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a cidade e os outros
the city and the others
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BAIXOCENTRO: THE CRY OF THE OTHER

MOVIMENTO BAIXOCENTRO

The BaixoCentro Movement is collaborative, horizontal, independent and self-managed, organized by a network of "anarchists, Provos, beatniks, night owls, grinders, rogues, simple stylists simonists, magicians, pacifists, potato chips eaters, (...) and all the rabble like that." It is a movement of civil occupation which wants to crack, hack and dispute the streets.

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The structure of a city can only exist as a consequence of the relationship with "the other." The concept of what a city is emerges from everyday exchanges among its inhabitants. And São Paulo is a city with countless others. So many of them that, for many years, their voices have been suppressed so that a status quo could be achieved with respect to the course taken by public policies for the city. The problem is that no one ever asked its inhabitants whether that was the São Paulo they longed for.

In 2011, São Paulo was at odds with its public policies, which were far from humane. The region coined as Baixo Centro (i.e., low center, comprising the neighborhoods of Luz, Barra Funda, Santa Cecília, Campos Elíseos, and Vila Buarque) became the new target for real estate speculation. Then, the city administration, in order to meet the demands of big construction companies, which finance political campaigns, decided to implement sanitizing actions to "cleanse" the region. By cleanse, it meant to put an end to housing movements grounded on rights found in the Statute of the City and evict existing drug users from an area they insisted on branding as "Cracolândia" ("Crackland") in

order to suggest the idea that it needed be stubbed out, thereby justifying their sanitizing plans, as explained in the Wikipedia article “Operação Cracolândia.” To this end, the Nova Luz project was created, aimed at tearing down 33% of the buildings in the region, reassigning it (e.g., doing away with the electronics businesses on Santa Iphigenia street and crafting another type of relationship with the others that frequent the region), and rebuilding it so that “revitalization,” as envisaged and desired by the real estate market, could take place.

To revitalize means to bring something back to life. In terms of urban planning, it also means that a particular section of the city is defunct; there is nothing there that can be exploited. Therefore, a new district should be built. The term, by itself, shows ignorance on the situation of the city and the existence of the other. For public officials, current residents of this defunct region cannot be considered “alive” as they do not represent what the city machine needs at that moment. In other words, these unwanted residents prevent the region from being sold in the real estate market. Dissimilarity is suppressed. Rosalyn Deutsche, analyzing one of Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko’s artworks that look into the relationship between the city and immigrants, pointed out:

“[immigrants] jeopardize the city qua an idea, i.e., urbanistic thought itself, in which not only does urbanism refer to urban planning or their way of life in the city, but also—in more political terms—to the way we live together, with others, in a heterogeneous space” (Deutsche 2002: 31).

In São Paulo, owing to the way its administration then saw its citizens, immigrants were the residents themselves. Baixo Centro inhabitants were seen as something to be driven out to the fringes of the city, condemning them to not use the city.

For these reasons, in 2012, a movement was organized to oppose this cleansing. If Baixo Centro streets were in a dispute (police vs. drug users, the present vs. real estate speculation), it was about time people took to the streets and began to understand the processes the city was going through. The Festival was the way found to attract Baixo Centro residents to its public

spaces to really grasp the reason why the city had been neglected. Today, the center of São Paulo is not a place of enjoyment. It is a passageway. For instance, the public transport system uses it as junction for routes leading to other regions of the city. Thus, anyone commuting from the South Zone and to the East Zone must necessarily go through the city center to change buses or trains in order to get to their final destination. It seldom constitutes a final destination. The region was taken by commercial buildings, which only bring "life" to the streets during business hours. Outside of these hours, the region is simply considered dead.

At its opening session, the Festival employed the oppression caused by these concrete routes to show what it was about. Inspired by German artist Iepe Rubingh's artwork "Painting Reality," four shades of paint were splattered at the intersection of São João Avenue and Helvétia Street, just around the bend of Minhocão, waiting for cars to paint its dull gray pavement, commonplace all over São Paulo. During one week, an example of how the city could be one day was painted on its pavement: less grey, less oppressive, and more creative. Furthermore, life, deemed nonexistent in the region, was bled through color.

The city center, both its low and high areas, is alive and latent. All the time. It is not a forsaken region in its residents' eyes. On the contrary, it is an area deserted only by businesses and property owners awaiting the much-coveted speculation. They vacate entire buildings for decades hoping that one day their real estate value will rise enough to finally give them some use. However, as there is life underneath this pavement, housing movements, which also claim the right to the city and occupy this latency, thereby assigning a social purpose to properties whose *raison d'être* has been solely commercial.

In 2012, the Festival, which comprised about 100 cultural events in the Baixo Centro region, was one among other actions to spark the question of the others in a city like São Paulo. Are they drug users, unlawful residents of abandoned buildings, unrepresented minorities, and unassisted homeless people? No. In the country's largest metropolis, the other is any citizen. The city was not planned for people, but for cars, machines. Paved up and

crisscrossed by avenues, the city was planned for cars, an individual and polluting means of transportation, 40-year old Minhocão being a case in point. Electing cars over people to guide public policy has made us all the other.

Antagonism in the city does not emerge from sharing public spaces with different people, since virtually no one goes anymore to the few still existing squares in the city. It emerges from the encounter between residents and the machine that runs the city. As Chantal Mouffe describes:

“Only when we accept that every identity is relational and that the condition of existence of any identity is the affirmation of a difference, i.e., the determination of the ‘other,’ they who will play the role of the ‘constituted excluded,’ is it possible to understand how antagonism emerges. With regard to collective identifications, whose core issue is the creation of ‘us’ by delimiting ‘them,’ there is always the possibility that the us/them relationship will turn into a relationship of the friend/enemy kind. [...] This can only happen when the other, who was seen only as a mode of difference until then, begins to be pursued as a denier of our identity, as if questioning our very existence. Thereupon, any kind of us/them relationship—whether religious, ethnic, national, economic or other—becomes the stage for political antagonism” (Mouffe, 1993:2-3).

To ensure that every voice can be part of this collective cry and demonstrate the suppressed difference, no activity is censored or barred. The movement works with the concept of “cuidadoria” (assistance). In other words, care is taken so that all projects can rumble and reverberate together through the windows of the apartments in the area. This collective participation is a way to indicate that there is still life underneath this concrete mass and, what is more, that this life is plural. Furthermore, this movement believes that there is no distinction between those who are the throat (platform, support) and those who are the voice in producing this cry. The bottom line is: we are all producers and all those propounding should be able to help their project come true. This responsibility is that which creates a culture of occupation. Seeing that there was no need to have the city administration’s permission for small events to happen and that the necessary equipment could be borrowed made every artist understand that the streets were definitely made for dancing.

And as claimed in the Spanish film “Noviembre:” art is a weapon loaded with the future.

THE FUTURE

By Rafael Bresciani

Rafael Bresciani is an anarchist and dreamer. Cheers childishly for S. E. Palmeiras, believe in the world peace and drinks a lot of Coke, even though being anti-capitalist - "It's my dose of caffeine," explains the journalist who does not like coffee and smoking cigarettes. He has democratic tastes for music and aspires to change the world through art. Let it be in the streets then!

Principles? Are they the most significant thing? Do they describe us? From people to people. To occupy, to create demand, to show that the streets are there to be taken advantage of, that the squares serve some important purpose, that we live in a gray, dangerous, sad city (I don't think so) because we don't know our neighbors. And whom we don't want to know!

If BaixoCentro doesn't exist, what are our principles? If BxC is composed of people, would the sum of these principles be BxC residents? Or would they be the conscription of these circles, the overlapping factors? Is there such a thing? There are top lines, moot points of complete agreement among the people who make up the low center? Is it okay to affirm that? Can we even tell untruths appropriately, if that were the case?

Another process bifurcation seems close. Not that I see people leaving (even if they existed), but perhaps I see ourselves trying to find other ways to improve the process, better understand our role (or at least try to understand this).

What will happen now? What will we be able to achieve? Will we keep on jacking off (don't take it as something bad, okay?) ideas and concepts and decide whether we should organize another festival in December, the same as it happened last year? Should we take more isolated actions in downtown São Paulo, putting the festival into practice permanently? Should we focus on Baixo Centro's Free Network and fulfill the (my) dream of creating a free-economy laboratory (primarily free from money or something of that sort)? Should we join other movements or organizations, gain momentum, and make money from what we already do on account of ideology (just not to leave out any

possibilities, however impossible they may be)? What should we do? Where do we want to aim for and march to? What message do we want to convey? What kind of work do we want to do? What kind of change do we want to be in the world?



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Figure 2. Divulcation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 3. Divulcation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 4. Divulcation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 5. Divulcation. (Source: Creative Commons)



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Figure 8. Divuligation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 9. Divuligation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 10. Divulcation. (Source: Creative Commons)

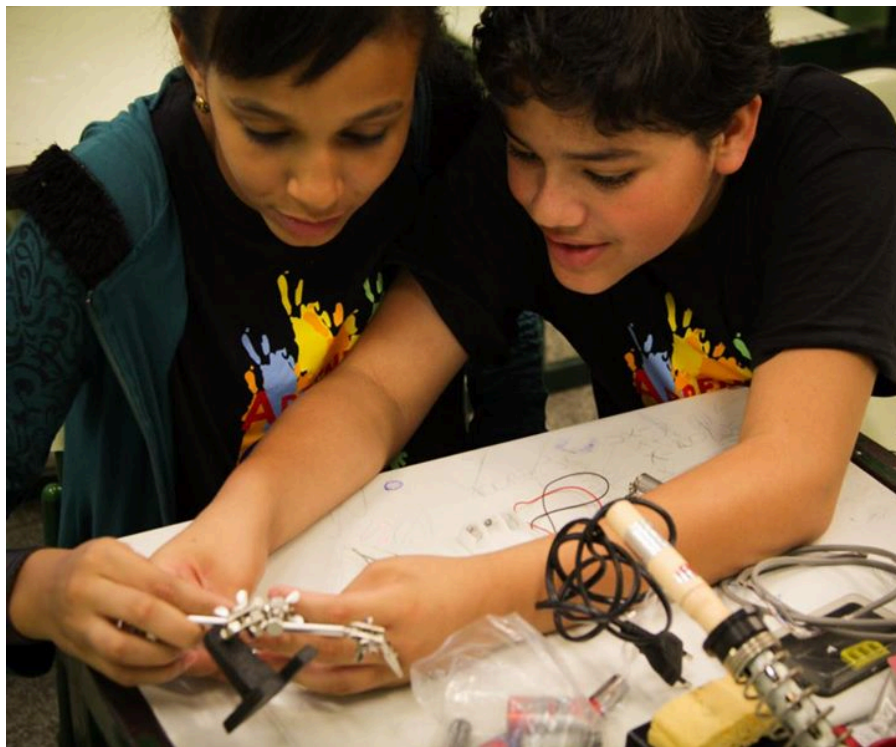


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Figure 12. Divulgate. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 13. Divulgate. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 14. Divulagation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 15. Divulagation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 16. Divulcation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 17. Divulcation. (Source: Creative Commons)



Figure 18. © Ángela León.



Figure 19. Divulgation. Baixo Centro Festival. (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.436719639754629.1073741839.195044933922102&type=1>)

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