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**NEW URBAN FRONTIERS: CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN BRAZIL'S
URBANIZATION**

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Introduction

Brazil's contemporary urbanization presents, at the end of this millenium, tendencies that point to the emergence of diverse and complex spatialities at local, regional and national levels. The urban population approached eighty percent of total national population in 1996. This is due both to the high concentration of urban population in the most developed and populous states in the Southern and Central regions and to the intense process of urbanization in the Northern and Western regions¹. In fact, although urban growth rates for the country as a whole were significantly reduced in the 1980s², contemporary patterns of urbanization continue to show a high concentration of population in urban agglomerations and a de-concentration over medium-size cities and small towns articulated in local and/or micro-regional sub-systems.

We can thus identify a dual process of urbanization in Brazil, already manifested in previous decades but now showing different patterns and renewed intensities that suggest transformations in the very nature of that process. On one side, it is evident a macro-regional demographic concentration in large and medium urban agglomerations, including the country's major metropolitan regions but also new urban areas, particularly in the Southeastern region³. The extension of middle-size non-metropolitan cities over their immediate peripheries has produced new urban agglomerations that express the relative industrial de-concentration and proliferation of

¹ In 1996, Brazil had 78.4% of its population living in urban areas while the states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro had 93.1% and 95.5%, respectively. The Southeast (89.3%) and the Center-west (84.4%) macro-regions raised the national average while the North showed the lowest percentage (62.4%) of all, a figure to be changed in the near future given its continuous annual average urban growth rates above 5% (since 1950).

² National average annual urban growth rates declined from 5.2% in the 1960s to 4.4% in the 1970s and to 2.9% in the 1980s.

³ A recent study about Brazil's urban network identified twelve metropolitan agglomerations (200 municipalities) that respond for 33.6% (52.7 million inhabitants) of the country's total population. In addition, thirty-seven other urban agglomerations (178 municipalities) comprise 13.1% (20.6 million inhabitants) of the total population and sixty two (isolated) urban centers over one-hundred thousand inhabitants comprise 8.5% (13.3 million people) of the total population. Those 111 metropolitan and urban agglomerations and (isolated) urban centers comprise 440 municipalities--less than 10% of Brazil's 5,656 municipalities--and hold 55% (86.6 million people) of the country's total population. (Ipea/Unicamp/Ibge, 1999).

production services beyond the metropolitan realm. At the same time, the concentration of both wealth and poverty in metropolitan regions has deepened the socio-spatial fragmentation and class confrontations within the urban fabric while the urban-industrial de-concentration over medium-size cities and urban agglomerations extends the *urban problems* to the country as a whole.

On the other side, a large number of small and medium-size towns throughout the country show high levels of urban growth, particularly in the North and Center-west regions. In addition, several new municipalities have been recently created showing that urban concentration is also taking place in villages (and hamlets), which eventually become new municipalities⁴. In other words, urbanization is extended over new regional and rural spaces as transportation, communication and services networks articulate urban-industrial spatialities and re-qualify urban-rural relations. More than that, the *urban tissue* is being extended beyond cities, towns and villages to produce new urban centralities (and peripheries) while it also extends the (capitalist) relations of production onto national space as a whole. It is that dual process of concentrated and extended urbanization what redefines the complex patterns of competition and cooperation at urban and regional levels and (re)articulates local and distant multiple actions and activities into new spatialities and socio-political arrangements.

The overall scenario above presented allows for the identification of four major patterns in contemporary Brazilian urbanization. First, the growth of metropolitan and urban agglomerations and the expansion of their functionally integrated areas to encompass surrounding municipalities⁵. The result has been an increase in the country's metropolitan population and the emergence of new non-metropolitan urban agglomerations, mostly in the more populated states⁶.

⁴ The Brazilian legal definition of urban population includes residents in *cities/towns*--heads of municipalities--and *villages*--heads of municipal districts. The emancipation of a municipal district to form a new municipality requires the fulfillment of legally defined socio-spatial conditions and a local plebiscite.

⁵ The 1991 Census showed for the first time a reduction in the percentage of Brazil's metropolitan population vis-a-vis total population, a figure challenged by the expansion of the metropolitan regions to include new municipalities.

⁶ The 1988 Brazilian Constitution gave the States the power to create metropolitan regions, a prerogative until then reserved to the Federal Government. In many cases these *new metropolitan areas* created at state level are organized not around a metropolis but around medium-size cities. Those will be referred to as non-metropolitan urban agglomerations, following the methodological classification used by Ipea/Unicamp.Ie/Ibge (1999).

Second, the multiplication of the number of large isolated urban centers (over 100,000 people) in all macro-regions. This relative de-concentration reflects the higher mobility of both capital and labor and the flexibilization in location patterns made possible by the extension of the conditions of production and the increasing spatial integration at regional and national levels. In fact, while the urban agglomerations are concentrated in the more populated regions--the Southeast, the South and the Northeast--the isolated urban centers are more evenly distributed among all five macro-regions⁷. They reflect the various urban-regional economic dynamics captained by state capitals and regional centers, many times due to the intensification of export relations and stronger direct linkages to external markets bypassing the sphere of control of São Paulo, Brazil's national economic center⁸.

Third, the proliferation and/or expansion of small and medium-size towns. This is due to the creation of new municipalities (particularly in Amazonia and the Center-west) and the growth of local and micro-regional centers. As a result of the new demands for the expansion and articulation of production and consumption services, smaller urban centers tend to develop new forms of inter-municipal cooperation institutionally innovating to strengthen the provision and management of services. The consequence is the development of new socio-spatial patterns in which urban networks are reorganized according to the new directions and intensities of flows of goods and services at both micro- and macro-regional levels. At the micro-regional and local levels, urban sub-systems tend to arise as the various urban centers develop complementary roles and articulate their actions in associations of municipalities and joint programs for specific purposes (education, health, sanitation, road construction, etc.). In some cases, particularly in new and/or less developed regions where technical and human resources are very scarce, newly created municipalities depend from their very beginning on inter-urban forms of cooperation and on administrative and economic interaction with existing towns.

⁷ The Northeast, the Southeast and the South, the most populated regions, concentrate 35 out of 37 urban agglomerations (97%) as opposed to 45 out of 62 isolated urban centers (70%) (Ipea/Unicamp/Ibge, 1999).

⁸ Another recent study of Brazil's urban network identifies twelve polarized macro-regions and classifies the major urban centers according to their economic polarization: financial, industrial, administrative, touristic and agricultural poles (not mutually exclusive) as well as isolated regions and enclaves, thus reflecting more clearly the regional (and urban) economic bases (Cedeplar, 2000).

Finally, we should emphasize the pattern of *extensive urbanization* through which the *urban tissue*⁹, extending from the cities and metropolitan areas, gain the rural and regional spaces and subordinate them to the urban-industrial logic (and its requirements). In doing so, it redefines and integrates the former rural spaces to the production and consumption systems generated in the multiple centralities (and peripheries) of major urban agglomerations. The concept of extended urbanization and its implications for the process of urbanization in Brazil will be developed in the next item.

The extensive nature of Brazil's contemporary urbanization

The urban scenario pictured above allows us to speak, following Henri Lefèbvre (1972), of a *virtual urban society* in Brazil. The high percentage of population living in cities, towns and (administrative) villages; the increasing number of urban agglomerations and the slow but steady growth of the major metropolitan regions; the growth of middle-size centers in all regions, the continuous strengthening of small towns and the emergence of new towns; and finally, the extension of the urban-industrial conditions of production and reproduction to almost all parts of the national territory clearly point to the virtual urbanization of Brazil, to an *urban society*.

When I emphasize the concept of *urban society* I must indebt my understanding of the contemporary process of urbanization (and more than that, of social space itself) to Lefèbvre's writings¹⁰. Lefèbvre uses the expression *urban society* as a dialectical synthesis of the old dichotomy city-country understanding that such dichotomy is overcome, in the industrial phase of world capitalism, by the term *urban*, understood as a metaphor for the apprehension of space itself (Lefèbvre, 1991). It is the extension of the socially produced (urban) space to (virtually) all human space --more particularly, of the *urban tissue*, this socio-spatial form that is the heir and

⁹ "The urban tissue proliferates, extends itself and destroys the residues of agrarian life. Those words, 'the urban tissue', do not designate, in a restrictive manner, the built realm of cities, but the whole set of manifestations of the domination of the city over the countryside. In that sense, a second home, a highway, a supermarket in the countryside, are part of the urban tissue." (Lefèbvre, 1999: 17; my translation)

¹⁰ I will be drawing mostly from Lefèbvre's writings about the city and the countryside (1973, 1976, 1999) and about contemporary capitalist society and the production of space within it (1976b, 1980, 1991).

substitute for both the city/town and country/rural forms--what characterizes the contemporary urban phenomenon and the (virtual) urban society.

What I have been calling *extensive urbanization* is, therefore, a manifestation of the urban society, more specifically, the socio-temporal materialization of the extension of the processes of production (and reproduction) proper to urban-industrial capitalism. The socio-spatiality that results from the explosive encounter between the industry and the city--the *urban*--is extended in the territory along with the relations of production (and reproduction) it engenders and reproduces as it produces the space required for the organization of production and (collective) reproduction. The general conditions of production (and collective consumption) are thus extended as a demand of the reproduction of the relations of production themselves. The city, the very center of social life, was "...superseded by a process of urbanization or, more generally, of the production of space, that was binding together the global and the local, the city and the country, the centre and the periphery, in new and quite unfamiliar ways. Daily life (...) has to be reinterpreted against this background of a changing production of space." (Harvey, 1991)

The heart of the nature of the city is its condition of *centrality* (and consequently, of its peripheries) and here we find one of the most significant changes in that *unfamiliar way* brought about by the urban process. "*The general concept of centrality connects the punctual to the global*", says Lefèbvre (1991: 332). *Centrality is movable* and as society changes the more rapid and intense are those changes and the more movable centralities become. The explosion or rupture of a given centrality is both distantly and locally determined by the myriad of forces that are manifested there--and elsewhere, in other centralities-to-be. "*What makes present-day society different in this regard? Simply this: centrality now aspires to be total.*" (Lefèbvre, idem)

The explosion of the industrial city into the urban form is achieved through the multiplicity of new centralities (and peripheries) that come to exist within contemporary socially produced space. New complex arrangements between those multiple centres and peripheries come to life and redefine total space. "*The form of centrality which, as a form, is empty, calls for a content and attract and concentrates particular objects. By becoming a locus of action, of a*

sequence of operations, this form acquires a functional reality. (...) The notion of centrality replaces the notion of totality, repositioning it, relativizing it, and rendering it dialectical." (Lefèbvre, 1991: 399). Lefèbvre reaffirms the hegemony of urban space: *"...the contradictions are no longer located between the city and the countryside. The main contradiction shifts and settles in the interior of the urban phenomenon: between the centrality of power and the other forms of centrality, between the 'wealth-power' centre and the peripheries, between integration and segregation."* (Lefèbvre, 1999: 155).

Such is the socio-historical-spatial¹¹ reality that has imposed itself in contemporary Brazil, both virtually and objectively, constituting in itself a condition for the adequate understanding of Brazilian urbanization (and social space). After the *Brazilian Miracle*¹², the *urban tissue* connected and integrated the national territory and space to the metropolitan economy and produced a new (urban) socio-spatial form to respond to the immediate demands of technocratic peripheral industrial capitalism. In fact, by 1978 Francisco de Oliveira, a Brazilian economist, emphatically identified Brazil's new hegemonic urban character in a provocative essay presented at the Annual SBPC Meeting (Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science): *"There are no more agrarian problems, there are now urban problems at national scale."* He also acknowledged the roots of the radical socio-spatial transformation taking place in Brazil: *"The urbanization of Brazilian economy and society is nothing else but the extension, to all corners and sectors of national life, of the capitalist relations of production; although it still is, in many cases, only a tendency, its mark is rather peculiar: there is no turning back."* (Oliveira, 1978: 74).

Two central aspects of Lefèbvre's thought about the urban question are quite clear in Oliveira's explanation on Brazil's contemporary urbanization. First, the extended and hegemonic character of the urban problematic superseding both the city and agrarian realities. His emphasis on the extension of the (capitalist) relations of production to all realms of national life highlights the ample dimension that the urban question had already achieved in the late 1970s. On the other

¹¹ The emphasis on Lefebvre's triad dialectical approach--*trialectical*--to the societal-temporal-spatial dimensions of the being is particularly due to Soja (1996), although Lefèbvre (1976) himself and other less known authors have also stressed it (Martins, 1996).

¹² *The Brazilian Miracle* is the expression popularly (and propagandistically) used to refer to the period of intense economic industrial growth based on multinational production of durable goods during the early years of military rule in Brazil (1964-85).

hand, the virtual dimension of the process in course: although mostly a tendency, he says, there is no turning back. Social production of space in contemporary capitalism takes the extended urban form as its central feature, this *third position* that supersedes the city-country old dichotomy.

This permanent search for a third position is a characteristic of Lefèbvre's thought. His *triad dialectic*--or *trialectic*, as Soja (1996) calls it--stresses the third term, the transforming synthesis (although not quite the synthesis, but actually a third alternative) of the static and reductionist vulgar dialectical approach many times privileged by other authors. "A *triad*: that is, three elements and not two. Relations with two elements boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms." (Lefèbvre, 1991: 39). The *Other*, the *Difference* mark his preoccupation with alterity as a means of understanding the dynamic and changing totality that the dialectical method intends to grasp.

To the theory and practice dichotomy, Lefèbvre proposes the *praxis*; to production and reproduction, he emphasizes *quotidianity/everyday life*; to historicity and sociality, he privileges *spatiality*; to physical and mental spaces, *social space*; to perceived and conceived spaces, *lived space*; to spatial practice and representations of space, the *space of representations*. It is also in this sense that Lefèbvre insists on virtuality as the potential emergence of a third term, the new possibilities, the *new* asking to be born and strengthened, the utopia to be built out of the materialization of the various (im)possibilities guided by the *radical necessities*, the roads to transformation called by virtuality itself¹³. Space is, in this case "...the locus of potentiality, built from a body intelligence." (Lefèbvre, 1991: 174). Materialization is thus seen not as the dominium of necessity but instead, as the dominium of liberty, the theater of human praxis (Santos, 1996).

It is also in this sense that urban theory becomes central to understand contemporary production of space in Brazil: a multiple societal-temporal-spatial dimension where possibilities are to be identified and construed in everyday life, a virtuality where spaces of representation are lived by inhabitants and users on the basis also of non-verbal symbols and signs systems (Lefèbvre, 1991). "The urban thus becomes for Lefèbvre something very much like what I have been

¹³ For a discussion on Lefèbvre's di(tri)alectics see, besides his own writings, Soja (1996) and Martins (1996).

describing as Thirdspace: a lived space of radical openness and unlimited scope, where all histories and geographies, all times and places, are immanently presented and represented, a strategic space of power and domination, empowerment and resistance." (Soja, 1996: 311).

When we discuss urbanization and production of social space in new peripheral, underdeveloped and incompletely organized countries, such as Brazil, the idea of limits and borders, of ample spaces open for occupation, of *frontiers* easily comes to mind. Spaces of permanent tension, the frontiers represent the third position between the rich and the poor, the developed and the non-developed, the civilized and the un-civilized; in short, the open possibility for the difference, for the reinvention, the other, the third who announces itself as possible. And indeed, frontiers have always been at the frontier of transforming societies, leading them and pointing towards the future, the unknown that can only be deciphered from the careful study of the socio-temporal-spatial dialectics of everyday human praxis.

New frontiers in the production of (urban) space in Brazil

The rather controversial concept of frontier has been widely used in Brazil to discuss the incorporation into the national market economy of incompletely organized, underdeveloped and/or marginalized parts of its territory. Pioneers who entered the backlands in search for riches and/or natives to enslave marked the Brazilian history. Cattle, extraction goods and agriculture were the economic bases for that occupation and the idea of an extensive frontier to be conquered--Amazonia being the last one--has been part of the national imaginary since colonial and imperial days. However, only after 1930 the concept of frontier became a part of the national discussion about the incorporation of new areas into the country's newly integrated economic space. After the World War II, when national and regional planning gained political prominence in the country, the concept came to mean the extension of the (capitalist) conditions of production to those new regional spaces in process of economic occupation¹⁴.

¹⁴ Foweraker (1981) identifies three stages in Brazil's *pioneer frontiers*: a non-capitalist stage in early twentieth century; a pre-capitalist stage in the 1940s and 1950s; and a capitalist stage beginning in the 1960s when capitalist relations of production (particularly, land and labor markets) came to dominate regional and urban spaces.

It was during the military ruling that geopolitical and socio-economic objectives defined by the federal government placed the agricultural frontier at the center of national development debates. Capitalist export agriculture centered on soybeans production captained the occupation of the Center-west while mineral extraction, cattle and agriculture conducted the occupation of Amazonia, both treated as major issues within federal and state public policies. By then, the occupation of (*pioneer*) *frontiers* also had a strategical geopolitical role within national security policies both in guaranteeing the control of the extensive national western frontiers (borders) and in populating extensive regions perceived as *empty* and/or under-developed. On the other hand, the urban dimension had already been incorporated as a major feature in regional planning and urban centers and local nuclei to support agricultural activities had become a central part of the design for new regional spaces. The frontiers had definitely also become an urban problem.

However, two different concepts of frontier permeate(d) the specialized literature. On the one hand, the idea of frontier can be understood as the limit or border separating two different areas, regions or countries. In that sense, the frontier is an area of transition and/or confrontation between two societies and their territories. Brazil, who for centuries had concentrated its development on the eastern Atlantic coast, finally began to pay attention to its extensive western borders with almost every South-american country (except for Chile and Ecuador). Frontier occupation and development thus became a matter of military concern, particularly in the context of continental social and political unrest that marked those days--the 1960s and 1970s¹⁵.

On the other hand, frontier also means the stretch of land between a settled and an unsettled territory. Or further else, its extension into a region marked by changing characteristics, mostly dual, in which to be in the frontier means to be bordering two worlds, two societies, two temporalities and two spatialities. More specifically, the presence of a dominant pattern over another, in which the unsettled is to be taken over and overcome by the settled pattern, the first expressing the old and barbarian and the latter the new and civilized. It is in this sense that the concept of frontier is more commonly used in contemporary Brazil.

¹⁵ Historical western borders conflicts did take place and they include the war with Paraguay and the disputes with Bolivia that ended with the purchase of Acre, since 1905 a Brazilian Amazonian state.

The formulation and early development of this idea of frontier is due to Frederick Jackson Turner, the American historian who, in 1893, delivered a paper before the American History Association at Chicago in which he stated that the unsettled area of Western United States was so broken by new settlements that one could hardly talk of a frontier line. His conclusion was that the closing of the historic movement towards the West would have great impacts on American society since it was from the *frontier* that it took its nature and strength (Reps, 1981).

The idea of a frontier that extends the rather ambiguous territory between the settled and unsettled worlds came eventually to permeate the debates on territorial expansion, modernization, and the extension of *civilized* (urbanized?) spaces over new areas for human settlement. *The outer edge of the wave--the meeting point between savagery and civilization*--the Turnerian *moving frontier* is a social space in state of transformation towards capitalism. Turner uses geological and geophysical metaphors to mark a linear evolution and, in spite of recognizing multiple frontiers--farming, mining, trading, ranching--they all move towards cities and fabrics in a rather homogeneous process centered on agriculture where urban growth is a development only to come after the various stages to be followed¹⁶.

In Brazil, the multiplicity of *frontiers* involving peasant movements, plantation territorial expansions and state planned occupations of new areas characterize instead a heterogeneity much more complex than the Turnerian moving frontier. Brazilian authors (and Brazilianists) have looked at the various *expansion and pioneer fronts* from the perspective of their role within capitalist development in Brazil, particularly in their functionality to guarantee the conditions for urban-industrial accumulation. The state has played its part in guaranteeing, through violence and other persuasive means, the expropriation of the surplus product by capital, thus forcing the frontier to move farther away. The availability of land for occupation and the incentives to extend the frontier have postponed several conflicts that otherwise would necessarily rise from confrontations in the settled borders¹⁷.

¹⁶ Reps (1980, 1981) argues that the roles of new towns were minimized in that perspective, since they preceded and/or accompanied the occupation of new lands and that the planning patterns were by then available from the European experience.

¹⁷ See Foweraker (1981) and Pereira (1990) for a thorough discussion on the topic.

The concept of frontier has been also used in various ways to discuss contemporary urban development and/or sprawl. Joel Garreau's today widely known *edge cities* incorporates that idea to praise *life on the new frontier* and suggests that the urban future rests on peripheral urban developments and centralities. In spite of whatever may have been his original intentions his ideas (and he, himself) have been part of advertising campaigns for new urban developments for the upper middle-class in the U.S. and abroad¹⁸. Neil Smith (1996), instead, discusses the processes of gentrification in the United States and England in what he calls *the new urban frontier* and identifies (and foresees) the strong reaction coming from those excluded from the *right to the city* in the form of a *revanchist city*.

Attempts to restore the frontier myth and ideology to support developmental projects of urban development and/or renewal in adjoining and internal metropolitan areas emphasize ideas like *urban pioneers*, *urban homesteaders* and *urban cowboys* as part of gentrification processes. At the same time, ideas of *urban wilderness* and *urban outlaws* are identified with low class areas and inner city sections where violence and social disruption dominates. Smith (1996) emphasizes the internal differentiation of those various *frontier* movements as opposed to the rather homogeneous nature of the American western frontier that informed Turner and other authors.

In Brazil, where homogeneity was not present from the very beginning due to the various social-temporal-spatial processes that characterize underdeveloped countries, several perspectives can be identified with the idea of frontier. Caldeira (1999) discusses *the new urban segregation* in São Paulo where new large closed condominiums magnify the differential borders and inequalities between the rich and the very poor combining advertisement, high walls and private security forces to stir (and capitalize from) surmounting fears and thus develop new strategies for class control and segregation. Holston (1999), however, also speaks of *spaces of insurgent citizenship* in which, criticizing the old (modernist) forms of urbanism, he suggests that the heterogeneity be taken into consideration in a more flexible and experience grounded urban practice and planning.

¹⁸ Caldeira (1999) describes his interviews in the Brazilian TV as part of the campaign to support three major urban developments in the periphery São Paulo: Alphaville, Aldeia da Serra and Tamboré.

In that sense, Arantes (1994), in an ethnographic essay about *the war of places* in downtown São Paulo, describes *multiple territorialities* and *fluid frontiers* constructed (and destroyed) in everyday life by the various and different social appropriations of space within multiple temporalities, spatialities and socialities¹⁹. The transient and the ephemeral character of that triad in the urban context led him to a flexibilization of the concepts of frontier, territory, identity, place and non-place, as parts of tenuous character of symbolic frontiers understood as “...necessary components of a way of living where to cross limits is actually lived with pleasure and ludic challenge, beyond its own justification as useful for survival”. (Arantes, 1994: 201). Baptista (2000), for her turn, identifies in Belo Horizonte a recently built public park around an urban water reservoir, between a large and rather traditional *favela* (slum area) and a new rich neighborhood, as a place where the possibilities of public space to bridge differences and construct *frontier areas* of socio-spatial co-existence and improved citizenship are still open. Here, again, multiple and also transient *spatialities, temporalities and socialities* (Soja, 1996) are constructed as everyday (urban) life is constantly recreated (in time and space).

A multiplicity of other possibilities are also in process in other urban frontiers in Brazil. Beyond the central and peripheral areas of metropolitan and urban agglomerations, cities and towns meet their countrysides in a (contemporary) process of urbanization that implies a di(tri)alectical process of recreation of the *urban fabric*. New socialities, made possible by the emergence of new (and death of old) social actors); new spatialities and temporalities, made possible by new technologies and interconnections, appear apparently everywhere, from small towns in traditional rural Brazil to regional centers and urban nuclei in new and old regions and in Frontier Amazonia. Everywhere different socio-spatial combinations seem to come to life to produce multiple socio-spatial encounters, new institutional arrangements and new forms of inter-urban cooperation. Multi-level articulations and mutant socio-spatial forms seem to co-exist forcing the redefinition of former ways of understanding the reality and eventually, leading to creative political action. The old definitions of urban and rural do not give account anymore of the necessary classifications and a rather strange official terminology emerges: *rural agglomerations*;

¹⁹ I am again borrowing Soja's interpretation of Lefèbvre's triad dialectics of the being: sociality, temporality and spatiality (Soja, 1996).

rural slums; rural nuclei; areas of urban extension; isolated urban areas, among others, try to respond to the needs to grasp the new (urban) socio-spatial realities²⁰. Multiple local and micro-regional diversity builds up underneath extended urbanization expanding and redefining the urban-industrial frontiers, both internally and externally. The proliferation of centralities and peripheries multiplies the various socio-temporal-spatial encounters and with them, the frontier spaces between different levels of settlement.

In fact, whichever way we approach the concept of frontier the idea of limits, of spaces of tension, of areas of transformation (or new formations) is necessarily present. Either within the advance of a (civilized) socio-spatiality over another or simply a line defining differences between contiguous territories (and societies), the frontier always points toward a third position, an area of open possibilities for re-inventions and redefinitions. The other, the ambiguous, the different, are options heralded by the implicit confrontation contained within the duality present in the frontier. Between the city and the countryside other possibilities arise; between the urban-industrial and the jungle there is room for many third positions, fronts, limits, encounters. The mutant periphery mediates old realities both (re)constituting and informing it. Nevertheless, those options always point towards a virtual *urban society*, toward that third possibility suggested by Lefèbvre where the radical necessities suggest the road to transformation, the virtual. The frontiers are also the spaces of utopia, where the (im)possible can come to life.

²⁰ Those are expressions used by the 1991 Brazilian Census.

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