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Local Genealogies of Urban Redevelopment in Bogotá, Colombia

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Abstract: In my paper I carry out a critique of the politics of redevelopment in downtown Bogotá. I consider the shifting contexts in which discourses of recovery, renovation, and densification have emerged in the city's recent history. I argue that recent calls for urban densification are part of an older albeit historically changing constellation of ideas and practices associated to the control of urban space and the creation of urban value. I consider two emblematic interventions during the 20th century that were aimed at dismantling central agglomerations in Bogotá. I argue that these projects advanced class-inflected forms of *dedensification*, as well as underlying, and largely fraught, densification agendas. This takes me from the late 1990s back to the late 1940s in an attempt to describe the continuities between democratic and modernist projects of urban unbuilding. I conclude by considering the contemporary resurgence of discourses of inner city densification during the last decade. I consider the ways in which such projects have become entangled with forms of removal and displacement. I examine how the alleged consensus over central densification in the city's present juncture, has opened a complex field of socio-political struggles in which ideas of economic growth, security, and inclusion meet uneasily.

Since the 1940s, removal and repopulation have functioned jointly as rationales for urban renewal in Bogotá's inner city districts. At different times, either one of these notions has appeared as the dominant discourse to justify intervention. This dialectic, however, has mostly resulted in the gradual removal of 'problem areas' and the partial displacement of impoverished residents. Overall, Bogotá's downtown residential population has decreased steadily since the mid-20th century, not least because of planned demolitions to produce new infrastructure and public space. In the meantime, densification through mixed-use redevelopment has mostly failed or remained stalled¹ as a result of escalating insecurity, economic instability, deepening socio-spatial segregation, and enduring contestations over the use of the city center.

In more recent years, the economic stakes of rebuilding central areas have risen as a result of the increased pressure on urban land, the intensive circulation of global capital, the growth of the real estate market and tourism industry, and the reduction and dislocation of criminal activities². Several countervailing dynamics, however, have obfuscated the smooth advance of profit-driven redevelopment in downtown Bogotá. Among these factors are: the

¹ This is what Lawrence Herzog refers to as "stalled gentrification" in his analysis of inner city revitalization policies in Latin American cities and particularly in Mexico (cf. Herzog, 2006: 143). For more on the concept of "stalled gentrification" in the US context see Williams, 1988.

² Crime rates peaked in Bogotá in 1993, with central districts concentrating some of the highest rates. During the past years violent crime has decreased significantly: murder rates, for instance, dropped from 80 cases per 100.000 inhabitants in 1993 to 17 cases per 100.000 inhabitants in 2012.

mounting centrality of ideals of socio-spatial inclusion in political discourse³; the blocking of public-private partnerships by recurrent bureaucratic conflicts; and persisting middle-class and elite anxieties about the dangers of downtown spaces. Accordingly, the idioms of renovation and densification have become a crucial terrain for contestations over urban security, profit-driven redevelopment, and social inclusion.

In this paper I undertake a critique of the politics of densification by exploring the social and political dimensions of urban density in Bogotá's recent history. I consider the shifting contexts in which such discourses have emerged, the ways in which they have been assembled and deployed in urban policy, and their role in shaping the urban environment. I argue that recent calls for urban densification are part of an older albeit historically changing constellation of ideas and practices associated to the control of urban space and the creation of urban value.

In what follows I trace the politics of inner city transformation in Bogotá by examining concrete articulations of actors, materials, ideas, and practices, as well as their broader social, political, and economic contexts. I consider two emblematic interventions during the 20th century that were aimed at dismantling central agglomerations in Bogotá. I argue that they advanced class-inflected forms of *dedensification*, as well as underlying, and largely fraught, densification agendas. This takes me from the late 1990s back to the late 1940s in an attempt to describe the continuities between democratic and modernist projects of urban unbuilding. I conclude by considering the contemporary resurgence of inner city densification as a dominant real estate and planning practice during the last decade. I consider the ways in which reconstruction projects have become entangled with forms of removal and displacement. Most significantly, I examine how the alleged consensus over central densification in the city's present juncture, has opened a complex field of socio-political struggles in which competing urban visions (of economic growth, sustainability, security, and inclusion) meet uneasily.

³ Citizen opposition to redevelopment has not been particularly organized or strong in Bogotá. In the past years, however, a few movements were formed to oppose the government's plans for the city center. These organizations had links to the Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA), the leftist political party of Bogotá's two last mayors: Luis Eduardo Garzón (2004-2007) and Samuel Moreno (2008-2011). Paradoxically, it was during these mayors' terms that several profit-oriented redevelopment projects were launched and a series of downtown evictions took place. Current mayor Gustavo Petro, who was previously a PDA member, abandoned the party to form a dissident leftist movement, Progresistas, partly as a reaction to corruption scandals involving mayor Moreno, who is currently in jail facing corruption charges. Petro's discourse of inclusionary redevelopment is partly a reflection of the increasing political and electoral costs associated to previous redevelopment evictions, displacements, and corruption.

The Production of Emptiness

“We’re standing on what used to be the biggest *olla*⁴ [drug market] in Latin America!” It was October 2012 and a young crack smoker said this trying to shake off his own disbelief. “All this was only shadows and death, because that is what an *olla* is,” he continued, apparently coming down from his last hit of *bazuco* [crack cocaine]. The metropolitan park where we were talking had been Bogota’s largest drug market in the 1980s and 1990s: a bustling hub of illegality and crime known as El Cartucho. It had also been a refuge for impoverished families, forcefully displaced migrants, homeless waste pickers, small businesses, and street vendors. This enclave of ‘urban blight’ formed in the old Santa Inés neighborhood after decades of state (in)action, and only two blocks away from the historic Plaza de Bolívar and government buildings such as City Hall, National Congress, and the Presidential Palace. In 1998, the city administration of Enrique Peñalosa (1998-2000) slated the area for demolition. During the next six years 20 blocks of dilapidated colonial and republican houses were razed to give way to the Third Millennium Park, a monumental space in the heart of Bogotá that was to mark the city’s entrance into the 21st century.

Significantly, today the park is still recognized more for what used to be its place than for being the millennial space its designers envisioned (Donovan 2008). The large expanse of concrete and grass currently acts as a buffer zone between the institutional, business, and historic districts of east downtown and the more ‘dangerous’ and ‘marginal’ neighborhoods in the west side of the city center. The everyday use of the park is revealing of its transitional character. The homeless and *bazuco* smokers use the edges of the park. They are allowed to rest but not sleep, as a private security guard explained. These spots are closest to the surrounding neighborhoods to which many of the businesses of El Cartucho relocated: from drug markets and crack houses to brothels and precarious tenement rentals.

Hundreds of street vendors and hawkers of recycled goods crowd the northern and eastern limits of the park. They sell their merchandise on the adjacent sidewalks and are only allowed inside the park when they are passing through. Central areas in turn are sparsely used. On weekdays it is mainly commuters hurrying to and from the bus station on the southwest corner. On weekends a greater number of poor and middle-class families spend time in the

⁴ The term “olla,” which originally refers to a common household pot or cauldron, is used in this context to describe a particularly ‘deteriorated’ urban area, usually associated to drug trade and consumption.

children's areas on the east and south sides. These more 'disciplined' visitors are wary of the habitual 'unruly' users. As three women walking their dogs on a Sunday morning explained, they found the park's central areas to be "calmer," while the nooks and slopes on the edges seemed more "complicated" and "insecure." A few minutes before speaking with them, I had seen a guard wake up a young man who was sleeping behind a small wall near the children's play areas. After some arguing, he walked away slowly, complaining, and pulling his rags behind him.

The dialectic of depopulation and repopulation

The Third Millennium Operation became the contemporary epitome of a form of urban 'rarefaction' aimed at thinning 'disorderly' areas out of existence through the construction of 'democratic public space.' At the same time the project aligned itself with long standing calls for the repopulation and reactivation of the city center. In this manner, the plan invoked two contradictory discourses of urban density, one associated to decline and the other to recovery. According to the municipal decree that sanctioned the plan, the area of intervention presented "high concentration rates of homelessness [indigentes]" and "of activities such as the commerce of drugs and other illicit activities." The official diagnostic also argued, "saturation in some buildings and the invasion of buildings and public spaces prevents the adequate functioning of activities in the area". Finally, it pointed out that "the state of decay of some constructions, and the risk of ruin in others, degrade the quality of the sector" (Decree 880/1998). In the convoluted language of the decree, urban decay was conceptualized as the result of the area's *saturation* with certain kinds of people, constructions, and activities. According to early official reports, of the three areas that were contemplated in the plan, the one that was finally demolished, El Cartucho, was the most populated, with approximately 8.000 inhabitants and a density of 504 people per hectare⁵ (Econometría 1999). Experts who participated in the plan's local census often noted that population figures might have been significantly underreported given the large "floating population" in the area. A plan to repopulate the city center had paradoxically started by emptying out one of its most populous areas.

Alongside the notion of a deteriorating modality of urban density, the project recognized the potential for an "adequate" form of densification: "Large areas that are empty, incorrectly used, and deteriorated, can be employed for large-scale intervention through projects that

⁵ The average density for Bogotá in 1997, according the same report, was 140 inhabitants per hectare.

generate a positive impact with the capability of recovering the value of the [city] center” (Decree 880/1998). A think-tank hired by the administration to carry out preliminary studies further stressed the “social and economic convenience of continuing...the process of urban renewal that would be initiated with the Third Millennium Project, in order to recover and redensify a much larger area of the center of the city” (Econometría 1999). The demolition of El Cartucho and the construction of the park were to be the first stages of a more ambitious plan for mixed-use redevelopment in surrounding areas. The proposal originally included the construction of high-density housing in San Bernardo, a low-income residential neighborhood to the south. While part of the San Victorino area, a traditional wholesale and informal commerce district to the north, would be used for the development of an open-air mall. In the end only the park was constructed. The plan for San Bernardo never took off, and instead, criminal networks operating in El Cartucho allegedly moved into the neighborhood causing a new round of displacements (Franco Calderón 2010). For its part, the open-air mall in San Victorino has been on hold for years due to mismanagement and under suspicions of corruption. The three hectares of land set apart for this purpose (of the almost 20 demolished for the construction of the park) have remained undeveloped to this date. Since 2012, the ‘progressive’ administration of Gustavo Petro has considered a contentious move to change the original plan and devote part of the land for subsidized low-income housing. The shift is complex, given the relative inflexibility of previous legal, financial, and political commitments.

The Third Millennium project can be understood as a truncated form of creative destruction in which *dispossession* did not translate into anticipated modes of *accumulation* (Harvey, 2007). The incomplete dialectic of rarefaction and densification, depopulation and repopulation, evinced the uncertainties and complex contestations that are inherent to the creation of urban value (Weber 2002). The reversal of ‘densities of decline’ and the production of new ‘densities of recovery’ presupposed a division in the labor of redevelopment that was not fulfilled: the state carried out projects of urban destruction and reinvestment under the premise that certain social actors would follow its lead and, most importantly, that the private sector would respond with real estate development (Fainstein 2001). A crucial part of the work of the state and its experts, in this sense, was to establish classificatory schemes to sort out and justify the destruction of decaying urban spaces (Herzfeld 2006). At play here was the social production of “urban blight,” a process inherent to uneven urban development (Fainstein 1983) and a

rhetoric with a long history in planning thought (Beauregard 2003; Hall 2002; Rabinow 1989). Similarly important, however, was the ideological labor invested in constructing ‘public space’ – the millennial park– as the obverse of spatial decay. This appeared as the main vehicle to revert urban disorder, restore democratic governance and citizenship, and eventually produce ‘adequate’ densities.

As Third Millennium exemplifies, the politics of urban decline and reconstruction should not be reduced to a mystified operation in favor of capital accumulation, although in many cases they end up doing just that. Urban destruction and creation are part of a more complex socio-cultural and political struggle over urban sovereignty, value, and space that must be studied in context. Crucial here is the analysis of the micro-practices and socio-material assemblages, as well as of the broader political and economic conditions, which make possible the unbuilding and rebuilding of physical and human infrastructures (Hommels 2005).

Crisis Planning

Security rationalities were integral to the Third Millennium Operation. An acute sense of socio-spatial crisis informed the actions of many of state actors and experts involved in the project, legitimating the removal of the neighborhood as an end in itself. In recalling the operation from his consulting office, overlooking the tree-lined streets of the upscale La Cabrera district in north Bogotá, former mayor Peñalosa stressed the belligerent nature of the project. He described his administration’s first incursion in the area, which entailed clearing San Victorino, on the north side of El Cartucho, of thousands of street vendors who had been stationed in a plaza and its surrounding streets since the 1960s:

San Victorino was a horror, block after block invaded by vendors...insecurity was horrible. [San Victorino] was obviously the back or front part of El Cartucho...The struggle to remove San Victorino was monumental. [Clearing] San Victorino was something that no one would have dared, it was almost like the FARC⁶, no one dared touch it...It’s unimaginable what it was, it was

⁶ Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces, by its acronym in Spanish: the country’s largest and oldest illegal armed group.

the symbol of the impotence of the state: the center of Bogotá totally occupied, it was complete chaos.

This early operation and the way it was framed was based on the assumption that El Cartucho and San Victorino were both expressions of the same kinds of extreme disorder and violence. Largely the result of an arbitrary remapping of perceptions of crime unto a wide array of actors and spaces (Caldeira 2000), the shadowy presence of local mafias in Bogotá's social landscape has often led to the criminalization of the urban poor and, in particular, of street vendors (Berney 2011; Donovan 2008). This logic permeated the Third Millennium Operation: a multiplicity of actors and forms of sociality were portrayed as being in some way associated to the same criminal dynamics. Such slippages were instrumental in justifying the decision to clear a sizeable part of the Santa Inés neighborhood, beyond the circumscribed space –known as the *street* of El Cartucho– where criminal groups admittedly operated⁷. Hence Peñalosa's particular rendering of planning as a mode of urban warfare (Weizman 2007):

[San Victorino] was taken over by thousands of mafia organizations with political and military power... So how was I able to get them out? Basically because I had a police chief, a tough guy, who was later killed, and we carried out a military operation. When we launched the final operation we brought in everything: 1.500 police officers, helicopters, armored vehicles, everything! Why? Because when you're going to carry out one of these operations you always have to have overwhelming force. So the guys can clearly see they have no chance...[Back then] no one dared even to say that San Victorino was going to be cleared, everyone panicked! Much less that El Cartucho was going to be torn down!

Military metaphors ran deep in the conception and implementation of Third Millennium, which was often described as a “detonating” project for similar efforts to “recover” public space in Bogotá's center. One senior planner, for instance, described the land acquisition and demolition process as a “military strategy”: the city bought, evicted, and demolished properties starting from the outer rings of the neighborhood and encircling the drug market in the core. Regular

⁷ The linguistic shift itself through which ‘El Cartucho’ gradually came to index most of ‘Santa Inés’ was significant in this regard.

procedures, she further explained, were frequently conducted in the company of armed police units and the planning team was often forced to “work from above” using aerial photography.

The idea that El Cartucho was irredeemable and that radical measures were required, was also linked to a certain variety of spatial determinism. An experienced sociologist, who headed the “social component” of the project in the late 1990s, described the historical degradation of the area as the result of both institutional weaknesses and complex social dynamics. During a conversation with her in a café in the fashionable El Virrey park, not far from Peñalosa’s office, she called attention, however, to the unique spatial attributes that had contributed to the reproduction of ‘urban decay’: “Morphologically El Cartucho was like a triangle with a very particular urban form, so people rolled themselves up [la gente se encartuchaba], that is, they got into a space into which authorities could not easily penetrate...it was somewhat like a ghetto where no one could enter.”

In her comment she had played with the word ‘cartucho’, which means ‘lily,’ ‘cartridge’ or simply ‘cone’ or ‘roll of paper.’ These terms usually conjure urban lore about El Cartucho: from images of lily gardens when Santa Inés was an upper middle class neighborhood at the turn of the 19th century, to an earlier revolutionary history when gun powder was allegedly packed in paper cones by insurgent artisans in what was then a colonial periphery. But far from being merely anecdotal, such ideas about the built environment shaped official and popular imaginations of El Cartucho, which in turn influenced concrete practices and modes of intervention. The tacit assumption was that crime, violence, and marginality were emergent properties of particular spatial forms. Consequently, such spaces had to be replaced with what was conceived as their opposite: public spaces allegedly embodying and engendering democratic exchange, civism, and security.

An architect who had worked for the city’s Company of Urban Renewal –at the time a small office created by Peñalosa to oversee the implementation of the project– explained how the intervention essentially sought to “desencartuchar El Cartucho,” “to unroll the roll” as it were, in reference to the elimination of narrow alleyways, dead-end streets, and winding passages. The emphasis on terrain –a recurring element in the social construction of this marginal space throughout the city’s history– reinforced a planning strategy aimed at securing the area by materially disassembling it. Hence the reluctance in city hall, as several architects working on the plan explained, to preserve any of the neighborhoods’ historic houses. In addition to restoration

efforts being more costly than demolition, leaving any structures standing was seen as a risk for the reemergence of ‘urban decay.’ Unbuilding had to be complete and transformation had to reach, as one senior planner put it, “a point of no return.”

Unbuilding human infrastructures

Strategies to physically dismantle urban space were coupled with social programs to relocate residents or, very often, to simply persuade them to leave. At issue here was the unmaking of human infrastructures: those complex modes of social collaboration and interaction that had been created and sustained through the years to secure livelihoods in the midst of precarious conditions (Simone 2004). One governmental technology that was adapted to these purposes came directly from the World Bank’s resettlement policies. An architect who worked in the implementation of Third Millennium, and who had previous experience in infrastructure management, explained how such schemes had been originally designed for displacements caused by infrastructure projects in “vulnerable areas” such as “risk zones” and “informal developments” where residents did not hold legal titles (cf. Zeiderman 2012). Because its original owners had consistently abandoned the Santa Inés area starting as early as the 1930s, what at the time were already complex property regimes and forms of occupation became even more varied and fluctuating. Mechanisms such as socio-economic censuses and baselines were deployed to bring these intricate modes of tenancy into some form of bureaucratic rationality, however limited and imperfect.

The “Reestablishment of Initial Conditions,” as the resettlement framework was known, became a case of local policy transfer, and the Third Millennium Operation, as the architect put it, a “lesson in the management of vulnerability in non-marginal zones.” The recontextualization of techniques of intervention from the periphery to the urban core was instrumental in carrying out relocation programs, which resulted in the disintegration of residential and small business clusters. Ultimately, it enabled the official conceptualization of this downtown space as ‘marginal,’ as a ‘central periphery’ requiring intervention. Several families, now appearing as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966), were resettled in peripheral neighborhoods and what was finally accomplished was not the reestablishment of *initial* but rather *presupposed* conditions, namely: that impoverished urban dwellers should inhabit the city’s margins, not its center.

Closely related to these notions of risk and vulnerability, the Third Millennium Operation explicitly appealed to a humanitarian logic, a narrative readily available in the context of Colombia's enduring armed conflict. The sociologist in charge of the project's social policies described this as "a strategy of seduction," which started by "identifying" and "recognizing" local inhabitants and then "approaching" them in diverse ways to "build trust." These statements did not simply signal a form of bureaucratic expediency, they were also an indication of the moral convictions that accompanied the plan to eradicate El Cartucho. Humanitarian intervention and persuasion reconstituted urban dwellers into victims who required urgent attention (Fassin 2012; Theidon 2013). Social programs included "psycho-social attention" and "transitory lodging." As the sociologist put it:

First in line was a strategy of social and humanitarian intervention and then behind it came the real estate component of urban renewal for land acquisition. So what was smart about Peñalosa's [plan was that it said]: 'Let the humanitarian issue go first, let it take care of whatever has to be taken care of and when it is assured that everyone, to the last human being there, is taken in or protected or at least intervened or supported, only then will we come in with the acquisition of the properties and with the bulldozer.'

Ultimately, the sociologist explained, the administration provided "support so [people in the area] could begin preparing to exit the zone." In this manner, urban warfare and humanitarianism operated in conjunction and based on the assumption that Santa Inés-El Cartucho had become a site of social disaster that could only be dealt with through demolition and resettlement (Duffield 2001; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010). The operation took the form of an emergency evacuation in which vulnerable subjects were allegedly being rescued from violence, poverty, and drug dependence.

Without denying the very real structures of violence that existed in the area, it is crucial to point to the ways in which this urban humanitarianism, with its militarized and spatialized overtones, obfuscated more complex political dynamics. By naturalizing the deterioration of the neighborhood as an irreversible crisis, the operation presented its demolition as an unquestionable response, while at the same time foreclosing any discussion about alternative courses of action. Furthermore, by conceiving inhabitants as either criminals or victims, intervention was basically divided into the use of force and the provision of assistance. From this

perspective, most residents did not appear as subjects of rights with political agency, but rather as passive recipients of state action.

But the neighborhood's contentious and heterogeneous socio-political landscape inevitably surfaced in the course of the operation. Conducting the census, for example, which was the foundation of most of the state's actions, became "an ordeal," as one of the city officials working in the 'social management plan' commented: "it implied negotiations and agreements with internal actors." Gathering information was a political process from the start, a struggle over knowledge, which all actors were very much aware of. The consulting firms carrying out the census relied on local residents –a few of whom were hired directly as census takers– as well as on the ambivalent 'collaboration' of drug dealers. "Our hard lesson was to understand that [the population] was not a singular mass, that [El Cartucho] was not a singular context," the city official overseeing the process noted.

The census registered the presence of tenement dwellers [inquilinos], homeowners, shopkeepers, food market vendors [vivanderas], used goods vendors [cachivacheros], traditional typography businesses, homeless addicts [indigentes adictos], waste pickers [recicladores], administrators of small recycling warehouses [bodegueros], and drug dealers [jíbaros], among others. These categories –especially the last four– interacted in complex ways. Importantly, the census and its associated programs, as one city official explained, became a catalyst for diverse political claims and conflicts: "Some forms of leadership emerged, some were terrible...matters were handled poorly, city functionaries at some moments thought they could buy off certain leaders...buying off meant giving them a job, something of the sort, and that generated internal conflicts among those leaders and there were several deaths and also threats." Rather than a coherent process of state coercion and assistance, a series of negotiations and compromises took place, blurring the boundaries between state and non-state, legal and illegal, official and unofficial (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Das and Poole 2004). Final outcomes ranged from state-led relocation and marginal compensations to forceful or indirect expulsion.

In the end, the intervention's contradictions were dramatically exposed by two episodes that received wide press coverage. On 2 March 2000, around 400 people organized a protest in El Cartucho, which soon became a full-blown "rebellion" according to local press reports (El Tiempo, 2000). Police intervened and violence escalated to the point where protesters came very close to setting a gas station on fire. During the event a local leader gained visibility: Ernesto 'El

Loco' Calderón, a self-declared representative of homeless waste pickers and the owner of several recycling warehouses in the area (Morris Rincón 2011). City officials who were involved in the project often mention 'El Loco' Calderón as a key broker during the implementation of Third Millennium, one who moved between incendiary opposition and pragmatic agreements. Almost exactly a year after the revolt, on 3 March 2001, Calderón was shot dead by a rival drug gang, which had probably felt betrayed by his mediations.

The drug trade and its connections to waste pickers and homeless addicts became the most intractable issue for the administration. For the most part, city officials turned a blind eye to drug dealers' efforts to relocate in nearby neighborhoods. But the homeless population became almost impossible for municipal authorities to manage or ignore. In 2005, demolitions in El Cartucho had reached an end and Third Millennium Park would soon be inaugurated. On 21 April the city administration carried out the last incursion to remove the people who had been left behind living in the neighborhood's ruins. Initial reports spoke of 300 former inhabitants of El Cartucho wandering through downtown neighborhoods as residents in their path took to the streets to protest against their presence (El Tiempo, 2005a). Finally, in an improbable and all too literal stripping down to 'bare life,' the administration decided to provisionally shelter these destitute bodies in the city's old slaughterhouse (El Tiempo, 2005b). By the end of April news sources talked of 1.400 to 1.800 people temporarily living in the abandoned meatpacking facilities. In the following months, as the park opened, drug dealers, homeless consumers, and waste pickers slowly resettled around its margins.

Modernist reverberations

The Third Millennium Operation was essentially a governmental strategy against concentrated 'urban decay.' The project consisted of a series of maneuvers aimed at eliminating what it portrayed as dense socio-material assemblages of violence, illegality, and poverty. Undoing this agglomeration was viewed primarily as a restoration of state sovereignty embodied in the idealized space of Third Millennium Park, and a first step towards the formation of new 'densities of recovery.' From a broader historical perspective, the operation seemed to continue earlier interventions aimed at clearing and reconstructing downtown districts. Peñalosa, in fact, partly attributed the idea of Third Millennium to his father, a city councilor in the 1950s, who

would often talk to him about the “unique opportunity of tearing down the whole area [of Santa Inés]” to undertake an urban project.

In 1946, the country’s main architectural magazine and a local platform for modernist planning, *Proa*, published an issue titled, “Bogotá can be a modern city” (*Proa* 1946). In the centerpiece article, the modernist architects noted how “the city’s most dirty and sordid neighborhoods are in downtown, but their existence is a great fortune, a stupendous mine that the collectivity can and must take advantage of: it is called VALORIZATION” (16). The key operation to create wealth was simple, the article continued, it was through “official urbanization, characterized by wide avenues” (16). The magazine then called for the “official re-urbanization of the filthiest sector, the so-called Central Market [Plaza de Mercado],” an area which basically coincided with what 50 years later would be the Third Millennium site. The admonition included photographs of impoverished peasants and market vendors with captions such as “filth,” “misery,” “contagion,” “promiscuity,” and “abandonment.” In juxtaposition, the architects presented sketches of a city of towers, arranged symmetrically around ample avenues and gardens. For them, this was the “solution to the problem” of Santa Inés, those “16 blocks that clamor for demolition, fire, or earthquake” (16).

Two years later, the architects’ pleas for disaster were partly answered. On 9 April 1948 populist leader and presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated in downtown Bogotá. Crowds flooded the streets looting and burning government buildings, churches, stores, warehouses, and trolleys in a foundational event of public violence known as *El Bogotazo*. Although destruction was apparently not as widespread as the media initially reported, the *Bogotazo* was taken up by city officials, experts, and developers as an opportunity to accelerate plans for urban destruction and reconstruction (Aprile Gniset 1983). The architects of *Proa* went so far as to welcome the riots in their June issue arguing that “Bogotá’s urban problem” had been “frankly cleared and partially resolved” (*Proa* 1948). Political turmoil had cleared the path for ongoing processes of planned demolition and seemingly justified the call for extreme measures: “large-scale surgery is the only therapeutic means that can save this city” (*Proa* 1948).

The road towards modernity

One of the deepest incisions performed on Bogotá’s urban fabric began the year before the *Bogotazo* took place: the construction of the Carrera Décima –a 40 meter wide and 8

kilometer long avenue— in the heart of downtown Bogotá. Significantly, the road cut through the Santa Inés neighborhood, obliterating the central market [Plaza de la Concepción] much to the satisfaction of Proa's architects, who in a 1952 editorial had called it a "necessary demolition":

The old plaza [of Concepción] so primitively organized, so dreadfully congested, had been in previous decades cause for serious concerns in terms of hygiene. Its miserable and repugnant presence in such a central area was a disgrace for Bogotá. The city's most abject and contemptible foci congregated there in horrendous promiscuity. Hideouts, brothels, hideousness, and diseases will disappear with this demolition. The new road, besides fulfilling its immediate ends related to circulation, will create in this area a new modern urban core, comfortable, better inhabited... With good regulations, one of the best and most lucrative zones of the city can appear in this area (Proa, 1952)

Similarly to the carving out of Parisian boulevards under Baron Haussmann or slum clearance efforts in the United States, 'urban modernization' in Bogotá was inextricably tied to notions of hygiene, morality, and circulation (Hall 2002; Harvey 2003). Anxieties about the deteriorating congestion of the city center had started to surface at the turn of the century when Bogotá's population increased from approximately 80.000 in 1870 to 120.000 in 1910 (Mejía P 1999). Most of the city's new inhabitants were peasants fleeing from rural violence and poverty. Because the urban structure had remained more or less unchanged, the impoverished migrants settled in tenements and partitioned dwellings in central districts [inquilinos], contributing to an early process of densification (Mejía P 1999: 366). One of such areas was precisely Santa Inés, a transportation and commercial hub in the western edges of the city core, to which thousands of travellers arrived in search of accommodations and livelihoods.

In this light, modernist perceptions of 'crowding' had clear class and racial overtones. Hence Proa's remarks about ridding the city of certain forms of "congestion" to create spaces for "valorization" and, most suggestively, for "better inhabitants" (Aprile Gniset 1983: 70). When the Carrera Décima opened its way through the west side of the city center, Bogotá's population had multiplied by more than five times in a span of 40 years, reaching 660.000 in 1951. Working class presence had become stronger in central districts, while middle classes and elites had been moving out to new developments in the north since at least the 1930s (Zambrano Pantoja and de Urbina González 2009). In this context, the construction of the road became a project to counter

‘immoral’ and ‘unruly’ densities in the name of progress and modernity, which basically meant eliminating pauperization through spatial displacement and reconstruction. In addition to appealing to morality, prophylactics, and aesthetics, the intervention relied on the authoritative discourses of local and international experts. Most notably, in the late 1940s the government hired Le Corbusier, Josep Lluís Sert, and Paul Lester Wiener to produce a master plan for Bogotá. Although their Plan Director (1950) and Plan Regulador (1953) were never implemented, the influence of these “international experts” in political and technocratic circles, as well as in public opinion, undoubtedly lent force to modernist perspectives and projects such as Carrera Décima. Famously, Le Corbusier’s unrealized plan for a new Civic Center entailed the almost entire demolition of downtown Bogotá.

A corridor for capital

Although only a modest approximation to Le Corbusier’s tabula rasa, the Carrera Décima displaced thousands of residents in an effort to ‘decongest’ the center, while it simultaneously opened a corridor for the circulation of new people and capital. In a clear example of the dialectic of depopulation and repopulation, the project promoted new ‘modern’ densities in what became, during some years, the “avenue of the industries” [avenida de los gremios]: a boulevard lined with office and residential high-rises built by the country’s main companies and elite families (Niño Murcia and Reina Mendoza 2010). Within the project, discourses of hygiene, social improvement, and spaciousness were indistinguishable from ideas of national progress, economic growth, and international prestige. Such notions, mobilized through the similarly undifferentiated interests of state actors and capitalists, allowed the large-scale unbuilding and rebuilding that took place between the late 1940s and the early 1960s along the modernist corridor.

Massive land acquisitions and demolitions were tightly synchronized with the deployment of financial instruments such as the issuing of government bonds and the levying of ‘valorization’ contributions (Niño Murcia and Reina Mendoza 2010). In this manner, the creation of urban value was ultimately enabled by the government and capitalized by booming industrial and construction sectors in the midst of a turbulent period marked by violent conflict in the countryside, inordinate demographic growth, and a “golden age” of economic development (Henderson 2001). Ultimately, this attempt to reconquest the city center was as much an act of

sovereignty as it was a capitalist venture (Ong 2011). It represented the consolidation of a authentic “growth machine” (Logan and Molotch 1987) that operated at national and local levels and which was epitomized in the figure of the politician-developer. President Mariano Ospina Pérez and mayor Fernando Mazuera, who pushed the project forward, were also the founders of two of the largest real estate companies in Colombia: Ospinas & Cia. and Fernando Mazuera & Cia.

The Carrera Décima purported to end a crisis of congestion only to usher in a state sanctioned form of “speculative density” (Rao 2007). High-rise construction became the crucial tool for both value extraction and modern aspirations. In fact, Colombia’s first horizontal property regime was passed into law in 1948 by president Ospina Pérez, as part of the plan to reconstruct Bogotá after the riots of El Bogotazo. On one hand, the initiative sought to replace the anachronistic property regimes that still governed most of the city center and which many blamed to be the cause of ‘urban decay.’ On the other hand, the law opened the way for a process of verticalization through the construction of high-rises, now conceived as the material embodiments of national ideals of development and modernization. One of the avenue’s emblematic buildings was the new headquarters of the Bank of Bogotá inaugurated in 1960. At the time, it was the city's tallest building: a seventeen-story glass and steel structure designed in collaboration with the renowned New York firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (Proa 1960). The tower was built in International Style and was modeled after Lever House in Manhattan. Following Aihwa Ong’s (2011) discussion of “hyperbuilding” in contemporary Asia, in its mimicry of cosmopolitanism, the glittering Bank of Bogotá was a both spectacle of nationhood and a spectacle of speculation.

The monumental avenue, however, soon became exemplary of the contradictions of modernist planning and its negation of socio-political realities (Holston 1989; Scott 1998). The city’s population continued to increase in the following decades at an unprecedented rate, as did inequalities and urban violence. Informal urbanizations developed rapidly in the peripheries and socio-spatial segregation deepened along a north-south divide. The city center stood at the crux of these processes, still providing forms of housing and economic resources for the urban poor, as well as a variety of services for middle classes and the elite. Significantly, by cutting through the middle of downtown Bogotá, the Carrera Décima had severed working-class neighborhoods in the west from the more prestigious districts in the east (Carbonell Higuera 2011; Jaramillo

2006). The project reinforced patterns of uneven development, rendering neighborhoods such as Santa Inés ‘residual’ and contributing to their precipitous decline. In the 1980s, the powerful occupants of the Carrera Décima had almost all left for the more homogenously upscale districts of the north. The corridor had become prematurely obsolescent amid fears of crime, extreme traffic congestion, and an expanding informal economy.

A political economy of urban (dis)assembling

The resonances and continuities between Carrera Décima and Third Millennium are evident. Both interventions originated from an anti-density impulse. Furthermore, the two plans constituted a chain of failures, where the contradictions in the first partly set the stage for the contested implementation of the second. Importantly, in both projects the production of emptiness was presented as a condition for the creation of more ‘orderly’ and ‘standardized’ densities (Jacobs 1961). Undoing ‘decaying’ agglomerations became the rationale behind attempts to displace working-class modes of inhabiting and using urban space. In this sense, both projects appealed to the joint action of the state and the market to establish class-inflected forms of political and economic sovereignty over the allegedly unregulated and uncontrolled spaces of the city center. Despite the dislocations such interventions brought about, the upper-class reconquest of downtown Bogotá was really never accomplished, it was at best short-lived and tentative. While spatial forms succumbed to these forceful programs of material transformation, the human infrastructures they targeted were in the end more obdurate.

Important differences, however, are also apparent in how the two projects unfolded and in the social-spatial arrangements they helped produce. Each intervention brought together a particular set of discourses, material forms, legal and political instruments, and social actors in order to disassemble and reassemble urban space. Distinct institutional landscapes, economic conditions, and ideological frameworks articulated these assemblages in specific ways (cf. Moore 2005). The Carrera Décima, for instance, coalesced under the influence of a powerful urban elite that controlled the city administration and owned the country’s main real estate and construction companies during the 1950s (Niño Murcia and Reina Mendoza 2010; Suárez Mayorga 2006). The ascendancy of this political and economic coalition was fueled by extraordinary economic growth, sustained industrial development (under import substitution policies and a coffee bonanza), and expanding domestic markets (Henderson 2001). More

generally, the plans for Bogotá, and specifically for the city center, were inflected with an ideology of national modernization that repudiated colonial forms, rural uncouthness, and ‘disorderly’ masses –a rejection that was intensified with the Bogotazo riots. In this manner, the avenue and the skyscraper became emblems of modern nationhood and vehicles for the creation of wealth. These monolithic structures aspired to be materializations of progress, as well as international demonstrations of a rising state and national economy.

Public space and civic exclusions

The Third Millennium project was assembled in a radically different context. The 1990s was a decade of widespread violence and democratic expansion in Colombia (cf. Caldeira and Holston 1999). The country’s 1991 constitutional reform introduced comprehensive measures to extend political decentralization, democratic participation, and citizen rights. This was largely a response to the “crisis of legitimacy” of traditional parties, as well as an attempt to counter an enduring violent conflict that had originated within a highly centralized and exclusionary power-sharing structure (Rojas 2004). City administrations emerged as “new state spaces” (Brenner 2004) of crucial importance within this new architecture of governance⁸. They became sites for intense political and economic struggles, as well as incubators for new socio-spatial visions. Resembling to some extent what David Harvey (1989) terms “urban entrepreneurialism”, Colombia’s turn to municipalism compelled a reinvention of local governance that generated both “urban fortunes and misfortunes.” By the end of the 1990s, Bogotá was regarded as an example of the former. The city had managed to pull itself out of a fiscal crisis; crime rates were falling rapidly; and the election of independent mayors Antanas Mockus (1995-1997; 2001-2003) and Enrique Peñalosa (1998-2000) had revitalized the political scene.

The “recovery of public space” became one of the central policies in Bogotá’s ‘renaissance’ during the 1990s; it was associated to ideals of civism, democracy, and equality, and ultimately, to a broad notion of the “public good” [lo público]. The public space discourse, however, led to a range of dissimilar interventions: from the “pedagogical” promotion of “civic behavior,” to the construction of public infrastructure and amenities to reduce spatial

⁸ Until 1988, the year of some of the first political reforms, municipal mayors had been appointed either by department governors (who were in turn nominated by the president) or, in the case of Bogotá, directly by the president.

segregation, to the overt control and policing of urban space. Unlike cities such as New York or Chicago, where city governments during the late 20th century focused primarily on urban policing and beautification as a form of city branding (Bennett 2010; Pasotti 2010; Smith 1996), Bogotá's spatial policies merged competing claims for citizenship rights and social justice with the impulse towards economic development (Beckett and Godoy 2010; Pérez 2010). Spatial reconstruction during this period was an irregular process that straddled right to the city discourses and neoliberal agendas (Berney 2013). The Third Millennium Operation was possibly the clearest example of the contradictions of Bogotá's ideology of public space (cf. Delgado Ruiz 2007). It was a monumental symbol of publicness and openness –an instrument to 'civilize' and 'democratize' urban densities– that had been erected through displacement and 'civic' exclusions.

In addition to its allegedly intrinsic 'democratic' qualities, the construction of the park was conceived as a necessary first step towards the "reactivation" of the area. As one of the city officials who worked in the project explained: "[It was] a stellar project to create public space in a strategic location in the center –in that moment tremendously deteriorated– which would detonate urban development around that emblematic public space." Importantly, economic conditions at the time both enabled and limited the intervention. The government's improved fiscal conditions (which included the capital reduction of the city's energy company) provided the significant public resources (over USD 100 million) that went into the operation. From 1998 to 2000, however, the country fell into an economic recession, partly as a result of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which led to an unprecedented mortgage crisis and the collapse of the construction sector. The housing crash, as one of the Third Millennium consultants explained, brought highly qualified professionals from real estate companies to work in the city government, providing the kind of 'entrepreneurial' experience that was needed to push the project through. Most significantly, however, the crisis prevented the flow of private capital that was required to complete the plan through the redevelopment of the adjacent neighborhoods. In the end, all that was left was a vacuous symbol of democracy and the dispersal of the agglomeration of 'decay.'

Peopling space?

A few years after the inauguration of Third Millennium, a block on the east side of downtown Bogotá became ground zero for the city's next wave of urban renovation. Strategically located below the emblematic Monserrate Mountain and next to the historic neighborhood of La Candelaria, the 8.500 m² site was demolished in 2009 and remains unchanged to this date. The project, known as Block 5 and launched during the administration of self-declared leftist mayor Luis Eduardo Garzón (2004-2007), proposed the construction of a cultural center, which was to be funded by the Spanish government, along with a middle-income residential development. The fate of Block 5 is demonstrative of the social struggles that have surfaced in recent initiatives explicitly aimed at repopulating 'underused' and 'deteriorated' zones through mixed-use redevelopment.

Today, the construction of the cultural center is uncertain due to Spanish withdrawal of support in the wake of the global financial crisis. The sales office of what is now marketed as a high-end condominium, however, opened this year. In the meantime, evicted property owners persist in a legal battle, as of yet lost, to recover their properties or obtain greater compensation. For the property owners, their eviction was the perverse upshot of state-backed real estate speculation. Margarita, an elderly woman from the area, expressed her outrage during a conversation we had in 2012: "They stole the block from us in such a savage way." What most shocked her was that it had been "the state itself that had done the robbing." The former owners of Block 5 had experienced the violence of the law through a highly bureaucratized form of displacement.

In contrast to Third Millennium, recent renovation plans such as the Block 5 project aim to open highly profitable real estate markets in places where the notions of 'decay' are strongly contested. For Paulina and Enrique, two community leaders affected by another downtown renewal plan –Central Station– a politics of 'decline' had been mobilized to displace residents for the profits of redevelopment. For them, 'insecurity' and 'decay' had to be dealt with by the police and judiciary and not through eminent domain and renovation. In the absence of policies for the inclusion of local inhabitants, Paulina noted, it would be primarily developers and new higher-income residents who would reap the benefits of renovation. Security and development would arrive after local residents had left. On one occasion Enrique further questioned the collaboration between security discourse and economic interests by drawing a parallel with

Colombia's armed conflict: "I haven't found anyone who can tell me the difference between what's going on here and the violent displacement of campesinos [rural peasants] by paramilitary forces."

The Block 5 and Central Station projects, and the multiple private development plans that followed, have sought to redevelop land for mixed uses, in contrast to the public space centered paradigm of previous years. Security was now less about terrain and more about activities and population. Such plans, however, also bore continuities with earlier interventions in their attempts to erase and fully reinvent spaces and their inhabitants. Securing and recovering the city was to be accomplished not through the violence of spatial emptiness but through the force of radical redevelopment. This wave of urban renovation peaked between 2007 and 2009 but soon died out. Displacing local inhabitants to remake spaces exclusively for new capital and new people quickly became politically and socially untenable. Urban renovation had to come to terms with mounting claims for inclusion.

A new approach confronting these challenges has begun to take shape since 2010, when a private university, acting as developer, took the first steps in rethinking urban renovation. During the past two years the Universidad de los Andes has promoted a participatory redevelopment plan known as Fenicia Progresses in the east side of downtown Bogotá, next to the Block 5 project. The university has focused its efforts on building a partnership with property owners and residents with the aim of avoiding displacement and redistributing the benefits of urban renovation. The plan relies on the voluntary association of local actors who can become redevelopment partners by contributing their land. Although not without opposition, the Fenicia Progresses plan was submitted to city authorities in late 2012 and is currently under study.

During the past year, the recently elected administration of Gustavo Petro (2012-2016) has attempted to redirect the city's renovation policies along these same lines. In what could be described as an associative turn, the administration's 'revitalization' policies now emphasize participation and inclusion. One of the government's key policies is the densification of the inner city and, in particular, the production of low-income housing in central districts. Current attempts to restructure plans that were formulated by previous administrations –such as San Victorino, Block 5, and Central Station– now seek to include local residents, diminish the projects' profit-driven character, and increase the overall offer of accessible housing.

Although their future is uncertain, Bogotá's emergent renovation frameworks strive to connect concerns for security, development, and inclusion. Redevelopment appears here less as a matter of spatially displacing violent conflict and 'urban decay', and more about reverting it from within through more complex forms of managing spaces and people. While apparently carving out promising political openings to address the city's deep-seated patterns of inequality, these new conceptions of urban revitalization are nonetheless compelled to contend with market forces and to rely on an individualistic ethos. Partnership schemes, and what are still only elusive associations, are primarily open to propertied and self-reliant individuals, who are willing to remake themselves into real estate and development entrepreneurs. But in the absence of clear state sanctioned rights, capable institutions, or strong forms of cooperation that can offset market-driven inequalities, it may well be that urban citizens will unwittingly contribute to their own displacement by participating in the construction of an exclusive city center.

Coda

Impoverished waste pickers and homeless drug addicts have gone on to live in makeshift shacks [cambuches] and crowded tenements near to where El Cartucho used to stand. One of these places, the busiest and most populated, is located one block to the west of Third Millennium Park. In February 2013, a small-scale replay of the Third Millennium Operation seemed to be happening when hundreds of police officers and city officials stormed into this area, known as El Bronx, in an operation for the "recovery of public space" (El Tiempo, 2013a). Bulldozers took down improvised tin and wood structures that had been built on sidewalks and streets, as social workers provided humanitarian assistance and police officers searched for the heads of the drug trade. A few days later, around 2.000 people were wandering in adjacent streets looking for refuge (El Tiempo, 2013b).

The administration emphasized the humanitarian dimension of the intervention far more decidedly than had been the case in Third Millennium: the state was after drug traffickers (several of whom were detained in the following weeks) and not residents or the homeless, was what officials said. The city government installed mobile Attention Centers for Drug Addicts [Centros de Atención para Drogadictos] in the area and began to work towards the reconditioning of expropriated crack houses to convert them into homeless shelters. Although interventions in El Bronx were framed as police actions aimed at 'recovering public space,' very

much like Third Millennium, they also suggested a different approach based not on the *evacuation* but rather the *normalization* of ‘densities of decay’ as a route toward the inclusive redevelopment of downtown districts. The crucial question, once again, is if the rhetoric of inclusionary densification will ever be materialized under the city’s existing politico-institutional, economic, and socio-cultural conditions. Or if, as pressure for inner city redevelopment rises, such discourses will represent a more subtle turn in the exclusionary dialectic of the depopulation and repopulation of the city center.

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