption and leisure redesigning its profile, making it the area with the highest concentration of bars and restaurants in the city of Recife. The new image developed for the area focused in part precisely on the fact that it was one of the few places where consumers had various options within a relatively small area, like a food court in a shopping mall.

In 1998, when the Revitalization Plan for the old Recife Quarter was already in progress, the area was listed by IPHAN, recognizing it as a national heritage, largely on the basis of the urban transformations and changes of styles, especially during the major reform of 1910 that turned the Recife Quarter into what "(...) is today a unique, intact, and hybrid Brazilian example of Haussmann's Paris." This reform, which marked the transition from Old Recife to New Recife, had turned the quarter into a "(...) unique living archive of the overlapping temporalities that have dominated history and artistic production in Recife and in Brazil."

Gentrification and Consuming Heritage

The process of tourism gentrification promoted by the reformation of historical sites is typically based around installing services and offering an extensive range of culture, leisure and entertainment for the middle and upper classes.

In general, such interventions are preceded by a comprehensive decline of the site, both its physical aspect (including the deterioration of buildings, urban housing and sanitary infrastructure) and its symbolic aspect (the decline in the site's importance relative to other areas of the city, loss of centrality, and an increasingly negative social image, frequently associated with insecurity, inhospitable conditions and marginality). Despite this problematic diagnosis, these areas maintain a strong significance in the city's history, precisely because they were once places of pronounced visibility and economic, political and cultural importance (Leite 2013).

Even during its most 'decadent' phase, the Recife Quarter retained its historical importance in the local imagination as the site where the city originated. Once 'revitalized,' the area underwent an adaptation of tradition to the demands of a market of cultural consumption, in what Carlos Fortuna (1997) has called *detraditionalization* to refer to a strategic mechanism of contemporary urban planning, designed to revalue local culture and heritage as part of adapting cities to the context of 'inter-city competition':

> [...] detraditionalization is a social process through which cities and societies are modernized by subjecting earlier values, meanings and actions to a new interpretative logic of intervention. This detraditionalization is driven by the need for each city to revalue its resources, actual or potential, in order to reposition itself in the increasingly disputed market of inter-city competition. (Fortuna 1997: 234)

This process does not mean abandoning tradition, therefore, but reworking it in response to the market forces that permeate any kind of contemporary urban interventions. In those cases involving 'gentrifying' interventions, this detraditionalization assumes its most radical form with the possibility of a complete change in the meanings attributed to heritage sites, including the addition of entirely new values. Such interventions therefore enable deep changes in uses and users, affecting especially traditional residents who are usually targeted for relocation away from the area, making room for others

more suited to the new intended uses. In some cases this alteration takes a dramatic form with the eviction of former residents, configuring what Michel de Certeau has called 'social curettage' (Certeau 1996). In other cases there may be a search for residents and users with new profiles without, though, discarding those already found there. This is the case – to a lesser extent – of the city of Porto, in Portugal, which retained some of its traditional residents, and – to a greater extent – of the city of Évora, also in Portugal, which even today invests in attracting younger residents owing to the aging demographic profile of its resident population. Like Recife, Porto was a strategic centre for the local economy – indeed for the entire Douro region due to its intense social and commercial life. As the Portuguese saying goes, "Lisbon parties, Porto works, Coimbra studies, Braga prays." The city's association with commercial activities is ancient, tracing back to the earliest origins of the city, regarded by natives as the birthplace of the Portuguese nation. This idea derives from a kind of foundation myth in which the city is attributed with the origin of the country's name, due to the independence of the County of Portugal, the *Condado Portucalense*, from which the word Portugal originated as a composite of the toponymic expressions 'port' and 'cale' (Fortuna & Silva 2002). Labelled the 'Portuguese Manchester,' Porto shared the latter's image of an active, liberal and progressive city. Even with the decline in the use of its historic districts, especially from the 1960s when its resident population decreased substantially,[1] Porto retained a central role due to the rich history associated with the city's image.

Évora is possibly one of the oldest historical cities in Portugal. Its origin is supposedly related to the Romanization of Lusitania, which elevated the province to the status of *municipium Ebora Liberalitas Julia* by Emperor Julius Caesar during the exploration of the Iberian Peninsula (Évora Municipal Chamber 1997). With its Roman archaeological remains and a rich architectural complex, including palaces and churches, Évora during the medieval period was an important walled citadel, the residence of Portugal's kings and aristocracy. Its rich heritage contains examples of Renaissance, Islamic, Gothic, Manueline, Baroque and Neoclassical art and architecture. Situated in the region of Alentejo, the idea hovers over Évora that it could have been the country's

1 According to data from the Rede Atlante (2005), the population living in the historical region of Porto fell from 16% to 5% of the city's total population between 1940 and 2001.

Figures 11 and 12. Historical centre of Porto, Portugal. 2006. Photo by R.P. Leite

Figure 13. Ribeira do Porto during the gentrification process. 2006. Photo by R.P. Leite

Figure 14. Historical centre of Évora after the revitalization process. 2006. Photo by R.P. Leite

capital. Prior to the recent interventions, its image was mostly that of a stagnant, small and traditional city, dominated by a few small families and groups of influence (Fortuna 1997). During the 1980s, precisely when emphasis on conservation and gentrification processes was increasing in urban areas around the world, interventions began in Évora that would turn it into an attractive centre for leisure and tourism. Following Paulo Peixoto's analysis (1997), these transformations, which culminated in 1986 with Évora's declaration as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, represented a pioneering example in Portugal of the use of heritage resources as a means to project a city at global level.

A significant difference exists, though, between the Brazilian and Portuguese cases, which can be considered a mitigating point in terms of how the Portuguese experience fits into the gentrification pattern. Given the residential characteristics of Porto and Évora, the kind of gentrification that occurred there was less concerned with replacing their traditional residents than, for example, the Brazilian case of Recife (Leite 2010).

At the same time, it is also worth observing that although the Brazilian and Portuguese examples of intervention sought the same results – namely, the detraditionalization of their cultural heritage in order to ensure that

Figures 15 and 16. Historical centre of Évora after the revitalization process. 2006. Photo by R.P. Leite

their respective historic centres were included in inter-city competition – the Brazilian discourse was more clearly focused on creating urban tourist and entertainment hotspots, perhaps because Recife's residential size was smaller. Moreover, the Portuguese concern to avoid creating mere scenarios had not stopped detraditionalization from taking place in Porto and Évora, including the same kind of spectacularization of culture seen in the Brazilian cases.

I take the spectacularization of culture to be the accentuation or creation of cultural traits that look to highlight the singularity of an urban space, through a strong visual appeal and fleeting social practices, intended to turn history and culture into consumable commodities. The idea of a spectacularization of culture has always been present in diverse forms in urban intervention processes. Architectural monumentality is perhaps the best known and certainly the most remarkable element of this desire to spectacularize found in some reforms as part of a search for greater visibility, distinction and aesthetic appeal. Gentrification policies, like the *protogentrification* practices that preceded them, such as Haussmann's famous reforms in Paris and Otto Wagner's interventions in Vienna's Ringstrasse, are clearly monumental experiments in architecture and large-scale urban design (Schorske 1990).

However architectural and urban monumentality is not the only form taken by the spectacularization of culture. In Brazil, the heady appeal of the supposed (but questionable) authenticity of popular culture has been one of the most powerful resources for the revival or even reinvention of these gentrified spaces, part of a spectacularizing and market-oriented view of the culture economy. The intervention process is well known: manifestations of the local culture are promoted in order to exploit certain aspects of the cultural legitimacy of these sites, creating thematic spaces through this emphasis on local culture. The ultimate aim is to attract new users by expanding the possibilities for consumption, either in the form of new bars and restaurants or symbolically through the heavily promoted artistic and cultural manifestations.

Consequently the notion of the spectacularization of culture can be considered a derivative of the concept of detraditionalization, since it presupposes an accentuation of cultural values and local heritage as part of the visual and scenic accentuation of the urban space and the social practices directed towards symbolic consumption. The primary outcome of the spectacularization of culture in gentrification processes is a strong socio-spatial demarcation of public life revolving around the desired/intended uses for these

'revitalized' spaces. Often this demarcation focuses on the ways of inhabiting these spaces, where public socializing is heavily determined by the possibilities available for social interaction.

Sociospatialities and counter-uses of the city

One of the main negative impacts of gentrification, affecting its own long-term sustainability, is inherent to the urban strategy of this type of urban intervention: the creation of a strong socio-spatial demarcation in the use of space. This appears to be an insoluble dilemma. To activate new uses of the local area and establish differentiated niches of consumption to attract consumers, these interventions invest heavily in the 'requalification' of spaces, creating relatively well-defined boundaries between different users. This often involves excluding a significant part of the local population, who are left unable to interact within these spaces due to the strong tendency towards market commodification that makes these spaces the preserve of a social elite. In response, non-users create zones of instability around or even within these spaces, generating points of permeability and tension related to the practical and symbolic dispute for the urban space. This also stems from other factors, I think, including the debatable idea that cultural heritage can produce a unique sense of belonging for the entire population, serving as a force for social cohesion.

In-depth studies on the polysemic meanings of heritage (Canclini 1997, Fortuna 1998, Arantes 2000) have shown the degree of symbolic complexity that heritage can have for different social groups. Distinct forms of appropriating and attributing meaning are generated when these sites are 'revitalized,' depending on how users see themselves represented in these transformed spaces. Moreover a kind of latent conflict between local residents and outside visitors becomes established, explaining why this type of intervention can seldom be sustained for long. Either the old residents, even if residual, perceive no benefits for themselves from the interventions (the cases of Recife and Porto), or the influx of new users alters day-to-day routines, generating a dynamism not always desired by the local population (the case of Évora).

One conclusion seems clear when we analyze these processes comparatively: regardless of the different contexts and variations between the processes, the type of intervention geared towards consuming heritage and

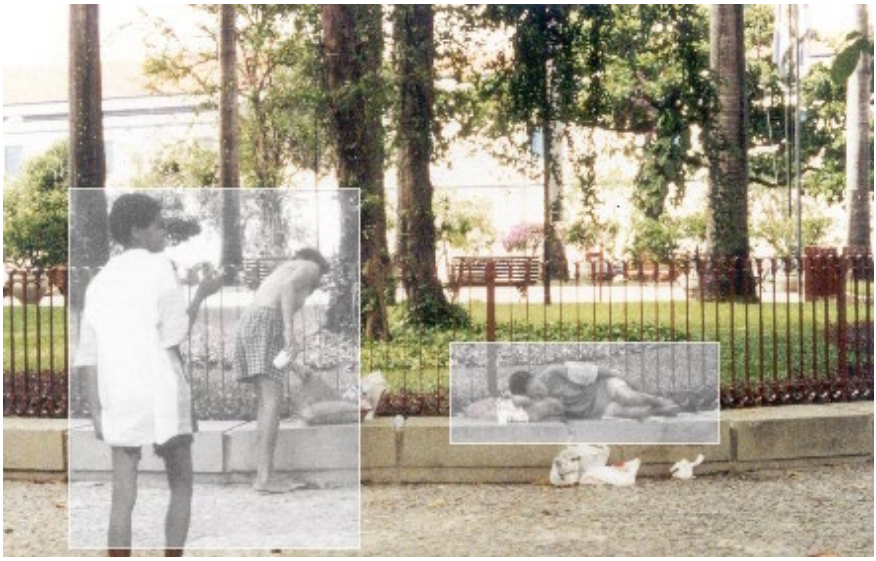

Figure 17. Counter-uses in the main square of the Recife Quarter. 1999. Photo by R.P. Leite

towards the spectacularization of culture curbs the possibilities for interaction due to the distinct sociospatialities created in the process. The problem is that the model, as conceived, fails to escape the trap that it sets for itself: in order to generate niches of consumption, users must be selected, but by inhibiting some uses deemed contrary to those intended for these spaces, it weakens the desired urban harmony by provoking a range of reactions that very often take the form of a symbolic contestation and confrontation, what I have called *counter-uses* (Leite 2007). By *counter-uses* I mean the daily practices that challenge the disciplinary space in order to subvert expected uses, creating practical and symbolic ruptures within the space.

Hence urban interventions like gentrification would appear to collide with an implicit nonviability: the different interests and social motivations for interactive processes do not fit into a model designed to promote a single predominant urban (economic) use. In some cases, the solution found to reduce the effects of such *counter-uses* has been to demarcate the 'revitalized' spaces even more radically, creating distinct areas of cultural entertainment. The Recife case provides a clear illustration of this mistaken solution. At the height of the revitalization program, Recife City Council created different 'animation centres' in distinct zones of the heritage site, seeking to meet the demands of different consumer groups. Initially it seemed that the idea would work, since it reinforced the boundaries separating the different areas

Figure 18. Counter-uses at Ribeira do Porto. 2007. Photo by R.P. Leite

of the Recife Quarter. But the contact zones remained fluid and permeable, and the boundaries had to be symbolically 'negotiated' by the different users and counter-users as the uses in one area became *counter-uses* in another. Such urban permeability is inevitable in this kind of process. In Salvador, a recent study showed how the small 'Rocinha favela,' deeply embedded in the city's historic centre, penetrated the gentrified space of the Pelourinho, just as the latter merged with the sociabilities of the favela (Araujo 2007). A similar situation was observable in Recife with the conflicts and permeabilities between the 'Favela do Rato' and the gentrified area (Souza 2007) or again in the 'revitalization' of Iracema Beach and the relations with the 'Poço da Draga' favela (Souza 2007, Bezerra 2008).

In referring to the restrictions or curtailments on interaction in spectacularized spaces, I am thinking above all of the social constraints involved in gentrification. The sophistication of some houses, transformed into restaurants and luxury hotels, the widespread adaptation of spaces for tourists and the scant attention paid to local residents and users, all seem to contribute to generating points of tension that, when recurrent, culminate in a conflicting spatial configuration, which can be seen as an important factor in any subsequent decline of these spaces – an *exhaustion* which, as I have suggested elsewhere, seems to be a post-gentrification and counter-revanchist phase in many cities (Leite 2010).

What we can glean from all this is that something appears to be askew: either urban practices are too deleterious when they presume that a city can be created without taking into account the differences between people in their daily routines, or urban life by definition eludes any excessive control, given that it is the locus par excellence of the dissent that animates public life (Leite 2009). I suspect both reasons are valid. Both offer a considerable explanatory power when it comes to understanding the contradictory dynamics of contemporary urban culture.

This is not the first time that social scientists have warned that urban intervention projects in historic centres must pay more attention to the aspirations of their main users and residents: their worldviews and their representations of heritage sites and the symbolic places through which they construct their multiple identities. I conclude by recalling a pertinent analytic suggestion that would ideally precede the development of any gentrification policy:

> [...] it is necessary to imagine people using and transforming the spaces in which they live [...] Empty landscapes can be deceptive. (Arantes 1997).

Translated by David Rodgers
Accepted for publication on March 22, 2013.

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