
Imprinting and Moving Around: New Visibilities and Configurations of Public Space in São Paulo

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São Paulo, Brazil, is a city of amazing graffiti and overwhelming amounts of tagging, huge public gatherings, and intense artistic production. It is striated by the rapid movements of motorcycles darting between lines of stalled traffic, by skateboarding and parkour, by rap and break dancing. The city itself is the site and subject of a diverse range of public practices that end up appropriating and producing it in unexpected ways. These interventions in public spaces are transforming and, at the same time, articulating anew the profound social inequalities that have always marked them. Expressed as both artistic production and urban performance, they not only give the subaltern new visibility in the city but also express new forms of political agency. However, these interventions are contradictory: they affirm rights to the city while fracturing the public; expose discrimination but refuse integration. They test the limits of the democratization process by simultaneously expanding the openness of the democratic public sphere while challenging it with transgressive actions ranging from the mildly illicit to the criminal.

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In this essay, I analyze some of the transformations and tensions created in São Paulo by two overlapping modes of intervention: imprinting and moving around. Imprinting refers to the proliferation of graffiti and *pixações*, the style of tagging characteristic of São Paulo. Moving around alludes to new practices of circulation in the city. They include motorcycling, skateboarding, and parkour but are also much broader, as to move around becomes central to the sociability and leisure of youth groups and is an important component of graffiti and tagging. The agents of both modes of intervention are almost all young men, who as they re-create public space also shape gender hierarchies. These are certainly not all the practices that constitute public space in the city today, and its practitioners represent only a minority of the residents of the metropolis. However, these practices are now embedded in the everyday routines of the city, affect the lives of citizens well beyond the group of practitioners, and provoke paradoxical transformations of public space. These interventions take inequality for granted and thus naturalize it. They choose aggression and transgression as their mode of articulation while simultaneously speaking the language of rights and liberties and affirming a deep pleasure in freely moving around the city. They challenge a certain common ground but do not evoke recognized alternatives, such as those articulated in terms of citizenship and equality. These practices thus require a new conceptualization of democratic public space and of the role of subaltern citizens in producing the city.

Shifting Ground: New Articulations of Inequality and Public Space

Social inequality is probably the most salient characteristic of Brazilian cities. But in the past decades both the marks and the meanings of inequality and the relationships and spaces in which they are manifested and reproduced have changed considerably. There are new and often contradictory configurations of inequality in cities such as São Paulo. It is in relation to them that the new modes of intervention in the city by young groups can be understood.

Some of the indications of these new configurations are evident and agreed on. In spite of continuing poverty, in the past decades urban infrastructure and the material quality of space in São Paulo have improved considerably, thus bettering the conditions of the life of the poor in the improved peripheries. In spite of economic restructuring and considerable unemployment, especially in the 1980s, mass consumption and access to goods previously restricted to a few have expanded. Some of their signs, such as cell phones and televisions, are now ubiq-

uitous, and others, such as autoconstructed houses and automobiles, are widespread.¹ The organization of urban social movements in the 1970s and 1980s brought the residents of the peripheries to the center of the political arena. Their mobilizations took the main squares, their claims for rights were incorporated in the constitution, and their ways of organizing and making public policies became routine. Moreover, these movements were fundamental in provoking qualitative changes to urban space, as they forced the expansion of urban infrastructure and public services throughout the peripheries (see Caldeira 2000: chap. 6 and Marques and Torres 2005). Democracy took root and became taken for granted. All these shifts signify an expansion of the public sphere and of citizenship and the improvement of the quality of life and the spaces of the working poor.

But there were also shifts in the opposite direction. As democracy institutionalized, violent crime increased. With violence came a proliferation of narratives—a talk of crime—that articulated prejudices, justified intolerance, and generated a new mode of production of space. The city became walled as citizens built fortified enclaves for living, work, consumption, and leisure. As residents retreated to private spaces shaped by technologies of protection and surveillance, and as this apparatus of control and enclosure became a matter of style and status, the public spaces of the city became leftover territory, perceived as tense and dangerous.

This configuration has precluded neither the expansion and strengthening of democracy nor the reclamation of public space. In the past decade, democracy has continued to penetrate deeply into Brazilian society, beyond the predictable realms of elections and party politics. In fact, the new urban practices that imprint their marks on the city today signal exactly how democracy has enabled a deep transformation in some tacit aspects of the previous configuration of inequality.

These new practices challenge a certain *modus vivendi* according to which social and spatial inequalities were reproduced without being confronted directly.

1. Autoconstruction refers to the process through which people build their own houses in lots that they acquire in the urbanizing peripheries of large Brazilian cities. Two characteristics are fundamental to define autoconstruction. First, the builders are property owners and build their houses with their private resources and typically without any sort of financing. Although there may be several issues involving the regularization of the construction and the legalization of the deeds, the crucial fact is that the land is purchased and the buyers are entitled to home ownership. Second, autoconstruction is a long-term project. The house is improved and extended step by step over many decades, depending on the family resources. An autoconstructed house is always something in the making. Through the construction of their houses, residents experience social mobility and engagement with the process of urbanizing the city. Autoconstructed neighborhoods are not favelas, even when precarious and in the initial phase of construction. Typically, favelas are built on invaded land.



Figure 1 Fences, 2008. By Antoni Muntadas

There were many arrangements that made this possible. First of all, São Paulo was clearly a dispersed city, segregated by large distances and empty spaces, the better-off occupying the center and the poor the peripheries.² Spaces of sociability and spaces of circulation of people from different classes were different. Certainly, these people encountered each other in public, especially downtown, but there were many things that guaranteed separation and allowed a certain inattention to the other. There were different systems of circulation: public buses for the working poor and private cars for the middle and upper classes; the front door and the social elevator for the latter and the back door and service elevator for the former, to take some obvious examples. There was also a certain subservience from the subaltern that was assumed by the upper classes: an expectation that they would “know their place.” Obviously, for a long time there was repression, censorship, and dictatorship. But there was also a strong belief in progress and social mobility that allowed inequalities to be downplayed. All these references are now transformed.

The withdrawal of many of the upper classes from the center is associated not only with the fear of crime but also with the breakdown of this old *modus vivendi* that kept separations and inequalities in place. It is associated with the positive indistinction that democratization brought to the city, its opening of the

2. I analyze this mode of segregation that marked the city especially between the 1940s and the 1980s and its transformation into the pattern segregated by fortified enclaves in Caldeira 2000: chap. 6.

political center to members of the peripheries, its quiet undermining of pieces of the systems of separation that framed the everyday, as, for example, the law that prohibits segregation in the use of elevators and entranceways.³ It is also associated with an expansion of mass consumption that destabilized the system of differentiation based on obvious marks of status: in a city of about 11 million people and more than 5 million private automobiles, it is clear that it is not only upper- and middle-class people who circulate in this status-conferring good. Moreover, the fortification of space brought many of the middle and upper classes to areas away from the center, exactly to the peripheries where land to build their enclaves was available. This generated a certain proximity between people from different social groups, but it came with a sophisticated and explicit apparatus of surveillance and separation.

In what follows, I argue that new urban practices that started to mark the city clearly in the 1990s occupy and resignify the public spaces that enclaving, fortification, and technologies of security produced as leftover. They simultaneously further transform the old *modus vivendi* that guaranteed the relative invisibility of the subaltern and the inattention to deep social and spatial inequalities. The young men who are the protagonists of the new urban practices create a new visibility for the subaltern. Those who were supposed to be circulating elsewhere transgressively and aggressively take over public space, mark it, claim rights over it, and enjoy it. As they do so, they expose inequalities. However, they also reject incorporation and create new inequalities. Their new presence in the city and the contradictions it generates cannot be missed.⁴

3. For an analysis of this breakdown, see Holston 2008.

4. The analysis I develop in this article is based on fieldwork I have been undertaking in São Paulo since 2001 and is part of a larger project on youth, gender, and new technologies of the public. Since 2005, I have focused specifically on street art and new practices of circulation. Fieldwork for this project was done entirely in public spaces. I have interviewed many graffiti artists, *pixadores*, skaters, and motoboyas at their meeting “points” or at the bars, cafés, and cultural centers where they have chosen to meet with me. I have observed their encounters and attended every cultural event and public gathering I could learn about. I circulated with them around the city, usually from one event to the next, but I have never asked to go with them either to tag or to graffiti, as it was evident to me that this would create awkward situations. Several people I interviewed became interested in my book about crime and walls and enjoyed getting copies of its Brazilian edition. I have become a friend on social media with those who have invited me, and through this means I receive daily updates of their activities and whereabouts.

Graffiti and tagging are today globalized modes of expression adopted by youth groups everywhere, establishing a dialogue among them that has been greatly facilitated by the Internet. As expected, in São Paulo they acquire specific characteristics. Graffiti artists and taggers imprint their marks on a city that a few years ago started to adopt bold policies to eliminate billboards and other signage from public space. The city was so saturated with advertisements and a host of commodity and commercial signage that residents considered them forms of visual pollution. In 2006 the municipal administration passed a radical law to address it. The so-called Clean City (Cidade Limpa) law of 2006 prohibits all types of billboards and banners and severely limits the dimensions of commercial and corporate signage in the city. In a short time, the city enforced this law and probably became one of the first large capitalist cities to eradicate these signs from public space. With overwhelming popular support and constant surveillance by the municipal administration, the symbols of capital and consumption were either removed or forced to shrink.

But while the city has been remarkably successful in dealing with ads and commercial signs, it has failed as remarkably in controlling more transgressive practices such as graffiti and *pixação*.⁵ As advertisements are removed and buildings painted anew, they are graffitied and tagged. *Pixações* seem to be especially uncontrollable regardless of all the attempts by the municipal administration to paint walls and viaducts gray and with spray-resistant materials. *Pixações* have today become an omnipresent backdrop to the city, shaping the everyday life of *paulistanos* and ironically providing a kind of uniformity to all kinds of space. They appear in every direction and space possible (not to mention seemingly impossible spaces) and as far as the city can be imagined.

Although both graffiti and *pixação* are gestures of transgression and have similar roots, and although many practitioners participate in both styles, they constitute different types of intervention in public space, and their tense coexistence is a peculiar characteristic of the São Paulo scene.⁶ Most graffiti artists and *pixadores* (taggers) are young men who come from nonelite and noncentral areas

5. The official spelling of the word in Portuguese is *pichação*. However, its practitioners and people associated with street art usually spell it with an *x* instead of *ch*. I adopt this spelling here, as I am referring to this specific practice and not to other forms of writing on walls. In Portuguese, *pichar* means “to apply *piche* (tar)” or “to write on public walls,” usually political messages. It also has a negative connotation: “to say bad things about something or someone.”

6. I have addressed some of the characteristics of São Paulo’s graffiti and *pixação* in a previous article, Caldeira 2006a. I expand here some of these arguments.



Figure 2 Before Cidade Limpa, 2006



Figure 3 After Cidade Limpa, 2010. Photos by Teresa P. R. Caldeira



Figure 4 Graffiti, 2010



Figure 5 *Pixação*, 2010. Photos by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

of the city. Several graffiti artists have a middle-class background and are college educated, but only a tiny minority of them have passed through an elite institution such as the University of São Paulo or have lived in the richest neighborhoods in town.⁷ Most *pixadores* come from the peripheries and grew up under conditions of significant poverty, lacking access to institutional resources, from education to regular employment.⁸ Many of them are Afro-descendent.⁹ Through their inscriptions in the most diverse spaces of the city, they transcend their original areas and conditions and intrude in all types of spaces, resignify them, and appropriate them to leave their mark.

There are several styles of graffiti and *pixação* in São Paulo. The two basic formal elements that set them apart are the use of color and figuration. Graffiti has always maintained a tense relationship with the universe of art. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to retell the history of São Paulo's graffiti, it is important to mention a few historical moments. Its first manifestations came from the field of art to the streets during the 1970s and 1980s. These were inspired by the modernist avant-garde and pop art movements and used paint and stencils as media.¹⁰ At its origins, São Paulo graffiti clearly conceived of itself as art. Its second type of manifestation can be traced to New York hip-hop graffiti and arguably came from the streets to the field of art.¹¹ Although graffiti in São Paulo has used letters and the writing of names, and although it continues to produce both "pieces" and "throw-ups" similar to the ones found in New York, it has innovated both through technique and imagery.

Today what most *paulistanos* recognize as graffiti are large and colorful murals painted mainly in public surfaces using not only aerosols but also latex paint. Artists frequently create amazing characters and complex compositions with imagery that runs from abstract to surrealist. The compositions are applied to

7. The most famous São Paulo graffiti artists now live off their art, and a few are extremely well paid. Others manage to make a living in occupations connected to their art, in fashion, advertisement, the art gallery world, or education. Almost all of them, even the best paid, live in modest homes in lower-middle-class or middle-class neighborhoods around the center of the city.

8. The large majority of *pixadores* I interviewed live in the peripheries, sometimes close to the places where their parents live and where they themselves grew up. Most of them hold low-paid jobs in the service sector (from clerks to nurses and electricians); a significant number of them are motoboys or office boys.

9. Although I focus on the gender dimension of the new urban practices in this article, I will not focus on the racial issue, which will be the subject of another article. I have analyzed this dimension in relation to rap in Caldeira 2006b.

10. For accounts of early practitioners, see Gitahy 1999, Prades 2009, and Spinelli 2010. Early analyses of São Paulo graffiti are Ramos 1994 and Schlecht 1995.

11. On this manifestation, see the comprehensive study by Sérgio Miguel Franco (2009).



Figure 6 Graffiti, 2008



Figure 7 Graffiti, 2010

very large spaces, especially viaducts, underpasses, and retaining walls, but they are never found on subway cars and public buses. Moreover, graffiti in São Paulo has developed an amicable relationship with city hall, unlike responses to graffiti in cities such as New York. The municipal administration in São Paulo has frequently sponsored graffiti instead of only repressing and erasing it, alleging that it can help improve, beautify, and recuperate public spaces. In this context, the city authorizes many large graffiti pieces and designates and prepares the spaces in which they will be applied.¹² Sometimes graffiti has also had the patronage

12. Neil E. Schlecht (1995) convincingly argues that this relationship with city hall was consolidated starting in the late 1980s by the first generation of graffiti artists. It was especially strong during two Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT; Workers' Party) administrations in the city, but even the current administration under the rule of Cidade Limpa continues to sponsor and authorize murals, while also painting over existing ones.



Figure 8 Graffiti, 2009. Photos by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

of private institutions.¹³ Graffiti has thus become a type of relatively sanctioned public art in São Paulo and is so prevalent that it has become its own tourist attraction: graffiti tours are now easily available in the city. Moreover, São Paulo's most famous graffiti artists, such as *os Gemeos* and *Nunca*, are not only well known but have transitioned their work into the circuit of mainstream art galleries, from São Paulo to London's Tate Modern and beyond, commanding very high prices for their work. In July–August 2010 there were at least nine exhibitions of street art in São Paulo, both in the official circuit of art institutions and with support from the Municipal Secretary of Culture and from corporations and in the alternative art circuits. Street art and graffiti have definitively been integrated into the cultural production of the city.

13. A famous example is the project *São Paulo Capital Graffiti* sponsored by a partnership among Fundação BankBoston, *Cidade Escola Aprendiz* (a nongovernmental organization [NGO] dedicated to educational programs), *Tintas Suvini* (a large producer of paints), and the city of São Paulo (through the *Coordenadoria Especial da Juventude* [Special Coordination on Youth]) in 2003–4. This project painted fifty-one large walls distributed all over the city. The results were documented in an art book, Scavone 2004, distributed to the VIP clients of BankBoston.



Figure 9 *Pixações*, 2008

If graffiti has always maintained links to the art world and can be assimilated into the imaginary of art and beauty, *pixação* is not absorbable in any easy way and has remained much more transgressive. *Pixação* is equivalent to American tagging, the writing in public spaces usually in black and without figuration.¹⁴ It started to be noticed in the city around 1980 and spread immensely in the 1990s and 2000s. *Pixação* is made either with spray cans or with black paint and small foam rollers. São Paulo's *pixação* has its own renowned style: a calligraphy made of vertically elongated and pointy letters using straight lines. It is sometimes called “straight tag”—*tag reto*. Some say that this letter type has been inspired by São Paulo's tall buildings. Others argue that it derives from the type of gothic letters used on the covers and sleeves of heavy metal and punk records popular in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁵ *Pixação*'s calligraphy has become quite consistent and popular, to the point that an attempt has been made to codify it as a typeface under

the name of “adrenalina-sp” (adrenaline—São Paulo), which can be purchased commercially.¹⁶

Pixação is conceived by its practitioners as an anarchic intervention and a kind of radical urban sport. The idea is to inscribe onto the most impossible of spaces, to experience an adrenaline rush by risking personal safety. *Pixadores* climb tall buildings without safety equipment and write upside down, frequently hanging from difficult and dangerous positions to tag their preferred spot, the highest part of buildings. Accidents are common. *Pixadores* wear their scars with pride, and several have lost their lives in their attempts to reach dangerous spots.

14. On São Paulo's *pixação*, see Boleta 2006.

15. For an analysis of this calligraphy and its relations to other typographic forms, see Chastanet 2007.

16. For an overview of this typeface, see MyFonts 2011.



Figure 10 *Pixações*, 2010



Figure 11 *Pixações*, 2009. Photos by Teresa P. R. Caldeira



Figure 12 Competing inscriptions, 2009. Photo by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

Pixadores tag everything, from abandoned factories and decaying spaces to all types of buildings, residences, and urban furniture, in the center and in the peripheries. *Pixadores* can tag any kind of surface and, like skateboarders and *traceurs* (practitioners of parkour), read architecture in peculiar ways, appropriating it for their own aims (see Borden 2001). *Pixadores* sometimes say that they conceive of the lines in buildings' facades as lines in a giant calligraphy notebook (Wainer 2009). They try to guide their writing by those lines and especially appreciate the inscriptions that keep a consistent dimension of the letters and a balanced relation to the facade.

Undoubtedly, *pixação* is about fame. It is about being seen and recognized for one's daring deeds. It is about leaving one's mark all over the city. Undoubtedly, too, it is about competition. The universe of *pixação* is heterogeneous and tense. It is organized in groups (*turmas* [crews]) that build a strong sense of internal cohesion and loyalty but

which also frequently collide with each other in disputes over space and recognition. These disputes may develop into violence and physical fighting or into *atropelos*, the practice of writing over someone else's tags and graffiti.¹⁷ Recently, *atropelos* have also moved from the streets to art galleries and, most famously, to the 2008 Art Biannual. For many *pixadores*, their crews are their most important social and emotional reference. Many talk about them as real families, as many *pixadores* come from fragmented and disrupted families. Probably the word that would describe these crews more accurately is *brotherhood*. This is also true for rappers, who address one another as *mano* (brother).¹⁸ These are almost exclusively male groups that are relatively nonhierarchical and create strong ties among their members. However, they never call their groups "gangs," and they are not territorial as gangs in Los Angeles are—the neighborhood is not their organiza-

17. In this sense, the universe of *pixação* is not different from that of New York graffiti, described by Gregory J. Snyder (2009: 60) as having "beef" as a characteristic. *Atropelo* literally means "the act of running over someone or something."

18. On the sense of brotherhood among rappers, see Caldeira 2006b and Kehl 2000.



Figure 13 August 2008



Figure 14 December 2008

Atropelo in one of the most famous graffiti sites, o Beco do Batman, Vila Madalena. Photos by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

tional unit.¹⁹ Violence, competition, fighting, aggressiveness, and adrenaline are ingredients in the type of masculinity they articulate.

Pixadores are never sponsored by city hall. Rather, they are common targets of police harassment and disdain from the general population. The large majority of residents of the city detest *pixação*. They see it as vandalism and crime, as attacks on their property, and as proof of the deterioration and defacement of the public spaces they no longer prefer to circulate in.²⁰ *Pixações* are commonly associated with ugliness and defilement, not with art and beauty.²¹ For *pixadores*, though, their intervention signals the character of a public in which they have few other forms of belonging and in which they feel that they have to force their presence. As their tags spread throughout the city, so does the tension that marks interactions in public with young men who may be associated with tagging.

Pixação and graffiti are transgressions. More than improper appropriations of public or private space, they imprint on the city, especially on its wealthier part, the presence of those who are supposed to be invisible. Thus graffiti and *pixação* destabilize the old *modus vivendi* and its system of signs, social relations, and rules for the use of public space. Through *pixação*, graffiti, and a couple of other forms of cultural production, young men from the lower middle classes and especially from the peripheries not only affirm their existence in the city but also start to master the production of signs—painting, calligraphy, writing, rhyme (especially in rap), video, and several forms of electronic and digital production. Moreover, they use them aggressively to expose the discrimination they experience. These young men, no longer represented by others who used to dominate the production of signs, force their own representations onto the city.²² This production of self-representation is without doubt one of the most innovative by-products of Brazilian democratization.

19. On Los Angeles gangs and tagging, see Phillips 1999.

20. According to Brazilian law, graffiti and *pixações* are environmental crimes, as defined by article 65 of Law 9.605, of February 12, 1998 (Lei dos Crimes Ambientais [Law of Environmental Crimes]), subject to fine and imprisonment for periods of three months to one year. Before this law, graffiti and *pixação* were treated in the penal code (article 163) as attacks to property (public or private).

21. In the past years, a group of *pixadores* has tried to articulate the notion that *pixação* is art, and they agreed to participate in the 2010 São Paulo Art Biannual and at the exhibition *Né dans la rue* (*Born in the Street*) at Fondation Cartier in Paris, in 2009. This is inevitably an ambiguous engagement since the defining act of *pixação* is exactly to be illicit. See below.

22. To contextualize this reversal, one should consider that illiteracy rates were high in Brazil until recently (20 percent of the urban population in 1970 and 10 percent in 2000) and that illiterate people were not allowed to vote until 1985. Moreover, in 2000 the probability that a young black man living in the peripheries of São Paulo would complete twelve years of education was a low 15.2 percent (Torres, Ferreira, and Gomes 2005: 135).



Figure 15 Virada Cultural, 2009. Photo by Sylvia Masini

One of the main novelties of these interventions is their political idiom. Three decades ago, residents of the peripheries started to represent themselves through organized social movements that brought them to the center of the public sphere and demanded citizenship and rights, especially the right to the city.²³ Now, after more than twenty years of democratization, representations from the peripheries are articulated by languages and institutions that are different from the ones that organized past mobilizations (neighborhood associations, trade unions, and Catholic base communities). It is especially in the field of cultural production, urban intervention, everyday life, and the circulation of signs that new articulations crystallize.

Some of the marks of contemporary São Paulo are, on the one hand, an intense cultural production that is mass consumed and, on the other, mass demonstrations that are not directly political. For example, the gay parade has brought more than 3 million people to the region of Avenida Paulista annually over the past few years and has become one of the most popular tourist events of São Paulo. Another common type of mass gathering attracting millions of participants are religious events, especially those organized by evangelical groups. But most significant

23. For an account of this process, see Holston 2008.



Figure 16 Two *pixações* at the top of a building, 2010. Both *pixações* have three parts. The one on the top has two names: Domínios (Domains), which starts on the left column of the building, and Bebados (Drunk Men). They are followed by the signature of a writer (Jão) and the date (07). The *pixação* on the bottom has the logo of the *grife*, Os Mais Imundos (O,S,M,I—the Dirtiest), followed by the name of the *turma* (Conex), the signature of the writer (Fe), the date (2010), and ZL, which stands for “Zona Leste” (Eastern Zone) and indicates the region of the city where the *turma* comes from. Photo by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

are cultural interventions ranging from *pixação* to the installation of large-scale cultural centers in the peripheries by the public administration. It includes the massive production of shows during the Virada Cultural—an event sponsored by city administration that presents twenty-four hours of uninterrupted art spectacles in downtown streets and theaters. In 2010 and again in 2011, an estimated 4 million people attended more than a thousand attractions during that day. The new artistic productions also include weekly meetings for poetry reading (*saraus*) that are promoted by Cooperifa and other groups in the peripheries and that bring together hundreds of people every week to read their own work and listen to others. Through intense cultural production, the subaltern now express themselves in the city in ways that go well beyond the traditional circuits of Brazilian popular music and carnival. More than social movements and the political language of the past, the production of signs and mass cultural and artistic events mark their presence in public space. This change in the means of expression brings with it changes in the process of signification.

Pixações, for example, are frequently illegible to anybody else but the group of practitioners that tag them. They are not necessarily intended to be deciphered, nor do they commonly transmit any immediate message, much less an immediate political message. During the military years, there were some forms of political inscriptions, the best known being the *Abaixo a ditadura*, or Down with the Dictatorship, a message written to be understood and thus using plain roman capitals as letters. *Pixadores* rarely write a phrase with political meaning. When they do, they may demand peace or write messages in roman capitals that sarcastically reveal their take on society: “Cidade Limpa de políticos corruptos” (City Clean of Corrupt Politicians) or “Brasil . . . onde graffiti é crime e corrupção é arte” (Brazil . . . where graffiti is crime and corruption is art).²⁴ However, São Paulo’s typical *pixação* is an inscription in *tag reto* with three parts (see also Pereira 2005). The first or central part, the *pixo*, is the label of a group. *Pixadores* belong to *turmas*, and all members write the same *pixo* with exactly the same style. The second part of a *pixação*, usually on the left-hand side, is the *grife* (label). It is often a diagram, a logo, and stands for a larger group formed by many crews. The third part, on the right-hand side of the *pixo*, indicates individual authorship, frequently with the initials of the individual *pixadores* who participated in one specific *pixação* or the name of the *pixador* plus the date. This three-part inscription clearly indicates that *pixação* is more about the collectivity than it is about the individual: usually one does not tag alone but as part of a group. Sometimes the names of *pixadores* who have died are added as a way of honoring them and keeping them alive.

The names of *turmas* and *grifes* commonly refer to notions of criminality, marginality, filth, transgression, drugs, and madness. Examples include the Dirtiest (Os + Imundos), Vice (Vício), the Nothings (Os Porra Nenhuma), Energumens (Energúmenos), Tombs (Túmulos), Abnormals (Anormais), and the Worst (Os Piores). These names reaffirm stigmas as a mode of intervention in the city, a practice that is also common in rap. Both *pixadores* and rappers choose to identify themselves using expressions that derogate them. By doing so, they produce an uncomfortable estrangement and call attention to the discrimination they suffer. This strategy can be contrasted with that of urban social movements of the previous era and their constant insistence that their members were dignified workers and citizens.

Nevertheless, the interpretation of *pixadores*’ interventions on the space of the city should not be mainly a search for the meaning of their words, for they are frequently unreadable and empty signifiers, as Jean Baudrillard (1993 [1976])

24. The first inscription is a pun referencing the name of the Clean City law. A photograph of the second phrase went viral on the Internet in September 2011.



Figure 17 *Pixações*, 2006



Figure 18 *Pixações*, 2009. Photos by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

argued years ago in an illuminating analysis of New York graffiti (see also Stewart 1987). Rather, they are signs working in relation to other signs. In this context, their power resides in their emptiness as signifiers. Their “revolutionary intuition,” argues Baudrillard (1993 [1976]: 80), comes from the perception that “ideology no longer functions at the level of political signifieds, but at the level of the signifier, and that this is where the system is vulnerable and must be dismantled.” Graffiti and especially *pixação* are attacks at the level of the signifier.

Their attack is powerful. Although aggressively public, however, *pixações* have no intention of emphasizing dignity, citizenship, law, or rights, as was the case with the urban social movements. They are not gestures toward social inclusion, as are some examples of graffiti that have become icons of urban art. *Pixação* is a clear transgression, marked by aggressiveness and a stubborn resistance to assimilation. *Pixação* accepts the illicit as something both inevitable and desirable, as the only location from where young men from the peripheries can talk. They are openly defiant, and it is their insistence on the illicit nature of their practices, rather than the messages that can be deciphered from their inscriptions, that reveals their attitudes. As the *pixador* Djan summarizes in the film *Pixo*: “*Pixação* is illegal, and this is its essence. *Pixação* is pure anarchy, [it] is hatred.” Thus Choque Photos, another member of the *pixação* scene, questions, “What society is this that forms a whole generation of youth who need to express themselves through destruction?”²⁵ *Ódio* (hatred) is a word that frequently comes up in discussions about *pixação*. But hatred is also contested. For a couple of years now, someone has been tagging the walls of the city with the same phrase: *Odeie seu ódio!*—Hate Your Hatred!

Moving Around

Imprinted marks and their complex meanings of beauty and aggressiveness, of official sponsorship and illicit appropriations, coexist with many other ways of producing the city. Some of these are less tangible, like practices of mobility. A pillar supporting an elevated highway in one of São Paulo’s busiest avenues was inscribed with graffiti that captures the essence of some of the new urban prac-

25. “*Pixação é ilegal, e a essência tá nisso. Pixação é anarquia pura, é ódio.*” “Que sociedade é essa que forma uma geração inteira de jovens que precisa se expressar através da destruição?” Both phrases are in the film *Pixo* (2009) by João Wainer and Roberto Oliveira. The film was shown at the Fondation Cartier, Paris, in 2009, as part of the exhibition *Né dans la rue*. A clip of the film is available on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1X2toIrnGg.



Figure 19 “Jump over the turnstile. Free ride now! A city only exists for those who can move around it!!,” 2010. Photo by Rodrigo Paiva / Folhapress

tices. It says: “Jump over the turnstile. Free ride now! A city only exists for those who can move around it!!”²⁶ It is an intriguing inscription for a city segregated by walls and distances, obsessed with fear of crime, and frequently stalled by mammoth traffic jams. This kind of urban manifesto simultaneously affirms a desire to possess the city by moving around it while acknowledging the difficulty of doing so because of the price of public transportation. Thus it identifies a form of social injustice and an entitlement to belong. It also uses street art and an incitement to transgress as a mode of political articulation for young men unwilling to remain fixed to the territories of the impoverished peripheries where they supposedly “belong.” They want access to the entire city, to the same one that upper classes are fleeing. As they aggressively, illicitly, dangerously, and joyfully take over the city, they impose a new dynamic on its social and spatial life.

For many young men, São Paulo has become a space of mobility, experimentation, pleasure, and risk. They have a deep knowledge of the city, a curiosity about its different spaces, and take pleasure in exploring it. *Pixadores* and graffiti artists, in the same way as skateboarders, *traceurs*, rappers, and break-dancers, not to

26. This inscription is probably associated with the Movimento Passe Livre (Movement Free Ride), which since the mid-2000s has been campaigning for free public transportation and progressive modes of taxation to support it. In the literature produced by this movement, free public transportation is demanded as a right to the city. See Movimento Passe Livre 2011.

mention motoboys, circulate intensively throughout São Paulo (see also Guasco 2001, Pereira 2005, and Santos 2009). Usually the same people belong to several of these categories, which are unified by a deep enjoyment and engagement with the city. All these urban performers decipher the city's spaces and experience them through surprising angles, for example, from the top of its highest buildings climbed from the outside, handrails that become sliders for skaters, walls that are treated as obstacles by *traceurs*, or streets traveled by motorcyclists at high speeds in the narrow spaces between cars or from many places where nobody else dares to reach, such as the sewage system transformed into a space for graffiti.²⁷

These new urban explorers are usually from the peripheries, but they are never restricted to their own areas. *Pixadores* go everywhere, both for leisure and to tag. They consider the whole city as a canvas and also tag extensively at the center, a key intersection for meeting and where the status of their *pixos* is higher, given their greater visibility. The center is also a valued space for skateboarders, rappers, and break-dancers, whose meeting points are also there, frequently around subway stations. Thus through their movements and spatial practices these urban performers break down the center-periphery dichotomy that both residents and social scientists have long used to analyze the city.

Obviously, to circulate intensively is not something new for residents of the peripheries, who have always lived away from their jobs and have spent long hours commuting. In fact, numerous studies show that it is not uncommon for residents of the peripheries to spend three or four hours daily in public transportation.²⁸ However, the current circulations of young people bear some differences. They are not necessarily moving around to go to work. If they are, it is only one dimension of their movement. They move frequently for leisure or simply to

27. Two graffiti artists, two of the very few women in this universe, paint together almost on a daily basis. They told me that they get their materials ready and choose a subway station or a bus destination, usually far away, each day in a different direction. When they arrive at their destination, they start walking around until they find a wall to paint. One of them is also a skilled skater who crosses the whole city on her skateboard. Because São Paulo is a huge city, the distances they travel are large, at least twelve miles in each direction each day.

28. Displacements around the city have been well documented since 1967 by the Pesquisa Origem-Destino (O-D) research done by Metrô, the Companhia do Metropolitano de São Paulo and Emplasa (Empresa Paulista de Planejamento Metropolitano). Results for the 1997 and the 2007 researches are available online at Metrô's website, www.metro.sp.gov.br/empresa/pesquisas/od_1997/teod.shtml and www.metro.sp.gov.br/empresa/pesquisas/od_2007/teod.shtml (accessed September 29, 2011).

Some *pixadores* I interviewed who live in the peripheries and do not have a motorcycle spend a minimum of four and a half hours commuting across the city. On the way back at night, they often stop downtown to meet other *pixadores* and go around with them.

enjoy the city. While the middle and upper classes have enclosed themselves in fortified enclaves and enjoy the city behind closed car windows, the young urban performers enjoy it openly, everywhere, in detail. Moreover, they assert their right to do this just for the sake of doing it: “A city only exists for those who can move around it.”

Skateboarders cross the whole city on their skates, but they also concentrate in special sites, such as well-known avenues that they occupy late at night or ample spaces downtown left relatively unattended during weekends. Moreover, they use special *pistas* (ramps) that exist in parks and cultural centers. Parkour, a newer type of urban performance, uses public parks for training and public buildings, viaducts, bridges, and streets for its trajectories. *Traceurs* run throughout urban spaces, overcoming obstacles as they formulate their paths. Moreover, as they jump from viaducts and move up facades, they sometimes end up reaching the top of the same buildings that *pixadores* love to tag.

Like graffiti, skateboarding and parkour have similarly developed an amicable relationship with city hall. While they continue to be practiced as a form of enjoying the city and as unprogrammed and defiant urban performances, they have also been at least partially legitimated by the city administration, which treats them either as sport or as street art and subsequently sponsors and tries to regulate them.²⁹

If the circulation of skaters and *traceurs* may be assimilated in relatively calm ways, this is certainly not the case for groups of young men engaged in other types of movement. The interactions that are likely to provoke the highest amount of tension in public space today are the daily encounters with a multitude of moto-boys. In São Paulo, two occupations widely available to young men are labeled in English, “office boy” and “motoboy.” They are two variants of the same job: to carry documents and objects from one place to another and to run errands for others as quickly as humanly possible through heavy traffic and equally grid-locked bureaucracies. “Office boy” is a job that has existed for a long time, usually recruits men quite young, and is a traditional first job for working-class young men. They do their job of waiting in line, obtaining papers, and circulating documents by foot or public transportation. Motoboys do the same job using motor-

29. A list of the best *pistas* for skate elaborated by the well-known skate magazine *Cemporcento-SKATE* (Catraca Livre 2010) shows that the majority are located in public parks in the peripheries. Another example of how the Secretary of Culture has been sponsoring skate is the exhibition *Apropriação—meu centro é o skate* (Appropriation—My Center Is the Skate), curated by skaters and installed in August 2011 in one of its venues (Galeria Olido) in downtown São Paulo. This support for parkour is exemplified by the short film *Samparkour* (2008).

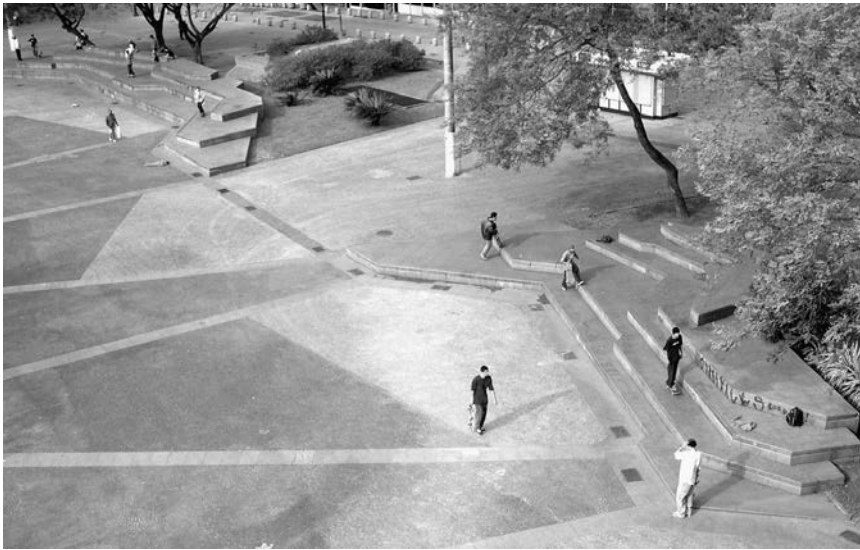


Figure 20 Circulations, 2006



Figure 21 Circulations, 2009. Photos by Teresa P. R. Caldeira

cycles and have to be at least eighteen years old, the age at which one can obtain a license. In addition to documents, they also circulate numerous types of goods, such as food, medicine, books, or flowers, or whatever one can buy by phone or on the Internet and have delivered immediately to one's home or office. Sometimes they also carry people, as the service of mototaxi starts to take root. They are expected to be fast and to deliver everything as soon as possible, a daunting task in a huge metropolitan region full of heavy traffic. Although there are many women working as motogirls in São Paulo, the large majority of deliverers on motorcycles are men, and the category is referred to as if it were exclusively male.

More than anybody else, these young men rushing through lanes of traffic and crisscrossing the city know its meanders. They act as communicating agents, both for those who can pay for their services and for the other brothers from the peripheries for whom they carry and disseminate information and sometimes documents and goods as well. Although motoboys' movement around the city is definitively not, or largely, for enjoyment, in many ways they share perspectives and experiences with other urban explorers. Many motoboys are *pixadores* and use their movements around the city for work to leave their *pixos* in different parts of the city. Several *pixadores* in São Paulo recount how *pixação* originated in meetings of office boys at lunchtime in downtown São Paulo two decades ago. Today motoboys, *pixadores*, rappers, skateboarders, and break-dancers meet around the city, collaborate, network, share music, consume clothes and pirated CDs and DVDs. On weekends, many circulate together from neighborhood to neighborhood in the outskirts of the city throughout the night, looking for dances and rap shows and sometimes writing on the walls.

But motoboy is also an occupation, and one that puts these men at great risk and in a quite contentious relationship with other residents of the city. Estimates of the number of motoboys vary, but no source mentions fewer than 120,000 in São Paulo, and some use numbers as high as 250,000.³⁰ They started to appear in the 1980s and continued to grow exponentially in the 1990s, as the service economy diversified and as the increase in the number of vehicles made traffic impossible.³¹ São Paulo, a city of around 11 million inhabitants, had in August 2011 more than 7 million registered vehicles. Of this total, more than 5 million were automobiles

30. Ricardo Barbosa da Silva (2009) cites different sources both from the government and from motoboys trade unions.

31. According to data cited by Silva (2009: 84), the number of cars per one thousand inhabitants in São Paulo grew from 70 in 1967 to 184 in 2002. The number of motorcycles in São Paulo increased from 348,098 in 2000 (Silva 2009: 88) to more than 900,000 in 2011 (State Department of Transit of São Paulo 2011).

and around nine hundred thousand were motorcycles.³² Today motoboys dominate the traffic in some of the central avenues of the city, driving dangerously in spaces not conceived to be used by motor vehicles. Attempts by the city to regulate traffic and to designate special lanes for motorcycles have failed. Automobile drivers in general dislike motoboys intensely, because they make the experience of driving tense and more difficult (to shift lanes of traffic in some avenues may be a daunting task). Moreover, crimes involving motorcycles have increased, and motoboys in general become easily associated with crime and are feared accordingly. Motoboys complain bitterly about a deep lack of respect, the assaults they suffer, and the prejudices people have in relation to them.³³ In this context, it is not surprising that aggressions in traffic have escalated. Accidents are common. In 2010 accidents with motorcycles represented 48 percent of all traffic accidents, although motorcycles were only around 12 percent of the vehicles circulating in the city.³⁴ The number of motorcycle deaths in São Paulo increased from 86 in 2000 to 262 in 2010, although this total is probably underestimated.³⁵ In addition to deaths, a great number of motoboys are hurt in traffic accidents daily.

A constant topic in the usually heated conversations with residents of the city about motoboys is the destruction of cars' side mirrors, a topic also easily addressed by motoboys. In their tight and fast maneuvers in between cars, motoboys occasionally hit these mirrors. Car drivers accuse them of doing so intentionally, which is sometimes true, when they kick them with their feet. This is just one of the countless incivilities that constitute traffic in São Paulo. However, in this case the symbolism is especially compelling. Since owners of private cars

32. According to data from the Detran-SP (State Department of Transit of São Paulo) (2011), the breakdown of the 7,117,136 vehicles is as follows: 912,651 motorcycles and similar vehicles; 818,667 micro-buses (vans used for public transportation) and utility vehicles; 5,179,363 automobiles; 42,891 buses; 156,878 trucks; and 6,686 other vehicles.

33. This treatment is evident in a book organized by members of a collective called Canal*MOTOBOY (Santos 2009) in which they recount their daily experiences. It is also evident in any other study regarding motoboys; see, e.g., Olivato 2001 and Stiel Neto, Mutaf, and Avlasevicius 2003.

34. Data on traffic accidents are from the Secretary of Health, Prefeitura de São Paulo (2011). Studies on traffic accidents in Brazil have shown that while the deaths of pedestrians and car drivers have been diminishing since the mid-1990s, deaths of motorcyclists have increased considerably. See Waiselfisz 2011a. Thanks to Marcelo B. Nery from NEV-USP (Núcleo de Estudos da Violência da Universidade de São Paulo) for directing me to this study.

35. Data are from Pro-Aim 2011. These numbers underestimate the death total. A study by Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz (2011b) has calculated this underestimation by re-reclassifying deaths registered as simply "traffic accidents" and then readjusting the numbers. It concluded that in 2008 the number of deaths of motorcyclists in São Paulo was 479 (Waiselfisz 2011b: Table 6.4 available online only).

often sit in traffic on São Paulo's main avenues, what they see in their rearview mirrors, especially the lateral ones, are motoboys in movement. Their presence disrupts a space supposed to be left empty and over which cars were expected to reign. It annoys those whose ownership of a private car comes with notions of distinction and avoidance of the experience of public transportation.

In fact, motoboys are the most visible of all the new protagonists of these new urban practices in São Paulo. Although *pixações* saturate the landscape of the city, usually nobody sees *pixadores*. But motoboys are there, physically, noisily, close by, at a glance in one's mirror. They are regarded with disdain and rage by other residents who, contrary to the new urban explorers, dislike the public space of the city and avoid circulating around it as much as they can.

New circulations through São Paulo have also been taking place beyond the city streets, on what Manuel Castells (2000) would call the "space of flows." Walking, skateboarding, parkour, and motorcycling are all ephemeral practices that vanish as they are performed. However, the easy access to video, photographs, and the Internet has opened up another dimension of incorporeal life and an arena for global dialogues among youth groups. Skaters and *traceurs* are very careful about documenting their performance, many times with a simple cell phone. Invariably, these images end up on the Internet, where they all gain another existence. For example, the twelve participants of Canal*MOTOBOT have been experimenting with new modes of intervention. They carry cell phones with video cameras and transmit their experiences in real time, thus becoming, as they say, "chroniclers of our own reality" (Canal*MOTOBOT 2011).³⁶ The subtitle of their web page is "Digital Public Space" (Canal*MOTOBOT 2011).

Acting on the streets as well as on the Internet, urban practitioners play with scale and context to gain not only audience but also especially permanence. They trade space to try to conquer time. This is also true for graffiti artists and *pixadores*, whose marks may be erased or crossed over in the city but remain on the web. However, these inscriptions, especially *pixação*, find another way to create a permanence in the city. They are repetitive. The reputation of a crew and its writers comes from repetition, from the capacity to distribute the same sign all over the city. Single inscriptions do not last long: what lasts is their collective presence and repetitive production (see also Stewart 1987).

36. The sponsors of Canal*MOTOBOT and its web page include a series of art and academic institutions, such as the Secretary of Culture of São Paulo and the Cultural Center of the Spanish Embassy, and corporations.

New practices in the production of signs, interventions in public space, and circulation around the city are re-creating public space and asserting the agency of youth groups in contemporary São Paulo. Four sets of features capture their main innovations in the production of public space. First, they create a new visibility and a new type of presence for the subaltern that disrupts a certain order of things that used to constitute the public. Second, this disruption is contradictory because it is articulated with narratives of rights and of enjoyment while expressing itself as danger or tension and frequently materializing in illicit or even violent forms. Third, these practices unequivocally help reproduce and deepen gender hierarchies. Fourth, in sum, these are paradoxical interventions. They repetitively expand and fracture public space, claim rights and challenge them, affirm enjoyment and encounter death, and denounce injustices but stubbornly reject assimilation. Let me elaborate on these points.

The new practices of the urban produce a new and ubiquitous logic of visibility for the subaltern. In spite of fortification and systems of surveillance that were supposed to regulate and limit the presence and mobility of these young men, they continue to circulate, flow into unexpected spaces, and force a recalibration of gazes. When physical distances between classes in the city were larger, movements more difficult, knowledge and technologies of communication less accessible, and behavior more controlled, the active presence of the subaltern in the city was less visible, transgressive, and inconvenient. The middle and upper classes still dominated the use of public space in less contested ways. Today, as the better-off have chosen to retreat to fortified enclaves, and the commercial and corporate signs have shrunk, the young men from the peripheries and their productions become especially visible in the public spaces of the city, reversing the historical trend.

This new visibility is associated with a new type of agency. These new urban flâneurs coming from the margins of a highly unequal society finally assert their rights of wandering around it, observing it from up high, producing its signs, representing themselves, and constituting its public sphere. Inevitably, as they do this, they bring to the forefront the inequalities, tensions, intolerance, and fears that are at the core of Brazilian society. They disturb the traffic, literally and metaphorically. They are no longer segregated in the peripheries where they live or in certain circuits of mobility, such as public transportation and commuting to work. They move around intensively to enjoy the city just for the sake of it, not because they have to. No interpretation of their movements based on notions of need will ever be able to capture their meaning.

Additionally, the young men who imprint the city with their marks master several skills that in the past were available only to the upper classes and produce sophisticated forms of self-representation. They may be school dropouts, but they develop amazing calligraphies and artistic styles and join global networks of production and circulation of signs. With these skills, they force their representations on the rest of the city. They need no one to speak for them.

The disruption they cause is undoubtedly tense. They embellish public space but also deface it, tagging people's houses and buildings, monuments and viaducts. They infuriate residents, as they welcome the illicit. They refuse to pay for public transportation and threaten bus drivers who may want to collect the fare, and they join groups of soccer fans to damage cars and buildings on their way to stadiums. Sometimes their behavior slides into outright criminality, always an option in many parts of the city. The information needed to climb a building to tag it is the same information needed to assault it. Feuds are frequent among different crews, sometimes leading to murder, the main cause of death for São Paulo's young men.

In fact, violence and death are always around. Young men die in São Paulo at alarmingly high rates, as can be seen in table 1 below. Homicide rates have decreased substantially in the past decade in São Paulo and elsewhere in Brazil.³⁷ One can speculate that increased mobility is a by-product of the decline in violent deaths: it is no doubt easier to circulate in and enjoy a less murderous city. Nevertheless, violence is still high, and mortality among the most mobile of the youth groups, the motoboys, has increased substantially.

But what table 1 also demonstrates is a stark gender gap. More than 90 percent of those who die violently in São Paulo every year are men, mostly young. Young men put their bodies at risk in various situations, including in all the urban practices discussed above. They skateboard in the middle of the street; drive their motorcycles between lanes of fast traffic; tag as an urban sport, which involves climbing buildings without ropes; practice parkour from bridges and between

37. The other types of crime, especially property crimes (robbery, theft, car robbery and theft, and kidnapping), have not decreased. There is not a consensus among either citizens or social scientists regarding the reasons for the sharp decrease in murder. The government credits it to its policies of incarceration, police reform, and improving systems of information, on the one hand, and to policies of improving services and infrastructure on the peripheries, on the other; NGOs and human rights activists associate it with the control of weapons among the civil population and policies of empowering youth in the peripheries; hip-hop may associate it with its efforts of educating and incorporating youth to its practices (*Hiphop salva* [Hip-hop saves] was one of its slogans); some people even associate it with the role of organized crime in disciplining the use of weapons among its members.

Table 1 Violent Deaths in the Municipality of São Paulo by Sex and Age-Group

	2000	% Male	2005	% Male	2010	% Male
Homicides	5,979		2,784		1,293	
Male	5,528	92.5	2,572	92.4	1,157	89.5
15–24	2,229		889		303	
25–34	2,061		1,005		423	
Traffic accidents						
(excluding motorcycle)	1,098		1,062		772	
Male	836	76.1	791	74.5	600	77.7
15–24	217		165		103	
25–34	206		197		135	
Motorcycle accidents	86		282		262	
Male	78	90.7	255	90.4	245	93.5
15–24	35		117		104	
25–34	34		106		114	
Rate of violent deaths/ 100,000	68.64		37.99		20.64	
Rate of violent deaths of men/100,000	129.54		70.06		37.57	
Population	10,434,252		10,865,573		11,253,503	

Source: Secretary of Health, Prefeitura de São Paulo, Sistema de Informações para Vigilância de Violências e Acidentes (SIVVA; System of Information for Vigilance over Violence and Accidents), 2011.

Notes: Violent deaths refer to the sum of homicides, traffic accidents, and motorcycle accidents. Data for age-groups include male and female.

buildings; hang from the top of high-rises to write on their facades; and engage in group fights. As young men reinvent their subjectivities by being aggressive and putting their bodies at risk, they also re-create gender hierarchies. These practices not only exclude women but also despise them, a sentiment deeply embedded and expressed in rap culture. The young women they disdain do not have a comparable form of public cultural production or urban practice. However, they are on average more educated, have stabler jobs, and increasingly become heads of households, in many cases choosing to do so without male partners. These choices not only widen the gap between genders but also make it less easy to bridge. This resignified gender inequality is at the core of the new public.

The public space created in contemporary São Paulo is thus paradoxical in many ways. To move freely and not be simply smashed by repression, young men from the peripheries who use public space for aggressive practices depend on

the principles of tolerance and inclusion that democratization has historically inscribed onto public space. But in São Paulo this democracy is clearly disjunctive. It is a democracy in which the presence of the youth from the peripheries in public spaces is aggressive and in which relationships across classes are based on intolerance, prejudice, avoidance, and frequently fear. It is also a democracy in which contestation comes in new political idioms. The new urban interventions operate according to a logic divergent from that introduced by urban social movements during Brazilian democratization in the 1980s. These new practitioners distance themselves from established political languages and modes of demonstration and instead produce signs, cultural and artistic events, and practices of mobility. Social movements demanded inclusion and articulated narratives of universal citizenship. Instead, new urban actors are skeptical about possibilities of social incorporation. They conceive of their performances as practices explicitly belonging to and located in the margins. As they reappropriate spaces left over from urban fortification, they take social inequality for granted and thus naturalize it. Their practices expose inequality but do not imagine that they will diminish it. They claim rights to the city, but most do not ask for inclusion. Rather, they choose the illicit and stubbornly reject assimilation. Their aggressive and intolerant interventions reveal that they have little intention to emphasize dignity, citizenship, or the rule of law.

The new urban practitioners and their interventions expose the limits of a common ground. As they subvert the rules of visibility and invisibility in the city created by walls and by the center-periphery opposition, as they affirm their existence as marginals and transgressors and speak from this position, they make strange an order of things, expose the flaws in its system of partitions, and open a dissensus about distributions (cf. Rancière 1999 [1995]). By doing so, they expose the depth of the system of injustice that characterizes São Paulo and Brazilian society.

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