

THE CITY AS CURRICULUM AND ACTS OF REFUSAL: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE OCUPAÇÃO 9 DE JULHO

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ABSTRACT

This article approaches the city of São Paulo as a curricular structure, understood not only as a physical space but also as a symbolic and pedagogical device that organises ways of life. Starting from a critique of the capitalist rationality that shapes the contemporary city, it analyses how urbanisation processes — particularly in the field of housing — function as pedagogies of inequality, obedience, and disenchantment. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as those of Paulo Freire, Raymond Williams, and Mark Fisher, the article examines urban practices that serve as forms of refusal of this dominant logic and announce alternative ways of inhabiting urban space. The focus is on the Movimento Sem Teto do Centro (City Centre Homeless People's Movement, MSTC) and, in particular, on the Ocupação 9 de Julho (9 de Julho Occupation), located in central São Paulo. It considers their modes of political action — where culture and art hold a privileged role — together with the art workshops conducted between 2018 and 2023. The argument is that these experiences constitute alternative forms of meaning-making and urban resistance, fostering ways of life grounded in collectivity, creativity, and participation. The article concludes that, although organised under the hegemony of capital, the city also accommodates formative practices that destabilise its norms and point to other possible modes of existence and coexistence.

KEYWORDS

curriculum, art, territory, urban occupations, popular education

CIDADE COMO CURRÍCULO E PRÁTICAS DE RECUSA: A EXPERIÊNCIA DA OCUPAÇÃO 9 DE JULHO

RESUMO

O presente artigo propõe uma abordagem da cidade de São Paulo como estrutura curricular, compreendida não apenas como espaço físico, mas como dispositivo simbólico e pedagógico que organiza formas de vida. Partindo de uma crítica à racionalidade capitalista que estrutura a cidade contemporânea, analisa-se como os processos de urbanização, especialmente no campo da moradia, operam enquanto pedagogias da desigualdade, da obediência e do desencantamento. A partir de referenciais teóricos como Paulo Freire, Raymond Williams e Mark Fisher, o trabalho investiga práticas urbanas que operam como formas de recusa a essa lógica dominante e anunciam outras formas de se viver no espaço urbano. O foco recai sobre o Movimento Sem Teto do Centro (MSTC) e, particularmente, sobre a Ocupação 9 de Julho, situada no centro de São Paulo. Através da análise de suas formas de atuação política — onde a cultura e a arte encontram um lugar privilegiado — e das oficinas de arte realizadas entre os anos de 2018 e 2023, argumenta-se que essas experiências constituem formas alternativas de produção de

sentido e de resistência urbana, praticando modos de vida baseados na coletividade, na criação e na participação. Conclui-se que, embora hegemonicamente organizada pelo capital, a cidade também abriga práticas formativas que desestabilizam suas normas e anunciam outros modos possíveis de existência e convivência.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

currículo, arte, território, ocupações urbanas, educação popular

1. THE CITY

According to the 2022 census conducted by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, IBGE), the urban population in Brazil represents 87% of the country's total population (Siqueira & Britto, 2024). According to the same census, the city of São Paulo has approximately 11.4 million inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2022). Its metropolitan area — comprising the city and its surrounding municipalities — known as the “Greater São Paulo”, has almost 22 million inhabitants.

Throughout the processes of consolidating capitalism as the dominant mode of production in history, the city has become the economic hub of Brazil and Latin America, as well as the country's largest and most populous city. In this position, São Paulo not only reflects but centralises the multiple contradictions inherent in urban capitalism: it is simultaneously a showcase of productive progress and a stage for the structural tensions that sustain and challenge the logic of capital. In its materiality and organisation, the city carries the historical impasses and disputes that shape social experience.

Part of the contradictions produced by the capitalist system in São Paulo's urban dynamics is concentrated in the realm of social inequality. Discussing São Paulo is to address Brazil, and urban inequality requires attention to regional, class, gender, and racial dimensions. It is crucial, however, to recognise inequality as a central problem in São Paulo to contextualise the tensions explored in this article.

To this end, one could refer to data on transport, infrastructure, and employment, among other areas. However, amid this complex web of public policy and rights — both present and absent¹ — housing emerges as a pressing issue. As a structural and structuring problem within urban social relations, housing is often approached through the lens of “lack”: the problem of insufficient housing and accommodation in São Paulo. This, however, does not refer to a shortage of properties suitable for habitation, but rather to a lack of democratic access to housing.

¹ There are various ways to measure inequality in a country or in a specific city. Regarding the city of São Paulo, the Mapa da Desigualdade (Inequality Map) produced by Rede Nossa São Paulo stands out (Rede Nossa São Paulo, 2024).

In 2023, São Paulo had 53,118 people living in a “street situation”² (Ribeiro, 2023) — a quarter of the national total. The term “street situation” (i.e., experiencing homelessness) is somewhat euphemistic, describing an emergent portion of people without housing, a condition that disproportionately affects populations already marginalised by the State, such as Black and LGBTQIAPN+ communities, and which has only increased in recent years. By 2025, 96,220 people were recorded in these conditions, according to the Observatório de Políticas Públicas com a População em Situação de Rua (Brazilian Observatory of Public Policies for the Homeless Population) at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Brito, 2025) — in just two years, the number of people living on the streets had nearly doubled.

The housing problem in São Paulo is a complex product of multiple factors, including the concentration of income and assets³, rising rental prices⁴, real estate speculation, and structural processes that render the living conditions of the working class precarious — combined with the State’s inaction regarding housing policies. One symptom of this process is the number of unoccupied properties in the city. According to the 2022 IBGE census, São Paulo had 588,978 unoccupied dwellings (Stabile, 2022), roughly six times the number of people recorded as homeless in 2025, and 11% of the city’s total private housing stock. An “unoccupied dwelling” is one with no resident at the time of the census. However, some may be vacant due to tenant turnover or “typical” urban vacancy; a substantial portion of these properties are legally considered to lack a “social function”. A property’s social function is defined by its alignment with collective social and environmental interests, granting the State the authority to intervene in cases of abuse of private property and to ensure that the property fulfils its social purpose — in this case, that a dwelling serves as a home.

Housing is a highly complex issue, arguably one of the city’s most sensitive problems. This introduction seeks to outline this issue, particularly revealing that it is fundamentally political. When an economically powerful class utilises this discussion within public policy to maintain its economic interests, the policies that organise the city of São Paulo — such as the City Master Plan⁵ — become policies that create conditions for producing and reproducing inequality. The result is a city structured around private and speculative interests in public space: vertical, exclusionary, and violent, comprising gated condominiums, fenced parks, and people without the right to housing.

² Data regarding the population experiencing homelessness in the city vary numerically depending on the source and the institution that collects and publishes them (Ribeiro, 2023).

³ According to Mônica de Souza from the Observatório das Metrópoles (Observatory of the Metropolises), as reported by Rodrigo Burgarelli in *Estado de São Paulo* (2016), the equivalent of 1% of property owners in São Paulo holds 45% of the city’s real estate value (Burgarelli, 2016).

⁴ Since 2022, São Paulo has been experiencing a rapid rise in average rental prices, according to the FipeZAP Index of Annual Variation in Property Rental Prices (Fundação Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas, 2024).

⁵ The City Master Plan is a municipal law that articulates guidelines for urban growth and development — it is the basic tool for each municipality to organize and discuss its urban planning policies.

2. THE CURRICULUM

“The development of the urban environment is the capitalist education of space” (Bonafé, 2013, p. 405). As an environment that shapes and informs capitalist development, the city educates in a particular way, shaping how life is lived and practised within this territory. If it is organised according to logics guided by ideologies that produce inequality, it becomes the materialisation that reproduces old forms and generates new forms of being unequal. This “capitalist education of space” is a fundamental part of the education of a capitalist rationality, operating according to class antagonisms — between those who “have” and those who “have not”.

The process of education occurs through languages. Meanings are constructed and deconstructed in this process. Ideas and ways of knowing are selected, organised, and intersected, creating a symbolic-cultural system. The way in which this system is materialised, structured, and organised in the form of a text — whether textual, sonic, visual, or relational — is what will be referred to here as the curriculum. It is the curriculum that truly constructs and destroys the possibilities for ways of seeing, reading, and inhabiting the world from a given perspective, for it is the curriculum that materialises this symbolic structure.

Thus, the city is a curriculum — a text. As such, it materialises ideas that shape its organisation, which in turn inform and form those who live within it. It is a complex cultural and historical device from which messages and meanings emerge. If the city, as a curriculum, educates in line with ideas that uphold the oppressor, then experiences within it will be organised according to the logics of capital reproduction. Capital multiplies and fragments according to an individualising logic, prioritising obedience and, ultimately, submission to standards of class, colour, and gender. At the other extreme, “where the rope breaks”, a curriculum produces, tolerates, stigmatises, and oppresses an economically excluded population into the streets.

The education of the oppressor⁶ reaches its most terrifying dimension when it naturalises certain conditions of existence within the city. The “most successful” capitalist education is that which produces subjects incapable of envisioning alternatives to “what is out there”, assuming that this reality is the only possible one. This capture of the imagination, which transforms capitalism not only into a dominant system but into an insurmountable horizon, is the diffuse belief that no alternative exists to the prevailing way of life. In this sense, education that naturalises the present not only teaches the acceptance of inequality but blocks the very capacity to dream of other worlds — rendering critique a gesture disallowed from the outset⁷.

⁶ The term “education of the oppressor” is used here as an indirect reference to the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire, throughout his critical oeuvre, but especially in *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed), elaborates on the concept of liberatory education as a counterpoint to an education that serves to maintain the oppressor–oppressed relationship, denying the exercise of critique and action (Freire, 1968/2019).

⁷ The British cultural critic Mark Fisher discusses this and other ideas — drawing on critical theory, pop culture, and cultural studies — under the concept of “capitalist realism” in his 2009 book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. According to Fisher, the condition of capitalist realism is one in which capital fully occupies subjectivity, making it impossible to think beyond it (Fisher, 2009).

The city of São Paulo, however, is composed of many cities, centres, and peripheries. Within these multiple territories that constitute the vastness and diversity of São Paulo, other and new curricula are formed: ways of seeing, reading, and inhabiting the city.

The city is both product and producer of contestation, it is the materiality whose construction has been shaped by historical processes and contingencies. The city as curriculum is a text that can be altered to overcome its own structures of domination and exclusion. Through these “other” curricula that are produced and practised within urban space, spaces of profound transformation emerge within the urban fabric, creating dissent and conditions for changes in social relations. Such curricula are written by hands that recognise and refuse alienation as a mode of inhabiting the city, taking on the role of active agents and modifiers of their imposed reality. By doing so, they claim the city as a curricular space for a liberatory education, forming other kinds of experiences and ways of life.

What, then, would a proposed curriculum for the city look like — one that denounces the current realities of São Paulo? Which territories, through their very ways of inhabiting the city, establish a refusal of exploitative practices that generate inequality in urban space? As Godard (1993) asks in *Je Vous Salue, Sarajevo*⁸, how can an exception be produced from within the rule itself?

3. REFUSAL: BETWEEN DENUNCIATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT

Producing a curriculum that is radically opposed to the prevailing situation entails a form of refusal. On the one hand, refusal of the reality considered “normal” denounces the structures of oppression and inequality that produce this “normality”. On the other hand, it announces the possibility of an alternative reality.

Raymond Williams was a Welsh sociologist, cultural theorist, and political activist of the New Left generation in Britain. In his 1980s text “The Politics of Nuclear Disarmament”, Williams (1989/2015) reflects on the destructive power of atomic bombs — and the entirely new social order that emerges from them. In the text, the sociologist constructs the notion of “refusal” from a perspective that moves beyond mere reactive negativity, transforming it into a positive force for action:

to build peace, now more than ever, it is necessary to build more than peace. To refuse nuclear weapons, we have to refuse much more than nuclear weapons. Unless the refusals can be connected with such building, unless protest can be connected with and surpassed by significant practical construction, our strength will remain insufficient. It is then in making hope practical, rather than despair convincing, that we must resume and change and extend our campaigns. (Williams, 1989/2015, p. 305)

⁸ *Je Vous Salue, Sarajevo* is a 1993 video produced by Jean-Luc Godard. Comprising appropriated imagery of the Bosnian occupation in the 1990s and a voice-over narration, Godard’s video reflects on the condition of culture as rule — death — and art as exception — life — and on the dialectical relationship between the two (see Godard, 1993).

Here, refusal is a movement of recognising what exists, an understanding of its unsustainability as a civilisational model, and a will for change already situated within the perspective of organised and collective struggle. Similarly, Paulo Freire (1992/2020) employs the concept of “utopia” as a necessary and radiant material for a new future, in contrast to an “intolerable” present:

there is no true utopia outside the tension between the denunciation of a present that is becoming ever more intolerable and the announcement of a future to be created, constructed, politically, aesthetically, and ethically, by us (...). Utopia implies this denunciation and this announcement, but the tension between the two is exhausted in the production of the future that was previously announced and is now a new present. The new experience of dreaming is established to the extent that history does not immobilise itself, does not die. On the contrary, it continues. (p. 126)

For Freire, the idea of utopia is the projection of a reality that surpasses the previous one, articulated in connection with the announcement. To overcome, one must start from what is to be overcome; utopia therefore resides on the horizon of lived experience, connecting it to denunciation. It is not, then, an idea emptied of materiality or action; instead, it is intimately linked to praxis.

“Refusal”, “denunciation”, and “announcement”. In light of the intersectionalities that structure social inequality in the city of São Paulo, the thoughts of Williams (1989/2015) and Freire (1992/2020) become central. Refusing the lack of democratic access to housing also means refusing all other deprivations of rights that follow from it. Within this refusal lies hope — or the desire — for a city that is profoundly democratic in terms of access and forms of life. Those who refuse move beyond: the oppressed reject the passivity and alienation imposed by the oppressor and sustained by multiple mechanisms that produce and reproduce this condition. It is always the oppressed who, by transforming their own reality, transform the reality of all. However, refusal and utopia mean little if they are not anchored in organised, collective practice. This organised refusal, which does not tolerate the inequality expressed in the inaccessibility of housing, materialises in social movements and urban occupations.

4. REFUSAL: HOUSING MOVEMENTS AND OCCUPATIONS

Housing occupations in the city of São Paulo are collective actions carried out by groups seeking to guarantee the right to decent and affordable housing for all. The occupation of properties and their transformation into homes for those deprived of their rights is, fundamentally, a tactic. The fact that it is a tactic, however, does not diminish its full complexity.

Refusal in the form of occupation emerges from multiple factors, but the inaction of the State — combined with policies that deepen inequality — is decisive for the

emergence of these actions. When the State fails to guarantee a right enshrined in the Constitution, it is the right of citizens to enforce it, especially when repeatedly denied. With no prospect of change through institutional means, direct action becomes the only possible recourse for housing movements. Occupying vacant properties and converting them immediately into housing for people in vulnerable situations is, at once, an affirmation of the constitutional principle of housing access for all — regardless of economic and/or social condition — and an urgent response to a concrete need. To occupy is a right born of necessity: an active refusal of the normalisation of homelessness, a practical denunciation of the inefficiency of housing policies, and an announcement of an urban life that prioritises the social function of its infrastructure.

It is vital, however, not to place occupations — and their complex processes — in a position of easy romanticisation. Since many properties have been abandoned for a considerable period, most have not undergone maintenance of their infrastructure and facilities. This means that the social movements occupying such spaces must deal with potential structural risks and hazards related to building installations, including significant works or repairs to plumbing and electrical systems. This process of “adapting” the space for the families who live in the occupation is carried out once the occupation is in place and families are already living in the building. Moreover, to live in and take part in the organisation of an occupation is to endure the constant threat of eviction or repossession actions carried out by the repressive arm of the State — the police — through physical, legal, and psychological violence. The stigmatisation of part of this population, produced mainly through coverage by major media outlets, is also a common form of violence directed against them.

As of August 2023, according to the Municipal Housing Department, 115,000 families were living in 567 occupations in the city of São Paulo (Cícero, 2025). Among the various movements that shape and sustain the struggle for dignified and affordable housing in Brazilian cities are the Movimento Sem Teto do Centro (MSTC), the Frente de Luta por Moradia (Housing Struggle Front), and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto (Homeless Workers’ Movement), for instance. These movements differ in their organisational structures and in the areas of the city where their struggles are rooted.

In the case of MSTC (<https://www.instagram.com/movimentomstc/>), the struggle for housing is also a struggle for the right to the city, particularly the right to inhabit the central region. The movement is coordinated by Carmen Silva, a teacher, activist, and member of the Brazilian Socialist Party, who ran under its banner in the 2022 elections for the position of State legislator. Since its foundation in 2001, the movement has mobilised and organised the housing struggle in more than a dozen occupations in the central region of São Paulo, including the Ocupação 9 de Julho.

The “9 de Julho” — as it is popularly known — is located in a former building of the Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social (National Institute of Social Security, INSS), situated between 9 de Julho Avenue and Álvaro de Carvalho Street. The space has been

occupied since 1997, and after successive rounds of evictions and “reoccupations”, the building was reoccupied in 2016 by the MSTC, officially becoming the Ocupação 9 de Julho, home to more than 128 families, totalling 500 people across the building’s fourteen floors (Ministério da Cultura, 2023). The territory includes, beyond the residences, a thrift shop, a carpentry workshop, a communal kitchen, a dining hall, a multipurpose room, a library, a playroom, an art gallery, a sports court, and a community garden. In recent years, the Ocupação 9 de Julho has consolidated itself as a reference space for resistance in the fight for housing, as well as for broader political struggle and resistance, understood as an expanded field where culture and art play a fundamental role.

With an intense and extensive cultural programme, the Ocupação 9 de Julho opens its space in central São Paulo for a variety of cultural, educational, and artistic activities. Occasional activities, such as book launches, discussion groups, film screenings (CineOcupa), publishing fairs, and musical and theatrical performances, take place throughout the year, often within the Cozinha Ocupação 9 de Julho (Kitchen of the 9 de Julho Occupation, <https://www.instagram.com/cozinhaocupacaogdejulho/>). This activity takes place on Sundays in the building’s communal space, involving a partnership between the movement and chefs and cooks to prepare dishes for production in the community kitchen by residents and movement collaborators. These dishes are then sold to the building’s community, the neighbourhood, and the city. On Sundays, therefore, the occupation building becomes a shared city space for quality, affordable lunch, cultural activities, book fairs, art, and a thrift shop. This gesture of opening the space to the city, combining food, culture, and social gathering, announces an alternative model of urban coexistence based on collectivity rather than consumption. Under the motto “Quem Ocupa, Cuida” (Occupying is Caring), the significance of the Cozinha Ocupação 9 de Julho initiative was institutionally recognised through its participation in the 35th São Paulo Art Biennial in 2023⁹.

The occupation also organises celebrations and events on holidays and commemorative dates, such as Festa Junina (June Festival) and Labour Day (Figure 1), mobilising cultural agents and offering free and accessible shows, fairs, and exhibitions. Additionally, the building’s gallery, with an exit onto 9 de Julho Avenue — formerly the main entrance of the INSS — was renovated. It became the Galeria ReOcupa (https://www.instagram.com/galeria_reocupa/), hosting collective visual arts exhibitions organised by the movement since 2019. Finally, culture and art intersect with education through the Oficina de Arte da Ocupação 9 de Julho (Art Workshop of the 9 de Julho Occupation, <https://www.instagram.com/oficinadearteocup/>), which has been offering artistic activities for children, adolescents, adults, and older adults since 2018.

⁹ The Cozinha Ocupação 9 de Julho was selected to participate in the 35th São Paulo Biennial, “Choreographies of the Impossible”, as an ongoing practical activity within the programme (Bienal de São Paulo, 2023).



Figure 1. Entrance of the Ocupação 9 de Julho, Labour Day, 1 May

Source. Retrived from “Festa do Trabalhador na Cozinha Ocupação 9 de Julho: Registros da Comemoração do Dia do Trabalhador na Ocupação do MSTC” (Labour Day at the Cozinha Ocupação 9 de Julho: Records of the Labour Day Celebration at the MSTC Occupation), by Ian Valente, 2023, for Agent – Jornalismo PUC-SP (<https://agent.pucsp.br/noticias/festa-do-trabalhador-na-cozinha-ocupacao-9-de-julho>)

Credits. Ian Valente

Cultural, artistic, and educational activities within occupation spaces contribute to the political struggle they pursue and implement. The roles of culture and art in politics are complex and multifaceted, comprising two interrelated fronts in the struggle of these movements. The first concerns the immediate mobilisation of the population living in the occupations, the community in which it is embedded, and the city as a whole. This mobilisation draws the city’s attention to the housing struggle, which is often treated in a stigmatising manner by major media outlets. By promoting cultural activities in their spaces, the occupations open themselves to direct dialogue with the surrounding community, deconstructing the narrative imposed on the occupations, those who organise them, and those who live in them. This openness simultaneously denounces the criminalising narrative and announces another form of relationship between housing and culture, which rejects segregation and affirms the space as a common good. In this context, a bond is constructed between the occupation and its surrounding territory. At the same time, by establishing the occupation as a space of cultural, artistic, and educational relevance, the movement also formulates legal arguments supporting the social function they assign to these previously idle spaces.

Access to culture in Brazil is mediated by class, race, and gender. The number of accessible, high-quality public facilities falls far short of the demand for this right. Consequently, culture becomes commodified; as a commodity, its production and circulation are limited and dictated by market demand, with no public commitment. Non-governmental organisations, other third-sector initiatives, and community spaces form

the foundations of cultural resistance, drawing attention to the need for more comprehensive, robust, and diverse public cultural policies. By promoting democratic and plural access to culture and art, the occupations refuse the imposed reality that access is a privilege for the few, strengthening the struggle for its democratisation and going beyond their initial demands. Adapting Raymond Williams (1989/2015): to refuse the lack of accessible housing, it is necessary to refuse more than the lack of accessible housing.

Moreover, by opening their activities to the neighbourhood and city community, the occupations oppose the logic structuring Brazilian metropolises today. São Paulo exemplifies how private logic can structure city life, characterised by the scarcity of public spaces, privatisations and concessions, and vertical development. All these aspects, which shape how the city is organised, promote violence as a mode of urban experience. In operating and opening to the external community, the occupations also form part of the struggle for the right to a city that prioritises public and general well-being, without distinction, performing the role of public spaces where consumption is not the primary form of socialisation.

The second front where culture and art intersect with political struggle lies in the field of subjectivity. This is not about a “cultural policy” defining what is “worthy” of production and circulation, but rather a policy for culture that considers subjectivity as a fertile and complex political territory. The way politics shapes subjectivities cannot be precisely measured; they are experienced through affect and bodily sensations. In other words, the politics permeating multiple subjectivities operates through the sensible: eating, drinking, dancing, playing music, singing, listening, reading, seeing, drawing, and painting, among many other aspects of feeling, constitute this way of producing politics. Diversity, plurality, and equality are extremely radical political contents today, and art is capable of constructing them. Culture, the arts, and diverse forms of expression can contribute to redefining social and political relations, challenging hierarchies, and giving space for new voices and perspectives to emerge.

“The opposite of life is not death but disenchantment” (Rufino & Simas, 2019, p. 5). São Paulo is structured through exclusion and inequality, in a policy of disenchantment regarding the individual’s experience of the city. How the subjectivities of those living in it are constructed directly affects how this experience unfolds. In this way, by refusing policies that produce disenchantment — death — the occupations and housing movements in São Paulo also announce an alternative of re-enchantment with the city experience — life — primarily through the reassertion of principles of collectivity, community, and diversity. Life is fascination, and fascination also entails a critical vision of how society is structured.

Occupations and social movements advocating democratic access to housing, through their struggles rooted in refusal and necessity, present various aspects of urban living that denounce the unsustainability of the current way of life, while simultaneously announcing new and alternative ways of living and practising the city. Culture, art, and

education deeply intersect with these ways of being and living, serving as privileged tools in these contexts, capable of contributing to radical change. In this context, the occupations take on an essential role as spaces of desire and as sites for the formation and construction of alternatives for cities and for living within them. In this regard, the Ocupação 9 de Julho functions as an alternative curricular structure, whose pedagogy is the daily practice of denunciation, refusal, and announcement, articulated through collective life, creation, and active participation.

5. THE ART WORKSHOPS OF THE OCUPAÇÃO 9 DE JULHO, 2018–2023

The art workshops of the Ocupação 9 de Julho are an example of this practice. The Oficina de Arte da Ocupação 9 de Julho was established in 2018 as an initiative of artists and educators from both within and outside the occupation. Characterised by its autonomous organisation, the form of the workshops developed and shifted over the years, shaped by those who led and organised them.

Between 2018 and 2023, the activities of the Oficina de Arte included a wide range of artistic practices held on a weekly or fortnightly basis within the occupation, as well as occasional visits to exhibitions in public and private art and cultural institutions, such as museums, cultural centres, cinemas, and theatres. What follows is a brief presentation and analysis of two workshops held in 2019, along with an examination of the organisation of the activities, a summary of the hiatus during the pandemic, and an overview of the initiatives carried out in 2022 and 2023.

Most of the workshops organised inside the occupation took place in the multipurpose room, the common space on the ground floor of the building. Depending on the temperature, the weather, the workshop's proposal, and, above all, the availability of the room, activities were relocated to the dining hall, the sports court, the vegetable garden, or other spaces in the building. Participation was not limited to a specific age group or gender, being open to the general community of the occupation. This, among other factors, influenced the scheduling of activities for the early evening — outside school hours for children and after working hours for most workers. Although this timing was intended to attract a diverse age range, the workshops were attended mainly by children between the ages of 2 and 12, as well as teenagers aged 13 to 16, with a smaller number of elderly participants. Regardless of age group, women were significantly more present than men.

The content of the 2019 workshops was divided into two main groups: those proposed by members of the organisation and those proposed by “external” artists and educators. What these groups had in common was spontaneity, flexibility and diversity of themes. In the first group, proposals stemmed from the personal interests and research of each facilitator, with planning undertaken by one or more organisers and supported by the rest. The second group consisted of activities introduced by artists and educators who approached the organisation via its Instagram profile or directly through a member, proposing workshops aligned with their artistic and pedagogical work.

This way of organising and planning activities drew on influences from what is often called “non-school education”. By “non-school education”, we mean teaching and learning activities that occur outside the school system, which is typically based in fixed locations and guided by curricula established by larger institutions. Being outside the physical and symbolic structures of school education, non-school education is not obliged to follow a traditional curriculum or one defined by an institution, nor is it subject to other forms of organisation typical of school education, such as dividing participants by age. This mode of education reflects the idea that learning occurs everywhere, not only within conventional educational institutions and the forms of knowledge they construct, but also through encounters among people of different ages, genders and cultural backgrounds.

The organisation of the Oficinas de Arte da Ocupação 9 de Julho was shaped by both necessity and intent towards non-school education. The autonomous organisation, together with the availability of spaces, staff and — above all — materials, required curricular flexibility. Moreover, the non-compulsory nature of the workshops made planning particularly challenging, as participant numbers varied considerably. At the same time, the artists and educators organising the workshops were motivated by a deliberate desire to create activities that contrasted with the school structure. Since the workshops took place outside school hours, the idea of reproducing the school model was seen as exhausting and unappealing. This form of organisation created an opportunity to experiment with new ways of planning and conducting classes and content. In other words, flexibility opened a space for both the occupation’s community and the city at large to propose activities and pedagogies.

Planning and organisational meetings took place once a month, following workshops, and focused on exchanging ideas, desires, and proposals among the organisers. In addition, a messaging group functioned as the central hub for discussions, organisation and coordination. These were the spaces in which suggestions and proposals emerged — from both organisers and “external” collaborators — supplemented by feedback from participants during the workshops themselves. Between 2019 and 2020, however, the organisers did not conduct a formal consultation with residents or participants to identify themes they would like to explore.

The way workshop content was structured created a powerful and open space for a wide range of artistic proposals and themes. Among those developed by the organisation, one 2019 activity stands out: a workshop introduced by Carmen Silva¹⁰, coordinator of the MSTC movement and the occupation, to illustrate her short book *Cem Dias de Exílio* (One Hundred Days of Exile), published by N-1 Edições. As part of the activation

¹⁰ Carmen Silva is a mother, urbanist, activist, educator, and actress — leader of the MSTC and politician affiliated with the Brazilian Socialist Party. Born in Santo Estevão, a city in the Recôncavo Baiano (Bahia), in 1960, she moved to São Paulo at the age of 35 to escape a relationship marked by domestic violence. In this “retirante” (forced departure) process, she spent a year living on the streets of São Paulo. Eventually, she came into contact with housing movements through meetings of the Fórum de Cortiços — a movement established in the 1990s. From that point on, Carmen joined the struggle for rights in the city, founding the MSTC in 2001 (Rodrigues, 2021).

of the exhibition “O que não é Floresta é Prisão Política” (What Is Not Forest Is Political Prison) at the ReOcupa gallery, a large number of Carmen’s booklets were to be distributed, with their covers illustrated by workshop participants. In the book, Carmen narrates the hundred days she spent in hiding from the authorities — as an act of civil disobedience against a police investigation with clear political persecution motives¹¹ — between 2018 and 2019, in the form of stories and reflections. The idea of inviting participants to draw on the covers arose from a desire to engage the workshops with the cultural life of the occupation, and also as a collective exercise in working through the institutional violence directed at Carmen and her family, and its reverberations throughout the occupation. While all participants knew Carmen, some of the younger ones were unaware of the situation and its link to the housing struggle. This required joint efforts by organisers and participants to address the issue responsibly and sensitively with the younger group. In this workshop, denunciation emerged by making visible, for children and young people in the occupation, the violence of the State and the criminalisation of housing movements, unveiling narratives usually silenced. Announcement lay in the collective elaboration of this violence through artistic practice, transforming harsh memories into political and affective potential. Refusal appeared as resistance to the normalisation of such violence, affirming the occupation as a pedagogy that teaches how to read the city critically and resist its forms of oppression. The workshop records can be accessed and viewed through the Instagram profile of the Oficina de Artes da Ocupação 9 de Julho (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BzPBZcEH5KN/?igsh=dDFqYTVuNWlpbXVI>).

In June of the same year, the community garden at the entrance of the building on Rua Álvaro de Carvalho was under construction. In this context, the celebration of the Festa Junina provided an opportunity for collective engagement with a traditional Brazilian popular festivity within the workshops. Bringing these two contexts together in a poetic and pedagogical proposal, the workshop was developed around the collective creation of a scarecrow — or, as it was renamed, a “protective spirit”—for the garden. The activity began with a conversation about what a scarecrow and a protective spirit might mean in a garden, as well as their function. This was followed by the collective construction and assembly of the protective spirit using clothes and materials “gleaned” from various places. The protective spirit was named after Pagu¹² — Brazilian writer, poet, director and activist — presented to the group by the organisers. From this workshop, Pagu, the protective spirit of the Ocupação 9 de Julho’s community garden, was born.

¹¹ The context of Carmen’s exile arose amid two police inquiries involving her and her family. The first accused Carmen of extortion and criminal association, concerning the amount of R\$200 (Brazilian real) that families in the movement’s occupations paid for the maintenance of the buildings they occupied. The second inquiry investigated the collapse of the Wilton Paes de Almeida building in 2018, which housed 150 families. In this case, two of Carmen’s children — Preta Ferreira and Sidney Silva — were imprisoned for 100 days, despite having no connection with the specific movement that occupied the building in question; Carmen had her arrest decreed, forcing her into a 100-day exile as a fugitive (Quierati, 2019).

¹² Patrícia Rehder Galvão (1910–1962), known as Pagu, was a journalist, writer, translator, political activist, and a central figure in Brazilian Modernism. She was deeply involved in the Brazilian communist movement and the arts — particularly theatre — leaving behind a body of work characterised by the intersection of art and social engagement.

In this experience, denunciation took shape in relation to the commodification of land and the privatisation of urban spaces, while opening a place for community cultivation at the heart of the city. The announcement was built on the concrete possibility of shared food production and collective care for the garden, calling for alternative ways of inhabiting and relating to the territory. Finally, refusal was asserted in the daily construction of a space of encounter, poetry and cultivation, where the symbolic and the material intertwine to produce other ways of living in the city. The records of this workshop are available on the Instagram profile of the Oficina de Artes da Ocupação 9 de Julho (https://www.instagram.com/p/B5GW1OrH_yO/?img_index=1&igsh=MXU4aXdzaW5ocHk5cg==)

These two activities were part of a cycle of workshops conducted between 2019 and 2020. In March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all cultural activities open to the external public were suspended until further notice — a necessary measure for everyone's health at the time. The abrupt suspension of all non-essential activities prevented the workshops from closing a cycle, which was challenging for both organisers and participants. It was also not possible to migrate the workshops online due to the lack of infrastructure for full participation. As a result, the workshops went into hiatus with no forecast of return.

In 2022, the workshops resumed thanks to the approval of a project submitted to the State of São Paulo's Cultural Action Programme, designed by women artists and educators who were already part of the workshop's organisation. The project, titled *Autoconstrução, o Comum em Nós* (Self-construction: The Common in Us, <https://www.instagram.com/oficinadearteocupa/>), organised art workshops led by women artists and educators for children and women living in the occupation. At the end of the workshop cycle, the project planned a collective exhibition of works by women and children from the MSTC as a closing activity. The exhibition, *Autoconstrução, o Comum de Nós*, opened on 12 June 2022, following four consecutive weekends of workshops held on Sundays. In the same year, the project was awarded the Prêmio Museu é Mundo (Museum is World Award)¹³, and the workshop programme was reformulated. The new phase of the Ocupação 9 de Julho Art Workshops consisted of Sunday sessions in which invited artists, educators, and collectives designed activities for the children residing in the occupation. This cycle continued until mid-2023.

The workshops at Ocupação 9 de Julho functioned simultaneously as acts of denunciation and announcement, revealing the violences inscribed in the city's curriculum while enacting daily alternatives constructed by the movement. If the city educates towards alienation, the occupation responds with a curriculum woven from radical and straightforward gestures, in which drawing, cooking, and planting become profoundly political acts. In this sense, artistic and cultural practice is not peripheral but the living core of an urban pedagogy that transforms collective life into a form of resistance.

¹³ The Prêmio Museu é Mundo was established to map, promote, disseminate, and support artistic initiatives that foster cultural and social development (<https://www.premiomuseuemundo.com.br/>).

6. CONCLUSION

The city, as a socially produced space, is not merely the result of capital forces but also a territory of symbolic, affective, and political contestation. While it is true that many of its structures promote obedience, exclusion, and disenchantment — fostering a pedagogy of capital — it is equally valid that the city can shape lives in other ways, as it already does, through those on the margins who claim their spaces.

In the context of the Oficina de Arte da Ocupação 9 de Julho, the workshops are more than just a set of artistic activities; they operate as a counter-mechanism within the logic of contemporary urban development. By activating the subjective dimension of housing struggles, they make visible what is constantly silenced: the right to imagination, expression, and active participation in building an alternative city. In this sense, Ocupação 9 de Julho does not merely resist: it teaches. It constitutes a curriculum of refusal, a living materialisation of Freirean hope and Williams' notion of constructive refusal, in which collective life becomes pedagogy and the city transforms into a field for creating possible futures.

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