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## **OCCUPYING HOPE: NOTES FROM A UNIVERSITY OCCUPY EXPERIENCE IN BRAZIL**

### **1. Introduction**

*The ball I threw when playing in the park*

*has not touched the floor yet*

—Dylan Thomas



Jean Pierre Vernant, in his book *L'individu, la mort, l'amour* proposes a thesis stating that the writing principle of Homer's *Iliad* is based on the use of poetry as an expression of a fight against the forgetfulness. Underlying the more than fifteen thousand verses of the oldest and largest literary work of the Western culture, endures, therefore, the gesture of carving the word to make it the flame that keeps the memory of the heroes alive.

Similarly, as Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin reminds us, the Greek word *Sema*, before taking its most abiding meaning of “sign”, was used for centuries in the Greek culture as a synonym of tomb.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the author reminds us of the fact that the earliest known glimpses of written signs in the Western culture have been found in the form of funeral inscriptions. Both memory and writing have a double weakness stemming from the fact that both are based on the paradigm of "trace", that is, they represent the presence of something that no longer exists, and that always threatens to be permanently erased.

As in Homer's endeavor in *Iliad*, this text also takes on this historic compromise in undertaking memory and writing as a form of struggle against oblivion. Therefore, the desire that motivates this text is to keep alive the presence of an episode of campus occupation among college students whose utopian character is our outlining goal.

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<sup>1</sup> Gagnebin, J. M. (2006). *Lembrar escrever esquecer*. São Paulo: Editora 34.

Following the idea of Unger, according to which societies are "built and imagined",<sup>2</sup> we aim to reconstruct, from the depiction of four image-scenes that took place within this occupation experience, the multiple forms of refusal that were expressed in the plane of the ordinary routine practices of life in the occupation that accomplish the fundamental need of the utopian thought: the exercise of imagining "better futures".<sup>3</sup>

That way, it is speculated that the description of these small gestures *costumary* to the everyday life in the occupations — its temporality, its urgency, its art, its erotic, its particular form of promoting meetings and negotiating differences —, perhaps more than its macropolitical goals, can illuminate the production of new images, not yet available, that indicate ways to build a non-existent social reality, yet to come, and about which we still know little.

## 2. Utopic Images: style and method

*Surgissez bois de pins,*

*surgissez dans la parole*

*L'on ne vous connaît pas.*

*Donnez votre formule.*

—Francis Ponge

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<sup>2</sup> Unger, R. (1987). *Social Theory: Its Situation and Its Task*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Moylan, T. (2007). Realizing Better Futures, Strong Thought for Hard Times. In: Moylan, T. and Baccolini, R. *Utopia Method Vision: The use value of social dreaming*. Oxford: Peter Lang AG.

*Non, pas question de paix:*  
*nous sommes inépuisables en expériences.*  
—Henri Michaux

The bet in describing the image-scenes of everyday life in the occupations as a way to tell the story of this movement makes justice to the methodological option chosen in this essay to continue unique experiences from its "form", that is, covering the traces of its style.

From the recent contributions of Marielle Macé for a reflection on the sense of style — emphasizing its content of concept, at the same time anthropological, moral and political<sup>4</sup>— we understand the notion of style as the Foucauldian thought program proposed in the 1970s, the problem of the "stylistic of existence" as an approach that allows one to think of "forms of life" in terms of an "experience of engagement". Here, the term "engagement" refers to the forms from which, by argumentative route<sup>5</sup> or by the traces of a style<sup>6</sup> people qualify life and the world, that is, put into question the good or bad character, fair or unfair in the world and the situations in the world around them. In doing so, people thus mobilize values and conceptions of the good life and good society on behalf of which they believe that life is worth living, against the backdrop the "story of a future to-come", namely a future to be

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<sup>4</sup> Macé, M. (2016). *Styles: critique de nos formes de vie*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

<sup>5</sup> Boltanski, L. and Thévenot L. (1991). *De la Justification*. Paris: Gallimard.

<sup>6</sup> Macé, M. (2016). *Styles: critique de nos formes de vie*. [op. cit.]

built collectively. That implies pursuing what is not yet known, the dimension of the "not yet" of Ernst Bloch.

This perspective of thinking about human action and the repertoires of criticism is very much in tune with the works of the so-called "pragmatic sociology of criticism" which, from the so-called "pragmatic gesture" in the field of social sciences in the French context, brings as a fundamental proposal the resumption of the reflection on the centrality of morals and values in social life from the analysis of critical repertoires and justification of people in common situations of dispute in the ordinary life.<sup>7</sup>

This theoretical constellation, reactive to the tradition of structuralist sociology, focuses the sociological analysis on the actions, in the arguments, and in the forms of life that the actors perform and take as theirs, in the speeches that they sustain from their moral point of view, from what they see as bring the good, the well and the right.<sup>8</sup> This proposition seems to be especially interesting when one has the objective of analyzing repertoires of contestation and criticism of social movements that, from different moral grammars, call into question the fair or unfair character of the present social reality, thus producing diverse forms of construction of the *new*.

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<sup>7</sup> Boltanski, L. and Thévenot L. (1991). *De la Justification*. Paris: Gallimard; Brevieglieri, M. and Stavo-Debaugé, J. (1997). Le geste pragmatique de la sociologie française. Autour des travaux de Luc Boltanski et Laurent Thévenot. In: *Antropolítica: revista contemporânea de Antropologia e Ciência Política*. n. 1 (2. sem. 95) Niterói: EdUFF; Nachi, M. (2006). *Introduction à la sociologie pragmatique*. Paris: Armand Colin; Pharo, P. (2004). *Morale et sociologie*. Paris : Éditions Galimard.

<sup>8</sup> Benatouil, T. (1999, May-April). Critique et pragmatique en sociologie. Quelques principes de lecture. *Annales HSS*. N. 2, pp. 281–317.

In these terms, the small gestures, the rituality, the rhythms, everything that concerns the "how" of life, come into play as traces/tracks of a style, i.e. as tools for classifying life in terms of an "experience of engagement". It is in these terms that "the vocabulary of the style makes up a vocabulary of the value," that is, it brings with it a critical reflection about the meaning of forms of life and living, viewed here from their formal aspects (relating to form, to the "how" of everyday life) in which the form also becomes the gateway to the question of values.

Not by chance, Marielle Macé starts from the poetry of Piero Pasolini to approach the question of style. According to the author, Pasolini's "poetic rage", consumed in every small trait of his incendiary poetry, becomes the basis of his style, which seeks to elaborate a vigorous reflection (and a forceful criticism!) on the violent transformations of the forms of existence in the first half of the twentieth century. Literature serves in this context as a privileged gateway to the reflection on the "style", as it is one of the fields of artistic production where the full extent of the question of "form" is most clearly perceived. As Macé argues, "the literary texts, in their variety and singularity, constitute the place par excellence where one thinks — without fixing oneself on — the sense of the form, of the 'how' (...) attention to the various engagements of the literary style is at the same time its object and its practice".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Macé, M. (2016). *Styles: critique de nos formes de vie*. [op. cit.], p. 48.

At a given point in the essay entitled “*É antes o fim de um mundo*” (“It is before the end of a world”) the writer Manoel Ricardo de Lima invites us to think about the discussion of what the poet Pasolini called “creative fiction of the lived”, the ideation of the poetry of “inventing everything” as an ethical commitment. It is a radical perspective of invention perhaps in proportion to the size of the refusal of what is set as the only setting for life. In the poem “*País*” (“Country”) Eduardo Sterzi writes, “- *this is almost a country. / But this country / doesn't exist. This country / is no good...*”.<sup>10</sup>

When Sterzi writes “this country”, it is as if we could read “not mine”. A kind of refusal to accept this country as one’s own. The need to invent everything. The need to invent a language as a tactical field, or, as Deleuze said, “to invent a missing people”.<sup>11</sup> It is in the attempt to “organize the pessimism”, as Walter Benjamin said, that this fragment is placed, that is, a historical and critical gamble so that we can invent new ways of life and experience loving the world we hate, once again paraphrasing Pasolini.

The only possible answer may be that of Pierre Naville, which became famous in Walter Benjamin's pen.<sup>12</sup> According to them our mission would be to organize the pessimism. Walter Benjamin is explicit in saying that organizing pessimism means discovering a place of images in the field of political conduct.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that Naville's text “The Revolution and the

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<sup>10</sup> Sterzi, E. *Aleijão*. Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze, G. (1997). *A Literatura e a Vida*. In *Crítica e Clínica*. Peter Paul Pelpart (trans.). São Paulo: Ed. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin makes a complacent and enthusiastic mention of this essay by Pierre Naville in his text on surrealism. See here the essay by Georges Didi-Huberman on this question. Didi-Huberman, G. (2009). In *Survivances des Lucioles*. Paris: Ed. De Minuit, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> See here the essay by Georges Didi-Huberman on this question. *Ibid.*

Intellectuals", written in the late 1920s, will precisely draw the landscape of violence and obscurantism of an Europe marked by Stalinist tyranny and the rise of Nazism. The triggering question of the text, however, is a fierce defense of surrealism against all criticism of this artistic revolution. Naville's text is impressively up-to-date. Thus, we will highlight from this text the concept of utopia in a critical pessimism, in which the author shows us the utopian power of true pessimism.

In these terms, Naville defends the idea of a responsible and consequent pessimism indicating that hopelessness can fulfill an important function in the political scenario. He criticizes the naïve hope associated, according to him, with the mediocre aspects of an era. In this sense, we can say that Naville proposes an active pessimism and that it must find its lead. "It is necessary to organize the pessimism, or rather, since it is not a matter of submitting it to a call, it must be allowed to organize itself".<sup>14</sup> The challenge would be the needed resistance to what he names the tyranny of the future. However, the question that remains is precisely how it is possible to inject utopian power into hopelessness. The path is not simple, but certainly the only way out is to be able to narrate and witness affection to this world. In other words, pour into language what we experience. Therefore, some powerful images may come up helping us to see and understand better what we live.

It is in behalf of this refusal to accept the present state of things as they are presented that this text proposes a reflection on the new modalities of life and

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<sup>14</sup> Naville, P. (1975). *La révolution et les intellectuels*. Gallimard, Paris, 1975, p. 117.

social criticism that germinated from an experience of an university occupation in Brazil. In this sense, we also aim to re-launch the presence of this "non-textual utopia" in the hope that it may inspire the ever-present need for invention of better futures, thus taking on its commitment to poetic ethics and the utopian method, which together make up a method for producing knowledge and intervening in the world.

### 3. The Occupy experience in times of "conservative turn"

*"But where the danger is,  
also grows the saving power."*

—Holderlin

Over the last years, it has been noticed in the global geopolitical scenario what has been conventionally called the "conservative turn" in the scope of the political representation. A series of more or less recent historical events converged for the design of a global social order in which the conservative thinking seems to strongly re-emerge, turning its rhetorical arsenal in the recent "losses" caused by the major global economic crisis.

For example, we could list: i) the collapse of successive leftist governments in Latin America; ii) the election of President Donald Trump in the United States after one of the most overtly conservative campaigns of a presidential candidate in the United States; iii) the migratory crisis in Europe and the corresponding popularization of radical proposals of nationalist parties; iv) the strengthening of ethnic tensions, especially in Europe, under the so-called

"culturalist neo-racism", understood as a mode of sociability, from which one rejects certain social minorities whose cultural practices or identity traits are not accepted by a majority. The list could go on at length.

On the other hand, the impasses produced by the structural crises that capitalist development has been undergoing since the end of the twentieth century favor the upsurge of important social tensions around the world which, in turn, give rise to several critical repertoires related to the difficulties of modernity in sustaining its promises of emancipation and affirmation of rights.<sup>15</sup> As examples of these structural crises, we can mention: i) the ecological crisis in the face of the destruction of ecosystems and the limitation of biodiversity; (ii) the economic crisis and the deepening of unemployment, stagnation and increasing social inequalities throughout the world; iii) the political crisis stemming from growing disbelief in the autonomy of the political space before the merging with the economic power, and many others.

It is important to point out some of the political developments that emerge as an initial response and expression of a latent subjectivity capable of opposing the discourses that "nothing can be done" in relation to this state of permanent crisis of capitalism. Reassembling a political narrative of the global struggle cycle of this last decade directs our eyes to the year of 2011, when a tsunami of mobilizations and social protests started in North Africa, overthrowing

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<sup>15</sup> Harvey, D. (1996). *A Condição pós-moderna: uma pesquisa sobre as origens da mudança cultural*. São Paulo: Loyola; Melucci, A. (2001). *A invenção do presente: movimentos sociais nas sociedades complexas*. Petrópolis: Vozes; Touraine, A. (1997). *Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble? égaux et différents*. Paris: Fayard.

dictatorships in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen, stretched across the Mediterranean Sea to find Spain and Greece. The historian Enrique Carneiro recalls the event that originated these revolts: A Tunisian fruit seller commits suicide by immolation on December 17, in 2010. This desperate gesture, seemingly an individual act, has brought to light the "psychological exhaustion of many peoples at once." The popular rebellions of North Africa are taken as an example of revolutionary courage by the Outcasts of the Sun Gate; of the Generation to Scratch, in Portugal; and by the occupants of Syntagma square in Greece. Carneiro recalls that "in all countries there was the same form of action: squatting, use of alternative communication networks and political articulations that rejected the traditional institutional space." However, the anarchic breeze of the cycle of struggles was not extinguished in Europe. Unknowing boundaries, it traveled the Atlantic Ocean and erupted in Chile in student claims by public and free education. Then, it stretched to the northern hemisphere to kick off Occupy Wall Street in New York at the center of the global financial heart. The union of the bodies in the public space in a state of occupation made appear the popular demand for real democracy, political demand for truth against the false politics of bureaucrats, those who represent the 1% of the political and financial caste. Since its beginning, the Occupy Movements were taken as political anomies, a product of subversive and intoxicated young people. What is important here is to emphasize the relevance of a resistance movements which still with precarious names, but that can be taken as an experiment of invention of new political dispositions.

In the Brazilian issue, a possible starting point for thinking about the eventual "conservative turn" dates back to the scenario of 2013 and the wave of popular demonstrations that took place that year. Initially, the demonstrations were based on an eminently progressive agenda, led by the Movimento Passe

Livre around the demand for the lowering of ticket prices and improvement of the public transport system. In this context, which also coincides with the anteroom of the 2014 World Cup, a series of left wing social movements spread over the streets of major Brazilian cities, denouncing the roughness of urban life. In these repertoires, a series of denunciations was aimed at criticizing the high cost and poor conditions of the public transport and public health services options, as well as, on the other hand, the enormous expenditures of the Brazilian State with the construction of large Arenas for the World Cup.

Little by little, the "June journeys" gained a massive adhesion of traditional sectors of the Brazilian middle class that, until then, seemed to have remained outside the mobilization. Thus, with the increasing blooming of the origin and of the social class of the protesters, there is also a movement of increasing ideological heterogenization of the demands in the agenda. In this context, the posters and slogans painted in the colors of left-wing progressivism, originally organized in the orbit of "a city without turnstiles," also orbit around the old themes more aligned with the conservative spectrum: the fight against corruption, the excessive payment of taxes, the reduction of the penal age, the inefficiency of the State, etc.

One year after the "Journées", Brazil watches the fiercest presidential election of the Republican period, which results in the reelection of the Workers Party candidate, Dilma Rousseff, with a narrow margin in relation to the second place candidate, Aécio Neves. In these same elections, according to the Inter-

Congressional Department of Parliamentary Advice, the Congress elected is the most conservative since 1964, with a significant draw of politicians linked to social groups traditionally committed to conservative agendas (including the armed forces, ruralists and members of neo-Pentecostal churches).

On the other hand, the recent effects of the economic crisis in Brazil seem to reintroduce in the daily agenda conservative conceptions and measures in the field of economic policy. In this context, there is a growing apology to the free market, to the reduction of the State's role in regulating economic exchanges, to the curtailment of public banks, and a growing questioning of the extent of social rights and public services in the face of recession. In the field of security, with increasing violence and crime rates, there has also been an upsurge in authoritarian and life-threatening punitive measures, such as the popularization of support for the death penalty, reduction of age of criminal liability, and life imprisonment for heinous crimes.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the vertiginous thickening of the cultural conservative broth in Brazil. The rise of an intellectual body of Brazilian journalists, writers and columnists who dedicate themselves to writing works for dissemination of Brazilian conservative ideology moves the publishing field in an extraordinary way. In this fashion, the so-called "politically incorrect guides" proliferate or, moreover, books that tell stories of people who enjoy some public prestige (artists, writers, intellectuals) and who have made political conversions toward conservatism. In addition to these works, it has been seen in the Brazilian publishing market a massive amount of "popular" books whose commitment is the dissemination of ideas that are dear to conservative thinking and of open controversy and detraction before the social movements that present themselves with the colors of left wing progressivism. In this worrying scenario, Michel Temer illegitimately takes power with an agenda aimed at forcefully implementing, without the proper

democratic debate, a series of conservative policies driven by a troupe of politicians involved up to their necks in scary corruption scandals.

It is on this context, thus, of conservatism turn on the political representation and public discussion on Brazil, that we also observe, on the other hand, the flowering of an important movement of resistance pulled out by some social movements, including high school students. Throughout the year of 2016, young people from all around Brazil, mostly between 14 and 18 years old, high school students, have occupied their schools in protest against the austerity measures and the education reforms imposed by the Brazilian government. Among these reforms, we can highlight the PEC 55 and the High school reform.<sup>16</sup>

These reforms, whose texts were produced without any consultation or popular discussion, found in the students themselves their most dedicated critics. Discontent with their content and with the undemocratic way in which the reforms were imposed, the students themselves took responsibility for

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<sup>16</sup> The so-called "PEC 55" consisted of a Draft Constitutional Amendment that transited and was approved by the Brazilian Congress over the last months of 2016. In the context of the economic recession that has dominated the country on that time, this Amendment had as objective the freezing of public expenditures for the next twenty years based on the 2016 budget. Thus, this project was seen as an instrument of public expenses reduction looking towards an improvement of the economy. This way, also in Brazil we have seen the confirmation of a (dangerous) global trend of coping with the economic crisis faced by fiscal austerity programs that reduce investment in the "non-market" areas of social life, such as health and public education, whose commitment of investment by the State, in the Brazilian case, is guaranteed by the Federal Constitution of 1988. On the other hand, the High School Reform consists of a political maneuver aimed at removing the compulsory nature of certain disciplines in the humanities field of the high school curriculum, such as sociology, philosophy and arts.

their own future and, in a gesture of courage and political protagonism, occupied their schools as a form of protest in the name of public education.

It's worth sharing here one scene of the documentary "Lute como uma menina (Fight as a girl!)" (2016)<sup>17</sup> which will lead us to find, right here next, on the different styles of students narratives, the transmission of an occupation experience. Just as the act of occupying the secondary school was the great motivating force for university students to have this courage as well, the scene of this documentary that will be described also forms part of the quest for the ways of narrating. This film, directed by Beatriz Alonso and Flávio Colombini, is an excellent material to understand the various reasons why the schools were occupied.

We also find that the scenes narrated by these girls convey a great political engagement, a living indignation, a force of resistance and the testimony of the violence they suffered.

A student speaks of an episode during a demonstration in which the violence of a police officer upon her and her colleagues highlight the intentions of the State and its police apparatus when we speak and fight for a quality public education. "Then I was holding [the chair] so I grinned good, waiting for the boys to negotiate there with the police, then a policeman comes and picks up

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<sup>17</sup> The movie "Lute como uma menina! (Fight as a girl!)" (59:00) can be accessed through the following link  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OCUMGHm2oA&t=3853s>>

my chair, then I pulled him back and there we were: I'm holding one now and he pulling the other, pulling, pulling, pulling."

The tension in front of a chair. It was not just a chair. It was a high school chair. It was a chair held by a student struggling for education. And even at the insistence of the student in the tension in the chair, the policeman pulls out of his hand and throws away on the floor. She finally says, "No! The chair is from school, it's going to break!" It was not just a chair. It was a symbol of the care about education. And after this, we can see many cases of students tried and found guilty of depredation of the public patrimony, as the girl from the movie mentions.



Photo by Gabriela Lima.

We can start our reflection from the point of view of a chair to think about the 'how' of the relation between social movements and the apparatuses of the

State. A school chair paralyzed by the tension of the hand of a high school student who fights for a quality education with the hand of a policeman who insists on taking her and throwing away, through violence and abuse of power. In this narrated scene, it turns out that not only the chair of his school is taken from his hands and destroyed with the violence of state powers, but also the education of a country.

The so-called "urgency of suspension" was, therefore, a concept and a political *praxis* of intervention created by young people among 14 and 18 years old that, as perspicacious observants of their present time, did not cease to take responsibility for their future time.

And in the Brazilian context, this fundamental responsibility is hampered by the criminalization of social movements, transforming a political demand into a police / judicial issue, as well as the publication of the book *Busy Schools* (2017). In this written record, we come across various testimonies of the student resistance in the face of a scary scenario of precarious services to the population as well as the excessive state violence that daily violates human rights. As an example, we can mention an occupation in the Department of the Treasury that culminated in the arrest of a journalist who fulfilled his work, of a filmmaker and of supporters, among them a student of the psychology from the same university as the authors of this article. In addition to the 33 underage students who were detained but had their cases dismissed later. And even more than a year after the event occurred, their trial is still not over. Even though aware of the state strategy of demobilization, students have been showing us the struggle to rethink the forms of teaching and learning in schools, finding in the occupations possible responses of refusal face an overpassed educational system. By doing this, the students also take

advantage of this space-time to strengthen the networks of affection that will make all the difference in future resistances. In this book, we find reports of many high school students who teach us to invent other possible ways of thinking what a quality education is. "We're trying to bring some culture to school, because we do not have any of it. The arts course is offered only in the first year and it is an art that 'there, go draw something and hand it to the teacher'. We think that art is music, it's theater, it's graffiti and it's promoting workshops like that. There are people here who like music, who sing, and why do not we bring it to our conviviality? Why can not we have a diversified class, a cinema-debate? Why can't we use a space that is ours? We want to bring this in the workshops because there are a lot of people who feel this difficulty of not being able to bring what they like into the school and many times when they try, it is barred. " Ana Paula, Protasio Alves High School.

Some months later, the high school boldness have contaminated the college students that, similarly, also began to occupy the university's buildings on behalf of the public education defense and as a way to ask for more democratic debate concerning the measures of fiscal austerity and education reforms "proposed" by the government. Thereby, universities all over Brazil had their buildings occupied by students who, just like the high school students, promoted a radical critique not only of austerity measures but also of the classical forms of participation and political representation.

One of the arguments that this text pursues is that, in the day-to-day of the occupations, the daily practice of the students in this space of coexistence, as well as the experiences produced there, promoted a true uprising against the

apathy of the "conservative turn" which takes place in Brazil nowadays and, in the same way, contributed to the emergence of new repertoires of criticism and contestation of the dominant forms of life, inside and outside the university.

It is in this context, therefore, that the four scenes below try to make emerge some images lived by the students who participated in the occupation of the building of the Institute of Psychology of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The essayistic tone of each one of them tries to preserve the power of invention, of risk and of hope within the scenario in which they were born.

#### 4. Groundings

*"The ground when it flees from the feet,*

*Everything loses its gravity,*

*Then we will be alone,*

*A foot from the city floor. "*

—Lenine, Chão (2011)

Walking is the act that presses me, in rhythms that are giving way to a style of each being; and there is no choice... I pressure them at the same intensity. At each step, one glance, looking for an image that walks, never to be fully captured. I witness the walk of those who experience the slowness of the

moment in which they stop to meet other's steps; to stop, as life blossoms. There is also those who rush, they are forced to run, as if the sound of the footsteps resonate production. Usually the worried footsteps are those who consume me more valiantly, not frightened by what they may cause – be it a stone, an uneven patch of land, a strange object sort of left out on the middle of the road, a hole in the ground – it seems that the fear of tripping comes from something harder, deeper, brighter and more forgotten. The rollers, the feet that became wheels teach me that there are bumps in life, I love trying to follow them, unlike the authoritarians, who impose a kind of step as if no one could supersede theirs. And I must confess, what is common among all of them, or at least almost, they all fall, there is always that fall, the boldness in embodying life's gravity. That's the risk.

Each way of walking traces a line in the composition of an unfinished drawing. On this textual ground, in which you stand as well, the eyes stroll looking for memories of a students' surge occupying their schools. Aren't we all occupying with a body-thought in a determined time and space? Why do we occupy?

In the moment in which the weight of our presences, on October 31, 2016, in a circle made me feel a pressure I had never felt before, a vibration made me question: what was that pressure that transformed an everyday place into something else? What was that place where I lay? So many teachers, students, workers, together on the court of a university building and the not knowing was a breath of fresh air. Why do we occupy? The act of the high school

students had a major role on the decision. They taught and still teach the world the courage of trying some new ways of teaching and learning, owning a place that belongs to them, but makes itself distant as a control mechanism. They were the ones that magnified a crack in me, which now creates its ramifications. Is it possible to think that crack as an act that cuts on the surface of appearances, so as to make an image out of darkness? Or should we consider the crack as grounds that escape our feet, as the Brazilian musician Lenine says? Isn't it in darkness where we find a background, almost a ground to the creative act? Putting our foot down, literally; the act of refuse.

Facing this frightening scenario of instability and violence that looms over us, facing this blinding light, we occupied. The need for a suspension made new ways of walking possible, since I not only lay my feet on the ground, but also, from that day on, was a pillow for many dreams.



Drawing by Sofia Tessler during the occupation movement

## 5. Beginnings

*“And suddenly you know:  
It's time to start something new  
and trust the magic of beginnings.”*  
— Meister Eckhart

### **About one of the beginnings.**

For a moment I stop this writing to know what day of the month it is today and I realize that the day of the month that appears on my cell phone is not correct. I tell Matthew that my record of memories of everything that has been happening since the first day of the occupation is not recorded according to the linearity of the conventional time presented by the days of the month, by the appointment of the days of the week and even by the clock that marks a complete turn of the Earth to the surroundings of the Sun. This is how I begin my account of the beginning of something that escapes time, which suspends the temporal logic of beginning and end, because each day the beginning and the end are lived and experienced. Each day the movement dies and is born again and again and again. On the last Monday of October 2016, we held an assembly for the entire community of the Institute of Psychology - students, teachers, technicians, servers, and finally all those who travel through this space. It was a large assembly outside the IP, on the patio. The students-

occupants of the course of Letters, the first course to occupy their building, came to give a support and to tell how the occupation process was there; and also to talk a little about PEC 55, the High School Reform and the No-Party School, which are the main reasons why students are occupying the university. The idea of whether or not to occupy the Institute was already circulating in the mouth and imagination of the people present, so it was not long before we began to talk about the possibility of occupation. In an historic meeting, we decided to occupy the Institute of Psychology. The large number of students, who were first outside the building, enter the building, go up the stairs and announce that the Institute is OCCUPIED. Here is one of the beginnings.

**Picture of a chaos-affection:**

It was Friday night, after the first less tense and less time-consuming assembly of the last days. We were between 10 and 15 people in DASEIN (Academic Directory of Psychology) drinking, smoking, singing, laughing, shouting, talking wildly. Moment that talks about the necessity of the chaos and everything that with it breaks, it flows, it destroys and reborns. A need that, after days when we tried, in various ways, to find and put into practice a kind of collective discipline so that we would feel safe, cohesive and belonging to a collective under construction that went in a direction not yet known by all.

Revisiting this scene now in the present that was just to that past, I wonder about the singular nature of a movement that paradoxically feeds from chaos to endure discipline; creates and lives in another time to understand, to face

and to resist the frightening real time that is denounced by the news of every day and that decides literally to occupy with different bodies the space that represents the right that they want to destroy us. Why or for whom do we put our body on the street today?

It seems difficult, perhaps still recent, to be able to describe the nature of the occupation movement, but it contains the disposition of construction from the differences of each subject that occupies, in the sense of asserting the heterogeneity of a collective. The search for a uniform and homogeneous body is something impossible to a movement like this in which the different bodies, which bring with them singular ways of life, share the daily life. They wake up and fall asleep together; clean the place and cook collectively; organize the tasks of the week, as well as deliberate the next actions of the movement. That is, the collective is not produced collectively only in institutionalized spaces such as assemblies, the collective occupation is literally in the daily chores.

So in this daily coexistence, differences - of color, of gender, of thought, of belief - not only appeared, but also shouted and constituted the movement of occupation. The great power and also the great challenge of the movement is really to be affected by the constituent differences of it, as well as to sustain the movement and its political force by the bet on the heterogeneity. Otherwise the movement runs the risk of killing itself by trying to live from the old strategies of social movements or weakens until it is swallowed up by hegemonic discourses that easily delegitimize them. It is in this sense that

movement becomes a challenge and a power at the same time, since the construction of a social movement based on the union of differences disturbs social structures of a current social system that is bankrupt, organized and subjective through stratifying and supposedly incommunicable divisions, that when they communicate much more is to place limits and barriers between them.

In times when representative "democracy" humbly asks only the "unified" black, white, homosexual, female, poor, rich people to vote for it, how to cause them more panic than to see a movement that brings all these differences together? What was common in the midst of differences was the need to interrupt any further discussion in order to think collectively about the dangerous course that the Brazilian illegitimate government was giving to public education. After a parliamentary coup d'état, which placed an unlawful president in the presidency of the Republic, a vote on Constitutional Amendment Proposal 55 was sent to the national congress, which provides for the limitation, as well as the drastic reduction of public spending for 20 years in the areas of health, education and public safety.

Coined by the discourse of the need for economic recovery, what the government intends with this proposal is to make public education precarious and then privatize it. It is through measures like this that the neoliberal prescription is updated in Brazil. It is against this proposal of dismantling public education that hundreds of Brazilian students decide to occupy their universities. They occupy to think about what is happening, occupy to carry out activities and debates on the political, economic and social conjuncture of Brazil, occupy to show resistance and existence of subjects, who no longer

paralyze as a form of subversion, but rather put bodies into action in an attempt to invent other ways of resisting, being and being in the world.

To think of the nature of the occupation movement not as an analysis that aims at its mere reproduction or that gathers its characteristics in a primer on social movements; to think of it, however, in the perspective of trying to understand the limit zone that the collective of an occupation movement seems to constitute. The boundary between the ideological crisis of the old institutions and the need to occupy them; the boundary between following the old strategies and affirming the creation of new ones; the boundary between leaving the comfortable place of being with equals to go out and building the place of differences; zone boundary between having to walk under chaos to invent the new. It is not seeking answers that this writing proposes, it is to keep asking: why or for whom do we put our body on the street today?

## **6. Another encounter**

*“Fully inhabiting is all that can be set  
against the paradigm of government.”*

— Invisible Committee

We were walking in the street, my friend and I. We met accidentally and decided to keep on together for a while. It was night time. Cars passed by,

while we walked through a slightly illuminated street. It was almost summer. The wind was wildly blowing, yet it was hot, so that we felt it as a warm breath gently touching our tense bodies. We were in a bohemian neighborhood in Porto Alegre. There were lots of people around us, drinking, spending time together and cheering. Yet, we were alert. It's said that streets aren't as safe as they used to be. We kept on our path, glancing backwards eventually, and open to an eventual veering; but definitely resolute about keeping on.

Some rare condition was operating over that atmosphere. It looked like we were in one of these moments in which every eventual judgment about things could – and maybe should – remain sort of suspended. We felt, at the same time, fearful and courageous.

Maybe it was this feeling that brought up the subject on the way we inhabit public spaces nowadays. My friend is a law student, and I already knew many of his opinions about this particular matter. However, something new was happening in our city. Since the month before, the students of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul had been occupying some of its buildings, demanding for a qualified and public education that could be offered by a universal access. Someone was reciting the poems of Carlos Drummond de Andrade. We sat and listened it for a while. We talked about how our system provides this education, but only in theory.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> In order to be admitted in a university, people in Brazil have to go through a test called *vestibular*. In this test, essentially, prevails a sort of knowledge that is taught at private schools. Considering that and the discussion on racial inequality, a national law was recently created, establishing a quota system for black people and for people that studied in public schools. We agreed that this was a plausible initiative for the

We started walking again and passed by a person standing still in a strange and inquiring position. That picture given, I brought up the occupations as an interesting way for claiming these matters we were discussing. He then said that he didn't defend the occupation at his college. Two people beside us started an argument. A few steps ahead, we saw a couple kissing, right in the middle of the street. For my friend, the occupation was a mess and that, in his opinion, was making the students lose their argument. I didn't (and still don't) agree with his opinion. A group of people laughing appeared. Youngsters with graffiti cans were singing loudly rap and funk<sup>19</sup> songs. We kept on by the street.

I said that I supported the occupation at the Institute of Psychology, the place where I finished my under graduation studies. For me, the profanation of space that the students proposed in an academic place was precisely the potency of the movement. So we diverged exactly on that issue. But still, we kept going.

Now that I think about our encounter, I start to believe that our fundamental diverging was what kept us talking. Maybe affected by such fact, I explained to my friend about the assemblies, and the resignification that outcomes from this particular way of taking decisions. Or, taking the idea of the occupations to its radical practice, we might say: this particular way of not necessarily

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admission of students; however, there are social and cultural inequalities that persist after this admission and do not receive its proper visibility.

<sup>19</sup> *Funk* is the local designation for a musical genre from Brazil, known internationally as *funk carioca* or *baile funk*.

taking decisions. Even time, in the occupations, is something that comes to a resignification. You have to give time and space for the eventual traversements that have “not yet” happened. In this context, one’s priorities are the opinions of people, more than the decisions that might come out of these. In many of the assemblies that I have participated at the occupation, that was what assured the singularity of each one’s opinion.

So we talked about that, while a juggler in the street manipulated the suspension of four lemons. We then talked about the logistic and the conditions of each occupation and agreed that they were different, and he and I decided to keep our standings about the occupations. And, at some point, I remembered the beginning of our conversation, and the fact that we had the same purposes behind our approaches. We both wanted a public university, of quality and universal access, that does not refrain from difference. We had that in common.

I then understood something new. The proposals of our approaches weren't properly opposites. Thinking by opposites works when you rationalize by a closed logic, that considers the variables only in a restrict system. It works when you have to think on alternatives to a specific problem, or when you propose methods of government. But that wasn't the case. We were there to exchange experiences and create some sort of collective narrative. When we see things by only one perspective, that's when we tend to analyze processes by a binary argument, and that's how fascism finds its roots to grow. We could diverge and yet keep on walking together, composing a narrative *by* that fundamental difference.

And so we did, until we said goodbye to each other and separated. The juggler kept there, juggling his four lemons. No perceptible decision was made. I didn't convince him of my ideals, neither did he convince me of his. Yet, we didn't come out of that conversation like we entered it.

What matters in an occupation is not the occupation itself, but the different and singular styles that reverberate in these circumstances and eventually interfere in the general ways of being. The point of the assemblies (and the occupations) is not to convince or interfere in someone's standings. The real power of these assemblages is in its exchange of experiences.

My friend may not be in favor of the occupations, and maybe he shouldn't be. But that night we fought together against the same enemy that, in my opinion, the occupations resist to: the fascism of absolute opinions and the suppression of hope, which leads to a generalized and monstrous lack of narrative. At that moment, we suspended our opinions and were able to wait.

I'm glad we were courageous enough to let it happen.

## 7. The Desire, Our Only Weapon

*"mes yeux sont l'aveugle foudre  
mon couer est le ciel  
où l'orage éclate"*

— Georges Bataille

Sitting at the diner on a sunny cold winter afternoon, I warm my hands in the steam of my coffee as I follow the street drive: bicycles passing, boarding and landing in the bus corridor, meetings and farewells at the corners. The Institute of Education in the background, the austere architecture of its neoclassical columns. Were it not for the posters hung outside the grate, the graffiti painted in the marble, and the barricade mounted on the entrance just above the first staircase, it might have been just another old-fashioned building for my pupils, but today this building is the first trench of courage. I think about the story my mother recounts over and over again about that day in 1974 when the police invaded school while she listened to the biology teacher talking about the life cycle of flowers. The unbearable noise of the explosions added to the tear-gas cloud made the panicked students run under the tables. My mother avoided crying, because of what the teacher shouted: "Do not cry, children, tears increase the burning sensation of the tear." On that day, my mother would see her high school classmates sneak into the black cars with some teachers from the second-floor window. "The subversives are those who disappear in the vehicles," she might have thought. Or, "Why do they do this to us?" Those moments were enough that she would never want to touch her memories of school time again. For her, school and fear were

only two versions of the same name. More than forty years have passed and now I see in the faces of the young students who occupy this same Institute of Education a face different from the one I imagine to be my mother's face. My mother's face in horror. I finish my coffee and then I go to the bakery on the side street to get the breads with which we will make our barbecue in the occupation in celebration of a friend who, after more than ten years in prison, began his life again. At the bakery, I get all the bread my money can buy. I think of that story of the UNE congress in Ibiuna in October 1968, when thousands of students were caught by surprise by soldiers from the Public Force and DOPS police. In the situation, the population of the small town in the interior of the state of São Paulo suspected that something was happening when the stock of bread from the bakeries ended overnight. One could write the history of revolutions from the perspective of breads, the most democratic food of all. Armed with two giant bags of bread, I cross the street and smile at a fourteen-year-old boy who serves as the doorkeeper for the occupation. His cap back, his sneakers damaged by the skateboard, the Real Madrid reserve team uniform. Everything in him infects me with unspeakable joy. That boy, for an ephemeral second, was my mother's colleague, who, after the cops had left, put her hand on her shoulder and said, "Be cool, Chris, everything will be all right". We walk down the corridor and he leads me to the kitchen. "The kitchen is the heart of the occupation," he says. Making sure to explain everything in detail, such as a night watchman, he knows every corner of the school, entrances and exits, stairways and warehouses, and especially escape routes, emergency exits. Then he takes me to the teachers' room. Two young students kiss each other on one of the many sofas in the room. Unrelated to the presence of any foreigner they kiss. He sticks his tongue into her mouth, she sticks his tongue into his mouth, they kiss. From

a quick motion in the camera, this scene sucks for itself all the brightness of the school, the sunny day above us. The exact moment when the image pulls all the others into a disappearance region where they are lodged and remain sending messages. The hidden center of the movie. Like that kiss was the only one meaning of the whole occupy. The lover's community. There's no way to cross the purple mystery cloud without getting wet.

## 8. Conclusion

*“What are the roots that clutch,  
what branches grow  
Out of this Stony rubbish?”*

—T.S.Eliot

The Wasteland

*“The future is dark, which is  
on the whole, the best thing  
the future can be, I think.”*

—Virginia Woolf

We invent utopias in order to take out the roots that are already dead, opening space to the brewing of new ideas. The main principle of this essay was the belief in the living testimony of university students that were engaged in a political occupying movement, one that has spread through hundreds of Brazilian universities by the end of 2016. In the face of an uncertain future,

full of disputes and hesitations between a libertarian acting and a conservative chain, such occupations insurge, creating a singular style of resistance and questioning the establishments of a common living. It is by this singularity, affirmed in front of and in a dialogue with the shared space of a polis, that one can take the uncertainty and propose, by that, some hope.

It is in the face of a Wasteland - devastated by conservative state politics that limitate the funds that are saved for public teaching and give themselves the right to legislate (in an authoritarian way) on the disciplines program of the basics and university courses - that a great occupying movement took place in the Brazilian schools and universities, bringing as a reminder the proposal of Harald Szeeman at Berna's Kunsthalle exposition: "When attitudes become Form".

What turns up as a challenge to the occupying movements are the ways of proposing new attitudes of political resistance, breaking away from instituted grammars: ones that are already subordinated to power but, under the veiling of a democratic state, mask violent and imposed acts. Besides the innumerable operations that are made in a micropolitical field, that is the main potency of this occupying movement in a social field: it proves that something else, or something different, is possible. Thousands of students got together to say "no", experiencing something original and introducing different political experiences, ones that were built by the responsible act of living together and by the bet in new strategies for the political acting; above all, by regaining the right to dream.

What is here written tries by some meanings to this memory alive, by the assumption that for that is necessary to register the reports of the students that lived this moment. By that, we intend to point out the situational and singular nature of such happenings. Also, this text serves as a trace that takes back to the intense conversation between its authors; one that followed up (and still follows up) to the occupying experience. By this audacious form, what matters here is saving the storm, as Tomas Morus says in his *Utopia*: “You must not abandon the ship in a storm because you cannot control the winds”.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Morus, T. (1977). *A Utopia*. Luís de Andrade (trans.). São Paulo: Nova Cultural, p. 57.

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