

Log

WINTER/SPRING 2013
Observations on
architecture and the
contemporary city

46° 33' N, 15° 39' E

Maribor, Slovenia, 2069. Speculative urban-future projects typically are compelled toward the race of progress and prediction, but the central park spanning the Drava River is a paradoxically anachronistic provocation. After 57 years, the project – a simple stitch between the river's north and south banks – is fully mature, a carpet of vegetation filling in the twisting curlicues of the flesh-structure grafted onto the old city. This gesture of pure density should hope to prevail as long as the world's oldest living vine, Maribor's more than 500-year-old Žametovka, the grapes of which produce a still undrinkable sweet wine.

27

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This year promises to be a good one for architecture, in part because exhibitions on Henri Labrouste and Le Corbusier are coming to the Museum of Modern Art, and because *Log* will mark its tenth anniversary with a September conference, called *In Pursuit of Architecture*, also at MoMA. Together these events represent architectural thinking and practice across three centuries. On March 28, MoMA will stage a Labrouste symposium to explore how aspects of his 19th-century work are relevant in the 21st. One of those surely needs to be the creation of ennobling public space in the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève and the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, which opened the doors of knowledge to all French citizens, a society then in the throes of radical change.

The role of architecture in the making of cities is a subject of constant debate. This is particularly so in Berlin, which was the focus of the *Achtung Berlin* symposium at the Yale School of Architecture in mid February. Addressing an overflow audience, historian Kurt Forster spoke of his "adult love for Berlin," and how a city grows increasingly attractive as we recognize its faults. Perhaps here he meant its dark side. Certainly the Berlin of national socialism, of post-World War II destruction and occupation, and then of Cold War division, was unique in the 20th century. But as Rem Koolhaas later pointed out (via satellite), the fall in 1989 of the wall dividing a democratic government from a communist one was also the beginning of the loss of Berlin's very aura. Once the barrier between the Brandenburg Gate and the Tiergarten was toppled, two vast public spaces were reunited, and city planners went to work transforming Potsdamer Platz with corporate logos and Pariser Platz with officious national embassies. For when the people of Berlin, East and West, climbed the Berlin Wall, they also struck down ideology. Twenty-four years later, Berlin is a city seemingly striving for a populist equilibrium. As the ongoing Humboldt Forum project attests, architecture in Berlin no longer has symbolic power; rebuilding the historic baroque Berliner Stadtschloss on the site of the former GDR's glazed Palast der Republik strips Berlin not only of its divided history, but also of the possibilities of a new architectural symbol going forward.

There were no conclusions to be had at the Berlin conference, nor should there have been. Cities are perpetual works in progress, both overcoming and succumbing to the architectures and populations that constitute their being. Today the challenge is the politically correct, populist urban thinking, which, in its ambition to be all things to all people, teeters on producing a banality worse than boredom. Too often this process only leads to the usual private development of homogenized landscapes for a "heterogeneous" population, bundled into so many glazed towers and brick bungalows as to lose its differences. Is that really a city we can love? — CD



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Maribor Mutations
Postcard image: Hernan Diaz Alonso / Xefirotarch, 2012.

5. Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 6.

although the legislator makes the laws for the people, festivals make the people for the laws.”⁵ In playing themselves, they became citizens. This role is self-imposed, which is precisely what makes it attractive to governments. In Leipzig, we find resonance both with the promise of citizenship and its possible corruption by bureaucracy.

While we speculate about the actual future of the Leipzig memorial, it is important to consider the political implications of the proposed symbolic action regardless of the number of participants. Can symbolic acts of appropriation intended to celebrate reunification do justice to the memory of protesters who pursued democracy, not consumer capitalism? If one follows Žižek, the reenactment could only count as a democratic act if the *very same* protesters who took to the streets in 1989 took the stools home in 2014. But the organizers seem to want to pass on political involvement. They expect an awakening to new responsibility among people who were children or perhaps not even born at the time of the demonstrations, by inviting them to become political both at home and on the street. Demonstrations and their commemoration consist of a “mass” of people who are in fact individuals, going about their daily life in the city and at home. This is the formal analogy of the proposal: the units (of people, of pedestals), beginning as one compact and thus powerful entity, disperse. Carrying away these units and reusing them however particular actors choose is an apt spatial metaphor for the intertwining of collective power and individual wishes in the public sphere, and could change the use of space in this realm – a match between political and social revitalization. The more the space works in the present, the less it may be about the past. This does not have to be read as negative. In giving up commemoration, the memorial may come closer to the intent of the '89 demonstrations.

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Marc Angélil and Cary Siress

Cingapura: Cities in Circulation

Do planning ideas travel?¹ Indeed they do, and at an ever accelerated rate given today's integrated world economy. But much gets lost in translation in the seemingly simple act of lifting planning practices from one context and inserting them into another, as if one could readily transport a way of life irrespective of political and social differences.² Notwithstanding the divergence of cultures, a common agenda continues to motivate the mobilization of urban models, namely, to produce citizens according to an accepted notion of what it means to be modern. This, of course, assumes that modernization does “come in a single cut, pret-a-porter, as it were,” ready to be worn in any circumstance.³ The assumption that a model has universal applicability is part and parcel of a campaign to rid the world of its ills, a work of “purification” that typically misses the tangled realities of a particular place altogether.⁴ Abstraction and objectification, in theory, have served the project of modernization well, providing a remedy to clean up any situation and positioning the West as an exemplary standard to be emulated in anything from lifestyle to urban planning.

The paths followed by models in circulation, however, are more convoluted than one might expect. A case in point is Cingapura, a project initiated in the mid-1990s by the municipality of São Paulo to improve living conditions in select favelas by appropriating planning practices from Singapore for use in the Brazilian metropolis. The project has undergone many iterations, from an early phase of euphoric support to abandonment and subsequent resurrection in piecemeal form. The story of Cingapura has taken many twists and turns, clouding the modern narrative of a clear-cut economy of purification and illustrating the messy business of hybridizing cultural practices.

A glossy, promotional booklet sponsored by the government of São Paulo tells the happy side of the story, celebrating the administration's ambition to build 100,000 low-cost, five- to six-story walkup apartments in 240 targeted favelas within just a few years. The name *Cingapura*⁵ is written in bold red letters with the hurried hand of a graffiti artist, a typography that plays on the idiosyncrasies of popular culture and implies a tag left by an urban gang to mark its turf. At the same time, it

1. See John Friedmann, “Crossing Borders: Do Planning Ideas Travel?,” in *Crossing Borders: International Exchange and Planning Practices*, eds. Patsy Healey and Robert Upton (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), 313.

2. The question of what gets transported in such planning-model transfers is addressed by Jane Jacobs in “Urban Geographies I: Still Thinking Cities Relationally,” *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 3 (June 2012), 412–22.

3. Friedmann, “Crossing Borders: Do Planning Ideas Travel?,” 313.

4. For the notion of modernity and the work of purification see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10–11.

5. *Cingapura. O Encontro de São Paulo com a Cidadania*, ed. Lair Krähenbühl (São Paulo: Bix Comunicação S/C Ltda., 1996).

PROJETO CINGAPURA



FIRE IN THE FAVELA OF MOINHO, SÃO PAULO, DECEMBER 22, 2011. PHOTO: PAULO PAMPOLIN/HYPE. TOP: OFFICIAL LOGO OF PROJETO CINGAPURA.

6. Lair Krähenbühl, *Trajatória de um Profissional da Habitação* (São Paulo: Editora Pini, 2011), 72.

7. Chua Beng Huat, "Singapore as Model: Planning Innovations, Knowledge Experts," in *Wording Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2011), 49.

8. See Ananya Roy, "Postcolonial Urbanism: Speed, Hysteria, Mass Dreams," in *Wording Cities*, 331–32.

9. The term *social engineering* was used by Manuel Castells in an early study of Singapore's economic development. Manuel Castells, *The Developmental City-State in an Open World Economy: The Singapore Experience*, Working Paper 31, Berkeley Roundtable on the International Economy (Berkeley: University of California Press, February 1988), 48.

10. Janice E. Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality: Urban Poverty and Politics in Rio de Janeiro* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 199.

is cleverly designed as a corporate logo and stamped onto every building complex, advertising brochure, and neighborhood newsletter to announce the slum upgrading program.⁶ That Singapore could serve as a model for the Brazilian favelas might come as a surprise. But putting a clean, green, and rationalized island-utopia of sorts on a par with a rough, tough, and sprawling megalopolis has a clear relational logic. In the book, a centerfold with symmetrically arranged foldout pages stages the operation of transfer: on one side "Singapura" with an S, on the other, a new "Cingapura" with a C.

The pairing seems to confirm that one country's success story can be seen as a best practice worth being copied in other parts of the world. Although those responsible for the Cingapura project never actually visited the island state, they did research its founding as a modern-day nation. This act of borrowing did not go unnoticed on the other side of the world. In fact, the Singapore government is aware and quite proud of being used as a model, whether in Asia, on the Indian subcontinent, or in Latin America, as stated by Chua Beng Huat in his essay "Singapore as Model," where, with respect to *Projeto Cingapura* in São Paulo, he notes that "the humble beginnings of Singapore's national public housing program of small rental flats – befitting of its then developing economic conditions – is registered halfway around the globe from Asia."⁷ One encounters here a city model in transit across continents, a floating citation of ordered urbanism borrowed to alleviate urban problems elsewhere. This transaction takes place along a south–south route that bypasses the north, calling into question its role as normative exemplar and tracing trajectories of a new regime of exchange.⁸ Cingapura, one might say, is a Brazilian aspiration of Singaporean origin.

Such efforts to bring about an integrated citizenry according to plan, however, amount to a form of "social engineering" that all too often follows the same refrain in campaigns to eradicate the settings of poverty.⁹ When slums are "seen as the *problem* rather than the *solution*," then the most convenient fix for municipal authorities is usually outright demolition.¹⁰ Here, parallels in the histories of the two nations surface, specifically concerning how government policy in each context addressed marginalized settlements within their respective territories.

Although born of different conditions, Brazilian favelas and Singaporean kampongs shared a common fate. In each case, fire played a strategic role in urban redevelopment. For example, the burning of the unauthorized squatter community

AERIAL VIEW OF CINGAPURA HOUSING PROJECTS, SÃO PAULO, 2012. PHOTO: FERNANDO STANKUNS & FABIO KNOLL.



Bukit Ho Swee in 1961, the greatest fire in Singapore's history, finds its equivalent in the 1969 blaze that destroyed the Brazilian slum of Praia do Pinto in Rio de Janeiro.¹¹ The origin of the fires in both instances remains unknown: was it government-led arson or merely the unfortunate result of hazardous, ad hoc living conditions? Regardless of who or what was to blame, the fires not only eliminated the purported menace of shantytowns and cleared prime property for private ventures and public works, they also facilitated the mass relocation of slum dwellers into newly built tenement projects. In the process, long-established social ties that shaped communal life in the city were also eliminated, replaced by a rational design of social order imposed from above. Whereas fires in Singapore served to clear literally all slumlike conditions in a short period of time, they have only begun to play a role in São Paulo, including a wave of suspicious incidents beginning in 2002 and continuing almost every year, with more than 100 reported cases of fire in favelas between 2011 and 2012.¹² Given these statistics, and with real-estate values increasing in direct relation to the burning of informal settlements, one could argue that today gentrification by arson is fast becoming the standard practice of urban redevelopment in São Paulo.¹³

As founding father Lee Kuan Yew proudly proclaims in his history of the city-state, Singapore has successfully erased any signs of poverty and upgraded itself "from Third World to First."¹⁴ Slum eradication here was part of a total plan to reinvent the nation according to top-down planning and policy-making under single-party rule – the People's Action Party (PAP) – which, mindful of its achievements and corruption-free reputation, continues to prioritize economic growth imperatives above all others. Key to this plan is the

11. For a more specific treatment of the Rio fire, see Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality*, 206–11.

12. See Raquel Rolnik, "Incêndios em favelas de São Paulo: está mais do que na hora de prevenir e investigar," published on her blog, September 6, 2012, www.raquelrolnik.wordpress.com. Using crowdsourced research, Patrícia Cornils and a group of local citizens are mapping blazes in São Paulo's favelas at a site called "Fogo no Barraco" (Shanty on Fire), revealing increases in land value near fire incidents.

13. One explanation for the relatively late spate of fires in São Paulo in comparison to those in Rio de Janeiro is that favelas in the former were initially situated at the periphery of the city and not in the center as with the latter, thus presenting less of an obstacle to real-estate development.

14. Lee Kuan Yew, *From Third World to First. The Singapore Story: 1965–2000* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).



DIAGRAM OF SINGAPORE RING CONCEPT, 1971.

Housing and Development Board (HDB), established in 1961 to construct high-density neighborhoods with high-rise apartments, schools, community centers, grocery stores, and medical facilities, all connected by efficient public transportation networks. Moreover, public housing was directly tied to the country's growing industrialization, with manufacturing plants built in close proximity to the new domestic pool of cheap labor – a clever setup that also attracted foreign industries seeking more profitable modes of operation in Southeast Asia. In addition, an ingenious homeownership program links property to party, with monthly mortgage payments made to a state-sponsored financial institution, the Central Provident Fund (CPF), which oversees various accounts for Singaporean citizens. Among them is a savings plan for housing. In lieu of entitlement benefits, money is invested by citizens in an apartment, thus, by default, one's home becomes one's pension plan.¹⁵ Success in this case results from prudent disciplining of the socius and its habitat, a mode of governance from above that results not only in a well-tuned civic machine, but also guarantees a happily complacent status quo, kept in place under the patronage of the ruling party's "soft authoritarianism."¹⁶

As Singapore's population was tamed, so too was its territory. With the erasure of building stock by either demolition or fire and thus erasure of history in general, plans were drawn to reorganize the space of the entire city-state. With technical assistance from the United Nations and international planning experts in the early 1960s, the Concept Plan of Singapore was drafted.¹⁷ Upon a fresh "tabula rasa," new towns were plotted along a ring of infrastructure that circumscribed the island, with a quilt of green completing the garden city landscape.¹⁸ Here too foreign planning ideas – whether pertaining to the concepts of urban renewal, Ring Cities, New Towns, or the Ville Radieuse – were imported to steer national modernization. This knowledge transfer further propelled the stellar metamorphosis of a meager, colonial enclave into a shiny, state-of-the-art world city – an urban Cinderella story that has since turned perfection into a brand. No wonder Singapore is viewed by other nations with envy and considered a prime prototype for emulation, an ideal source for readymade solutions, though without any guarantee of success in other contexts.

One could say that Singapore once had a São Paulo-like condition that the island-nation managed to overcome. But São Paulo's bid to install the Singapore model on its home turf has proved more difficult, for the picture is undoubtedly messier

15. Stephen McCarthy, *The Political Theory of Tyranny in Singapore and Burma* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

16. See Rem Koolhaas, "Singapore Songlines: Portrait of a Potemkin Metropolis ... or Thirty Years of Tabula Rasa," in *S, M, L, XL*, eds. O.M.A., Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), 1009–89.

17. The Concept Plan was published in 1971 and was informed by the earlier work of a UN mission to Singapore led by three experts, the American Charles Abrams, the Japanese Susumu Kobe, and the German Otto Koenigsberger. See their report *Growth and Urban Renewal in Singapore* (New York: UN Programme of Technical Assistance, 1963).

18. Chua, "Singapore as Model," 44.



HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD ESTATE GHIM MOH, CONSTRUCTED IN THE EARLY 1970S AND RETROFITTED IN THE 1990S, SINGAPORE, 2011. TOP: HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD ESTATE GHIM MOH, SINGAPORE, 2011. PHOTOS: CARY SIRESS.

19. Krähenbühl, *Trajectoria de um Profissional da Habitação*, 65.

20. *Projeto Cingapura* was part of a more widespread campaign to densify existing slum areas under "The Favela Verticalization Programme for the Municipality of São Paulo" (PROVER). Krähenbühl, *Cingapura*, 45.

here. Reform-minded policies in Brazil have been subject to countless revisions due to successive national regime changes, from a military dictatorship to democratically elected governments and a slew of political parties, each jockeying for power. Every mistake possible has been made in dealing with the urban poor. Eviction and demolition was repeated in case after case, with little foresight given to long-term consequences. Planning measures were fragmented at best, producing isolated patches of quick fixes that ultimately exacerbated the dilemma of physical and social living conditions. Faced with a desperate situation, a new model was needed, and the Cingapura project was introduced to amend previously failed remedies.

With his election as mayor of São Paulo in 1992, right-wing candidate Paulo Maluf sought a proving ground for his political prowess in large-scale urban renewal. *Projeto Cingapura* was launched soon thereafter to boost the building industry and score points for the administration by addressing the issue of poverty. Singapore's success story had attracted those in charge of drafting the program, specifically Maluf's Secretary for Housing Lair Krähenbühl, who provides a detailed inventory of the knowledge mined from Singapore in the *Cingapura* booklet as well as in his own account, *Trajectoria de um Profissional da Habitação* (Trajectories of a Housing Professional).¹⁹

Having learned lessons from Brazil's past, Krähenbühl and his team adapted the Singapore model to local conditions, at least in principle. Rather than pursue mass evictions as an off-the-shelf response to the slum problem, this new program proposed to keep communities in place by providing provisional, on-site shelter during new construction. Large tracts of housing blocks were literally inserted into favelas as part of a broader "verticalization plan" to improve and densify such areas throughout the city.²⁰ In addition to an elaborate financial scheme designed to make units affordable, a social program was implemented to monitor the renewal process and offer guidance on how to live in new vertical neighborhoods. As suggested by the *Cingapura* booklet's subtitle, *An Encounter of São Paulo with Citizenship*, slum dwellers were now viewed as citizens to be integrated into the greater social fabric of the city, and would presumably no longer be marginalized and invisible.

To do this required money. Prior to the Cingapura project, funding for slum clearance and new housing was provided by the Banco Nacional da Habitação (BNH), founded just after the 1964 military coup in Brazil. With BNH firmly in its grip, the new dictatorship had "the power, centralization, and resources to implement full-scale eradication" of squatter



REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SÃO PAULO MUNICIPALITY MEET WITH PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON (LEFT) AT THE WHITE HOUSE TO ENDORSE US SUPPORT OF THE CINGAPURA PROJECT, WASHINGTON, DC, 1996. PHOTO COURTESY LAIR KRÄHENBÜHL.

settlements and to “direct, discipline, and control the financing of a housing system aimed at promoting homeownership.”²¹ BNH itself was bankrolled by mandatory savings deducted from salaries, which could be withdrawn only for the purchase of a BNH house or flat. With vast assets at its disposal and with additional funds flowing in from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), BNH grew to be one of the most powerful forces in the Brazilian economy for years to come. The elimination of favelas became an institutionalized practice, freeing up prized land in city centers for development through mass evictions of the urban poor, who were subsequently relocated to cities’ outskirts. Those in power also relied on experts in planning and construction from the US and Europe to help build affordable housing. While this history of Brazil’s efforts to modernize might have parallels with Singapore, in Brazil a more brutal and cursory approach was taken by the military regime to revamp the country. Feared and viewed with disdain, the slums were hastily cleared and the poor relocated en masse. Those displaced were cut off from their workplaces and could barely afford to commute. Many lost their jobs and defaulted on their mortgages.²² Throw bad construction, the tangle of bureaucracy, and corruption into the mix and you have a recipe for disaster.

The end of the dictatorship in the mid-1980s was also the end of the National Housing Bank, which by then was primarily serving the wealthy rather than the needy. When the Maluf administration needed new investment in the favelas in the mid-1990s, they turned to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) as provider for long-term loans. A delegation of São Paulo officials went to Washington with a plan that mirrored Singapore – providing 30,000 apartments for the resident poor in a first phase – and secured funding for Cingapura.²³ The meeting culminated in a visit to the White House and a photo op with then President Bill Clinton.

With affordability crucial to the financial scheme, a key move was to classify the population according to socioeconomic class. Local artist Dionisio González claims that Cingapura became a pretext for categorizing the poor, stating, “There was also a hidden intention of the project, that the landless, those invisible to the system, should finally be catalogued.”²⁴ Those living in favelas fell into Class E, which designated the bottom of the heap – illiterate, largely unskilled, and without means.²⁵ Acknowledging the success of both the HDB and CPF in Singapore in helping to fund low-cost housing, the Cingapura program similarly promoted the concept of homeownership

21. Perlman, 200–01.

22. Ibid., 212–23.

23. For an explanation of the five socio-economic income classes A to E, see David Smith, *Best Practices in Slum Improvement: The Case of São Paulo, Brazil*, report prepared by the Affordable Housing Institute (AHI) for the Development Innovations Group (DIG), August 2008, 9.

24. Dionisio González, “A New Suggestion of Urban Architecture through Photography,” interview by Choi Jini, *E-SPACE*, April 11, 2011, http://www.vmspace.com/eng/sub_emagazine_view.asp?category=people&idx=11224.

25. Krähenbühl, *Cingapura*, 56.



MAP OF 30 CINGAPURA HOUSING PROJECTS TARGETED FOR UPGRADE, 2011. IMAGE COURTESY SEHAB SÃO PAULO.

27. Ibid., 15.

26. See Anemona Hartocollis and Larry Rohter, “Brazilian Politician Indicted in New York in Kickback Scheme,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2007.

for Class E tenants. Condominium apartments were to be sold to local residents at an affordable price, with monthly mortgage rates set as low as possible. But to meet the demand for a balanced budget, the municipal government had to offset construction costs with revenue from property owners in order to repay the loans from IDB in Washington.

The situation looked good at the beginning, but the project went awry early on and was ultimately abandoned in 2001, less than a decade after its inception. Even though 14,000 new apartments had been built in 50 of the 240 planned locations in São Paulo, the reasons for failure were many, ranging from budget shortfalls, shoddy implementation, and inadequate living spaces to a rise in violence and loss of social cohesion in local communities. The original objective to provide provisional shelter during the building phase of new housing blocks was only partially achieved, due to lack of space and lengthy waiting periods for resettlement. Mortgages escalated due to the inflation of construction costs by a powerful lobby of building contractors, and Cingapura simply became too expensive for many of the families it was intended to help.²⁶ To make matters worse, municipal funds were diverted by public officials, including Maluf himself. Although a popular politician, he has been tainted by allegations of corruption, money laundering, and embezzlement,²⁷ prompting still unproven charges that Cingapura was part of a construction kickback scheme.

But above all, Cingapura’s success was limited because it basically imposed an unfamiliar urban model on a way of life that erased the culture and livelihood of the population it was meant to serve. Colorful facades, pitched roofs, and neatly arranged spaces might instill a sense of order, but they also amounted to a physical and social cleansing of entire communities. Inhabitants and their environments were to be tamed and more effectively controlled by their induction into a normative regulatory system. Yet favelas have proven far more resistant to erasure than anticipated, for slum-like conditions already have encroached on the sanitized model of housing blocks, literally engulfing them in a sea of low-rise shacks, signaling a reassertion of the informal.

A lesson to be learned is that the attempt to erase thriving cultures does not work, whether in the slums of São Paulo or in other cities facing similar challenges – unless, that is, you live in Singapore. The response to the favela question must come from within rather than beyond, from grassroots communities already in place rather than the other side of the planet. Instead



AERIAL VIEWS OF CINGAPURA HOUSING PROJECTS, SÃO PAULO, 2012. PHOTOS: FERNANDO STANKUNS & FABIO KNOLL.

of outright expulsion or demolition and rebuilding, the answer begins with urbanizing existing contexts as they are, building on existing social networks and physical structures that *do* work – however informal they may be – by retrofitting them in order to better integrate vulnerable communities into the urban fabric. This would involve more direct participation of local stakeholders, marking a shift from seeing the state solely as provider to recognizing residents themselves as the driving force in reconstruction. Perhaps then the favela could be understood as a resource rather than de facto problem. As John Turner argues, favelas offer “very specific solutions to the question of housing the masses, with what is normally meant to be the solution – state-sponsored mass housing – representing the real problem of urban development.”²⁸

To some extent, successive administrations have learned these lessons, having inherited the burden of an incomplete Cingapura and its destitute estates. With each municipal government seeking legitimacy for its own agenda, they had no choice but to attempt to correct previous failures by introducing ever new programs. The election of socialist Mayor Marta Suplicy in 2000, for example, marked a change in strategy toward the housing issue. After completing more than 1,000 unfinished Cingapura units, the São Paulo Municipal Housing Department (SEHAB) issued the “Bairro Legal Programme” in 2001 to assist families in constructing or upgrading their own homes. Following the “Favela-Bairro” model piloted in Rio de Janeiro, this self-help scheme was based on small-scale interventions that would have high impact for minimum cost. “Bairro Legal,” meaning both a legal and nice neighborhood, aimed to provide tenure security and improve the living conditions of low-income families in some of the most violent and socially excluded areas of the city. The undertaking lasted a mere four years, only to be shelved by the next administration.²⁹ In 2006, Mayor Gilberto Kassab was forced to readdress the derelict state of the housing projects and announced a new Cingapura upgrading program. SEHAB director Elisabete França – responsible for an ambitious range of initiatives, including the construction of favela infrastructure, land tenure regularization, institutional reforms, and the promotion of community participation – managed successful interventions in multiple locations throughout São Paulo. Cingapura sites were among those surveyed to determine what needed to be improved.³⁰ But because Kassab’s term ended in 2012, only some of the neighborhoods were actually upgraded, leaving a still unfinished legacy for yet another administration to come.

28. John Turner presented his concept of “the favela as solution” in a lecture in 1968 in Belém, Brazil. John Charles Turner, “Habitação de Baixa Renda no Brasil: Políticas atuais e oportunidades futuras,” *Arquitetura. Revista do Instituto do Arquiteto do Brasil*, no. 68 (1968), 17. Translated by Rainer Hehl.

29. See *São Paulo: A Tale of Two Cities*, UN-Habitat report published as part of the Cities and Citizens Series Bridging the Urban Divide (Nairobi: United Nations Human Settlement Programme, 2010), 91.
30. Elisabete França and Keila Prado Costa, *Plano Municipal de Habitação: a Experiência de São Paulo*, vol. 1 (São Paulo: Secretaria Municipal de Habitação, 2012), 166–77.

AERIAL VIEW OF UPGRADED CINGAPURA HOUSING PROJECTS, CITY JARAGUÁ, PIRITUBA DISTRICT, 2012. PHOTO COURTESY SEHAB SÃO PAULO.



Nonetheless, we are witness today to a nascent civic agenda, one informed by the circumstances of the favelas themselves rather than one relying on solutions from elsewhere. To venture further into the politics of poverty requires the courage to face a “molecular revolution” underway – as elaborated by Félix Guattari during his travels to Brazil from 1979 to 1992.³¹ Hinting at a transformation from below, Guattari spoke of a political vitality among people who believe they can indeed bring about change in the world. Key to this notion is the formation of active collectives that, once empowered, are strong enough to free themselves from the status quo hierarchies behind political and economic determination. Such formations must draw on the social and spatial resources of the city, including the still marginalized resource of the alleged minority itself, which remains, in fact, a neglected and ill-served majority. To recognize that favelas are not wrong per se, and to acknowledge that the formal city is deficient in its ongoing inability to integrate the poor as citizens, suggests that a more substantial reversal of perspective is required. People must become visible rather than remain in the shadows; potential needs to be identified rather than just problems; and practices that enable rather than inhibit by decree must be adopted. With such reversals, the city might not need a prototype from beyond, but rather could recognize itself as its own model for reform.

31. Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*, trans. Karel Clapshow and Brian Holmes (New York: Semiotext(e), 2008), 9.

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