

## **Art and Industrial Heritage: Reuse and Regeneration in Rio de Janeiro's Old Docklands**

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### **Abstract**

**This paper emphasizes the practice of cultural heritage regeneration attentive to diversity and mixtures of cultures and the interrelationships with urban and cultural policies in a historic neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, where deactivated industrial warehouses have been vacant for decades although still reflecting the activities of the old docklands and its social activities. In search of social diversity and the mixture between diverse cultures in one of the oldest regions of Rio de Janeiro, this proposal aims to integrate different social classes in artistic activities produced by various ethnic groups who still live in the delimited neighborhoods. Drawing on successful experiences, such as the *Armazém da Utopia* (Utopia Warehouse), occupied by the Companhia Ensaio Aberto a few years ago, this research examines the occupation of former industrial warehouses based on the theories of Henri Lefebvre (1974) and Michel de Certeau (1980), while also grounded in Beatriz Kühl's discussions of the restoration and reuse of industrial heritage (2002). The municipality is still the owner of many listed industrial heritage buildings, which remain unoccupied, as also is the port company (Docas do Porto do Rio de Janeiro), which owns its numerous deactivated sheds. After research on the available warehouses, we recommend the restoration of six deactivated structures, proposing to reuse them with community artistic activities that return this historical heritage to local populations, thereby contributing to the cultural diversity of the region occupied by Afro-**

**descendants, Portuguese, and immigrants of different origins.**

### **Introduction**

Industrial heritage, reflecting on the remnants of industrialization, includes buildings and machinery, workshops, factories and warehouses, amongst others, as well as places where social activities related to the industry took place. In search of social diversity and the mixture between different cultures in one of the oldest regions of Rio de Janeiro, this proposal aims to integrate different social classes in artistic activities produced by diverse ethnic groups who still live in the neighborhoods of Gamboa, Saúde, and Santo Cristo. Drawing on successful experiences, such as Galpão da Utopia, occupied by the Companhia Ensaio Aberto a few years ago, this research examines the occupation of former industrial buildings based on the theories of Henri Lefebvre<sup>1</sup> and Michel de Certeau,<sup>2</sup> while also grounded in Beatriz Kühl's discussions of the restoration and reuse of industrial heritage.<sup>3</sup>

Institutionally recognized in 1978 following the creation of the International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage (TICCHI), during the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Congress for the Conservation of Industrial Monuments in Stockholm, industrial heritage is multidisciplinary. The main objective of this research was to examine the availability of this heritage in the area in question and to suggest artistic uses for it, returning these abandoned structures to the population. Transforming the area into a center of gastronomy, fashion shows, and amusement parks, as spaces of consumerism and cultural industry, was ruled out of the study, in agreement with the understanding of the concept of cultural industry as outlined in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in its definitive version in 1947.<sup>4</sup> The cultural industry, according to these authors,

has patterns that repeat with the intention of forming a common aesthetic or perception aimed at consumerism. These authors suggest alternative sources of art and cultural production that may produce aesthetic and critical effects that go beyond the standards of the cultural industry.

As a tactic to confront the harmful strategy of the ‘society of the spectacle’, ‘cultural actions’ are now being privileged - initiatives of a non-hegemonic nature, based on diverse artistic-cultural manifestations such as theater, cinema, dance, music and crafts, among others, and implemented in peripheral areas of Rio de Janeiro, resulting in a “greater concern for social development on a local scale. [...] Such processes of resistance through culture have occurred in the search for a full sense of belonging to the community.”<sup>5</sup> After research on the available industrial heritage in the delimited neighborhoods, we recommend the restoration of six deactivated buildings, proposing to reuse them with less spectacular artistic and cultural activities that return this historical heritage to local populations, thereby contributing to the cultural diversity of the region occupied in different temporalities by Afro-descendants, Portuguese, and immigrants of different origins.

It is a fact that cultural equipment created for the entertainment industry and to strengthen the image of power contributes to increase segregation processes and social, political, spatial and territorial exclusion. Despite the shrinking frontiers of liquid modernity identified by Zygmunt Bauman,<sup>6</sup> invisible barriers are created for lower-income populations who can hardly afford such equipment.

Museums and cultural centers designed by star-system architects have been installed in Rio de Janeiro's neighborhoods or urban centers as one of the expressions of City Marketing adopted by late capitalism without any consultation with resident populations, in the service of capital. Such high-impact cultural facilities generally do not encourage the participation of residents, as they are explicitly intended for elites. Nor does simply transforming cultural heritage into a museum guarantee its use by residents, an argument that we have advocated for decades.

As a form of resistance and an alternative to the commodification of culture, some theatrical groups and their visionary directors have sought to fill urban voids as an effort to

exercise citizenship. Often, those so-called ‘opaque’ and peripheral areas produce a spontaneous culture by involving communities in their projects and thus avoiding segregation.

With new technologies and the displacement of the port and industrial activities, a large part of the resident population in the Docklands area has been shifting to the new centralities created in neighborhoods and, as a result, many ‘sobrados’<sup>7</sup> and several industrial structures have been left vacant, generating a loss of valuable real estate. Nevertheless, they still constitute the living history of the Docklands where the first huge warehouse was built by the negro engineer André Rebouças (1871) and many other warehouses were added after the port landfill under the administration of Mayor Pereira Passos (1903-1906). Indeed, some of the properties are listed as industrial heritage. The municipality is still the owner of many buildings, which remain unoccupied, as also is the port company (Docas do Porto do Rio de Janeiro), which owns its numerous deactivated sheds (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Warehouses at Avenida Rodrigues Alves on the waterfront.

<https://infograficos.oglobo.globo.com/rio/os-armazens-da-zona-portuaria.html>

### Some industrial heritage studies and well-succeeded cases

In Brazil, few researchers work with the study of industrial heritage. Among those who do are Beatriz Kühl,<sup>8</sup> Angela Rodrigues,<sup>9</sup> and Andrea Sampaio.<sup>10</sup> In the article “Industrial heritage: some open questions,” Kühl addresses the definitions related to industrial archeology and industrial heritage and their implications from a theoretical-methodological point of view in

shaping an interdisciplinary thematic field. Kühl did research on the preservation and restoration of industrial heritage, emphasizing ensembles of architectural and documentary interest, mostly located in the central areas of the city of São Paulo, which helps confuse priorities: practical issues (such the transformation of use of these buildings) or economic issues (dictated by the pressures of the real estate market) that eventually remove the important content for the memory of the urban worker. This conceptual gap seems to be filled through the broad definition of the term industrial heritage offered by the Dublin Principle (ICOMOS, 2011) in recognizing the importance of preserving the material legacy associated with its intangible dimension.

Other consistent research on industrial heritage includes Angela Rodrigues' dissertation on industrial heritage for industrial use in the city of São Paulo, "focusing on three case studies and differences in value judgment between owners and heritage organisms," and the work of Andrea Sampaio from Universidade Federal Fluminense, whose article discusses Rio's industrial heritage considering urban legislation. None of these studies focused on the artistic and cultural appropriation of industrial heritage, as occurs with the cession of use of *Armazém da Utopia* (Utopia Warehouse) to the theater group Companhia Ensaio Aberto, a well-succeeded experience that has been proposed as a pilot study for this research (Figure 2)

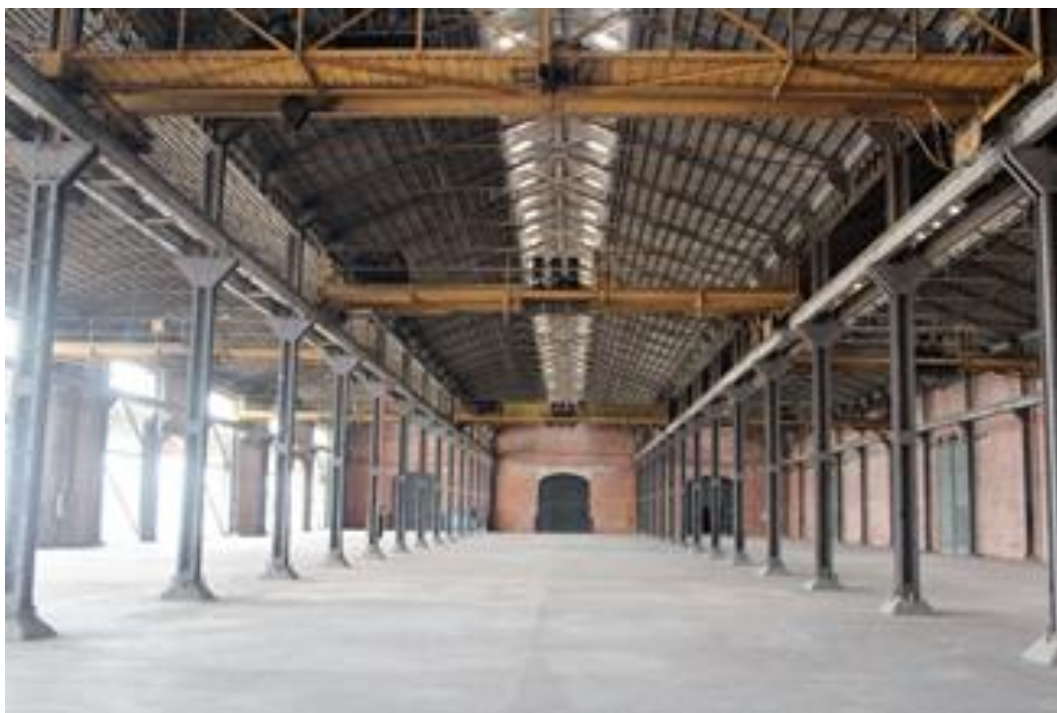


Figure 2. Interior of the *Armazém da Utopia* (Utopia Warehouse). @ Natalia Gadiolli, 2019.

Occupying large properties with socio-cultural activities is adequate, if this is in accordance with the wishes of the communities that inhabit or work in areas adjacent to the properties being regenerated. This occurred in the successful re-occupation of the Custard Factory (Pudding Factory) which is today Birmingham's most creative neighborhood. Built over 100 years ago along the Rea River, the factory employed 1,000 working people at its peak, but by the 1980s it had lost its economic importance and went into decline. In

1989, a private entrepreneur - driven by social ideals - started the Custard Factory Quarter regeneration process, which continued until 2011. After the conservation works, the entrepreneur announced that he would rent studios to Birmingham's talented young people who wanted to settle there. About 500 people now work in the old factory, where visual artists now live, and computer companies have established themselves. The venue also houses a theater, cafés, art galleries, and many open public spaces, as well as a

5,000-seat arena.<sup>11</sup> Artistic and cultural activities, coupled with low rents, have ensured the regeneration of the area and generated jobs for the local population (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Custard Factory - Original factory, recently regenerated.

[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6f/Devonshire\\_Works\\_Birmingham.JPG](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6f/Devonshire_Works_Birmingham.JPG)

In Rio, in the Santo Cristo district, the former Bhering Chocolate Factory has housed for fifteen years a set of visual artist workshops, among other uses. Due to the landlord's debts with the Federal government, the property was auctioned, and the tenant artists were evicted. However, in 2010, these tenants organized themselves into an association, a fact that helped them to win the fight and remain in the space they had occupied for over a decade. Recognizing the relevance of the deactivated property creative occupation, the municipal government expropriated the building to ensure the permanence of the *ateliers* that became part of the city's cultural map. However, the expropriation procedure may take a long time to end and the property's use is not yet guaranteed, but Bhering Factory went under a revitalization process induced by the community itself, which has won for itself both the management of and responsibility for the space. This example demonstrates that citizenship can really be exercised when individuals come together and organize themselves. In the socio-anthropological practices of this example, we can identify the forms of resistance called 'practiced places' through tactics to combat economic power strategies, translated by the auction of the property and the eviction action, fortunately, interrupted.<sup>12</sup> The visual artist and artisan community managed to preserve it as a 'space of representation', determined to prevent the former factory from turning into a mere 'representation of space' dictated by economic

power, as theorized by Henri Lefebvre.<sup>13</sup> (Figure 4)



Figure 4. Bhering Chocolate Factory – currently occupied by visual arts and creative industry workshops that have resisted expulsion. @ Evelyn Lima, 2012.

Another successful example of an occupation of an old industrial building in downtown Rio de Janeiro is the Galpão da Gamboa (Gamboa Shed), rented by famous Brazilian actor Marcos Nanini, who set up a theater and an art and sports center for the local population.

### Conceptual framework

In his book *Spaces of Hope*, the English geographer David Harvey focuses on the profound contradictions that exist in the urban space, in which public policies generally benefit private enterprise producing spaces for the reproduction of capital to the detriment of the disadvantaged population.<sup>14</sup> In general, urban spaces are ceded to large enterprises – the choice often made by governments interested in urban renewal to make large cities economically competitive, always ignoring local populations and the city's immaterial and material inheritance.

For the Brazilian geographer Milton Santos, space should be an inseparable set of systems of objects, whether natural or manufactured, and systems of actions, deliberate or not, which are objects, products of human action through work.<sup>15</sup> Their value in the contemporary model relies on their effectiveness, on their contribution to productivity. In this research, the materiality of industrial buildings - which had an intense meaning to docklands workers - should be reactivated and reoccupied by artistic and cultural activities, resulting in a benefit for the

city’s memory and heritage, both material and immaterial.

Recently, Rio’s old docklands have become a ‘pseudo-luminous’ area, where hegemonic actions that demand large investments in scientific and technological innovation prevail, allowing the intensification of capital flows, services, and goods. We argue that Santos’ concept of ‘luminous area’ applies to the spaces benefited by investments aimed at either profit or the affirmation of political and economic power.<sup>16</sup> These areas fall into the category of ‘representation of space’ as conceptualized by Lefebvre, as areas conceived and intellectually related to the institution of an order, and therefore linked to pre-established codes that ignore the wishes of the inhabitants.<sup>17</sup> We also discovered that long-term artistic occupations involving local populations are still very timid.

For Harvey, the right to the city is “collective power to reshape urbanization processes” through the promotion of new lifestyles and new social bonds between citizens.<sup>18</sup> Thus, as Harvey points out, “the right to the city is not

only the right to enjoy what is in the city but also the right to make it into something completely different.”<sup>19</sup> The Olympic Boulevard is indeed a tourist spot, where many investments were made to enhance the city’s image. However, numerous disused structures remain in the area. These could house groups of artists from the region or other neighborhoods, preserving the architecture and returning the urban voids to Rio’s population.

What kind of practice is currently taking place in the disabled sheds of that area? *Gastronomy Hall*, which has been occupying warehouses number 3 and 4 on August weekends since 2015 and the *Veste Rio Business Hall*, which recently held its fashion event for the sixth time in warehouses number 2, 3 and 4, are open to the great public but not intended for the local population such as warehouse number 6, currently called *Armazém da Utopia* (Utopia Warehouse), restored and occupied by a theatrical group whose productions are opened to the local residents among others (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Warehouse 6, currently the *Armazém da Utopia* (Utopia Warehouse), a theatrical company. @ Natalia Gadiolli, 2019.

### Some considerations

We argue that artistic activities developed in the urban voids allow a broadening of theater,

dance, and visual arts, permitting them reach different layers of the population, also benefiting the artists themselves. Directors and

performers - who in recent years have abandoned large theaters - help reinforce the dynamic between theater and the city. Many of these groups of actors and visual artists develop site-specific work that is critically tuned to space and place issues, seeking alternative spaces for making art. The question of eliminating illusionism and putting into discussion there - with intense participation by spectators - the economic contradictions, social dramas, and oppressions typical of a class-structured society dates back to the modern theater proposed by Bertolt Brecht, but in contemporary times other spaces in the city have taken on a fundamental role in ensuring stage-audience interrelation and the enjoyment of works of art in general.

To face the fragmentation of life in the community, in which individual self-affirmation prevails to the detriment of the collective in a world increasingly focused on consumption, we believe that art will become one of the possibilities for developing an active sense of citizenship. Recently, theater and performance have been shown to be an effective means in this dialogue with the city. The challenge for those concerned with a socially engaged theater is to open the way between the impasses of contemporary capitalism through cultural practices in the city space to ensure the exercise of citizenship. In the project the following disused industrial structures were identified for possible use by theatrical groups: 303, 241, and 509 Rodrigues Alves Avenue, 70/74 and 148, Santo Cristo Street, and 120, Gamboa Street, suggesting an intense consultation of the vacant industrial heritage suitable for occupation by theatrical groups or groups of visual artists.

## Endnotes

1. Henri Lefebvre. *La production de l'espace*. Paris: Anthropos, 1974.
2. Michel de Certeau. *A Invenção do cotidiano: 1. Artes de fazer*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1994[1980].

3. Beatriz Kühn. "Patrimônio industrial: algumas questões em aberto". *Arq.urb* Arquitetura e Urbanismo, 3, 2002.
4. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. *Dialética do Esclarecimento*. Fragmentos Filosóficos. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1985 [1947].
5. Claudia Seldin. *Imagens urbanas e resistências: das capitais de cultura às cidades criativas*. Rio de Janeiro: Rio Books, 2017, 16.
6. Cf. Zigmunt Bauman. *Modernidade líquida*. Rio de Janeiro, Zahar, 2001.
7. A *sobrado* is a type of building consisting of two or more floors and with a relatively large built area.
8. Beatriz Kühn. *Op. Cit.*, 2002, 3.
9. Angela Rodrigues. Estudo sobre o patrimônio industrial de uso fabril na cidade de São Paulo. Master Dissertation / FAU-USP, 2011.
10. Andrea Sampaio. "Vazios urbanos e patrimônio industrial". In: Andrea Borde (org.) *Vazios Urbanos*, Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 2012, 142-165.
11. See the entrepreneur's interview in: <http://www.englishheritage.org.uk/content/imported-docs/a-e/custard-factory-birmingham.pdf>. Accessed in Jul.7, 2018.
12. Michel de Certeau. *A Invenção do cotidiano*. 1994[1980].
13. Henri Lefebvre. *La production de l'espace*, 1974.
14. David Harvey. *Espaços de esperança*. 3ª Edição. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2004[2000].
15. Milton Santos. *Por uma outra globalização: do pensamento único à consciência universal*. São Paulo: Record, 2000, 46.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Henri Lefebvre. *La production de l'espace*, 1974.
18. David Harvey. *Espaços de esperança.*, 2004[2000], 218.
19. *Ibid.*