

## THE DUALITY BETWEEN PHYSICAL FORM AND APPROPRIATION: A STUDY OF THE OPEN SPACES OF SAO PAULO'S AVENIDA PAULISTA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper discusses manners of appropriation of publicly accessible open spaces in São Paulo. To this end, the case study is Avenida Paulista, one of the most emblematic of the city, with an important role in its history and economic and cultural life. Furthermore, there are various open spaces along the avenue, with different manners and intensity of use and appropriation. Initially, the main open spaces are identified and then their manners of appropriation are analyzed. As a method, the open spaces are hereto categorized into five morphological elements: park, square, crossroads, sidewalk adjacent to cultural equipment, and sidewalk adjacent to commercial area. The observation of the manners of use, user profile, as well as predominant flows and trajectories in each area subsidizes the comprehension of the duality between function and socio-cultural significance. The goal of this work is to better comprehend the relationship between physical form and appropriation. Considering unrestricted open spaces as the places of man's actions and relationships, it is possible to infer that there are different players representing different interests in action, which inevitably leads to relationships of conflict and negotiation.*

**Keywords:** Open Spaces; Appropriation; São Paulo; Avenida Paulista

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper is part of Doctoral research on the appropriation of publicly accessed open spaces in the city of São Paulo. To this end, Avenida Paulista is defined as case study. The following is an analysis exercise based on field observations.

Considering the street as quintessential public space, we assume that, more than circulation area, the public road is a place for social encounter and interaction. As per Queiroga (2001), streets may become extensions of the home and the domestic life, places of leisure and interaction, taking on the traits of elongated squares. Although the author's writes specially about streets on peripheral neighborhoods, a similar phenomenon may be observed on Avenida Paulista. In the case of the avenue, one may consider that some places, more than others, have characteristics that could be attributed to what Queiroga calls *pracialidade*<sup>1</sup>. In other words, some parts of the avenue have greater concentration of users and a variety of uses and appropriation, which means that, more than spaces of transit and passage, they become places of encounter and social practices. In this paper, we shall discuss some of them.

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### BACKGROUND

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<sup>1</sup> Queiroga (2001) coined the term *pracialidade* to describe open urban spaces with square- and plaza-like characteristics, regarding both their physical aspects and uses.

The case study, Avenida Paulista, was inaugurated in the end of the nineteenth century, when it housed the mansions of the most prominent coffee barons of the time. From the 1960s, the residences began to be replaced by tall commercial buildings and the avenue became the new financial center of the city. Due to new demands, its design was modified, resulting in wider road and sidewalks (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Aerial views of Avenida Paulista – beginning of the 20th century and current (Oliveira, 2015; authors' collection, 2015)

The high concentration of services and jobs, combined to the ample supply of public transportation, turned Avenida Paulista and its surroundings into an attraction center through which thousands of people pass by daily, due to various reasons. In 2009, a leisure bicycle lane, occupying one of the traffic lanes on Sundays and holidays, was implemented on the avenue. In 2016, after a decree by then mayor Fernando Haddad, the avenue became entirely open to pedestrians on Sundays and closed to motorized vehicles, as part of a municipal leisure program. It is important to point out that Avenida Paulista is located on a ridge, water divide between drainage sub-basins of Pinheiros (South) and Tiete (North) rivers. Furthermore, is one of the few structural roads of the city not located on a stream or river floodplain – predominant model on the consolidation of São Paulo's urban tissue – which means it is not susceptible to the frequent

floods and inundations during rain season. Due to both its importance to the road, political and economic systems, as well as its geographical location, the avenue is also a limit between neighborhoods and municipal administrative regions (Figure 2).

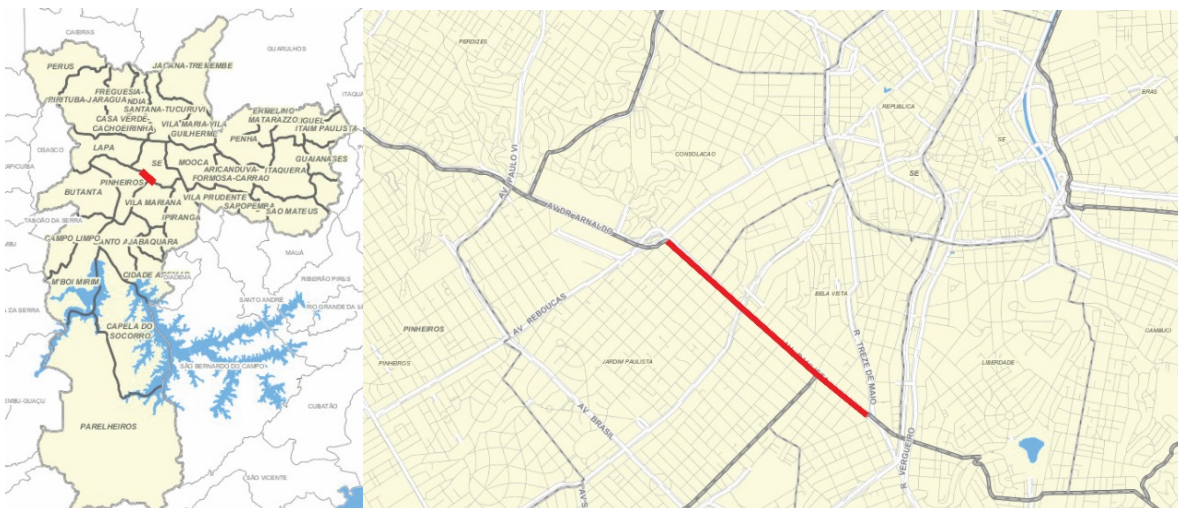


Figure 2: Maps of São Paulo municipality (Avenida Paulista indicated in red), of the limits between Sé, Pinheiros and Vila Mariana administrative areas, and central region (São Paulo, 2019)

The avenue's design change throughout the twentieth century, along with its new trait of financial and service center, sought to better accommodate the intense vehicular and pedestrian circulation the region was sure to attract. However, its uses are much more diverse than simple transit of people and vehicles. It is possible to interpret such phenomenon as the "surpassing of imposed models", as Santos and Vogel (1981) put it.

Besides the great flow of workers, Paulista's ample sidewalks have always drawn other activities, such as street trading, commercial and institutional promotion, and social gatherings. The sidewalks and building marquees shelter many homeless people. Apart from everyday activities, Paulista is also stage to a series of annual or extraordinary events, such as New Year festivities, LGBTQ+ Parade, and various political rallies. Even before 2016, many people, specially youth, used the avenue – with its ample infrastructure and varied service supply – as a place of encounter and socializing (Ripoli; Silva, 2018)

In 2016, the closing of the avenue to automobiles on Sunday received harsh criticism, specially from a considerable portion of its store owners. Nevertheless, soon after, it became clear that one of the consequences of the intense pedestrian circulation was a significant increase in sales. Henceforth, the action gained great acceptance of different layers of society, becoming a part of the region's routine. The avenue was already a leisure option for the citizens, as a place for strolling, sports, and cultural and artistic performances, but its exclusive opening to pedestrian on Sundays enhanced this trait, palpably increasing the flow of people, both from the region and from farther areas of the city, due to the large supply of public transportation. Furthermore: companies and institutions took advantage of this context to implement commercial actions and to promote their brands.

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## METHODOLOGY

The work is specially based on observations and notes taken on a variety of field trips to Avenida Paulista, on different hours and days of the week. During the survey, 5 variations of morphological elements (Lamas, 1993) were identified within the open spaces. On one hand, there are the urban elements traditionally devoted to leisure and recreation: parks and squares. On the other, there are stretches of sidewalk with plaza-like characteristics. The latter are usually subject to greater appropriation when adjacent to cultural or highly frequented commercial buildings.

There are two parks on Avenida Paulista – Trianon and Prefeito Mário Covas – both small-sized due to the dense urbanization. The second element, squares, are also leisure-oriented spaces, but with a different configuration. In the case of São Paulo, there is yet another distinction: unlike squares, the parks are fenced and subjected to access control and working hours.

The third and fourth elements are sidewalks adjacent to cultural or commercial buildings, which tend to attract their own users, apart from the people and works who routinely frequent the region. Lastly, there are three major crossroads on the avenue, in terms of both vehicle and pedestrian circulation: Consolação street, Augusta street, and Brigadeiro Luís Antônio avenue.

Throughout the analysis we shall consider Queiroga's debate (2001) on the influence of physical form and design on the intensity of appropriation of open spaces. It is also important to consider the value attribution aspect, which become clear when Santos and Vogel state that "common spaces and their appropriation by a community of dwellers arise from a complex process of meaning attribution" (Santos; Vogel, 1981, p.150). Thus, more than use, appropriation is a

process of meaning attribution. Hereinafter, we shall cover 5 areas, examples of each of the morphological elements.

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## FINDINGS

Built in 2008 where there stood the garden of Vila Fortunato residence, Prefeito Mario Covas park is a little over 5 thousand square meters and is located in the crossing of three important roads: it faces Avenida Paulista, its back access is on Alameda Santos and one of its side is adjacent to Alameda Ministro Rocha Azevedo. The site plays an important role in the environmental protection in the region, considering its many native plant and animal species, specially birds and insects (São Paulo, 2019a)

Despite its minute proportions, the park houses a series of urban furnishings, such as bicycle stand, tourist information center and free wi-fi access. These factors contribute to the park's uses and forms of appropriation. In business days, it is common to note the presence of users enjoying the shade and relative silence provided by the trees to sit on the park benches and access the internet on their mobile phones. During lunch hours, this kind of use is yet more intense – considering the park is surrounded by tall commercial buildings – and it is common to come across people having lunch on the sitting areas. Park users during business hours are primarily workers from the surrounding buildings and street dwellers. In general, the people who frequent the park on business days are alone and spend relatively less time in there, although one may encounter a couple enjoying time together. On weekends and holidays, the tourist information center gets busy and the park is visited by families and people with children. However, there are still a significant amount of people resting or using their phones alone.

Oswaldo Cruz square marks the start of Avenida Paulista, situated at a junction with three other important roads – Bernardino de Campos avenue, Treze de Maio street and Doutor Rafael de Barros street – where there originally was Largo do Paraíso plaza. The square contains vegetation, sitting and passage areas, as well as two sculptures, important landmarks on each side of the avenue. However, the most notable aspect is that the space is intersected by the roads, which then creates isolated areas, with distinct uses (**Figure 3**). Another one of the square's particularities is that it is located on the edge between two administrative regions: The North portion falls under Sé district jurisdiction, while the South portion is under Vila Mariana district administration.



The portion North of the avenue is a few meters distant of a shopping center, a Japanese Heritage cultural center and two hospitals. In recent years, the place started to house various food trucks, some temporarily, only on weekends or holidays, and others that operate daily. The presence of food trucks altered the manners of appropriation of this section. Formerly a predominantly passage route, it is now also a place of leisure, rest and eating. The latter are significantly intensified on weekends, and lunch and end-of-work hours on weekdays.

On the portion South of Paulista, there is a busy notary public and it is close to Casa das Rosas, former mansion designed by Ramos de Azevedo during the first half of the twentieth century turned cultural center. Due to the adjacent streets and their thriving local businesses, restaurants and banks, this side of the square has heavy foot traffic, especially on its borders and surrounding sidewalks, but, unlike the North portion, is rarely used as sitting or resting place by passersby. Aside for the nature of its surroundings, a possible explanation for this phenomenon is social conflict. The center of this portion of the square, with its benches and sitting areas, is mainly occupied by homeless people (**Figure 3**). However, this space is currently undergoing renovations

**Figure 3: Oswaldo Cruz square, South (top) and North (bottom) portions, 2019 (authors' collection)**

to implement new landscaping and to broaden passageways. According to Vila Mariana district administration, in charge of the intervention, the renovations result from a series of complaints by surrounding resident associations (São Paulo, 2019b).

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The São Paulo Art Museum Assis Chateaubriand (MASP) is one of the city's most notorious symbols and an icon of national Modern Architecture. The museum's new building, designed by architect Lina Bo Bardi, was inaugurated in 1968. Its location is also iconic: built across Trianon park, above Nove de Julho tunnel, where engineer and former mayor Prestes Maia had designed in 1930 an observation deck facing Anhangabau stream valley.



**Figure 4: MASP observation deck, 2019 (authors' collection)**

The area under the museum is one of the longest clearances in the world, having been designed as a large square for public fruition. In fact, amongst the observed areas, MASP's clearance has the most diversity of uses. For decades, a traditional antiques fair takes place there every Sunday. Every day, it is possible to observe a vast array of uses: Pedestrian traffic, leisure, socializing, street artists

performances, political rallies. Even the museum appropriates the area from time to time, with temporary exhibitions or line and entrance organization for large events. The observation deck area, specifically, is usually appropriated by groups of teenagers and youth to rest and socialize, regardless of day or time (**Figure 4**).

Although the clearance replicates the dynamic of the avenue – greater presence of workers during business hours and people on leisure time at night and on weekends –, the museum is a large attraction center for visitors. Which means the presence of school groups and tourists is always significant.

Cidade de São Paulo shopping center is one of the most recent buildings of Avenida Paulista. Located on the lot of the old Matarazzo mansion – demolished under controversial circumstances amidst the debate on its possible cultural heritage status – the complex has a side square, adjacent to Pamplona street and completely open to the public, and a tall office building, apart from the shopping center building itself.

The mall is very close to a subway station and has intense pedestrian traffic on all periods and days of the week, varying between workers on lunch break or leaving work and friends groups

and families at night and on weekends. The sidewalk in front of the main entrance has become a place of gathering for street artists and vendors, especially in the evenings and on weekends and holidays.

The side square is also intensely used, albeit in a different manner. The mall offers free wi-fi; therefore, it is common to come across people and couples on the benches resting and accessing the internet on their phones. This kind of use may be observed at different moments, varying in numbers due to time and weather conditions.

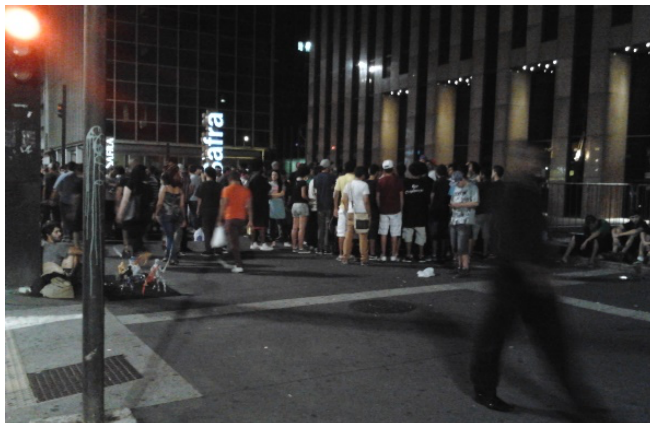


Figure 5: junction of Avenida Paulista and Augusta street, Saturday night, 2014 (author's collection)

The junction of Avenida Paulista and Augusta street may be the busiest stretch of sidewalk in the avenue, in terms of pedestrian numbers and profiles. There is located Consolação station, which connects two important subway routes, as well as bus stops for many municipal and intercity buses. The crossroads is also where two of the first commercial centers of Paulista were built: Conjunto Nacional and Center 3 shopping mall. The high concentration of service, commerce and public transportation is certainly responsible for the great amount of people that pass by

daily. The intense flow also attracts street artists and vendors, craftspeople and beggars.

As in the other studied areas, the corners of Paulista and Augusta are most frequented by workers during business hours. User profile tends to change on the evening and weekends. It is especially noteworthy the great occupancy by youth on Friday and Saturday nights, due to the busy nightlife of Augusta street and its surroundings (Figure 5).

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## CONCLUSIONS

Avenida Paulista has one of the highest built and populational concentrations in São Paulo. The large number of offices and companies attracts great amounts of people daily, from workers to street vendors and artists in search of a large public. Albeit the avenue is a densely built and greatly corporate location, the ample supply of services, commerce and cultural centers contributes to the diversification of the user population and manners of open space appropriation. Such facilities tend to attract their own public, different than the avenue and its buildings' regular users.

However, throughout these initial observations, some patterns begin to stand out. On business days, for instance, there are characteristic flows during lunch hour – when coworkers move in groups towards restaurants, or people enjoy their breaks alone – and in the evening – when many people move towards public transportation boarding stations or commercial centers.

In the evenings and on weekends, commerce, services and cultural buildings become busier, as expected. Nevertheless, it is possible to observe a change in user profile. As per the findings, at those times, the presence of youth, families and couples on leisure activities significantly increases.

Such variety of public and manners of appropriation greatly enriches the social practices that take place on public spaces and modify the very space on which they are inserted. In turn, new

possibilities of social interaction and appropriation arise, creating a dynamic of transformation and reframing of the city's open spaces.

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