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Preference Atmospheres in the 'Carioca Gaza Strip'

Manguinhos Favela Complex, Rio de Janeiro

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Abstract. In this work we analyse preference atmospheres, investigating attractiveness and affectivity in conflict and vulnerability territories located in peripheral urban areas. Preference atmospheres are conceptions of world that contemplate multiple meanings attribution. This conceptualization is based on various studies, whose dialogues enabled a methodology development that has been applied, in this work, in the Manguinhos favela complex - the 'Carioca Gaza Strip', located in Rio de Janeiro's North Zone. Our analysis focuses on the so-called 'Marcelo Square', a small square constructed by local residents in a prohibited area, and Estrada de Manguinhos Street, symbolic open spaces of affectivity and attractiveness in an area widely known for its socio-environmental vulnerability.

Keywords. Preference Atmospheres, Vulnerability, Political Ecology, Favela Complex

Introduction



Figure 1. Manguinhos Location (left), Rio de Janeiro City Council, 2003, Google Earth, 2020; Aerial View (middle), Tângari, 2019; 'Marcelo Square' photos (right), Lamounier, 2019

This work aims to analyse preference atmospheres in urban peripheries, investigating attractiveness and affectivity in vulnerability areas located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

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The studied territory is Manguinhos, favela in the city North Zone, a high demographic density region and consolidated urban fabric, but with very few open spaces (Tângari, 2019). Popularly known as the ‘Carioca Gaza Strip,’ Manguinhos is characterized as a socioenvironmental vulnerability territory that suffers from diverse violence types, specially the everyday conflicts between State security agents and the parallel ‘commands,’ and the State large projects’ neglect. In this context, ‘Marcelo Square’ and *Estrada de Manguinhos* Street stand out as local level attractiveness and affective symbolism open spaces.

Our photos show virtually no people and are limited in their visual angles. In the ‘Carioca Gaza Strip,’ pointing mobile phones or cameras towards particular scenes can carry risks, both for researchers and for the people photographed. Such ‘invisibility’ as an internal defense mechanism tell us much about Manguinhos’s vulnerabilities.

Preference Atmospheres

The preference atmospheres concept is founded on dialogues between diverse knowledge fields’. Berque’s contributions (1998, 84), which emphasize the importance of the “study of the (global and unitary) sense” which society attributes to the relations that it maintains “with space and nature,” includes meanings and feelings connotations and points to the atmosphere idea. Griffero (2013, 3) defines “atmosphere” as the “sensorial skin of the city,” resulting of the combination of urban configuration, sensory stimuli and sociocultural aspects that involves “topographic appropriation, spatial realization of the place and pragmatic negotiation.” Thibaud (2015, 284) understands “atmosphere” in terms of “situated experience,” “continuous creation” and perception related to the experience enabled by a given “situation.” He points out that ordinary atmospheres can become memorable according to how they affect us. Thus, the attributions of “sense” (Berque, 1998) to an atmosphere may vary not only for different individuals, but also according to the different “experiences” (Thibaud, 2015) that this atmosphere provides to a person. Reflections concerning “ordinary landscapes” (Meinig, 1979) stress, by analogy, that not every attractive atmosphere is exceptional or widely diffused.

Preference atmospheres are understood as memorable atmospheres of everyday life. Although they may be diffused and recognizable to a certain extent in the collective imaginary, they are related to lived experience at a more intimate scale. Investigating for whom certain atmospheres are configured as a preference involves reflections on the “construction and maintenance of public space” as a guarantee of the “public freedom of democratic participation” (Arendt, 2007, 350-352); and the understanding of space as a product of interrelations, based on “plurality,” permanently under construction, a product of relations necessarily “embedded in material practices which have to be carried out,” (Massey, 2009, 29-32).

Preference atmospheres thus comprise a form of conceiving the world that contemplates attributions of sense that also involve the other’s gaze contemplation. Their configuration and diffusion depend on how they enable multiple senses contemplation, related to different people. The proposed method enables preference atmospheres analysis shaped by the interrelations between four categories, described below.

Physical Components: concrete structural elements whose visible relations and attributions of sense define other categories: natural site; paths and connections; implantation; urban grid; structuring elements; buildings; remarkable details.

Visual Attributes: relations between Components, resulting in aspects referring to the

visible configuration: contrast; order; layers; visuals; rhythm³.

Attractiveness: that the area exerts on its surroundings and on the broader city context. It emerges from the Carvalho (2009) studies on "landscape's DNA" and its six dimensions: "morphological"; "institutional"; "social"; "economic"; "environmental"; "accessibility."

Sense: includes diverse atmosphere conceptions provided by the relations between the other three categories. Since it involves conceptions, emphasizes the atmosphere idea vague character. It is analyzed according to the Thibaud's criteria (2015) to understand atmosphere in terms of "diffuse quality": "sensitive unit"; "motor solicitation"; "time dynamics"; "shareable experience"; "affective tonality"; "diffuse field." In our studies, these criteria are analyzed considering the contributions of several other authors, presented below, in the explanation of each criterion.

The first three categories comprise aspects related to the landscape character. They combine previous methodologies that involve studies on atmospheres, landscapes of preference, affectivity, attractiveness, among others: the method for analyzing urban atmospheres developed by Lamounier (2006), based on several authors, especially Norberg-Schulz (1980), applied in open spaces in Londrina, medium city in the south of Brazil; the Yamaki's method for assessing railway landscapes in northern Paraná (Lamounier & Yamaki, 2012), also in southern Brazil; the method for analyzing the "landscape DNA" (Carvalho, 2009).

Sense, in turn, is derived from Berque's reflections (1998) on the 'sense' attributed to the relations between society and landscape, associated with the criteria of Thibaud (2015), already mentioned, amplified by the contributions of several other studies on atmosphere and related themes. It is the category that applies to the characterization of the atmosphere, as it involves the investigation of preferences in the use and appropriation of the territory, affectivity and various attractiveness factors.

So, this four categories method resulted from dialogues between different studies on atmospheres, landscapes and related themes, and field investigations in Rio de Janeiro's open spaces systems. Here we analyze the set of open spaces making up the territory selected for this work in accordance with the Sense category and its various components. The objective is to investigate conceptions that show residents preferences in a territory that, in the Rio's imaginary, evokes an atmosphere of risk and vulnerabilities.

Analytic Application

"Sensitive Unit"

Quality of generating memorable situations, distinguishing the atmosphere as a "coherent unit" (Thibaud, 2015). It involves first impressions, emotions, synaesthesia (Griffero, 2013); identity, legibility (Meinig, 1979); visual attributes (Yamaki, 2011); morphological and environmental dimensions (Carvalho, 2009); vivid character (Massey, 2009).

Contrasts between 'Marcelo Square' colorful playground and its tree canopies versus the rubble and constructions in the favela alleys; open spaces amid the buildings' density; flat local terrain versus distant hills; signs of sporadic care in despite a general aspect of neglect and abandonment; as well as the sensation of danger and the affective territories demarcations, are aspects of this atmosphere as a "sensitive unit."

3. *Physical Components and Visual Attributes are based on the Yamaki's Railway Landscapes evaluation method (Lamounier & Yamaki, 2012) and on Street Atmospheres analyse's earlier methodology (Lamounier, 2006).*

“Motor Solicitation”

“How [the atmosphere] convokes the plane of movement” and induces behaviour rhythms (Thibaud, 2015). It involves “suggestions of movement” (Böhme, 2013); “synchronized kinetic styles” (Griffero, 2013); structure, order, rhythm (Yamaki, 2011); ‘functional’ attractors (Carvalho, 2009).

‘Marcelo Square’ is a central place connecting open spaces and attractive elements in Manguinhos. The main movement axis connects two attractors: the Railway Station and *Estrada de Manguinhos* Street, bordered by a surprising commercial establishments diversity. On this axis, ‘Marcelo Square’ provides a place to pause and for children to play.

“Time Dynamics”

The diverse phases articulation that allow an atmosphere understanding in terms of “continuous creation” (Thibaud, 2015). It involves “permanent construction” (Massey, 2009); oriented evolution (Yamaki, 2011); structures and uses consolidation (Carvalho, 2009); imaginaries’ consolidation (Meinig, 1979).

The growth of trees and the wear of equipment are visible passage of time marks in ‘Marcelo Square’. In the immediate surroundings, the main transformation marks refer to the appropriations and their expressions, not always particularly visible, in the landscape. Next to the ‘society’ soccer pitch, the *Mães de Manguinhos*⁴ Movement, formed by women whose children have been killed by the police, has erected a small monument, called “Our Dead Have a Voice”⁵. Inaugurated in May 2016, it presents a 10 young people names updated list, aged between 13 and 29 years old, who were killed there or in the nearby area by State security agents in recent years. It marks the time of absence and struggle through resistance, justice and memory.

“Shareable Experience”

Quality of enabling the customs and values sharing that singularize an atmosphere (Thibaud, 2015). It involves determined uses attraction (Griffero, 2013); morphology, accessibility, sociability (Carvalho, 2009); “social characteristics” (Böhme, 2013); appropriations and diverse uses (Meinig, 1979); cultural aspects (Yamaki, 2011); different stories’ simultaneity (Massey, 2009).

‘Marcelo Square’ configures an interaction place between children from different localities (nearby and beyond the railway) who share similar everyday lives in terms of vulnerability. Under the Manguinhos strong sun, the benches under the trees invite people to rest in the square shaded areas, enabling interactions among the adult frequenters. However, barricades made from railway tracks, blocking the access of the police ‘*caveirão*’⁶, denote that the experiences shared there involve living with the daily risk of violence between the conflicting powers: the parallel ‘commands’ and the police.

“Affective Tonality”

This is related to the capacity to stir emotion and sensitivity, resulting from the combination of aspects like spatial configuration, activities and collective or individual conceptions (Thibaud, 2015). It involves meanings attributions (Berque, 1998); affective identification (Yamaki, 2011); familiarity sense (Griffero, 2013); different views recognition (Massey, 2009).

4. *Manguinhos Mother’s Movement*.

5. “*Nossos Mortos Têm Voz*.”

6. ‘*Big skull*’. Nickname given to the armoured car used by the Rio de Janeiro State Military Police.

'Marcelo Square,' an illegal appropriation under high voltage power lines, and the continuous fight for its maintenance, reveal a major local importance affective territory. In the square southern portion, the *Mães de Manguinhos* planted trees with plaques that remember their killed children. There, affectivity is associated with resistance and the fight for the absent children memory and dignity, as one of the mothers emphasizes.

"Diffuse Field"

The quality of "irradiating through the surroundings," atmosphere as a field that involves and connects its diverse components, although it cannot be delimited with precision (Thibaud, 2015). Atmosphere as an "influential presence" (Griffero, 2013); visual landmarks (Yamaki, 2011); range of imaginary (Meinig, 1979); space/time as a product of interrelations (Massey, 2009); landscape singularization (Carvalho, 2009). As a conflict territory between parallel power factions and police forces, Manguinhos is known in the media as the 'Carioca Gaza Strip'. However, elements of diffusion at a smaller scale that can configure preferences in its atmosphere are also observed. The attraction that *Estrada de Manguinhos* commercial axis exerts is a diffusion factor at local level. The affective senses, invisible at a larger scale, have become diffused thanks to the *Mães de Manguinhos* work. At the microscale, this can be perceived in the recognition of this region as a strong affectivity territory, with an atmosphere imbued with the senses of solidarity and the fight for the right to the city, the open spaces' enjoyment and life itself.

Conclusion

Constructed under high voltage power lines, 'Marcelo Square' denounces the neglect in the urban legislation in response to the vulnerable territories populations needs. The *Estrada de Manguinhos* commercial diversity emphasize that, even in risk areas, it is necessary to live. This both open spaces are key elements in the configuration of a microscale Preference Atmosphere that involves the nearby surroundings. There, where the more vitality places are also the most violent, the public space appropriation is a resistance form expressed in the affect symbolism and of being in the street.

Affectivity, attractiveness, symbolism indicate a preference atmosphere imbued with a resilience sense grounded in solidarity. Where exercising the right to the city involves contravening official regulations, appropriations and senses commonly considered marginal are essential components. It reflects the "process, hopefully subversive, of topographic appropriation, spatial realization of the place and pragmatic negotiation" (Certeau, cited in Griffero, 2013, 3), as a response to "distributive conflicts" and "environmental racism" (Alier, 2017) characteristics of vulnerability territories, primarily located in peripheral areas.

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