



CUBAN GEOGRAPHIC REMAPPING AND INFLUENCE ON “The GAZE”

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TOURISM TROPICALIZATION & THE ARCHITECTURAL IMAGE

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Figure 1: Above are the 5 Boroughs of New York City, New York

GEOGRAPHIC REMAPPING

To start off, defining some important terms is crucial to the understanding of the topic. What is “Geographic remapping”? Geographic remapping is in essence the physical rearranging of an area in a city or town. However, geographic mapping can be applied to other concepts such as tourism. Geographic remapping, as so known as “Tourism remapping” is providing guidance to the tourists in an area to help identify and find the best tourism spots in that specific area. This concept of tourism remapping is in essence an innocent idea to help make the tourism industry grow and to in addition to this help improve the experience of tourists by providing them with efficient ways to navigate in an area they are not familiar with. Some more subtle examples of these are New York City and its 5 different boroughs. New York is separated into Brooklyn, Staten Island, Manhattan, Nassau, and Queens, and the Bronx. Although the 5 different boroughs were not made directly for tourists, it does help show how one city/place could divide up a city to help organize the different areas for travelers. This was not the case as geographic remapping turned into something that hurts the tourist more than it does good as it leads to a lack of information or misleading the tourist and unfortunately many well known tourist destinations are implementing this negative geographic remapping into their city planning. Because of this, many factors like the city’s culture and architecture have changed for the worse and all to support this unhealthy habit of drawing in tourists and political agendas.

One major city to look at is Havana, Cuba and how it became the way it is now.

HAVANA, CUBA

Currently Metropolitan Habana occupies an area of 460 square miles and has a population of a little over 2 million. Home to a busy old port area to the east and the Prado, a wide tree-lined

pedestrian promenade, renovated by J. C. Nicolas Forestier in the late 1920s. The neighborhood is very dense with 1.3 square miles holding over 3,500 buildings with some of those buildings dating back to the earliest phase of Spanish Colonial rule in the 16th century. Most of the structures were built in the 18th and 19th centuries when Havana was only a very successful port. However today that has changed as about 10,000 people inhabit Habana Vieja today, while most of them are living in makeshift quarters constructed within former grand colonial palaces. These alterations have converted lorer mansions into cramped tenement-style living conditions that provide little privacy or comfort and lack proper ventilation and lighting. Hundreds of people now live in buildings that were originally designed for a single family. This has resulted in Habana Vieja being one of the most densely populated areas of the greater metropolitan region. Electricity meters located inside building entrances are the only readily available means of measuring urban density in the area. There is even black market apartment exchange that takes place at the end of the Prado because housing is so expensive. In addition to being overcrowded, most of Old Havana is in ruins where about 2/3rds of the buildings are in poor condition and mostly because many of the buildings have not been touched since the Revolution in 1959 and as a result, many of the structures are on the verge of collapsing. Some claim that there is a building collapse in the city every third day. The underground hydraulic system has not been maintained and now leaks more water than it provides and many houses lack running water entirely which is saddening concerning that in 1878 at the world Exposition in Paris it was a technical masterpiece to many. Mostly because the Castro regime has been more interested in developing social projects than investing in it’s architecture. While the built environment is in ruin, the inhabitants are healthy and social services are intact. Unlike other 20th century dictators who deployed new architecture during their term, Castro encouraged relatively little new construction. Because of this lack of interest in architecture, it was at least in part a condemnation of the bourgeois culture associated with building that prevailed in the decades leading up to the Revolution when new construction provided the primary means to flaunt social status and wealth.

The magnificent villas lining 5th Avenue in the once chie Miramar



The figures above below and across shows the state of Old Havana.



neighborhood are proof of these materialistic values; however, Castro of course did not approve of such flashy displays. He sought to reoccupy and reconfigure extant buildings rather than build new ones while suppressing existing programmatic associations that were seen as being in conflict with his revolutionary socialist agenda. For example, the luxurious Presidential Palace that was occupied by President Fulgencio Batista was transformed into the Museum of the Revolution and today the museum's exhibit chronicles the victories of Fidel, Ché, and their followers within the former home of the man the young revolutionaries overthrew. Thus, while Castro did dedicate some time to architecture to support his political goals, his mode of operating by recycling existing buildings was different from the architectural fashion that is shown in most Cuban leadership and as well as unique from dictators in other countries. It was not until the so-called "Special Period" which is a period of self imposed austerity in effect from 1990 to 1995 following the fall of the Soviet Union that the Castro government wanted to have a proactive stance towards architecture. This is when the government began to shape a desirable tourism product and cultivate a broad base through a complex project of both physical and ephemeral urban redefinition. The plan was to start by renovating select areas of city's environment which had fallen due to neglect during the revolution, and packing up its colonial heritage in a way that would appeal to a discerning audience. All so known as tourists. The project started in 1993 and it served as a way for the Castro government to generate income and it is praised by people outside of Cuba as an innovative historic



Above is an example of the hotels in Havana, Cuba

preservation project and Habana Vieja has become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Caribbean.

THE TALE OF TWO CITIES

One city is designed for the tourists while a second is maintained for Habaneros and in the end both geographies are controlled by the Office of the Historian. It is either through the construction of tourist sites or through financing new housing, schools, and social services. While these cities are interdependent they still depend on the revenues raised by the tourist city. However even through that, they still remain culturally distinct. This is further proved by the fact that the Habaneros and tourists use three different currencies. While it may be easier to convert between pesos and dollars, in truth the two currencies are not comparable and cause a huge problem with the currency. Combined with the fact that the country ratios specific luxury items and only have it where they are only purchasable through dollars. In other words, the new gift shops, bars, restaurants and hotels are expensive for Cubans. Also Cubans were not allowed in bars and restaurants and still remain excluded from spending the night in Habaguanex hotels even if this was something they could afford. The Cuban government gives every newly married couple a two

night honeymoon in the comfortable and familiar conditions of the “louria bubble.” but in Havana, the distinction between the cultural geography of the hotel and that which lies outside, is heightened. “Inside the hotel room the Habaguanex company has created an atmosphere that seeks to meet the needs of the discerning international traveler. The hotel rooms boast minibars, room service, and air conditioning. Habaguanex brand soap and shampoo is available in the bathroom and pencils and paper sit by the phone - items that are tightly rationed outside the hotel. (The state gives each Cuban one bar of soap and two pencils each month.) With the abundance of amenities available within the hotels it is easy to forget that outside Cubans are living under severe economic restraint outside, Within the rooms multilingual satellite televisions carry CNN, MTV, ESPN, and other networks. Ironically, tourists have every program at their disposal except for the two state-run Cuban television stations that are in turn the only station available in Cuban homes.”





Above is the former residences of Cubas dictator.

<https://www.architecturaldigest.com/gallery/beautiful-caribbean-architecture>



Above and below are posters of propaganda that surrounded the local areas of Cuba.

This just shows how the Cuban government prioritized tourist comfort moreover their own citizens and even went to the extent to make more hotels to please even more tourists. So much so they are trying to almost erase the real Cuban experience from the tourists. As stated in the reading..

“Clearly the goal is to edit out Cuban reality from the tourist experience. In fact, even Fidel is noticeably absent in Old Havana. The familiar patriotic slogans (Viva Fidel! or Hasta La Victoria Siempre!) which can be found painted on the sides of buildings or incorporated into billboard propaganda elsewhere in the city are not readily available for tourist consumption in Habana Vieja. In truth, the only reminder of the revolution visible at tourist sites takes the form of Ché Guevara paraphernalia, which, in its variety of form and material - from clay ashtrays to t-shirts - borders on kitsch. While Ché is a central figure of the Cuban Revolution, he is as much revered for his activism outside of Cuba (in Angola, Bolivia, and Mexico), his charisma, and gallant good looks. His presence in the tourist city is therefore happily accommodated and readily sought out. Fidel, on the other hand, is more problematic than useful. As a result his appearance is infrequent. Such self-abnegation is

both insidious and clever, as it is through his absence that the tourist-city is depoliticized. And it is through such depoliticization that the true nature of the realities and hardships of contemporary Cuba remain hidden from the tourist. Once such realities are suppressed, Habana becomes inherently more appealing. This is of course similar to any tourist site where an enclave “furious bubble” (Judd 1999) is constructed to distance and protect the tourist. In Habana however, the contrast between what lies within the bubble and what lies without is stark. This becomes apparent as one travels by taxi through some of the more remote neighborhoods of metropolitan Habana.”

HERITAGE VS MODERN CUBAN ARCHITECTURE

Havana sustains multiple forms of tourism and was able to construct a tourist geography for a specific clientele. Heritage tourism project does not overlap with Cero. Even people who have been living in Havana for years claim they have not seen a foreigner in years and this just confirms the intense segregation of the average tourist itinerary and it becomes even more apparent when looking at the architecture.





Above is the picture of Cuban streets in the tourist area

During the modernism era of architecture, this is when Cubans really were trying to focus a lot of their efforts and architecture to appeal to the tourist. This is when the Cuban government started to go for a more sleek and less intricate look. Lots of buildings were made out of concrete and some had cantilevers. In comparison to the heritage style of architecture that had more color, intricate designs. It implements molding on facades with metal sculptures and ornaments decorating the facade. In the tourist parts of Havana you will see more modernist architecture but in the authentic places of Havana you will see heritage style architecture. Because of the separations of Havana and isolation, it affected the gaze of the tourists who would visit these areas. Before understanding how it affected the tourist gaze we need to understand what the gaze is.



THE GAZE

Places are chosen to be gazed upon and that is due to an anticipation. Especially through daydreaming, fantasizing of intense pleasures involving different senses from those related to. The anticipation is made and maintained through a plethora of non-tourist practices. For example, things such as film, watching TV, reading a piece of literature, browsing through magazines, listening to records and watching videos. These construct and reinforce that gaze. The tourist gaze could be influenced by those methods but a lot of it is directed to features of landscape and townscape which is not the case of one's everyday experience. These aspects are attacked because they are taken to be in some sense out of the ordinary. The viewing of such tourist sights often involves different forms of social patterning, with a much greater sensitivity to visual elements of landscape or townscape than is normally found in everyday life. People often than not are mesmerized over a gaze because one thing that may seem visually normal is objectified or captured through photographs, postcards, films, models and so on to make it seem exclusive. And in turn causes the gaze to be endless, reproduced and recaptured. The gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs. For example, when tourists see two people kissing in Paris, relating to the city of Paris is a gaze of 'timeless romantic Paris'. When a small village in England is seen, what they see is the 'real olde England'. "The tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself. All over the world the unsung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of the signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behaviour, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs." (Culler)

And with this gaze they have become two different sides of Havana that not many people have seen.



As shown in the picture above shows a more clean and neat version of Havana.



As shown in the picture above shows the reality of what Cuban citizens have to live with.

In conclusion, the idealization surrounding tourism is rooted in society's gaze. The ability to appeal to an individual's gaze, allows the growth of the tourism industry. So places like Havana will continue to have separate cities that help inform/ influence "the gaze" and will hurt the locals if success is found behind it.

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