“The Return to the ‘Historic Center’: Heritage Landscapes and the Reterritorialization of Urban Space in Late Socialist Cuba.”

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GLOBAL DOWNTOWNS

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The conversion of chance into destiny displaces intimacy in favor of form. . . . Materially, this reduction is enshrined in that triumph of place over time . . . [of] monuments over social experience.

—Michael Herzfeld, *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town*

As group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences.


In the summer of 1996, demolition crews arrived in the Plaza Vieja—a 500-year-old plaza in Havana’s historic center, Habana Vieja—equipped with explosive charges. Carrying out orders issued by the city historian, they planned to eliminate every trace of a republican-era park and an underground
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parking structure, which was built to accommodate the “bulky American autos” that blocked the sidewalks of Habana Vieja’s narrow streets and entrances to residential courtyards (Scarpaci 2000: 733). In addition to the parking structure, which raised the original height of the square a meter off the ground, the “modernist” Havana Park (constructed in 1952) consisted of an open-air amphitheater with benches, grass, and shade trees. For residents, it was also a public space, where people gathered to listen to music, children rode bikes and played games of pick-up baseball, and the elderly paused to sit and enjoy the breeze from the harbor.

The plan to “implode” the parking structure with explosives engendered what one plaza resident, an architect, referred to as a “tremendous scandal.” Late-breaking news of the plan sent “residents en masse to the Communist Party and in every direction” to protest an action that they feared would bring not only the park but also its dilapidated tenements to the ground. “Sure,” the architect noted, “their strategy was, ‘We’re going to evacuate everyone ahead of time.’ Given the disturbances this would create, the attitude of the authorities was, ‘You have to leave here for 3 or 4 days,’ who knows where. And if your house collapses, the only thing they have to say is, ‘Sorry, you’re screwed.’” Chastised by resident appeals to the national leadership, conservation authorities regrouped and decided to eliminate the park with jackhammers, a noisy, dusty process that residents would have to endure for two years. In the end, demolition teams removed 235 tons of concrete from the center of the square, leaving a gaping hole that was subsequently filled with hundreds of truckloads of topsoil. To give the plaza a “colonial” feel, conservationists restored the plaza to street level, and covered it with polished paving stones. Moreover, in the center of the square, where fountains of various sizes and shapes had existed in colonial times, they imported a massive Italian marble and set it in place using a large crane. They subsequently ringed the fountain with a ten-foot-high black iron fence to keep neighborhood children from bathing in its waters. Finally, they barricaded the entrances to the plaza with heavy metal chains and surrounded the periphery with cannonball-shaped iron bollards to keep vehicular traffic from entering the square and spoiling the view.

These processes of remaking and enclosure were complemented by further panoptical transformations which made the plaza further available for the visual gaze. First, conservationists mounted a camera obscura on the roof of the plaza’s tallest building, through which tourists are afforded a panorama of the plaza. Next, they opened the restored balconies of former
palaces transformed from tenements into hotels, museums, and shops, offering the tourist another set of viewing points from which to gaze down upon the square. Further, they mounted a large placard at the main entrance to the square, depicting enlarged reproductions of various eighteenth-century engravings of the square by different European traveler artists, and set in place life-sized cutouts of Spanish colonial troops dressed in signature red-and-white uniforms, playing fife and drums. Finally, viewers to this space are instructed in how to see it as part of a “disciplined order of things” (Boyer 1994: 253) by tour guides who circumambulate through the square, instructing viewers what to see and how to see it.

This vignette crystallizes some of the dynamic processes and forces that are transforming colonial city centers and cultural landscapes throughout Cuba today. These include at times conflicting agendas of international and local preservation efforts; marketization, privatization, and the insertion of global capital combined with the persistence of socialist institutions; the opening to tourism as a means of “capturing” hard currency; and the turn to cultural heritage in the search for new symbols from which to construct a socialist identity in a post-socialist world. This article examines Habana Vieja, a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage site in Havana, Cuba, and arguably one of the largest and most significant colonial city centers in Latin America today. It begins with an analysis of the concept of urban centrality, followed by a discussion of the loss of centrality in Habana Vieja in the aftermath of colonialism. Finally, an analysis of the situation in Habana Vieja reveals how the recycling of traditional architectural forms in keeping with the demands of the global economy gives rise to a new centrality in Habana Vieja. It also demonstrates how this centrality is achieved through a process of modernization which reframes the site through practices of enclosing, selective highlighting, and forms of social exclusion that create a coherent view of Habana Vieja as a cosmopolitan, European city.

**Urban Centrality in the Spanish American Town**

When it comes to the colonial Spanish American town, there are two forms of social centrality that are critical for understanding the politics of urban transformation in the contemporary period. These include both the plaza as an urban form and the grid-shaped Spanish American town which was
defined according to established rules set forth in the *Ordinances for the Discovery, Settlement and Pacification of the Indies* (1573), a set of royal instructions for the urban planning of towns in the empire from 1513 onward (Lefebvre 1991: 151; Kinsbruner 2005: 23).

The first of these forms, the Spanish American plaza, was an urban form whose design was rigorously specified by royal decree. The core main plaza, or Plaza Mayor, was to be rectangular in shape, twice as long as wide to accommodate official celebrations, and located either near the port or, for inland cities, at the center of town. The administrative hierarchy of church and state was to be inscribed and monumentalized on this main plaza, with church and government buildings, respectively, being placed on whole blocks. On the religious side, the institutions of the Catholic Church, the cathedral, parish church, and monastery, were to receive the first lots, followed by the government palace, town hall, customs house, and arsenal, assigned in that order. From the main plaza, the grid was to extend outward in every direction, with remaining lots assigned to settlers by socioeconomic status so that the most prominent families received lots closest to the main plaza (Kinsbruner 2005: 24). On a ritual level, the plaza was intended to accommodate assertions of royal authority that were enacted on the main plaza, including royal births, or the arrival of royal officials, as well as secular and religious celebrations and events such as parades, festivals, bullfights, and public hangings (ibid.: 122). A new Baroque culture underwrote the authority inscribed in this idealized space. It applied the rigid principles of “abstraction, rationalization, and systemization” in an attempt to erase all local expressions of individuality and imagination (Rama 1996: 10). In sum, the architectural design, institutional organization, and officially sanctioned use of the main plaza “embodies an idea of centrality” that represents and instantiates a hierarchical and entrenched regime of urban citizenship that segregates those of lower status to the peripheries (Holston 2009: 246).

The second form of centrality was the Spanish American town itself. Opening out from the main plaza, the Spanish American town possessed an important degree of social centrality that emerged from its role as a civilizing node in the context of the Spanish conquest. This is evinced in the fact that the Spanish American colonial town became “the residences of viceroys, governors, and archbishops, the seats of universities, high courts, and inquisitional tribunals” before it even housed the legislatures of independent republics (Rama 1996: 13). The resilience of this civilizing ideal, which survived three centuries after the conquest, is exemplified by the writings of
early republican authors such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie*, published in 1845. Sarmiento emphasized the centrality of the city as a civilizing agent whose civic virtues were capable of overcoming barbarism of the residents of the untamed *pampa* (plains or countryside) through schools and a strong seat of government. He saw the city as a pedagogical instrument for the formation of “citizen-workers” (granting citizenship only after literacy had been first achieved) and supported the immigration of Europeans to offset the crude ways of the gaucho in the countryside (Sarlo 2008: 38). In sum, the social centrality of Spanish American cities was defined by their role as receptacles of imported European culture, and as launching pads from which an educated elite could impose social norms such as literacy on the “savage surroundings” (Rama 1996: 13).

With the advent of twentieth-century mass culture, urban renewal, and elite flight from the city to the suburbs, the lost centrality of the cosmopolitan Spanish American city center engendered elite nostalgia for the cultivated, imperial city or *ciudad letrado*, with its writers, newspapers, government agencies, libraries, universities, concert halls, cafés, theaters, law offices, brothels, churches, and shops located within a quadrangle of ten or so blocks (Rama 1996: 114). To contemporary elites, Rama’s vast lettered elites or *letrados*, the city appears as if under siege, threatened by the “spatial mutations” and occupation of the uncivilized rural masses accused of destroying its cosmopolitan character (Prakash 2008: 182). The “slumification” of the city further transports images of the city being taken over by internal migrants, returning the city back to nature (Sarlo 2000: 119). Of course this vision, as Prakash notes, is predicated on the lettered intellectual’s vision of the cosmopolitan city as an organism, a bounded city defined by an “internally coherent civic life” (2008: 182). In the case of the Habana Vieja, it is this elite vision of the city as a totality that urban conservationists seek to restore—the ordered city that existed only in the lettered intellectual’s mind. Yet ultimately, this project of restoration is complemented by the transformation of the city center into a tourist and museum space, which lies side by side with the squalor of slums, crumbling houses, and compromised urban services (Sarlo 2000: 122).

**Habana Vieja: The Future of the Past**

The construction of anonymous suburbs, the proliferation of insipid commercial buildings, the empty gaps and peripheral areas occupied
by spontaneous settlements of unemployed and impoverished migrants, dispel the image of the city of its primitive coherence and formal and spatial unity which it preserved . . . during the colonial period. (Segre 1989: 159)

Ironically, the origins of the nostalgic impulse for the conservationist’s recuperación of the “old” Spanish American Havana arose in the aftermath of its definitive decline. The signal events that inspired this renaissance were the U.S. intervention in Cuba’s second war of independence with Spain (1895–1898), which brought an end to the colonial era (if not full independence), and the establishment of a new, North American–inspired center of power just outside the city wall, in an area known as the Prado, and subsequently in the garden city suburb of Vedado. It was only with the urbanization of the area created by the gradual demolition of the city walls beginning in the late nineteenth century and the urbanization of the area left in their wake that a gradual awareness emerged of the difference between the “new” and the “old” city (Venegas Fornias 1990). It was in this context that the past of old Havana began to be conceived of as belonging to a different realm, one which “validated and exalted” the present and deserved to be preserved as an emblem “of community identity, continuity and aspiration” (Lowenthal 1988: xvi).

Founded in 1519 on the shores of a large, well-protected harbor, the early settlement of San Cristobal de la Habana initially developed as a gathering point for transatlantic shipments between Europe and the New World. For the first two and half centuries of its existence, it remained a compact, fortified enclave focused on maritime trade rather than on the development of its hinterlands. Given this form of dependent urbanization, the city developed at a gradual pace with an irregular pattern of growth along streets and plazas that failed to conform to the Laws of the Indies (Salinas et al. 1971: 13). As in other Spanish American colonial cities, the hierarchy of church and state in Havana was encoded in this spatial arrangement through the insertion of government buildings, churches, and convents in plazas as public spaces that exercised ideological and political control over its inhabitants.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, a new pattern of urbanization was fueled by the development of vast sugar and coffee plantations in the rural hinterlands, transforming the city into a major commercial and symbolic center. During this formative period, the streets inside the walled city were laid out in an ordered grid-shaped pattern; public buildings, theaters, and markets were built; and the new sugar aristocracy began constructing
monumental baroque palaces around the principal plazas and squares with columned archways. In keeping with this new residential form, the nuclear family became socially stratified, with the original family unit now augmented by administrators, servants, and slaves occupying different levels of the colonial household.

As previously noted, the gradual demolition of the city walls after 1863 and the insertion of North American capital gave rise to a new pattern of monumental urbanization in the area left in the wall’s wake. This “new” Havana, which eclipsed the “old” one, was characterized by a plethora of architectural styles (neo-Gothic, Baroque, Beaux Arts, Eclectic, Art Nouveau) that created a “style without style” (Carpentier 1970), while portions of the old city were rebuilt from the ground up (Venegas Fornias 1990).

In the twentieth century, the gradual decline of the “old” Havana was hastened by the subdivision of the old colonial aristocracy’s residences to house an influx of rural migrants, and the shift of government and administrative functions outside the city center. The dense concentrations of poverty in the center became a source of speculative pressure in the 1950s as the dictator Fulgencio Batista planned to demolish major portions of the “old” Havana to build high-rise apartments, offices, and roadways and to connect the rest of the city to the previously undeveloped lands in Habana del Este. These plans were interrupted by the victory of Fidel Castro’s 26th of July Movement in 1959 and subsequent flight of Batista to the United States.

The U.S. occupation of Cuba and modernization of areas outside the city walls gave impetus to a new class of intellectuals who felt nostalgia for the old Havana. In the labyrinth of narrow streets and passageways of this “other” Havana, they were able to detect an “ideal” city, in spite of continuous modifications to the area in the twentieth century. Foremost among these was the American-trained architect Joaquín Emilio Weiss y Sánchez, author of the first compendium of colonial architecture in Cuba (1996). Weiss conferred particular status on colonial architecture, believing that a “revolutionary sensibility” could best be achieved by constructing a “univocal linkage” between the architectures of the colonial past, of the present, and of the future (Lizardi n.d.: 6). These views were carried over to the present era by one of Weiss’s disciples, Eusebio Leal Spengler, the current city historian, and head of the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de la Habana (OHCH), the entrepreneurial state agency charged by the Cuban government with restoring Habana Vieja. In Spengler’s view, the colonial architecture of Habana Vieja “reveals the invisible soul of the country” and a process
of transculturation that is “imprinted on the character of the people who inhabit it” (Guerra 1999: 5; Rodríguez Alomá and Ochoa Alomá 1999: 20).

* * *

What is significant about this history of “old” Havana for thinking about downtowns, then, is that the primacy of Habana Vieja as the symbolic center of the city was eclipsed in the twentieth century first by the zone of neorepublican expansion outside the city walls and later, in the 1950s, by the emergence of two new symbolic centers: one a modernist high-rise, exclusive commercial and hotel district called La Rampa in the northern Vedado district and the other, to the south, a ceremonial administrative center constructed by Batista named the Plaza Civica (renamed the Plaza de la Revolución after 1959).

The neglect of “old” Havana was continued by a future-oriented Revolution for which historic conservation stood in tension with the desire to create a radically new society based on the values of egalitarianism and collective solidarity embodied in Che Guevara’s *Hombre Nuevo* (that is, New Socialist Man). The centrality of the old colonial urban core as the center or downtown of the city was lost in the twentieth century, and would be regained, in the new millennium, only through the work of urban conservationists. Urban centrality, then, like the historicity of the built environment, is not something that is given, but has to be produced through differently scaled political actors and discursive practices such as heritage, or patrimony, as it is more commonly referred to in Latin America.

**UNESCO and the World Heritage Grid**

Given the historic rupture with the colonial past, the sudden shift in temporal horizons from the future orientation of the Revolution to the engagement and identification with the colonial past that characterizes Cuba today requires explanation. Where heritage conservation was a secondary priority in the revolutionary context, it has become one of the defining characteristics of the late socialist period. On an island of 12 million people, there are now nine UNESCO World Heritage sites, five of which are located in urban settings (Habana Vieja, Santiago, Trinidad, Cienfuegos, and Camaguey). Seven of these sites have been nominated since the 1989 collapse of the
Soviet Union, and six of those in the past decade. Over a million heritage tourists now pass through Habana Vieja annually, and the heritage tourism is an important source of hard currency for the national budget. The discourse of patrimony has been taken up across a range of social domains, from daily conversations, to reader’s letters (known as cartas abiertas, or “open letters”) published in the official press, to community development centers (talleres integrales) that operate in local barrios. How has this shift in temporalities come about, and what role has it played in apotheosis of the colonial urban core as the symbolic pole of national belonging?

In the case of Habana Vieja, as I have argued elsewhere (Hill 2007), the heritage assemblage is composed of differently scaled actors that articulate with one another in revalorizing the meaning and value of the site as cultural patrimony. These include international heritage organizations like UNESCO and its subsidiary organization ICOMOS, the socialist state, heritage conservationists, transnational tourism developers, and the people who reside and work in the site. In view of this range of social actors in historical perspective, a great deal of work needed to be accomplished to “condition the possibility” for Habana Vieja to become a World Heritage Site. Each of these actors is involved in reterritorializing Habana Vieja as a heritage site. And yet these multiple territorializations do not legitimate one set of interpretations of a site to the exclusion of another. Rather, the heritage assemblage “makes room for them all” (Breglia 2006 50).

Foremost among the actors engaged in the reterritorialization of Habana Vieja is UNESCO and its World Heritage Convention. Through its designation, cataloging, and monitoring of natural, cultural, and “mixed” heritage sites of “outstanding universal value” around the globe, and the addition of those sites to its World Heritage List, UNESCO is engaged in constituting a global imaginary that comprises a “global heritage grid” (Hill 2007). On an international plane, UNESCO’s discourse about places like Habana Vieja reterritorializes by disembedding sites from their concrete locations within the boundaries of local, regional, and national meanings and policies, and reattaching them to UNESCO’s World Heritage program and its notions of “universal cultural value” (Breglia 2006:50; cf. Turtinen 2000). State parties to the World Heritage Convention (WHC) elect to participate in this reterritorialization project by agreeing to fulfill a number of responsibilities, including the creation of the “appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this
“heritage” (UNESCO 1972:3). They must also adopt the transnational grammar of UNESCO, which universalizes and standardizes cultural, natural, and “mixed” heritage sites across the globe through clearly defined rules, procedures, and actors that play specific roles.

UNESCO’s Operational Guidelines form the lynchpin of this grammar, designating the criteria that are used to judge what constitutes “outstanding universal value” and is thus worthy of inclusion on UNESCO’s World Heritage List. By selecting sites, defining their outstanding universal qualities, and justifying their inclusion on the World Heritage List, state parties participate in the reterritorialization of local, regional, and national sites within a transnational framework. This process of reterritorialization is not a mere semantic process. It adds global recognition that sets up tourism flows, raises visibility, and ultimately adds tourism revenues to state coffers. The heightened cache of World Heritage objects was not lost on the director of one of Old Havana’s main conservation institutions. In response to a question about the importance of the World Heritage designation for Havana’s historic center, he commented: “[World Heritage] is very prestigious, an honor. It’s the possibility to attract more tourism, to sell more books. It’s the possibility for the university to say, come to [Old Havana] to study architecture because [Old Havana] is World Heritage. . . . I believe that World Heritage (patrimonio mundial) has been turned into a type of small flag of identity, and people have made a kind of business out of it.” Old Havana’s 1982 nomination as a World Heritage site offered a source of pride and commercial gain for the state and the Cuban conservation community. But it also relocated Habana Vieja as a universal value on a global circuit that included the most important wonders of the world. Invoking this circuit, the previously mentioned director went on to note, “When we say that [Old] Havana is World Heritage (Patrimonio de la Humanidad), we say that Habana Vieja is on a cultural level with the Pyramids of Egypt or Athens.”

What gets pulled out and valued vis-à-vis UNESCO’s criteria of outstanding universal value in Habana Vieja is a highly aestheticized and bounded image of an elite cosmopolitan colonial city. The justification for inclusion of the site, which is entitled “Habana Vieja and Its Fortifications,” focuses on four of the five principal plazas in Old Havana, a nineteenth-century zone of late colonial expansion outside the city walls, and a series of adjacent fortifications (ICOMOS 1982). Even though the heritage site is a geographic space that includes all the land within the former walled city and its immediate environs, the list of monuments included with the designation
concentrates on the monumental political, military, ecclesiastical, and residential architecture of what one conservationist called the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century “palace Havana.” Excluded from the list are vernacular elements—tenements, warehouses, docks, industry, red light districts—that played an important role in the history of the district. Even though the working-class neighborhoods on the southern part of the Habana Vieja are of great antiquity, their history is not invoked in UNESCO’s description of this cultural property as “an interesting mix of baroque and neo-classical monuments, and homogenous ensemble of civilian houses with arcades, balconies, wrought-iron gates, and interior courtyards.” Also excluded are the extramural barrios of Colon, Guadalupe, and Jesús María that formed an integral part of the colonial urban fabric. Finally, nonwhite Cubans who constitute the majority of Habana Vieja residents today are largely constructed as “outsiders” to the heritage narrative, negating the heterogeneous character of the actual colonial city.

**Building the Heritage Landscape: The OHCH**

While UNESCO and its transnational grammar are involved in reterritorializing local sites around the planet within the circuits that constitute the global heritage grid, the heritage practices of states and conservation authorities do the work of bounding, naming, marking, and regulating the urban landscape so that it can be known and recognized as an “authentic” heritage object. This work of bounding and marking what conservationists refer to as immovable heritage, that is, monuments that are too large to be collected, transported, and displayed in museums, enables them to nevertheless be “collected” in the sense of being possessed by a state agency such as the Oficina del Historiador de la Habana (OHCH), which has the power to reframe and enclose them (Errington 1993: 44). As Shelly Errington notes, this power of enclosing does different work for the national government and for the tourists who visit monumental sites. For the national government, such enclosure nationalizes the site, placing itself in charge, while also constructing an image of the nation for external consumption. For the tourist, the process of enclosure makes the monument knowable, transforming it into a “museum and art object simultaneously” (44).

In Old Havana, the OHCH is a powerful conservation agency that was charged by the socialist state in 1994 with the responsibility of conserv-
ing and restoring the Centro Histórico and turning it into a profitable tourist destination. To enable the OHCH to carry out this mandate, the state endowed it with extraordinary powers that are highly unusual in a socialist Cuba. It transferred control over the heritage zone “in usufruct” for a period of twenty-five years, and effectively transformed the OHCH into “the zoning authority, the planning board, housing authority, parks commissioner, tax collector, comptroller and final arbiter of nearly every public investment decision” in Habana Vieja (Peters 2001). It also gave the OHCH the power to self-finance the restoration, by enabling it to operate hotels, restaurants, museums, real estate, and other for-profit entities, and to sign joint venture contracts independent of the normal channels approved by the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Investment (Scarpaci 2000).

Through these powers, the OHCH is directly involved in reterritorializing Habana Vieja through the production of an essentialized and homogenized landscape that is placed in the service of creating an authentic tourist experience (Silverman 2002: 887). To foreground this activity, I highlight here three interrelated sets of heritage practices that are central to the building or production of the centralized heritage space in Old Havana. First among these are practices of bounding and naming that turn the Historic Center into a distinct space, while cordonning it off from areas that fail to fit into the heritage frame. Second, I show how OHCH planners work to give the heritage zone a historical cast by selectively highlighting architectural features that index the colonial period, while removing others that fail to fit in this frame of reference. And finally, I show how heritage practices seek to grant the heritage zone a kind of coherence as a colonial city, by excluding social elements and memories that do not fit with this view of the past. In analyzing heritage as a space that is produced by practices, I move beyond notions of heritage as a thing or artifact which is given a priori, and merely in need of dusting off. Rather, I show how heritage practices such as laws, zoning regulations, and physical manipulation of the built environment transform not only space, but social relationships and ideals about the meaning of national identity.

Nationalizing Habana Vieja: Bounding and Naming

I illustrate the practices of bounding and naming by describing a zoning map that is taken from the master plan for Old Havana, the Plan de Desarrollo
Integral (the Integral Development Plan, Rodríguez Alomá 1996: 13). The map is an instance of what urban geographer Henri Lefebvre calls a representation of space, an abstract or conceptual view of space that exists in the mind of the technocrat (urban planner, scientist, engineer, and so on). Whether signs, maps, or codes, representations of space seek to order space and spatial practice in ways that are tied to a given mode of production such as heritage tourism (1991: 33–39). The intent of the zoning map is to separate residential from tourism areas. The zoning map points to the difficulty that planners face in producing a coherent heritage narrative and image in a "complex, heterogeneous, living city" like Habana Vieja (Silverman 2002: 884). To produce a sense of coherence, the zoning map seeks to "selectively highlight and ideologically structure reality" (892) by confining visitors to "tourist sectors" that possess the most monumental forms of colonial architecture—plazas, cathedrals, monasteries, government buildings, customs houses, defensive fortresses—and routing them through "view" corridors whose building façades have been revitalized to appear as nineteenth-century shops. Tourists who walk away from this official route, even by so much as one block, are greeted by an entirely different reality, the "residential sectors"—overcrowded tenements in need of paint and repair, the remains of collapsed buildings, and manufacturing and auto repair shops.

These zoning categories in turn form a part of the Regulaciones Urbanísticas (Urban Regulations) that establish "norms and principles" that are to "guide construction urbanism and land use decisions in the prioritized conservation zone" (Reg. Art. 1). In the case of tourism sectors, usos permitidos (permitted uses) include cultural, culinary, hospitality, recreational, commercial, business, and financial activities (Reg. Art. 281)—all service-based functions that are transacted in dollars and geared toward tourists. Usos incompatibles (incompatible uses) include public services stores, bakeries, butcher shops, puntas de leche (milk distribution stations), health centers, gymnasiums, laundries, dry cleaners, tailor’s shops, daycare centers, handicapped schools, fire stations, and funeral homes (Reg. Art. 282) as well as industrial uses such as warehouses, loading docks, auto garages, and manufacturing that are to be eradicated, transferred to residential sectors, or moved out of the prioritized zone altogether (Reg. Art. 273). As representations of space, maps and zoning codes move from the mind of the planner to the attempt at organizing what Lefebvre calls spatial practice, or the way that people move through and use space. For instance, the bus-
loads of tourists that daily arrive on organized tours of the historic center are met by tour guides who lead them through an hour-long journey through the principal squares and restored buildings that dot the interstitial connecting streets of the old historic nucleus. Tour guides point out to tourists what they do see, while narrating how they should see it. They also seek to organize representation space, or the way that space is lived and experienced by tourists through (folkloric) images and symbolic meanings that “spill into contemporary lived experience” (1991: 38–39; Breglia 2006 32).

Sector maps and zoning categories that divide and differentiate people and uses then take on a life of their own through spatial practices that turn buildings into monuments in tourism zones, or that police the boundary between residential and tourism areas. One such boundary is a virtual checkpoint at the intersection of Obispo and San Ignacio Streets, where the Obispo pedestrian corridor feeds into the old historic nucleus. Two policemen are perennially stationed at this intersection, where they can be found checking the national ID cards of young Afro-Cuban males in a ritualized routine that is intended to discourage access to the zone. The ID checks and plainclothed policemen who circulate through the tourism configure Afro-Cubans as “dangerous backdrops” (Collins 2008: 295) to the folkloricized areas. Such racially coded practices that also restrict access to tourism sectors and hotels reintroduce the separation of tourist and residential areas.

One other form of bounding that is exemplified by the zoning map is the separation of the UNESCO World Heritage district—Habana intramuros and a zone of early republican expansion beyond the city walls—from the rest of the colonial city. In this respect, the UNESCO district presents an artificial view of the colonial city, masking the fact that the neighborhoods surrounding the walls (Colon, Guadalupe, Jesús María) have been incrementally built and blended into the walled city area since the late eighteenth century. The continuity between these neighborhoods and the UNESCO district is further reinforced by the fact that the city walls took many years to complete, and decades more to demolish. Further unifying the two areas are the “cemeteries, hospitals, rest homes, markets, leper colonies, parishes, jails and light industry” outside the city walls that serviced the intramural population (Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula 2002: 317). Universal building codes and land use regulations ensured the continuity of architectural forms between the two areas throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (317). In this respect, the UNESCO district creates an artificial break between the two halves of colonial Havana, excluding 1,000 to 2,000 hectares.
of architecture that grew up outside the city walls. It also names the bounded heritage space, that is, the Centro Histórico, giving it a specificity that it previously lacked.

**Selectively Highlighting the Colonial Past**

A second aspect of producing a heritage space in Habana Vieja involves the selective highlighting of the physical landscape in ways that give it a colonial cast. In Habana Vieja this is exemplified through the “scraping away” of layers such as republican-era features that fail to fit in the heritage frame, and the creation of new layers that create the appearance of continuity with the colonial past. An example of the former practice is exemplified by the removal of the underground parking structure in Old Havana’s Plaza Vieja with which I introduced this article. The new enclosed fountain and “the edge-perching transience” (Silverman 2002) of tourists and residents illustrate the transformation of the Plaza Vieja from a space of public use to a ceremonial space constructed for the “tourist gaze” (Urry 1990). Other transformations to the plaza contribute to the processes of interiorization and embourgeoisification aimed at producing a controlled environment and excluding marginal elements—hustlers, prostitutes, street kids, flâneurs—that fail to fit in the frame. For instance, in the redesigned plaza, the former park benches were removed and replaced with new security features that reinforced the colonial image. In their place, forms of defensive architecture such as heavy metal cannons and chains were installed at the four entrances to the plaza, and metal bollards along its perimeter, prohibiting vehicular traffic from entering the frame and disrupting the image. A police station was also set up in the former printing shop of a ground floor apartment building after a rash of purse snatchings threatened the security of tourists in the newly remade colonial square.

Apart from the practices of “creative destruction” that remove unwanted elements from the heritage landscape, conservationists also create new layers that accentuate the image of the colonial past. For instance, after an eighteenth-century merchant’s house collapsed while awaiting restoration in 1993, conservationists reconstructed a replica of the original from the ground up (Hill 2007). The imitation of the original is so convincing that it has become one of the most photographed buildings by unsuspecting tourists in the Plaza Vieja. The practice of replacing neoclassical façades with
more traditional design elements—fan-shaped windows, Persian blinds, balconies, iron latticework, and tile roofs—is another means through which layers are added to existing buildings to bring them into alignment with the image of a colonial landscape (Capablanca 1983: 27). Color is also strictly regulated throughout the old city, with buildings painted in the ubiquitous yellow with blue and white doors and balconies to create the effect of uniformity.

But the creation of “new layers” is not limited to the practice of building replicas and other simulacra. Other undesirable architectural features are also covered over to make them invisible. An example of the latter practice can be found in a massive modernist structure known as the “Ministry of Education” building, for the government ministry that occupied it until the mid-1990s. The last remains of the Convent of San Juan de Letrán, the site of Havana’s first university, were demolished in 1956 to make way for this contemporary structure, which separates Old Havana’s two most visited plazas, the Plaza de las Armas and the Plaza de la Catedral. Covering an entire city block, the green and white building was built according to the modernist codes of the Wiener-Sert plan for Old Havana, and housed the city’s first helicopter terminal on its rooftop. Conservationists frequently lament the loss of the original university, which according to the city historian of the period “was united with the history of the city and Cuban culture” (Roig de Leuchsenring 1963: 175).

Accentuating the university’s importance, his predecessor, the current city historian, has referred to the building as the “cradle of the [Cuban] Enlightenment, and formation of the Cuban intelligentsia.” After a debate in which it was decided that it would be too costly to demolish the new Ministry of Education building, the decision was made to cover it with reflective glass. A descriptive panel on the outside of the structure describes the purpose of the reflective glass, which is “to transform the skin of the building, in order to return it to the city with an appearance that is different from the one that to date has generated so much controversy, and as a sign of the intense concern (la vital inquietud) with activities that have transformed the appearance of the former city.” It adds that “contemporary materials will be used to re-create the image of some of the iconographic elements of the former convent-university, such as the original bell tower, the entrance, and the patio and nave of the church.” Such modernist practices of creating new layers that are superimposed on the existing built environment play as important a role in the process of selective highlighting as the practices of
scraping away modern accretions that are evident in the case of the underground parking structure in the Plaza Vieja. Scraping away and the creation of new layers then are heritage practices that attempt to overcome the “progressive disarticulation of the urban landscape” (Geertz 1989: 293).

**Excluding Memories from the Heritage Frame**

In order to grant the heritage space a certain type of coherence as a colonial city, conservationists work to exclude social elements and memories that fail to fit within the heritage frame. Obispo Street, the main pedestrian tourism corridor connecting the historic nucleus (T1) and the Paseo del Prado (T3), provides a good example of this type of social exclusion. Obispo was historically one of Havana’s principal commercial streets. But throughout the 1980s and 1990s, its stores, like those in the rest of the city, were devoid of commerce. Beginning in the late 1990s, though, the OHCH began to restore the street to its former glory, lining it with relatively fancy dollar shops. The stores were given names of nineteenth-century boutiques and shops—La Francia, Le Palais Royal, and El Almendares—that were meant to conjure images of a boulevard in Paris or London. Period signs posted on the outside of the stores reinforced this transnational imagination of “Parisian” Havana, carrying images of European commodities (Baccarat glassware, fine eyewear, imported clothing) that enabled one to experience—“see, smell, feel”—an “imported modernity that is pretheoretical and synaesthetic” (Guano 2002: 193). This was in spite of the fact that the dollar stores actually offered a disorganized jumble of eclectic fare—Chinese refrigerators, Japanese TVs, and Phillips stereo systems crammed together with cheap imitations of brand-name jeans, sport shirts, frying pans, women’s lingerie, lipstick, and deodorant. The use of naming practices throughout the principal tourism zones then contributes to the construction of an essentialized and homogenized past that creates the “authenticity” of Old Havana.

Excluded from this frame are signs and symbols that code Cuba as a socialist country, images that might disrupt the heritage frame. For instance, in 2002, only four shops remained on Obispo Street that continued to offer goods and services to ordinary Cubans in pesos, the local currency. These included a bookstore displaying copies of Marx ahora (Marx Today), a vintage tailor’s shop, a women’s hair salon with cracked ceiling tiles, and a feria, or five-and-dime shop, with an old-fashioned soda fountain, swivel stools,
and mostly empty glass display cases. The latter featured a curious assortment of cheap domestic goods—spare bike parts, toy lighthouses, placemats, cleaning solvents, cooking pots, plastic strainers, trays with a gaudy flower motif—illuminated under eerily glowing fluorescent lights. Similarly removed from the tourist zone are revolutionary events, such as a youth march that I observed just outside the tourism zone in Habana Vieja in 2002. The march consisted of a group of schoolchildren known as Pioneros (Pioneers), dressed in signature red and white uniforms and blue bandanas. The children carried a banner that read, *La libertad es lo mas grande de pueblos y hombres. Es mejor morir que perderla* (“Liberty is the greatest value of nations and peoples. It’s better to die than to lose it”). Such revolutionary enactments are nowhere to be found in the tourist zone, together with propaganda billboards plastered with revolutionary slogans—*Aquí no queremos amos* (“Here we will have no masters”), *Con Cuba, con Fidel y el socialismo* (“With Cuba, with Fidel, and socialism”), and *Socialismo o muerte* (“Socialism or death”)—that dot the streets of the rest of the city.

A walk along Obispo Street offers a glimpse of another form of social exclusion. As you make your way past period bars with names like Café Paris, Lluvia del Oro, and La Dichosa, you see Cubans peering in through the metal grates that separate these open-air venues from the street. Inside, white male European tourists often accompanied by Cuban women known as *jineteras* listen to Cuban *conjuntos* that play traditional tourist music like “Guantanamara” and the wistful refrains of Comandante Che Guevara. While the lack of access to dollars accounts in large part for this segregation of hosts and guests, except for relationships of convenience, it also invokes differences of culture.

Daniel, a local musician who plays Rumba, a percussive style of Afro-Cuban folkloric music that he dubbed *música del solar* or music of the tenements, offered commentary on this form of social exclusion. During a well-publicized visit of the governor of Illinois, George Ryan, in the fall of 1999, Daniel was playing with his *conjunto* in one of the main plazas when the governor and his entourage passed by. Although the city historian, who was leading the prominent visitors on a tour, encouraged the group to keep going, Ryan requested that they stop and listen. Before departing, members of the entourage showered the group with tips of $20 and $100 bills. Daniel’s *conjunto* was subsequently denied permission to play in the plazas or tourist bars of the heritage district, which he interpreted as a form of discrimination based on his style of music and its Afro-Cuban origins. As Daniel put it,
“the jefes [managers] of these bars don’t want this music in their clubs because they don’t want them filled with blacks dancing [sic], and lots of noise.” He went on to suggest that only *música septeto de turismo* or “whitened” forms of Cuban music acceptable to tourists, such as the son, salsa, and guaracha, were encouraged in the tourism sector. This stands in contrast with music like the rumba, which is linked to the lower classes, and the *rumbero*, who “tries to cultivate a happy life in the face of nothing.” Rumba, in other words, is a kind of barrio music that cuts across the grain of the heritage space, producing a disjuncture that marks its practitioners as outsiders.

**Conclusion**

Although I have focused primarily on the reterritorializing practices of UNESCO and the OHCH, other forms of territorialization compete with conservationists’ efforts to enforce a centralized and unified colonial history and identity in Old Havana. The constant references by the city historian to the need for residents to “respect” the heritage, and to allow only those who “love the environment” and “would die of sadness if they were forced to leave” to reside in this “overpopulated sector,” point to the underlying social tensions involved in creating a heritage space in the midst of a heterogeneous living city (Molina 1993). Related calls for a modern police force that is “known by the people” and “equipped with the latest technology” to prevent future incidents with “pickpockets” (*rateros*) and “thieves” (*rapiñadores*) highlight underlying tensions over the meaning of Habana Vieja as a place.

The difficulty of constructing a coherent heritage landscape in Habana Vieja, unlike carefully controlled, museum-like environments such as Colonial Williamsburg, is that Habana Vieja is situated in a complex, heterogeneous, lived urban space. Yet the ability to manage the colonial image is accentuated by the control that the OHCH, its team of architects and urban planners, and ultimately Eusebio Leal himself are able to exercise over this heritage site. The OHCH’s management of the past extends to every facet of the old city, from the design of building façades and the color of paint to decisions about what to restore and what to tear down, to the naming of hotels and restaurants, enterprises, and shops, and ultimately to the name of the city itself, known variously as Centro Histórico, Habana Profunda, Habana *Mística*, Patrimonio Mundial, and Patrimonio de la Nación. An illustrative *chiste* (joke), which circulated in the streets, captures the power of
Eusebio Leal to determine the image of Old Havana. In it, a group of architects and planners trail in the wake of Eusebio Leal’s shadow as he walks through the old city, jotting down his every request for a hotel here, a restaurant there, and a museum over there.

The reterritorialization of Habana Vieja, then, involves the “traditionalization” of a densely settled, diverse, and multifaceted urban space, and its reorganization around the diffuse idea of an “authentic” Spanish colonial town. As a heritage landscape, it consists of a simplified set of spatial perspectives, objects, and discourses that taken together are presented as the suprahistorical embodiment of tradition, history, and identity in the context of the built environment. Although presented as “natural,” that is, the living instantiation of 500 years of colonial history, what counts as “tradition” has in fact been carefully produced through a set of emergent institutions, particularly the OHCH, and the discourse that surrounds them. The focus, then, of this analysis has been on the process of selecting and organizing itself, rather than the inherited goods (buildings, monuments, people) that are said to comprise the heritage per se, and on the way in which this process of selection and simultaneous erasure emerges in relationship to the OHCH, its range of commercial enterprises, and the discourses that surround them (Dorst 1989: 129). Taken together, these discourses and practices have transformed Habana Vieja into a new colonial center of power, which has symbolically replaced the modernist commercial Americanized downtown constructed around the Havana Hilton and the La Rampa movie theater in the 1950s. Thus the centrality of the city has shifted, setting up a new set of continuities between Cuba and a globalized European colonial past, in lieu of a problematic, “pseudo-republican,” North American one.