



Walking Santa Cecilia: A Peripatetic Experiment in Reclaiming Urban Space

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Abstract

This article is the summary of an experiment that proposes a way of analysing and acting upon public space. The experiment was done through the re-interpretation of the history of walking as an aesthetic practice and of the game of walking as put by the architect and philosopher Francesco Careri¹. The investigation was divided into three parts; a theoretical, analytical and practical. This path sought to explore to what extent is it possible to apply the theories surrounding walking as an esthetic practice to an actual instrument of transformation of urban spaces into a city made for the pedestrian, for the encounter and for the ludic use of time. Both a means and an end to a more humane city.

The discussion was taken to the city of São Paulo as a case of study, and its public space, or lack thereof. A purposely randomly selected neighborhood was chosen for the exercise – Santa Cecília, a neighbourhood that saw the abandonment of central areas in the 90's due to security issues in downtown São Paulo. The instruments chosen for the experiment were crucial – not the conventional urban analysis ones, but walking in itself, translated into “corpografias” or bodygraphs, photography and subjective mapping.

Along the delimited path nine voids, or urban situations that resulted from the analysis were chosen to receive surgical interventions; made through the understanding of both material and immaterial experiences. These interventions might improve the possibilities of people being in and relating to urban spaces, but most importantly this work aims to show a way in which urbanists could look at and interact with cities before proposing interferences in its dynamics; an analysis that comes from within the body and the streets.

¹ See CARERI, Francesco. **Walkscapes**: o caminhar como prática estética. 2 ed. São Paulo: Gustavo Gili, 2013.

PART I

“Walking, even if it is not the physical construction of a space, implies a transformation of place and its meanings. The physical presence of man in a space – and the variation of the perceptions he receives from it when crossing it – is a form of transformation of the landscape that, although it does not leave tangible signs, modifies culturally the meaning of space and, consequently, the space itself, turning it into place”²
-Francesco Careri

Since the beginning of times, humans have been walking the surface of the earth. And, through walking, they explored and conquered territories, taming the supposedly wild landscapes around them. Considering that, it is possible to wonder how cities can be seen as meeting points between these routes of wandering humans; or as are nodes where the passing flows of humanity accumulate. The arrival of industrialization meant a big change in the fluxes of transportation and communication³ which also meant that cities began to be thought of and built in a different way⁴ - through a global and aerial view, urban layouts were organized and manipulated to accommodate all the speed and efficiency required by modernity. And, it could be argued that is how a contemporary city par excellence⁵ was shaped; a city made for cars that aims at efficient transportation, but that lacks quality public spaces, shelter and meeting possibilities – a city that does not allow for leisure time.

This is the case of São Paulo, a village founded in the 16th century, that had its growth boom during the 20th century - when it saw its layout, its morphology and its dynamics being radically transformed in an industrial development era. While some remnants of its past as a colonial city still remain, the metropolis suffers from all the consequences of an exacerbated growth, under the bias of modernization and increased productivity. Not only were the streets transformed into spaces primarily for motor vehicles, but public spaces were sacrificed and urban environments segregated, generating a very high rate of social problems such as urban violence, mental illness and increased social inequality. The population of São Paulo witnessed, over the last decades of the 20th century, their public space being taken over by road works, violence and abandonment; which made the population, in response, take refuge in closed spaces, behind increasingly high walls, in an illusion of security. And,

² CARERI, Francesco. **Walkscapes**: o caminhar como prática estética. 2 ed. São Paulo: Gustavo Gili, 2013.

³ ABOUT INDUSTRIALIZATION

⁴ See for exemple the HAUSSMAN transformations Paris

⁵ For example Brasilia, both considering the time it was planned and the ideas that surround its project.

as a consequence, leisure activities were limited almost completely to closed environments, with paid admission, increasingly segregating a population that already experiences enormous social inequality. With the empty spaces of cities abandoned, most people from São Paulo live the urge to hide behind bars, security cameras and private vehicles – the death of public spaces in cities.

However, a phenomenon that began in recent years⁶ places the São Paulo metropolis as an object of study that becomes urbanistically interesting; a growing movement of reclaiming public spaces and the use of streets has taken over the city, a movement that comes from citizens themselves⁷. It was in the midst of the described panorama that different social groups, dissatisfied with the city's situation, began to change the atmosphere of urban voids and public spaces, as a counter-movement to political actions hitherto. Through ephemeral and itinerant events, at first, and later with more permanent solutions, city voids were occupied and transformed, changing people's relationship with public space. These movements started from people's desire to occupy the streets and the understanding of the street as a space of playful potential and meeting of individuals and the Collective.

In the midst of this movement that parts from the citizens to transform their city into a more humane place, one that offers places of exchange, play and encounter, that this experiment takes place – understanding the urbanist as an agent that can act like and with the citizen movement. Having perceived the will of people to transform the city's opaque spaces and their will to occupy the streets, it is pertinent to rescue the ideological current initiated by the critics of the modern movement and of walking as an aesthetic practice to establish a dialogue between architecture, urbanism and the population and to ask how that can be a tool for urban transformation.

The analysis of an urban environment based on the experience of walking can be understood as a way of making an architecture that meets new urban demands – spaces that reflect the will of individuals and that support the need for encounter, exchange, dreaming and contemplation – of living in the city – that disappeared along with the death of public spaces. By understanding the human being as the determining and constituting element of the environment and by looking at the city as a body present in space it might be possible to find, in its interstices, tokens of

⁶ From 2013 on

⁷ The first manifestations of the will to retake the streets took place from itinerant parties in public places and of great social tension. The movement began timidly with the *VoodooHop* party, created by Thomas Hafelach who, after occupying an abandoned building, moved to the streets and squares of the city center. From there, other artists created their own parties and the movement dissipated into different activities. See MARTÍ, S. **Baladas de SP Tomam viadutos e praças e ocupações urbanistas festejam** <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2014/11/1551151-baladas-de-sp-tomam-viadutos-pra-cas-e-ocupacoes-urbanistas-festejam.shtml> last access May 23 2016.

transformation - so that the street that was geometrically defined by a functionalist urbanism is transformed into a place by and for pedestrians. A way of reclaiming urban spaces from the bottom up through one of the first actions of territorial recognition. As put by Guy Debord, the leader of the situationist movement,

“Contrary to modern urbanism, the Situationists thought that it was the role of society itself to change cities, and they called for a true collective construction of urban space through the contribution and participation of residents, who should transform and experience their own spaces. Thus, according to situationist thinking, any construction (...) would only be possible through a revolution in the daily lives of citizens.⁸”

(JURGENS, 2016, p.77.)

In his book *Walkscapes*, Francesco Careri explains how walking can be understood as man's first action on space. Which means that parallel to the traditional history of cities, normally seen as a consequence of the sedentary lifestyle and the fixation of humans in the territory, it is possible to trace a history of wandering, or of nomadism. It is not only the sedentary human who makes the city, as is usually said, but the nomadic human is also part of this construction, of human intervention in space. When walking, humans occupy, with their bodies, the landscape; and so, consequently, it tames and transforms it. The nomadic human crosses barriers, dissipates and sows cultures, transports information – all essential issues for the maintenance of cities, if not the fundamental reason for their existence. The first architecture, the *menir*, arises from the conquest of space by man through walking⁹, this was not an architecture that presented itself as a physical construction of space, but rather as a symbolic occupation of the territory.

The issue of wandering, however, did not remain only in the ancient world or in contemporary nomadic communities, but was recovered in the modern world, along with the great urban reforms of the 19th century, as an aesthetic practice. A narrative that is compiled by both Francesco Careri and the researched Paola Berenstein Jacques in her book *Elogio aos Errantes*¹⁰. These movements that began with the *flâneurs*, passing through the *deambulants* and the *wanderers*¹¹ criticized what were considered the canonic or official art and architecture movements, they denounced the construction of an spectacularized world around the *homo faber* and sought an alternative that valued the *homo ludens*; through a more participatory art and

⁸ JURGENS, S. Deviation and Drift: Critical, Artistic and Curatorial Practices in Urban Contexts em Flaneur New Urban Narratives. Procurarte. Free Translation. p. 77

⁹ CARERI, Francesco. *Walkscapes: o caminhar como prática estética*. 2 ed. São Paulo: Gustavo Gili, 2013. p. 52

¹⁰ JACQUES, Paola Berenstein. *Elogio aos Errantes*. 1 ed. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2012. p. 48

¹¹ Terms used by Paola Berenstein Jacques. See JACQUES, Paola Berenstein. **Elogio aos Errantes**. 1 ed. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2012

architecture through the practice of drifting in the city and its exploration, creating conditions for the exercise of freedom¹². Walking as an aesthetic practice has been critical of traditional urbanism throughout recent urban history. It is possible to say that, in the same way that walking was essential for the formation of cities, – through walking that the routes were traced and the embryonic meeting points of urban agglomerations formed – walking is essential for understanding, appropriation and making of cities to this day. It is only from walking and actually being somewhere that one experiences and perceives the multiplicity of situational and sensorial particularities of the different spaces in the city; this multiplicity that makes cities human creations. While the discipline of urbanism seeks to orient itself and build from rational plans and maps, the wanderers seek to disorient themselves, slow down and approach the city through walking.

“We can then think that New Babylon hides in the gaps, in the interstices, in the shadows and leftovers of the contemporary spectacular city and that Careri’s great game of walking different from Constant’s “great game of the future” (...) would be a detective game in search of these ludic situations that already exist in cities, a search for the nomad city hidden inside the sedentary city or, to speak like Deleuze and Guattari, a game of looking for Nomos inside the Polis, a game of hide and seek, in that walking players would seek the very principle of the game in the city (...). The players of this great walking and exploratory urban game would then discover that the very space of the game, of homo ludens, resists and survives in all these spaces of indeterminacy in our cities.”¹³

(BERENSTEIN, 2013, p. 13)

Part II

“For the architect’s activity, the city is at the same time a source – which demands actions –, a target – to which the actions are directed to transform – and it is also a medium – the environment in which the actions operate.”¹⁴ -Angelo Bucci

It was from the understanding of the critical walk, therefore, as an aesthetic and analytical practice, the issues of public space in the contemporary city and the perception of the expectation that people in São Paulo live in relation to reclaiming city spaces, that this experiment was proposed. What was questioned was a possible way of approaching the city from walking and the subjective look’s perspective, oriented to unveil situations in the urban space that can contribute to an improvement

¹² JACQUES, Paola Berenstein. *Elogio aos Errantes*. 1 ed. Salvador: EDUFBA, 2012 p. 196

¹³ BERENSTEIN, P. Prefácio. In: CARERI, F. *Walkscapes: o caminhar como prática estética*. 2 ed. São Paulo: Gustavo Gili, 2013. p.13

¹⁴ BUCCI, Angelo. **São Paulo, razões de arquitetura**: da dissolução de edifícios e de como atravessar paredes. São Paulo: rg, 2005 p. 14

of access to public space and, consequently, the experience of the Collective and shelter in the city. This isn't a method, but an experiment of analysis and intervention based on face-to-face experience, an instrument that matches the dynamics of a contemporary metropolis and tries to read the city from within. The idea is to understand how, combined with the conventional instruments of analysis, can the subjective experience be able to collect extremely relevant information for the understanding of the interstices of cities, the intangible factors and the spare spaces that make up the urban space, indicating possibilities of rescuing the playful city, the city of encounter.

By placing, in this work, the will to analyze and intervene in the city through an experience of the body present in space, it is natural that the instruments used to document the process must be in accordance with this proposition. Thus, without devaluing the importance of conventional tools used in the discipline of urbanism, what was proposed was an experience of analysis based on three instruments that were understood as most representative of the experience of the body present in the city; what is this *checkered, cut-out, nuanced* space as put by Foucault¹⁵; they are the *critical walk* itself translated into a *corpography, photography* and *subjective mapping*¹⁶. The instruments for absorbing and documenting the process of analyzing the city through walking were chosen with the aim of translating the experience of the present body in space. It is understood that, as stated by Gaston Bachelard, "the inhabited space transcends the geometric"¹⁷; and therefore, the way of analyzing the city and the instruments used for that must be in accordance with this posture. The mentioned tools should be capable of, precisely, transcending a purely geometric reading of space and portraying the elements here valued.

¹⁵ FOUCAULT, M. O Corpo Utópico, as Heteotopias. São Paulo: n-1. 2015.

¹⁶ For more on corpographies see BRITTO, Fabiana e Jacques, Paola. Corpocidade debates em estética urbana. Salvador: EDUFBA. 2010. p. 14 e 15. For more on photography see TAVARES, Miriam e SOARES, Ana. City, photography and cinema: the representation of the flâneur in audiovisual em Flaneur New Urban Narratives. Procurarte. p. 91 and for more on subjective mapping see QUINTELA, I. Guia Para la Navegación Urbana. Mexico DF: UI, 2010. p. 16.

¹⁷ BACHELARD, Gaston. A poética do espaço. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1989. p. 62

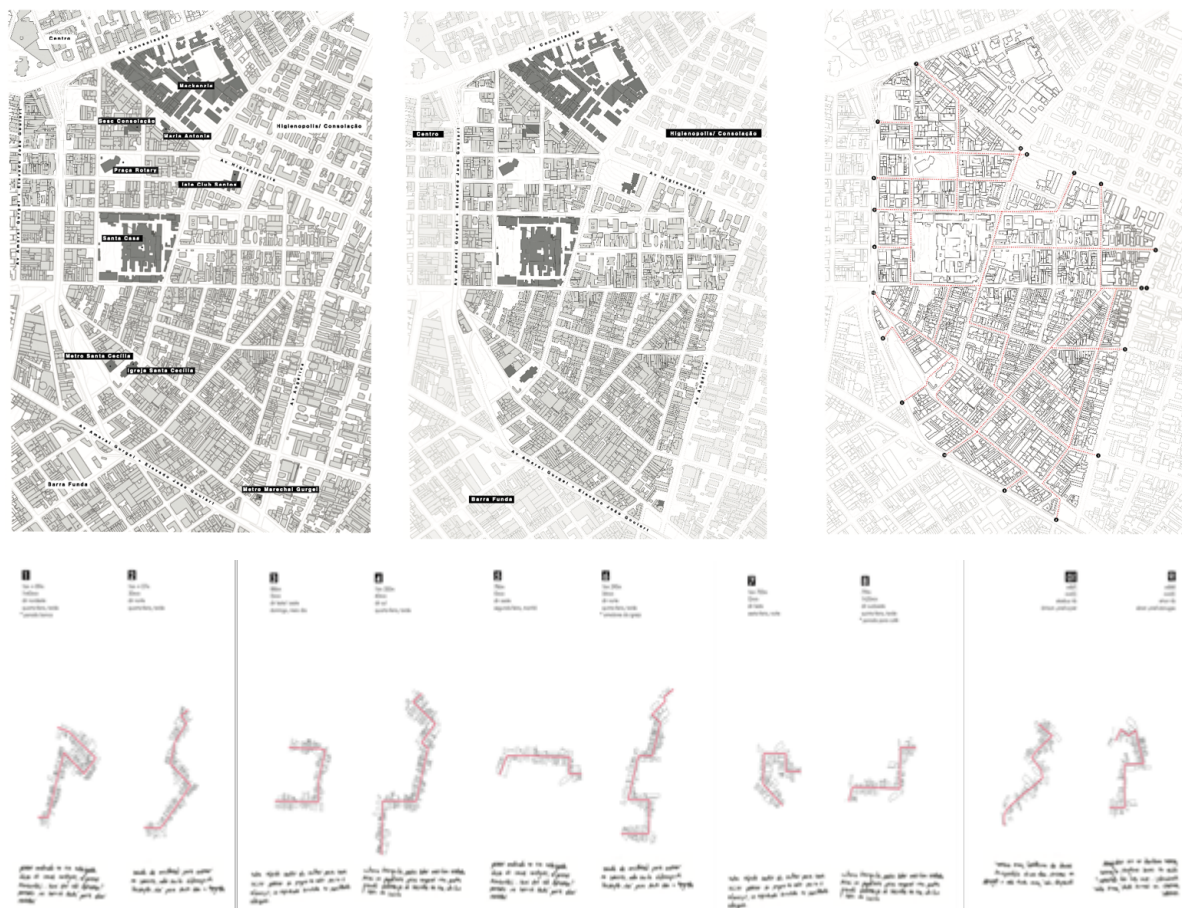


Image 1 – delimiting the neighborhood and experiment area + ten first recognition walks

So, for this experiment, at first, attentive walking was done as if in a drift, inspired by the Situationists – guided by randomness, but following a set of rules. In this case, the rule was given by the limit of the explored territory; within the vastness of the São Paulo metropolis, a neighborhood was chosen as the focus for this experiment. The chosen area was part of the Santa Cecília¹⁸ neighborhood. Through this case study, the mentioned instruments enabled to experience the possibility of intervening in the city through the face-to-face experience, in order to rescue the experience of public space that matches the non-utilitarian time of the urban experience. To start the walk, therefore, the city was understood as a space of experience where one can understand the different fragments of this dynamic and living urban universe; in order to understand which are the architectural/spatial and sensorial/fleeting elements that characterize these scattered pieces of the city. It was from walking that it was possible to absorb all the elements that make up a place and how they are related, thus discovering what are the relevant issues of a specific space and the situations with

¹⁸ For further reading on the neighbourhood's history see JORGE, C. Série História dos Bairros de São Paulo: Santa Cecília. Vol 30. São Paulo: DPH

the possibility of change: appropriating a territory in which its particularities are distinguished and its potential is discovered.

The reconnaissance walks made through the neighborhood, after the beginning of this work, form a set of ten random paths, sought to cover the largest possible area of the proposed surroundings, thus trying to understand the entirety of the neighborhood. The maps below show the routes taken, the time taken to travel each one and any notable events along the way. Most of the neighborhood can be described as a fragmented space, a collage of different epochs and intentions that make it for a complex apprehension. What could be concluded from these first walks is that despite the particularities in terms of time, frequency, morphology and sensations between the different stretches that make up the set of the defined area, the contrast between sensations and times and the fragmented perception occurred continuously through the different walks, and the search of those who frequent this part of the city for public places of shelter and experience of the Collective is evident. These first walks were represented in a set of maps, illustrations and photographs.

After a first understanding of the study area, or the specific context in which it is intended to work, for a greater approximation of scale and level of perception, a path was delimited. At this moment, after walking freely through the neighborhood, the tracing of a well-defined and limited path highlights the question of the route, of a narrative that guides the look and the movement when walking. The extension and repetition of the face-to-face experience on this route allowed the addition of layers of complexity and the experience of a greater number of events, expanding the understanding of the particularities of the place. The path chosen was, once again, traced almost at random with the aim of experimenting with acting under the demands of any place, and not looking for a place for a convenient performance, in order to cover a wide variety of events, making the route pass through different nuclei of the neighborhood. Five attentive walks, or drifts, were made and recorded along the path for a better understanding of the morphological and phenomenological situations that characterize it. These walks were made from both directions – Rua Baronesa de Itu and Rua Sabará – on different days of the week, times of day, duration times and both on foot and by bicycle; always passing through its entire length; in order to create a route. The records during the journey were made in three ways: notes on a map, where all the elements perceived during the crossing were noted; a text for each passage made right after completing the route, where the work with memory was used as a resource to perceive and fix the important points of the events experienced during the route; and through photography – which portrays a critical look at what was experienced and which presents a personal cut of the experiences of walking along the path, placed here in the form of an essay.

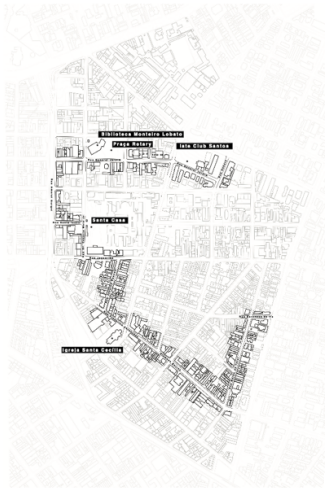


Image 2 - Defined path in the neighborhood + five walks along it

Along the different passages, it was increasingly possible to feel the appropriation of space by the body, through which it created a memory of the various past stretches – both of barriers or physical openings of space, and of sensations and emotions. After a certain point, it was already possible to anticipate events, such as a sound, a smell or an obstacle that were confirmed or not – modifying the next experience again. Thus, it was possible to create a mental and corporeal map of the studied route,

generating a clear narrative of the place. It was important to vary the direction of the route because the importance of the order of events is very noticeable – if coming from a street with a lot of noise, for example, the next street may seem silent; but coming from the opposite direction, it may be possible to recognize the existence of an auditory discomfort in this section as well. In other words, it was possible to perceive that the number of variations in time, speed and direction made influences the quality of the generated narrative, as sensations are often felt by comparison.

During the passages along the route, one can see the relationship between people's willingness to occupy the public space and the city's hostility to receive them. The lack of urban furniture, adequate treatment of roads and sidewalks, the huge number of railings, lack of trees, architectural schizophrenia, the great commercial activity, the desire to occupy the streets, the remnants of morphologies from the past and the annoying noise from motor vehicles was a recurring factor in all walks along the proposed route. The search for shelter spaces in the public sphere, which sometimes appear timidly and sometimes are non-existent, is constant; and the opening (or not) of the city to receive this demand varies along the way. Considering this fact, an urbanity scale was created that summarizes the set of information collected along the routes. High urbanity is understood as the parts of the city where it welcomes the user, allows the experience of the Collective and provides a pleasant experience for walking or for public enjoyment; and as urbanity lowers the parts of the city that are hostile to pedestrians, do not allow permanence in space and provide a difficult or impossible experience to walk. This scale is shown in the map below, where the points of different levels of urbanity, the main points of conflict and possibilities of action are located and that, at the same time, it is possible to see all the phrases, thoughts and perceptions experienced throughout the walks that influenced the urbanity of each location. The walks and experiences were then translated into analytical maps that emphasize interesting points along the path, the public areas (streets), the walls or closed spaces, the built areas and the voids (both horizontal and vertical).

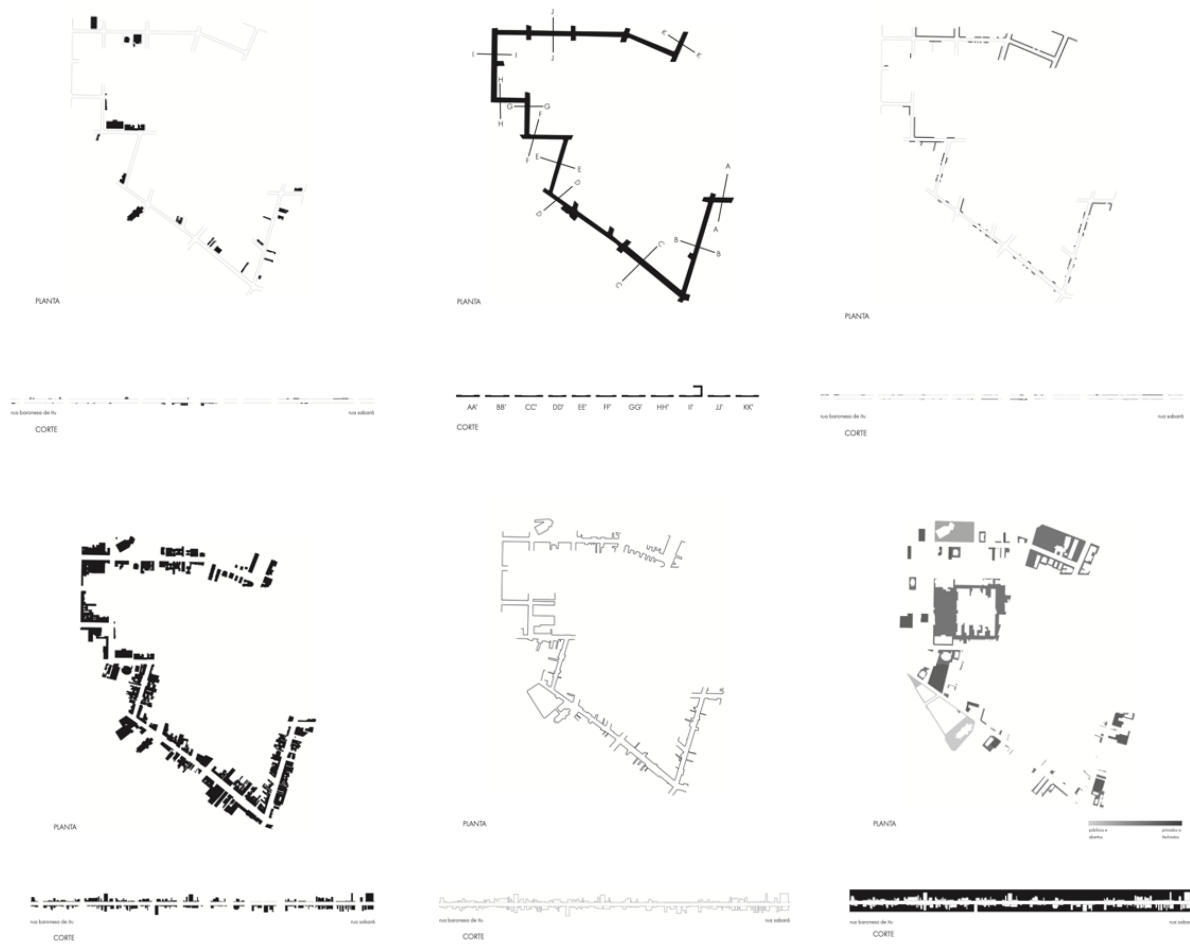


Image 3 - Analysis of space along the path – points of historical interest, vertical, horizontal and visual voids and buildings

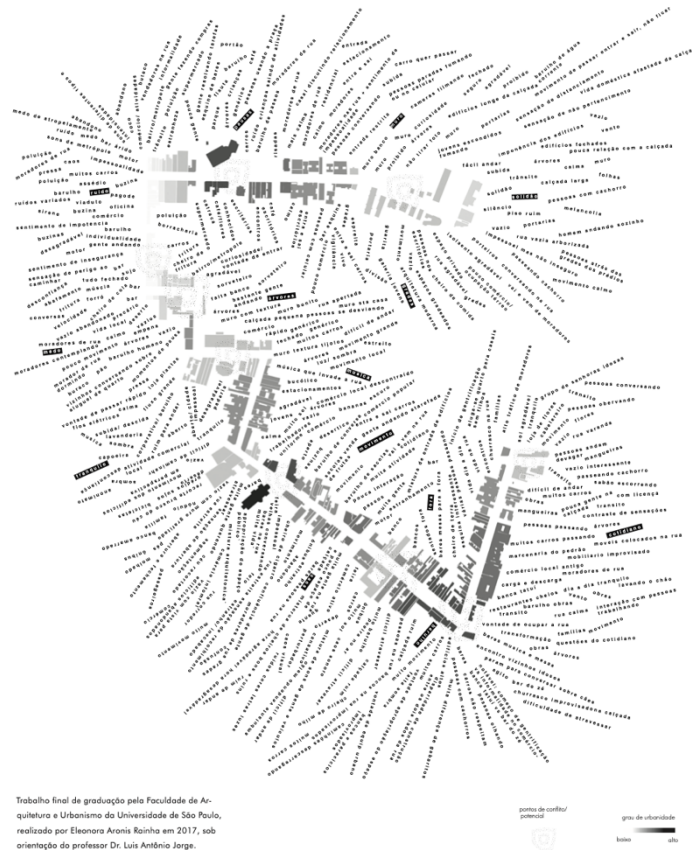


Image 4 -Synthesis Map - Levels of urbanity along the path

It is believed that from the analytical approach it is possible to find impediments in the urban space and understand its possibilities of transformation, converting a hostile and generic city into a city that enables the experience of the Collective; to find the possibilities of a nomadic and playful city within the utilitarian city. From the map derived from the walking experiment nine situations along the path were chosen for an intervention. These situations were understood as critical points where an intervention could be aimed at creating a narrative and a path that exalts the use of space by the Collective, of public space as a place of shelter and the search for the city of playful time. The interventions aimed at making a more humane, walkable and playful city; not through building but precisely through opening up spaces and providing shelter and support to the infinite possibilities of human encounter. Therefore, a large part of the work took place precisely in finding these spaces and opening them up for people to use, intervening in the sense of making them less hostile and enabling the very use given by people to allow this rescue of the imaginary in the public space to that conflict in the urban context does not take place between the people and the city, but between the people themselves – in the encounter with the Other.



Image 5 - Possibility of access to public space along the path – before and after intervention

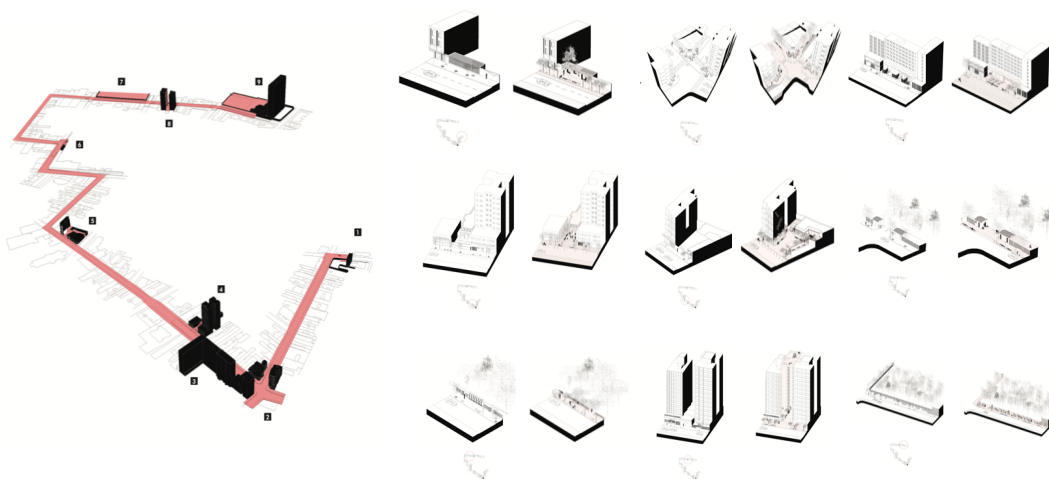


Image 6 - Nine situations along the path – before and after intervention

Part III

“Walking is a path to this encounter, which is almost always non-consensual and conflicting. But, as we know, dissent and urban conflicts are not only legitimate and necessary for the constitution of the public sphere and also of public spaces, but it would be precisely on the permanence of this tension between the non-idealized nor pacified differences that the construction of a less urbanized city would depend. spectacular and more playful and experimental.”¹⁹

(Paola Jacques, 2003, 14)

¹⁹ JACQUES, Paola Berenstein. **Apologia da Deriva**: Escritos situacionistas sobre a cidade. 1 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra, 2003. p. 14

In addition, in the proposed case study, which is the city of São Paulo, the search for the nomadic city and the experience in public spaces was not justified only by the fact that this is an important issue in contemporary metropolises, but also because the citizens themselves have, in recent years, raised the urgency of a change in the way the city is built. Thus, architecture and urbanism can be placed not as an imposition, but as a support that perceives the lack and demand for shelter spaces of the Collective. This walk, therefore, was not a matter of marking and mapping an unknown landscape, but of seeking, in a familiar and constructed territory the human essence in urban design, which has disappeared over time, in the midst of so many transformations aimed at making cities a living machine.

When perceiving the city as the meeting place par excellence, this research aimed at finding, in the utilitarian city, the remnants of the ludic city, and this was only possible through a face-to-face experience, because what was being investigated demanded the attention of all the senses. It was about understanding the city as a human product and, therefore, seeking, as a body that walks, in the city itself, the elements that characterize it as such – returning the city made by the people to the people, through architecture. The “importance of the human in architecture is defended. This time, not as a mere user of space, but as a determining and constitutive element of space itself.”²⁰

São Paulo, and more specifically Santa Cecília, as a case study, proved to be relevant for this experiment, as there was a desire that parted from the people themselves to retake the public space and replace the experience of the Collective as a primary issue of the use of these spaces. Thus, the analysis tried to understand this phenomenon in the proposed path. The situations encountered, and the actions proposed, therefore, took place in the sense of pointing out the problematic issues of impediment to the use of public space along the way in concrete situations, and to propose opening maneuvers as possibilities for action. The objective was not to fill these spaces with new constructions, but to give new meaning to the voids, transforming them into places and opening them up for people to use; diverting the conflict that occurs in the contemporary city between people and the built space to a conflict between the people themselves, in the form of an encounter, of living with the Other, of using the city. But most of all it was an experiment of city reading in a bottom-up maneuver. Thus, in a procedural way, it is possible to see how it is possible to transform the spaces of the city into places of travel and the construction of narratives.

²⁰ LEITÃO, Lúcia. **Onde coisas e homens se encontram: cidade arquitetura e subjetividade**. São Paulo: Annablume, 2014. P 34

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