

The Center on the Metropolis' Way

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In *Tristes Tropiques*, a book published in 1955, Claude Lévi-Strauss depicts his passage by São Paulo in the beginning of 1935 while heading on into his Amazon incursion. The remarks he made about this short trip stopover are recorded in a few pages of text, where the city, its architecture and some aspects of its urban life are the object of an eloquent testimony. The chapter *São Paulo* opens up with the invocation of a maxim which the author himself points out as “oblique” and made by “a malicious spirit” which defines America as a continent that went from barbarism to decadence without knowing the civilization. While rejecting the hardness of the formula to describe the American continent, Lévi-Strauss resorts to the same motto to trace the evolutionary cycle of American cities, the cities of the New World, as he uses to name them: “they go from freshness to decrepitude without stopping in the old age” (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1955, p. 78). Despite the general tone, as he was referring to the New World cities, the home of such stinging synthesis is undoubtedly the city of São Paulo.

Addressed to the city in the mid-1930s, at the specific time in which São Paulo reached its first million inhabitants, with an annual growth of 4.5%, with its rulers boasting, as indeed it is registered in the text itself with a tip of irony, that they built “one house every hour,” such remark present a huge reach. The great interest in this assessment lies in the fact that it pinpoints with accuracy the ambiguities, destructive and even ruinous issues of the advance which in that moment gained a huge presence, raising the city to the category of “capital of progress”. Compared by the anthropologist to the two American metropolises, Chicago and New York, São Paulo lived, such as these two, “feverishly in a chronic disease, perpetually young, it will never be sane” (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1955, p. 78).

We must not confuse, under the penalty of losing such rich information, this analytical *look* on the

city, with comments left by visitors, accustomed to the contours of medieval and baroque cities, barely capable of discerning and appreciating other urban forms. Far from it, the approach with which Lévi-Strauss deals with the American cities, the New World cities, as he prefers to name them, is detached from those in which “the eyes see differences to which they reach with nonchalance” (SENNETT, 1990). To avoid any misunderstanding, he makes it clear to his readers that he eliminates the presence of traces accumulated by the past to feel attracted by the cities of the New World. He considers, to the contrary, that such absence is precisely one element of its significance, of its urban substance. And he goes further on when he states that he regards as a privilege for his activity to be able to adapt himself to a timeless dimension system to interpret a new form of civilization.

What the anthropologist is actually lamenting is the inability of the American cities, in this case Paulo from the 1930', to remain new, since “this is its justification and its essence” (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1955, p. 78).

Degradation and dispersion: two simultaneous and overlapping phenomena that coexist in the metropolis

Currently, after the lapse of seven decades and after having undergone a long urban route, two major themes dominate the contemporary urbanism of the city of São Paulo: the degradation of urban sectors, especially those of the central areas, and the fragmented and dispersed growth of the metropolises. The interpretations and especially the descriptions produced by the urban planners as from these primordial themes reveal the nature of the many issues therein contained. The Physical forms assumed by the degradation of the central spaces and the unlimited

dispersion of the metropolitan territory are objects of reflection for all the fields of knowledge that regard the metropolis as a decisive fact of contemporary life.

There is always a recurring distinction between those who have propositional responsibilities and those whose commitment is the comprehension of the implications of the phenomenon with other aspects of contemporary society, with the anticipation of new urban experiences. Accepting a gap between the two approaches, particularly in the current juncture, when more doubts and perplexities than certainties hover over the matters which do invade the metropolises particularly harm those role is to intervene. Assuming the inexorable fact that the urban planner has before him a propositional task, it has become vital to follow up the analysis that emerge from the artistic look and from the political analysis. Nowadays, more than ever, it is timely and correct the remark by Giulio Carlo Argan (1993, p. 88), when he stated that urbanism is an aesthetic discipline that advances into the political field.

Examination of the vast amount of material produced from the 1970s onwards, surpassing the conventional urban approaches, points out to dynamic relationships which unite and confront the two issues mentioned above, i.e. *the decline and the atrophy of the central districts and the essentially diffuse and unlimited propagation of the metropolitan sprawl*. By virtue of this relationship, since they are aspects of a single and continuous urban reality - the metropolis - these two phenomena have strong relationships in their origin and therefore in their own development.

Thus, the interpretations of the physical scope and of the spatial and functional nature of the central areas cannot do without a holistic approach on the metropolitan operations, failing of which render them grossly inadequate or even superficial. It is worthwhile noting that this is not about a globalizing kind of analysis in which the metropolis should be taken as a whole, as a formally single object. The very definition of metropolis – an urban multi articulate kind – renders such approach contradictory. The acceptance of the fragmentation of the traditional city, unitary and with clearly defined boundaries in favor of the metropolitan urban avalanche forces us

to accept as well its essentially diffuse and dispersed organization. Therefore, the analysis of the center and all the central area aiming at pointing out and forward projects that address their urban problems *rests less on the precise definition of its perimeter and more in the definition of urban systems of metropolitan scale of which it participates*.

The problem of the decay of central urban areas in conjunction with metropolitan structuring projects, unfolds into a set of decisive issues to the practice of contemporary urbanism. The *escape* of the poor to the central areas gave to the subject, from every point of view, a strong social content that can no longer be absent from any restorative intervention. Both the investment and the disinvestment of the private real estate sector or that of the public branch in the center are closely linked to the presence and more strongly to the fate of most part of shanty town population of the metropolis, which found therein a *niche* of urban life.

The significant increase of slums in the central area – downtown and central districts - is not a phenomenon that accompanied linearly the pattern of gentrification described by the specialized literature. Although the phenomenon is present in every city district, it is specifically in those which compound the central area that it manifested itself on a rather more consistently stance. The process was more clearly developed as from the 1960s onwards and was, right from the beginning, associated to the loss of quality introduced by large-scale urban projects, all connected to the metropolitan thoroughfare changes. In this sense it is illuminating the distinction formulated by Neil Smith (1996):

The gentrification stopped being a narrow and quixotic eccentricity of the real estate market and has become the foremost point of a much broader project: the replacement of social class (class remake) at the Centre. It would be anachronistic now to exclude the urban reforms from the gentrification heading, and assume that the latter, at the Center, has remained restricted to the recovery of an elegant past of the old malls of the ancient cities, rather than associating it with a wide restructuring.

To reinforce the view hereon presented, it is noteworthy recalling a banal historical data: it was not the forceful denunciation of the living conditions in the

slums of Manchester that laid out the foundations of modern urbanism (BENÉVOLO, 1967). Although the materiality of Friedrich Engels's description revealed the reality of the neighborhoods and of the housing which the large modern industry offered to the English working class in the last decades of the 19th century there were other determinants and constraints on the establishment of the urban planning discipline. The description of the workers territories of Glasgow and Manchester around the 1850's pointed to the unrelenting need to transform the very production mode (ENGELS, 1962). The changes required by the industrial city, the improvement of the working class neighborhoods, of the slums, should come as the corollary of the changes that socialism would bring into the social relations.

In truth, the modern urbanism originated from the imperious need that presented itself to the capitalist societies of the second half of the 19th century of organizing on an adequate and efficient stance the urban space required by the industrial capitalism. While it was a theoretical apparatus and a set of techniques, urbanism was born committed to the adaptation of the medieval city to the new economic order and soon afterwards with the regeneration of the city destroyed by the predatory procedures of the first industrial cycle. But it went further on by making it clear, by its own deeds, i.e. by the projects presented and carried out, *that it was not solely about a restorative action, but above all an exacerbating action* (POPE, 1996).

Hence, apart from its subservient and subordinate content, to use the words of the Leonardo Benévolo himself, the urban techniques aimed at the regeneration of urban sectors, do engender new and tough questions whose scope is not commonly contemplated in the analyses which have been producing in the last twenty years.

The boomerang effect of the thoroughfare structuring

The consolidation of the concept of urban sprawl reveals the difficulty and then the renunciation of seeking accurate settings and the consequent

acceptance of an unlimited growth and literally out of control.

It will not be herein listed, nor analyzed the metropolitan growth process of the city of São Paulo. The interest here is that of solely highlighting, as has already been said, that there is a dynamic and direct relationship between the growth of this sprawl and the destruction of the central spaces, particularly as from the 1950's and 1960's. A brief review of the issues that were in the agenda in São Paulo as from the mid-1960's places as a counterpoint of the decentralization a marked dispersion of the urbanized territory, led by growth pattern which resulted in the production of a *sprawling metropolis*, where the search for the urban form may acquire the connotation of *regressive utopia*, as pointed out by Manfredo Tafuri (1985).

Although the demolition activity of the colonial city for the construction of the industrial metropolis was already underway in the decade of the 1920's and more intensely in the 1930's with the works carried out by the mayors Pires do Rio (1926-1930) and Fabio Prado (1935-1938), it is the analysis of the avenues plan that gives us a clear view of the relationship of the center with the city's neighborhoods. Important and structuring works preceded the period in which the engineer Francisco Prestes Maia (1938-1945) led the urban transformation of the city. Major works, such as the sanitation of Baixada do Glicério and the creation of Parque D. Pedro II, the widening of Avenida São João, the construction of the new Viaduto do Chá, the opening of Avenida 9 de Julho and the two tunnels under Avenida Paulista, show the importance assumed by the mobility within the metropolis and by the accessibility to the central area.

By the mid-1940's, under the command of Mayor Prestes Maia, it was attempted the installation of an efficient road system, and one can even say, a clear and efficient structuring for the center and for the downtown area. Between the perimeter of irradiation, the "Y system" and the ten radial avenues, the city seemed to be heading for a structuring that met at the same time, its radio-concentric profile (centripetal) and its outward expansion.

Throughout the 1950's, the works of the "irradiation

Avenue” were being consolidated: Avenidas Ipiranga and São Luís, Viadutos Jacarei and Maria Paula, Praça João Mendes, Avenida Rangel Pestana, Rua da Figueira, Avenida Mercúrio and Avenida Senador Queirós closed a circuit that embraced the center. New codes for land use and occupation intended to provide to the central avenues templates consistent with their gutters. The “Y system” won its final configuration in 1957 with the approval of the opening of Avenida 23 de Maio, which subsequently took on Expressway features (PORTO, 1992).

While it was being completed the planned center and, above all, designed in the 1930's, it was initiated with great impact, in the decade of the 1960's, a new cycle of transformations. The design of the second perimetral moved away by Mayor Adhemar de Barros in 1957, and then partially recovered, became fundamental to create additional links of the “irradiation Avenue”. Mayor Faria Lima, who took office in 1965, concentrated his efforts on the completion of two works of great importance to the metropolitan connections and huge impact in the center: the Radial Leste and the construction work of the thoroughfare complex of the Parque D. Pedro II (PORTO, 1992).

The proliferation and growth of suburban neighborhoods and of the “villages” - Matilde, Guilhermina, Esperança, among others -, as well as the dismembering of the municipalities that later formed the metropolis, made it clear that the growth of sprawl was actually unlimited and fast. In the period from 1940 to 1970 there was a considerable advance in the number of municipalities around São Paulo: ten in the 1940's and thirty in 1960 (PORTO, 1992).

The disruption of this slow process of road and urban organization arrived earlier than their creators expected. Without taking into account the characteristics of the next period, i.e. from 1950 to 1980, the three decades in which the monopolist industry led the ways of the metropolis, we can hardly understand how this structure became fragile and insufficient. So, concomitantly to the construction of the Conjunto Nacional at Avenida Paulista, the center received in the period between 1950 and 1960, large size investments such as the construction of the skyscrapers Italia and Copan, making clear its ability to

compete with the attractions and the prestige of the “new avenue”, the expressway, which would ultimately play a crucial role in its urban weakening, became the only response to new scales of vehicles circulating throughout the city.

By the mid-1960's we reached the milestone of 415,000 automobiles circulating in the city. This number corresponded to an increase of 1.518% in sixteen years (MEYER, 1991). Nowadays, with nearly three hundred bus lines arriving at the center terminals, it is not hard to realize that the scale and type of mobility required by the distribution pattern of the activities in the metropolis, together with the sharp radio-concentric distribution of the road system, has become a crucial problem. Jointly evaluated, the urban projects carried out in the central area and in the center as from 1960s is the fruit of the demands for metropolitan mobility and accessibility. It is important to emphasize that such projects are not necessarily predatory. Other metropolises have faced similar issues without creating for their central areas so negative processes.

Like a boomerang thrown from the inside out, that is, from the center to the districts, the road structure snapped itself back to the center, demanding new attitudes and scales of intervention. Although the implementation of the plan of avenues were still mobilizing the attention of Prestes Maia, who in 1961 again assumed the office of mayor, his technical response to the urban problems of the city of São Paulo had already come in 1955 with the “Ante – Project for a Rapid Metropolitan Transport System” in which the subway was presented as the sole appropriate solution. The reverberations of the slow addressing of the various proposals to build a high-capacity transport system are present in the current issues of the center.

The escalation of the interventions

The incorporation of the required urban elements by the metropolization process - a dynamic succession of transformation stages of the metropolis - focused decisively on the physical and functional structure of the center, producing deep scars in its public spaces.

The combination of the start of the works of the stretch of the East-West Expressway over Avenida Sao Joao, the Elevado Costa e Silva, with the inauguration of the new Praça Roosevelt, mark the first major attack on public spaces of the center having as premise, or justification, the serious road traffic issues. The Elevado Costa e Silva connecting Rua Amaral Gurgel to the Largo Padre Pericles, in Perizes, delivered for use in January 1971, created a new urban status for Avenida São João.

Inaugurated at the beginning of 1970, Praça Roosevelt became a symbol of the public action on the public spaces of the central area. The project implemented in three levels, presented a complementary program of complex uses, apart from meeting the requirements of the metropolitan circulation.

The former unpaved square was replaced by an edification whose urban quality was immediately challenged. The project scale interfered with the structure of the region, creating walls where there were sights. Paradoxically, even recognizing that there existed a huge and inappropriate parking in the open, it is impossible not to recognize the destructive character of the initiative. The attempt to provide an empty body - the mega-structure of 30,000 square meters - with urban qualities, when its primary and essential role was actually to cover up the underground lanes and assure the free flow of the vehicles crossing the center, with no direct contact with its road structure, led the architects responsible for the urban project to seek a density of use and of roles capable of creating an "authentic city stretch".

But the false spatial and programmatic complexity has created spaces which do not reveal their roles. The lack of distinction, both in the external accesses and in the indoor spaces, between a garage, a kindergarten or a library, became a barrier, an obstacle for further assimilation by the user and by the city. The difficulty of "reading" its opaque and mysterious interior, as well as the impossibility to create any kind of continuity between the new construction and the existing urban fabric, established between the square and the center coexisting relationships, in the sense used by Rem Koolhaas (1995, page 504) when describing the properties of the buildings in which the size (bigness concept) is a fundamental datum.

Although the term coexistence suggests some kind of agreement, it is advisable not to nurture any illusions: the current conditions of Praça Roosevelt do not show any kind of rapprochement between the urban context wherein it was installed and its interior. The paradoxical possibility that a project might exacerbate the precariousness rather than inducing or promoting the reparation of urban problems became therein blatant. The new square created in the 1970's a tremendous municipal waste whose erosion power remains negatively alive and active in the center.

The second blow within principles similar to those that led to the intervention on Praça Roosevelt came right afterwards with the expansion plan of the Praça da Sé, approved in 1973 and undertaken as from 1974. The implementation of the Sé station connected to the first line the São Paulo North-South subway imposed the demolition of the buildings of the East side of the square, along with the Ruas Felipe de Oliveira and Santa Teresa. The two presented justifications for the size of the interventions were: the need for underground space that the largest subway station in the center would require; and the volume of pedestrians that the area would receive after 1978, with its inauguration.

According to the project carried out between 1974 and 1978, the Praças da Sé and Clóvis Beviláqua started to compose a continuous space without, however, arriving in no moment to the condition of an integrated space. The Cathedral da Sé and the Palace of Justice lost their specific spaces, their urban supports, what also withdrew from them the ability to operate as "delimiting landmarks" starting to dispute "shoulder to shoulder" the duplicated and overflowing space. With these edifications, it was imploded the very spatial and functional essence of these two squares. *The new space, the resulting space, swallowed the two squares creating a fluid and undefined territory at all levels.* Although later on it was aggregated the strong presence of the Sé subway station, the wound was never healed and neither did it stop the space excess created by the accumulation of the two squares.

The created emptiness did not actually win the evocative power of the *terrain vague* referred to by Ignasi de Solà-Morales (1996). Here, the void created by

the absence of the buildings could not achieve the positive dimension of a *promise*, of expectant space, ready to receive a project and a new use, described in his analysis. The vacuum created in the Sé is pure indeterminacy; it remits, still today, in purely spatial terms, more clearly to what was imploded than what it conquered - the new station. The numerous attempts to recompose it through indoor interventions were nullified. Faced with the impossibility of reconstituting the imploded urban fabric, the fountains, the sculptures and the carefully designed thresholds which were strategically distributed do not comply with any articulating role. They end up by assuming the role of props wherein the art seems to want to replace and compensate the very urban life which was ousted from it (SOLÁ-MORALES, 1996).

In the 1990s, the new Parque do Anhangabaú added to the center another example of urban space destroyed on behalf of road circulation. In this case, the magnitude of pedestrian-automobile conflict served as a justification and led to intervention. A huge slab covers the tunnel and guarantees the circulation with standard of expressway for the intense flow of vehicles which cuts through the center in the North-South axis. The project, carried out in the decade of the 1980's, has made it clear that, with regard to urban transformations, the expressway is less impactful by the distant territories that it connects than by the spaces and local systems that it disconnects (JACOBS, 1961).

The resulting space corresponding to the road system coverage does not hide the impotence of a "square" whose program relies exclusively on issues that mark the conflicting relationship between pedestrian and vehicle. Thus, once the problem is addressed and the roles are separated, vehicles below and pedestrians above, there occurred the undesirable "space flood" which carried with it the space articulating strength, roles and symbols of the former Vale do Anhangabaú. The Viaduto do Chá, belittled in its monumental scaled by the accommodation works of the underground road system, floats over a space that no longer requires "its services".

The inherent complexity of a public space the size of Anhangabaú, a landmark of the most fundamental spatial relationship of the city, our primordial

crossing, can hardly be sustained through strictly functional interventions. The compositional aspects, translated into landscape design and pavement pattern, allude to the Parque Anhangabaú at the start of the century, without nevertheless creating an active relationship with the buildings that today could offer some support to the set. The indispensable urban spaces have been ousted from a joint reflection for the full realization of a project for Anhangabaú: Praça da Bandeira, the Largo da Memória, the set composed by the Praças Carlos Gomes and Ramos de Azevedo, Largo Paissandú, Praça Pedro Lessa, Largo São Bento (including the subway exit that opens to the valley), and finally, the Praça do Patriarca, including the Prestes Maia Gallery.

Struck by these large size interventions and by the permanent and imperative need to accommodate an ever-increasing number of vehicles, the slicing of the central area reached such a structural disorganization level that solely a comprehensive plan might revert, by indicating and coordinating the punctual actions which effectively should add up and not just pile up.

With the same force of the interventions which used the center as an "express passage servitude", it is indispensable to point out as well those which deteriorated it by the abusive use of its public spaces. Numerous squares: Bandeira, Patriarca, Pedro Lessa and Parque Dom Pedro II, were usurped by public transport (above all by the bus) to such an extent that they were converted into terminal squares. The demographic growth of the peripheries imposed as from the decade of the 1940's, new transport standards. The drawbacks of rail transportation have become evident as from the moment in which the distances were attaining new scales. The creation of the municipal agency of public transport, the City Public Transport Company (CMTC) in 1947, and the structuring of a road system with a long territorial reach sealed our metropolitan profile: huge horizontal expansion, low occupancy density of the urbanized soil and a centralized road structure. It is indispensable in order to understand the matters concerned to the metropolitan profile of São Paulo, to mention the lack of relationship between social housing and industrial labor market. These issues have long reach and form the essence of our urban

problems. We are here seeking to recall their most direct, spatial and functional repercussions, in the central area of the metropolis.

Nowadays, seven and a half million passengers are carried out on working days in the municipality of São Paulo. Out of the 1,200 bus lines that serve the city, 294 reach a relatively small territory of 4,4 square kilometers that makes up the center, that is, the districts of Sé and República, which are distributed into three large terminals: Parque Dom Pedro II, Princesa Isabel and Bandeiras. Other smaller terminals, as well as the sets of bus stops located in central squares such as Praça do Patriarca, Praça Pedro Lessa, Largo do Paissandú and Praça Ramos de Azevedo, fulfill complementary role of receiving the impact, even if partial in certain cases, of two million people crossing the center daily (SÃO PAULO, 1998).

This structure and metropolitan operation reverberate in the everyday mobility of a huge population. As far as the center is concerned, the compulsory presence of a huge mass of commuters who do not have their final destination in the central area creates an anomaly in the use of its public spaces. Although the center remains a tremendous pole of attraction – until the end of the decade of 1980's 25% of the travels had the center as their final destination - today it acts as a gigantic territory for transshipment. It is evident that the center has suffered in the last two decades a process of accelerated degradation of its squares and parks, transformed in an improvised and unruly stance in public transport terminals. The absence of any kind of integration strategy generates routes for passengers compelled between two modes of transport or just between two points with different destinations. The implementation of pedestrianized streets was a response to the growing conflicts between pedestrians and private vehicles in the narrow streets of the old center.

The construction of the metropolis and the erosion of its center

The centrifugal growth and its impact on the centripetal road organization gained weight as from the moment in which the metropolitan scale started to

demand concrete measures in the urban structure, in the strict road systems and in those of mass transit. A comparison of the road works carried out in the center, arising from the plan outlined by Prestes Maia in the 1930's and those which as from the 1960's came to provide an answer to the mobility issues in metropolitan scale, may be summarized in the following remark: both had in the road circulation and in the automobile its paradigm; however, whereas the former sought to create a road network capable of organizing and structure the center, taking into account the new circulation standard required by the nascent industrial capitalism, the latter, answering to the very same necessities, however on a new scale, created and remain creating strategic crossings wherein the central spaces, above all the existing squares and avenues, become contingent supports with enormous reverberation on its local performance.

The so-called “possibilist mentality” which valorizes the *doing* to the detriment of the *thinking*, that is, the action pressed by junctures, above all those of political and economic nature, and distant from any strategic plan, has created in the center of the city of São Paulo a list of public spaces wherein it became blatantly clear the *exacerbating* role that the functionalist urbanism can achieve. The permanent search for articulations of metropolitan level assumed commonly, such an overwhelming importance that the impact of the found “solutions” did not include any consideration for the central spaces.

The analysis of the executed urban projects in the last two decades, in the center and in the central area testifies to the tacit acceptance of the difficulty of reconciling these two intervention scales. In the solutions found, with few exceptions, the center acquired the marks of an obstacle to be overcome. The reconciliation of these two dimensions – the intra urban (local) and the metropolitan one – arises as an unwarranted demand before the functional benefits which the new projects would be offering to the integration of the *metropolis*.

Seen from such an angle, the urban project may easily be pointed out as the exacerbating agent of the erosion processes of the urban attributes of the central area and of the center. Dialoging with problems located outside the central area, each one of these

interventions have created, by the chosen solutions, underground or aerial, its own resulting space, its own secondary problems. Once attended the primordial demand, i.e., crossing in the most efficient stance as possible the central area, each one of the actions, based in specific projects, or solely in ways to perform on the central public spaces, launched on the set of public areas in the center, constituted and articulated by historical urban practices, a power disarticulation focus. They have produced the insulation of more important spaces and have promoted the dilution of the public space system, carrying on a process which is described as of urban degradation.

For the user who crosses its systems of road connections, the center might be apprehended as a continuous space, and even intelligible for that matter; now for those who simply move “from one place to another” the experiences are those of fragmentation and discontinuity. *The breach of one network of public spaces, squares, parks and streets, characteristic places of the center, introduced an abstract dimension in the urban network.*

The precedence assumed by circulation and traffic issues ended up by generating unidimensional urban projects wherein the preexisting space, the support, has become an isolated fragment of its original context. *Reduced to the condition of remaining spaces of the metropolis' adaptation actions, they end up to be object of complementary projects in which the difficulty of re-articulation with its original tissue has generated abstract spaces from the urban viewpoint.* These are baffling projects due to the lack of spatial clarity and absence of programmatic definition. Ruled by simplifying premises which reduce the urban complexity to mistaken urban principles and incomplete in their formulation, they end up by producing solutions which in a second moment exacerbate the urban problems of the center. *The combination of the priority task of giving free flow to the circulation of vehicles, with the search of segregating the automobile from the pedestrian has generated ambiguous spaces, destituted of urban quality.*

From palimpsest to erosion

The centrifugal growth, tentacular and unlimited of the metropolitan sprawl, led by the massive presence of the individual transport has produced, in each one of its stages, structural and spatial relationships with the internal territories from which it started, as well as with the new territories which it aggregated. It is indispensable to combine the trajectory of the transformation lived by the center to the path of the metropolis construction. There is a *continuum* in the constitution of the metropolitan sprawl, from the historical, territorial and functional viewpoint, to which the central area was associated to and subjected to on a permanent basis.

The decentralization, while an organizing process of secondary urban poles which spatially structured and functionally organized the metropolitan territory, was not responsible for the decline of the center and much less for the destruction of its attributes. One may even state that the urban growth of the *metropolitan* kind, such as the one described by the geographers, had in the decentralization a strong organizing agent (LANGENBUCH, 1971). It is worthwhile noting, once more, that the resulting functional and territorial decentralization from the metropolization of São Paulo prior to the expansion propitiated by the hegemonic growth of the transport on wheels, which was being consolidated until the 1960's, is a positive process which did not radically affect the center and the central area.

The construction of a territory of metropolitan scale, spatially fragmented and disperse, and the degradation of the central area and of the center of São Paulo are phenomena which can only be explained if dealt with on a dialectic stance. This phenomenon and this relationship are, perhaps, the sole way to approach the matter left by Lévi-Strauss in the decade of the 1930's when he regretted that the American cities did not keep their content and lineament of new cities. It is fundamental for the evaluation of the addressing of the discussion to let settled down that the analysis of this process eloquently show that the metropolitan growth of São Paulo, in the period of accelerated industrialization, between the years 1950 and 1980, presented at least four characteristics: it was *liberal*

from the viewpoint of the urban planning; *centrifugal* from the territorial viewpoint; *unlimited* as far as the involved economic interests are concerned; predatory from the view point of the relationships that it established with the road modernization and the consolidated urban tissues.

The content of the impact of such *metropolitan standard* growth on the center is one of the important issues of the urbanism of the city of São Paulo of the 1990's. The public policies and the urban projects which have per object the center must consider that the already prepared analyses in several areas do indicate some important conclusions, of which the following three ones may be considered the most relevant ones:

First: presented like this, as from such premises, the destruction of the central spaces is in a direct relationship with the scale acquired by the metropolitan territory and, as a corollary, with the mobility model demanded by the activities therein located. One of the most clarifying analysis on the relationships between the constitution of the metropolis and that of the mobility establishes that the latter grounds the urbanization process, it is not the *resulting action* or a mere consequence of the metropolization, it is rather a *principle* (ASCHER, 1998). Hence, the dimension and the kind of organization of the metropolitan territory are directly related with the mobility options implemented in the period of highest expansion of the metropolitan sprawl, which today congregates 39 municipalities in the interior of a territory which reaches 8.000 square kilometers and has a fleet of for million and a half of vehicles.

Second: in the urban renovation of central areas, one of the most recurring phenomena is the expulsion of dwellers whose location in such areas is subject to the diminution of the commercial value of the properties and of the adjoining public spaces. This remark remits, above all to the slums, but it has also become valid, moreover in the last decade, to the situation which we are calling "street dwellers". The exacerbation of the social issues is, doubtless, one of the numerous faces of the recovery operations of downgraded areas. Nowadays, after decades of theoretical discussion and some actual experience of recovery of downgraded urban sectors, two basic

questions are delineated: the expulsion of the poor population which occupied the spaces which were being gradually downgraded, and the land revaluation which the modernizing interventions introduce. Even though it becomes clear that these are the most eloquent unfolding of the process, it is also evident that the scope of the analysis must be expanded, that the examination of the matter demands a systemic view of the metropolis' operation. Thus, the recovery of an urban sector implies into the equating of social issues, chiefly the housing ones.

Third: the set of produced reflections and experiences until the moment on the decay and the recovery of central areas of large metropolises points out to a convergence: that the urban centers are functionally important territories, whose initial characteristics have been destroyed by modernizing interventions and which remain historically and culturally estimable places, whose deterioration compromises the quality of urban life. Even in the metropolises wherein new centralities – understood as such new poles geographically distributed in the metropolitan territory, fulfilling, above all, roles linked to the service sector, before concentrated in the center – have already organized themselves, be it to attend a legitimate development of the urban roles or solely to answer to hard real estate concerns. The loss or solely the simple weakening of the *primordial centrality* affects the essence of the experience of integrating a metropolis.

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