

Presentation

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Memory and Cultural Heritage in São Paulo: multiple dimensions of a relationship in transformation

A memory vector, the cultural heritage, after the Second World War, mainly since the 1980s, has been a field in continuous and rapid transformation due to changes, especially in the way memory – together with history - have been understood and faced.

Since the end of that war, the so-called “crisis of modernity”, as we know it today, is the heir of an impasse situation, characterized by multiple questions about the social, economic and cultural conditions that modernity, and its fundamental concepts – “constant progress”, “dominant reason”, “neutral technique”, mechanicism, among others –, presented to the world, whether on the capitalist or socialist side. The movement against the Vietnam War, the Prague Spring, May 1968 were undisputed events of a worldwide change of attitude, questioning the values that

modernity (or at least a certain kind of modernity) was trying to impose on humanity.

However, instead of the disruption that seemed forthcoming, the so-called processes of economic globalization –resulting from the collapse of the socialist world, the end of the Cold War, the triumph of the market system and the business and economic neoliberalism that began in the 1980s – led to greater flexibility, mobility and internationalization of capital, producing the intensification of the processes of centralization and concentration of capital in a few hands. Wealth left production - and nations - to settle in the world of finance, stocks, stock exchanges, futures markets, globalized economy, offshore, tax havens, money laundering - and, from this totalizing position of the rich world simulacrum, the real world was displaced.

The speech of State disqualification as a provider of physical and institutional infrastructure or as a representative of the collective interest,

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legitimized new social forms. Neoliberal policies were sustained by the dismantling of the welfare State, the concentration of capital and income, and the unsustainable prolonged indebtedness to finance consumption, while the center of gravity of social production shifted from industry to services (deindustrialization and outsourcing).

In this context, “truth”, as a positive instance of modernity, ceased to have any value, became relativized as all other aspects of society. The “devaluation” of truth was first accompanied by relativism about truth itself, that initially began to have various interpretations (including in the field of science, post Einstein) to later, finally, end up with no value. Any tradition could be used or reused to inform about the state of society.

This change in social paradigms would inexorably influence the appropriation of memory. As one of its vectors, it is well known as the field of cultural heritage has expanded since the second half of the 20th century. More than that, the fragmentation of the contemporary world – which has replaced the compartmentalization of the modern world, as noted by Milton Santos (2000) – has been represented by Pierre Nora’s “places of memory” (1984), which well translate the fragmentation of the memory use in a world with no rituals.

The valorization of memory, that intensifies since the 1980s, is precisely related to the feeling of loss of a world whose solid foundations crumble in the air (Berman, 1982). As Halbwachs (1990) has

already revealed, society remembers memory in times of loss; an answer to the need for temporal continuity of the human being:

The advancement of communication technology and the fast pace of daily life remind the individuals the fact that they always live the same historical time, the present, and disrupt the sense of continuity previously perceived between past-present-future. Thus, we seek to overcome the rupture with the past, which originated the insecurity regarding the future, imaginary dimension of time, where the expectations prior to this one are fulfilled. (RODRIGUES, 2008, no page number)

The spread of “heritage appreciation” throughout the world over the last decades (CHOAY, 2001, p. 237) reveals precisely the moment when society is no longer what it was, but does not yet know what it will be. The loss of traditional forms of artifacts, whether architectural or urban, of the doings and knowledge that begin manifesting in the Enlightenment period, in the 18th century (TAFURI, 1985), grow bigger in the last third of the 20th century. At this time, society sought memory as a means of valuing specific cultures and recognizing various identities.

In Brazil, the Federal Constitution of 1988 well reflects this moment of expansion of the concept of cultural heritage and enhancement of the memory and identity of the various social groups, shifting the attribution of value from the state to society.

The right to memory, initially advocated in the late 1980s and 1990s, finds a complex and contradictory field of action today. If, on the one hand, heritage preservation agencies are threatened by conservative instances that seek to weaken these institutions, on the other, society resists by means of actions that claim the right to memory. More than resisting, these actions point out new paths. Paths that show the change in values that society has been giving to memory. As a lived experience, as a social practice, memory has been used to relocate old and pending cultural issues under new perspectives, such as those related to social groups less represented in official choices of cultural heritage:

Finally, from the last quarter of the last century onwards, the pragmatic character of memory dominates. From a knowledge tool to ethical criteria and a powerful weapon of claim and political action, it is now subject to a multivariate analysis of disciplines. Political practices, especially the ones related to identity, replace the knowledge function. (MENESES, 2018, p. 2)

Of a political nature, the fields of memory and cultural heritage demand caution to avoid manipulation, trivialization or even mystification of concepts and values. On the other hand, places of memory – unlike places of history (Nora, 1993) -- have played a significant role in the construction and enhancement of identity, since they constitute a representation that mobilizes certain social groups, not only through individual but also collective memory. Memory and heritage

have been used in the search for resignifications of social places.

This new dimension of memory values requires, therefore, great care in addressing these issues. The production of knowledge about memory and cultural heritage, in this situation, is fundamental for the understanding of an increasingly dynamic field that, as previously more static, was almost exclusively based on the choices of the official institutions, responsible for identifying and protecting this heritage.

It is in this context that the 26th edition of *arq.urb* Journal is inserted, thematic edition on memory and cultural heritage in São Paulo. The articles of this edition feature recent approaches that reflect the new dimensions, issues and challenges of a changing relationship such as the one that unites memory and cultural heritage in this early 21st century. The articles refer to multiple aspects of this relationship, seeking new readings on social meanings, Afro-Brazilian memory and religiosity, the natural, urban, industrial and local heritage, the perception of the resident, the issue of the surroundings of landmarked properties, as well as queries regarding pictorial representation and the construction of memory. These diverse dimensions respond to the changes highlighted herein.

An edition built from various approaches, mainly from professionals in History and Architecture and Urbanism. However, there are different views from

the technical staff from preservation agencies, to university researchers, as well as from the civil society organized in the form of a collective of professionals from diverse areas.

In these approaches, there is no separation between tangible and the intangible. Places are always unique and their meanings multiple.

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