

# PERUS, PERUS — BY DAY NO WATER, BY NIGHT NO LIGHT: COLLECTIVITIES, SCHOOL, ART, AND TERRITORY

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines established and seemingly immutable forms of knowledge, articulating reflections grounded in the recognition of the peripheral neighbourhood of Perus, located in the north-western zone of the city of São Paulo. This territory has historically been marked by the stigma of water and electricity shortages, while simultaneously standing out for the creative vitality of artistic collectives such as Ocupação Artística Canhoba — home to the Grupo de Teatro Pandora — and Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué. These collectives offer multiple possibilities for connecting art, community, and public education, in dialogue with a symbolic and material element of the territory: the Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus. Theoretical references include Henri Lefebvre (1968/2011) and Tiaraju Pablo D'Andrea (2013, 2020), the text engages with the urban, artistic, and educational fields of peripheral studies in their broadest sense, seeking to relate peripheral subjects — still underrepresented — at their intersection: basic education students, cultural projects developed in and by the “quebradas” of the city (a colloquial term commonly used in Brazil to refer to peripheral neighbourhoods), collectivities, and possible new horizons. Methodologically, the reflections derive from practices developed in a public school, involving participants and mediated through artistic languages. The findings suggest that actions involving art and local collectivities can be fundamental in disrupting the logic that frames the periphery solely as a place defined by historical deprivations.

## KEYWORDS

artistic collectives, peripheries, city and community, art in school, neighbourhood of Perus

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# PERUS, PERUS, DE DIA FALTA ÁGUA E DE NOITE FALTA LUZ: COLETIVIDADES, ESCOLA, ARTE E TERRITÓRIO

## RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo aproximar-se do questionamento sobre saberes já consolidados e aparentemente imutáveis, articulando reflexões produzidas a partir do reconhecimento do bairro periférico de Perus, localizado na Zona Noroeste da cidade de São Paulo. Trata-se de um território historicamente marcado pelo estigma das faltas de luz e água, mas também pela potência criativa de coletivos artísticos, como a Ocupação Artística Canhoba, sede do Grupo de Teatro Pandora, e a Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué. Esses coletivos proporcionam diferentes possibilidades de relação entre arte, comunidade e educação pública, em diálogo com um elemento simbólico e material presente no território: a Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus. Tendo como referenciais teóricos principais autores como Henri Lefebvre (1968/2011) e Tiaraju Pablo

D'Andrea (2013, 2020), o texto tangencia os campos de estudos periféricos urbanos, artísticos e educacionais, em sua forma ampla, e busca relacionar sujeitos e sujeitas periféricas, ainda pouco visibilizados(as) em intersecção: estudantes da educação básica, projetos culturais das e nas “quebradas” da cidade (termo utilizado comumente para se referir aos bairros periféricos no Brasil), coletividades e novos horizontes possíveis. Metodologicamente, as reflexões partem de práticas desenvolvidas em uma escola pública, envolvendo os(as) sujeitos(as) e mediadas pelas linguagens artísticas. Como possíveis conclusões, verifica-se que as ações realizadas com a arte e as coletividades do território podem ser fundamentais para romper a lógica de que a periferia é apenas o lugar das faltas a ela historicamente atribuídas.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

coletivos artísticos, periferias, cidade e comunidade, arte na escola, bairro de Perus

### 1. SÃO PAULO: A COLLECTIVE WORK BY MANY PEOPLE

The city of São Paulo, covering 1,521.110 km<sup>2</sup> and with a population of 11,451.999<sup>1</sup>, presents significant potential for exploration within the educational context for educators, children, and adolescents. Territory is understood not only in its geographical sense but also through the broader relational dynamics that unfold within it, simultaneously shaping it. Conferring particular characteristics on both those who engage with them and those who inhabit them, territories may at times be considered peripheral, at other times central — producing culture that is more or less recognised across different circuits, or generating that which is ignored or selectively acknowledged. It is precisely these dynamics that this article seeks to examine. What is visible and what remains unseen, and what role does formal education play in these processes? The analysis begins with recognition of the value of educational processes within the relationships formed among groups and individuals who shape the territory, not solely within the school institution, which is enriched when these interactions are put into dialogue with the surrounding environment.

Peripheral territories have long been depicted as spaces of poverty and violence (D'Andrea, 2013), with their populations regarded as surplus (Davis, 2005/2016) and denied not only fundamental rights such as health, food, housing, and education but also recognition of their cultural expressions and potential as culture producers. Consequently, their cultural outputs and the resulting relational, affective, and political networks necessary for development, expansion, and permanence — sometimes essential — have been silenced. Permanence, in this context, is understood as a means of fostering a sense of belonging to a place visited not merely for sustenance but also for sharing everyday scenes akin to those experienced in schools. These spaces intersect with the existing artistic manifestations in the territory, which are recognised as crucial to its cultural vitality.

Given the physical and emotional fragmentation imposed on individuals — often individualised and sometimes shaped to meet the expectations of neoliberal frameworks — questions arise regarding the existence and substance of spaces that foster cultural

<sup>1</sup> Data relating to the year 2022 (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, n.d.).

life, and the extent to which such life, when present, contributes to the creative potential inherent in the territory. It becomes apparent that the rich existence and intellectual production of peripheral communities, or “quebradas”, a term whose use and appropriation allows engagement with the periphery from within, rather than understanding it solely as a marginal space. Understanding the “quebrada”<sup>2</sup> from within the “quebrada” enables engagement with alternative forms of political practice in the contemporary historical context, while also revealing organised and capable structures that present other possible political projects for society. Drawing on Milton Santos (1996/2002, 1978/2022, 2000/2023), the territory is understood as living and continually constructed — not merely physical space but also the relationships produced within it, which simultaneously shape it. It is a collective work created by all, including children. The aim is to recognise certain groups and their forms of creation and life, which may or may not engender a sense of belonging to a place through everyday relationships. Attention is therefore directed to the margins — not to assert marginality but to reflect on its meaning and to ask whether those outside the margins occupy any centrality, and under what conditions.

Engagement with the *Manifesto Território do Povo* (Territory of the People Manifesto; Povo, 2016), collectively produced by various peripheral collectives at the Escola Municipal de Ensino Fundamental (EMEF) Sócrates Brasileiro in Campo Limpo, São Paulo, documents the occupation and revitalisation of a vacant lot and the subsequent creation of a Cultural Hall. This space hosts artistic gatherings, workshops, meetings, and artistic performances involving schools, students, and the broader community of the city’s south zone. The potential of this school, often regarded as perpetually declining and irrecoverable, is interrogated. The institution was “planted” even as its capacities, staff salaries, and study and working conditions were gradually eroded. Field research in peripheral schools revealed spaces that foster other futures, particularly through collectivities and artistic languages. Key questions include: which relationships within schools support the potential present in peripheral territories to overcome the dichotomy of periphery/poverty<sup>3</sup>? How can engagement with the surrounding environment strengthen the dialogue among school, territory, and art to promote collective learning with under-represented students? (D’Andrea, 2013).

Another municipal school was identified in the Perus neighbourhood, north-west São Paulo, which, like EMEF Sócrates Brasileiro, aimed to establish dialogues with local artistic collectives. This engagement facilitated reflection not merely on documenting a successful experience but on the articulation within and across “quebradas” and the production of alternative forms of life, still little known or resisted. Are other political or artistic projects emerging elsewhere in the city?

<sup>2</sup> “[Brazil, Informal] A neighbourhood located on the outskirts of a city, generally of modest means” (Priberam Dicionário, n. d., para. 8).

<sup>3</sup> These and other questions were further explored during the course *Infância e Cidade: Tópicos em Educação e Ciências Sociais* (Childhood and the City: Topics in Education and Social Sciences), taken in the first semester of 2021 as part of the doctoral programme, and taught by professor Márcia Aparecida Gobbi at the Faculty of Education, University of São Paulo.

Existing dialogues between Escola Municipal de Ensino Fundamental Júlio de Oliveira in Perus and artistic collectives provide opportunities to document experiences that draw on the creative potential of artistic languages, reinforcing the elements of “culture and potency” (D’Andrea, 2013, p. 132) among culture-producing individuals. These actions, presented here as scenes, demonstrate that the long-standing adage — “Perus, Perus: by day no water, by night no light” — spoken for decades by residents of the neighbourhood and surrounding areas, and widely known among many inhabitants of São Paulo as a reference to the district, whose origin is lost in oral tradition passed down through generations. The expression refers to historical interruptions in water and electricity, could be reconsidered, recognising that the peripheral territory is not solely defined by deficiencies.

To examine the dialogue between school and territory, the article highlights artistic initiatives conducted in three cultural facilities within the Territory of Cultural and Landscape Interest<sup>4</sup> (TICP). These initiatives provide alternatives to consumerist urban culture and foster connections with traditional arts. They are: Ocupação Artística Canhoba, home to the Grupo de Teatro Pandora, originally intended as a reading centre but occupied by the community due to public neglect<sup>5</sup>, now functions as a vibrant performing arts space; Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué, initiated by local youth, has, for sixteen years, developed significant work with African-rooted cultural expressions such as theatre, dance, performance, music, and circus; Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus (Perus Portland Cement Factory), established in 1924, which was the site of a significant labour strike — the largest in Brazil between 1962 and 1969 (Ansara, 2009) — in response to inhumane working conditions imposed by the employer J. J. Abdalla, known as the “bad boss”. The site is now protected as part of São Paulo’s material and immaterial heritage.

This article is divided into four sections: (1) São Paulo: A Collective Work by Many People, introducing the key issues; (2) Perus, Perus — By Day No Water, by Night No Light... and Is That All?, presenting the Perus neighbourhood within the Territory of Cultural and Landscape Interest and the three cultural facilities (Ocupação Artística Canhoba/Grupo de Teatro Pandora, Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué, and Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus); (3) When New Characters Entered the School: Minor Scenes, Other Possible Futures, detailing initiatives in the school involving local cultural collectives. This section is divided into two scenes highlighting critical issues for the article’s argument, prompting reflection on the school as a fundamental space for constructing peripheral political and artistic projects and challenging organisational forms that perpetuate neoliberal extremism and the erosion of educational imagination, as highlighted

<sup>4</sup> Established under Article 314 of Municipal Law No. 16.050 of 31 July 2014, which approved the Urban Development Policy and the Strategic Master Plan of the Municipality of São Paulo (<https://legislacao.prefeitura.sp.gov.br/leis/lei-16050-de-31-de-julho-de-2014>).

<sup>5</sup> A similar situation occurred in the occupations Cine Campinho, in Guaianazes-SP (<https://www.instagram.com/cinecampinho>); a public square in the Arthur Alvim neighbourhood, occupied by the Coletivo Dolores Boca Aberta (<https://www.instagram.com/doloresbocaaberta>); and the Casa do Hip Hop, in Perus-SP (<https://www.instagram.com/casadolohipopperus>), which were occupied and transformed by collectives, among other spaces that were abandoned by public authorities. Information is available on the collectives’ websites and social media pages.

by Freire (1996): “hence the hopeless, fatalistic, anti-utopian character of such an ideology, in which education is forged as a coldly technicist practice requiring an educator skilled in accommodation to the world rather than its transformation” (p. 53); (4) Some Possible Conclusions, acknowledging that conclusions remain tentative.

## 2. PERUS, PERUS — BY DAY NO WATER, BY NIGHT NO LIGHT... AND IS THAT ALL?

Located on the far north-western edge of São Paulo, the district of Perus carries the reputation of having, throughout its history, sought to separate itself from the metropolis and follow its own path. However, the idea — whose origin is unknown and has become one more of the city's urban legends — did not take root, and it remains a peripheral neighbourhood with many particularities, histories, and struggles to tell. Day by day, it asserts itself as a cultural force in a city that, for many people, is limited to what lies within — or is understood as — the central perimeter. It is necessary to reflect on what is considered to be “at the centre” of the city and what, or who, lies at its margins. What constitutes the centre and what constitutes the periphery? Researchers and scholars (D'Andrea, 2013; Lefebvre, 1968/2011; Santos, 1996/2002; Spivak, 2010), particularly within the Social Sciences, have devoted decades to this question, which will not be addressed here as an object of reflection due to the limitations of an article. Nevertheless, some provocations are proposed; after all, when one says that one works in Perus, the usual question follows: but is Perus part of São Paulo? Rolnik (1995), when discussing what constitutes the city, reflects on its borders, which may be apparent or not. In the case of Perus, a border that permeates the imaginary of São Paulo's residents confronts us daily, segregating this neighbourhood from the great metropolis.

Economically, the neighbourhood is characterised as a dormitory district, where most residents commute daily — mainly via the Rubi railway line of the Companhia Paulista de Trens Metropolitanos (São Paulo Metropolitan Train Company) — to work in the city's central areas. Data from the Mapa da Desigualdade (Map of Inequality; Figure 1), produced by Rede Nossa São Paulo (2023), indicate that the municipality ranks 84th in terms of average monthly earnings from formal employment, with an average income of R\$2,506.43.

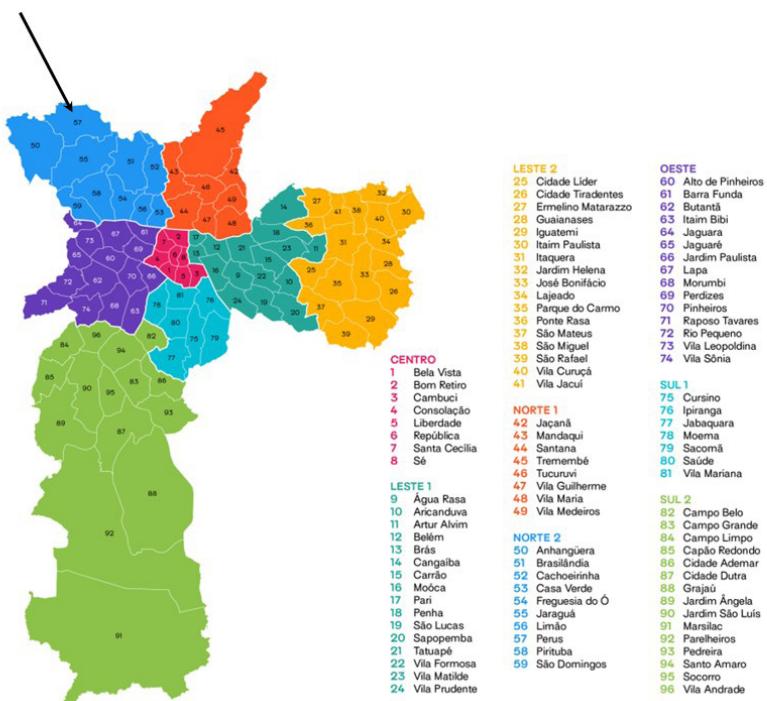


Figure 1. Map of the city of São Paulo with an arrow indicating the location of the district of Perus, in the North-west Zone

Source. Adapted from Rede Nossa São Paulo (2023, <https://institutocidadessustentaveis.shinyapps.io/mapadesigualdadesaopaulo/>)

Following the enactment of Municipal Law No. 16,050, of 31 July 2014 (Lei nº 16.050, de 31 de julho de 2014, 2014), the Perus region was recognised as a TICP and considered an area of cultural potential, with relevant material and immaterial urban elements, as well as environmental potential for the city.

Article 315, Law No. 16,050, of 31 July 2014 (Lei nº 16.050, de 31 de julho de 2014, 2014), establishes the objectives of the TICP; among them, we highlight those we believe to be most closely related to the experiences described in this text:

II – to broaden the scope of the principle of the right to the city, ensuring cultural citizenship, tolerance, and respect for cultural, social, ethnic, and sexual diversity through access to culture, education, and the arts; III – to value the city's memory and identity, at both local and regional levels; ( ... ) V – to promote, especially in TICPs located in areas of greater social vulnerability, the development of autonomous cultural collectives, encouraging their interaction with educational, research, cultural, and other institutions, in ways that enable understanding of local and regional historical, environmental, and artistic processes. (art. 315, cls. II, III e V)

Thus, for this article, we focus on two artistic collectives: Ocupação Canhoba/Grupo de Teatro Pandora and Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué, as well as a material and immaterial element present in the territory, the Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus, which, beyond the ruins it currently occupies, preserves stories, legends, and memories of the struggles of the workers of that space, highlighting its artistic potential and how these

collectives have engaged with the work in performing arts carried out at the school. In a way, the choice of these collectives is based on the work they have developed with artistic languages in the territory and how these have established themselves as possibilities for alternative futures, breaking with the prevailing neoliberal logic — a movement also present in various other collectives across São Paulo, encompassing marginal literature, theater groups, *samba* communities, artistic gatherings, film clubs, among other activities (D'Andrea, 2013).

Silvia Federici (2014) acknowledges that urban gardens in the United States were fundamental starting points for reflecting on shared spaces in the city and functioned as “spaces for meeting and socialisation, knowledge production, and cultural and international exchange” (p. 150). Her statement allows us to recover other initiatives, such as the Clubes de Mães (Mothers’ Clubs) that existed in the South Zone of São Paulo in the 1980s (Sader, 1988), which were crucial for the education and formation of women during this period of struggle against the dictatorship. Among the activities carried out by these clubs, discussions and training on feminist practices, as well as on different ways of being a woman, stand out. Democratic processes were strongly nurtured in these groups, fostering collective relationships. It is worth highlighting that, alongside the U.S. urban gardens and those also existing in the East Zone of São Paulo, created by a group called Mulheres do GAU (Martins et al., 2021), as well as collectives of educators and other cultural actors, spaces and relationships have been constructed — sometimes more, sometimes less consolidated — that share objectives fundamental to fostering, among other aspects, a sense of belonging and place-making.

Occupying the roles of pedagogical coordinator, arts educator, and researcher during doctoral studies, and of professor at a public university in the State of São Paulo, this reflection addresses the presence of a group of adolescents attending theatre workshops in the Vocational Programme<sup>6</sup>, whose mobilisation led to the creation of the Grupo de Teatro Pandora in 2004. Years later, the group, with the support of other collectives from the neighbourhood and the local population, occupied a space that the municipality had intended for a reading area, which until that moment had been used as a spot for drug trafficking and violence. Thus, Ocupação Canhoba emerged. By believing, along with Henri Lefebvre (1968/2011), that the city is a work produced daily by its inhabitants, this represents a significant example in which use-value is reclaimed and ceases to yield to exchange-value — that is, to the outright commodification of the city’s — or to relationships that are perversely sustained, such as violence and other exploitative uses. Lefebvre (1968/2011), when discussing human needs in the context of the right to the city, analyses: “the need for a creative activity, for work (and not merely for consumable products and goods), the needs for information, symbolism, imagination, and playful activities” (p. 105).

The Ocupação Canhoba is also part of the TICP, serving as one of the neighbourhood’s cultural facilities that has played a significant role for the local population. The

<sup>6</sup> The meeting space was the Centro Educacional Unificado Perus, within the artistic workshops of the Programa Vocacional (Vocational Programme), which “is a cultural citizenship project of the city of São Paulo” (Secretaria Municipal de Cultura e Economia Criativa, 2020, para. 6).

space occupied by the Group has been its base for performances and also hosts other collectives from the city of São Paulo. The Group maintains partnerships with various schools, organises diverse events, theatre workshops, and other artistic language workshops, and collaborates with other social movements in the neighbourhood. What emerges are relationships in which hospitality, the questioning of the abusive use of power, and the strong presence of knowledge from and within the peripheries — or the production of knowledge of the “quebradas” — are mobilised and acknowledged, with the school not simply granting validation but participating jointly in this process, in a two-way construction of knowledge. This was also observed by another collective on the other side of the city, the Coletivo Sarau do Binho, located in Campo Limpo, in the southern zone of São Paulo, which similarly envisioned the school as a welcoming space and partner in building affective ties and knowledge:

schools thus appear in our lives through different paths and ways of understanding them, as transformative spaces and spaces of life. ( ...) From that point on, many schools began to create their own artistic gatherings with the autonomy of these students. (Soares, 2021, p. 73)

Another collective in the neighbourhood is the Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué, founded in 2005 by a group of young residents. Quilombaqué has been involved in art since its inception, serving as a unifying force that brings together young people and adolescents. The name derives from the combination of the words *quilo* (*quilombo*) and *baque* (drumming), and the collective’s main aim is “to promote production and dissemination, providing residents, especially young people, with opportunities to experiment, enjoy, and express diverse forms of artistic and cultural expression, while empowering sustainable local social, educational, environmental, and economic development” (Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué, n. d., para. 4).

Building on this ideal, Quilombaqué has developed a wide range of activities within the territory. These include courses and workshops (percussion, dance, circus, marquetry, Brazilian Sign Language, writing, theatre, hip hop, graffiti, environmental education), cinema, theatre, and music activities, debates, photography and art exhibitions, sports, *festa junina* (june festival), literary and artistic gatherings, craft fairs. The community is actively involved in social initiatives, which encompass: opposition to the local landfill and racism; International Women’s Day; Children’s Day; street carnival events advocating for education; Fórum de Desenvolvimento Local (Local Development Forum); Rede de Movimentos Sociais (Social Movements Network); and the United Nations Children’s Fund Urban Platform. Through the Bloco Refúgio, the collective has carried out numerous performances and processions in the region, participated in both local neighbourhood and official city street carnivals, and established partnerships with local schools (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Memory Trail on the History of the Cement Factory and the Queixadas Movement with Students and Leisure Specialists at the 15th World Leisure Congress in São Paulo, 2018

Source. IMS (n. d., <https://ims.com.br/convida/comunidade-cultural-quilombaue/>)

Credits. Raul Silva Costa

The educational potential inherent in these activities is once again emphasised, as they exemplify a particular pedagogy of the collectives that can extend and build connections with pedagogies already established in schools, challenging them from the context in which they are lived and envisioning other possible worlds, as noted by Penha (2023) in reflecting on the actions of the *Projeto para Arte, Lazer, Cultura e Orientação* (Project for Art, Leisure, Culture and Guidance; PALCO)<sup>7</sup>, also located in a peripheral area of the city.

the place where one lives and experiences life is fundamental to the formation of subjectivity and to the construction and strengthening of social networks. Furthermore, for individuals to feel a sense of belonging to the territory, they must have the opportunity to explore it, transform it, and express themselves through it. (p. 33)

It is noteworthy that the Quilombaue Collective highlights on its website that it emerged in the periphery of one of São Paulo's districts with the lowest levels of socioeconomic and cultural development, factors that render young people highly vulnerable to the hardships of daily life and undermine their expectations for the future. This observation invites a dialogue with Davis (2005/2016), who, cited by the authors of the report "The Challenge of Slums"<sup>8</sup>, reflects on how cities have become repositories for the economically most fragile, considered human surplus, and relegated to the margins in terms of employment, income, culture, and geographical spaces. It was in this context that, 17 years ago, a group of young people emerged to challenge this logic and, not without struggle,

<sup>7</sup> The PALCO project is a social initiative "that, through networking, transforms people's lives, broadens access to art, and cultivates audiences and cultural collectives. The PALCO Project promotes and expands knowledge, access to, and interest in the arts for children, young people, adults, and older adults living in situations of social vulnerability" (Palco, n.d., paras. 1–2).

<sup>8</sup> "The Challenge of Slums" is a report that addresses issues, perspectives, and various data on these communities. The full document can be consulted at: <https://unhabitat.org/the-challenge-of-slums-global-report-on-human-settlements-2003>.

resistance, and “firmeza permanente” (enduring resolve — a motto borrowed from the Queixadas movement initiated by local workers), established themselves as a powerful cultural hub in the area.

The motto “enduring resolve”, which expressed resistance grounded in non-violence, marked the strike of workers at the Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus that began in 1962 (Centro de Memória Queixadas, n.d.), led by the trade union lawyer Mário Carvalho de Jesus and the trade unionist João Breno.

Enduring resolve is by no means a cowardly submission to oppressors. On the contrary, it opposes violence and tyranny with complete determination.

The *queixada* (nickname given to the workers of Perus due to their courage and solidarity) continuously strives to overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth, and hatred with love. (Pires, et al., 1997, p. 14)

Regarding the struggles of the Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué (Cultural Community Quilombaqué), it was recently compelled to carry out a crowdfunding campaign to acquire the land where it is located to avoid eviction (Em Movimentos, 2020), which highlights the perverse capitalist logic of the city that does not allow uses of its territory other than those directed towards capital and real estate speculation. As Neiman (2021) observes, “producing another urban space implies recognising other experiences and ways of inhabiting the city beyond the imposed abstraction of the white, male, adult, and productive citizen, which segregates access to the right to the city” (p. 228).

Another material and immaterial element in the Perus territory is the Portland Cement Factory, a place of great importance to the region’s economic development that was decommissioned in 1983 and now lies in ruins. From the factory’s ruins — and, above all, from the relationships that persist among the community, at times tense — a new cultural movement in Perus has emerged.

The Municipal Council listed the 327,000 m<sup>2</sup> comprising the Portland Cement Factory for the Conselho Municipal de Preservação do Patrimônio Histórico, Cultural e Ambiental da Cidade de São Paulo (Preservation of Historical, Cultural, and Environmental Heritage of the City of São Paulo) in 1992. Nevertheless, this appears to be a territory destined for ongoing struggles. While it was once the site of a workers’ strike, today the battle is led by collectives and social movements in the neighbourhood against real estate speculation, which disregards heritage and seeks to build real estate developments that ignore the factory’s material and immaterial significance. This exemplifies, once again, the resistance of urban collectives against the perverse logics of capitalism and neoliberalism. A comparison can be drawn with the reflections of professor and researcher Ana Mae Barbosa (2023), who cites an episode in São Paulo in September 2015, when the government, aiming to meet the demands of real estate speculation, attempted to sell public school land, provoking a widespread movement under the slogan “Don’t Close My School”. As Guimarães (2016) notes, the Movimento pela Reapropriação da Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus (Movement for the Reappropriation of the Perus Portland Cement Factory) aims to establish the Centro de Memória do Trabalhador (Workers’ Memory Centre) on the site. It has

relied on partnerships with civil society, collectives, neighbourhood movements, and the Free and Collaborative University (Figure 3 and Figure 4).

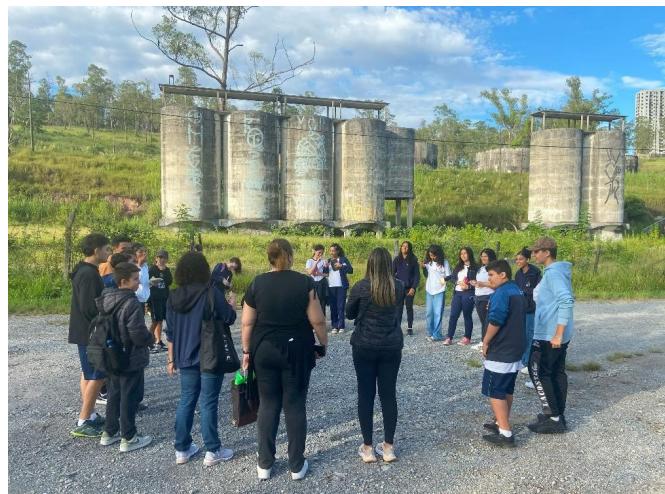


Figure 3. Activity within the factory premises with 8th-grade classes, 2025

Credits. Adriano Pinheiro



Figure 4. Activity within the factory premises with 8th-grade classes, 2025

Credits. Adriano Pinheiro

Therefore, it is through the dialogue established between the cultural facilities — Ocupação Canhoba/Grupo de Teatro Pandora, Quilomboque, and Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus — and EMEF Júlio de Oliveira that the actions reported below were developed. These scenes also consider the peripheral territories as producers of culture, overcoming the poverty/violence dichotomy so firmly entrenched until the 1990s, and fostering alternative subjectivities assigned to the city of São Paulo's peripheries (D'Andrea, 2013).

### 3. WHEN NEW CHARACTERS ENTERED THE SCHOOL: MINOR SCENES, OTHER POSSIBLE FUTURES

#### 3.1. SCENE 1: WHEN A SCHOOL-BASED RESEARCH OCCUPIES AND PRODUCES ALONGSIDE THE TERRITORY

The relationships between the school and the artistic collectives intensified, taking shape in curricular actions that expanded qualitatively, not only from the perspective of formal learning but also through the construction of relational practices in the composition of the territory. It can be affirmed, drawing inspiration from the classic text by Sader (1988), that new characters entered the scene. In this experience, even though school culture rejected it for not recognising its contents, the support of municipal educational legislation, such as the Municipal Secretary of Education Ordinance — SME No. 5.930, of 14 October 2013 (SME N° 5.930, de 14 de outubro de 2013, 2013), was fundamental to formalising this relationship.

From that point onwards, the collaborative authorship work described in the *Plano de Navegação do Autor: Caderno do Professor* (Author's Navigation Plan: Teacher's Notebook; Secretaria Municipal de Educação, 2014), an educational proposal created during Mayor Fernando Haddad's administration (2013–2016), became part of the curriculum of the authorship cycle<sup>9</sup>, to foster a proposal for social intervention in the reality in which the school is embedded, through research work guided by teachers. It should be emphasised that this was not an intervention but a partnership gradually built between the school and the collective, in which memories are contested within the curriculum alongside content that privileges supposed martyrs and a history that reproduces colonialist views, with the intent of perpetuating them. The school, in relation to the territory and existing collective groups, breaks with this familiar line, so strongly present in school cultures.

Observations conducted in 2019 indicated that the group developing work on the articulation between school, territory, and neighbourhood collectives was guided by professor Carolina Trevisan and partnered with the Grupo de Teatro Pandora, which at that time presented the performance Comum (Common), based on the military dictatorship in Brazil between 1964 and 1985 and the Vala Clandestina de Perus (Clandestine Grave of Perus), where in 1990 over a thousand remains of political disappearances from this period of Brazilian history were found. The site now houses a memorial honouring the victims of the Brazilian military dictatorship. An excerpt from the performance programme and some images are presented below (Figure 5 and Figure 6):

we of Grupo Pandora experience the relationship between Theatre, Memory and Territory as a potential for the creation and strengthening of our actions. Theatre and Periphery, intertwined affections, possible intersections in shared experiences. Floating territories. Memory as an act of resistance

<sup>9</sup> The São Paulo municipal education system divides fundamental education into three cycles: the literacy cycle (1st to 3rd grade); the interdisciplinary cycle (4th to 6th grade); and the authorial cycle (7th to 9th grade).

between word and polyphony. They summon the marks, scar-memories, and historical events of a territory. (Grupo Pandora de Teatro, n. d., p. 3)



Figure 5. Scene from the performance *Comum* (Common) by Grupo Pandora de Teatro

Source. Grupo Pandora de Teatro Pandora (n. d., [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l-3srF6opBhdfe4AoXcQUjSiKrP3moGD/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1l-3srF6opBhdfe4AoXcQUjSiKrP3moGD/view?usp=drive_link))

Credits. Amanda Barboza de Lima



Figure 6. Lesson on the clandestine grave of Perus at the memorial present in the Dom Bosco Cemetery, Perus-SP

Credits. Adriano José Pinheiro

Through the intertwining of affections, memories, research, performance, and conversations with actors, students developed — as final outcomes of a collaborative authorship process — different interpretations of the theme, presented in the form of a mini-documentary (Pinheiro, 2021) and a theatrical performance, which were shared with the community at the conclusion of the project. Penha (2023) can again be cited when highlighting actions such as dialogue, protagonism, and artistic practice in schools, as in this context “students assume their creative processes and narratives, instead of reproducing or exclusively studying others’ works at a distance from the reality in which they live” (p. 223).

More recently, the school hosted activities involving actors from Grupo Pandora de Teatro, who presented performances and conducted theatre game workshops. These

activities emerged after the social distancing period during the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to foster a welcoming work environment and other expressive possibilities for children and young people. Actions developed in partnership with the young actors' collective reaffirmed the group's political role as a proponent of reflections against the violent logic of large capitalist metropolises and contemporary issues. As D'Andrea (2020) notes, the salvation of the peripheries will occur through *aquilombamento* — a continuous form of cultural and political resistance of the Afro-Brazilian community manifested in the formation of support networks, preservation of African cultural traditions, the fight for rights and autonomy, and the construction of potent relationships, ensuring that history is not left in the hands of those who control capital. We observe that the peripheries are at the moment of proposition, no longer merely lamentation.

While the memory and cultural production of peripheral territories are not recognised for their importance and complexity, it should be noted that the documentation of these acts by those involved serves as a fundamental point for reflection and encourages self-questioning and questioning of others. As a means to record to remember, and to remember so as not to forget, the project *Imprensa Jovem na Escola* (Youth Press at School), which in 2017 involved 45 adolescents, addressed a crucial question: how to reflect on territorial productions and retain future memories of the people involved in these productions, who are not usually, or ever, heard? Besides enabling investigative relationships among participants, the project sought connections with other institutions, once more facing the challenge of forging relations within and between territories through the photographic language (Pinheiro, 2023).

To this end, various formative and inclusive activities were necessary: discussion circles, seminars, photography workshops, visits to exhibitions, research into the origins of photography, and viewing documentaries and videos on photographers, as well as the photographic essay, which took place on a sunny afternoon in November at the Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus. On that occasion, the adolescents navigated the ruins of the old factory and, armed with their projects, applied the knowledge acquired about photographic language to produce their shots. This culminated in a photographic exhibition held at the Biblioteca Pública Padre José de Anchieta<sup>10</sup> (Padre José de Anchieta Public Library), which drew approximately 300 visitors. It was not merely an exhibition but an exposure to the hardships and vitality of a history that demands investigation, full consideration, and questioning.

The project *Caminhos do Concreto*<sup>11</sup> (Concrete Paths), while enabling new perspectives on the vast and potent space of the Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus, also allowed adolescents to be protagonists in their photographic creations, offering innovative

<sup>10</sup> Neighbourhood collectives and social movements have advocated changing the name of the Padre José de Anchieta Library to the José Soró Library, in honour of the late activist who had a significant influence on cultural development in the area.

<sup>11</sup> The project, developed by Professor Eunice da Mota Brito in co-authorship with the pedagogical coordinator Adriano José Pinheiro, was one of the winning projects of the Prêmio Territórios (Territórios Award) from the Tomie Ohtake Institute – 2018. As part of the award, a mini-documentary was produced, presenting the stages of the work and also contextualising the Fábrica de Cimento Portland Perus (Instituto Tomie Ohtake, 2019).

perspectives on spaces long imbued with memories of the territory (Figure 7, Figure 8 and Figure 9).



Figure 7. Image from the exhibition *Caminhos do Concreto* (Concrete Paths), 2018

Credits. Eunice da Mota Brito



Figure 8. Image from the exhibition *Caminhos do Concreto* (Concrete Paths), 2018

Credits. Eunice da Mota Brito



Figure 9. School community visiting the exhibition *Caminhos do Concreto* (Concrete Paths)

Credits. Eunice da Mota Brito

It is relevant to recall Lefebvre (1968/2011), who in *The Right to the City* observes:

necessary as science, but not sufficient, art brings to the realisation of urban society its extended meditation on life as drama and enjoyment. Moreover, and above all, art restores the meaning of the work; it offers multiple figures of time and space appropriated — not imposed, not accepted through passive resignation, but metamorphosed into work. Music shows the appropriation of time, painting and sculpture show the appropriation of space. (p. 116)

By sculpting time through their shots (Tarkovski, 1985/2010) and appropriating the ruins of the old factory with their poetics, the dialogue between school, art, and territory was once again woven, demonstrating the resistance of the periphery metamorphosed in works created by local students envisioning other possible futures.

It should also be noted that the cinematic, scenic, and photographic works cited, which articulated art, collectives, and territory, were based on the premises of reading, doing, and contextualising within artistic languages, propositions referenced in the triangular approach (Barbosa, 2001, 2007, 1991/2009), resulting in works shared with the school community at the conclusions of these processes.

### 3.2. SCENE 2: “QUILO DE QUILOMBO, BAQUE DE BATUQUE” – QUILOMBAQUE AQUILOMBAODO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

In connecting the practices of EMEF Júlio de Oliveira with the existing collectives and cultural producers of the territory, attention is drawn to the work developed by the Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué (2009), an organisation whose aim is to “empower social and educational development” (para. 3). Based on this principle, these young people from the periphery have conducted artistic workshops, lectures, theatre and dance performances, artistic gatherings, and courses, empowering the population of Perus across multiple areas.

Among the many actions carried out in the territory, Quilombaqué daily reaffirms the motto of its late principal leader, José Soró, who passed away in 2019, and who proclaimed: “ferve território!” (let the territory boil!). As noted by Tata in the Podcast “Fica Quilombaqué” (Stay Quilombaqué; Em Movimentos, 2020), the community leader also stated: “art and culture nourish the imaginary universe, which expands and amplifies the repertoire of languages, empowering the individual and their capacity to transform themselves and their surroundings”. These transformations are observable when engaging with the young people of the Comunidade Cultural Quilombaqué, further contributing to the perception of Perus as more than a district defined solely by its deficits.

Reflecting on Quilombaqué’s activities allows dialogue with Sarr (2016/2019) and his concept of “epistemic decentralisation”, as the collective’s actions aim to draw upon the resources and knowledge of African and Indigenous peoples to expand Western epistemic frameworks while simultaneously making visible and empowering the local masters

of knowledge. Other possible futures are imagined for those who understand that “the first step forward is to realise that the world encompasses possibilities far greater than what the real, under whose weight we toil, allows us to see” (Sarr, 2016/2019, p. 136).

It is also necessary to recognise the importance of African cultures being articulated with the individuals who produce them within the community (Grinberg et al., 2019). This has been Quilombaque’s ongoing work in the territory, enacted through relationships among collectives, art, schools, and the production of knowledge that is sometimes not socially legitimised.

#### 4. SOME POSSIBLE CONCLUSIONS

The collectivised experiences between school, art and territory, together with the observation of community and student engagement through the valorisation of the inhabited territory, help to rethink the slogan “Perus, Perus, by day no water, by night no light”, while fostering discussions that envision peripheral territories beyond the usual deficiencies attributed to them. The scenes presented throughout the text also contribute to the perception that, where the State is absent, the periphery mobilises collectives, indicating other forms of organisation and belonging, often proposing a critique of the colonising project present in schools and the valorisation of decolonial knowledge. After all, “it is necessary to recognise pluralistic approaches, studies and conceptions that break with the dogmatic thinking of a single theoretical matrix of knowledge and universal understanding” (Silva, 2022, p. 357), which, in opposing neoliberalism, can be learned from women, children and indigenous peoples. Creation and imagination, often present in the dialogue between collectives, school, art and territory, were understood as founding elements of the scenes narrated, constituting senses of appropriation and belonging.

These concerns, in dialogue with the writings of the authors discussed in this article, enabled a reflective exercise between theory and practice that guided the actions undertaken. In the practices reported, the articulation between artistic, pedagogical and community approaches contributed to questioning knowledge entrenched in school culture, while also opening space for experiences of creation, care and collectivity. Such movements, inspired by decolonial perspectives and critiques of the colonising project present in schools, supported the construction of scenes that materialise not only educational practices, but also forms of resistance and the imagination of other possible futures.

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