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Title: Reducing Boundaries

Understanding exclusion through informal security defensive systems in wealthy urban areas: the cases of Porto Alegre and Brussels

A large part of manifestations of social disease by the "risk society" are connected with the perception of an increase in criminal phenomena, due to the growing distrust, anxiety and uncertainty with respect to the Public Authorities. The issue of security moves from a national to a local concern, especially at the urban level, where different strategies and interventions are displaced for securing private and public spaces, ranging from spatial segregation (e.g. gated communities) to the control of accesses, use of road bollards, installation of closed-circuit television system, and other techniques of crime prevention through environmental design. Moreover, it is progressively emerging in different contexts, both from the global north and south, that the way upper class reproduces itself is deeply entangled with ideas of risk and safety, leading to what has been defined as the "visual landscape of fear" (Low, 2001). Daniel Goldstein has recently defined the "rise of the security paradigm as a framework for organising contemporary social life" (Goldstein, 2010). This leading paradigm is reaffirming class differences rather than abolishing them. Media, public discourses and the "market of fear" contribute to that polarisation simplifying and reducing the opposition between legal and illegal settlements, and exacerbating the perception of risk.

The paper will focus on the ongoing research "Reducing Boundaries" in which defensive spaces and devices used by upper classes have been studied and compared in two cases - Porto Alegre and Brussels - through a series of in depth interviews, spatial and morphological analysis in order to understand the socio-political dynamics that lead to their production.

In both cities the strong demand for safety and security not compensated by the State or by public authorities lead to self-produced, informal solutions that are increasing amongst higher income groups not only in infamous cases, like the Brazilian cities, but also in Europe especially due to the recent economic crisis.

So far the research output show that while the feeling of security is often related to enclosed spaces (the private room, the single family house, the gated community) and their defensive systems, fear seems to be commonly related to the image of the open and uncontrolled space such as the street. Moreover, the most dangerous place is often represented by the threshold between private and public space. This sort of liminal space between in and out, safe and unsafe, secure and dangerous is the space where the technologies of security are performed, both as "concrete" devices as well as embodied strategies leading to a informal "military" surveillance - rather than a negotiation - of borders. At the same time technologies of securitisation, i.e. gates, cameras, alarm systems etc. are clearly demonstrating to be only palliatives and to have the negative effect of increasing the general sense of insecurity, segregation (gated communities) and intensifying punishment policies.

Furthermore, the feudalisation of the city is generated by the construction of dystopian places built through the relegation of the Other outside the golden gates of an imagined community of "equals".