

# Lanchonete.org: Centro de São Paulo

Lanchonete.org is a site-specific artist residency program and simultaneously a cooperative restaurant aimed at the interconnected neighborhood at the center of Brazilian city São Paulo. Although Lanchonete can most easily be described as a popular restaurant, it is a lot of things: an idea, business, proposition, art project, observatory, cultural association and membership body. Last but not least, it is a visual mode of knowledge production that is nonlinear, non-expert and, thus, non-exclusive to the social financing and art worlds. Lanchonete.org aspires to be a prism through which understanding and dialog on issues, conditions, successes and failures that reflect daily life in the center of São Paulo can again gain momentum and flourish. Moreover, it aspires to be the engine for a citizen authored feedback loop with the prospect of informing urban policy-setting. Lanchonete.org is the idea of Todd Lester and was co-founded by Lorena Vicini, Isabel Gandia and Raphael Daibert; its artists include Thiago Gonçalves, Jakub Szczęsny, Leandro Viana, and others. (Todd Lester)

Todd Lester

Adham Bakry

Leandro Viana

Jakub Szczęsny

Thiago Gonçalves

Raphael Daibert

Lorena Vicini

Isabel Gandia & al.



Oscar Niemeyer's Copan Building  
(Photo David Bank)



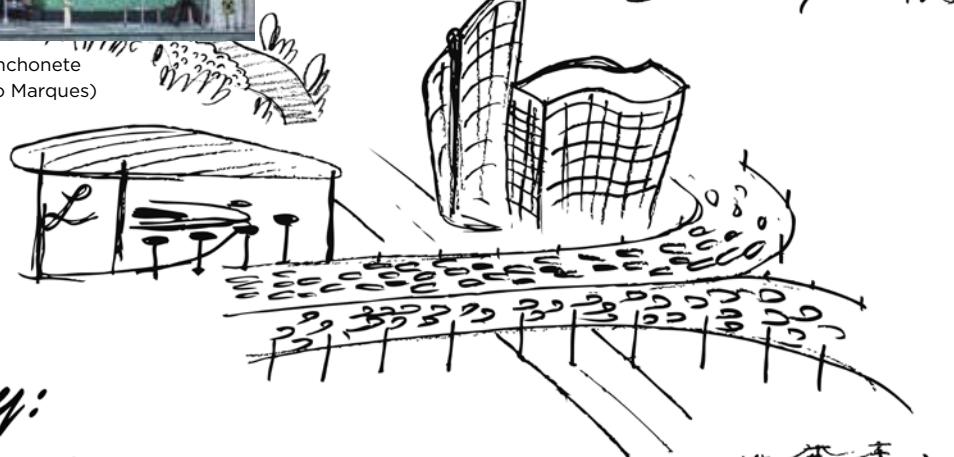
São Paulo lanchonete  
(Photo Pedro Marques)

*What:*

A LUNCH COUNTER,  
WORKER'S COOPERATIVE,  
SOAPBOX &  
SOUNDING BOARD

*Why:*

PEOPLE HAVE A  
RIGHT TO THE CITY...  
AND, THEY NEED TO EAT



Lanchonete.org: What? Why?  
Drawing by Adham Bakry

Garden in the East Zone of São Paulo  
(Photo Leandro Viana)

## **Anatomy of a Project: Lanchonete.org, 2013-2017**

Todd Lester

*A writer who wrote only the things he intended would be a very poor writer.*

(Jorge Luis Borges)

### **Introduction**

In 2005 I left the international humanitarian field after seven years of working around the world in areas of extreme poverty and conflict. I was disillusioned with a system I observed to hold national interests over systemic improvements. During that same period, I witnessed independent artists — unaffiliated to the big NGOs — doing the most courageous work in the same places yet not receiving acknowledgement, support and the resources needed to avert danger when necessary. My reaction to this phenomenon was to launch freeDimensional, an organization that provides safe haven to artists and activists in danger through a global network of participating artist residencies. To date, freeDimensional has helped over 200 artists, activists and culture workers-in-danger from all over the world.

The freeDimensional approach started a movement within the artist residency sector, asking brick-and-mortar art spaces with hosting ability (apartments, spare rooms, staff capacity, etc.) to consider using those vacancies for hosting artists in danger, artists who would not have the peace of mind to apply and wait for vacancy without an intermediary broker. While my current project, Lanchonete.org, is rather different than freeDimensional, I am again looking at how the artist residency template can be stretched to fit the needs of a specific community. Over a series of short visits and long stays in São Paulo, Brazil, since 2005, I observed that the lanchonete (lunch counter) due to its ubiquitous presence and porous, open-front or open-corner design remains a place where different economic classes (A,B,C,D,E)<sup>1</sup> share middle ground — if only to take a cafzinho and pao de queijo standing at the same counter — in an otherwise swiftly stratifying and fortifying city. Whereas freeDimensional brokered a relationship between the demographic of artists-in-distress and helpful art spaces globally, Lanchonete.org is focused on the interlocking neighborhoods that make up the Center of São Paulo and the state of housing, food and water sovereignty, and transportation as well as political agency and access to municipal resources.

Conceived over the past decade, Lanchonete.org celebrates São Paulo's ubiquitous lunch counters and their role in the life of the Center. The project invites a group of international artists to reside in — and thus develop a relationship with — the Center of São Paulo, its citizens (local artists among them), institutions, issues and patterns. Launched formally in 2013 as a research process, the project materializes into a cooperatively-owned restaurant and social business by the beginning of 2018 along with the requisite management structure — Associação Espaço Cultural Lanchonete — to assure that the restaurant and its cultural programming continue to reflect com-

munity desires and the diverse realities of people living in the center of São Paulo. While the residency component is already operational, the restaurant will open by mid-2015.

For all we know about artists in our communities and throughout history, we know that they don't march to the beat of an official drum. Thankfully, they operate 'outside the box' ... they help us imagine new ways to 'be' in a fast changing world. They inspire, they analyze, they bridge diverse groups, their alchemy can transform despair into hope and warn us when society is about to repeat a dumb mistake, thus offering us an alternative to that despair. It is with this understanding that a project focused on artists living in the center of São Paulo<sup>2</sup> — and those who the project will invite to visit — can have no guaranteed deliverables other than the prospect of turning the dial a notch from opaqueness towards transparency on issues that local people care most about. For this reason, a discussion of the values of the project (detailed in the {HOW} section) is just as important as one on the prospect of full community ownership, an ulterior motive that is only viable after the restaurant is opened and managed well during the project period. Now for the basics.

## The Basics

### {WHAT}

Lanchonete.org is a site-specific, visiting-artists program and cooperative restaurant focused on the interconnected neighborhoods of São Paulo's Centro. While Lanchonete.org can most easily be experienced, explained and summed up as a popular restaurant, it is a lot of things — an idea, inquiry, business, proposition, art, project, observatory, cultural association, membership body, and, importantly, a visual mode of knowledge production that is non-linear, non-expert, and thus non-exclusive to the social, finance and art worlds that it inhabits as a project. In the microcosm of daily life in the center of São Paulo, there is no one central issue that invites innovation, but rather the cumulative causality of capital encroachment under the guise of gentrification (as fait accompli) and the set of conditions brought about by population growth and social service needs outpacing urban planning. Lanchonete.org aspires to be a prism through which understanding and dialogue on issues, conditions, successes and failures that reflect daily life in the Center of São Paulo can gain momentum and flourish. Moreover, it aspires to be the engine for a citizen-authored feedback loop with the prospect of informing urban policy-setting, which is explained in more detail under Project Design Details.

### {WHY}

In addition to its role as a single restaurant, Lanchonete.org functions as a catalyst and space for dialogue on socioeconomic conditions in the face of diminishing public space. In so doing, the project acknowledges a cultural subscription to the lanchonete — more broadly as an urban fixture — and how cumulatively they might be seen as a field of cross-class points of consumption throughout the city. In other cities, such as New York, the market-side solution of privately-owned public space (POPS)<sup>3</sup> is being bandied about, even if it fueled the tug o' war over Zucotti Park between Occupy Wall Street protestors and local authorities. In São Paulo, however, notions of public space are different. I am often left thinking it amounts to 'control' ... that spaces are just controlled differently. I do not think the POPS notion — er, oxymoron — is

as viable in a city like São Paulo where the de jure (urban planning) and de facto (popular usage) demarcations of public space are nonconforming. I surmise that the usage of space in São Paulo is a negotiation between people and business with the municipal government often playing catch-up, which is evidenced by struggles such as the aforementioned injunction against Ricardo Fraga Oliveira and the Movement for the Other Side of the Wall.

#### {WHEN}

Lanchonete.org lasts five years, from 2013 through 2017. The first years, 2013 and 2014, are administrative, research and awareness and fundraising years. The restaurant opens by mid-2015, and a series of eight four-month program periods commences in May 2015.

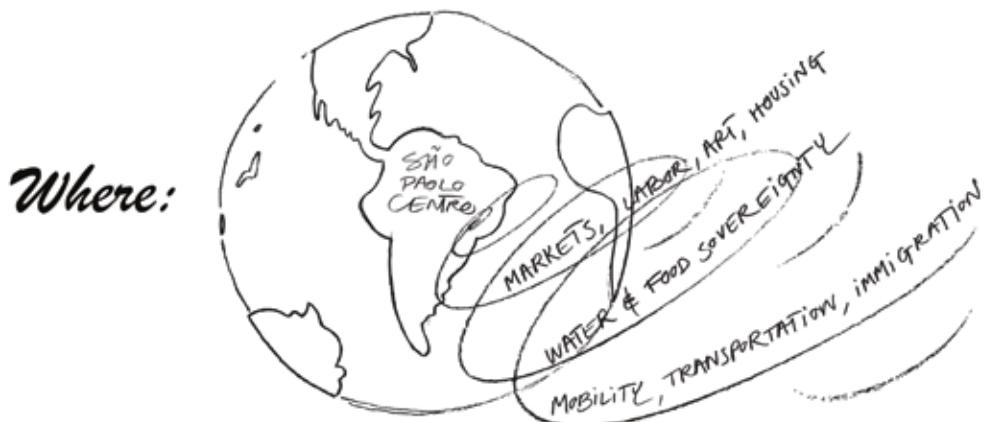
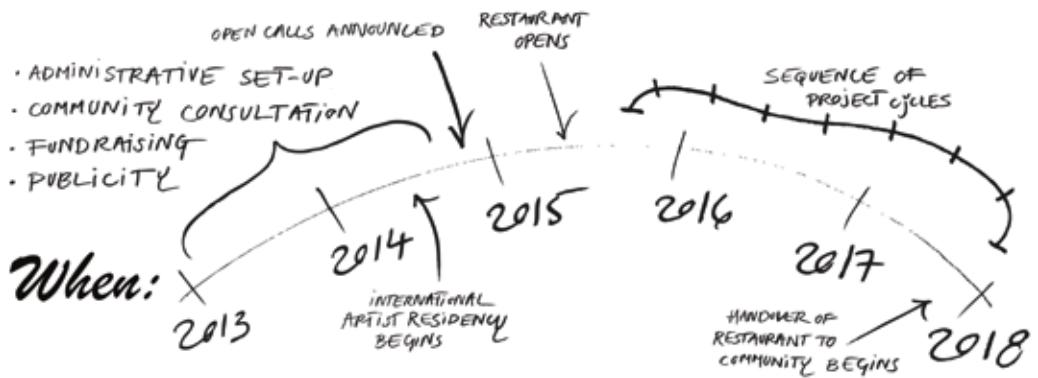
#### {WHERE}

Center of São Paulo — Lanchonete.org is located in and focused on an area that is undergoing fast-paced change that, given its convenience, includes both predictable gentrification<sup>4</sup> as well as challenges to this status quo from various sectors of the population, e.g. artists, cultural centers, anti-forced-eviction activists, cultural producers, community organizers, occupation dwellers and other citizen groups. As major cities of the world move from limited to contested space — for a variety of reasons, including rural to urban migration, immigration, forced mobility, etc. — and because institutions, groups and people with the most social and political agency and financial means get priority access to prime real estate, Lanchonete.org is a reference to the global phenomenon in which economic growth sectors exhibit disregard for citizen needs and desires as well as their foreseeable vulnerability to unpredictable spikes in the cost of living.

As São Paulo becomes more and more congested, the Center, which was formerly perceived as a dangerous and blighted area (by some) becomes coveted real estate for its convenience and accessibility to public and private goods. Along with this shift in perception, those desirous of relocating to the Center for its convenience are encouraged to see occupiers and low rent-payers as freeloaders, even if they have settled areas and beautified<sup>5</sup> buildings that were formerly thought to be unlivable. As if on autopilot, real estate developers who bought buildings during the ‘danger’ period because they were devalued and cheap to ‘grab’ — and the capitalist system they represent — will organically push out the diverse range of mixed-income constituencies that make up the Center, for which the well-organized Occupations<sup>6</sup> are bellwethers of change. A more specific instance that reflects the showdown between people and capital — with the judiciary coming down on the side of business — is the injunction against engineer and community activist Ricardo Fraga Oliveira (founder of the Movement for the Other Side of the Wall) and his campaign at a construction site that required him to delete all references to the real estate development company from his Facebook page.<sup>7</sup>

#### {HOW}

Lanchonete.org is especially interested in food as an aspect of culture and concerned with the broader related issues of food justice and food sovereignty in complex urban environments. Whereas the project understands some of the major concerns of people living in the Center of São Paulo, which are reflected in its design and values,



the implementation process is intentionally porous so that we may accommodate new and changing issues as they emerge. The aforementioned values inform a set of aspirations-cum-actions, which are to:

1. Enact food justice, equitable food systems, and employment standards in a brick-and-mortar space — the restaurant — undergirded by a management (and membership) structure that reflects the same ethos and aspires for longevity in the community.
2. Build durable relationships and partnerships to assure that community desires, decisions, histories and consensuses are understood, as well as to access expert knowledge<sup>8</sup> requisite for an emerging business in the hospitality sector.
3. Amplify citizen voices and actions by forging new coalitions with guest artists and local artists, citizens and organizational partners, thereby enhancing solidarity on issues key to quality of life for all.

All told, Lanchonete.org upholds the values of transparency, inclusiveness and unfettered creativity and seeks to amplify the different ways people claim their *right to the city*.

#### {WHO}

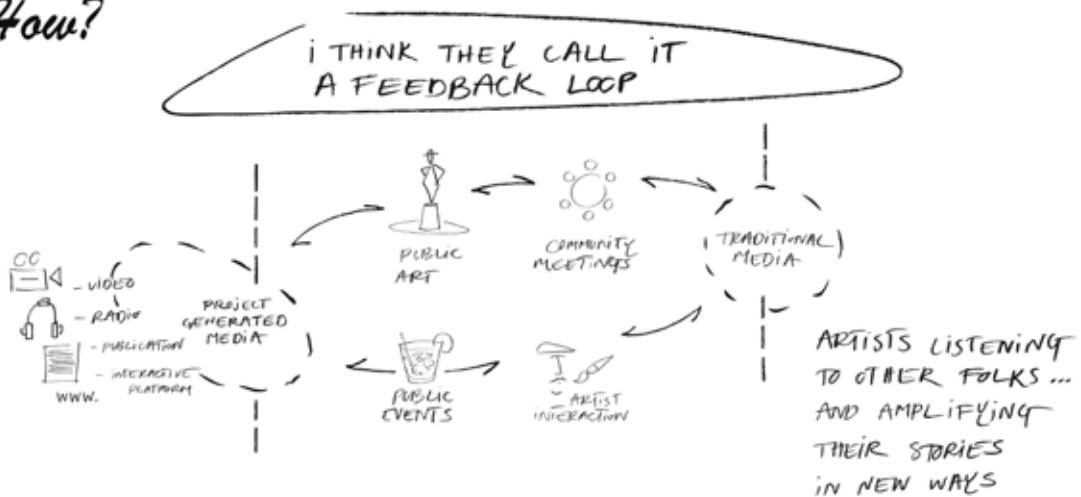
Lanchonete.org works in consensus with individual citizens as well as community-based organizations and informal groups. The project's founding members have been consulting citizens and citizen groups (artists, food workers, occupiers, activists, gardeners and community organizers among them), guest artists, social movements, policymakers, local businesses, community-based organizations, and educational partners in the Center of São Paulo since 2005 in preparation for its launch. In that Lanchonete.org seeks to accommodate multiple storylines (and even re-envision the actors of an urban policy-setting process), we are in an ongoing process of community dialogue that is both 'surfacing' the stories and contributing to the project's design simultaneously. And, we realize that there are likely other stakeholders we do not yet know.

As a project, Lanchonete.org has developed a specific set of values and goals with both the creative community and general citizens in the center of São Paulo. While organic and fluid, there is a shared ethos among our peers that the art world can co-exist with (and thrive by respecting) the diversity of this neighborhood. One of our community partners, the Occupation São João, tells us that collaboration with international artists and cultural producers lends credibility to their approach and use of cultural strategy to 'build a bridge' between people who came to the center when it still had abandoned buildings (seeking a better and more convenient way of life) and those now who 'come down from Paulista' and often hold negative impressions of occupiers, ethnic enclaves, informal groups and low rent payers. To learn more about Occupation São João, see Partner on Lanchonete.org.

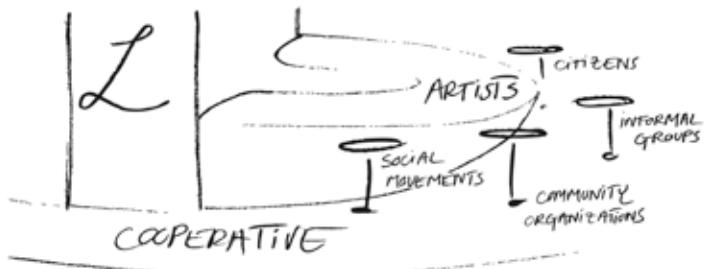
#### **Questions From Both Directions**

In the center of São Paulo and across the vast city, the lanchonete (or lunch counter) is one of the few places where the upper and lower economic classes share middle ground. Different than new construction restaurants, lunch counters in the older part of the city typically have open fronts rather than doors, making them porous and

**How?**



**Who?**



easy to enter or pass through. These ubiquitous pedestrian meeting and service ‘points’ and their longstanding, popular tradition present an alternative to the homogenizing effect of advanced gentrification (otherwise termed capital encroachment<sup>9</sup>) on public space. Lanchonete.org enacts a literal process — opening a restaurant — that is also a symbolic reference to the possibility of diverse groups and classes co-existing in the urban space. Given this context, there are questions that the project asks and questions that are asked of it. While programmatic and tactile in nature, the project wrestles with four overriding questions that are addressed to its different contexts — food service, the art world, capital and market tendencies, São Paulo and other cities experiencing similar growth:

*What if a popular restaurant would function on two levels and in so doing, forge a new model for amplifying citizen voice?*

*When artists are empowered to innovate on a scale large enough to interrupt the status quo, what does it look like?*

*Is it possible for the resources marshaled for a durational, site-specific art project to stay in that community after the ‘art project’ has ended?*

*Can diverse neighborhoods persist and survive in close proximity to epicenters of capital?*

While these questions do not have immediate answers and function at a rhetorical level, there are a few questions asked frequently of Lanchonete.org which will be answered throughout the text: *Will artists work in the restaurant? Will artists exhibit in the restaurant? Will pedestrians know it’s an art project? What if the project becomes a part of the problem for which it seeks to create transparency and amplify citizen voices?* and — importantly, I might add — *What is the problem?*

The first ones are pretty easy. Artists will not work in the restaurant due to probable lack of food-service training, language competency and work permits. To have artists exhibit in the restaurant will over-determine a small space and would miss the bigger opportunity to use the city as studio and stage. And, patrons should have their coffee or prato feito (Brazil’s equivalent of a blue plate special) cheap and fast before they are expected to engage with other aspects of the project.

I hear the latter question to be about pacing — in a community experiencing aggressive real estate speculation in which we will rent a commercial storefront to house the lunch counter — and believe that the only way the restaurant can be seen and used as a space of dialogue is if we<sup>10</sup> ‘hit’ the right pace of engaging community members and building cooperative ownership in the start-up phase. The goal is to have local folks either appreciate (because it is authentic) or — better yet — understand why we are doing the project, and thus how we are using a business (as Trojan Horse) to interrogate the characteristics of capital in a specific place — their neighborhood. And, *best* is if they would like to be a co-owner of the idea and enterprise. All three are perfectly fine ways to experience the restaurant and project. I deeply be-



lieve the way to manage the project's pacing is to be there — physically refereeing all its moving parts — as the restaurant opens in 2015, thereby knowing intuitively when things need to speed up or slow down.

As an artist, I am interested in how the multi-functionalism of a space may constitute a civic commons even if only intermittently. This is why I bring up 'refereeing' ... We have planned everything we can plan at this point about the restaurant, and since we cannot predict how denizens of the Center will react to it or how they'll interact with our guest artists (and vice versa), we are getting ready to play an active, daily role of referee. The term arts administrator also works here, but I think that we are planning for something larger than an art project, something that starts as one but evolves into a community-guided public space.

### **Project Design Details**

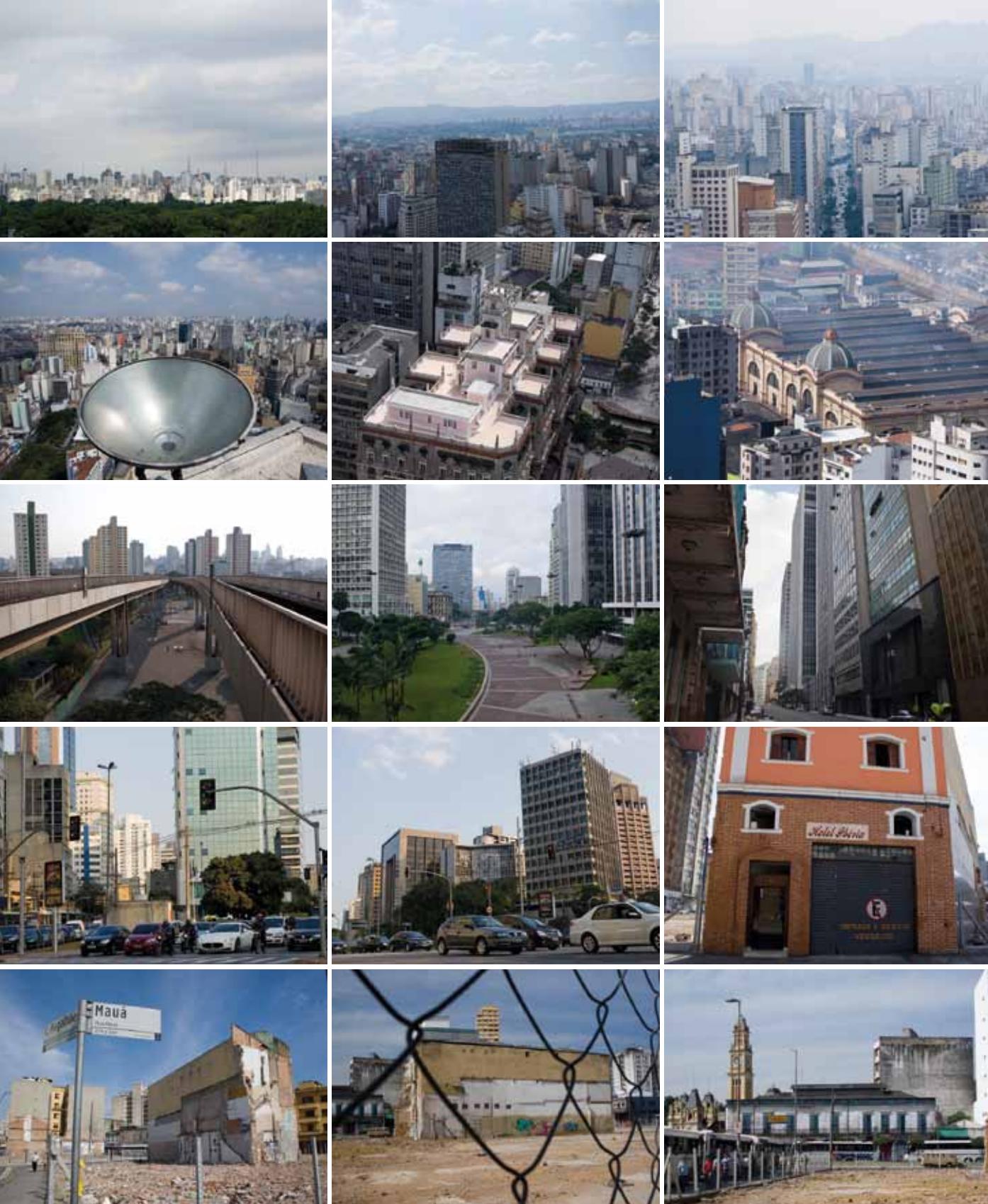
Lanchonete.org's material outputs will be a restaurant — a social business — and a visiting-artists program situated in the Center of São Paulo, an area that has undergone (and is still undergoing) aggressive property speculation and 'land grabbing' under the guise of acceptable, or normal, gentrification. While brimming with life and inhabitants, the center of São Paulo and its neighborhoods — e.g. Luz, República, Bixiga, Liberdade, Bela Vista, Bom Retiro, Santa Cecília — are framed by speculators and the urban planners they influence as 'deteriorated' and having 'underutilized' space. The onset of capital encroachment changes the 'normal' slowly, steadily and then picks up pace until it becomes ostensibly irrevocable — characterized by displacement and demolition — while redeveloping in a way that reflects a higher purchasing power and homogeneity and that does not 'understand' the current population of a neighborhood as potential users but as a removable impediment to economic growth.

As the Center of São Paulo moves directly into the eye of the storm of speculation (similar to New York City's Times Square just before the Giuliani mayoralty), the utility of an art project that does not take a side — on this or that approach — is to accommodate and amplify multiple story lines that convey daily life in the Center of São Paulo. This means that the project must meet various users and peers where they are, whether that be as a participating artist, as a patron of the restaurant, and/or as a community member with concerns and ideas for which the overall platform can serve as a sounding board.

#### {ENTER: VISITING ARTISTS PROGRAM}

Whereas Lanchonete.org has a range of partnerships with brick-and-mortar art spaces<sup>11</sup> in the Center of São Paulo and cultural institutions throughout the city, the corresponding artist residencies are not studio residencies. These partner spaces can be engaged to hold meetings and produce work throughout the residency period, and even to exhibit that work in a weekend festival and exhibition that marks the end of each four-month period. However, the project seeks artists who are most interested and comfortable with the city as their studio and stage, and local counterparts as their guides to daily life — its complexity and simplicity — in the center of São Paulo.

São Paulo, views from the city center (Photo Leandro Viana)



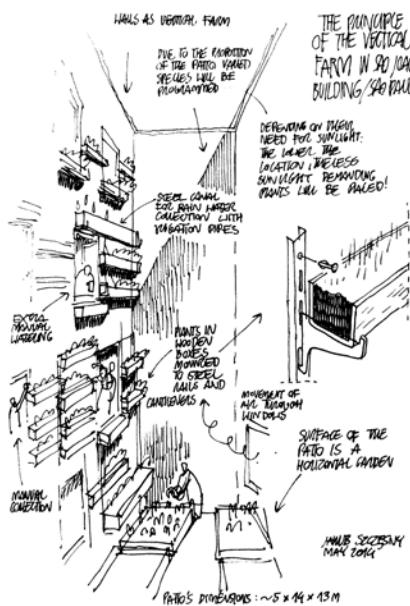
Each visiting artist will stay approximately four months. They will be in a cohort with three other guest artists (4 at a time, 3 international with 1 coming from another Brazilian state). These guest artists will have the option of collaborating with one another, but it is not required. What is required is that the first month be spent getting to know the Center of São Paulo — its citizens, institutions, issues and patterns. It is the responsibility of the Lanchonete.org staff to facilitate these introductions. Selection of the four guest artists will be made by a jury comprised of art professionals, local artists, members of the community and — more specifically — those of the Associação Espaço Cultural Lanchonete, as well as representatives from project partners. The selection of local artists will happen more organically.

For the first month, the project's administrators make approximately three meetings each day (Monday to Friday) for the group of guest artists; these meetings are with local artists, activists and organizers, social, urban issue and arts organizations as well as with community members whom the guest artists have identified. It is envisioned that the four guest artists will meet approximately eight local artists during the first month who become their counterparts for the period of the residency, and thus part of the culminating festival and exhibition of art, ideas and dialogue. The newly configured group of 12 artists will then have three more months to continue getting to know the city after the initial month of introductions in and popular education on the Center of São Paulo. Similarly, the four guest artists will be lodged in and around the Center in a way that creates meaningful cultural exchange, such as our partnership with the Occupation São João, where one artist from each four-artist cohort will reside during the residency.

#### {ENTER: SOCIAL BUSINESS}

While it is easy to view the restaurant as the tangible goal (and form) of the project, the association (Associação Espaço Cultural Lanchonete) is the backbone of the entire initiative, even if it is less visible. It is the mechanism by which resources can be attracted and held to implement the project; the mechanism by which community members (artists and non-artists, organizational leaders, youth and residents of the center) can participate in the project; and ultimately the mechanism by which the infrastructure and other capital assets can be transferred to community members at the end of a five-year project period, leaving behind a new citizen group with a set of resources and the common agenda to encourage open dialogue on pressing issues that span class and other societal divisions. Whereas a Brazilian cultural association has a distinct form and specific requirements under law, its organizational form is flexible enough to accommodate a worker's cooperative. The design of this aspect of the project is informed by both the Rochdale Principles<sup>12</sup>, a set of ideals for the operation of cooperatives, and the burgeoning global B-Corp (benefits corporation)<sup>13</sup> movement. Final amendments to the association's by-laws will be made after a series of member meetings in late 2014 and early 2015.

Starting in 2013, a focus on building institutional partnerships with food, youth and social service organizations began in order to develop a just food system in the short-term, and to inform the goal of community ownership of the restaurant at the end of the five-year project in 2018. A couple of these organizations, Cities Without



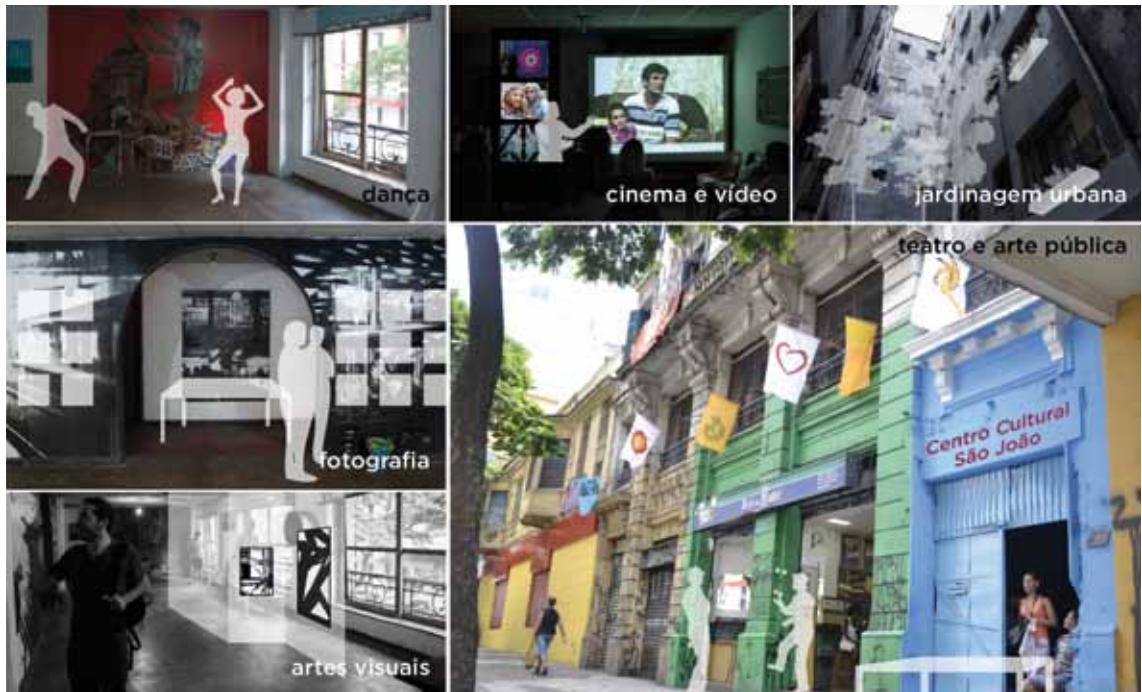
Hunger (Cidade sem Fome) and GastroMotiva are detailed in the Partners to Lanchonete.org section. Starting in 2015, the restaurant will be accessible to the general public (artists among them) for regular meals during breakfast and lunch hours, and at night the food service is organized, themed and directed cooperatively by community members who have joined the association and the participating artists. These may range from special events to weekly community dinners.

#### {ENTER: ALTERNATE POLICY PROCESS}

A city has different stories, yet sometimes decision makers need help hearing them all. The notion of an alternative policy-setting process — with atypical actors who do not often access the corridors of power — will not be left to chance. Focused on daily life in the Center of São Paulo, Lanchonete.org occasions a feedback loop that is made for sharing. We believe it is essential that there be a mode of engagement by which to receive community input and whereby the public feels it has a stake in the dialogue. The project's leadership has gained insight from consensus-building methodologies such as Appreciative Inquiry<sup>14</sup> generally and the Public Narrative Framework<sup>15</sup> specifically, as well as historic media and cultural initiatives known to have disrupted the status quo of dominant culture in other locations, e.g. The Fogo Process<sup>16</sup> and participatory video more broadly.

The project is broken into four-month cycles that include a range of activities surrounding the visit of four guest artists and their collaboration with local counterparts. At the end of each of the first three months there will be collaborative workshops (also known as consultations or town hall meetings) designed by community members with guest and local artists in easily accessible venues throughout the Center, such as but not limited to the restaurant itself. Open to the public, the three workshops constitute a mode and sequence of engagement that leads up to a final series of events, e.g. a weekend festival of dialogue, art exhibition of local and international artists, and related programming that will continue for the following month, overlapping the first month of the next four-month session. Some sample themes of these workshops are urban mobility, rivers and urban waterways, home and forced eviction, youth and cultural movement, food systems and food justice, urban planning and citizen engagement as well as many other combinations that will be informed by public engagement during the workshops and by each of the 12 artists' own work and experiences. There will be a local curator and writer who document and uses information from the workshops to help the 12 artists and Lanchonete.org administrators to shape the final weekend exhibition at the end of the fourth month. The workshops and culminating events will be widely publicized, and attendance is free and open to the public.

In addition to the physical restaurant, points of entry to this process include preliminary series of introductions, regular 'town hall' workshops, print zine, online multimedia reportage, a culminating month of art, ideas, actions, and dialogue open to the public, as well as residual traces of the process, e.g. debates, interviews, policy briefs, lingering art works, widely distributed documentation of the process, and the unforeseen outcomes of artist interaction. Outreach to mainstream media and a range of media components<sup>17</sup> endogenous to the project design constitute a citizen-authored feedback loop available to urban decision makers. While the curator is looking inward, helping the cohort of artists build consensus for the culminating events, the local writer will look outward to the community relations that the artists



Cultural activities at the Occupation São João and its Cultural Center  
(Photo by Raphael Daibert / Design by Adham Bakry)

Café Imaginario convening in the Cultural Center at the Occupation São João (Photo Raphael Daibert)



create and maintain. The journalist and curator will work closely together as a constant support mechanism for the process, making sure that the information accessed and feedback prompted reach a wider public.

Documentation of the process, topics and results will be on our website and in a free publication (or zine) at the end of each four-month period. The zines carry community-related information (or news) and double as announcements for the culminating events of the cycle. Each zine is designed by one or more of the participating artists and unfolds as a poster that is both collectible and works as signage for public events that mark the end of each session. This constitutes a process whereby citizens and local partners 'see' their ideas and input interpreted by the participating artists and strategically relayed to a broader public and decision makers by way of dynamically produced events and through both formal and informal media channels. Throughout history, artists have gained trust and accepted this responsibility of witnessing, by which I mean the frequency of involving oneself in a social issue by simply watching and synthesizing information for fellow community members, and, if the artist is an outsider, employing the decorum of entering the community and asking permission to become involved.

---

The inaugural zine was distributed during the Tijuana Art Book Fair in the Center of São Paulo (August 2014); it serves as a letter to our peers explaining the rationale of the project and asking for support and permission to carry it out and carries three open calls for participating artists, institutions, and local citizens wishing to join the association that owns the restaurant. The same zine is used to represent Lanchonete.org in the *Modes of Democracy* exhibition (November 2014) at the Dox Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague, for which Czech will replace the original Portuguese language of the publication.

### **Partners to Lanchonete.org**

In the first two years, our focus is on developing strong partnerships with key sectors and populations, which we feel are foundational to the project. These include Cities Without Hunger (urban gardening), GastroMotiva (culinary vocational training), and Occupation São João (intentional community situation in the Center).

Cities Without Hunger is a world-renowned urban gardening initiative operating in the East part of São Paulo where unemployment is at the highest level in the city. Therefore teaching households how to grow produce in urban conditions provides both a healthy diet and income-generating opportunities. Cumulatively, the gardens under Cities Without Hunger management produce at a surplus; therefore it is possible for a restaurant to buy directly from producers. GastroMotiva trains at-risk urban youth to cook and become chefs in professional kitchens. It shares a very similar ethos with Cities Without Hunger, to first improve food preparation and dietary habits at the household level which, in turn, leads to employment opportunities and holistic betterment in families, communities, neighborhoods, business and the city. We plan to purchase our produce from Cities Without Hunger and hire our restaurant

Flag-making workshop by Raphael Daibert, Lorena Vicini, Isabel Gandia and Jakub Szczęsny with families at the Occupation São João (Photo Raphael Daibert)



staff from the ranks of GastroMotiva trainees. Furthermore, we have asked the founders of both organizations to be part of an advisory council for Lanchonete.org and are planning a hybrid ownership model whereby their organizations can serve as anchors within the association's membership if so desired. Both organizations (whose stakeholders are primarily from the periphery) have expressed an interest in having a central location — or food/food service lab — in the Centro for a variety of reasons; therefore, it makes sense to enter discussions with them now regarding future usage and management of the restaurant facility. While these two organizations primarily serve constituents in the periphery of São Paulo, the occupation movement or Frente de Luta por Moradia (FLM)<sup>18</sup> is more focused on the center of the city where there is a higher density of both population and the built environment.

In the worldwide phenomenon of forced eviction that affects millions of people at lower levels of economic agency, occupations are at the forefront because their legitimacy can be dashed with the claim of illegality. This *de jure* interpretation of the law does not account for the *de facto* reality (and complexity) of daily life in fast-evolving cities such as São Paulo. While land speculation both benefitted from and fueled a 'danger' narrative in the Center, occupiers have renovated whole buildings to livable states whereby they can more easily get to their jobs and enjoy convenience in this sprawling city. Simply put, they used things that were not being used. Through the normalizing effect of daily use, occupiers (and the larger socio-economic demographic that they represent) helped the inner city of São Paulo to be perceived as livable again, even if they will be the first to be removed ... even if their methods are no more or less legal than those of wealthy land speculators who are able to pad the pockets of politicians for favorable prices on city-owned buildings and favorable zoning decisions, a part of the same system that deploys police forces willing to remove 'occupiers' from their homes in the middle of the night when that property is ready to be 'turned' into something more luxurious. As I mentioned in the beginning, working with the occupation movement has been useful in understanding issues at play in the Center of São Paulo from a group of people affected most acutely and immediately by capital encroachment. Back during the 2013 São Paulo Architecture Biennial when the Occupation São João invited us to co-produce an event with them in their second-floor cultural center, we realized that, unless they live in them, Paulistanos do not often enter these occupations. This experience has led us into a deeper partnership with the Occupation São João, which will span the full project.

While the Occupation São João is less visible than the São Paulo-wide movement, the FLM of which they are a constituent member, they are one of its most dynamic members for the following reasons: women-led, smaller size (170 people, 60 families), relative homogeneity (most of them come from the same part of the periphery where Cities Without Hunger is also located — São Mateus to the east — and are related, even if they open their doors to others, e.g. a newly arriving Colombian family), and, most importantly, strategy (knowing that they will never be legal tenants, they have found ways to 'inch' forward in justifying staying and claiming their right to be there by, for example, leading the process of landmarking their building, the historic Columbus Hotel. Additionally, the Occupation has a registered cultural association



and is therefore eligible to receive tax-exempt financial support for the Centro Cultural São João (CCSJ). The CCSJ is a unique art space on the second floor of the Occupation that is open to the broader community, providing space for language lessons, LGBT and other identity group meetings, Capoeira instruction, etc.

---

*Laws are made by the rich in order to exploit those who cannot respect them owing to brutal necessity.* (Bertolt Brecht)

## Conclusion

It is hard to argue with urban plans that promise convenience, improved standards of living, and structural (and public space) beautification; however, these aspirations are often future-oriented and do not assure that the incremental changes necessary to achieve them will be easy on the population currently living in areas under heavy speculation. Without fail, when government, politicians and urban planners start to consider such projects, commercial interests are drawn like moths to a flame, interests that do not normally take humanistic approaches to redevelopment without a system of checks and balances.

In brief, the success of Lanchonete.org will be measured by how effectively we work (in the restaurant and on the project) to support connections across socio-economic class levels and areas of interest, which means that we must keep in mind that people who do not benefit from the art world must derive value and meaning from the project in practical and — even — immediate ways that respond to their own needs and desires. We believe that this approach works on a variety of levels (individual, institutional, artistic, and so on), and that ultimately coffee and food that's good, fast and cheap, as well as a feedback loop that adequately represents the daily lives and concerns of people living in the Center, are both achievable.

Lanchonete.org reflects some of the same (and related) concerns for São Paulo as the recent Vinegar Revolt<sup>19</sup> did for the country. Whereas many organizations are working on the identifiable disparities and inequities in Brazilian society, Lanchonete.org is looking for the gaps, getting into the crevices, working across sectors and perceived boundaries, and — ultimately — letting art do what it does best, which is to source new ideas and ways forward on otherwise intersectional and intractable problems. Lanchonete.org recognizes that “a policy that is entirely or primarily made by way of making other policies” — what David Dery<sup>20</sup> coins policy by the way — may yield a larger impact due to an accumulative and, at times, illogical nature and does not normally improve the quality of life for, or is detrimental to, non-elite populations. While non-elite contingents may be given seats at specific policy tables, they do not often gain access to the corridors of power that connect related ‘tables’ in the service of resource control and monopolization by the dominant elite. By transparently connecting related issues and sustaining critical dialogues in an accessible space contiguous with its surroundings, Lanchonete.org attempts to reimagine the civic commons, a place where every story counts.

---



*Associação Espaço Cultural Lanchonete (Lanchonete Cultural Space Association) is a nonprofit entity in Brazil. It has a President and three counselors, all of whom are Brazilian citizens living and working in Brazil and the cultural sector. Lanchonete.org is Todd Lester's idea; he works with an amazing team of co-founders – Lorena Vicini, Isabel Gandia and Raphael Daibert. The project is inspired by a range of ideas, people and movements – e.g. Walking in the City (Michel de Certeau), Social Sculpture (Joseph Beuys), Artist Placement Group, The Situationist International, and the work of a local São Paulo philosopher, Nelson Brissac Peixoto and his residual project, arte/cidade, as well as the art of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, the films of Frederick Wiseman, the approach to writing of Roberto Bolaño, and the ideas of Henri Lefebvre.*

**Endnotes:**

- 1 <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2009/09/629200-districto-federal-tem-a-maior-proporcao-de-ricos-no-brasil.shtml>.
- 2 Local artists will have opportunities to represent the Lanchonete.org project internationally as well as being essential participants in the overall process.
- 3 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privately\\_owned\\_public\\_space](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privately_owned_public_space).
- 4 Left Hand Rotation defines gentrification as "a process of urban transformation in which the original population of a neighborhood is gradually displaced by another of higher purchasing [power]".
- 5 I use 'beautified' here in juxtaposition to the more frequent notion of beautification as "projects... undertaken by city councils to refurbish their downtown areas, in order to boost tourism or other commerce." – <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beautification>.
- 6 Lanchonete.org works closely with Occupation São João and thereby the Frente de Luta por Moradia (FLM), which is the movement of São Paulo's occupations. The artist residency component of the project, which starts in mid-2015, will host 8 cohorts of 4 artists (32 total); one artist from each cohort will stay in the Occupation São João.
- 7 [http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3756/en/brazil:-court-approves-ban-on-development-protestor?utm\\_source=ARTICLE+19+Mailing+List&utm\\_campaign=315cc6fa38-Free\\_Expression\\_23\\_May&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_c3bf82663f-315cc6fa38-209348197](http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/3756/en/brazil:-court-approves-ban-on-development-protestor?utm_source=ARTICLE+19+Mailing+List&utm_campaign=315cc6fa38-Free_Expression_23_May&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c3bf82663f-315cc6fa38-209348197).
- 8 Cities Without Hunger and GastroMotiva met through the Lanchonete.org project, thus confirming that one role of the project can be to make essential introductions. We feel this is an important role because often when people and organizations are claiming their rights to the city in limited-resource settings, there is an automatic default to working in isolation. We seek to build new alliances through this project.
- 9 Aggressive property speculation and 'land grabbing' under the guise of acceptable or normal gentrification.
- 10 'We' refers to the team that is implementing the project.
- 11 Such as those organized through Circuito Centro, <http://www.circuito-centro.org>.
- 12 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochdale\\_principles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochdale_principles).
- 13 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benefit\\_corporation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benefit_corporation).
- 14 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appreciative\\_inquiry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appreciative_inquiry).
- 15 <http://leadingchangenetwork.com/files/2012/05/Public-Narrative-Collective-Action-and-Power.pdf>.
- 16 <http://coolstudios.com/576/pdf/Challenge%20for%20Change%20-%20The%20Fogo%20Process.pdf>.
- 17 It is conceivable that some of the artists and collectives invited to the project will have media approaches that are complementary to the desire to accommodate stories – versions of life – such as Publication Studio (<http://www.publicationstudio.biz>) and The One Minutes (<http://sandberg.nl/the-one-minutes>). It is also likely that the project will borrow ideas from other projects such as Transformazium's (<http://transformazium.org>) Neighborhood Conversation Starters, the Center for Urban Pedagogy's *Making Policy Public* initiative (<http://www.makingpolicypublic.net>), and/or the Sante Fe Radio Café (<http://www.santaferadiocafe.org>). We will invite them to show us how they do it in their communities.
- 18 <http://www.portalflm.com.br>.



- 19 2013 protests resulting from bus fare increases and police brutality levied on the early protesters, which spawned more widespread protest – <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/events/brazil-s-vinegar-revolt>.
- 20 Dery, D. (1999). Policy by the Way: When Policy is Incidental to Making Other Policies. In *Journal of Public Policy* 18, 2:163.