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## RELATIONS BETWEEN FACE-TO-FACE ETHNOGRAPHY AND IMAGES FROM GOOGLE STREET VIEW: A RESEARCH INTO CRACK COCAINE USERS OF THE STREETS OF SÃO PAULO'S INNER CITY<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

**keywords**  
Itinerant territorialities; Spatial  
practices; Urban landscapes;  
Ethnography; Google Street View.

Our starting point was a fieldwork experience carried out by the Anthropology of the City Study Group (GE-

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AC-USP) members. We investigated networks of relationships, working with the idea of the so called “cracolândia” (“crackland”) as a type of itinerant territoriality, within a multifaceted context, marked by situational variations (2008-2012).

Afterwards, we have integrated ourselves into a new project – “Plataform São Paulo” – bringing together professors from the University of São Paulo. This platform led us to establish a relationship between ethnographic texts, maps and images (data from Google Street View, from 2010 to 2016) of the region of Luz neighborhood, in the central area of São Paulo, the investigated space in the initial research.

Our goal in this article is to evaluate the possibilities and limits made possible by this specific relationship between previous ethnographic practice and a posterior use of Google maps and images.

## **INTRODUCTION: OUR ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPERIENCE**

Above all, we must briefly present the main aspects of our fieldwork experience – in other words, our face-to-face ethnography, having in mind the objectives of this article. We basically sought to reconstitute several networks of relations and connections between two relatively common ways in which Luz region in downtown São Paulo is generally represented: as a *cultural neighborhood* (made possible by the creation and strengthening of various cultural institutions by the state since the mid-1980s) and as “cracolândia”, a stigma of degradation and crime resulting from the presence of many crack users in the streets of the neighborhood, including homeless men, women and children, professionals of sex etc.

Luz neighborhood is marked by high urban and social density, and includes several buildings and cultural institutions registered as heritage sites. These institutions have drawn a new influx of middle and upper class people to the old city center for the purpose of cultural consumption (Bourdieu 2007 [1979], Talhari 2016). A predominantly working class population, however, has occupied the residences, streets and city squares of the region for many decades. Luz is host to a significant number of *cortiços*<sup>2</sup>, and informal commerce, prostitution and the trafficking and consumption of crack are common in many of the region’s public spaces. This stigmatization dates back a long time and is also related to previous symbols such as the “Red Light District” known as “Boca do

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2. A *cortiço* is a type of illegally rented accommodation occupied by low income families found in Brazilian cities for many decades. *Cortiços* are typically large, dilapidated and over-crowded houses, inhabited by multiple families that share bathrooms and cooking facilities.

Lixo”, which operated there. Some of the interviewed people refer to the use of crack in the streets of Luz and the vicinity as early as the 1990s.

The polarity between *cultural neighborhood* and *cracolândia* can also be related to the opposition between the “*requalification*” (*renovation*) and *deterioration* that has been taking place since the early 1990s in downtown São Paulo, although these processes can be considered the results of other previous oppositions.

Our ethnographic practices concentrated on parts of the local population of Luz – especially shopkeepers and dwellers –, on people who commonly use the streets and on some urban services. We also focus on social actors related (often as mediators) more closely to the so called “*cracolândia*”. It is precisely on this latter context that this article focuses.

By studying this neighborhood, we inevitably developed a more systematic view of what is customarily called *cracolândia*. It is much more than a series of highly stigmatized representations given by the media, which in a certain way, are a current form of criminalizing poverty.

Our hypothesis, developed during the fieldwork, was that “*cracolândia*” could be seen as a kind of itinerant territoriality (Perlongher 1987; 2005 [1988]), characterized by many kinds of conflicts (Arantes 1996), which are located in a certain urban area. However, it may move further depending on the type of repression or intervention practiced, and the dynamics of their own internal relations. In this sense, this study is similar to, but also different from that that was carried out by Bourgois (2003; 1997 [1989]), which basically focused on agents connected mainly to the sale of crack (*crack dealers*) at certain points of El Barrio (Hispanic Harlem, New York). Although our work also deals with people who are often identified as homeless, our focus is basically on crack users, due to their widespread presence in the streets of Luz neighborhood and their occupation of other public spaces, as well as their more visible relations with other social actors in the streets.

Our approach perhaps comes relatively closer to the concept of a psychotropic territory (Fernandes 1995), whose “main communicational feature is minimal interaction and which is structured as an interstice of space and time” (Fernandes 2000, 146). According to this author, when repression of drug trafficking is increased in a certain territory, there is generally a move to the surroundings or to neighboring districts, in which the actors involved with drugs are diluted by adjoining zones and change their interactive strategies, through the exploitation of other urban interstices (Fernandes 1995, 27-28).



Our own ethnographic relations took place most through contact with agents from an NGO (“É de Lei”), whose actions aimed at harm reduction, especially for crack users, by means of direct contact in the streets of Luz neighborhood and at a reception center.

During 2007, it was possible to establish some interactions with crack users, although marked by a certain transience, and of which we were trying to understand what was possible to describe from the great variety of situations observed. In general, it was noticed that the police action led the users to quickly leave the sidewalks where they were located, migrating to another nearby location, and finally, at varying times, returning to previous points of concentration. Some private security guards also made, to a lesser extent, some kind of action on the stay and movement of these users. Most of them consume crack on the sidewalks (several hide the practice under blankets), although there is also the use of hotels and nearby pensions, in addition to *mocós* (hiding places) in houses or abandoned buildings or sealed by the city.

During the observation between these agents and the crack users of the region, it was possible to realize some spatial shifts. On most of the field trips conducted by this NGO’s (“É de Lei”) agents, the chosen destination was Helvétia Street, where there was the largest number of users. This represented a slight change in territorial focus in relation to former routes by the region.

Between 2007 and 2008, there was a considerable increase in the number of users, especially in the region of Helvétia, as the members of “É de Lei” had foreseen. In our observations between September and October of 2008, there were occasions in which we counted as many as 200 users along this street. At the same time, there were fewer users at Princesa Isabel Square compared to the previous year.

In areas nearer to the pentagon, inside which the demolitions of 2007 took place, there was apparently a reduction in the number of crack users. But this cannot be stated definitely. For example, when we imagined that we had understood this territoriality a little better, we discovered from shopkeepers that at night there was another large gathering of users of crack who came into the streets at night at the corner of Guaianazes Street and Gusmões Street, only after local establishments closed their doors.

Certain changes in the dynamics of the spatial occupation by the crack users could also be seen, as police control increased significantly (in cars, motorcycles, horses or officers walking around in civilian clothes), forcing the users to circulate around the streets much more – even though they still maintained certain points of concentration, as observed. The interactions with users became thus more fleeting than the previous ones.

During the interactions, one more time a succession of dramatic scenes for us took place, such as a pregnant woman who consumed crack on the floor, people with serious injury or worrying physical conditions, not to mention many who had been arrested, and dozens of users who smoked at the same time, preventing any useful approximation by the harm reduction agents.

The described situation underwent some changes after the inauguration of “Ação Integrada Centro Legal” (“Integrated Action for a Legal Downtown”), in the middle of the following year (2009) at Luz district<sup>4</sup>. In a certain way, the program readopted some general principles of “Operação Limpa” (“Operation Clean Up”, 2005), whose ostensive police patrols in the area continued, though to a lesser degree, in the following years, with a series of repressive interventions undertaken during the Administration of Mayor Gilberto Kassab<sup>5</sup>. This program established certain continuity, combining police action with that of other sectors and governmental agencies. Nevertheless, people related to the use of crack and to other illegal activities remained in the region (although continually moving around the downtown area) – even after the demolition of many buildings after “Operation Clean Up”, and especially after the “Nova Luz Project” (2007) was decreed. This demanded the application of other forms of intervention in the neighborhood.

In October 2008, agents of “É de Lei” stated that they had noticed a gradual change in the way in which the government was facing the question of “cracolândia”. What had been treated before as a social problem, began to be recognized as a “health issue”, although they pointed out that this was still far from ideal, since the policy was restricted to the hospitalization of users and police action continued to be repressive.

This new way of tackling the “cracolândia problem” would appear more strongly in 2009, when local government began a new intervention at Luz neighborhood and surroundings by means of the so called “Integrated Action for a Legal Downtown” (Cursaete 23/7/2009). But this was connected as before to considerable interests in the urban sphere. In the middle of the first semester of 2009, a controversial plan of “urban concession” was approved by São Paulo’s City Council and sanctioned by the mayor on May 7, 2009. It included the expropriation of 18 blocks in the central region (about 600 properties), with participation of the private sector. At the same time, “cracolândia” began to be regarded, in the words of the mayor, as a “health problem”.

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4. Authorized by the Public Ministry, and including a joint action by the Military and Civil Polices, inspection authorities and health inspection (Folha Online 22/7/2009).

5. Gilberto Kassab was vice mayor during José Serra’s administration (PSDB-PFL, 2005-2006), taking over the City Hall in 2006 (he joined the DEM - former PFL - after March, 2007). He was elected to a four-year term in 2009.

These developments raised new questions concerning what we had been attempting to analyze regarding *cracolândia* as an itinerant territoriality, characterized by a certain mobility, and which was related to social actors within the dynamics of work, trade, housing and leisure in “degraded” areas. Previous observations had allowed us to relativize certain territorial determinations regarding a perimeter that defined the main target of repression and investment by the authorities during the last decade and where some demolitions began in 2007. However, it remained a challenge to understand the impact of new political and daily dynamics on the context after 2009.

Although it was not possible to conduct an ethnographic study of the region in question at the time of “Operation Clean Up” (May 2005), it seems to us that aspects of that situation, especially the dispersion of crack users to other downtown areas, reappeared (in new arrangements) after the “Integrated Action for a Legal Downtown” (from July 2009 onwards).<sup>6</sup> This became especially clear when the national media began to criticize the efficiency of the eradication of crack use at Luz neighborhood. It also showed the presence of user groups in other downtown areas, such as the neighborhoods of Barra Funda, Vale do Anhangabaú and Praça da República.

In January 2012, there was a new episode of systematic police repression, involving police, firefighters, helicopters, hundreds of cars, dozens of motorcycles, sniffer dogs and horses, based on the strategy, as disclosed in numerous news reports of the time, of causing “pain and suffering” to users, forcing them to seek treatment. Even in mid-January, in the midst of all these controversies, an act of protest against police violence directed to crack users and the lack of public policies for the homeless population and drug addicts was organized. It was convened by 43 civil organizations, with the participation of activists, crack users, residents, goers and traders of the region and other parts of the city, as well as journalists and photographers.

Before moving on to the analysis of the images proposed in this article, it is important to emphasize that the photos from the Google Street View system, as well as from other news sources, were selected based on questions related to our research, carried out since 2008, and to a broader context regarding the region of Luz and the city of São Paulo as a whole.

The conflicts around the uses of this region, that will be presented in four axes in the next pages, are related to a succession of events which mobilize different agendas of public policies and areas of knowledge, characterizing this place as a convergence and dispute of medical and juridical

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6. Our investigations show a series of articles regarding this theme during July, 2009.

discourses, municipal and state agendas of public security and combat of the crack use, homeless population, social movements, drug users, drug dealers and religious entities, connecting not only different agents, but also different areas of the city (Rui et al 2/11/2014, Rui and Mallart 2016).

We present below a series of events which highlight the succession of interventions directed to the region over the last ten years. This scheme, however, does not intend to present such events as isolated episodes, but seeks to evidence the chronology of these facts and the connection between these disputes and tensions that continually produce effects on the relations and, consequently, on the spatialities of the region of Luz, which will be discussed next.

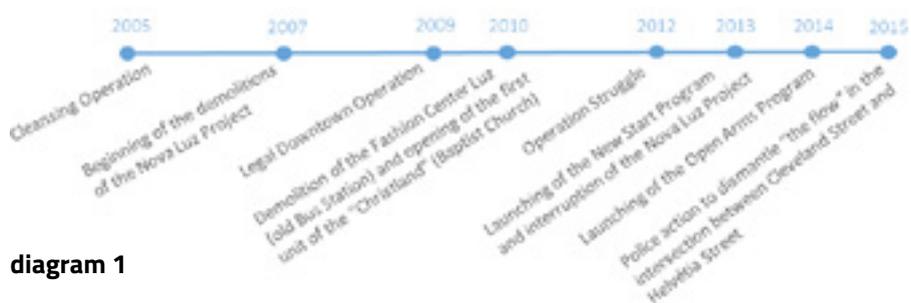


diagram 1

## OUR GOOGLE STREET VIEW INVESTIGATION<sup>7</sup>

As already said, afterwards we have integrated ourselves into a new project – “Plataforma (Platform) São Paulo” – bringing together professors allocated to University of São Paulo – from the fields of architecture and urbanism, anthropology, sociology, history and geography – counting with “two main issues that mark, recursively, their different trajectories. Firstly, the intellectual restlessness with the city, understood in its complexity” [...] “Secondly, the presence of an ever-pressing issue of how to leverage the access and dissemination of accumulated knowledge, both inside and outside the walls of the University”.<sup>8</sup>

7. The panel where this article was presented as paper (see note 1) proved to be an interesting forum for debate. It covered questions to ethnography (in its classical sense) arising from the postmodern critique of the 1990’s, basically taking into account how the observed agents themselves move, with several motivations, for multiple territories – which refers to the theme of the multi-sited ethnography established by George Marcus (1998) – or how the agents themselves make use of information and communication technologies (ICT as Skype, Facebook etc.) that inflect in the ethnographic approach of the context of research.

8. See more details at <https://patrimonioculturalnapsp.wordpress.com/2013/06/18/napsp/> (access on 30/3/2016).

Regarding our participation in this project, this proposed platform led us to establish (from 2013 on) *a relationship between ethnographic texts, maps and images* (data from Google Street View, from 2010 to 2016) of the region of Luz neighborhood, at the central area of São Paulo, the investigated space in the initial research.

In our virtual routes by “*cracolândia*” made in this second phase, we virtually circulated in the neighborhood, electing a starting point as a specific reference to this new form of observation.

We decided to focus our attention on the intersection of Dino Bueno Street with Helvetia Street – according to our fieldwork, a kind of symbolic space of a lot of social dynamics that occurs in the surrounding streets. In this sense, this place could be regarded as a kind of epicenter of a meeting between users, residents, and agents from churches and the state (police, demolition work, and institutions of social welfare).

At the same time, coincidentally, Google Street View started to make available not only images of the region, but it also began to offer them in a chronological sequence. At first, a new image replaced the previous one, but at a certain point, these images began to be available in sequence: 2010 January, 2011 February, 2014 March, July and December, and 2016 May. This allowed us to collect not only temporally subsequent urban scenes to our fieldwork, but also discover new uses of space in the following years.

Basically, this new approach to the region allowed us to explore relationships among the following topics (established by the initial ethnographic research):

#### I - USES AND MOVEMENTS IN THE STREETS, LINKED TO CRACK COCAINE USERS' CIRCULATION

Here, there is a sequence of images in a brief time interval, with the possibility of capturing certain synchronicities between them, which allows us to visually capture a modality of the aforementioned itinerant territoriality. It is important for the reader to relate sequentially the three images below, since they compose a narrative only comprehensible at the end, and which is related to the spatial practices that were observed several times during our ethnography.



**image 1 (feb. 2011)**

Dino Bueno Street with Helvetia Street: users gather on Helvetia (right) as they observe the presence of the Military Police in action at Dino Bueno (left).



**image 2 (feb. 2011)**

This image is a sequence of the previous one, and one can note in it that users moved to Dino Bueno, given the presence of the Military Police, this time in Helvetia (observe the police car in the back, in the right of Helvetia). This can be confirmed with the following image.



**image 3 (feb. 2011)**

In this new framework, one can note the presence of police officers in a police approach among garbage remains, with the low presence of crack users, that can be seen – moving the image forward in a straight direction (in the direction of Helvetia, and turning right at Dino Bueno) – occupying the streets and sidewalks, as shown in image 2.

## II - PROCESSES OF URBAN INTERVENTIONS AND DEMOLITIONS

Here, there is a sequence of images over the years, therefore with a diachronic approach, with emphasis on the proliferation of demolished, closed and banned spaces by the public power, which encourage the permanence of crack users, homeless people and, therefore, agents who provide several means of assistance.

The first four images capture the same point at Dino Bueno Street, at the intersection of Julio Prestes Square:



**image 4 (jan. 2010)**

The building above and on the left had been the main Bus Terminal in São Paulo, and then became a textile wholesale mall (Fashion Center Luz), with predominantly Korean traders. At the time of this image, it had already been closed for future demolition, due to the construction project of a Cultural Center. One can note the presence of possible crack users and of homeless people, sitting in front of the old mall entrance.



**image 5 (feb. 2011)**

This is the first image that portrays the demolition of this block. Further along, on the opposite sidewalk of the demolished block (on the right of the image), there is a group of crack users.



**image 6 (mar. 2014)**

The immediate surroundings of the demolished block no longer has the presence of users, and more to the background of the image, at the edge of the demolished block, one can note the construction of the physical structure that housed the “Projeto Recomeço” (“New Start Project”, linked to the State Government<sup>9</sup> and aimed at crack users, based on hospitalization for treatment; see Diagram 1).

On the same day, at the intersection of Dino Bueno Street and Helvetia Street, one can capture images of a large number of employees of the cleaning service (sweepers and water truck cleaning the street), police officers, professionals of “New Start Project”, as well as the absence of concentration of users, who are at the end of the intersection between Helvétia Street and Cleveland Street.



**image 7 (dec. 2014)**

This image nine months later gives a clearer dimension of the size of the two demolished areas in the so called “cracolândia” region – both the area of the old Bus Terminal (mentioned on image 4), and the block in front of Julio Prestes Square, delimited by Helvetia Street, Cleveland Street and Dino Bueno Street, which began to concentrate a large number of crack users.

9. During Geraldo Alckmin’s administration (PSDB, from 2011 to the present).



**images 8 (clockwise, dec. 2013, jan. 2014, oct. 2014 and sept. 2010)**

This is a set of images obtained in other ways than through Google Street View, in which appears what came to be called “Favelinha” (“Small slum”), with the predominance of crack users in the surroundings of this demolished block, with several spatial arrangements (with the exception of the image on the left and below, which shows an agglomeration of people within the block, before it was fenced). In the photo below, on the right, one can see the internal occupation of the block for amateur soccer games.

*Above left:* Montero, André. 17/12/2013. Governo de SP pressiona Prefeitura para fechar ‘hotéis do crack’. *Folha de São Paulo*, São Paulo (Moacyr Lopes Jr., Folhapress), <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2013/12/1386589-governo-de-sp-pressiona-prefeitura-para-fechar-hotéis-do-crack.shtml> (last access on 1/10/2016).

*Above right:* Veja. 15/1/2014. Prefeitura começa a desmontar favela na Cracolândia (Adriano Lima/Brazil Photo Press/Folhapress/VEJA), <http://veja.abril.com.br/politica/prefeitura-comeca-desmontar-favela-na-cracolandia/> (last access on 1/10/2016).

*Below left:* Trindade, Eliane e Pagnan, Rogério. 14/9/2010. Obra parada da Nova Luz, em SP, vira abrigo para centenas de usuários de crack. *Folha de São Paulo*, São Paulo (Danilo Verpa, Folhapress), <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2010/09/798513-obra-parada-da-nova-luz-em-sp-vira-abrigo-para-centenas-de-usuarios-de-crack.shtml> (last access on 1/10/2016).

*Below right:* Nogueira, Pedro Ribeiro. 8/10/2014. “Nova Luz expõe vazio de políticas urbanas pensadas de cima para baixo”. *Portal Aprendiz*, São Paulo (Comitê Popular da Copa, reprodução), <http://portal.aprendiz.uol.com.br/2014/10/08/nova-luz-expoe-vazio-de-politicas-urbanas-pensadas-de-cima-para-baixo/> (last access on 1/10/2016).

### III - ATTENDANCE AND POPULAR PRACTICES OF SPACE (CERTEAU 1980)

Although this theme allows a diachronic approach, since the popular presence in this region dates from a long time, we will focus this aspect, on this article, in a synchronic perspective, based on the images available on Google Street View.



**image 9 (feb. 2011)**

This image from Dino Bueno Street near the corner of Helvetia Street was taken in the same day of the images 1, 2 and 3. In it, one can note the presence of people playing cards, others walking on the streets, a hair salon, an used furniture store, a teamster, dogs and a woman with a stroller: a relatively common scene in a popular and residential neighborhood (on the left, there is a bus parked, linked to the informal public transportation network, given the popular memory of means of transportation in the area, even after the extinction of the Bus Terminal in the region, many years ago).



**image 10 (feb. 2011)**

Temos aqui uma variação de 45° na observação da mesma cena. A presença do crack e a tensão trazida pela presença policial não se dissipam: na calçada em frente à enfocada na imagem anterior (à direita da presente imagem), nota-se a presença de uma viatura policial e agentes realizando uma revista de três pessoas, em frente a uma casa que havia sido interdita, mas que era ocupada por usuários de crack para um consumo menos exposto da substância. Obs.: à esquerda dessa imagem, vemos a mesma mulher com o carrinho de bebê da imagem 9.

#### IV - VARIOUS GOVERNMENTAL ACTIONS, WITH DIFFERENT INTENTIONS AND SCOPES

It is important a brief contextualization of the following images. They capture a spatial concentration of crack users which came to be called “fluxo” (“flow”), (in the confluence of Cleveland Street and Helvetia Street). Despite its spatial fixation, it had this name, among other factors, because it is a space of daily convergence of a large number of people.

We have seen that, since the aforementioned demolition of the wholesale mall, a kind of “small slum” was formed in the “desertified” sidewalks of its surroundings (see images 8). In in the beginning of 2014, the City Hall created a new program of assistance aimed at crack users, called “De Braços Abertos” (“With Open Arms”),<sup>10</sup> based on harm reduction and without a repressive perspective (see Diagram 1).



#### **images 11 and 11a (jan. 2010)**

At this period, the intersection of Helvetia Street and Cleveland Street did not concentrate crack users yet, and the region presents its previous uses: a bus stop, pedestrians, residents and commercial shops on the ground floor of two residential buildings.

10. During Fernando Haddad’s administration (PT, 2013-2016).

In short, the existence henceforth of two care programs (the aforementioned “New Start Project”, of the State Government, and the “Open Arms”, of the Municipal Government) made that the already mentioned “small slum” concentrate, since then, in a space adjacent to the facilities of these programs (one close to the other), with a new phase of police control, no longer marked by constant movements, but concentrated on the vigilance of the so called “flow”.



**images 12 and 12a (mar. 2014)**

On *Google Street View* records, there is a lapse of three years between the previous record (images 11 and 11A) and the present ones (March 2014). In these images, one can note the absence of the two old residential buildings (see pictures 11 and 11A), already demolished, with the expansion of an area that is now increasingly occupied by crack users of the region, but still without the densification that would be seen months later.



**images 13 and 13A (july 2014)**

In these images four months later one can observe the densification of the occupation of this space with the arrival of more crack users, as well as the installation of a small slum inside this land (with houses and tents made with plastic garbage, wood and all sort of materials). Besides, on the left (13) one can observe the installation of a bike route, which integrates the municipal mobility plan. In picture 13A, one also can note the same space seen from another point of the street, in which other important elements to understand this context appear: pedestrians, cyclists, many carts, a minibus of the Metropolitan Civil Guard (linked to the City Hall) with the words of the project: "Crack, é possível vencer" ("Crack, it is possible to win"), as well as cones and tapes to indicate the area destined to crack consumption, which became known as the "flow".



**images 14 and 14a (dec. 2014)**

These are images taken five months later and only testify the continuity of the already presented dynamics. There are no substantial differences in comparison to the images 13 and 13a.

To conclude this part, it is important to emphasize that the displacement of the so called “flow” in May 2015 was quite conflicting and violent. The two news story below present images from the days of the removal of the tents through a police action, and one of them deals with the itinerancy of the so called “small slum” (see <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2015/05/1626034-usuarios-entram-em-confronto-com-guardas-civis-na-cracolandia-em-sp.shtml> and <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2015/05/1625271-fluxo-da-cracolandia-mudou-tres-vezes-de-lugar-desde-a-acao-da-prefeitura.shtml>, access on 30/3/2016).<sup>11</sup>

11. If there was more space, we could also use, alternatively, the images that were made available by the press, as in the case of the approach of the images number eight.

Unfortunately there were no new captures from Google Street View for 17 months (the penultimate ones date back to December 2014, as shown in pictures 14 and 14A), a methodological aspect that will be part of our final comments, hereinafter. The last image available on Google (May 2016), already shows, on the other hand, some urbanistic changes and new uses of that space too.



**image 15 (may 2016)**

## **CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT POTENTIALITIES AND LIMITS IN THE USE OF GOOGLE STREET VIEW**

### **POTENTIALITIES**

*The virtual ethnography of this research, specifically the use of a set of Google Street View images (GSV), mediated by the knowledge that was previously built by face-to-face ethnography, seems to be an useful tool, as it helps to provide more elements for the mapping of a restricted area of the city, since:*

- a.** It extends the instantaneous time of traditional ethnographic observation. As of 2010, Google Street View, according to our view, expanded its investigative possibilities, by chronologically arranging the photos from its database. Thus, it became possible to observe the same stretch of the street, square or intersection of streets over time, depending on the records made by the company, which vary considerably between districts and within the same region. In our case, the opportunity of comparing different moments of the same street expanded in a way the time of ethnographic observation, due to the access of moments that are subsequent to the conclusion of the *face-to-face* research. Therefore, this allows a monitoring, even though distant, of continuities and changes of the ethnographically observed phenomena, such as the dynamics of police presence and aspects of itinerant territoriality, based on the movements of pedestrians through the streets and sidewalks; new uses of properties that were interdicted before (interdicted buildings that became hotels, or the reformation of old

hotels); arrival of new institutions of care for crack users in previously demolished areas (“With Open Arms” and “New Start Project”); and the installation dynamics of new urban equipment.

In any case, the perspective proposed here of a diachronic approach of the images, combined with also synchronic looks,<sup>12</sup> should seek to dialogue with the set of studies that accumulate about this region, whose approaches also offer, explicitly or implicitly, a given imagetic narrative.

- b. *It allows the mapping of regions that may present some kind of momentary difficulty in terms of access for the researcher, either because of lack of accessibility or mobility, lack of security, geographical distance, among other aspects. Therefore, it may be useful to other research contexts (e.g., when it is not viable to keep regular visits to the surveyed site).*
- c. *It visually systematizes the recurrence of ethnographic reported phenomena, such as the itinerant territoriality, the demolition of buildings and houses and the police interventions. It also provides visual spatiality to the story, without being a mere illustration.*
- d. *Although the images are made by cameras attached to a car that was moving through the streets, these records partially preserve characteristics of the dislocation of an anthropologist walking on foot through the city. This is not an aerial record, from top to bottom, that is, away from the street level dynamics, the dynamics of the pedestrians, the obstacles and the unpredictability of the city itself. Therefore, it may hypothetically present a certain consonance with the ethnographic gaze.*

We must surely pay attention to the fact that the view of Google Street View is generally (but not exclusively) obtained through a vehicle – which at first would not coincide with the sight of a pedestrian. However, it also cannot be said that this is similar to a look usually captured by a driver, since it involves cameras, scanners and a GPS receiver centralized by a computer that allows to capture, process and dispose, in the end, a three-dimensionality.<sup>13</sup> It is beyond our goals to produce a deeper analysis regarding this dimension. In the future, we should think about how to critically approximate this dimension to what a corporally situated look could accomplish.<sup>14</sup>

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12. And that, by the way, always give priority the interactive ethnographic observation as a practice.

13. See details at <https://www.google.com/streetview/>, access on 27/11/2016.

14. A very initial clue would be to imagine the hybrid production of such images, in the line proposed by Latour (1994).

## LIMITS

- a. *Such remote ethnography does not replace several factors of the traditional ethnography:* although the virtual ethnography provides the aforementioned potentialities, of course that this alone does not allow the investigator to access the specificities of the urban dynamics. The observation of the streets by means of Google Street View's image bank only acquires a dense meaning if it is preceded or simultaneous to the presential ethnography. The ethnographic observation or the participant observation investigate and access the relational component of a given scenario (a component so dear to anthropology), something that the mapping of images by itself is not able to provide. The study would not have approached the four aforementioned items through a solely virtual incursion in the surveyed area; neither using secondary data, that do not gather the stories, expectations, contradictions and strategies of people who live, circulate and work there.
  
- b. Ethical limits regarding the use of unauthorized image captured by GSV, and the risk of the spectacularization of misery. During the collective research conducted by GEAC, it was chosen not to make photographic records that included crack users, for considering it (in that context) a markedly uneven relationship, and with great possibility of acquiring a sensationalist tone, related to the spectacularization of misery. "Cracolândia" is located in a symbolic and economically undervalued region of the city, which does not make it a touristic or even regarded as a safe region - although it has in its surroundings a series of important cultural institutions. It is common that the concentration of crack users exceed a hundred people, resulting in a scenario of great social vulnerability. To portrait this context of misery, a region avoided by those who do not live or usually circulate there, always seemed to us a sensible posture and close to the appealing and dehumanizing language of a number of journalistic attempts at the time. Google Street View's database has the policy of blurring the faces of people, allegedly preventing their identification, and in addition, the photos do not record people at close range. However, these characteristics of the used records do not entirely solve the ethical issues initially raised, since the risk of spectacularization remains. We understand, however, that the use of these images mediated and preceded by *face-to-face* ethnography grants them a more controlled place in the narrative, and more attentive to the dynamics resulting from the encounter between people, police forces, urban space and crack, and not only the image of crack users, isolated from the relationships in which they are inserted.

- c. *Technical limitations*: to use a database such as this presents technical limits that are difficult to be overcome, since the possibility of registration of the images, as well as its frequency, is subject to the interests of the company. Moreover, this capture of images is not performed in the same way in each and every city, neither in the same neighborhood, making it difficult or even invalidating certain continuities. In our case, the interruption in the capture of images between December 2014 and May 2016 almost represented an obstacle for the visualization of posterior urban scenes that are certainly important for the research. It even raises a reflection regarding Google's image capturing policy, which could lead to a future attempt to interview the responsible representatives of the company, where practicable, as well as the reflection concerning other alternative forms of capturing images.

## FINAL REMARKS

Although we do not intend to make any exhaustive analysis in this conclusion, it is possible to say that there are several works in the anthropology marked by a significant use of imagetic resources, as in the case of the classic *The Nuer* (Evans-Pritchard 1978 [1940]), which uses a dense series of photos, drawings, maps, and diagrams (with a strong role of geometric figures), or *Tristes Tropiques* (Lévi-Strauss 1955), which uses photos, maps and a series of drawings (some of them made by natives).<sup>15</sup>

In Brazil, despite a significant development of the visual anthropology,<sup>16</sup> maybe one could say that the approaches in the field of the anthropology of the city that deal with the image are still relatively punctual, albeit with fruitful paths, which inspire further developments. One could quote as a reference the collective work *Quando a rua vira casa* (Mello et al 1985), marked by the combination of drawings, maps, and photos, in a compound of anthropological and architectural approaches to Catumbi and Selva de Pedra neighborhoods, in Rio de Janeiro, or the multidisciplinary experiment which resulted in the work "São Paulo 450 years Expedition" (Magnani et al 2004), which through photos, maps (including satellite images) and an additional video documentary, sought to record a survey of data collected in multiple spaces, during a week (from 1/11/2004 to 1/18/2004), for what would then compose the initial collection of the Museu da Cidade de São Paulo.

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15. Regarding both works, see Geertz (2002 [1998]). For an analysis of multiple languages in social analyses, see Becker (2009). For a recent approach on "Tristes Tropiques", see Wilcken (2011). For a later work that recovers and amplifies images of São Paulo from the 1930s, see Lévi-Strauss (1996). Finally, for an approach to the pioneering visual works of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, see Samain (2004).

16. For a systematic review up to 2010, see Caiuby Novaes (2010).

It would also be worthwhile to register the book *Paisagens paulistanas* (Arantes 2000), which combines ethnographic and memorialist approaches to the city of São Paulo, in which photos and drawings play an important argumentative role on the public spaces, or the book *O tempo das ruas na São Paulo de fins do Império* (Frehse 2005), in which the author performs an ethnography of the urban past of São Paulo through the analysis of photos, maps and newspaper cartoons of the 19th century, emphasizing its central area. In this field, the most explicit contribution to a systematic dialogue between the urban and the visual anthropologies comes from the work of Eckert and Rocha (2013), mainly due to their contributions in several filmic approaches on the urban life.

The contribution of the present article aims at what may be a promising path, focused on a new field in which the images available - in the present study, since 2010 - are not produced by the anthropologist himself or by photographers, but by a technological process whose public availability would already require at least some critical follow-up.

More than this, we sought to advance in an in-depth use, articulated to the previous ethnographic practice itself - although other studies may temporarily rearrange such relation -, which allows the access to images which, in the case of the anthropology of the city, help in the unraveling of relations among the city dwellers and also between them and the city in its physical materiality (Arantes 1996; Magnani 2005; Frúgoli Jr. 2007).

**translation**

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This is a visible dimension, especially in the streets, an elementary space of urbanity, as we sought to demonstrate in this text, with emphasis on agents marked by the vulnerability in their spatial practices and conflicts of various orders, in an urban context characterized by a confluence of interventions - in the buildings and equipments, in health care services and also in the repressive practices.



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