Historic Center of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil: dilemma between conservation and cultural consumption

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1. Introduction

As of mid-20th century, the themes related to memory and conservation have been gaining repercussion and reaching consensus not only among experts but rather among general public, as they become subject of wide multidisciplinary discussions. It’s noticeable - within this context - that the amplification of heritage concept transcends the notion of monument as outstanding buildings to embrace the everyday architecture, and goes beyond the architectural object to become the built environment, binding therefore the notion of architectural heritage and urban heritage.

However, as much as cultural preservation stands out on one side, it wears out on the other due to economic and touristic approaches embraced by contemporaneous city planning and administrations. Discussions over such twist in heritage understanding associated to consumption and public shows, diminishing therefore its original cultural dimension have been the concerns of authors like Françoise Choay (1992) and Henri Pierre Jeudy (2005).

Lina Bo Bardi’s work in Bahia throughout the 1950-60’s was part of a wide plan to foster the reconfiguration of national identity setting out from its popular culture pillars. In these terms, the implementation of Museum of Modern Art associated to Documentation Center of Popular Art (Centro de Documentação sobre Arte Popular) at the Solar do Unhão building (1959-62), encourages cultural public policies with the purpose of developing activities of exhibition, research, and trials to incorporate vernacular practices. The intervention in the Ladeira da Misericórdia (1987), on its turn, allows for assessing the preservationist concern combined with expectations over urban transformation. It is about an effort anchored in the human and material singularity, without any intention to retrocede in time or to recover the idealized formal unit. It is important to point out that these two interventions are not punctual designs, on the contrary, they are design-models integrated to the extensive plan of territory restructuring for Pelourinho surroundings, understood as the historic center to be appraised.

Different approach is observed at the Recovery Plan of Historic Center of Salvador (set out in 1992), promoted by the public administration, which definitely determines the conception of touristic landmark split from people’s and city’s everyday life.

It is adopted as reference for Lina Bo Bardi et team’s strategy the remarkable rehabilitation of Historic Center of Bologna, as an outstanding work designed during the late 1960’s and carried out along the 1970-1980’s. It contributed for the great international repercussion reached by this work, the reversion of degradation and depreciation phenomenon found not only in the historic center of Bologna, but also in other central areas of important European cities. The relevance of this intervention can be measured by the attention rendered to
both local dwellers and its peculiar uses as well as to the authentic testimonies of historic city.

2. From the architectonic to urban heritage
In her book, *L’Allégorie du Patrimoine* (2001)\(^3\), Françoise Choay recomposes the picture of formulation of main propositions which are the origin of heritage preservation represented by the architecture and cities. The several contributions are placed in their relative cultural contexts, associating them to certain approaches which go from the understanding of historic monument as individual element, to the consideration of urban heritage as an architecture building, comprehending the urban space with its lines, and morphology. Choay’s interest lies on writing critical evaluation about recent heritage approaches as of an investigation that intertwines the construction of concepts and cultural motivations grounding the initial preservationist practices, which face today the “perverse effects” of this cultural industry, compromised with an excessive increase of heritage dominium, characterizing a sort of “Noah complex”, with all animals crammed into an arch as means of salvation. Among the negative aspects to be faced, the author addresses the intense flow of visitors and tourists jeopardizing the integrity of selected heritage assets for preservation. Another issue is the cultural excitement that, when on its extreme, turn the monument into a theater play or scene. In this case, Choay points out, “the building compete with an imposed public show or ‘event’ for its autonomy (...) this, on its turn, may due to this weird antagonist relation, be aggrandized, depreciated, or reduced to void” [Choay, 2001, p. 216].
It is interesting to point out in this study, the analysis made by the French historiographer of the progressive amplification of historic heritage concept, which extended from a first moment when it was an initial individual asset to a second moment, as an urban scale. Therefore, it calls attention the temporal irregularity separating the interest of preserving the individual cultural asset from the “urban heritage invention”, as Choay says. The birth of historic monument is said to be on 15th century, associated to intellectual and artistic appreciation of Old Age monuments, even though, such appreciation has not been translated into real preservation of such legacy. Among factors contributing to the discrepancy dividing the notion of architectonic heritage from the focus on urban heritage, the author recognizes the classic culture persisting on the trend to identify the cities by their genealogies, social-economic structures, their religious and political institutions, other than relating cities directly to their physical space. The architecture history itself ignores the cities, claims the author.
The genesis of urban space history - presuming the material city as object of knowledge - is according to Choay, motivated by the radical transformation of this space as of the industrial revolution. This is the same as saying that the ancient cities became object of investigation as base to the contraposition to the present cities, which does not assure, immediately, the defense of ancient city preservation. The preservation interest starts later as a reaction to the dominant urbanization process, characterizing as “result of a dialectic of history and historicity which has been processed in three successive characters
(or approaches) of ancient city (…) memorial, historic and historical” (2001, p.180).
To the performance of memorial role, the author associates the approach of English John Ruskin (1819-1900) - who in his book called Stones in Venice warns the public opinion against the interventions which cause damages to the ancient city, identifying the urban network as the essence to the city. For Ruskin, it is unacceptable to touch the pre-industrial cities. More precisely, this passionate intransigence, according to Choay, determines the incongruence of his approach: “Wishing to live the historic city in the present, Ruskin actually, seals the city in the past and loses the sight of historic city, which is engaged in the transformations of historicity” (2001, p.181).

The second approach to the ancient city, according to Choay is the historic, represented by the Austrian Camillo Sitte (1843-1903), who undertakes the propaedeutic contribution by establishing a relation of new type with the built environment, investigating the relations between techniques and esthetics, convenience and beauty. Therefore, he establishes parameters of urban composition based on the identification of principles and rules present in the traditional forms to be transferred from ancient to modern city, considering the convenience of adaptations, examining mainly the paradigm of public square.

The third approach of ancient city for Choay is the historical, announced under the lessons of Gustavo Giovannoni (1873-1943), as the summary and resolution of prior two. For the historian, this approach constitutes the most recent discussion themes, related not only to the destiny of ancient urban spaces, but also to what she refers to the nature of contemporary city transformation. As Choay explains, when the Italian architect and urban designer assigns simultaneously value of use and value museum to ancient urban buildings he integrates them in a general conception of territory organization and postulates the urban heritage preservation, not as independent object but as part of urbanization.


The main publication of Instituto Lina Bo and P.M. Bardi gathering the memories of architect work brings up a partial documentation of work and a briefly descriptive text on her technical operations and conceptual decisions involving the project [Ferraz, 1993, pp. 152-157]. It stands out in that edition, the important architectonic set of buildings of 16th century, modified in the 17th century, and that in the 19th century receives the installation of one of the first manufacturers in Brazil. It is registered that this architectonic set of buildings was listed as historic heritage by SPHAN - Service of Historic and Artistic Heritage - in 1940 and it is said that the preservation works, based on a number of minimal interventions seek to keep the meaningful interventions that the architectonic buildings suffered during its history.

The operations of preservation carried out at the Solar do Unhão are specially driven to recover and emphasize the architectonic materiality, the “awesome” internal structure in hardwood (pillars, the superior wooden flooring, and the supporting structure of clay roof). It is important to point out the reconstruction5
of terrace leaning over the sea, laid on one of the sides of house (Fig.1). If one of the most significant images of this project is the new stairway, which creatively reinvents the fittings of traditional cart wheels pulled by animal traction, highlighting the detail of fixation of steps to the side beam; the actual most strong action is probably the demolition of those randomly added buildings, responsible for the obstruction of the initially open space (Fig.2).

4. The urban intervention at the Ladeira da Misericórdia

As we approach the design of Ladeira da Misericórdia by Lina Bo Bardi and team - of which Marcelo Ferraz and Marcelo Suzuki took part - it is considered, really, an intervention in a city fragment, an action that goes beyond the building to report to the urban, a context marked by traditional architecture testimony. The relevance of intervention is due to the attention to both local dwellers considering their peculiar uses and to the authentic testimonies of historic city without turning them into replica or simulacrum. A text written by Lina Bo Bardi in 1987 describes the underlying intervention “general idea”, “at the recovery of Historic Center of Bahia, we are looking at the modern landmark, rigorously respecting the principles of traditional historic restoration” [Ferraz, 1993, p.292]. When she states that she intends to “rigorously respect the principles of traditional historic restoration”, the architect shows to be fully aware of Camillo Boito approach consolidated by Gustavo Giovannoni, in the sense of overcoming the impasse created by contrary vi-
sions of the first theoretic authors, the stylistic restoration of Viollet-le-Duc or the anti-restoration of John Ruskin.

The architect is aware that this modern interpretation assures a moderate view embracing the archeology word and the rigorous study of historic documents. Such position is quite strong at the first half of 20th century as “historico-philological restoration” (Fig.3).

Another relevant aspect of Ladeira da Misericórdia project embraces the technique applied to the consolidation of existing beams and structures, resulting from the partnership with the architect João Filgueiras Lima, well known as Lelé. A solution in compliance with the Venice Chart (1964) directions suggesting the use of modern techniques for structural consolidations of which the efficacy is irrefutable, whenever the traditional processes show to be unsuitable. The adopted innovative technical procedure corresponds to the use of reinforced mortar pleated slabs, either used as internal walls or replacing the completely deteriorated floors, or employed as stabilizing buttress for existing buildings, recomposing the continuity of buildings in those empty lots where primitive constructions have been demolished. This is a structural consolidation system that is born as of the conceptual triangulation proposed by Lina Bo Bardi, who, being aware of Lelé’s structural conception process, recommends to observe the work of Pier Luigi Nervi on the re-elaboration of constructive process of iron-cement (Fig.4).

Lina Bo Bardi opts for a calculated intervention where the ruins are kept, as-
suring its presence as human time vestige. Simultaneously, it prevents the advancement of corrosion, dismantling, by means of structural consolidations with the use of reinforced mortar buttress, a new appropriate technique. The empty lots provide designs for new buildings which co-exist with pre-existing walls and vegetation.

New uses diversify and encourage activities over the site. It stands out the project attention driven to the internal space of these constructions where modifications are clearly noticeable: new walls with the same buttress technique are different from those which have been kept. The transformation, despite being a counterpoint, does not offend, but establishes a dialogue of times with the preexisting environment.

5. The plan for the historic center of Bologna

The understanding of inseparable relation binding the architecture to the territory is the essential condition for the formulation of urban heritage concept, considered in its dimension of cultural collective assets, overcoming the strict limits of economic value, merchandise. Taking as reference the remarkable rehabilitation of Historic Center of Bologna is a clear indication of this assumption. It is about a model action designed during the late 1960’s and carried out along the 1970-1980’s from a strategy binding the urban planning to heritage preservation. The crisis in central sectors of cities gets more severe at the same measure it foresees the mechanism of urban expansion, associated to the real-estate speculation which, as it favors the surrounding areas to implant new developments and services, gives the historic centers the condition of abandonment. The lack of private and public investments contributes for a huge evasion of dwellers and for the limited use of these area, which determines the preponderant permanence of those users with little affordability to bear the expenses for these buildings recovery works and modernization. Therefore, the public administration intervention is needed to promote and alter those processes generated by the real-estate market activities. The result is a careful intervention focused on resident population and the low and medium income groups, seeking to make feasible the performance of recovery work without causing the expel of this same population. The mechanism of gentrification so strong in more recent actions, where such concerns are not really evident is, therefore, refrained.

About this, Giulio Carlo Argan, in his book, *History of Art as History of city*, points out the advances obtained by the Bologna administration and calls attention to the fact that this experience was considered a model for similar interventions in the historic center of Rome, when he was leading the city capital administration. He emphasizes the processes of full regeneration of downtown urban network through procedures which, on the same time, are destined to reestablish a level of social dignity and subject the buildings to the restoration itself [Argan, 1995, p. 80].

6. The misunderstandings of most recent intervention in the historic center of Salvador

Differently from intervention criteria adopted in the Bologna experience, which
has some affinity with Lina Bo Bardi’s work – whose attention is focused on the historic center committed to their cultural roots and resident population – the most recent Program of Recovery of Historic Center of Salvador (plan started in 1992), mainly considers the urban territory as an economic product. It has been using marketing strategies to build the image of a public administration committed to a pseudo-valorization of cultural identity and traditions of Bahia in their most stereotyped aspects. A recurring approach today in the international panorama pointing to the cultural consumption and the mass tourism as essential elements to revert the degradation and abandon processes of central areas.

The implementation of program to determine the removal and indemnity of about one thousand and nine hundred families living precariously in these shabby areas. These people live, so far, in those areas exactly because they pay very low renting prices for unhealthy houses or because they live as squatters. It is important to point out that it was not seeing in these habitations, by their populations, any resistance to dislodge. Among other reasons, the indemnity offer - it doesn’t matter how low they are - is an encouragement to the transfer. Unfortunately, public administration is not really concerned about the destiny of this population who move to other similarly precarious conditions of living.

As Márcia Sant’Anna (2003, p. 52) points out, this intervention carries the misunderstanding of a scenography conception that, by ignoring the typologies and traditional uses, subverts the authentic urban processes, “(…) aiming to meet this media role and multiple of baianity sign, icon of tourism and leisure and symbol of consensus and good administration”.

Henri-Pierre Jeudy in *Espelho das Cidades (La machinarie patrimoniale)* discusses the contradictions and excesses of certain processes of museumification of cities typical of current days, called by the author as heritagezation and esthetization, carried out according to scenography ways of this last recovery program of historic center of Salvador. His words are strong and sound like a warning to the mistake of turning the cultural heritage into fetishes, “the repulsion inspired by the exhibition of preserved vestiges, of its extremely-without-purpose theaterlization, may likewise generate the hate to the heritage. And we may be taken by it whenever the excess of preservation, the formidable power of roots cancel present life, stripping it from its enchantments” [Jeudy, 2005, p.15].

7. The competence to build

The interventions of Lina Bo Bardi in Salvador show to be, beyond any doubt, a valid counterpoint to the phenomenon of spetacularization associated to the uncritical practices of heritagelization as those described and criticized by H.P. Jeudy. Moreover, it is laudable to recognize the pertinence of action which distinguishes the new from the old, and is entitled to carefully introduce new elements and deference to the existing architecture in order to make feasible a new appropriation of this architectonic space, refuting, therefore, the ambiguous strategies transforming the city into a museum.

At the attempt to find a solution for “heritage syndrome” excesses related to
the indiscriminate worship to heritage and refusal of present and real time, Françoise Choay makes an appeal to reencounter the competence to build. It is exactly this peculiar trait of architectonic build of Lina Bo Bardi where such competence is recognized, the attention to architecture as cultural fact, as apt-to-life body, which is translated into technical dominium, into acuity at designing plans for feasible uses, ready to welcome suitable activities to current social practices, mainly, at its ethical dimension, conceiving a long-lasting architecture to articulate the memory to become.

Notes
1 The city foundation site is marked by a geological shift determining the city division in two parts: the Low City and the High City. The slopes are paths developed by ramps which establish the connection between those two levels situated in different topographic levels.
2 At colonial time cities, this was the name given to post placed on public square center, where offender-slaves were held and punished. Along time, before the absence of column and its use, the memory of this testimony was preserved, using this denomination to public space where there was this post in the past.
3 It is known that the first edition of L’allégorie du patrimoine, is 1992. For this study, it was used the Portuguese translation of 2001, as indicated on bibliographic references.
4 The Solar was a house of large dimensions, belonging to a noble family, when Brazil was Portugal’s settlement.
5 This operation, defined by Giovannoni as “liberation”, is supported by the legitimacy of removing the elements without characterizing features, which inadvertently, contribute to the loss of architectonic value of cultural heritage with preservation interest.
6 The meaning of term, used generically to indicate a transformation process of a popular zone in a noble area is analyzed in details, in several nuances by different authors in text of Silvana Rubino, Gentrification: notes about a uncomfortable concept, in Schichh, M. C. et al. (org), Urbanismo: dossiê São Paulo-Rio de Janeiro, Campinas, Rio de Janeiro, PUC-Campinas, PROURB-UFRJ, 2003. The author says the term was first used by the English sociologist Ruth Glass in 1964.
7 Brazilian metropolises suffer with a chronicle lack of housing. Buildings with no use for long time are often invaded by social movements committed to the popular housing issues, or, in the worst case, they are occupied by homeless, beggars, wanderers, who live in the surroundings.
8 In a text with the title A recuperação do Centro Histórico de Salvador: origens, sentidos e resultados, published on the magazine «RUA», v. 6, UFBa, PPG-AU, Salvador. The article develops a deep analysis of recovery plan, of its criteria and implementation steps. The present text concentrates in the documented analysis in this period.
9 Concepts elaborated by Jeudy (2005): refer to the fruition process of cultural heritage, garbled by marketing and consumption and tourism cultural policy strategies to favor the image, the simulacrum, instead of genuine material fact, in addition to pass over the local population in favor of occasional visitors.

References