

Architecture of Emptiness in “Favelas”: Green Walls and Indigenous Graphism at MACquinho | Morro do Palácio, Brazil

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Figure 1: Green Wall and Indigenous Graphism/UFF, 2017

Introduction:

Transcultural Logics in Architecture and Urbanism

The transcultural logics defines the transformations that occur in the friction of distinct cultures. The academic knowledge in architecture and urbanism turns to a discussion in the field of anthropology and digital technologies, aiming at finding viable solutions to the current impasse of Brazilian megacities relating the occupation of public spaces that indicate the quality of urban life.

The paper explores the urban design responsible for spaces of socioeconomic exclusion and updating of a supposed citizenship, as well as disciplinary schemes of public-private control by focusing on the architecture of the “favela” Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It contrasts daily urban violence that occurs in the megalopolis of Rio de Janeiro/Niterói with the modern design by Oscar Niemeyer’s projects.

MACquinho, Oscar Niemeyer’s social project for the Museum of Contemporary Art-MAC-Niterói, Rio de Janeiro opened on December 20, 2008. Its mission results from an art education project developed in partnership with the Andy Warhol Museum/US and the Family Medical Program of University Federal Fluminense/UFF. Implanted at Morro do Palácio located just in front of MAC-Niterói, the aim of MACquinho is to bring art and social-environmental actions to the young community of this “favela” by interacting with the artistic programs of this contemporary art museum.

The transcultural field study intends to exchange the academic university language with popular language of illiterate “favela” builders and inhabitants of Morro do Palácio included in the seminar “Bioclimatic Indigenous Architecture”, ministered at MACquinho by the faculty of the University Federal Fluminense/UFF. The Green Walls and Indigenous Graphism pilot project focus on issues of transcultural communication through technical innovation, aesthetics, and ecological sustainability at MACquinho, the Secretary of Technology, the City of Niterói, Rio de Janeiro.

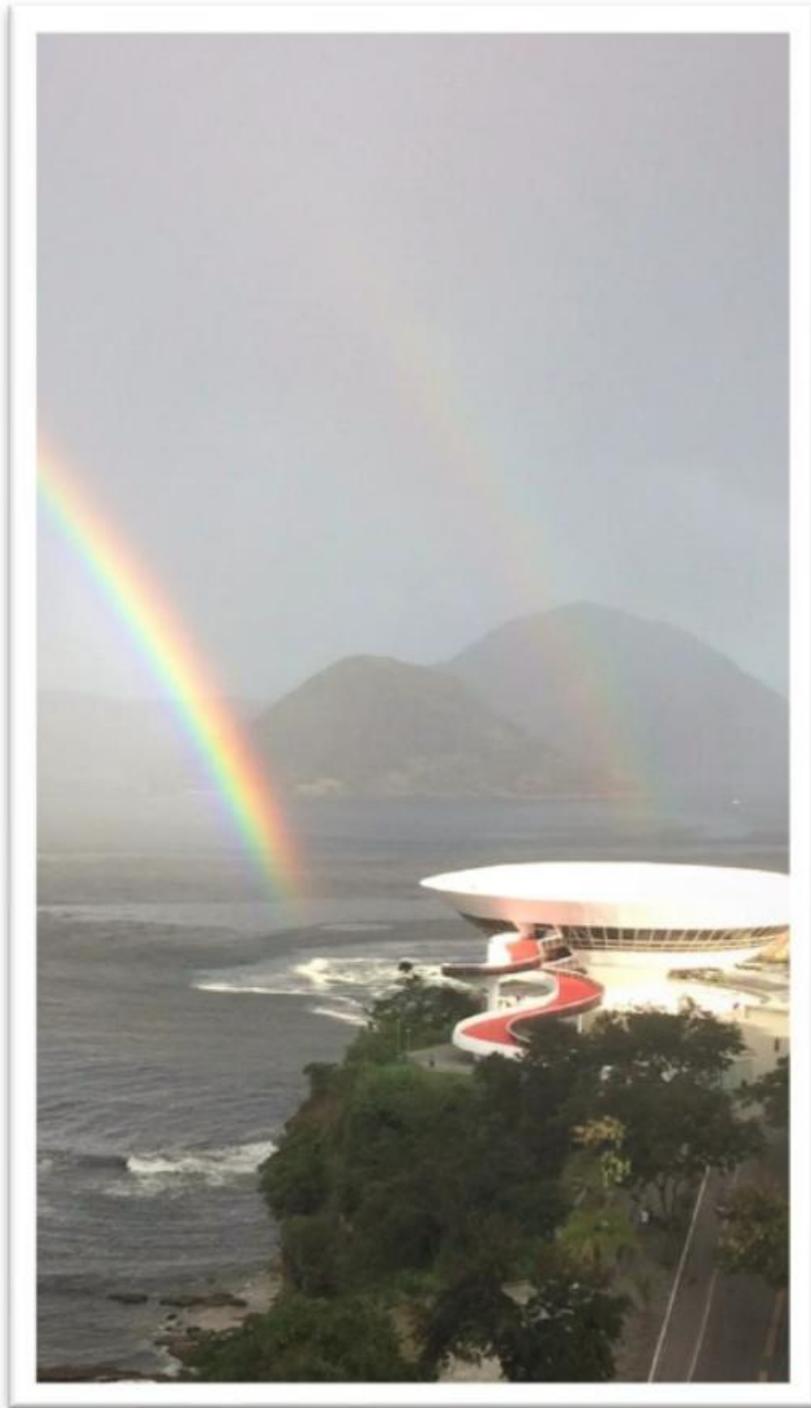


Figure 2: View of MAC from MACquinho/Niemeyer Project, 2018

State of the Art:
Symbolic Capacity of Culture and Urban Design of “Favelas”



Figure 3: Fulni-ô Indians/MACquinho, 2017

The symbolic capacity (Sahlins 2006) is the essence of culture, without which human bodily inclinations would lack a pattern. According to Sahlins, having confined the body to the symbolic organization of existence, the human being does not survive without culture. In this light, culture is, fundamentally, source of power.

The project emphasizes a critical urban reading that elects the city as a laboratory of digital green cities' experimentation. Experiences of changing public spaces from new interventions in empty spaces emphasizes the interpretation of reflexive exercise in critical self-assessment through microplanning prototypes. The research also analyzes the Brazilian urban space created in 2013 defined by the political and cultural performance of a new middle class articulated by networks. Therefore, the academic knowledge in architecture and urbanism turns to a discussion in the field of anthropology and digital technologies, aiming at finding viable solutions to the current impasse of Brazilian megacities relating the occupation of the public space.

The investigation mainly focuses on daily violence and in the architecture of the "favela" Morro do Palácio, in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, deriving from a participatory attitude that allows the residents to become its members as community agents, artists, curators and teachers. The objectives of the project are: 1) Disseminating the culture of this "favela" population through exhibitions, performances and workshops; 2) Establishing a database of its culture in relation to visual arts and crafts, music and dance, medicine, gastronomy, tourism and ecology; 3) Allowing its community agents the access to digital technology with the creation of new digital artistic products; 4) Stimulating the self-determination of its inhabitants at the local, national and international level by creating a collaboration network among "favela" communities.

The first Green Wall and Indigenous Graphism tentative project was carried out on April 29, 2017, by students of Architecture and Urbanism, Agroecology and Environmental Engineering at University Federal Fluminense/UFF, amid the tension generated by the death of a representative of drug trafficking by the police. This manifestation of urban violence raised tensions that have apparently already been resolved in the relationship of residents with the barracks of young traffickers occupying the community. This Green Wall and Indigenous Graphism was set up at the facing wall of Wilma's ice cream shop, making possible the creation of a Peace Alley ("Beco da Paz"). As a result of the implantation of the green wall, the drug trafficking was conducted since April 2017 at this alley by negotiating some youngster's "peace" with the residents of the "favela" Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro.



Figure 4: Attaching the tubes at the wall/Morro do Palácio, 2017



Figure 5: Setting up the bidim mantle with tubes, 2017

The architect Sophia Eder coordinated the implantation of this Green Wall at Morro do Palácio by invitation of MACquinho's director Breno Platais, counting on the collaboration of MACquinho's staff Jefferson and William, and students at the University Federal Fluminense/UFF. The process of construction of this green wall involved:

- 1) Measuring the surface of the wall.
- 2) Drilling the wall to attach tubes supporting the bidim mantle, where the earth and plants will be later set up.
- 3) Setting up the plastic cover underneath the bidim blanket to avoid humidity in the wall.
- 4) Placing the bidim blanket through metal supports in the wall.
- 5) Fixing the bidim mantle and tubes in the wall over the plastic cover.
- 6) Planting vegetal species inside the holes filled with earth made at the bidim mantle.

By emphasizing a reflexive exercise in critical self-assessment based on the analysis of typical constructions of Brazilian indigenous cultures ("ocas" or longhouses) and in pursuit of the promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, of global citizenship and the appreciation of cultural diversity, this project at MACquinho/Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro featured dance and handicraft by Fulni-ô Indians, aiming to ensure that residents of this community and university students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote a sustainable lifestyle by emphasizing artistic activities and performances of arts and crafts, music, and dance. At the same time, an experimental design workshop of Indigenous Graphism was ministered at the Peace Alley ("Beco da Paz") by the indigenous anthropologist Carol Potiguara, deriving from a transcultural dialogue with collective discussions in MACquinho that preceded the project, thus determining the main activities suggested by the inhabitants of Morro do Palácio.



Figure 6: Indigenous Graphism/Wilma's Bar, 2017



Figure 7: Indigenous Workshop/Carol Potiguara, 2017

Framework:

Urban Networks at Digital Platform of MACquinho

The methodology of the project was carried out with the Urban Digital Platform of MACquinho and it is based on a critical urban reading that elects the city as a laboratory and field of digital experimentation through the analysis of localized experiences that carry the intention of changing public spaces from new architectural interventions. Focusing on the occupation of Brazilian megacities by groups of demonstrators organized through networks, the research emphasizes action on the microscale based on social practices and collective appropriations, drawing attention to the importance of bottom-up initiatives in urban landscape settings.

The tactic of the project focuses on the survey of a CONCRETE SPACE / CONTEXT at the “favela” Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro defined by hollow occupations | emptiness as spaces that form an urban waste beneath viaducts, alleys, elevated streets, pillars, sheds, and iron fences. The focus of the research casts its gaze along the networks that represent instigating examples of how this “favela” population spontaneously transforms the technical artifacts into active places for political-cultural participation and for playful-creative manifestations in urban everyday life, through the creation of public gardens in the cities of Rio de Janeiro/Niterói.

The project prioritizes the public domain of Peace Alley (“Beco da Paz”) in specific scopes of urbanism as being composed by places where the exchange between different social groups becomes possible and where everyday life happens. It also emphasizes roughness in this specific alley as what is left of the past as concrete urban forms and built spaces and landscapes as what remains of the process of suppression, accumulation and superposition of things accumulated everywhere.

The purpose of the project relates opening the debates with “favela” inhabitants around the validity of the design and the construction of prototypes of Green Walls and Indigenous Graphism by faculty members of the University Federal Fluminense/UFF, counting on the participation of more than 400 builders of Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro.



Figure 8: Prototype/Green Wall/Peace Alley, 2017

Conclusion:

Green Walls and Indigenous Graphism in Empty Spaces

The project of building the Green Wall and Indigenous Graphism at the Peace Alley (“Beco da Paz”) of Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro emphasizes the following theoretical issues:

- 1) Cities as Adaptation between Private Rights and Public Responsibilities: Land Tenure in the “Favela”, Informal Housing and the Process of Gentrification.
- 2) Three-dimensional Mass of Buildings in the “Favela” Morro do Palácio: Hard Spaces x Empty Spaces.
- 3) Scale of Buildings in the “Favela” and in its Surroundings: Public Spaces x Private Spaces of the Museum of Contemporary Art- MAC, MACquinho and Morro do Palácio.
- 4) Environmental Sustainability: “Favela” Morro do Palácio, Lack of Urban Infrastructure and Urbanism.

Defining Innovative Urban Design Language in the “Favela” Morro do Palácio:

In order to achieve originality of designing Green Walls and Indigenous Graphism in the “favela” Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, the project prioritizes the quality and relevance of the knowledge it brings to the inhabitants by generating social-economic value to its resulting products.

New Codifications of Democratic Public Spaces in the “Favela” Morro do Palácio:

Revitalization of “Beco da Paz” at Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, regaining its place as an active space for exchanges and meetings. There occurred a transcultural dialogue with collective discussions that preceded the project and had determined the main activities suggested by the inhabitants of this community.

Concrete Space | Context:

Creation of a VOCABULARY OF EQUIPMENT IN THE EMPTINESS of Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro with the capacity of absorbing diversity. Previously considered as the background, the new space became front in relation to the environment created with the provision of the Green Wall and Indigenous Graphism at Wilma’s Bar in Peace Alley (“Beco da Paz”). The transcultural dialogue established between university professors and residents allowed houses to open balconies to the square, as the sidewalk turned a collective bed. The emptiness was delimited by self-constructions where previously existed a lack of meeting and leisure areas.

Trading | Opening:

Adding natural equipment (Green Walls, Community Gardens and Prototypes of Bioclimatic Architecture) capable of activating the emptiness of Peace Alley (“Beco da Paz”), based on uses suggested by residents of the nearby environment.

The methodology of Urban Design in the “Favela” Morro do Palácio, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro ultimately includes the creation of a VOCABULARY OF EQUIPMENT IN THE EMPTINESS at Peace Alley (“Beco da Paz”) with the capacity of absorbing diversity by establishing experimental production of prototypes designed by architects, in collaboration with joint partners and local builders.

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