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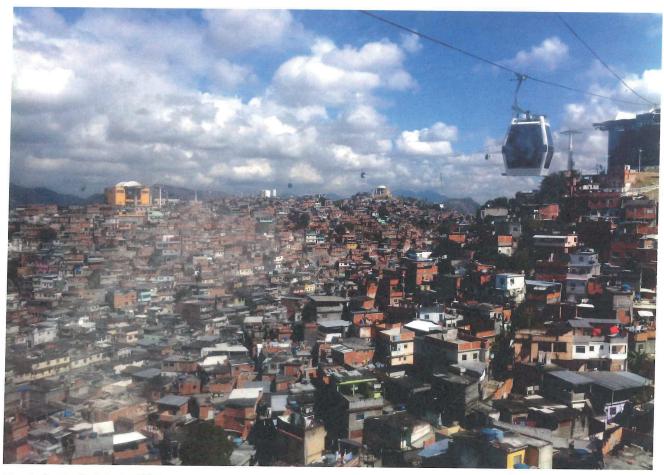
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## RIO DE JANEIRO

RUA Arquitetos, Rio de Janeiro MAS Urban Design, ETH Zurich

Common in tropical climates, varandas reflect the Brazilian way of life. They provide the inspiration for a catalogue of consumer goods that promotes the making of the city as a collective endeavor bringing together diverse social milieus.



Morro do Alemão, Rio de Janeiro. 2012

A survey of Rio de Janeiro's contrasting urban landscape ultimately reveals unevenness as a dominant feature of the city. While extreme topography constantly confronts the city with nature, the uneven growth patterns of a fragmented urban landscape are explicitly articulated in the contrast between rich and poor, between asfalto and morro (official city and favelas). The visibility and obvious presence of the favelas stand for the failure of urban planning and the inability to manage the city in an even way, but it also shows the consequences of self-organization, of an urban production made by the people.

Rio de Janeiro can be considered exemplary of Brazil's reputation

as one of the world's most unequal nation states. However, if we look at the nation's income distribution, things have drastically changed in the last decade. Due to increased social mobility, big portions of the lower class can now be considered middle class—during the last seven years, the Brazilian lower middle class has increased by 40 million people and currently represents the largest segment of the population. In Rio de Janeiro, 60 percent of favela residents now belong to this emerging middle class.

If Brazil is to become a middleclass country, does this also mean that unevenness is decreasing? The protesters that are currently shaking the country are claiming that the opposite is the case: in view of the investments at stake for the realization of mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup or the upcoming Olympic Games, the equal distribution of public services and educational facilities remains an unfulfilled promise. As a matter of fact, the discontent of large parts of the population clearly expresses the gap between the aspirations of an emerging consumer class and the lack of urban equality.

While redistribution of resources and proper investment in infrastructure remain valid claims for undoing inequalities, the question is whether governmental action is capable of resolving the problem while operating within an economic system that is increasingly transforming the city



into a setting for market-driven development dependent upon corporate protection.

In view of the dominance of market models, what kind of tactic can be deployed to allow an urban production that responds to the needs of the people beyond the standardized solutions of the prevalent urban economy? What is more, how can the emerging middle class become a mediator between segregated worlds as well as find its own way of life beyond the aspirations of a globalized consumer culture? What if the market could offer commodities that enable the users to reappropriate the urban environment in a more sustainable way by promoting the existing qualities of Brazilian street life?

In the face of everyday challenges, the *cariocas* (inhabitants of Rio) have always found ways to appropriate and subvert prevalent systems, which become explicit in the cultural phenomenon and the tactic of the *puxadinho*. Found all over Rio, *puxadinhos* are add-ons to existing structures, typical in Rio's self-built environments, that are created by people with minimal means from leftover and recycled materials. Operating as extensions beyond the boundaries of private property, *puxadinhos* collectively transform the built environment, incorporating and embracing new qualities and uses.

Inspired by the puxadinho,
Varanda Products accommodate
the logic of the market in order to
transform it. Serving as transitional
spaces between inside and outside,
varandas are architectural elements
that are simultaneously domestic
and public, creating an ambiguous
condition that is open to multiple

uses. The varanda operates as interface between individual and community; it offers places for encounters among various social groups; and it provides the middle ground that opens space for negotiation, gathering, and play. Varanda Products are tailored to create opportunities for social interaction in the urban environment.

The Varanda Products line relinks urban goods and their uses in everyday life—it offers consumer products addressed at diverse social milieus so as to bring them together. The spread of Varanda Products is dispersed but insinuates itself everywhere by encouraging small-scale entrepreneurship. Varanda Products activate the desire to remake the city with the openness and playfulness that is typical of the carioca way of life.

