

The Written City:

Modernizing Transformations and Urban Projections

Brazilian Pre-Modernist Literature

Maurício SILVA

Uninove

* Translated to English by Luciana Latarini Ginezi

In the spectrum of all human actions that can be analyzed in a more or less systematic way, one of the most relevant phenomena is the urbanization of modern cities, which had engendered - in the words of Henri Lefebvre - a true *urban revolution*¹. As a result, the uncontrolled industrialization process in which modern societies have ended up causing a set of sociopolitical and socioeconomic changes that, ultimately, resulted in extensive cities remodeling, with the consequent population and means of production concentration in large urban centers, the capitalist economy development, social relations diversification, labor social division, in other words an entire change in the physical structure and politics of the city that in ancient times was mainly commercial, from the XIX century became fundamentally industrial², to arrive at the beginning of the XXI century articulated to a large and diffuse process of globalization, which economic base rests on a financial capitalism, strongly backed by the consumption imagery³.

A similar phenomenon could be noticed in Brazil from the XIX century, a time when the rapid pace of urbanization in the country led to an indiscriminate urbanization of the major cities, creating in its own way, many urbanize industrial centers confirming the equation that industrial growth, mainly in the West, was directly proportional to urban growth⁴.

Obviously, similar transformations have focused immediately on people's lives by changing some habits and creating others, establishing new patterns of sociability, disrupting the ancient ways of life and articulating new ways of companionship either in private or in public range. These changes reveal the urban phenomenon tenacity, but also make it clear the urgency of establishing new reading and evaluation instrumental of social and cultural urban relations, as linking the diverse reality that is imposed to other protocols of urban space legibility.

Essentially plural by nature, *the urban experience* therefore requires the establishment of new existential and psychological parameters being, according to Maria Stella Bresciani, "in the privileged diversity observatory: at first, a strategic point to understand transformation sense and soon after a lab to define control and intervention strategies"⁵.

Thus, as a relatively new phenomenon Western civilization history, the urban city establishment creates new myths, ideologies and mentalities, and as a counterface of this process, different reading possibilities, which are translated as an unexpected multiplicity of perspectives: specialized and circumstantial looks, technical and literary, furtive and cautious glances, since the anthropologist and the historian's gaze to the dealer, the urbanist or the mere passerby. These looks are the ones that form a kind of an interpretive kaleidoscope of urban space, in which each action speculatively - forged by careful target of its inhabitants - contributes to the development of the idea they have of the city. Peering into its spaces, its architecture, its particular sociability, those looks are built by urban reading experience, while they

1 LEFEBVRE, Henri. *La Revolución Urbana*. Madrid, Alianza Editorial, 1983.

2 Cf SINGER, Paul. *Economia Política da Urbanização*. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1976; and DAVIS, Kingsley. "The origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World". *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 60, No. 05: 429-437, March, 1955.

3 Cf. SANTOS, Milton. *Por uma Outra Globalização. Do Pensamento Único à Consciência Universal*. Rio de Janeiro, Record, 2000; and CANCLINI, Néstor García. *A Globalização Imaginada*. São Paulo, Iluminuras, 2003.

4 Cf. LOPES, Juarez Rubens Brandão Lopes. *Desenvolvimento e Mudança Social. Formação da Sociedade Urbano-industrial no Brasil*. São Paulo, Companhia Editora Nacional, 1971; and SANTOS, Milton. *A Urbanização Brasileira*. São Paulo, Hucitec, 1994.

5 BRESCIANI, Maria Stella Martins. "Metrópoles: as Faces do Monstro Urbano (As Cidades no Século XIX). *Revista Brasileira de História*, São Paulo, Vol. 05, No. 08/09: 33-68, Sept. 1984/ April 1985, p. 39. For the urban experience presupposed plurality, see also FISCHER, Claude S. *The Urban Experience*. New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

are consolidated as key elements in the construction of the examined space. It creates, therefore, a city which, once not being real but born of a real experience, appears as an image, a fleeting image, unstable, constantly changing, since it is essentially multifaceted. Optical illusion shaped on the urban experience of each citizen, the city's image is so put upon to the city itself as an objective reality, disrupting any alleged unit, breaking a possible spatial homogeneity and creating instead of a territory reduced to the limits of political space, a multitude of cities: so varied, multiples and diverse as those looks which construct them.

In this context, what came to prevail is a kind of natural geography of senses, in which each urban space part, real or imagined, is not worthy by itself but for what it can come into being as part of a wide range of reading possibilities. Read the city thus becomes at once a political and cultural act, as it requires human intervention able to change, if not the substance, at least the image of the object that has been analyzed.

Indeed, as stated more than once Lucrezia Ferrara, urban perception is a cultural practice that is based both in urban use, as in habit as well, creating from the union between these two concepts, a perceptual image of the city which needs to be decoded. Thus, cultural characteristics sediment the city as a cluster of signs that creates a unique language of the city, whose knowledge is indispensable to its perception⁶.

Ambivalent and anonymous the urban space is the result of some ongoing changes, many of them from the industrialization process, becoming therefore an object of readings mediated by different languages, including the literary that seeks at the same time to decipher and recreate it.

Direct and indirect result of a series of renovations which have occurred, particularly with the advent

of so-called Industrial Revolution, transformations undergone by the Western world during the late XIX to XX century ended conditioning a wide range of unavoidable consequences that relentlessly focused on individuals' life. Accordingly, it is a period which is exactly the hallmark of eagerness for a kind of a fundamental versatility that ends - symbolically - translating itself into a new and unexpected sociability.

Under the renewal of social standards that the Western world has known, the city's image plays a fundamental role: it is the one who will determine the settlement of a different reality conception, especially in the urban reality. Thus, in the turn of the century, to be modern - in other words, to be consistent with the present - necessarily implies in being located in a city context, be part of a city environment or, at worst, in the urbanization process. Therefore, it seems extremely important to try to understand what vision after all was possible to have of a city during an age characterized particularly by ecological and social instability, task for which we will elect one of the many perspectives that comprise together the ways of reading the city reality - a literary perspective.

Indeed, amidst the various changes - ranging from economic and political to cultural, the ones specifically urban by nature are emphasized, not only being responsible for nations reorganization, but also by establishing a new *modus vivendi*, forcibly adapted to the emerging metropolis, as it can be seen in some European cities, marked in the period by an unbridled expansion of its urban fabric⁷.

In Brazil, as suggested, there was a similar process although characterized by some delays common to underdeveloped and / or peripherals countries: at the turn of the century, due to an inevitable consequence of a later industrialization it was known a huge escalation of urban changes resulting in the formation of incipient metropolis (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) and consolidation of new sociability patterns. The big cities - especially Rio de Janeiro,

6 Cf. FERRARA, Lucrécia d'Aléssio. *See Cidade: Cidade, Imagem, Leitura*. São Paulo, Nobel, 1988; FERRARA, Lucrécia d'Aléssio. "As Máscaras da Cidade". *Revista Usp*, São Paulo, No. 05: 03-10, March/April/May, 1990; e FERRARA, Lucrécia d'Aléssio. "Um Olhar entre Vizinhos. Espaço Social: Linguagem e Interpretação". *Espaço e Debates*. São Paulo, No. 29: 32-41, 1990. Also within the urbanism development semiotics - as proposed by Ferrara Lucrezia - it can be checked the possibilities for different readings about the urban city in HAUSER, Susanne. "The Perception of the City". *Espace et Sociétés. Revue Critique Internationale de l'Amenagement de l'Architecture et de l'Urbanization*. France, No. 47, 1985.

7 Cf. WEBER, Eugen. *França Fin-de-Siècle*. São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1988; and SCHORSKE, Carl E. *Viena Fin-de-Siècle. Política e Cultura*. São Paulo, Unicamp/Companhia das Letras, 1988.

newly proclaimed the Republic's capital - become the political and administrative center of the country, imposing itself economically and politically to the rest of the country converging to itself all sorts of artistic and cultural expression. This all in large part thanks to population displacement that could be noted from the last decades of the nineteenth century: with the decline of rural patriarchy and the urban state bureaucracy affirmation, there is a real demographic explosion, which would have direct consequences in the city's image made by our intellectuals and artists⁸.

Arise in this sense, two perspectives under which the city is contemplated: a positive, which attempts to highlight the urban sociability new forms benefits, along with its worldly trends, its cosmopolitanism and social donations; next the negative, which seeks to highlight the real harm and morals of a city which compulsory and disorderly progresses. There is thus an entire section of our cultural manifestation toward an encomiastic discourse in relation to urban development, which mainly emphasizes aspects of our material progress and a pretense social evolution, both presented under the guise of a diffuse civilization apology. Moreover, there is an equal concern in bringing out a fierce critique of these development effects, a criticism that sometimes sticks to its material aspects (traffic, noise, population density), sometimes to its moral aspects (prostitution, crime, addictions), and to the effect of a symbolic city characterization, what matter most are the deep moral critics - much more effective in shaping a particular urban semiology.

Moreover, with the advent of the Republic and the various factors that led to the gradual Brazilian society modernization, the city reality begins to overlap the peasant one, as suggested. The patriarchal social structure, rural-based, gives way to an urban bureaucracy, theoretically civilized and European model: it becomes, over the years, impossible the peaceful coexistence between a rural oligarchy - delayed and

allegedly linked to traditions that no longer sensitize urbanized citizens - and the social groups that make up the urban society, a bourgeois who longs for some structural reforms. In other words, at the turn of the century, we are witnessing Brazil's public life triumph (from urban roots) over the private life (marked by domestic environment of the patriarchal family), the bachelor over the patriarch⁹. This passage did not occur without grave consequences for society, since it implied a complete change in family structure in Brazil, and engender a political crisis that would have as its outcome - more than three decades later - the Vargas' Revolution. More than that, it is a structural change in Brazilian economy, in which a deliberate process of industrialization, little by little, started to replace the agrarian way of economic exploitation¹⁰.

Therefore, the city had to be the Brazilian citizen's centerpiece: it was the space of modernity and civility, which was modeled based on the great European metropolis; it was the political and administrative center of the country that is, the *locus* of nation's bureaucratic control. In short it was the goal of all sorts of individuals concerned with professional success: the descendants of a declining gentry, intellectuals from the provinces, newly formed bachelors looking for an opportunity and last but not least, writers from all over the country, which were bound for the incipient metropolis, in order to gain social prestige, artistic recognition and diverse public benefits. The countryside, meanwhile, was relegated as a mere reference of a not too distant colonial and monarchical past, and therefore, in the eyes of the new urban bourgeoisie, a space marked by the archaic and barbarity. In short, while the city became the definitive political, economic and cultural center, the

8 Cf. SANTOS, Milton. "Macanismos de Crescimento Urbano nos Países em Vias de Desenvolvimento". *América Latina*. Rio de Janeiro, Centro Latino-Americano de Pesquisas em Ciências Sociais, Ano 12, No. 04: 134-148, Oct./Dec. 1969; COSTA, Emilia Viotti da. *Da Monarquia à República: Momentos Decisivos*. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1985; e FREYRE, Gilberto. *Ordem e Progresso*. Lisbon, Livros do Brasil, Vol. I, s.d.

9 For the relation between public and urban life and private and rural life, consult SALDANHA, Nelson. *O Jardim e a Praça. O Privado e o Público na Vida Social e Histórica*. São Paulo, Edusp, 1993. For the relation between the Bachelor and the Patriarch, consult MARTINS, Luís. *O Patriarca e o Bacharel*. São Paulo, Martins, 1953.

10 For an overview of Brazil's industrialization theories, consult SAES, Flávio A. M. de. "A Controvérsia sobre a Industrialização da Primeira República". *Estudos Avançados*. São Paulo, Vol. 03, No. 07: 20-39, Sept./Dec. 1989; for the reaction of the rural oligarchy against the industrial capitalism consolidation, consult MENDONÇA, Sonia Regina de. "O Ruralismo Brasileiro na Primeira República: Um Debate de Idéias". *A Margem. Revista de Ciências Humanas*, Rio de Janeiro, Year I, No. 01: 25-40, Jan. 1993.

countryside was seen only as a place where primary production activities take place. Not without reason, ideologues of the new urban reality would see in the obsolete agrarian universe their main antagonist, turning a debate, political-economic at first, into a struggle that confronted civilization and barbarism, therefore promoting a genuine ideological cleavage.

In Brazil, the so-called First Republic has been studied as a historical lavish phase in modernizing transformations.

Obviously, these transformations are neither homogeneous nor they achieve all their characters in the same way. It starts with the own space limits that an urban reality imposes; it cannot be said that changes occurred during the First Republic have caused the same effects in the Republic's capital and in its most distant provinces as well. Similarly, in regard to chronological limits, it would be incoherent to say that such transformations have been uniform throughout the period that extends from the Proclamation of the Republic (1889) to Vargas' Revolution (1930), when the agrarian oligarchy is finally removed from power, completing the first phase of our republican period. On the contrary, it is possible to verify with respect to time transformations, noticeable differences among pre-transformation (1889-1902) - considered a sort of preparation for more radical changes, initiated by the government of Rodrigues Alves, real transformations (1902-1922) - when the country goes through a series of changes not only structural but also ideological, and post-transformation phase (1922-1930) - in which such changes seemed to be already mature and relatively embedded by the society.

First of all, however, it is necessary to undo some conceptual errors like the very definitions of modernity and modernization, essential to the study that we search to achieve, in essence, committed by an unfailing polysemy.

Trying to make a distinction between these two concepts, Raymundo Faoro teaches us that although both processes are fraught with a certain ideological direction, there are fundamental differences between them since the first one occurs through the effective citizenship practice while the completion of the

second is done by an action of authoritarian nature in its discrimination class:

“it is said for now that modernity committed in its process the society as a whole, enlarging the expansion range of all classes, revitalizing and removing their social role, while modernization, volunteer by nature, if not proactive comes to the society by a conductor group, but emphasizes the latter focuses on the dominant sectors”¹¹.

It is not hard to realize that the modernizing political started 1889, and even earlier in Brazil, was more a modernization than a modernity process, especially because of its exclusionary nature as it has been already pointed out by more than one scholar of the period¹². This means that such a process proved to be rather a class protectionism attitude, since it sought to focus on certain sectors of society, effecting caste modernization. Apart from this process people would suffer later all the evil consequences of rodriguesalvesiano “progressivism”, which culminate among other things in the revolt against the political hygienist Osvaldo Cruz¹³.

In this paper the modernizing changes are the main object of study, especially the urban nature occurred in the spatial boundaries of two large Brazilian cities (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo) and within the time frame of a phase called here *the real transformations* (1902 -1922), seeking to emphasize the *literary perception* of the city context, namely that reading promoted by writers and intellectuals of that time - whatever ideological assumption they were

11 FAORO, Raymundo. “A Questão Nacional: a Modernização”. *Estudos Avançados*. Universidade de São Paulo, Vol. 06, No. 14: 07-22, Jan./Apr. 1992, p. 08.

12 Cf. CARVALHO, José Murilo de. *Os Bestializados: O Rio de Janeiro e a República que não foi*. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras, 1989; PINHEIRO, Paulo Sérgio. “O Proletariado Industrial na Primeira República”. In: FAUSTO, Boris (dir.). *História Geral da Civilização Brasileira. O Brasil Republicano. Sociedade e Instituições (1889-1930)*. Rio de Janeiro, Difel, 1977, Tomo III, Vol. 02, p. 137-178; FERREIRA, Antonio Celso. “No fio da navalha: classes populares na República sob os olhos dos historiadores”. *História*, Universidade Estadual Paulista, São Paulo, Vol. 08: 01-08, 1989; SILVA, Eduardo. *As Queixas do Povo*. São Paulo, Paz e Terra, 1988; e DALLARI, Dalmo de Abreu. “A República dos Oligarcas” *Revista Usp*, São Paulo, No. 03: 13-18, Set./Out./Nov. 1989.

13 Consultar MENDONÇA, Marina Gusmão de. *Desenvolvimento e Miséria. As Raízes da Revolta de 1904*. São Paulo, FFLCH, 1988 (Master's paper); and SEVCENKO, Nicolau. *A Revolta da Vacina*. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1988.

based on - in order to promote an urban imaginary construction.

For that, our research is basically divided into three distinct but interconnected approaches. Firstly, we analyze the urban transformations in fact, in other words those changes that have promoted a physical alteration to the city, resulting in a new urban physiognomy that although it has in its genesis a primarily physical and material interference of the urban space had immediate consequences in both a new sociability and a different social mentality as well; in this stage of our research, which aims to understand - in more objective terms - is what was the role played by literature (or, more than that, by the time literary system, as we shall see later, when considering the methodological aspects here inside) in the process of urban transformation that affects the early decades of the twentieth century, a magnitude never seen before in Brazil. Secondly, we discuss the period's technological modernization highlighting the possible links that urban literature has established with it, either from the perspective of an explicit conflict or from the perspective of consent and subservience to technical procedures that were being developing, or in the incorporation of new technologies in an esthetic level. Thirdly, it will be addressed to sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementary relationship between the city's universe and the peasant's universe, in a perspective that deepens - aesthetic and pragmatic - from the late twentieth century, establishing a new interaction network that in the literary imagination limit can be interpreted either as an irreconcilable shock between civilization and barbarism or as a mild nostalgia of a time (and consequently a space) not entirely taken by the so-called modernizing transformations yet.

In this sense, the city is built from a discursive speech that has its roots at the same time in the intricacies of the historical evolution and in the interstices of the aesthetic imagination as well: it is made by texts, as texts and in spite of the literary texts. Therefore, it is stated from a complex dialogue among experience, perceptions and experiences that get closer, move apart and are complementary in a urban and literary continuously movement of doing so, undo and redo. Obviously, this is not about to establish a unilateral

and linear relationship between modernizing transformations and the literature produced in the period. Hence, what will be accomplished here is not a merely verification work on how literature reflects passively the changes of urban and social developments occurred in that time but rather it seeks to be a dialectical relation between urban transformation and literature culture, once the latest is articulated in a unique and complex way in relation to that: serving as a mirror but a multifaceted one, where the city becomes *constructus* and constructor of the literary creation, where a imaginary urban world and - not infrequently, ghostly - is set beside a real universe, an unexpected symbiosis; where the city society eagerly anticipates the lines drawn by our pre-modernist writers, who make the early twentieth century emerging metropolis a mental reproduction of a concrete reality.

Newsprint streets, buildings born from used cartridges, prosaic demolitions and poetic constructions, a partnership between fiction and reality - everything is intertwined, entangled, a metamorphose to finally give rise to a true city of paper, revealing the needed crossing changes between modernizing transformations and a specific literary culture.

Briefly, our intention is first to consider all modernizing changes, especially the urban ones - in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo - in order to examine the feasibility of speaking in a city undergoing through concrete modernization, such as official historiography of the advocated period. Furthermore, we will risk an interpretation of how such transformations - directly or indirectly - interfered on the urban sociability in order to deduce the changes that occurred in the social life of the urban population during our *Belle Epoque*.

Accordingly, it is necessary to expose facts of a historical nature, linked to the process of urbanization of the cities under study, whose main consequence will be the paradigm for social and cultural transformations of the time, revealing the emergence of conducive conditions to the development of a new style of life which begins to take shape in the late XIX century for finally to consolidate itself in the first decades of the XX. Thus, several factors related to country's effective modernization act to trigger

a historical process that consolidates the idea of a pre-modern city structurally different from both rural and urban reality of the XIX century. Therefore, are presented the necessary foundation for a closer study of a model city that is imposed to the population in which social relations are being guided by another role model in which a sociological context can be understood as efforts towards a civilized society¹⁴.

It can be said indeed that if a new social and political order formation, in the period, not necessarily presupposed the creation of a new linguistic code to legitimize the more pragmatic aspects of this order (the progress, the Republic, the urban cities), it is believed that it required at least the activation of a new discourse in order not only to give greater legitimacy to the social and political practices that were needed then, but especially with the order to better reflect a new mindset that was being forged. And if a new mentality corresponded to another speech in the specific case of the late XIX to XX century the literary language starts serving as a locus where perplexities related to the new sociopolitical order seek to be equated. In no sense, however, one can say that it is a peacefully embedded speech. Rather, it reflects the very contradictions lived and expressed by the society in an imaginary urban complex, hesitated and often ambiguous. Result perhaps, a rather unique way that was translated by individuals into novel reality: on the one hand for example, it was employed a certain vocabulary to express the recognition of a dynamic progressive inaugurated by the second Industrial Revolution; this same vocabulary, moreover, would be used to express an ironic criticism of this phenomenon, expressing itself in a unique urban semantics, in the purest tradition of the social language history¹⁵.

From this perspective, it seems urgent, therefore,

the need for establishing the necessary relationships between the literary period and the modernization of Brazilian society, since both - it can be said - walks *pari passu* in the shaping of our Belle Epoque for a period marked by the appearance of some pre-modern socio-cultural indices.

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15 For a general consideration of the social history of language and its conceptual parameters, see BURKE, Peter. *A Arte da Conversação*. São Paulo, Unesp, 1995; e BURKE, Peter. *Variedade de História Cultural*. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 2000.