



'The city belongs to us. Occupy it' Banner at José Estelita Pier (November 16, 2014) By Ana Lira

#OCCUPY ESTELITA: POSTCARDS FROM RECIFE, BRAZIL

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THE RISE OF THE URBAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST GROUP IN RECIFE

Arguing that contemporary cities are governed by neoliberal market logics, rather than by people, David Harvey states that the freedom to make and remake our cities and thus ourselves is one of the most precious human rights:

The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.¹

The Brazilian city of Recife has a significant shortage of urban social spaces, and is increasingly transforming into bunkers of high-class condos. In addition, the local government and individual politicians themselves have been supporting illegal practices, such as selling a public historical site to a development consortium.

#OCUPE ESTELITA: A SOCIAL MOVEMENT AGAINST THE “NOVO” RECIFE PROJECT

As Batista and Félix² have reported, in March 2012 a few people who were interested in discussing Recife's urban problems created the Urban Rights Group on Facebook.³ By July 2013, their Facebook page had reached 11,700 participants. The first protest advertised here took place in April 2012 and was called #Ocupe Estelita. Activists called for the preservation of warehouses and the federal railroad, which were located in the Pier José Estelita area, in downtown Recife. These warehouses would be demolished to allow the construction of a private condo



‘Street Art: Cidade para Quem? City for Whom?’ by Keila Vieira



Video still from “Novo Apocalypse Recife”

Source: Ocupe Estelita YouTube Channel www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE0wJi6xNBk Published on 14 May 2015. Produced and crowd funded by the Occupy Estelita and Blocking Your View Parade activists. “Dedicated to the city councilors who unscrupulously voted in favour of the New Recife project.”

project, named “Novo Recife.” However, this new project would generate drastically negative consequences for local citizens in the historical, sociocultural, and environmental spheres.

The José Estelita Pier is an area consisting of 10 hectares, with a 1,500-metre length along the waterfront. This is the primary heritage area of Recife’s urban formation, constituting an important archaeological site and cultural landscape. Recife was founded in the sixteenth century on a geographic site surrounded by wetlands, islands, and river estuaries protected by natural reefs. In fact, the word Recife comes from the Portuguese *arrecifes*, meaning “reefs.” These reefs acted as a natural barrier for the port of Recife, where ships departed for Europe with locally produced sugar.

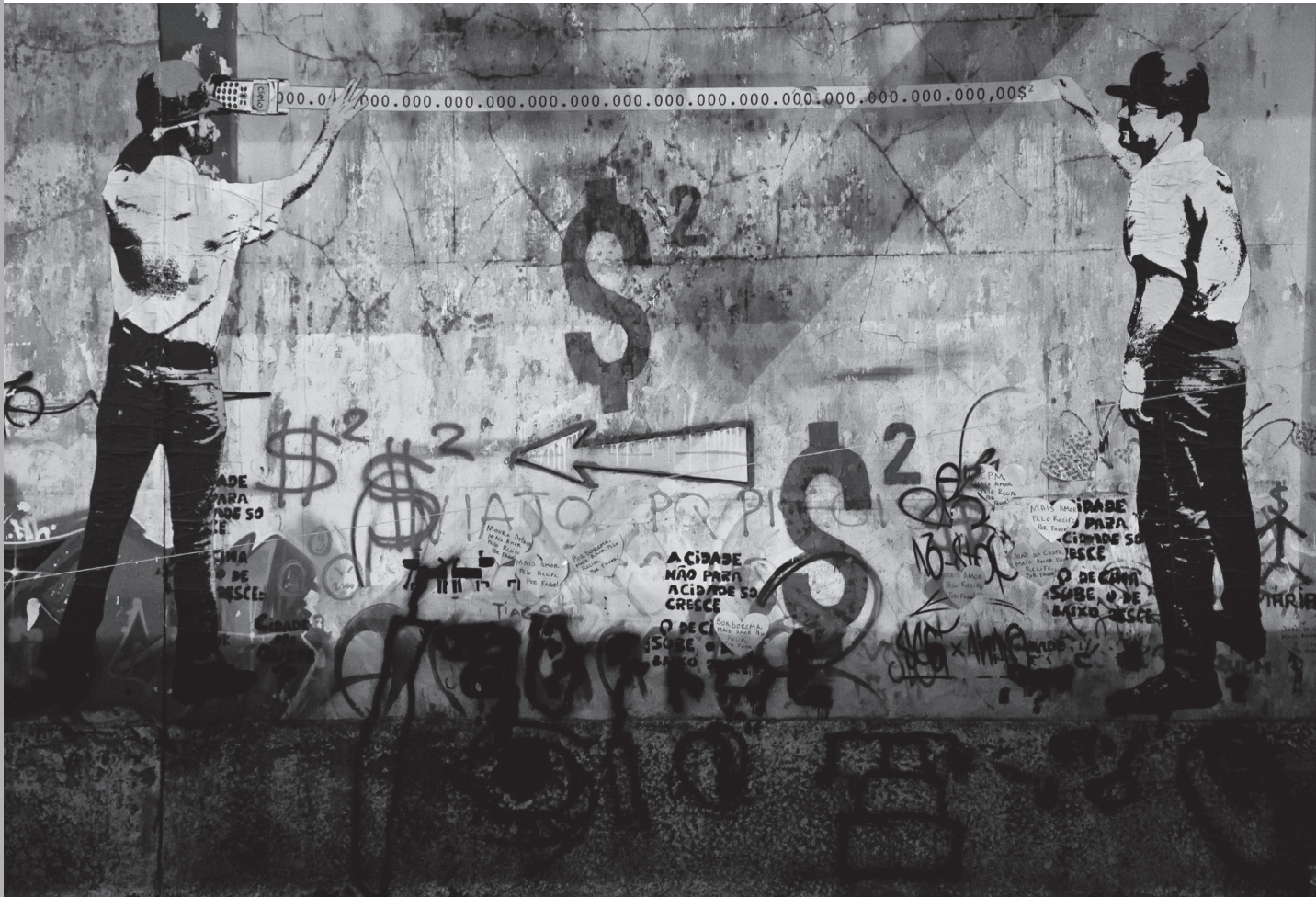
Later, by the mid-nineteenth century, a railway line was built to connect Recife to Cape of Saint Augustin, allowing the sugar to be transported to the port of Recife. In the early-twentieth century, both population growth and increased industrial activities led to an expansion of the port. At that time, the José Estelita Pier area included other port-related activities, such as warehouses, railways, and import/export infrastructure.

Since the 1970s, port activities have declined due to the construction of a new port in Suape, in Cape of Saint Augustin, which is much more modern and technologically advanced, but removed from Recife’s downtown area. As a result, the Estelita surroundings went through a steady decline and devaluation. At the same time, the railway infrastructure started to be used for public transport.

As Barreto et al. report,⁴ the Novo Recife Project was developed by a consortium of construction companies (Moura Dubeux, Queiroz Galvão, Ara Empreendimentos, and G.L. Empreendimentos). This project includes the construction of twelve towers with up to forty-four floors, divided into five blocks, with garages for 5,000 vehicles. It was estimated to be worth 800 million reais (300-million Canadian dollars), and the starting price for the one- to four-bedroom apartments ranges from 400 thousand to one million reais (\$140,000 to \$350,000).

With support from public and civil organizations, members of #Ocupe Estelita and Urban Rights have been criticizing this segregated urban expansion model, as well as denouncing illegalities involved in the New Recife Project related to the sale of public land and the city’s approval of the project. On 15 April 2012, the Urban Rights group gathered hundreds of people together at the Estelita Pier and not only protested against this private condo construction, but they also raised questions about the creation of new and better uses for the site, such as the development of decent public spaces, cultural and leisure areas that would improve the quality of life for all Recife citizens, since it was a historical site and a large part of the city’s cultural heritage.⁵

Ocupe Estelita/Urban Rights is a non-partisan social movement that has a horizontal leadership structure and supports democratic debate about urban space through the political mobilization of Recife’s citizens. Its members are arguing for a mixed-use project with business,



Activist street art removed by the municipality.
By Ana Lira

Recife libertarian revolutions won heterogeneous body that passed through by all ages. Generations come together in public space to discuss the community of city spaces... We made our body a political territory. Our body has collective which was public: the street; even the street who was kidnapped by private capital, as in the case of RioMar. Take to the streets is a way to decentralize the power given to the institutions that dictate the urban design at the whim of the individual and individualizing like the real estate market... The indifference of the government in relation to the demonstrations, the attempt by the councilors of preventing the entry of people and the withholding of information by the media show that occupy the streets should be the first step. 1) democratize public bodies, remove the concentration power of councilors and consequently the contractors who finance them, forming political advice to the presence of all social sectors and veto power and deliberation; 2) to take the power of councilors to bar the

entry of the population in what should be your home, that is, the city council; 3) to end the farce of public hearings; sterile because in them we just listened to the atrocities of the city hall and we have no power to reject them; 4) to democratize the media and serve other perceptions of the world and the city. Occupy is a step, but we need transform the mind in constant vigil so that other steps be taken in order to show that the legitimacy of democracy is built on the street.

Érico Andrade, "Democracia na rua," Derietos Urbanos Recife, <https://direitosurbanos.wordpress.com/2015/05/07/democracia-na-rua-ocupe-estelita>.

leisure, and residential areas, demanding that 30% of all housing on the pier be intended for low-income residents. In addition, the group wants the buildings to be integrated with the landscape and the dynamics of the region, respecting heritage sites and integrating the surrounding communities.⁶

Unfortunately, the concentration of land, income, and power—as well as the practices of corruption and favouritism—has been part of Brazilian society ever since it was a colony. This tradition includes the appropriation of public interest and property by politicians and capitalist corporations.⁷ As a result, construction companies continue to be the top donors of political campaigns in Brazil.

After the first Ocupe Estelita took place in April 2012, other occupations and an encampment took place on the contested land. During these protests, activists organized different crowd-funded leisure and cultural activities: they played music, invited speakers, painted t-shirts, promoted bike rides, etc. Many Brazilian and foreign artists and intellectuals have also been supporting the cause.

In the video “O que é desenvolvimento?” / “What is development?”⁸ published on the Urban Rights Group blog on 28 April 2013, a voiceover asks: “When will we awake? When will we open our eyes and realize that they have taken the city which we live in away from us? Are we losing our freedom of deciding how we want to live? Is there any choice left? We can’t deny it anymore! We need to rethink what development actually means! And we need to know what the alternative solutions are! We have found other people who think like us, so we have decided to react! We want to build the city we want to live in! When will we awake? Is there a better moment then now? The city belongs to us. Occupy it!”

In May 2015, Ocupe Estelita activists staged a protest in front of mayor Geraldo Júlio’s house. They criticized Júlio because his political campaign was largely funded by developers and construction companies. They believe that he has sided only with the consortium’s interests and is consequently taking an unfair position towards the Estelita struggle. Thus they gathered supporters on Facebook with the following invitation: “Bring your bathing suits, balls, beach wraps, plastic swimming pools and musical instruments.”

On 13 May 2015, the group published a crowd-funded videoclip on YouTube called “New Apocalypse Recife.” It went viral and received more than 100,000 views within a week. The key character wears a mask with the mayor’s face and the video parodies a popular song by Reginaldo Rossi, a famous Brazilian singer.⁹ The lyrics deeply criticize the mayor and developers’ relationship, as well as the New Recife Project, in translation here:

“Hey, come here I want to show you something:
Hey, a New Recife that will rock...
Hey, full of boldness and sophistication...
Hey, progress for the population...

The New Recife is wonderful,
Each skyscraper will impress everyone.
Luxury, and a heliport at the entrance,
A fancy pool and a closed-off balcony.

An exclusive pier for boats,
A garage for big cars,
A tremendous business centre,
You will have everything and much more.
It will be awesome...

Yeah, buddy... This is the New Recife...
Lots of cement... Lots of ceramic...
Lots of marble and mirrors!

It will be Miami Beach in Brazil!
Yeah... Facing the river,
It will be very modern and cool!
It will follow FIFA's Standards.

Within an international context
The New Recife is very vertical.
There is no need for green to cool off!
We gotta have air-conditioning, man!

The New Recife will arise,
A stylish concept for the region.
Those who live in public squares or in the streets
Are urbanists and thieves.

(Yeah, buddy... We will take out all those bums!
Those young people who smoke herb in public squares,
man!)

From the Estelita Pier to Aurora Street,
You can start saying goodbye.
From Vila Naval to the Cabanga area,
There is no chance, because it is going up, man!

You can tear it down, man!
Bring the backhoe excavator!
This will be the place for the good people!
A place for differentiated and exclusive people, man!
I have to bring the sheep to our side, right people?
Our buildings are the best!"

THE OCUPE ESTELITA AS A COLLECTIVE SYMBOL
FOR BROADER URBAN ISSUES

The Pier Jose Estelita belongs to an urban and cultural landscape recognized as an important heritage site by Federal National Historic and Artistic Heritage Institute (IPHAN). However, private investors and local government are disrespecting both laws and the public interest. The proposal to build a series of twelve skyscrapers on the pier would not only erase layers of historical, cultural, and affective significance from this place, but it would also deny the right for all to enjoy such urban space. Among these deprivations, we can add restrictions on citizen’s access to the landscape, which includes the sea and port views, the reduction of sunlight due to shadows projected by the skyscrapers, and increased heat in the area due to a reduction of the breeze that comes from the sea and refreshes the city’s tropical temperature.

As Lucas Alves, one of the Urban Rights activists told us, “if we didn’t resist, we couldn’t have tolerated the situation, because it was heartbreaking.” Indeed, there is a particular emotional value surrounding the Pier site, which has touched generations of Recife citizens. Hence, it has become part of the city’s memory and cultural heritage.

Over the three years of protest thus far, many cultural products have been created by Urban Rights and Estelita supporters. The majority of these were disseminated on social media and express outstanding creativity.¹⁰ The group has also been supported by citizens from many different fields (designers, journalists, lawyers, bikers, artists), as well as academics¹¹ and many institutions (including those in the governmental, non-governmental, and educational sectors).

On 16 November 2014, David Harvey spoke at one of the Ocupe Estelita demonstrations: “It is a fantastic privilege to be here, to be with you, in the defense of this city and all of it stands for. The only people who are going to defend your right to this city is you. You don’t have big money on your side. You don’t have the big corporations on your side. So the only way to defend what you have is on the streets with people together doing cultural things, enjoying yourselves at the same time as being very, very political. I write about the right to the city, and you do it.”¹²

Unfortunately, the New Recife Project is not the only critical urban problem in Recife. It is, in fact, evidence of far deeper problems related to the erosion of urban rights. For this reason, the Urban Rights Group and the Ocupe Estelita Movement stand as a collective symbol for broader urban issues. We hope this social movement inspires new collective initiatives for social change both here and abroad.

1

David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review* 53 (Sept.–Oct. 2008), newleftreview.org/II/53/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city.

2

Micheline Dayse Gomes Batista and Vilma Barbosa Félix, “Direitos Urbanos | Recife – Uma Nova Forma de Articulação e Participação Política,” paper delivered at the XXIX Congreso de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología 2013, actacientifica.servicioit.cl/biblioteca/gt/GT20/GT20_GomesBatista.pdf.

3

See pt-br.facebook.com/DireitosUrbanos.

4

Tiago Franca Barreto, Maria Iraê de Souza Corrêa, José Roberto Ferreira Guerra, Alexandre Hochmann Béharda, “Entre a Denúncia e o Anúncio: O Movimento #OcupeEstelita e o Enfrentamento ao *Dark Side* das Organizações,” paper presented at II Congresso Brasileiro de Estudos Organizacionais, Faculdade de Gestão e Negócios, Universidade Federal de Uberlândia, 19–21 November 2014, iicbeo.com.br/anais/1326GT3.pdf.

5

Ibid.

6

See *Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil*, 3 June 2014, <http://www.diplomatique.org.br/acervo.php?id=3068>; quoted in Barreto et al., “Entre a Denúncia e o Anúncio.”

7

See Erminia Maricato, “Metrópole, Legislação e Desigualdade,” *Estudos Avançados* 17, no. 48 (2003): 151–167; quoted in Barreto et al., “Entre a Denúncia e o Anúncio.”

8

Watch the video “O que é desenvolvimento?” (“What is development?”), published online at the Urban Rights Group blog, on 28 April 2013, direitosurbanos.wordpress.com/ocupeestelita-0/ocupeestelita-1-28-de-abril-de-2013.

9

The “Novo Apocalipse Recife” video is available online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=uE0WJi6xNBk.

10

Many videos can be watched with English subtitles on the Direitos Urbanos (Urban Rights) YouTube Channel: www.youtube.com/channel/UCC9-uXiOAchxgnfR2FkTbgg/ videos.

11

See Maria de Lourdes Carneiro da Cunha Nóbrega, Isabella Leite Trindade, and Andrea Dornelas Câmara, “O Cais onde o Patrimônio Atraca: O Cais José Estelita como Parte Integrante da Paisagem Cultural do Recife,” paper presented at III Colóquio Ibero Americano Paisagem Cultural, Patrimônio e Projeto (Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional (IPHAN), Instituto de Estudos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (IEDS)), 15–17 September 2014, www.forumpatrimonio.com.br/paisagem2014/artigos/pdf/87.pdf.

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Watch the video of David Harvey’s speech at #OcupeEstelita at www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxW-InT8XHk.

DIAGRAM
OF THE
AMOROUS
SEARCH:
GENERAT-
ING DESIRE
WITH
GUIRAUDIE’S
*L’INCONNU
DU LAC*¹

Nathan Friedman

What I hide by my language, my body utters.
Roland Barthes

Throughout *A Lover’s Discourse* Roland Barthes makes frequent comparison between body and language. The body is nuanced, a site of involuntary signs to be interpreted, while language is trapped by performative extremes, at once “*too much* and *too little*.” The truest of messages, we learn from Barthes, are “that of my body, not that of my speech.”² Outside the banalities of dialogue a parallel discourse on love can be found in gestures, looks, sighs. Such elements are given spatio-temporal charge in Alain Guiraudie’s 2013 queer thriller *L’inconnu du lac*. The film plots desire and violence across a

secluded lakefront where forms of interpersonal exchange are organized by means of site-specific locations.³ Cruising scenes privilege the male body and trajectories of the self over language, provoking characters to be read as abstract points and vectors. The representational mode evokes architectural theorist Stan Allen’s definition of “diagram” as a configuration of “momentary clusters of matter in space,” or a study of “potential relationships among elements.”⁴ Male bodies are figured on a continual search for the erotic subject, in flux, as matter en route to the next possible configuration or relationship.

Can a discourse on love be abstracted as diagram, a mathematical set of figures, positions, and trajectories? Further, can the diagram be viewed as a means of realizing new relationships and models, not simply as a representational tool to communicate existing ones? Such questions that approach an abstraction of desire and the potential therein can be tested through two underlying schemas in *L’inconnu du lac*. The first charts geographic position in relation to actions and affect, plotting boundary conditions and spatial sequences between four major environments in the film. The second focuses on the practice of cruising, defined here as an active search for erotic intimacy, framing bodies in relationship to speed, distance, and orientation. While the study uses *L’inconnu du lac* as a means to produce diagrammatic models, the end goal is not purely representational. The model’s potential within a discourse on love, and even more so within the context of queer desire, lies in its generative capacity. To decode an organizational logic behind sites labeled queer, other, or outside is to approach a method of production for alterative spatial and social narratives. As Deleuze has written, “[The diagram] never functions in order to represent a pre-existing world, it produces a new type of reality, a new model of truth.”⁵ Diagrams are not illustrations but abstract machines, capable of producing novel relationships of desire between site, activity, and matter.

Set on an isolated lakefront in Provence, *L’inconnu du lac* focuses on a summer cruising destination for queer men. The site