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Reducing Boundaries

Understanding exclusion through security defensive systems in wealthy urban areas

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Different societies produce different strategies and interventions for securing private and public spaces, which range from spatial segregation (e.g. gated communities) to the control of accesses, use of road bollards, installation of closed-circuit television system, and other techniques of crime prevention through environmental design. Given the worldwide growing economic gap between the lower and the upper classes, human sciences have kept focusing their attention on class differences and its consequences. However, they have mainly concentrated their analysis on how the poor and the low-middle classes inhabit the space or might be evicted from it.

Our research aims instead at highlighting how a sense of 'safety' and 'security' is perceived and reproduced by upper-classes classes and how it modifies the urban territory. On the one hand, we intend to detect eventual prejudices in the perception of risk and safety and on the other hand we aim to make specific urban trends 'recognizable' and 'manageable' by local institutions.

The research group will thus concentrate on specific gentrified areas of Brussels, Porto Alegre, Veneto region and analyse the adopted environmental strategies which, in turn, supposedly increased the perception of safety or eventually diminished social anxiety in relation to crime. Through a multidisciplinary approach we aim at focusing on the different strategies (from material to immaterial) of appropriation and defence of space that the higher classes have developed in order to create a secure, comfortable environment for them, their families and businesses. In order to do this, the research aims at highlighting how a sense of 'safety' and 'security' is perceived and reproduced by these classes and how it modifies the urban territory. The final objective is to understand if a sense of safety and security can be produced with other means than building physical obstacles and barriers that result in a highly divided city.

Within the project I focused on the politics of representations implied within the urban security framework produced by specific stakeholders – and for specific clients – in the city of Porto Alegre. First the research focused on a methodological problem: who are the wealthy classes in Porto Alegre and how do they relate to the urban security issues. Then the investigation moved to the analysis of private homes and dwelling as the model of security. Within this context, advertising materials and visual devices produced by stakeholders in the real estate market have been analyzed in order to reveal the rhetorical strategies implied in the imaginary of exclusivity. In other words the imaginary of exclusivity, which serves as the backdrop for the upper classes' routine and lifestyle, cannot leave aside exclusion and isolation. These visual designed devices operates thus a veritable symbolic reworking, which is able to transform the reclusion and the isolation into the very image of prosperity and wealth within which the rich and prosperous people of Porto Alegre confine themselves.

From a practical point of view I've produced two chapter for two different books:

– "Rendered Visions of Security. Exclusion and exclusivity in real estate advertising", in E. Bonini Lessing, F. Vanin, D. Achutti, Reducing Boundaries. Understanding exclusion through security defensive systems in wealthy urban areas, Mimesis International, Milano, 2017, 172-180. ISBN: 9788869771187;

– "Rendering security. Imaginaries of exclusivity and exclusion in Porto Alegre", in E. Bonini Lessing, Urban Safety and Security, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2015, 37-48. ISBN: 9788891727008

The description of wealth and security, doesn't rely solely on quantitative parameters; it has to resort to the analysis of the model of life – and of the luxury imaginary that this carries with itself. This means examining the persuasive and communicative strategies by means of which concepts like wealth or security are represented and spread. What enables to describe the effective presence of a prosperous and wealthy social class in Porto Alegre are therefore the representations, the narrations and the discourses produced and spread in order to defend one's own status, commodities and lifestyle. In this respect to analyse how the wealthiest classes of Porto Alegre perceive and reproduce an idea of security means also examining and describing their model of life, the elitist imaginary that these people configure as a model – and try to protect against the danger represented by urban criminality.

The imaginary of exclusivity is primarily expressed by home-ownership. The major urban security industries – the construction industry, the property market and all the services of installation and maintenance of security devices – developed themselves around this product. The research focused itself on the two main companies operating in Porto Alegre: Rossi Residencial and Goldsztein Cyrela. The building that is primarily sold by these two companies is a family apartment, located inside an apartment complex which takes the gated communities as its point of reference. The high price of these residential buildings is partially justified by the expenses incurred to build the shared spaces, while on the other side it is due to the installation of the security systems. It is not easy to demonstrate the extent to which the security standards necessary for an alto padrão house are actually effective, or to point out when they reduce themselves to marketing strategies, conceived to raise the market value per square metre of the apartments. What is nonetheless clear is the idea of security embedded in this kind of model – an idea that translates itself into the prosperous classes' self-isolation within the fortified urban areas.

Figure 1

REPRESENTATIONS OF SECURITY /
Symbolic and Cultural Exclusion

Another strategy employed is related to the cultural background that is referenced. The comfort sceneries are staged by means of elements and references which are peculiar to European culture and society, and allow to discern the extent to which the exclusivity imaginary of the Brazilian upper classes has to go through a symbolic and cultural purification process. This trend is instrumental to the process aimed at removing any bond with the territory and Brazilian history. It reflect itself in the ways, defined by exclusion and segregation, in which the locals interact with the people whose European origin is not clearly established – which come to be systematically excluded and identified with the problematic fringe, the one that brings about violence and insecurity.

ztein, advertising for Jardim Europa district.

r example is that of the bairro planejado dim Europa, built by Goldsztein. In addition to a dedicated to the first German immigrants – Parque ania – this residential neighbourhood hosts about partment blocks. Each of these gated communities a name that calls to mind an aspect of European e. The design of the residential tower Uffizi Gallerie

REPRESENTATIONS OF SECURITY /
Visual Construction of a Proper Aesthetic of Exclusivity and Exclusion

The rendering technique constitutes the peak of the image purification: these simulated images, by reason of their degree of definition and hyperreality, are by themselves symbols, ideal models of the luxury apartment. In the static images depicting the apartments the condition of reclusion is veiled by employing a perfectly diffused light, that doesn't leave any space for the shaded areas, and big glass surfaces which effectively isolate the inner (safe space) from the outer (unsafe space), ensuring nonetheless a visual contact. Rendering is the technique most suitable to represent not only the residential unit of the wealthiest Brazilians, but also the exclusivity and exclusion imaginary they take as an ideal.
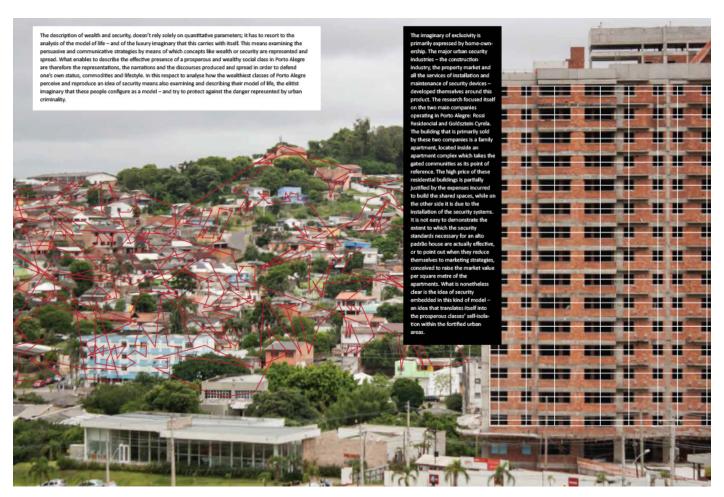
REPRESENTATIONS OF SECURITY /
Rossi DroneView

The Droneview service, provided by Rossi Residencial, summarises the essential features of the housing market's communication. Rossi Droneview is an online platform that simulates the flight of a drone across the sky over Rossi Atlàntida – a residential complex in the area of Xangrilá, located about a hundred kilometres from Porto Alegre. Using an interface that simulates the remote control environment of a drone pilot the user can watch a footage of the construction site, entirely realised by means of the rendering technique. Through the flight simulator, the application introduces itself through the graphical interface of a drone, making the user think that he can move himself as he pleases – even though it is actually not possible to deviate from the predefined trajectory. This deceit, together with a viewpoint resembling the bird's-eye view, the user – the potential customer – up to a position of absolute control. In other words the trick lies in endowing the cust with a panoptic gaze and consequently with a position of full control over the domestic environment, which guarantees i turn a sensation of safety – while actually the choice of this residential model does nothing more than segregating the pe in a highly controlled environment, guarded by the bunker architecture as well as by the monitoring activity performed b security apparatuses.

Figures 2, 3