

Amazon

The idea of “virgin forest” has a lot of fantasy into it: much of the Amazonian vegetation is the result of millennia of human intervention. Significant portions of the Amazonian soil are anthropogenic, indicating an intense and old occupation. The forest that the Europeans found when they invaded the continent was the result of the presence of human beings, not of their absence. Of course, a forest like that cannot be produced by any form of human presence. Indigenous peoples articulated with the Amazonian environment very differently than the agroindustrial complex of late capitalism. For the Amazon rainforest, a lot of Kuikuros is not the same thing as a lot of gauchos.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

Grass

Green and well kept lawns conceal contradictions of various kinds, and in spite of their inviting look, they end up replacing existing ecosystems and dramatically homogenizing the landscape. The perfect lawn heavily depends on mechanized work intensive on water and energy, and creates a costly cityscape. Estimated at 50 million square meters, the grassy area of Brasília exceeds 120 square meters per inhabitant, while international standards set 25 square meters as “excellent”. What the data do not tell is that many of the Brazilian city lawns are residual areas “carpeted” green so as to cover up the soil which would lay exposed due to the violence of road-making turned into urbanism. Wellington Cançado

Railroads

Brazil has had almost 40,000 kilometers of railway lines, carrying 100 million people a year. Today there are 29,000 kilometers left, of which only 3000 are fully used. Cars replaced trains in the country’s developmental matrix from the 60s onwards. In the late 90s, a technicist and economicist discourse of thrift and efficiency guided the privatization of the entire network. Only, trains carry today a mere 20% of total cargo in Brazil – the very same amount they carried before privatizations took place. The State assumed a debt of more than R\$8 billion, while the concessionaires bill about R\$12 billion per year, serving too few customers, mostly large producers of iron ore, grain and biofuels. Small producers and passengers were left waiting. Fernanda Regalado

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Air

Between 2000 and 2008, Brazil’s car fleet grew by almost 50% – an increase of 10 million units. Large and medium cities were filled with cars, and problems such as air pollution, excessive noise and slow traffic intensified. In 2008, most major Brazilian cities already had air pollution levels far above the recommended by the the World Health Organization. With the “Zero IPI” program (the exemption of the tax over industrialized products) for cars, more than 10 million cars were licensed in the 2009-2012 period alone. Today, air pollution kills more people in São Paulo than cigarettes or HIV and tuberculosis combined, and it generates a cost of about US\$150 million per year in health care. Inhaling the air of São Paulo for a day is equivalent to smoking two cigarettes. Roberto Andrés

Mobility

Paying for public transport at the moment of use is unfair and inefficient. It is unfair because those who pay are the least likely to afford it. A huge number of people go around on foot because they cannot afford the fare. And it is inefficient as almost 28% of the proceeds go to the charging system. The poor physical mobility of public transport users also translates into poor social mobility. With an inadequate and expensive public transport system, cars become the consumer’s dream, as they mean freedom from the nightmare which buses represent. Cars, however, strongly assault the environment and insatiably devour the urban space. As I understand it, a Fare Free system would bear radical effects on mobility, making it more rational, sustainable and fair.

Lucio Gregori

Climate

Over the past 40 years, the last great forest, head of atmospheric waters for most of the continent, has been under the relentless attack of deforestation. If the forest is removed, the continent will have considerably less evaporation than the adjacent ocean, which will determine a reversal in rain flows, creating vast deserts. Replacing the Amazon forest with pasture may increase the average temperature in 2.5°C and reduce rainfall by 25%. Some studies come to point at a 3.8°C increase in temperature. For a total deforestation scenario, researchers have forecasted a 42% reduction in rainfall. Antonio Nobre

Cars

When they speak of road traffic deaths, official rhetorics seek to avoid this way of putting it, but bluntly a car is no less than a weapon. In Brazil, traffic death rates increased by 40% between 2002 and 2012. In 2014 traffic killed more than 45,000 people. That means 3,750 deaths per month, 123 deaths per day, 5 deaths per hour, or one death every 12 minutes. We are not exactly perceived as a peaceful, non-violent country, but the number of Brazilians killed in traffic recently outweighed the number of homicide victims. That means that not even the accumulated (and far from negligible) effort of all murderers and all firearms in Brazil can kill more effectively than the daily interaction between humans beings and their vehicles over the asphalt. Paulo Brabo

Racism

The number of black people murdered in Brazil rose 20.2%, while the number of white victims of the same crime decreased 22.3%. Black and poor people are without a doubt the main victims of homicide, just as they are the most affected by lethal police brutality and illegal frisks. They are the primary target of warrantless arrests and are overrepresented in the penitentiary system. The institutional architecture of public safety, which Brazilian society inherited from the military dictatorship, remains untouched in the 25 years since the adoption of the 1988 “Citizens Constitution”. This fact hindered democratization and modernization in this field, and continues to reiterate forms of discrimination deeply rooted in our culture. Luiz Eduardo Soares

Garbage

Even though 97% of the 9 billion aluminum cans produced and discarded in Brazil are recycled, only 8% of Brazilian municipalities have collecting and recycling programs. What makes the country the largest aluminum recycler in the world is the huge informal economy operated by collectors. In the booming domestic waste market, every ton of waste is a highly profitable business, especially as municipalities have very little control of what actually goes to proper landfills. In this malodorous economy, private companies receive an average of US\$20 per ton of household waste collected. That is about the same price of a ton of sugarcane in the international market.

Wellington Cançado

Pedestrian

Public authorities in Brazil have not yet realized that walking is a means of transportation. The imaginary of a city that is good for walkers does not fit what we have: sidewalks are narrow, uneven and hindered, when they exist at all. In São Paulo, the index of falls on sidewalks reaches nine falls per thousand pedestrians every year, resulting in about 100,000 people injured per year. The lights that should regulate the often wayward pedestrian movement seem to be for athletes of speed, not for the elderly, women with screws on their backs, or obese dogs. Life, as observed by the very planners in the Modern Architecture International Congresses of the 1950s, is mainly made of these imperfections - not of athletes.

Renata Marquez

Pesticides

At least 14 pesticides are used in Brazil that are banned in several other places. Some of the substances allowed in the country are prohibited in the United States, China, Europe and many countries in Africa. In a recent survey, 29% of the food collected showed the presence of chemicals way above permitted levels, as well as substances used inappropriately and even banned in the country. Contamination levels reached over 30% in samples of beets, tomatoes, lettuce and papaya, 40% in pineapple and cabbage, and 50% in strawberries, cucumbers and grapes. Eating a conventional bell pepper in Brazil means more than an 80% chance of consuming more pesticides than permitted by national law – which is by no means very strict. Roberto Andrés

Schools

Recess time spent in the classroom is becoming a trend as a safety measure in Brazilian schools. Some of them are even adopting rotation schemes for trips to the bathroom in order to avoid conflicts. And if today less than 20% of public schools have security cameras installed (compared to 72% of private schools), that number is in full rise. In a typically Brazilian counter-civilizatory maneuver, security is privatized on the basis that the risk “out there” is imminent, although several studies indicate that ostensible security measures bring no results. (Such studies point, on the contrary, at positive effects obtained from investing in community participation in the school life). Fernanda Regalado

Rivers

One of the major rivers in South America, the São Francisco is going extinct. Salinized soils, ponds with brackish water, desertification along the river it is common to observe and trees are dying standing, prematurely. The extinction of insects prevents pollination, which means sharp reductions in the availability of fruits and seeds. The riparian forest, which harbored fish that, in turn, fed generations of people living in riverbanks, is now almost gone. Aquatic species disappeared with the construction of hydroelectric plants. Many animals were virtually exterminated by hunting, such as the armadillo, the howler monkey and the tapir. On the shores of what was once one of the most spectacular rivers in the country, fish imported from the Amazon is NOW CONSUMED. José A. de Siqueira Filho

NOTICIAS

Progress

Those who speak of “progress” are invariably those who come to places where other people and ways of life already exist. That is a word that belongs to the expropriators, nonexistent among the Maxakali people and perhaps among Amerindian peoples as a whole. Progress has always been perceived by the Maxakali as the imposition of a belligerent power greater than their own. The whites, who believe in progress, are those who hold firearms and know how to make them. They are known as a cannibal beast: they do not wait, do not talk, and “attack right away.” As the Maxakali do not long for the forms of sociability that operate among whites, they are careful not to empty their worlds and not to lose the bonds they built with the multitude of living beings.

Rosângela de Tugny

PAESSEL

Prisons

Governed by the detainees themselves, the prisoners at APAC, organizes everything that happens in prison. By delegating tasks and supervising their implementation, they are responsible for organizing the schedules of different activities, workshops and talks, as well as for cleaning, maintaining, and controlling key access to the entire building, including their own cells. The internees lock themselves in at 22:00, while from the outside of the cells one of them keeps all the keys, looking after the whole group. Strangely enough, just as the experience of APAC advances, laying foundations for great changes in Brazilian prisons, we are faced with strong pressure by the privatized prisons, in which internees are submitted to a radical routine of humiliation, destruction of individualities and burying of subjectivities.

Flavio Agostini

Belo Monte

The city of Altamira holds the most active social movements of the Amazon. Settlers, who arrived with the construction of the Transamazônica road and managed to survive the deceptive propaganda of the military dictatorship, had already joined forces with the traditional local peoples, indigenous and riparian, against ranchers and loggers. They all realized that the decision about building Belo Monte was already taken and that they would not be heard – as is required by the Constitution of Brazil. When they heard that the dam would be built anyway they felt cheated. A Kaiapó Benajoro (great leader) told me something I will never forget: “this dam kills the river, and by killing the river, it kill us too. So we will die fighting”.

Felício Pontes Jr.

FUTURO