

Capture and resistance: communicative potencies and politics of urban intervention practices

Captura e resistência: potências comunicacionais e políticas das práticas de intervenção urbana

Captura y resistencia: potencias comunicacionales y políticas de las prácticas de intervención urbana

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Abstract *The aim of this article is to present the possibilities of resistance the communicative practices of urban intervention are capable to offer to the attempts of the institutional power in capturing them, absorbing them and integrating them into the logic in vigour in order to keep them under its control. The trajectory of the group that transformed pilasters of the subway of São Paulo into an open air museum of urban art is linked to the experience of the group that tagged, consecutively, the São Paulo Fine Art Biennial in 2008 and 2010, and the Berlin Biennial, in 2012, can evidence some of the political, aesthetic, communicative and artistic questions that cross it, in the light of the contributions of Certeau, Mouffe, Rancière and Agamben.*

Keywords: *Urban intervention; Capture; Resistance; Dissensus*

Resumo *Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar as possibilidades de resistência que as práticas comunicacionais de intervenção urbana são capazes de*

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oferecer às tentativas do poder institucional de capturá-las, absorvê-las e integrá-las às lógicas vigentes, a fim de mantê-las sob seu controle. A trajetória do grupo que transformou pilastras do metrô de São Paulo em um museu a céu aberto de arte urbana paralelamente à do grupo que pichou, consecutivamente, as Bienais de Arte de São Paulo em 2008 e 2010, e a Bienal de Berlim, em 2012, podem dar a ver algumas das questões políticas, estéticas, comunicacionais e artísticas que a atravessam, sobretudo à luz das contribuições de Certeau, Mouffe, Rancière e Agamben.

Palavras-chave: *Intervenções urbanas; Captura; Resistência; Dissenso*

Resumen *Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar las posibilidades de la resistencia que las prácticas comunicacionales de intervención urbana son capaces de ofrecer a las tentativas del poder institucional en capturarlas, absorberlas e integrarlas a las lógicas dominantes para guardarlas bajo su control. La trayectoria del grupo que cambió las pilastras del subterráneo de São Paulo en un museo abierto del arte urbano y la experiencia del grupo que hizo pintas, consecutivamente, en las bienales de arte de São Paulo en 2008 y 2010, y en la bienal de Berlín, en 2012, pueden revelar algunas de las cuestiones políticas, estéticas, comunicacionales y artísticas que la cruzan, sobre todo a la luz de las contribuciones de Certeau, Mouffe, Rancière y Agamben.*

Palabras-clave: *Intervenciones urbanas; Captura; Resistencia; Disenso*

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Introduction

The practices of urban intervention permeate the contemporary cities, modify their landscapes and show that they are able to (re)organise perceptions and experiences in and on these spaces. They develop themselves almost always on the margin of the institutional environments, which most of the time condemn them. Due to the impossibility of administering such activities, the attempts to appropriate them institutionally come into being, which, in some cases, ended up strengthening the tension between the acknowledgment of these practices as artistic manifestations and their condemnation as vandalism.

The purpose of this article is to present the possibilities of resistance which the practices of urban intervention are able to offer to the attempts of the institutional power to capture them, absorb them and incorporate them into their logics which are in vigour (be they artistic, mercantile, political, or possibly reunited), in order to keep them under its control. Examples can be observed in the transference of typically urban practices, such as graffiti and *pixação*³ [the Brazilian form of tagging], from the streets to the art galleries and museums, thus modifying their status, the form in which they are perceived and, mainly, their essence. Besides this, we intend to observe the political, communicational and aesthetic questions, which develop themselves in the tension art versus vandalism which establishes itself in this context.

In order to carry out this analysis, we will observe two contemporary trajectories: firstly, that of a group of graffiti artists of São Paulo that, after having been arrested for spraying graffiti on pilasters of the underground in a region of the city, obtained the consent and the sponsorship of the State to transform the same space into a museum of urban art. Afterwards the trajectory of the “*pixadores das bienais*” (taggers of the biennials), as the members of the group, that tagged the São Paulo Biennials of 2008 and 2010, and the Berlin Biennial in 2012, were known; in

³ We opted for the spelling of the term *pixação* with x [the correct spelling is *pichação*: translator’s note], as it is adopted by the practitioners of this activity.

the two last ones they were present as guests. Both trajectories will be followed on the basis of the articles which were published by the site of the daily newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo*⁴ [the biggest and most influential daily newspaper of Brazil], between October 24th 2008 and July 15th 2012. We chose this newspaper after having researched and verified which news site had the largest content with free access to such events.

The practices of urban intervention will be presented according to the bias of resistance, on the basis of the concepts of tactics and strategies Michel de Certeau (1998) developed and also of the metaphor of the fireflies Georges Didi-Huberman (2011) uses. This metaphor emphasises, above all, the forms of resistance which translate the low-ermost brilliance that is almost lost in the excesses of luminosity and visibility which submerge the contemporary capitalist societies. “The resistant of all kinds, active or passive ones, transform themselves into fleeting fireflies and attempt to be as discreet as possible and at the same time they go on emitting their signals” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, p. 17). The approach of the attempts to incorporate these practices into the mercantile artistic logic and of the possibilities of resistance, which appear there, will be carried out on the basis of Chantal Mouffe’s critical approach (2007). Giorgio Agamben’s “profanations” (2007), will reinforce the idea Mouffe (2007) already used with respect to the importance of the gestures of subversion, although they are small, against the attempts of oppressive totalisation. The concepts of politics, police, damage and dissensus, among others Jacques Rancière (1996; 2005; 2007) uses, will help to trace a certain origin of this phenomenon and to understand its development.

Interfered City: tactics and subversions

Tagging, graffiti, stencils and stickers are examples, among many others, of the interventions which confer colours, texts and images on the urban spaces and articulate discourses and manifestoes or simply appropriate

⁴ Available on: <<http://www.folha.uol.com.br>>. Access on: July 11th 2012.

and demarcate territories. In their walks through the city, they invent routes, create new possibilities for the ways of gazing at its spaces and experiencing them; they incessantly create and recreate new physical and sensitive panoramas.

By symbolically appropriating the urban spaces, the young people transform them and they gain a new status in the everyday life of the metropolis: from places of passage, which are not very propitious for identity constructions and for group relationships, they turn to be territories full of affectivities, memories, relationships and identities (AUGÉ, 1994, apud OLIVEIRA, 2007, p. 72).

Nevertheless these practices develop themselves as nocturne, hidden, marginal actions and they face and deceive the institutional determinations which forbid them⁵ (but, as we can observe it, in a simple walk through the urban centre, they do not repress them) and a certain social consensus which condemns them. In this movement they compose what Certeau calls “network of anti-discipline” (CERTEAU, 1998, p. 42), since they establish themselves in a cunning way in the counter-current of the institutional power.

Still referring to Certeau (1998), it is possible to understand the urban interventions as the “tactics” the common subject develops when he/she faces the institutional “strategies”. According to the author, we can call “strategies” the actions, relations, normalisations and structures the institutions calculate in order to maintain their position, their power, and their control over the city and over all that which concerns it. However, to the common subject, who is deprived of power, not only an unquestionable agreement face to face with this control would be left, but uncountable possibilities of actions which would permit him/her small subversions of this logic and deviations from it, without abandoning it

⁵ According to the Lei de Crimes Ambientais [Environmental Crimes Law] n. 9.605, of February 12th 1998, Section IV – Dos Crimes contra o Ordenamento Urbano e o Patrimônio Cultural [Of the Crimes against the Urban Order and the Cultural Patrimony], Art. 65, it is a crime “to tag, to paint graffiti or to besmear the edifice or urban monument with another means”. Imprisonment from seven months to one year and payment of fine. The law still says, in a unique paragraph, that “if the act is accomplished on a monument or on a thing, which is listed in virtue of its artistic, archaeological or historic value, the sentence is from six months to one year detention and fine”. Law available on: <<http://www.ibama.gov.br/leiambiental/home.htm#sec3>>. Access on: Nov. 19th 2008.

however. Certeau calls these “tactics”, which develop themselves within the framework of the strategies by using their forces in order to confront it. The “tactic” must play with the terrain, which is imposed on it in the way in which the law of a strange force organises it”; “it is cunning, “the art of the weak” (CERTEAU, 1998, p. 100-101).

Despite all the effort of restriction and control, the institutional power concedes some small breaches, which become sufficiently big so that a whole complex set of actions, ideas and behaviours, which were considered subversive, could develop and establish itself.

It is convenient to draw a parallel between Certeau’s tactics (1998) and the forms of resistance which are symbolised by the fireflies in Didi-Huberman (2011). He bases his argument on some of Pier Paolo Pasolini’s letters, in which the filmmaker relates his youth experiences and later his adulthood experiences during the evolution of the Italian society in the period during and after the Second World War. In his first writings, in 1941, Pasolini poetically relates the contemplation of a cloud of fireflies, “which formed small woods of fire in the woods of the shrubs” (PASOLINI *apud* DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, p. 19), moving in an attractive way in the night, “an unexpected beauty; albeit so modest” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, p. 45). At the same time, cannons of light of the fascist projectors break the darkness of the sky, “very distant, very ferocious, mechanical eyes from which it was impossible to escape” (PASOLINI *apud* DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, p. 21). Hence he creates a metaphor with these lights of such different origins and intensities, as if the weak and intermittent lights of the fireflies represented a resistance, a counterpoint to the intense and oppressive light of the projectors. Here it is convenient to use again the question Didi-Huberman puts: would it be possible to find “the means to *see the fireflies appear* in the ferocious, too luminous space of super-exposition of our present history?” (2011, p. 70). According to him, it would be necessary to learn and analyse the “people’s languages, gestures, faces, all this which, as a contrast, draws zones or networks of *survival* on the very place where its extra-territoriality, its marginalisation, its resistance, its vocation for revolt are declared” (2011, p. 72).

If the practices of graffiti, of tagging, of sticker and of stencil can be linked to the concept of tactics, they can also be linked to the lights of the fireflies which twinkle, small, weak, but constant, in spite of the big institutional lights. After all, what are the practices of urban intervention if not forms the common subjects find in order to move about, to play, to express themselves in the city on the basis and in spite of the limits, which are imposed on them by an urbanistic project that strives to construct and maintain a “concept-city” (CERTEAU, 1998), which always seems to attempt to refer to a post-card?

“If you have no control over them, joint them”: efforts of capture

If, on the one hand, the institutional power plans a “panorama-city” (CERTEAU, 1998), which can be observed and controlled on the basis of the regulations and planning, on the other hand, it is in the daily practices of its inhabitants that the city is actually constructed and constantly reconfigured. This city, which is actually experienced, has not much to do with that which is intended by its governors, and Certeau (1998) exactly points out the impossibility of administering these “urban practices”:

Today, whatever the avatars of this concept may have been, we have to acknowledge that if in discourse the city serves as a totalising and almost mythical landmark for socio-economic and political strategies, urban life increasingly permits the re-emergence of the element that the urbanistic project excluded. The language of power is in itself “urbanising”, the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine one another outside the reach of panoptic power. The city becomes the dominant theme in political legends, but it is more a field of programmed and controlled operations. Beneath the discourses, which ideologise the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate; without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer (CERTEAU, 1984, p. 160).

In this sense the author states that, if the institutions cannot administer such activities and experiences, they reject them as “detritus” the

city cannot deal with. Indeed, for a long time, the practices of urban interventions were relegated to the margins of society, since even the legislation, which is contrary to them, was not able to block their action. Nonetheless, especially in the course of the past decade, a new phenomenon is being shaped, which Mouffe (2007) describes as the attempt of capitalism to capture the agonistic efforts of art and counterculture and make them become part of its mercantile logic:

The aesthetic strategies of the counterculture: the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, the anti-hierarchical exigency, are now used in order to promote the conditions required by the current mode of capitalist regulation [...]. Nowadays artistic and cultural productions play a central role in the process of capital valorisation and, through ‘neo-management’ artistic critique has become an important element of capitalist production (MOUFFE, 2007, p. 1).

When prohibition, marginalisation and/or negligence are not able to restrain the advance of intervention practices in the urban space, their neutralisation can seem an interesting expedient for the institutional power. “If you have no control over them, joint hem” is the maxim which seems to perfectly suit the efforts that are made in the attempt to take the manifestations, which develop themselves in the counter-current of the institutions, to the consensual framework of these institutions. In this trajectory from the margin to the centre, the manifestations, that have been contra-hegemonic until then, end up losing much of their intentions, which according to Mouffe, generates a disbelief in their critical power, since “any form of critique is automatically recuperated and neutralised by capitalism” (MOUFFE, 2007, p. 1).

In this pessimism with regard to the possibilities of resistance face to face with the capture attempts, we can come back to Pasolini’s letters Didi-Huberman (2011) uses. In 1975 (the year in which he was murdered), Pasolini is unmotivated and negativist with regard to the new socio-political context capitalism unleashed. According to him, the fascism of the period of the war was substituted by a new and worse fascism – the power of consumption. According to the filmmaker, the “fascist

fascism” imposed itself on the people’s behaviour, but not on its mind. Neo-fascism would have captured the identities, causes and motivations which resisted that first period. In that letter, Pasolini determines the disappearance of the fireflies, that is to say, of resistance.

Didi-Huberman (2011) points to the fact that the fireflies are the more visible the darker the night, in which they roam, will be. If a strong light is thrown on them, their weak brilliance becomes imperceptible:

It was not at night that the fireflies disappeared, in fact. When the night is deeper, we are able to seize the minimum flash of light, and it is the very emanation of light which is even more visible to us in its trail, albeit tenuous. No, the fireflies disappeared in the dazzling brightness of the “ferocious” projectors: projectors of the lookout towers, of the political shows, of the football stadia, of the television screens (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2011, p. 30).

Hence this is the way the institutional power found to take away the power of contestation from the urban interventions: to throw the big light of consent, of consensus on them. As Rancière (1996) stresses it, the consensus refers to a conceptual and imagetic framework for any intervention and discussion, the contradictions of which go unperceived since they coincide with hegemonic interests or since they reflect existing situations and inalterable views.

This movement of capture can be perceived, especially in relation to graffiti. The exportation of graffiti artists, who achieved great success abroad, such as Speto and OsGêmeos [The Twins], for example, initiates a change in the public impression of the activity, and graffiti turns to be perceived and accepted as art. The marginal urban activity is taken into the galleries, it is offered as workshop in schools and social programmes. It is absorbed, to a great extent, by the institutional logic which turns to have more control over its development.

We can give a specific case as example In April 2011, a group of eleven people was arrested while they were covering pilasters of the underground bridge with graffiti in an avenue of São Paulo. Among them, there were some of the renowned graffiti artists on the market and in the

artistic milieu.⁶ The group was accosted by the police after a denunciation and they were taken to the police station, where the members of the group gave testimonies and they were released. However they would have to answer judicially for environmental crime.⁷ About one month after the arrest, the same place, in which the graffiti artists had been arrested, while they were doing their graffiti, was given over by the Secretaria de Cultura do Estado [State Secretariat for Culture] and by the Metrô [Underground] of the city to a project which was developed by the same group, so that the space was occupied by the work of about 70 urban artists and it also involved educative workshops and exhibitions in other public spaces of the city, such as parks and libraries.⁸ At the same time, the Câmara de São Paulo [City Council of São Paulo] approved a law which decriminalises graffiti – when it is produced in places with preliminary authorisation of the owners – and regulates the sale of spray-paints to graffiti artists, thus creating a distinction between this practice and tagging.⁹ In October 2011, the Museu Aberto de Arte Urbana [Urban Art Open Air Museum] was inaugurated in São Paulo, with the sponsorship of the Secretaria de Cultura [Secretariat for Culture] and of the Metrô [Underground], which provided the paint and the sprays that are used in graffiti.

To acknowledge the value of urban art is to promote the diversity of gazes at culture and at the city. The graffiti, which are done in this organised way, helps to develop artistic talents and to preserve and embellish a deteriorated place. Not everybody likes graffiti and is not obliged to like it, but on the public pilasters it will not bother anybody, the Secretary of State

⁶ Eleven graffiti artists are detained in the north district of São Paulo. Published on April 3rd 2011 Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/897718-onze-grafiteiros-sao-detidos-na-zona-norte-de-sao-paulo.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

⁷ The group was indicted in the law cited in footnote 5. Graffiti artists arrested in SP must answer for environmental crime. Published on April 3rd 2011 Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/897750-grafiteiros-detidos-em-sp-devem-responder-por-crime-ambiental.shtml>>. Access on June 23rd 2012.

⁸ Arrested graffiti artists will have a gallery in pilasters of the underground of São Paulo. Published on May 19th 2011. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/914589-grafiteiros-detidos-terao-galeria-em-pilstras-do-metro-de-sp.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

⁹ Law approved which frees graffiti and forbids spray to minor than 18. Published on May 26th 2011. Available on: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/921118-sancionada-lei-que-libera-grafite-e-proibe-spray-para-menor-de-18.shtml> Access on: June 23rd 2012

for Culture, Andrea Matarazzo affirms; he confesses that he had already had removed many graffiti, which had no authorisation.¹⁰

This is the bright light of power thrown on the small flickers of urban intervention, which was condemned as long as it was not authorised, and was elevated to the status of art when it was institutionally consented. Then what Agamben (2007) calls consecration, occurs, which is the act of separating something from the sphere of experience. When the appropriation of the pilasters of the underground transforms itself into institutional concession, the possibility of profanation – which, according to Agamben, is the opposite movement, which removes something from the sphere of the sacred (here the institutionalised city) and brings it back, thus re-establishing its possibilities of use – it is diminished, since that which was considered as an encounter between subversions, art and urban life becomes a museumified thing and therefore separated from the everyday experience. This perspective comes near to Rancière's notion of consensus (1996), because the consensus does not allow that intervals between the experienced and the norm appear; it forces a coincidence between both. Its objective would be to produce an overlap between laws and facts, so that the laws become identical to social life, filling the empty spaces, through which the actions of resistance infiltrate themselves and gain form.

This example permits to see that a certain pessimism, which we perceive in Pasolini, Mouffe and Agamben with regard to the resistance of the resistances, can really be grounded. Nonetheless, as we already described it here, there are always breaches in the movements the institutions of power engender.

Back to darkness: resistances

Mouffe (2007) considers that the political dimension of art would be capable of opposing the hegemonic consensus and reveals what it hides,

¹⁰ Graffiti artists create Museu Aberto de Arte Urbana [Urban Art Open Air Museum] in São Paulo. Published on October 3rd 2011. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/984782-grafiteiros-criam-museu-aberto-de-arte-urbana-em-sao-paulo.shtml>>. Access on June 23rd 2012.

thus creating new identities and subjectivities. According to the author, against this scenario of incorporation of the counterculture practices by mercantile logic, it would be necessary to create new forms of experience, consumption and appropriation of spaces in a collective and critical way beyond the field of ideas. According to Mouffe, “every hegemonic order is susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices, i. e. practices which will attempt to disarticulate the existing order” (2007, p. 3). Therefore “what is needed is widening the field of artistic intervention, by intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the programme of total social mobilisation of capitalism. The objective should be to undermine the imaginary environment necessary for its reproduction” (MOUFFE, 2007, p. 1).

Coming back to Didi-Huberman, if it is in darkness that the lights of the fireflies are more seen and able to illuminate – albeit in a precarious way and for a short time – the points, where they burn, may be the best way for the actions, which want to establish themselves as resistances, is to leave the focus of the bright lights of consensus and to go back to darkness. It is what the group of *pixadores* seem to seek, in the past four years they have achieved certain visibility precisely because of their constant escapes from the attempts of capture they have been imposed on.

In October 2008, the 28th São Paulo Biennial, even before its opening, generated polemic by presenting the concept of a completely empty second floor, that was painted white, which draw the attention of *pixadores* who had already promoted similar actions in the Centro Universitário Belas Artes [University Centre for Fine Arts] and in the Galeria Choque Cultural [Culture Shock Gallery] both in São Paulo.¹¹ A big security scheme was organised in the attempt to restrain the action:

“We know that they are inviting people from the suburbs of the city to do this (*pixar the Biennial*),¹² and these people do not know what they will find. Generally, who does this kind of action does it at night, but here they

¹¹ São Paulo Biennial opens on Saturday with the menace of pichação. Published on October 24th 2008. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/ilustrada/ult90u459724.shtml>>. Access on June 23rd 2012.

¹² We put brackets.

do not know what they are going to be involved in. It is a public space and there will be many security guards”, another curator of the Biennial, Ana Paula Cohen affirmed.¹³

Nevertheless this scheme did not impede that about forty people, who entered as visitors tagged walls and pilasters of the empty floor on the first day of the event. The action would be a way of putting the limits of art¹⁴ under discussion. Caroline Pivetta da Mota, the only *pixadora* of the group who was arrested by the police – and who was kept arrested for 54 days –, alleged, in the audience about the case, that the attack had been an artistic manifestation.¹⁵ Nonetheless the organisation of the event condemned the fact as an act of vandalism and disrespect; they immediately removed the *pixações* and reinforced the security of the Biennial.¹⁶

The tension between the forms of perception and acceptance of *pixação* became a little stronger, when in July 2009, the *pixador* and cinegraphist Djan Ivson, called Cripta, was invited by the Cartier Foundation, of Paris, to tag the façade of a building in the French capital as part of the programme of the exhibition “Born in the streets – Graffiti”. The documentary “Pixo”, directed by Roberto T. Oliveira and João Wainer, was also part of the event; it shows the actuation of *pixadores* of the city of São Paulo. According to Cripta, the invitation indicates a change in the view on *pixação* on the part of the artistic milieu: “Now it’s ‘pixo’s turn! It’s the hot thing of the art world [...]. The art circuit only did not acknowledge it, because they simply rejected it. But now they begin to see its importance”.¹⁷

The evolution of the trajectory continues when in April 2010, the *pixadores* are invited to participate in the 29th São Paulo Biennial.

¹³ *Idem* note 12.

¹⁴ Group invades the Biennial and tags the second floor. Published on October 26th 2008. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/ilustrada/ult90u460634.shtml>>. Access on: July 23rd 2012.

¹⁵ *Pixadora* of the Biennial says, in audience, that the act was an artistic manifestation. Published on February 17th 2009. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/cotidiano/ult95u505370.shtml>>. Access on July 23rd 2012.

¹⁶ Organisation of the Biennial removes *pixações* and reinforces security. Published on October 28th 2008. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/ilustrada/ult90u461213.shtml>>. Access on: July 23rd 2012.

¹⁷ *Pixadores* of the city of São Paulo are outstanding in a retrospective in France. Published on July 4th 2009. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/ilustrada/ult90u590688.shtml>>. Access on: July 23rd 2012.

The invitation generates a big polemic, with contrary and favourable manifestations for the most diverse reasons. Some artists deplored the choice of the *pixadores* to the detriment of other artists in search of exhibition space, whereas others considered it an interesting bet. On the other hand, some *pixadores* contested the invitation, alleging that it would reflect an attempt to domesticate the activity.¹⁸ In an interview to *Folha de S. Paulo*, Moacir dos Anjos, curator of the 29th Biennial, declared that the purpose of the invitation to the *pixadores* was to stimulate the discussion and not to absorb the practice of *pixação* into the gallery, where, according to him, it would only become a remembrance of the activity: “our bet is to discover new forms of dealing with the topic with the integrity of both parties, without institution and *pixadores* completely yielding to the universe of the other one”.¹⁹ According to Pivetta, who was imprisoned because of the attack on the former Biennial, the invitation would reflect the fear of the curatorship with respect to the past event: “I think that they were a little afraid, I don’t know, a little apprehensive, you know? Of the kind ‘let’s join them, you know’. Even because I think that we [*pixadores*] are much stronger than they [Biennial].”²⁰

This strength was shown already on the first day of the Biennial, when Cripta tagged the work “*Bandeira Branca*” [White Flag], by the artist Nuno Ramos, with the phrase “*Liberte os urubu (sic)*” [Free the black vulture (sic)]. The work had already caused polemic because it kept two black vultures captured in its structure.²¹ On the second day it was the turn of the work “*Dito, Não Dito, Interdito*” [“Said, Unsaid, not

¹⁸ “Pixo” at São Paulo Biennial provokes separation in arts. Published on April 15th 2010. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/721033-pixo-na-bienal-de-sao-paulo-provoca-racha-nas-artes.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

¹⁹ Moacir dos Anjos, in an interview to *Folha de S. Paulo*. “Pixo’ questions limits which separate art and politics”, curator of SP Biennial says. Published on April 15th 2010. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/720657-pixo-questiona-limites-que-separam-arte-e-politica-diz-curador-da-bienal-de-sp.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

²⁰ Invitation reveals fear of Biennial, imprisoned *pixadora* in 2008 says. Published on September. 17th 2010. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrissima/800387-convite-revela-medo-da-bienal-diz-pichadora-presena-2008.shtml>>. Access on June 23rd 2012.

²¹ Polemical work of the São Paulo Fine Art Biennial is *pixador’s* target. Published on September 25th 2010. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/804784-obra-polemica-da-bienal-de-artes-de-sp-e-alvo-de-pichador.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

to be Said”], by the artist Kboco and the architect Roberto Loeb, to get the intervention of a *pixador* known as *Invasor* [Invader].^{22,23} At this point, the Biennial is again involved in the debate on the limits between art, politics and vandalism.

In a continuous deployment, in 2012, Cripta himself used the attack on Nuno Ramos’ work, together with other materials on the practice of *pixação* in the city of São Paulo, in the film *São Paulo, mon amour*, written by him.

The following step was done when the *pixadores* Cripta, Biscoito, William and R.C., of the “*Pixação*” movement, were invited to offer a workshop at the Berlin Biennial. The event would take place in a historic church of the city; the inner walls of the church were covered with white paper to be used by the participants. Nevertheless the *pixadores* climbed on the areas, which were protected by the paper, and tagged the walls of the church. When the organisers perceived what was being done, they would have said that they had no authorisation to tag on those places, to which the *pixadores* answered: “That’s fine. If they don’t want us to tag, we’re going to tag. It’s no use intending to control the uncontrollable”. The action was completed when Cripta threw paint on the curator of the Berlin Biennial, Artur Zmijewski, who stroke back. They called the police, but the group was not arrested, due to the public’s reactions and to the explanation that its members were guests of the Biennial. Cripta stated to *Folha de S. Paulo* that “you cannot give a *pixação* workshop, because *pixação* only occurs through transgression and in the context of the street”. And he completed: “they invited us because they wanted to know our ‘*pixação*’. Well, they got to know it”.²³ The church was closed to have the damages repaired²⁴ and the curator classified the action as

²² Second day of the Biennial has another work tagged. Published on September 27th 2010. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/805143-segundo-dia-da-bienal-tem-nova-obra-pichada.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

²³ Citizen of São Paulo “tags” curator of the Berlin Biennial. Published on June 13th 2012. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/1104025-paulista-picha-curador-da-bienal-de-berlim.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

²⁴ Church tagged by Brazilians in Berlin is interdicted for indeterminate time. Published on June 14th 2012. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/1104868-igreja-pichada-por-brasileiros-em-berlim-esta-interditada-por-tempo-indeterminado.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

an “irresponsibility”, which hides itself behind the argument of “act of transgression”.²⁵

It is possible to draw a parallel between the trajectory of the *pixadores* and that of the graffiti artists, we presented above. Both activities emerge from the urban context, with counter-hegemonic characteristics and few aspirations besides freely manifesting their ideas, causes, dissatisfactions and marks in the city. But both reach new environments and visibilities. And it is at that moment that they seem to separate.

The invitations to the biennials as well as to the concession of the pilasters of the underground and their transformation into museums can be seen as attempts to make the practices of urban intervention consensual, permitted, hegemonic. However to the contrary of graffiti, places, conditions and specific moments, which are conceded and permitted, do not seem to fit in with the essence of the activity of *pixação*, which is precisely characterised by appropriation, improvisation, challenge, contestation, marginality. By attempting to include *pixação* in the consensual artistic logics, these invitations can be seen as an attempt to darken it by removing its character of conflict, struggle and antagonistic effort, as they have been partly doing with graffiti. It is the light which is thrown on the fireflies in order to obfuscate them. But they do not recognise themselves in that space, hence they go back to darken and subvert it. In this movement, they design a scene of dissensus (RANCIÈRE, 1996) and promote a reconfiguration of the experience which is proposed for these spaces and moments.

Rancière (1996) explains the configuration of a scene of dissensus as the proposition of contexts of communicative situations which construct the subjects’ positions in a scenario that is not given beforehand: it occurs like the configuration of a specific space, the partition of a particular sphere of experience, of objects, which are put as common and derived from a common decision, of subjects who are recognised as able to designate these objects and argue about them. Thus, accord-

²⁵ According to German curator, Brazilian *pichadores*’ act was irresponsibility. Published on June 15th 2010. Available on: <<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/1105215-para-curador-alemao-ato-de-pichadores-brasileiros-foi-irresponsabilidade.shtml>>. Access on: June 23rd 2012.

ing to Rancière, the dissensual interlocution develops itself precisely in situations in which no scene existed *a priori* in order to regulate the interlocution partners or the questions belonging to the domain of the common. It is in the scenes of dissensus that consensual forms of expression and the framing of the world are challenged by means of a communication which invents ways of being, seeing and saying and configure new subjects and new forms of collective enunciation. And this potential of invention/creation derives from the fact that dissensus establishes a conflict between a sensible presentation of the world and the ways of producing meaning about it.

To be counted as a part of these scenes is directly linked to the acknowledgment of the subjects as beings of word and of language, in opposition to the noise, which only emits pleasure or pain:

Between the language of those who have no name and the moo of the beings without name, there is no situation of linguistic exchange which can be constituted; there are no rules or code for a discussion. This verdict does not only reflect the obstinacy of the dominant or their ideological blindness. It strictly expresses the order of the sensible, which organises their domination, which is the very domination (RANCIÈRE, 1996, p. 37).

It is the difference between the power of the word and the instinct of the noise which defines the count – or not – of the parties that integrate a community. Now, the very designation of the *pixação* acts as art, protest, vandalism, crime, etc. is that which will differentiate if they will be listened to as words or only as noises in these contexts and in others in which the practice inserts itself. As long as graffiti was seen as an illegitimate activity, it was treated as a crime. Its consent and the designation as art transformed its conditions of visibility. The *pixadores* are not seen in the same way as the artist in the spaces of the biennials and therefore their language is not acknowledged as such, but only as an undesirable noise. The acknowledgment as a part to be counted is fundamental to that kind of visibility each practice is able to achieve.

Nevertheless there is dis-identification of the *pixadores* with respect to the identity, to the place, to the way of doing in which the curator-

ship of the biennials have attempted to fit them. They seem to prefer being counted as uncounted – where they can remain and practise their activities according to their conviction – than accepting the place one attempts to bring them in line with, where the essence of the *pixação* practices seems to be sublimated. They refuse a name, a place and so they create a scene of dissensus on the basis of the (re)articulation of a type of discourse which, as much as the efforts of the curatorship's attempt to point to the contrary, has been excluded from the aims of these events: the intrinsically urban, improvised, contesting and uncontrollable character of the activity. Then they make politics:

Politics is primarily a conflict over the existence of a common stage and over the existence and status of those present on it. [...] politics does not exist, because men, through the privilege of the speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account, setting up a community by the fact of placing in common a wrong that is nothing more than this very confrontation, the contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are not, the world where there is something “between” them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count and the world where there is nothing (RANCIÈRE, 2004, p. 26-27).

According to Rancière, politics is that which opposes itself to the “police”, that is to say, to the institutions and their regulations. It is important to mention that there is no dichotomy, but a permanent tension between consensus and dissensus, police and politics. Rancière (2011) affirms that politics does not strive for a place outside the police. There is no place outside the police, but there are conflicting ways to do things with the places these ways occupy reordering them, reforming them or unfolding them. According to Rancière, politics requires the constant creation of the “common” so that it becomes open to other “commons”, which do not easily figure as forms of sensible experience of the world. And therefore, he challenges a consensual form of record and imposition of a “common” and at the same time, he establishes the possibility to oppose a common world to another world, at the same time at which

he (re)creates a dissensual scene. Hence the police and politics would express the conflicting existence of “two worlds”; the first imposes a logic of invisibility and of agreement (consensus), whereas the second reveals itself from time to time, fugacious brilliance, which appears in order to make visible, to broaden the horizon of possible and to rename/requalify spaces and that which can be seen, done and listened to in them. Hence the political bias of the *pixadores*’ actions is not characterised by a structured discourse or by the relation to specific movements or causes. Their action is political from the moment at which they expose their non-appurtenance to those spaces. They disorganise them, reconfigure them without letting themselves be captured.

Coming back to Agamben (2007), the biennial *pixações* seem to oppose themselves to the attempt to consecrate their practices, their isolation from the field of common use, the separation from the environment of the experience. According to Rancière, “a free people”:

is the one that does not know art as a separated reality, that does not know the separation of collective experiences into distinct forms called art, politics or religion. [...] The “resistance” of art promises a people to the extent that it promises its own abolition, the abolition of the distance or of the inhumanity of art. Art gains as an objective its own suppression, the transformation of its forms into forms of a common sensible world. From the French Revolution to the Soviet Revolution, the aesthetic revolution signified this self-achievement and this self-suppression of art in the construction of a new life, in which art, politics, economy or culture would amalgamate into one and the same form of collective life (RANCIÈRE, 2007, p. 134).

Art may not be art for the one who produced it. In this indifference, it promises a people that is free like the non-art which is being done: free from the definitions, separations and labels, which separate art from life. By continuing to subvert their invitations to enter the world of consent and artistic acknowledgement, the *pixadores*, resist limiting their works to the title of “art” and of all which it would imply. But it is not possible to deny that these incursions in the artistic environment, in some way or other, modify the gaze at these forms of expression. During this four-

year trajectory, the *pixadores* achieved the visibility of the media, of the public and of the institutions in a way they, possibly, never had achieved before. While they contested the new place they were given, they also took some advantage of it by appearing as interlocutors of the discussions they gave rise to.

Our purpose here is not to make a value judgement between the trajectories we presented and each of the practices which were developed in them, but only to present the forms in which the power institutions have tried to control the practices of urban interventions and the practitioners' possibilities to respond to these efforts. The tension between "police" and "politics" (RANCIÈRE, 1996) is present all the time in this context: organisation versus resistance, hegemony versus counterculture, art versus vandalism, consecration versus profanation, light of the projectors versus flickers of the fireflies. It is in this tension that the potency of the intervention is maximised.

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