Historical Geographies of Anarchism

Early Critical Geographers and Present-Day Scientific Challenges

Edited by
Federico Ferretti,
Gerónimo Barrera de la Torre,
Anthony Ince and
Francisco Toro

9 Moment, flow, language, non-plan

The unique architecture of insurrection in a Brazilian urban periphery

Rita Velloso[1]

This chapter examines June's 2013 Brazilian urban demonstrations that started in Belo Horizonte's Metropolitan Area, considering them to be a new type of political action, led by citizens who live on the capital cities' poor peripheries, thus allowing the emergence of new recognisable social actors. These uprisings took place in the outskirts of Greater Belo Horizonte's peripheral neighbourhoods, which are connected to the city by federal roads, where local people built barricades to block the access in and out of the capital. Belo Horizonte, in opposition to Rio de Janeiro, was designed to hide its poor inhabitants. If in Rio the limits between middle class neighbourhoods and *favelas* are not that well defined – always mixing people and places – here the spatial segregation is natural to the point that the local government uses the academic jargon 'extensive occupation' to describe our outlying suburbs. The peripheral population's aims through these insurrections were not simply to pose the problem of replacing local government but to regain control of their territory. Their struggle was waged by the transformation of the traditional urban planning logic, centre/power/margin/oppression, that usually defines large metropolitan areas. Emphatically, their claim is to establish new lines of escape from urban poverty while achieving citizenship, beginning to explore new ways of doing politics.

Moment

In early 2013 I was developing a study on the architecture of uprisings and insurgencies based on two distinct moments in urban history: first, the political and even spatial effect in the 1871 Paris commune and its proposal for a self-managed government in France, and second, May 1968 events, also in Paris, which not only were a culmination of social processes that unfolded into new and radical spatial practices but also reverberated into multiple urban environments in other European and American cities.

Although these were such different occasions, both Henri Lefebvre and Guy Debord analysed them more in terms of their similarities rather than their divergences. Both authors describe the Commune and May 1968 as moments of an urban proto-revolution. Lefebvre argues that these political

and spatial experiences could be the basis of an entire urban theory, addressing social and spatial *praxis*, spontaneity, creativity and, in Lefebvre's words, 'reconnaissant l'espace social en termes politiques et ne croyant pas qu'un monument puisse être innocent'[2]; Debord, on the other hand reflects upon the Commune's weeks and events in order to establish his peculiar perspective on political interpretation and the fascinating idea of a councilist government of the city, as an alternative to urbanism. As Debord proposes:

> The most revolutionary idea concerning urbanism is not itself urbanistic, technological or aesthetic. It is the project of reconstructing the entire environment in accordance with the needs of the power of workers councils, of the *antistate dictatorship* of the proletariat, of executory dialogue. Such councils can be effective only if they transform existing conditions in their entirety; and they cannot set themselves any lesser task if they wish to be recognised and to recognise themselves in a world of their own making.[3]

I certainly agree with Lefebvre and Debord that such relevant political hypothesis were formulated on those two stages: the 1871 urban *praxis* in relation to the experiences of inhabitants' participation in urban governments, and the 1968 involvement of groups and individuals in decision making processes of megacities. In addition, the hypothesis developed by Lefebvre and Debord could also be aligned with the very anarchist principles of voluntary association, egalitarianism, direct action and radical democracy. In diverse degrees, those two important moments have influenced contemporary urban thought, through particular thinkers, or 'performatively' through the rebellions themselves[4].

Investigating the past topographic memory of cities can prepare us for present times, where such procedures catalyse interpretations of events that bring people together, and at the same time help us understand the centrifugal actions of urban dwellers when sharing places, building networks and disseminating spatial knowledge. This practice results in a research method that explores these circumstances from the inside out, as it aims to understand the history of political riots through its spatial traces, effects and impacts, often camouflaged by urban morphology, plans or designs. The logic of urban historical and economic arrangements only makes sense when the appropriation of space by social actors is taken into account. Besides, analyses of past or current urban uprisings are only possible when combined with representations that have often been reconstructed from fragments of narratives taken from concepts and tools across disciplinary fields. The underlying, driving question behind this research as a whole has been to understand what those singular insurgent spatial practices mean to the peripheral cities in a metropolitan region; to comprehend them in terms of leaving traces in urban dwellers' 'real life'. In other words, during and after those days of insurgency, how should the relation between social actors and urban government be considered?[5]

How have the conflicts with government contributed to how people resituate agendas and negotiations for social justice?[6] How have those momentary ruptures and everyday struggles re-positioned everyday solidarities or mutual aid between neighbours?[7]

Therefore when in June 2013 demonstrations began in Brazil, so many questions were raised that they had to be placed next to those historical experiences of 1871 and 1968 in order to try and build a hypothesis: a theoretical and empirical interrogation that exposed a changing reality.

At first it was largely publicised by mainstream media that the demonstrations lacked focus, that the actions were diffuse and that people on the streets did not really know what they were protesting for or against. Police and government bodies wondered flabbergasted on national news who and where were the leaders of these movements, who could not be reached by media. Squares and streets were occupied for the very first time in decades, with large demonstrations, and roads blocked: the government, policy-makers and the mainstream media were stunned by urban sites transformed into intense political stages, ruptured momentarily for some days or even weeks by collective acts of dissent. Consequently, if there were no readable images of these political subjects to broadcast, no recognisable social actor in charge of these uprisings, no rallies or evidence of any political party, this kind of *political performance* could and would not be caught in the grids of usual interpretation.

In order to comprehend June 2013's momentum, a significant part of the Brazilian left intellectuality tried to recall their own experiences established during the political revolts during the dictatorship of 1960–1980s, refusing to see that there was definitely something new and radically different in these demonstrations. At that point, they made a plea for categories related to them as social subjects that would allow them to recognise the legitimacy of demonstrations to some extent.

At first glance, what happened in June 2013 is difficult to see through or even to comprehend. Undeniably the assemblage of facts presented could no longer be discussed as enshrined in sociological analysis but perhaps as urban studies. Amid this opacity, which does not reduce the huge validity of these facts – quite the opposite – what can be concluded from this experience is the formulation of hypotheses. It is precisely this hypothetical context (perceptual, linguistic and historical hypothesis) in which I write this current narrative: a moment of formulation aimed at understanding the peculiarities of some of Belo Horizonte's political movements.

Firstly it should be noted that what caught the attention of the regional newspapers between June and July 2013 was the fact that something peculiar was happening in these demonstrations, showing a very specific context: the *modus operandi* was the occupation of Belo Horizonte's historical city centre where people appeared to be having a party or celebration. In spite of this, protesters claimed that their number one public enemy was the International Football Federation (FIFA) because of its building projects for the 2013 Confederations Cup in Brazil. What is not only ironic but also beautiful to

have witnessed is the fact that tens of thousands of Brazilians were rallying against football – which culturally and symbolically is part of our national pride.

We could say that the *festival*, a collective and celebrative action presented by Henri Lefebvre as symbol of a proto-revolutionary moment, was present in the June demonstrations. At the same time, there was a great lack, because in Belo Horizonte the demonstration route was always the same. Aside from the marches toward the Soccer Arena Mineirão, they were performed in the historical city centre, along with the best-known public spaces of Station Square, Seven Square, Liberty Square and Savassi Square. At first they were not reported by the biggest city newspapers until the moment that the main local TV channel (Globo news) was forced to report in the evening news. However, as news began to emerge, unexpectedly a series of riots took place throughout the metropolitan area. For our research goals, it seemed somehow meaningful to collect the news and then think about that material and those records because, first, there seemed to be a political movement with a significant territorial impact and second, the riots were performed beyond the administrative city limits of Belo Horizonte in cities located on the outskirts of the metropolitan area.

Between 24 June and 2 July it became increasingly clear how distinctive the demonstrations happening in the 11 cities located in the peripheral centrality of the Metropolitan Area were, which blocked state and federal roads that gave access to Belo Horizonte (BH) city centre. These blockages or protests began at dawn, and negotiations between police officers and the inhabitants of these margins lasted usually until 9am when passage was regained. As June progressed, roads were being frequently closed by demonstrators, to the point where roads from eight out of the 34 cities on the outskirts of Greater BH, were simultaneously blocked. What at first appeared to be a number of irrelevant events gained momentum in the media as these blockages of interstate transportation of goods were affecting trade, industry and the economy.

During this moment in time it was impossible to forecast how many people would be participating on a daily basis, as the uprisings that took place in the suburbs of Ribeirão das Neves, Jaboticatubas and Sabará had been very disorganised. If on one day you had 20 people, a couple of sofas, some sticks and some bikes lying on the road, on others there were hundreds of local people as well as truck drivers adhering to the movement as they tried to pass by these areas. This architecture of insurgencies was completely unpredictable for the following weeks and for this to be reported in the news was very special, as Belo Horizonte is a city that traditionally hides its poor population.

Unlike Rio de Janeiro, where the contact between *favelas* and neighbourhoods, people and places happens all the time, in Belo Horizonte social and spatial segregation is naturalised and incorporated not only into governmental speeches as 'extensive occupation' but also in some scientific texts, papers and research with its invariant: 'the urban design of Belo Horizonte and its outlying suburbs'.[8] To some extent it is undeniable that the capital's

historic city centre predominates over all these poor neighbourhoods and workers' lives as it has been designed to be a unique centrality; to be inhabited by only bureaucracy and the upper and middle classes. Irrefutably, territories around the state capital were historically constituted to be segregated ones; however, the events of June 2013 shone a new light on this outdated urban configuration and its restraints.

Although Belo Horizonte is a very old functionalist city, planned in the nineteenth century to be triumphantly modern and utilitarian, it is a kind of urban space that rapidly lost its character due to the ideological device that inspired its design, as well as the exhaustion of a peculiar Brazilian cultural process that is constantly adopting international urban models. Aarão Reis, a Brazilian engineer who coordinated Belo Horizonte's urban design team had been Eugène Haussmann's student at the *École Polytechnique* in Paris and, as a result, the city was planned from the very beginning to oppose insurgency – but only for the emulation of the Haussmanian Paris, as, strictly speaking, it was constructed to ward off any possibility of conflict by ignoring it, pushing it spatially aside and not dealing with it. The city would therefore affirm itself as a spatial structure for a new Republican State, translating into geometrical ideals of order and control.[9]

The issue with urban matrix configuration in a capital city is that its spaces should serve as a model for a particular aesthetic experience combined with the expectation of rational knowledge and cosmopolitanism. This ideology of the city conceived a model of urban space that enabled the transfer of both categories of thought as if to provide transpositions for different contexts. It means adaptation to different time frames and historically variable conditions of possibility. In the end, it was a model conceived exactly in opposition to any kind of symbolic appropriation and everyday spatial practices, which are always local and singular.

In Belo Horizonte, the urban planning team applied the so-called Haussmanian rules for Paris almost schematically – an exact boundary within which the governmental apparatus had legal authority was drawn, and this avenue that circumscribed the urban territory was named *Avenida do Contorno* (Contour Avenue).

Despite remaining unequivocally linked to the State and its rationality, the plans for a modern city in the region of Minas Gerais were never fully completed. Capital of a very stratified region, during its implementation Belo Horizonte suffered the Brazilian economic crises and the effects of the 1929 crash. As a result, only a third of its buildings and places were accomplished, with large construction projects being abandoned in the foundation phase. With a low population density, and no dynamic production or work, where people lived without financial, commercial or technical support, could be described as a city that was in fact a large construction site.

Furthermore, the relation between power structures and everyday life makes it essential to conceive and produce specific types of urban spaces in order to achieve the concreteness of domination. The establishment of political

technologies by any governmental state involves the control of the urban territory, which takes place, *par excellence*, by land regulation, partitioning and property laws, or, in other words, by the effective regulation of the use of urban places in which people live their everyday lives. Belo Horizonte could here again be considered as an urban experiment: settling down its inhabitants according to their social background without considering merging different social classes; therefore urban zoning was taken very seriously in order to operate and protect bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie. To be labelled a functionalist city was never an uncomfortable title for Belo Horizonte, as official governmental narratives hid their segregationist assumptions behind the argument of an ever-glimpsed national role: the mirage of the internationalised metropolis in the State of Minas Gerais.

Social conflicts should not be expected here! This was an urban society of public servants, government employees and all kinds of families that migrated from the countryside anxious to preserve and continue living their traditional lives. Workers' claims or demands from working class neighbourhoods were not foreseen, not here in a capital city living under the burden of freedom and republican allegories.

Belo Horizonte is often presented as the centre of economic activity in Minas Gerais, structured as a single centrality. Almost everything that happens here converges to the intersection of the main Avenues Afonso Pena and Amazonas, the north/south and east/west axes that exist since the city knows itself as an urban configuration. The image of the city is not only an abstract one, but a powerful geographic constituency that continuously establishes its compelling spatial boundaries.

Flow

In 2012/2013, Brazil was discussing the emergence of a so-called 'new middle class', due to the good economic momentum the country had been experiencing. Surprisingly, it was exactly this group of inhabitants, according to government statistics, who were objecting, arguing their right to move and access the town centre and claim their right to collective consumer goods. It seemed that for the first time, their voice had reached traditional areas in Belo Horizonte.

During those moments of road blockages, it was clear that the metropolis' poor suburban inhabitants were aspiring for the very same issues fought for in other demonstrations in Brazil and abroad; if on one hand the movment was clearly in alignment with Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring and the Anonymous movement, on the other hand participants were also asking questions about their basic needs. As residents wrote in a pamphlet: 'How can a neighbourhood full of rich companies harbour so much poverty?'[10] Questioning infrastructure provision is not a trivial nor a political inquiry but a pro-blematising response. These uprisings have touched upon a matter of political praxis, as its strategy to tackle segregation has become clear. The tactics used by the inhabitants of the outskirts of greater Belo Horizonte in June and July

2013 places them as new political subjects as they close access by appropriating spaces of flow. Peripheral regions demonstrate the inability of historic cities to deal with incompleteness, while improvisation shows at the same time the spatial logic of the urban expansion process.

Traditionally, city centre workers live in Greater Belo Horizonte's poorer cities, leading to private and state property investments that have no connections with social actors and urban subjectivities. Theses peripheral cities in Belo Horizonte's metropolitan area were conceived to receive low-income inhabitants, working in steel mills or the mining industry and construction. As a consequence, there are large low-income housing estates mostly built between the 1950s and 1970s that are, nowadays, sorely deteriorated. Beside this, there are no investments in design for public spaces, or improving neighbourhoods concerning the social stratum of their singular inhabitants. Those peripheral suburbs can be considered as islands with poor connection to the inner city, although they undoubtedly express the social heterogeneity of the metropolitan area.

Groups of individuals and residents show how they understand the correlation of forces in insulating and reinventing their social space through conflicts that are brief and more like ephemeral breaks. Above all, these ruptures are decisive in order for the city-metropolis inhabitants and government to understand the relevance of peripheral residents' place in society, and the importance of those neighbourhoods in terms of being configured as *peripheral centralities.*

Transport interruptions and movements expose the architecture of metropolitan riots, which aim not to take any political power. Metropolitan insurrections do not pose the problem of replacing governments; more importantly their struggle is for the transformation of the logic of centre/power/margin/oppression that defines the capital city. One *territory configured as a peripheral centrality* begins to reverse control schemes in the metropolis and operate with another underlying logic, able to establish lines of escape from urban poverty through demonstrations, riots, insurgencies: decentralised and/or polycentric events, their movements are 'building blocks' towards increasing the power of struggles. It becomes clear that the city (as an appropriated space) is included in more than one specific dimension of poverty; workers – the metropolitan precariat whose homes are in the outskirts – are able to articulate the common struggle in contention for mobility and accessibility.

The urban struggles in Brazilian peripheries explain the exhaustion of a functionalist urban design model adopted for decades in this country: the demonstrations make evident how zoning and other urban politics are thought out; those riots and barricades express how segregation is no less than a spatial category closely linked to political processes and ideologies, applied to reinforce deteriorative everyday life conditions.

Centrality does not have an institutional dimension, it defines an urban area of economic and population density, heterogeneity of uses, functional complexity, diverse concentration of commerce and private and public services. If people in those places are asking for the provision of public space, one can

conclude that *the periphery protesting is a becoming-centre*. Their power is produced exactly by the perception of its inhabitants that they are trapped in areas without any urban activity build-up that is aimed at establishing them as a centrality. When the perspectives of economic development and new urban design proposals that are distributed around the Metropolitan Region are analysed, one can comprehend that none of them even minimally designs peripheries which provide decent living conditions for the people.

Centre–periphery is a mosaic of neighbourhoods and spatial-temporalities; people coming and going along their extensive itineraries, back and forth from the centre. Their protests refuse an established and traditional order expressed in urban configurations that expect them to have no strong connections with cultural, technological or even economic activities in addition to being 'productive' proletarians. It is required that people living in that peripheral centrality accept what the historical town centre says centralities in peripheries should be. It is as if the periphery were about to grasp some qualities and facilities that only the old centre has and consequently, the centre, as a political and social reference, adopts a position to tell people living in peripheries what they want, how to get there and what is good for them. The periphery is still waiting to be integrated and the centre has still to fulfil its promise.

But the truth is that the periphery needs different rules than those established in the centre. June 2013 seemed therefore to be a kind of redemption of Belo Horizonte's history. Undoubtedly it has been an occasion to discover new significant spaces in the metropolis, spaces that have been defined as specific locations for crowd movements. There have been small disputes, off-centre and polycentric ones, which have redesigned some details of the city and its capillarity. It was clear that significant transformations occurred in those micro-scale territories that were able to reverberate through metropolitan areas.

Roads were simultaneously blocked with sofas and the mayor refused to negotiate with 'people who placed "some" sofas on the road'.[11] There were three different barricades built, by three unrelated neighbourhoods, along the highway that crossed Ribeirão das Neves – where the first protest started in June – and they all had very similar claims. This caused chaos to transport links, the police could not clear the roads and as television broadcasted images from the buses more people turned up to join the riots, almost turning the event into a party.

In order to understand the logic of clusters and networks in these movements, our group of researchers heard from the inhabitants some answers to the questions addressed to government officers who were in possession of the investment budget of their respective municipalities. However, these answers had no power over decision-making processes that could affect the daily lives of those urban residents.

It was astonishing to note how people understood the structural problems of the city, and at the same time had no information about their own neighbourhood in relation to other neighbourhoods. Sabará, for example,

presented the same lack of investment as Rio Manso: its residents understood who were the entrepreneurs, investors, state alliances with real estate, but they still lacked the tools to exercise any control over their territories on a local or micro-local scale.

It seems that the act of protesting had been decisive and supported by residents, with many of them aware that they would only gain any visibility due to the interruption of road accesses, as this touched upon a central point in terms of transportation. This impact had been noted by a large portion of the metropolitan population that, to begin with, were supporting all events that happened in June. However, when closures began affecting supply they pulled out, remarking that 'truck drivers in Chile helped topple Allende' and began warning of the risks posed by a shortage of goods.

It is important to note that the road demonstrations never grew in number of people taking part; in fact, the key point was to understand the architecture of metropolitan flows, as well as what is at stake when popular action disrupts the efficiency of people's daily routines and lives in upper class neighbourhoods. Bikers, motorcycle taxis, couriers and suburban residents, who lay beside the motorcycles on the road, participated in these demonstrations, and children complained about how the authorities had money enough to build the soccer team sports centre but no money at all to provide safe points for pedestrians to cross the main roads, a demand that came after 12 years of waiting for a project that was still not finished!

We can only imagine how ephemeral those events and moments were, and, at the same time, how significant. It took a deep intelligence that can only come from a pragmatic claim and a demand for a good collective consumption – such as water supply and the right to transport and security amongst others. Beyond any doubt, it took a political claim to end the invisibility of poor people inhabiting the fringes of the metropolis. Something very powerful happens when roads are blocked – there is a very singular network made of flows interrupted – denoting how the complex space of a metropolitan area could be momentarily reconfigured as a time of proto-urban revolution – in other words, an effective device for interrupting forms of control and reversing resistance networks.

Language

These kinds of protests in Brazilian peripheries have shown a singular form of political action whose strength lies in generic cooperation, networks of solidarity and mutual aid. Demonstrations that block roads are events in which people are beginning to explore new ways of doing politics. That political praxis, once collectively constructed through people's performances, symbolically reconfigures the landscape of large cities, allowing new relations of collective power that will constitute the expression of many subjectivities. The riots were for those dwellers in peripheries the unique dialogical representations produced in their own language games.

Communicative interaction took place as an effect of mutual articulation by the people who organised the protests, which, in Minas Gerais, should only be considered a popular victory and unfortunately not a spectacular one. It is significant that the conflict could have been amplified as part of the urban history of this capital city; not only by making its peripheries visible to the rest of the city but, above all, by empowering protesters who were finally aware of what was happening in their neighbourhood. The news concerning these demonstrations has certainly resulted in an acknowledgement of this, which is, in itself, a form of self-reflection of subjectivities.

Such modulation of political articulation assuredly exposed a particular conflict to a wider audience, extrapolating the geographical reach of the event itself, and indicating how learning and knowledge can be generally taken today as the very definition of social productivity. The action of protest set in motion a unique form of cooperation rooted in the communicative competency of individuals, or, what has been called since Marx, *general intellect* – an entirely implicated form of cooperation in communicative attitudes and the diffuse creativity of human beings.

Precisely who are these political subjectivities built in the periphery? The crowd – a confluence of many – that has nothing to do with the One constituted by the State, but rather re-determines the unit that traditionally defines people. The crowd as a category of production based upon language and constructed from a network of individuals, is a form of political and social existence of the many as many. In other words, it is the mode of being of many singularities that realise the generic power of speaking when it fits them.

Individuals in protests are both a hybrid and juxtaposition and, because of that, are given unlimited potential of their own. Their power comes from their encounter and is prior to any particular thing or shape in what Virno calls 'collective centrifugal'.[12] The crowd is a plurality in the public scene, in collective action; an attention to common issues is an intersection that is not promise but premise: language, intellect and 'the common faculties of humanity' according to Virno.[13] The act of gathering together 'the many' precedes the moment when they come together to perform insurgent practices. Each person in that crowd is there because they share everyday experience. In a word, they have in common a way of trying to experience and confront the world.

Expression is a matter that is configured to give voice and establish language, finding gaps for claims to appear. As any dweller of these regions quickly realised, it is the power of speech that turned this action into something new – there was no need to be politically engaged in a party or union, simply because, at that time, traditional ways of complaint and contestation would not help them reach their goals.[14] In this centripetal arrangement of subjectivities, which operates through knowledge, communication and language, dwellers are no longer passive consumers of information. People create new collective networks of expression as long as they share linguistic and cognitive attitudes. After all, people speak as inhabitants; that is, they express

themselves in exactly the opposite way to the professional technique of speech or 'specialised' discourses.

The everyday performances in public arenas is what mobilises the production of real meaning in the possibility of extracting new forms of significance of our cultural world and of discovering new modes of social expression. All communication in everyday life is productive if it is either a sum of resistance born from expressions or if the claim articulates a moment of life as movement, as argued by Toni Negri.[15]

What subjectivity emerges then as political actors of uprisings? A plural subjectivity that replaces the masses and assumes trans-individual dimensions. Political actors are the sum of the resistance of subjectivities that have a generic faculty of speech – the undetermined power of saying. Speech articulation acts to produce new power relations by those taking part in riots and perhaps that is the main force of the crowd; that current urban uprisings are not manifestations of political representation but actions that put in motion a new grammar for political expression – the right to resistance and to struggle for some right that is worthy of being defended.

Non-plan

For those who live in the suburbs and want to participate in a political praxis, the horizon of expression is the production of their everyday life in addition to particular economic configurations. A significant political and spatial practice concerns establishing ways of cooperation, solidarity, mutual aid. The very realm of production implies taking into consideration all life forms developed in the everyday which, at the end, is configured as a constellation of social relations, habits, customs and tactics of surviving.

For all those who are dedicated to thinking about the metropolitan peripheries' regional planning by taking insurgencies as a starting point, a brand new territorial agenda emerges, requiring an effort to handle multi-scalar autonomies and polycentric interrelationships, For the very first time, since the development of the Brazilian periphery during the 1950s, another new form of territory arises; it is a periphery that is a new type of centrality that establishes another urban hierarchy – a singular new urban arrangement that presents a new hierarchy of diverse centralities, each of them producing its own form of expression and discourses.

As moments of uprisings are able to change the course of plans for the metropolis, what is the power of insurgencies in this transformation of urban forms when the crowd becomes a category that thinks of the crisis of the State-form as the effective foundation for a new urban plan? How should one confront the spatial unfolding of demonstrations that results in interruption and disruption of regulatory frameworks of state planning? Compared to planning based on cohesion – which then results in state coercion over the territory – what is the meaning of this kind of spatial appropriation? These are the questions that will outline a conclusion.

An analytical model can find its coherence around a given situation, an urban event that brings together a certain period, specific dynamics, and social actors whose identities and trajectories come to the surface by the action inscribed in networks and practices that constitute a social space. Therefore, the insurgency is a kind of 'counter-use' place that defies urban analysis. Through uprisings, the exhaustion and/or the impossibility of designing as well as predefining uses of spaces within the urban entirety is evident. However, this praxis does not fit in the categories of planning or urbanism.

In June 2013, the voices from the streets rejected the idea of urban planning by unveiling a new terrain for antagonism, which, in Henri Lefebvre's terms, had to be included in the calculation of conditions of possibility to the substantive Urban.[16] Lefebvre is the author that called urban uprising a moment to think of the common and collective externally from State logics. However, uprisings, riots and insurgencies – all those examples of a moment called proto-revolutionary, in Lefebvre's terminology, must be updated in order to describe the metropolitan life experienced by the crowd. In the neoliberal metropolis, an individual is always exposed to the unexpected, unusual and sudden changes, having to remain her/himself flexible to the changing urban experience. The context and experience of the metropolis is, to a large extent, training for precariousness, always requiring urgent adaptation. Here, in this metropolitan area, one simultaneously lives through precariousness and variability, multi-laterally exposed to the world: 'individuals move in a reality always and anyway renewed multiple times'.[17]

More than ever, urban and spatial thought are requiring the critical aim of reinventing democracy. Organisational and institutional forms must be built that can go beyond State logics, for example, a radically new form of democracy in terms of tacit knowledge, beyond the fallacious division between the technocratic employees of the agencies of urban planning and the participation techniques conducted, not uncommonly, by the same agencies. The realistic search for new forms of political action requires us to imagine how to sustain a radical democracy, 'nothing interstitial, marginal or residual, but the concrete appropriation and re-articulation of knowledge/power, something that nowadays is frozen in the administrative apparatus of the state'.[18]

We must think of confrontation between inhabitants and governments through other socio-political dynamics, mostly referred to as micro-politics, than institutional structures. The collective experience should be returned to the centre of the challenge of creating a new institutional logic of society, able to establish a new community based on solidarity and cooperation – an institutional logic able to replace the experience of many as the centre of our social and political practice.

Consequently, how should a peripheral centrality in Brazil be planned? By overcoming all modernist logics of urban policies that have always been associated with mutual innervation between political and economic powers, favouring the richest social strata which in turns results in a built environment

strongly influenced by the location of various social groups which historically has strengthened spatial segregation in favour of the elites.

Politics as praxis should be urgently put in place; a field where fights and struggles take place and strategies are performed that result in conflicts around contingent solutions. Thus one may begin to consider the periphery as an object of urban thought open to equal possibilities.

Perhaps taking advantage of a logical disorder that an insurrectional act demands could be a moment to create new communication channels, new forms and modes of interaction, new lines of asymmetric and destabilising forces that allow us to see a demonstration (when the threshold of what is tolerable creates new resistances), but not limited to it. Or possibly to think about how to question the limits of urban plan strategies; in other words, thinking about how to play various tactical games that aim to understand the irreducible multiplicity of these territories through their names: creativity, deprivation, restlessness, destruction, subjection, art and revolt.

In recent decades, urban theories have affirmed that the streets' radical political activity was shut down due to the ubiquity of television and Internet in the domestic sphere of life; the squares would be forever empty, as the street rally no longer made any sense. Nowadays, conversely, one has the answer concerning relations of power established in people's struggles together in urban places.

Insurgency is increasing around the world, requiring people to reinvent democracy while pursuing a coherent anti-capitalist politics. Wherever there is an uprising, there is a street, a square, a road that was profoundly transformed by people's action, in other words, by a radical appropriation of urban spaces by its users 'connected at various levels with the metropolitan and health technical networks, housing, education, communication'.[19]

The poor, the working class and the periphery are now included in communication and in virtual and metropolitan networks in a productive movement that mobilises knowledge – in all forms of life and each individual's world experience – to produce knowledge and power in their life forms. People now understand that micro-politics tactics can produce effects in macro-politics, forcing modification in its strategies. An insurgency, as a contingent political action that is materialised on the unexpected course of events is a public action, a collective performance – and it does not provide a *finished product* but it is, first, a *process*. This is not about making a revolution, or achieving governmental power; instead of configuring a 'state-taking mentality' or re-establishing a political decision-making sphere in political parties, the uprisings are examples of those emancipatory praxes that are certainly closer to autonomy, horizontal decision-making and direct action. This is about defending plural experiences and spatial uses as a potential site for radicalisation and, by extension, it night be claimed that such principles of anarchism animate these forms of resistance.

In examining these particular events in a Brazilian periphery, our ongoing research on the architecture of insurrections allows the conclusion that any

urban plan concerned with its concrete outcomes should consider uprisings as an inescapable part of urban foundations. If there is to be any possibility of transforming urban space and life by spatial planning, it is only in envisaging the emergence of an alternative space, which implies considering struggles, riots, or conflicts as concrete attempts to expand and enrich humanity's perceptual capacity to overcome alienation by appropriation of its spaces of life.

Notes

1 I am extremely grateful to Laura Barbi for her insightful comments and for providing invaluable support and encouragement during the drafting of this chapter.
2 Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune*, 32, 394 ('acknowledging the political nature of the social space and no longer believing that a monument can be neutral').
3 Debord, *Sociedade do espetáculo*, 179, 116. Debord, *Oeuvres*, 179, 842.
4 The following authors and works have been my sources of theoretical dialogues concerning insurgent spatial practices. Souza, White and Springer, *Theories of Resistance: Anarchism, Geography and the Spirit of Revolt*; Sitrin and Azzellini, *They Can't Represent Us: Reinventing Democracy from Greece to Occupy*; Clover, *Riot. Strike. Riot. The New Era of Uprisings*; Squatting Europe Collective, *Squatting in Europe: Radical Spaces, Urban Struggles*; Van der Steen, Bart, Katzeff, Van Hoogenhuijze, Leendert, *The The City is Ours: Squatting and Autonomous Movements in Europe from 1970s to the Present*. Bower, *Architecture and Space Re-imagined: Learning from the Difference, Multiplicity, and Otherness of Development Practice*; Cupers, *Use Matters: An Alternative History of Architecture*; Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation. Cross Benching Praxis as a Mode of Criticality*; Hou, *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*.
5 Souza, 'Cidades Brasileiras, junho de 2013: o(s) sentido(s) da revolta'.
6 Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation*, 95; Miessen and Basar, *Did Someone Say Participate: An Atlas of Spatial Practice*, 11.
7 Cupers, *Use Matters*, 10; Hou, *Insurgent Public Space*, 7.
8 Monte Mor, 'Extended Urbanization and Settlement Patterns in Brazil: An Environmental Approach' in Brenner (ed.), *Implosions/Explosions: Toward a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, 110.
9 Salgueiro, *Cidades capitais do século XIX: racionalidade, cosmopolitismo e transferência de modelos*, 22.
10 In many demonstrations at blocked roads people would hold hand-written pamphlets and posters expressing their claims.
11 Ribeirão das Neves mayor's interview to a local cable television channel, 28 June, 2013.
12 Virno, *Gramática da multidão. Para uma análise das formas de vida contemporâneas*, 16.
13 Virno, *Gramática da multidão*, 17.
14 Souza, 'Autogestão, autoplanejamento, autonomia: atualidade e dificuldades das práticas espaciais libertárias dos movimentos urbanos', 81.
15 Negri, 'Dispositivo metrópole. A multidão e a metrópole', 207.
16 Lefebvre, *A Revolução Urbana*, 38.
17 Virno, *Gramática da multidão*, 17.
18 Virno, *Gramática da multidão*, 27.
19 Cocco, 'Revolução 2.0: Sul, Sol, Sal', in Cocco and Albagi (eds), *Revolução 2.0 e crise do capitalismo global*, 11.