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Cultural Heritage Misfits
Perspectives from Developing Worlds

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Abstract   Considering that the dialectic of affirmation and contestation of hegemonies constantly modifies, reconstructs and shifts identities, and that human creativity incessantly reinvents social life, it can be expected that official protection does not guarantee a safe place in the cultural pantheon for CH. Heritage can be integrated to the local cultures or refused by them. It can be forgotten, re-encountered, remade, reinvented or trigger unexpected symbolic meanings and practices. This is a challenge that is perennially placed before the institutions responsible for the protection and conservation of these officially protected treasures.

Summary   1 Preliminaries. – 2 Misfit Senses. – 3 Whose Heritage? – 4 Misfit and Exclusion. – 5 Finalizing.

Keywords   Cultural heritage. Social memory. Politics of place. Appropriation. Dialogue. Exclusion.

1   Preliminaries

Academic researchers have given increasing attention in recent years to the relationship between preservation and daily life at heritage sites. Important developments in this line of research have taken place in France and Italy, for example.[1] The issue has also received attention in South America, as it did at the symposium *Habitar el Patrimonio* (Inhabit the Heritage), held in Quito for the 35th anniversary of that city's inclusion on the WHL. In this essay, I return to the general lines of my presentation at that meeting, seeking to deepen understanding of this problematic, and to stimulate the dialog between residents of protected sites, holders of ICH), public administrators and preservation professionals. My reflections are based on the following presumptions.[2]

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[1]   I refer in particular to the seminars promoted by the Mission Etnologie, Ministry of Culture and Communication, France, among which stand out the colloquium held in 2000, entitled *Vivre le temps. Anthropologie, historie et patrimoine*. Works presented at this symposium were published in Fabre, Iuso 2009.

[2]   About these interpretive parameters see, among others, Arantes 2007, 2009b, 2010; Durham 2013; Rodrigues 1996; Velho 2007.

The first – which nowadays seems quite evident, but was not in the early '80s when the so called 'anthropological turn' in heritage studies was beginning – is that CH, tangible or intangible, is not a residual reality or legacy that endures persistently at the margins of social transformations. Rather, it is *the result of specific social practices* that take shape in the realm of the public sphere and involve confrontations and negotiations between government institutions, civil society organizations, academics, economic agents and those who are in possession of protected cultural elements.

The second parameter, which stems from the first, is that once the heroic phase of preservation was overcome, this public policy became increasingly bureaucratized. I refer here not only to the period in which institutions, instruments and basic procedures were formed, but also, and mainly to the construction of their legitimacy in the eyes of society. In Brazil, for example, this process extended from the mid-1930s to the late '60s. During this period, both institutional organization and the implementation of policies and programs gradually became dependent on complex norms and procedures, requiring a high degree of specialization of their agents, as well as a consistent and constantly revised legal, theoretical and methodological framework.

The third parameter refers to the enrooting of these policies in the ways of life of the affected populations. In this perspective, the relations between heritage, memory and place stand out. This triad – memory, heritage and place – allows anchoring my present reflections on the idea of heritage site, which I understand to be the physical space, as well as the corresponding social milieu, where heritage practices take place, in a quite literal sense.

Places are spaces appropriated by human agency. They are realities of a simultaneously tangible and intangible nature, both material and symbolic, which can be interpreted as aggregates of space-time references. They are the where and when of economic transactions, religious worship, civic celebrations and political demonstrations.

As Bosi argued (1979), social memory, like personal memory, has 'anchorage points', *i.e.*, shared references to which various generations lash the memories of the places where they live, and that are inseparable from that which occurs in them. These anchorage points are key elements in the formation and nourishment of senses of localization and belonging; and are essential as concrete references of awareness of self, as well as of difference in relation to others.

The importance of recognizing the anchorage of heritage in social memory and place, is strengthened when its specialization is referred to the triple dimensions encompassed by the concept of 'urban environmental heritage', which articulates its condition as artefact, field of social forces and aggregate of symbolic representations (Bezerra de Meneses 2006, 36-39). This concept

favors a holistic understanding of heritage sites, associating the preserved cultural elements to the social fabric and to the territory where they are inserted. It also helps to incorporate its psychosocial dimension since it involves the processes by which social agents construct the senses of place that nurture and guide the experience of living at a heritage site. This perspective helps to question preservation, when it is conducted – as occurs in developing regions, if not countries – in disarticulated technical actions, some directed towards the artefactual dimension of a site and others to the intangible realities embedded in their inhabitants' social practices and present lives.

The fourth aspect to be considered in these preliminary remarks is that the actions triggered by preservation produce reflexive effects. When searching for the continuity and strengthening of the tangible and intangible manifestations of culture to which heritage value and memory are attributed, preservation and safeguarding[3] actively participate in cultural dynamics by aggregating heritage-related socio-political agendas and symbolic meanings to 'ordinary' artefacts and practices and, consequently, by affecting their use and exchange-values.

From an anthropological point of view, reflexivity is one of the most sensitive points of heritage preservation. The ideal of *shared management*, for example, – which presupposes dialog and a good understanding between public agents and civil society – is frequently shaken by disagreements related to the identification and delimitation of what should be preserved, how and why, as these decisions directly affect social life at heritage sites. Questions related to the appropriation of preserved cultural goods by society also come into play in this reflexive game. In the case of ICH – which is officially understood as living heritage – the transformative character of such appropriation is usually recognized in legal instruments used for safeguarding, since this heritage is recognized as part of cultural dynamics, and can be discontinued at the discretion of its practitioners, even after *heritagization*. In the case of tangible goods, however, the reverse situation occurs, as there are impediments to interventions and uses that affect their conservation and the continuity of officially attributed values (historic, aesthetic, scenic etc.). The transformative dimension of the use and transmission of heritage goods, which, in the first case, is understood as being inherent to the preserved reality is, in the second, interpreted as destructive, and therefore undesirable.

Finally, the fifth presumption is that the mentioned conflicts and tensions make explicit differences in values, worldviews and aspirations, found among the *various social and political agents involved in preservation*. The depth and complexity of these differences can trigger processes

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3 I adopt the distinction between 'safeguarding' and 'preserving', and the definition of the latter, given by Article 2(3) of UNESCO's 2003 Convention.

that, in certain contexts, are more radically intercultural than in others. By involving indigenous, aborigine or emigrant populations, for example, they can signify important confrontations between institutional legal systems and customary law.

2 Misfit Senses

To live at a heritage site, particularly in developing countries, as well as regions or localities of developed ones, involves being inserted in a web of values and regulations concerning the protection of natural or built spaces, without necessarily knowing the reasons that guide and justify this protection, agreeing with them or being benefitted by the investments made in the name of their safeguarding.

I am not suggesting that the average citizen is indifferent to the emblematic marks of the inhabited space, to the historic testimonies that are territorialized in it or to the festivals and celebrations that take place there. The drawing presented in figure 1 (São Paulo City Center by Jackson, 16 years old) as well as countless studies show that human groups attribute meanings to the spaces where they live and develop forms of practical or symbolic appropriation of their territory, through ordinary or ritual activities. As I have already suggested, lived space and the meanings that are enrooted in it are, in fact, inseparable realities; they are faces of the same coin, whose value is historically transformed. These values may be of a referential, testimonial, aesthetic, political, religious or cosmological nature. They are formed in social life and fed by it, and transform physical spaces and structures into places, that is, into inhabited, worked and experienced territories, into concrete supports of feelings of shared social belonging. Nevertheless, what can be denominated as CH *stricto sensu* is not the same as the symbolic constructions that are inherent to social life (Arantes 2009a, 11). Nor does the idea of preservation make sense if applied to the totality of the cultural references socially shared by any social group or cultural community. This would be a conservative fiction, necessarily antagonistic to the inevitable emergence of the future in the present.

Patrimony is selective; it can be described as a second-level cultural phenomenon, which results from the aggregation of coded meanings and regulations to the use, conservation and transmission of pre-existing cultural realities, tangible or not; strictly speaking it is a 'metacultural' fact. I am referring not only to rituals and ceremonies, to sacred and curing practices, or to musical and choreographic performances that may become registered as ICH. I am also thinking of works of art, spaces and buildings, vernacular or monumental,that can become protected because the historic or aesthetic values attributed to them. Both tangible and intangible culture can become

Figure 1. São Paulo city center. Drawing by Jackson de Oliveira, homeless teenager, 1992. Project: Building democracy. UNICAMP/Rockefeller Foundation

metacultural – and sometimes hyperreal – artefacts through heritagization (Arantes 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2004; Urban 2001). I insist on this distinction because it tends to become invisible in preservationist discourse and practice. Both tend to naturalize this symbolic construction, as if heritage value was an attribute inherent to the preserved objects, something that need only be pointed out to be automatically recognized and accepted. Even educational actions in the field of heritage at times do not sufficiently or seriously consider these differences. Nevertheless, it is crucial to make them explicit not only to understand preservation as a complex social process, but also to evaluate its consequences, both in relation to cultural dynamics, and in relation to heritage management. It is known, for example, that access to sacred knowledge and places is frequently regulated by moral interdictions and by the notion of secrecy, which conflicts with the preservationist ideal of making the heritage of some, virtually accessible to many. However, commodification often pervades the safeguarding system, and can sometimes make the contact with the 'other world' of mythical experience available for a low price and questionable beliefs.

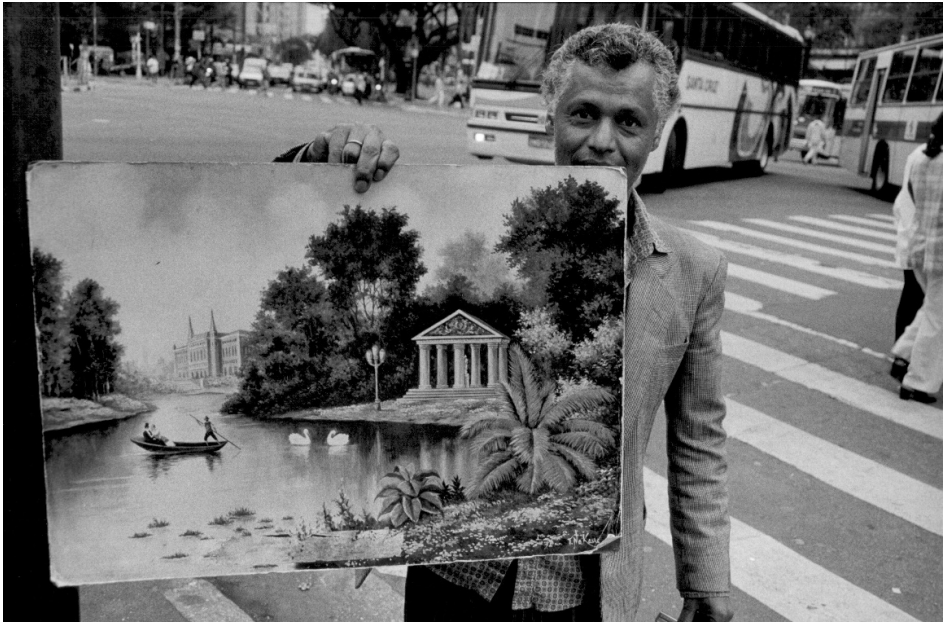It is noteworthy that meanings and senses attributed by custom to tan-

Figure 2. Idyllic representation of place. São Paulo. Photo by Paolo Gasparini, 1997. Project: Building Democracy. UNICAMP/Rockefeller Foundation

gible and intangible aspects of cultural artefacts and practices have no equivalent in the instruments and procedures used for safeguarding. This can be exemplified by the inadequacy of the concept of IP, as defined by Western law, when applied to TK and TCEs (Arantes 2013b). On the other hand, officially preserved objects tend to be reinterpreted and gain new uses and meanings according to the cultural logic and dynamics of the social milieu in which they occur (Arantes 2007), often challenging CH regulations. It is this ambivalent phenomenon of disjunction and convergence of values belonging to different worldviews about the same objects, that I call 'misfit'.

It is known that the production of heritage is fundamentally a question of attribution of value and of construction of meaning. But to understand the symbolic effectiveness of this practice, which necessarily goes beyond intercultural borders, it is necessary to have a nuanced understanding of its effects. This is so because, although preservation can legitimate and strengthen emblematic representations of identity and power, it does not do so automatically, nor without consequences.

This problem has not gone unnoticed by heritage administrators, but frequently has been poorly interpreted. In fact, preservation agencies have undertaken educational and promotional actions to make less discrepant

Figure 3. Fortune-teller in São Paulo city center. Photo by Paolo Gasparini, 1997. Project: Building Democracy. UNICAMP/Rockefeller Foundation

and less conflictive the interface between daily life at heritage sites and the innovations created by the heritage expertise, contradictorily in name of a continuity of tradition. By means of such programs, the arguments and values that justify the listing of artefacts and practices can become comprehensible to the public in general through educational actions. Moreover, the criteria of choice adopted for the formation of these lists can also come to be validated by public opinion. But some problems remain unresolved (Arantes 2013a). However, considering that the dialectics of affirmation and contestation of hegemonies constantly modifies, reconstructs and shifts identities, and that human creativity incessantly reinvents social life, it can be expected that official protection does not guarantee a safe place in the cultural pantheon for CH. Heritage can be integrated to the local cultures or refused by them. It can be forgotten, re-encountered, remade, reinvented or trigger unexpected symbolic meanings and practices. This is a challenge that is perennially placed before the institutions responsible for the protection and conservation of these officially protected treasures.

Figure 4. Wajãpi researchers at a workshop about cultural translation of the Western concept of 'intellectual property' in terms of their own language and culture. Wajãpi Indigenous Land (Aramirã Post). Photo by Antonio A. Arantes, 2008 (See Arantes 2013b)

3   Whose Heritage?

Preservation, as is known, is a selective action, which is based on criteria typically guided by hegemonic ideologies and validated by academic knowledge (Rubino 1992). For this reason, it is not surprising that there is space for polemics within the field. Take for example, what some Brazilian architectural historians qualify as a mistake of the country's National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute, which in a country of immigrants of various origins as is Brazil, interprets the word national as Brazilian and thus contributes to overlooking the eclectic architecture of Italian origin that strongly marked the urban landscape of the city of São Paulo, in the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

Until at least the '80s, social scientists – and particularly anthropologists – contributed relatively little to the development of the reflection about heritage, particularly concerning confronting practical questions raised by the preservationist activity. Until then, important contributions were produced for the understanding – and criticism – of the political conservativism found in these institutional practices, and their role in the
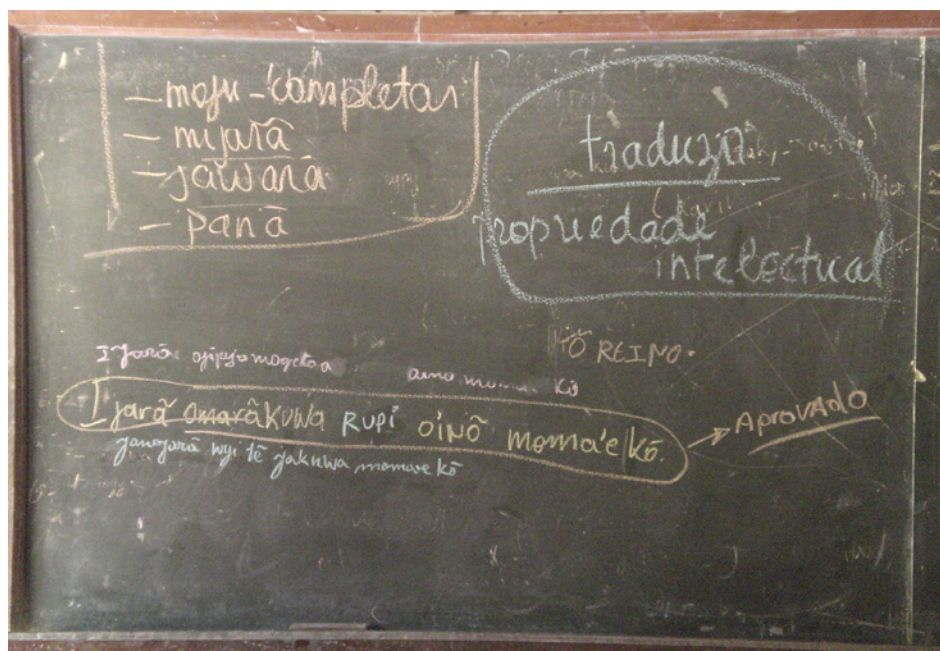
Figure 5. "*I jarã omarã kuwa rupi te oinõ momae'ko*", which translates as "the owner is the one who makes things with knowledge, in the route of experience". Approximate definition of 'intellectual property' in Tupi language by Wajãpi researchers. Wajãpi Indigenous Land (Aramirã Post). Photo by Antonio A. Arantes, 2008 (See Arantes 2013b)

construction of nations, nationalities and nationalisms. This critical outlook allowed understanding that preservation has served the construction of national symbols that are compromised to the interests of the dominant classes and with the rituals associated to them (Hobsbawn, Ranger 1983); and it has also problematized the simplistic, prejudiced and widely promoted correlation between heritage conservation and conservative politics.

CH institutions in Brazil and internationally have gradually incorporate – even if at times timidly and counter to the majority opinions – the perspectives of the subjects for whom – or with whom - preservation is implemented. The adoption of the idea of 'cultural significance' in the Venice Charter of 1964, and of 'social value' in the Australian Charter of Burra of 1999, was not part of a consistent trend. Nevertheless, they suggest that this sociological concern has been present among the preservation ideals and ideas for several decades. This trend is also corroborated by the thematic fields addressed by the ICOMOS commissions, particularly with the inclusion, in their activities, of the themes related to ICH, an object that by its nature involves the recognition of the heritage value attributed by so called *cultural communities*.

Figure 6. Sheik (on the left) commenting on the recommendations for the safeguarding of the ICH of the Makuwa Nahara. To the right, Shehe Hafiz Jamu serving as an interpreter at a public hearing on the Island of Moçambique. Photo: Ernesto Matzinhe, 2012

The conceptual changes that have favored a still timid incorporation of new social agents in the key issues of preservation feed, and have been fed, by the formation and strengthening of civil society organizations, particularly in Brazil. The mobilization around the elaboration and implementation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, for example, and in defense of intellectual rights associated to TK and TCEs before the WIPO, indicate quite consistent changes in this direction.

In relation to this topic, it is also relevant to recognize the expansion, in more recent times, of the range of types of objects that can be declared heritage, as with the inclusion of intangible cultural elements in the group of protected properties. One should also consider the awareness raising about cultural diversity among these changes, powered by the prompt and effective support of a significant number of countries of Central and South America, Africa, the Pacific and Asia to the 2003 Convention. The valorization of dances, songs and other cultural expressions of explicitly ethnic connotation as emblematic representations of nations also deserves highlighting. And, finally, encouragement to the adoption of participatory methods of identification and inventory of cultural goods, which inevitably places in contact institutional agents, owners or residents of heritage and professionals from various fields, can also not be ignored.

It is worth mentioning that these changes presuppose that the institutional agents of preservation are intellectually prepared for the intercultural dialogs resulting from the confrontation of the theoretical and practical questions about what I call here a misfit of meanings. It is known, however, that this rarely occurs.

The above-mentioned transformations in the trajectory of cultural preservation lead the institutional agents to the recognition of an undeniable fact: that CH elements are part of the ways of life of specific human groups – ethnic, artistic, artisan, religious or others – before they may become symbols of generalized national, regional or global interest. This recognition necessarily leads to the admission that, as supports for social identities undergoing mutation, heritage goods are psychosocial realities and their history – whether it involved conservation, transformation or abandonment – gains strength and complete meaning when interpreted in relation to the aspirations and future projects of those who own or possess them. That is, the heritage finally becomes an object with a subject, whether it is explicit or hidden; and the question: 'Whose heritage?' little by little no longer sounds like an obtuse question that is out of place in the technical and intellectual environments that feed public policies in this field.

4 Misfit and Exclusion

Exclusions of a political and economic nature underlie the legal and ideological issues focused on the present reflections. In fact, the investment in the rehabilitation of buildings and sites preserved in less developed localities, regions or countries, are not sufficiently accompanied by social policies for mediating cultural differences and material inequities among the resident populations. They tend to promote their dislocation and subsidize the substitution of the economic activities on which they depend for their livelihood. Moreover, it induces the formation of exclusionary social networks, which are associated to the development of lifestyles and consumption patterns practiced by usually wealthier new residents and developers (Zukin 1991; Rubino 2009; Leite 2004). Ironically, at times, efforts are made to add effects of authenticity to these new goods and services by including in the projects some local people, who can give an exotic color and flavor to a business that usually strives for a mass and globalized appeal.

The social problems generated by the re-qualification of tangible heritage goods have a counterpart in the intangible sphere. In this domain, there are also growing investments in the *reinvention of cultural diversity*, especially by the so-called creative industries, which 'requalify' and showcase, as it were, knowledge and aesthetic expressions specific to the traditional religions, arts and trades, according to global standards of taste

and indicators of authenticity.

It is necessary to emphasize that heritage, as an economic resource, is not necessarily linked to speculation. Some income generation programs, by reinforcing the public culture and access to citizenship, have successfully strengthened what the populations living at heritage sites in less affluent regions can do with the knowledge and material and immaterial resources available and accumulated in the places where they live.[4]

The use of tangible and intangible heritage resources can be positive for the sustainable development of cities and can also generate good business – and why not? The challenge that is raised is the well-known motto 'to preserve with sustainability'. Much has been written about the sustainable management of heritage sites. But what does the sustainability of ICH involve? In this case it involves developing policies that consider the symbolic, economic and socio-environmental aspects of what is being safeguarded in an integrated manner, and which strengthen the ties of the heritage with the social environment where it occurs and to which it belongs. *Sustainability* refers in this case to the conservation of resources (tangible and intangible) needed for the reproduction of this cultural element or practice, which can include the territory where it is practiced. Among these resources stand out both the knowledge enrooted in these practices and which preside over their execution, and the access of successive generations to this knowledge.

Poverty is one of the biggest threats to ICH; the integration of safeguarding policies to social, political and economic life is a necessary condition for their viability. There is no way to safeguard heritage without improving the living conditions of those who own or who live alongside it or have, historically, kept it throughout generations.

This challenge is also raised inversely, because there is no sustainable development if there is no integration with the cultural dimension, in particular with heritage. In this regard, it is helpful to recall the affirmation of the current UNESCO director general about the need to expand the conceptual framework of the Millennium Development Goals after 2015, so as to include culture in the agenda:

> development must be about human potential and capacity […]. culture is an enabler and a driver for sustainable development. It has also an inherent, unquantifiable, value as a source of strength and creativity essential for every individual and every society. (Bukova 2013, 3).

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4 Practical examples are provided by the projects developed in Brazil by ArteSol - Solidary Crafts; http://www.artesol.org.br.

5   Finalizing

Specialists in social policies have proven to be receptive to the thesis that the protection of CH can contribute to innovation and to human development. The step forward that becomes necessary includes facing theoretical and political challenges such as those presented in this essay; and seeing that the current national and international legal instruments are put in practice. This may be more important than creating new ones. It involves making the decision to act, and proceeding with caution because it is the manner that heritage administration is conducted that makes it viable, or not, to live in heritage sites and undertake sustainable projects at them. In public policies concerning culture the question of how is usually much more important than that of what is done.

In this second decade of the twenty-first century, when we ask ourselves about what is feeding the conflicts and debates raised by the problematics of heritage, we approximate an irreducible core of feelings, sensibilities and passions; the substrate that feeds the mutable and mutant senses of localization, belonging and identity inherent to the human condition and that have been dramatically revealed by the increasingly frequent forced population shifts.

The development of safeguarding policies depends to a large degree on the improvement of the relations between academic research, management practices and aspirations of the so-called 'cultural' or 'patrimonial communities' (HC). Professional expertise can offer instruments and parameters that allow resolving problems, proposing solutions and conducting interventions in the protected properties, but their implementation only becomes efficient if anchored in the experience of those who effectively inhabit the heritage site.

Therefore, I understand that the transformation of artefacts, spaces and even practices into monuments that count, that make a difference and that are dear to the population, depends on the validation by society at large, as well as on perspectives from the outside which are technically informed and that identify universal values in them. These must be perspectives that strive to make what Pietro Clemente (2010) calls 'someone's places' into places for everyone, without transforming them into 'non-places'.

These reflections seek to suggest routes for understanding – and if possible – to face this reality. But the question that remains is: are we, authors of intellectual work that in the past served the authoritarian or romantic idealization of nations, presently providing justifications for the transformation of unlivable tenements into business opportunities, at the expense of former residents and for the profit, pleasure and renewed emotions of satiated global upper and middle classes?

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