IMAGINATION IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN:  
THE CASE OF THE HOMELESS WORKERS MOVEMENT (MTST)  
IN SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL  

BY  
ALINE MAZETO ROLDAN  

THESIS  
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Urban Planning in Urban and Regional Planning  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2018  

Urbana, Illinois  

Master’s Committee:  
Professor Faranak Miraftab, Adviser  
Professor Clarissa Freitas
ABSTRACT

The foundational stone of radical planning, *Knowledge and Action in the Public Domain* (Friedmann, 1987), focused on the connection between reason and democracy based on the concepts of the single and double loop of learning. In this thesis, I start a conversation about the meaning, use, and application of a triple loop of learning to planning theory and practice by focusing on the connection between imagination and democracy. Toward that goal, I integrate the ideas of future as a source of learning (Scharmer, 2009) and future as a space of struggle between the opening up and closing down of the imagination (Miraftab, 2018). I ask how planners can unleash the collective imagination towards the flourishing of more humane urban futures. This thesis seeks to answer this question through the ethnographic case study of the grassroots housing Homeless Workers Movement (MTST — *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto*) in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area, Brazil. Field data was collected in December 2016 and January 2017 through in-person interviews, focus groups, content analysis of local news media and MTST’s documents, and participant observation of land occupations and meetings. Two conceptual poles guide this research: first, understanding future as a spatiotemporal layer in the city palimpsest. This means a set of images of the future — in tension with each other and with memories of the past and possibilities of present — that functions as a disciplinary instrument orchestrating planning. Second, understanding collective imagination as a dynamic tensegrity — a concept borrowed from architecture and applied in psychology and organizational studies — to indicate the mobile tensional arrangement of interconnected memories, present possibilities, and future projections.

Reflecting on the case of Sao Paulo and its formal planning processes, I show how contemporary city planning has systematically contributed to making territories, people, and futures invisible via processes that close down certain kinds of futures and imagination of alternatives. In contrast, by documenting MTST activists’ practices and testimonials, I show how insurgent practices make territories (space) visible, make people visible to themselves (identities), and, to a certain extent, make the future visible (vision) through processes that open up the imagination of alternative futures for a more humane urbanism. This binary structure is only partially applicable; the tension between these complex processes — the opening up and closing down of the imagination — is present in both insurgent and conventional planning settings. Rather than proposing a blueprint for practice, this research is an initial inquiry to problematize imagination in city planning. This thesis reframes imagination from being an individual trait, or the automatic outcome of the democratic process, to a spatially and socially circumscribed process engaging three dimensions of space, identity, and vision, in three layers (past, present, and future). I propose that unleashing the collective imagination is a key aspect of the planner’s role of mediation for social learning. Further collaborative and interdisciplinary research on the intricate connection between imagination and democracy would bring great value for planning theory and practice. We need to move beyond hope, imagining new horizons that do not reproduce the grammar of the present into the future, but instead reinvent unique humane compositions of past-present-future possibilities.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank Professor Faranak Miraftab. As my thesis advisor, she provided priceless feedback, both insightful and precise, combining rigor and flexibility. As a female international scholar, her presence encouraged me to become a researcher. As a human being, her example shifted my understanding of responsibility, redefining what caring for others means. Your presence in my life brought me a bag of lessons to unfold in the years to come.

I am grateful to Professor Clarissa Freitas, who, as a member of my thesis committee, opened the doors to the universe of Urban Planning in the Brazilian context. Her thoughtful suggestions and hearty encouragement contributed to fundamental changes in my arguments and chapters’ structure.

I would like to thank Guilherme Boulos, for giving me access to the people and resources that were key to the realization of this research. Even in the midst of his widely publicized temporary detention, he made sure he was available for an interview with me, which provided important insights for this thesis. Special gratitude towards Afonso Silva, who helped to organize 27 interviews in the interval of 1 month, by promptly presenting me to the interviewees, inviting me to important events, and giving me access to key materials. Also, Afonso provided information about MTST’s land occupations, through phone interviews until March of 2018. I also want to thank the MTST members, who welcomed me in the land occupations and in their houses, dedicated their time to the interviews, and wholeheartedly shared their stories.

I am also grateful for all the professors, staff, and colleagues at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Illinois, who gave me a challenging and yet cozy learning environment that allowed the emergence of my passions and the development of my skills. I would like to thank especially Professor Stacy Harwood for the amazing classes and supportive conversations and Professor Ken Salo, for introducing me to some key literature in 2015, as well as for trusting my capacities when I could barely express myself in English. Finally, without the financial support of the department, through assistantships and tuition waiver during the two years of the program, I would not have been able to join and complete the master program. Special gratitude towards the head of the department Professor Robert Olshansky, the program director Professor Mary Edwards, and Professor Merle Bowen from the Political Science department.

I would also like to acknowledge Professor Sara Hook, Professor Abby Zbikowski, and Professor Jennifer Monson from the Dance department at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The minor
created a unique possibility to bring my research to the body level to construct and de-construct my ideas. Thank you, and the Dance department as a whole, for holding the challenging space of interdisciplinarity.

A very warm acknowledgment goes to my friends Tooma Zaghloul, Christopher Di Franco, Efadul Huq, Devin Day, MD Muntasir, and Miriam Keep. Each one of them were no less than angels throughout the process, by listening, caring, opening my perspective, polishing arguments, or simply standing by as the beautiful and intelligent people that they are. I am also grateful for Rita Monte, Justin Pierce, David Aristizábal Urrea, Susan Martinez, Valeria Lo-Kung, Faizaan Qayyum, Stephen Sherman, and Giulio Vanzan, who provided short but insightful conversations; for Antonio Martins who opened the doors with MTST; and Luciana Siriani and André Manoel Dos Santos, who helped me to test my interview questions in 2016. For all the people who demonstrated excitement when I spoke about my research topic, even if you were just being polite, thank you. That helped to keep the boat afloat.

I would like to acknowledge the generosity of Fatima Alves and her family, who hosted me with the best thesis writing environment ever for several weeks, and the kindness of Cindy Yi, Nasrin Navab, Nahid Navab, and Solat Navab.

I would like to thank Jerome Glenn, whose flexibility and positive spirit allowed me to conciliate thesis writing and an internship at The Millennium Project.

There is no way for me to thank Ayush Gupta. During the last few months, when everything was uncertain, he was my safe harbor, cleaning the fear from my heart, defying my arguments, and making me laugh hard.

To my family, who kept doing their best to support me during the last two years and my field research, I love you.

Finally, Eugênio Davidoff, whose presence as a Da Vinci opens my perception of who I am and what I want to be, thanks for the miracles.

Being wholeheartedly engaged in this thought from October 2015 to February 2018 was a journey so intense and challenging that I cannot yet express how far dedicating myself to it has changed my trajectory. But there is one thing I am sure of: the presence of you all made everything brighter.

To the two future readers of this killing-long document, I acknowledge your effort, I say congratulations, and I hope you read it of free will, finding the clues you were looking for.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.......................................................................................................................... p.1

  What is Your Dream?.................................................................................................................. p.1
  Travel Guide: Chapters Structure............................................................................................ p.3

CHAPTER 1: Triple Loop of Learning and Imagination Tensegrity........................................... p.6

  Friedmann: The Lost Link Between Democratic Experience and Imagination...................... p.6
  Scharmer: The Triple Loop of Learning and Theory U.............................................................. p.10
  The Paradox of Imagination...................................................................................................... p.12
  Miraftab: Future as a Space of Struggle.................................................................................... p.15
  Imagination Tensegrity............................................................................................................. p.16
  The Future Layer in the City Palimpsest.................................................................................... p.18
  Closing Down the Imagination................................................................................................. p.21
  Opening the Imagination......................................................................................................... p.22
  Synthesis.................................................................................................................................... p.23

CHAPTER 2: The Invisible City.................................................................................................. p.25

  Portraits of an Inhumane Urbanism.......................................................................................... p.26
    Free, But Not for Themselves.................................................................................................. p.27
    The Place of the Poor in the City......................................................................................... p.28
    The Production of Illegality..................................................................................................... p.31
    A Counterpoint....................................................................................................................... p.32
    The Deviation......................................................................................................................... p.35
    Control-C, Control-V............................................................................................................. p.38
    The Response to the Deviation............................................................................................... p.42
    Exclusion is Planning as Usual............................................................................................... p.43
  The Production of Invisibility.................................................................................................... p.43
    Planning Separated From People......................................................................................... p.44
    Making People Invisible & the Single Loop of Learning...................................................... p.45
    Making People Invisible and the Mass Production of Placelessness.................................. p.46
    Future: a Disciplinary Instrument of Planning..................................................................... p.47
    Inhumane Urbanism: a City Without Past, Present, and Future.......................................... p.48
  Imagination in Insurgent Planning.......................................................................................... p.49

CHAPTER 3: MTST and the Housing Deficit ............................................................................ p.51

  The Housing Deficit................................................................................................................. p.51
  The Homeless Workers Movement (MTST)............................................................................. p.54
    MTST's History....................................................................................................................... p.55
    Beyond the House: Shifting Power and Changing the City................................................ p.57
    Land Squatting v. Land Occupation: From the Illegal to the Right..................................... p.58
    The Process of Occupation: The Politics of the Concrete................................................... p.64
    Participation: The Journey to Have a House...................................................................... p.68
    Communication: Establishing the Contours of the Occupation.......................................... p.71
    MTST, Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades (MCMV-E), and the City Statute...................... p.73
  MTST Organizing Practices in a Nutshell................................................................................. p.74

CHAPTER 4: Making Territories Visible.................................................................................... p.76

  Invented Spaces: MTST's Performative Acts.......................................................................... p.76
APPENDIX B. From Closed Doors to Mass Consumption.........................................................p.176
APPENDIX C. Principles for Imagining a Humane Urbanism......................................................p.179
APPENDIX D. Colonization of the Imagination and Colonization of the Future........................p.184
APPENDIX E. MTST: A Hierarchical and Horizontal Organizational Structure........................p.188
APPENDIX F. Visibility is the Chance for Respect: Protection, Legitimacy, and Dignity.................p.191
APPENDIX G. Dialectics of Imagination (Continued)......................................................................p.193

As the Search for the Dream Changes the Dreamer, the Dreamer Reshapes the Dream.................................p.193
Shifting Temporal and Spatial Arrangements.................................................................................p.194

ENDNOTES...........................................................................................................................................p.197
INTRODUCTION

What is your dream?

An inquiry from practice

The inquiry of this thesis was born from a practical urgency. From 2010 to 2015, I dedicated myself exclusively to planning and executing processes of community engagement in favelas and public schools of four Brazilian cities. As the founder of a startup project—Células de Transformação (Transformation Cells)—I can state that the experience could not have been more insightful, or harder. Our goal was ambitious. We did not want to reproduce paternalistic projects as a nonprofit. Our intention was to catalyze the existing dreams, skills, needs, memories, and resources to co-create projects with marginalized communities from the bottom up. We wanted to create transformation cells, a network of nuclei engaged in the making of alternative practical futures. Following that goal, we learned by doing, and frustration became a great professor.

Our methodologies consisted of embodied practices to create empathy among the participants and the activation of participatory action research processes. One of our programs started as an extension project of the sociology department of the University of São Paulo and consisted in journeys of learning in which volunteers would engage with peripheral communities. Although the process was totally free and open to any citizen of the metropolitan zone of São Paulo, our capacity of mobilization was limited. The volunteers, like the coordinators of the project itself, were mainly middle- to upper-class participants, with a majority of White, young women holding bachelor degrees or higher levels of educational attainment. Throughout six editions of this program, with 30 volunteers each dedicated for three to four months, 180 participants in total, we engaged with four communities in São Paulo.

Based on this scenario, you can already imagine the tensions embedded in the encounters between the volunteers from the center to the realities of the margins. In this process, we (White middle-class citizens) arrived in neighborhoods where the majority of the residents were Black, low-income, and living in precarious housing conditions. We could never pass as insiders. Since we did not want to be the white saviors, we constantly engaged in critical reflections about the validity of our own work, beyond the monumental learning process it represented to ourselves. And our critical awareness often did not meet practical instruments to get fully manifested. Naively and often we asked the residents the following question: What is your dream? This question took place in a variety of contexts (for example, during workshops or charrettes or in the middle of the street) throughout interventions, interviews, or conversations. We persistently posed this question to multiple age groups.

Often, our main public consisted of children and teens. They were open and curious about the strangers in their neighborhoods. Also, we found it easier to anchor our processes by starting in the local public schools. Many of the dreams we collected were to be super models, like Gisele Bundchen, or
soccer players, like Ronaldo. Who would like to be a carpenter or an artisan? A few wanted to be physicians or teachers. Nobody wanted to be a cleaner. Although repetitive and TV-like, the children still had their dreams, and the belief and the capacity to express them.

However, many adults could not visualize their future. Once, one of the volunteers, after coming back from a whole day of interviews with residents in a favela in Santo André, told me, dazed, about one of his interviews that day: “The person told me that she does not have any dreams, that she wished she were born again and that it was the only possible way.” And this is one of the multiple examples we faced. I remember an additional kind of response. When we were fortunate to mobilize a group of residents around a common objective, dystopian images appeared: “I want surveillance here”; “I want fences around this square”; “All those people from the favela are criminals—I want them to leave!”; “I want what the richer neighborhoods already have.” When I asked others working with similar practices, they reaffirmed my impressions.

The repetitive encounter with this pattern intrigued me, as well as the scenes I saw and the stories shared by the favela residents. Once, a mother received us in her home: one single small room where she lived with her three children. Sitting on her bed, she told us that she sleeps with a wooden stick to kill rats during the night. Because rats eat the hands and feet of babies during the night. Although she had a job as a cleaner in a local kindergarten, after a few years she got arrested when, looking to complement her income: she was caught carrying drugs inside her vagina into a prison. Another time, I was talking with a neighborhood association leader when a woman arrived sobbing and with blood in her face. Her son and niece had beaten her, and she wanted to call the police to arrest her boy, who was involved in local drug traffic. The leader calmed her down, saying, “I have three sons in jail. Once they are there, they are lost forever. You don’t want to lose your son. Let me solve this: a few guys [connected to the local drug cartel] will go there and spank him, and make him so scared that he will learn his lesson.” People find a way to make justice when the justice system is not fair.

Why do these and many other stories matter? Those scenes profoundly impacted me: they transformed abstract ideas and information into a strong emotional mark that cannot be erased. Those moments changed my approach to community development: why I was doing that—the quality of intention and presence—completely shifted. If those stories carry enough power to decolonize my own imagination, I could not avoid questioning what place they occupy in planning and their potential to affect decision making. Planners are most likely to be trapped by their own imaginations about what the world is or is not, their own boundaries of class, race, culture, education status, and personal and professional experiences. The periphery, the have-nots, and the minorities assume the form of numbers and information, objects to be managed. The segregation between the center and the peripheries is also a dissociation at the level of imagination: perceptions of reality and possibility.

Below the silent violence of poverty, we live in a monoculture of dreams. Many children wanted to be soccer players, supermodels, or physicians (in a country where football players receive monstrous
salaries and the possibility of a low-income citizen becoming a physician is absurdly low). At the other side of imagination, we met adults who could not express any dreams of the future at all. In addition, we have urban planners driving processes according to their own imaginative bubbles, acting according to their conception about what the world is or not, and how it should be. Then, when I questioned my own position in that space, I looked at my own answers. What was my dream for my life, my neighborhood, my city? To my own surprise, the scope of my answers was equally vague and narrow. I wanted social justice, equality, environmental sustainability, bike lanes, clean energy. My answers reproduced my life experiences, assimilating and propagating the ideas circulating in the groups I participated in.

Open to the ambivalence and holding the emptiness of not knowing what we were doing and toward what we were moving, I knew we were doing something wrong. I knew we needed to learn more, listen better, change something. But I also knew we were doing something right, that there was something true underlying our projects, and there was sincerity in our effort of community organizing.

My emotional reaction to the accumulation of dystopian images was frustration, and more questions. All those experiences marked me deeply, and found the soil to grow as an intellectual inquiry during my studies in urban and regional planning at UIUC. Through practice I learned that the attempt to imagine an alternative future for the immediate context is far from simple and not a common individual, collective, or public exercise. From my heart, I insist that such narrowly visualized dreams, and the monoculture of dreams, are not normal and must not be normalized. I seek to understand how imaginations are formed and what kinds of processes can enable imagination to open. Why do we dream what we dream for our neighborhoods and cities? What are the limits of imagination? What are the potentialities of understanding the imaginative process and applying its premises to improving planning processes? These and other related questions can help me address my main inquiry: how imagination intersects with urban planning and the making of democratic experiences.

**Travel Guide: Chapters Structure**

*How can we unleash the collective imagination towards the flourishing of more humane urban futures?* To address this question I rely on a methodology that involves the literature review and case study analysis. I focus on insurgent practices of a grassroots movement in São Paulo: the Movement of Homeless Workers (MTST—Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto). The case study included 27 in-person interviews, conducted in December 2016 and January 2017, and one focus group. The interviewees were the members of the movement, including militantes (leaders) and acampados, as well as residents or participants of their land occupations and protests.

In **Chapter 1: Triple Loop of Learning and Imagination Tensegrity**, my literature review explores why imagination is a central epistemological concern to the emergence of democratic urban futures. The chapter weaves together three major authors: John Friedman (1987), Otto Scharmer (2009), and Faranak Miraftab (2018), having as a background the discussions in Appendices A, B, and C about
imagination in philosophy of mind, utopianism in Boaventura de Souza Santos (1995), and key scholarly proposals to a new poetics of imagination. The chapter explores both the learning and power dimensions involved in imagining the future, proposing the prototype of city’s imagination tensegrity: to consider the experience as the dynamic tensions between spatiotemporal arrangements involving past, present, and future layers. Additionally, the chapter discusses the meaning of closing down the imagination, based on the ideas of colonization of imagination and future (see Appendix D for a more in-depth discussion), and opening the imagination as making territories visible, making people visible to themselves, and making the future visible.

Chapter 2: The Invisible City reviews part of the literature on the federal housing policies in Brazil and the urbanization process in São Paulo. In addition to providing background to understand MTST, the chapter discusses how mainstream planning produces inhumane cities by making territories, people, and futures invisible. At the end, the chapter proposes to define future as a disciplinary instrument of urban planning, introduces the literature in insurgent planning, and argues that imagination of the future also needs to be problematized in counter-hegemonic practices.

Chapter 3: MTST and the Housing Deficit presents a brief overview of the housing deficit in Brazil and in São Paulo, and introduces the Homeless Workers’ Movement (MTST - Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto) with focus on their history, philosophy, and land occupations. If you are interested in knowing about MTST’s occupations and the process by which an occupation is formed, and how MTST members organize themselves, you will find the chapter useful. Appendix E provides extra information on MTST’s organizational structure.

Chapter 4: Making Territories Visible presents how MTST’s transgressive use of the space impacts the public imagination in a two-fold movement. First, opening the possibilities for people to see, shaping the perception of problems, rights, and dreams as shared realities. Second, opening the possibilities for people to be seen, shaping the perception of a population and a territory as simultaneously a political opportunity and a risk that destabilizes power relations. Appendix F complements the discussion about the meaning of visibility in MTST’s practices.

Chapter 5: Making People Visible to Themselves discusses how MTST’s practices proportionate a learning environment where people expand their individual and collective possibilities. By constantly moving across spaces that invite them to express themselves and challenge their beliefs, people change their perceptions about what is present and what is absent in their life conditions, reformulating what they want for themselves. The chapter focuses on three main aspects: the dialectical imagination – opening the imagination needs to experience the tensional dialogue between new and old; the overflow of experience – opening the imagination enacts multiple sources of knowledge, the body, emotions, memories, and voice; and the proliferation of paradoxes – opening the imagination is not a linear progressive movement, but it happens through the destabilization of existing structures of
knowledge, substituting old contradictions by new tensions. Appendix G explores other angles on the dialectical nature of imagination in MTST’s case.

**Chapter 6: Making the Future Visible** explores the multiple shapes of futures present in MTST’s case, and discusses the mediation of the imagination of the future in terms of two main challenges: translating the future into expressive forms and mediating the tensions in the myriad of contrasting future projections. In this chapter, I explore how MTST creates spaces of hope and why hope is not enough: there is a need to move from the *impossible dream* (counter-hegemonic) to *generative visions*.

**Chapter 7: Imagination as Mediation** summarizes the whole thesis. The chapter presents the three dimensions of opening the public imagination (*making territories visible, making people visible to themselves, and making future visible*), synthesizing them in the diagram knitting of the imagination in the public domain, which I present on page 163. It proposes an alignment to Sandercock’s (2004) perspective on the planner’s imagination for the 21st century and discusses possibilities for further research.
In 1987, Friedmann focused his attention on the link between reason and democracy, nourished by the ideas of single and double loop of learning from the field of organizational development. In 2018, we can move his legacy a step forward and ask what the connection is between imagination and democracy. Theory U, a form of triple loop of learning, seeks in theory and practice to answer how we can learn from the future and how we can co-create realities where people live up to their higher potentials (Scharmer, 2009). Miraftab (2009; 2018) places imagination in a central position in radical planning by suggesting the future as a space of struggle, while defining transgression, counter-hegemony, and imagination as the core features of insurgent practices. In this chapter I explore the connections between social learning and imagination and how they should be integrated into both planning theory and planning practice. Such exploratory cross-pollination represents a small fraction of the intellectual and practical efforts to frame and enhance imagination. Although it is impossible to honor the full variety of analysis and experiments, the discussions in this chapter can form an initial ground on which to find theoretical and practical answers to one question: how can we unleash the collective imagination towards the flourishing of more humane urban futures?

**Friedmann: The Lost Link Between Democratic Experience and Imagination**

A Blind Spot in Planning Theory

Friedmann’s *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action* (1987) has become the foundational stone of radical planning. In it, Friedmann investigates the compatibility of reason and democracy. Are the masses capable of self-governance or will it always be necessary for an enlightened elite to guide the democratic process? Friedmann, arguing in favor of self-governance, indicates that the problem relies on the segregation of technical expertise and democratic practice, walls that help reproduce the systemic problems faced by capitalist societies. The core of radical planning—that is, the practice of planning that leads to social transformation—relies on the unity of theory and practice. For such unity, an organized civil society is indispensable. A planning process capable of producing paradigmatic shifts needs to be centered on civil society and its social learning capacity (Friedmann, 1987; 1993).

The paradigm of social learning, which provides the foundation for a radical planning theory, derives its principles from contemporary cutting-edge research produced in the field of organizational development. The method double loop of learning was born in 1976 as a management process to identify and correct errors and encourage change in organizational settings (Argyris, 1976). The method is based on the definition of two different forms of theory. The term espoused theories of action refers to theories people use to explain their behaviors, and the term theories-in-use relates to the actual patterns governing
people’s actions—in other words, what people say they do versus what they actually do. The single loop of learning involves only changes in tactics to solve a given problem, without reflecting on or changing the theory-in-use. The double loop of learning, instead, provokes reflection on and change of the paradigm informing one’s action, the values, beliefs, and assumptions driving the actions. In other words, single loop of learning operates inside a given set of alternatives, whereas double loop of learning reflects on a range of alternatives (Argyris, 1976; Friedmann, 1987; Scharmer, 2009; Toyer, 2012). For example, if I tell you that a city is made of concrete, trees, and money, and you believe in these categories, we are in the single loop of learning. Based on the single loop of learning, the planner is merely responsive to the existent categories, without questioning them. If your attention is not solely on what I am saying, but you look at the past and the present to understand what a city actually is, beyond the given discourse, you are engaged in the double loop of learning. Planners with such reflexivity reshape the boundaries to create alternatives based on the engagement with the past and the present reality. (A triple loop of learning, which we will explore later, refers to learning from the future in addition to reinventing the underlying categories with present and past experiences.) Drawing on these insights in organizational learning, Friedmann made a case for an epistemological turn within the planning field, one that requires engagement with the double loop of learning: a transactive form of planning that involves both formal and expert knowledge, and experiential or uncodified knowledge, which is the knowledge derived from practice (Friedmann, 1987; 1993). Formulating radical planning, Friedmann proclaimed simultaneously the illegitimacy of the rational model of planning and the urgency of re-centering planning practice in civil society.

Based on the second loop of learning, Friedman defined the central task of radical planning as the mediation between knowledge and practice. The planner, understood in a broad sense, has the responsibility of shaping theories, promoting the appropriation of theory by practitioners, and redefining the theory based on practice. The planner’s position would be tangential to the processes conducted by the civil society: not apart, above, or within. Ideally, successful struggles would prevent catastrophes, propose alternatives, and shift policies. In the worst-case scenario, “resistance is never wasted,” since it involves experimentation with solutions, consciousness raising, and formation of solidarities (Friedmann, 1987, p. 390). Mediation in radical planning means living the contradiction between empirical analysis and normative vision, critique and affirmation, present reality and future vision. Mediation is the capacity to hold the dialectical connection between a pair of opposites, choosing “and” rather than “or” (Friedmann, 1987, p. 405).

Besides the centrality of future in the definition of planning and mediation in Friedmann’s legacy, the formulation of desirable future outcomes remains a general principle in need of a problematized comprehension. In radical planning theorization there is a blind spot, I argue, with respect to future and how the imagination of that future is reached. Friedmann defines planning as “a forward-looking activity that selects from the past those elements that are useful in analyzing existing condition from a vantage
point of the future—the changes that are thought to be desirable and how they might be brought about” (1987, p. 11). A transformative theory would provide solid knowledge to frame structural problems, critique the reality, project the future trends of problems, elaborate images of desirable future outcomes, and discuss best strategies to achieve them (Friedmann, 1987, p. 390).

But in this vision of radical planning, based on a double loop of learning, democratic experiences would inevitably generate humane urban futures. What that future is, and how we have imagined and arrived at that desirable future, is not problematized. From this perspective, the main task is to engage in closing the gap between theory and practice, and the fundamental realm of learning is the past and present experience. “Future” is not a realm of learning; it is a mere consequence of what we do and have done. “Imagination” is mostly an individual psychological and biological trait that someone carries, and planning has nothing to contribute but hope to have imaginative citizens. I argue that the underlying and widespread assumption that suggests humane urban futures will emerge from the democratic experience needs to be reviewed. For example, Peter Marcuse argues:

\[
\text{It is not for lack of imagination or inadequate attention or failing thought that no more concrete picture is presented, but because, precisely, the direction for actions in the future should not be preempted, but left to the democratic experience of those in fact implementing the vision. (Marcuse, 2009, p. 194)}
\]

The cause of the problem, then, is the nature of the process creating the outcome. Such processes pursue a broken link between theory and practice, where those who imagine and those who implement are not the same groups. Marcuse’s concern is the suppression of intention of those who are excluded from envisioning alternatives but are implementing such visions. Several assumptions are implicit in Marcuse’s writing: (1) failing to imagine is an actual problem; (2) dysfunctional democratic processes creating such future projections cause the failure to imagine; (3) “dysfunctional” refers to (a) the imposition of external models and (b) processes that segregate intellectual and manual labor and (c) processes that compartmentalize visualization and implementation. In the absence of a body of research of imagination in planning processes, it is not clear how Marcuse defines “imagination”—if he considers it a product of a social process (rather than a feature of a process) or an individual trait (rather than feature of a process). In any case, this framework implies a divide between democratic experience and imagination.

Marcuse (2009) implies that the democratic experiences can be understood apart from the quality of the collective attention. Lack of imagination, inadequate attention, and failing thought are not the reasons why people cannot visualize more concrete images of future. Marcuse suggests that the democratic processes, not the imaginative capacities, should be the focus of analysis. This framework suggests imagination of alternative futures is an automatic result of a process in which imagination itself occupies a peripheral role. By linking theory and practice, visualization and implementation, intellectual and manual work, imaginative futures appear as a desirable and spontaneous outcome. However, as Holston (1998) noticed, participatory processes involving local communities across the United States commonly generated discriminatory, anti-democratic outcomes. (p. 53).
Moving radical planning theory to a *triple loop of learning* requires reintegrating imagination not as an automatic result of a democratic process, but as a fundamental feature of the democratic process. I will explore how imagination is a complex interplay between the individual and collective levels. Rather than an event that occasionally happens, imagination is a process to be cultivated and developed. A boss who proposes the most conventional structures of work, but demands unconventional creative outcomes from her employees, will undoubtedly be disappointed. The substance and imagination of a desirable future has been unwittingly omitted from the practical considerations of method and social learning. We want imaginative futures, without knowing how to be imaginative together.

The blind spot that imagination occupies in this framework cautiously appears in *Toward a Non-Euclidian Mode of Planning* (1993). In this article Friedmann advocates for a transactive, or radical, planning as a mode with the emphasis in the here and now—“people’s everyday lives” rather than an “imagined future time”:

*Innovative planning is consequently focused rather than comprehensive in scope; present rather than future oriented; and concerned chiefly with institutional and procedural changes appropriate to the case at hand. […] Face-to-face interaction in real time is the new model of planning. This is not to argue that it is altogether futile to imagine the future time or useless to make projections, simulations, and other hypothetical studies about what might or ought to-happen next year, or five or fifty years from now. Human imagination cannot be confined to practical problem solving in the here and now. Being open to the future, the mind takes leaps in time. Concern with an imagined future will continue to play an important role in planning, but the emphasis in non-Euclidian planning should be on processes operating in actual and real time, because it is only in the evanescent and still undecided present that planners can hope to be effective.* (Friedmann, 1993)

This passage demonstrates the absence of a more comprehensive understanding of imagination and its role in social learning. The humane vision and normative perspective remain a central concern, but the “imaginary time” receives marginal priority. Such disconnection demonstrates a loose conceptual link between imagination, morality, and action. The complex task of mediation between “present and future” is replaced by “the present rather than the future,” losing some of the future’s brightness promised in *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action*.1

Responding to such shortcomings, this thesis aims to extend Friedmann’s task into the 21st century, searching to nourish the planning field with some of the contemporary discussions in organizational learning, philosophy of mind, and urban utopianism. I believe such interdisciplinary inquiry might help radical practices move from a *reactive* position against the problems inherent in capitalist societies, to *regenerative* modes, which create new paradigms that cannot arise in the old frameworks of capitalism. If democracy does not necessarily and naturally unfold humane futures for humane cities, we need to understand the meaning of opening the imagination in order to change the processes by which we design and make change. This is a question of method. If the role of mediation in radical planning, referred to in the 1980s, was the mediation between formal knowledge and uncodified knowledge, what layer would we add to the task of mediation in order to respond to contemporary conditions of planning and social learning? That new layer, I argue, is a possible *third loop of learning*. 

9
How can planners mediate the visible and the invisible, the current reality and the future? In 1987, Friedmann focused his attention on the link between reason and democracy. In 2018, we can move his legacy a step forward and study the connection between imagination and democracy.

Scharmer: The Triple Loop of Learning and Theory U

*Intertwining the Visible and the Invisible, the Past and the Future*

In the organization and management field, the multiple definitions for the triple loop of learning can be categorized in three groups (Tosey et al., 2012). The first category defines the triple loop of learning as a change in “paradigm,” or the “why” of an organization. The second category proposes that a third loop of learning would be the learning about the process of learning, or how to develop the skills to operate the single and double loops of learning. The third category is inspired by Bateson’s (1973) five-level model of learning designed as *recursive hierarchy* represented as concentric circles that include and go beyond the previous levels. Level II resembles the double loop of learning and refers to the change in the way events are punctuated. Level III, which connects to the triple loop of learning, changes the grammar system itself. This level would not be an instrumental or goal-oriented process and would require different types of intelligence. Changing the set of alternatives (or the system of punctuation) needs to assume risks and engage with unconscious and aesthetic dimensions of experience that are beyond language and management control (Tosey et al., 2012). Since scholars in the field of organizational learning do not agree on a single encompassing definition for the triple loop, I chose to focus on Otto Scharmer’s *Theory U*, the core principles of which connect to the inquiry of this thesis.

*Theory U*, which is called by Scharmer a *triple loop of learning*, brings fundamental contributions to the dilemmas of imagining urban futures in radical planning. The driving question in Theory U is “How can we connect to our best future potential instead of continuing to operate from the patterns of the past?” The single and double loop of learning cannot answer this question because they are mostly reactive forms of learning based on past experiences. Scharmer proposes the social technology of *presencing* as a third loop of learning. If the single loop of learning is reacting to a problem in order to propose a solution, and the double loop of learning is focused on *reframing* the problem, *presencing* focuses on *regenerating* through the dialogue between the past and the future streams of time. The leverage of human systems is in intertwining the invisible and the visible.

Closing the gap between past and future is grounded on the idea that we are not one, but two: the self reproducing past patterns and the self we can become in the future (Scharmer, 2009, p. 25). Scharmer (2009) recounts personal experiences that illustrate his concept of *presencing*. In his childhood, the house he lived in with his family caught fire, and he watched its total destruction. In his description, his quality of presence in that moment shifted, watching a past dissolving and a future emerging. Later, when he was 16 years old, he joined a 100,000-person march in Brokdorf, Germany, which he described as a turning point in his life: “When I returned that night, my physical body was unharmed. But I came home a
different person. Our collective body—the living body I became “one with” during that event—had been attacked and wounded, that is: opened.” (p. 90) The risk they were exposed to during the confrontation was fundamental in his description. In both narratives there is an element of risk and a situation where the perception of time shifted. It is the experience of the threshold—an encounter between the self and “the other self,” which is “the person or community we can become as we journey into the future”—that marks and open the individual and collective body (Scharmer, 2009, p. 41).

The process of the U is grounded on Social Field Theory, from which I would like to highlight 2 out of the 20 developed principles that present the centrality of time in Scharmer’s framework. The generative inversion principle proposes that “a social field evolves by activating deeper levels, the experience of time, space, self, intersubjectivity, and Earth morphs through a process of inversion” (2009, p. 237). In terms of perception of time, social fields move from (1) habitual, where one is “disembodied or disconnected from time,” to (2) chronological, perceived as an “exterior sequence of events.” Then the chronological moves to (3) slowing down, when the “interior dimension of time is opening up,” and finally to (4) stillness/kairos/presencing, when “one feels present with something larger” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 237). In a deeper sense, social fields are not only marked by the experience with time; they change through shifting the perception or experience of time:

The social field is a time sculpture in the making. Unlike traditional sculptures that exist in space, social fields extend and evolve as sculptures of time. (...) Social time sculptures come into existence when both directionalities of time—from the past and from an emerging future—meet in the now. [...]. When the two arrows of time meet, people and groups begin to engage in a collective process of giving birth to something new. (Scharmer, 2009, p. 250)

Learning from the future refers to a learning process where people access deeper layers of experience that allow the emergence of a higher future possibility. Instead of activating tacit or embodied knowledge only, the process enacts the self-transcending or not-yet-embodied knowledge (p. 68). Instead of just involving objective structures and systems (Objectivity, related to the 19th century), and the enacted structures and process (Subjectivity, related to the 20th century), Theory U is based on the deep sources of enactment (Transsubjectivity, related to the 21st century). The triple loop of learning consists of shifting the source of attention (Scharmer, 2009, p. 162) that permeates one’s actions and thoughts, allowing access to deeper levels of experience that reveals the best future possibility (Scharmer, 2009, p. 162). The present is the site of the seeds of future. Access to these possibilities requires developing generative skills and multiple forms of intelligence (open mind, open heart, and open will), and facing resistance in the learning process (voices of judgement, fear, and cynicism). The U-journey refers to the shift of the structural field of attention from downloading, reproducing the past into the future, to a more profound quality of attention that listens to the not-yet-embodied knowledge.

The process of uncovering future possibilities happens through establishing horizontal and vertical connections. Horizontal connections are the linkages between the self and others, and the self and the senses. The vertical connection comprises the link between self (old self) to Self (a new self operating
from a higher future potential). In Theory U, Scharmer (2009) suggests the nature of the connections between self-others, self-senses, and self-Self that are able to open to the collective body involve a “‘crack’ in the situational script” (p. 90; p. 151). The activation of one’s deeper levels of attention is, therefore, not only a form of synthesis of new knowledge, but also a destabilization.

The U-journey to uncover and materialize the higher future possibility is a nonlinear and dialectical process. The stages of the journey are “cognitive spaces” within a matrix, or a “holographic theory,” that functions as “an integral whole” (Scharmer, 2009, p. 44). Furthermore, it involves a dialectical movement between presencing and absencing. Presencing involves the change from the structural field of downloading (the reproduction of past mental models) to the structural field of seeing, sensing, presencing, crystallizing, prototyping, and performing. (Scharmer, 2009). Absencing refers to cutting off the vertical and horizontal connections: the disconnection between self (both individual and collective) to its senses, to others, and to a higher-possibility Self. The connections between self-other, self-senses, and self-Self are cut off, referring respectively to the three core dividers: social-economic, ecological, and cultural-spiritual divides (Scharmer, 2009, p.96).

Scharmer (2009) dedicates most of his analysis to the individual and conversational levels, but recognizes that the application to larger and more complex spheres demand further research. A straightforward application of Theory U to understanding the meaning of opening the imagination is not without issues. The role of the past in the learning journey is ambiguous. In the context of planning, how can a group decide what it should let go of? What are the boundaries between resistance, stubbornness, and compliance? Moreover, how can the transference of Theory U as a model of social learning from the organizational scale accommodate the complexity of power dynamics entailed in the urban scale? Discussions in philosophy of mind, utopian thinking, and colonization of imagination (Appendices A, B, C, and D) will deepen our understanding of the dimensions of past, power dynamics, outcome, and space to refine this framework and its applicability to the context of radical planning.

**The Paradox of Imagination**

*Imagining the New with the Glasses of the Old*

“Utopia is always unequally utopian, in that its way of imagining the new is partly comprised of new combinations and scales of what exists, indeed, almost always mere obscure little details of what does exist.” (Santos, 1995, p. 479)

What I am calling the imagination paradox refers to an extensive discussion across urban planning, utopian thinking, philosophy of mind, and organizational learning: imagining the new ends reproducing the old. Every creative impulse to imagine and create an ideal urban future (which I refer to as humane urbanism) is hunted by the reproduction of one’s past experiences and habitual discourses, tending to degenerate into a not so different version of the present. Or, when it is indeed different from the
present, it tends to degenerate during the process of materialization. Many versions of this paradox have been expressed—for instance, as tension between emancipation and regulation (Santos, 1995), historical process and spatial form, as well as imaginative free play and control (Harvey, 2000), utopia and reality (Holston, 1998), reproductive and creative imagination (Sampaio, 2008), opening and closing the imagination (Miraftab, 2018), absencing and presencing (Scharmer, 2009), and intention and reality (Kind, 2016b; Langland-Hassan, 2016).

Based on my comprehensive review of literature, I find four key ways in which the imagination paradox is explained—predominantly understood in terms of its constraint by (1) present and past experience, (2) language or discourse, (3) imagined outcomes, (4) and the process of materialization. First, when we imagine an alternative future, we tend to reproduce the past into the future. Imagination is reality-oriented, adapting from past experiences the components with which to reimagine the world. Second, imagination is constrained by language. Since discourse shapes notions of reality and possibility, any effort to reveal something that is yet to come, a not-yet-embodied knowledge, gets trapped by the narratives you convey to communicate such emergent idea. Imagination is paradoxical: it is simultaneously under intentional control and unconstrained, reality oriented and time transgressive. (See Appendix A, which explores how reality shapes imagination and imagination shapes reality, based on the scholarship of philosophy of mind.)

The third dimension of this paradox suggests that any outcome we imagine will become the new constraint (or inspiration) of the next imaginative process, if we think about such process not as an isolated phenomenon but as a chain of events. In this sense, the act of imagining uses the imagined (materialized or not) as a boundary. The imagined or realized city of the past becomes a source of imagination in the present to think about the future. The images of the good city carry an emotional power and are the foundations of the political community and the sense of local identity (Friedmann, 2000).

Finally, it is not only the process of imagining that is far from pure. Every attempt to materialize these imagined futures are based on and constrained by existing material conditions, institutional arrangements, and personal behaviors—some of which are even the target of the initial aspirations of change (Harvey, 2000; Holston, 1998). A popular image circulating on the internet the last few years illustrates this idea. A man sitting in an armchair wears a Che Guevara T-shirt, while typing on his Mac and drinking a coffee produced by explored workers somewhere in the world. The materialization of the ideal city relies on the same conditions of the present it wants to overcome:

\[E\]ndless open and benevolent qualities of some utopian social process [...] have to crystalize into spatially-ordered and institutionalized material world somewhere and somehow [...] Free-flowing processes become instantiated in structures, in institutional, social, cultural, and physical realities that acquire a relative permanence, fixity, and immovability. Materialized utopias of process cannot escape the question of closure or the encrusted accumulations of traditions, institutional inertias, and the like, which they themselves produce. (Harvey, 2000, p. 185)
The imagination of a humane urban future is thus constrained in the process of imagining by experience, language, and previous projected futures, while the process of materializing the ideal is constrained by the existing material conditions and power dynamics.

If it is so hard to imagine alternatives to the dystopian realities of brutality, exclusion, and systematic destruction of our living world, should we abandon the act of imagining at all? Bringing it to practice, should community planners and organizers stop asking people what they want because the answers are disruptive projections of the existent naturalized state of violence, or because they are useless in satisfying any technical concern in the planning process? To stop imagining might be as oppressive as the projection of distorted and illusive futures, and the risk of degenerated utopias should not abort a genuine search for humane futures (Harvey, 2000; Holston, 1998). Such encouragement matters, especially when considering such an intricate and ambivalent process as imagination. Imagination of human futures should not work like a crossword puzzle, filling in the blanks of already established frameworks or believing in vacant spaces that one day after our time will be filled, if the instructions of resistance are properly followed. Moreover, there is no shame in affirming that what we have been wholeheartedly searching for across generations under labels of moral or solidarity economy, social and environmental justice, have been driven by inner, strong, but not-shaped desires for a world we don’t even have words or images to express. If imagination, even when contained in small, messy capsules, has the power to inspire people to seek change, discovering its true potentials and limits can make fundamental contributions finding humane urban futures. But of course, that is possible only if we dare to be fools. Holston (1998) suggests places of insurgent citizenship as the priority locus to investigate the traces of a new political imagination.

In Holston’s argument, the spaces of insurgent citizenship present the new as not yet absolved by the old. However, the imagination paradox implies that the failure of the utopian modernist project does not come from an exclusive trait of that imaginative mode. Instead, we need to assume that any attempt to imagine a future that differs from the present faces this paradox. The risk of reproducing the past into the future is not dissolved by the fire of a genuine counter-hegemonic practice and discourse—because the human beings involved in those practices are not apart from the world they want to change. Just as a humane urbanism is not a pure abstract notion apart from the inhumane, the future is not apart from the present and past. The most radical practice of grassroots movements might suffer similar imaginative challenges faced by an entrepreneur trying to come up with a solution toward what she thinks will make, in her perspective, “the world a better place.” Thus, insurgent places of citizenship are a rich field of study about the imagination paradox not because they are about idealized emergence of a humane urbanism, but because they intensely live the dilemmas of trying to create the new while living in the old.

The case study of the Brazilian urban grassroots movement MTST (Movement of Homeless Workers) will lead us through a passionate journey to understand the paradox of imagination and what it means to open the public or the collective imagination. Founded in 1997 in the state of São Paulo,
MTST’s principal strategy is to occupy large vacant plots in urban areas to denounce the housing deficit, open negotiations with the government to subsidize housing projects, and raise the social consciousness of those participating in the occupations. Although MTST is an openly anti-capitalist movement searching for urban reforms and holding a counter-hegemonic narrative, it does not decolonize the imagination. The transformative experiences explored along this thesis, especially in chapter 5, refer to a minority within MTST. Most of the members do not have a comparable level of engagement in the movement’s activities and internal dialogues as their leaders. The strong experiences of personal change lived by their leadership cannot be generalized to their entire social base. There is a sharp contrast between the leftist objectives and ideas of the leaders, and the conservative profile of its base, most of whom are concerned with the immediate acquisition of a house and have deep rooted beliefs in the inviolability of private property. However, it is exactly because such difference between the leaders and the basis exists that MTST is a perfect site to explore the paradoxes involved in the making of a humane urbanism.

Miraftab: Future as a Space of Struggle

Scharmer (2009) argues that future is a source of learning; Miraftab (2018) argues that future is a space of struggle; I propose to integrate both the learning and power dimensions for a triple loop of learning in planning theory and practice. Miraftab (2018) argued that future is the last colony, a space of struggle between opening and closing down our imaginations. In this section, I extend her argument based on the literature review and the case study, by (1) framing the collective imagination as imagination tensegrity; (2) adding a new conceptual layer to the definition of the urban space; and (3) defining the concepts of opening and closing the imagination. Based on the review of multidisciplinary scholarship in Appendix C, I propose the collective imagination as a dynamic constellation of memories, possibilities, and future projections in tension—the imagination tensegrity. By extending the notion of the city palimpsest, the urban space is a tensegrity system of spatiotemporal arrangements of past, present, and future layers. Opening the imagination destabilizes and reinvents such spatiotemporal arrangements, crystallized in structures of knowledge and power, through the creation of experiences that make territories visible, people visible to themselves, and the future visible. Closing down the imagination, formed by the two subcomponents “colonization of imagination” and “colonization of the future;” is the suppression of the experience with reality and time, that generates the stabilization of future possibilities.

Several authors and their multidisciplinary scholarship help us investigate what an urban utopian or a new political imagination could look like. These bodies of works include those by Harvey (2000), Donald (1997), Davoudi (2013), Foucault (1966), Unger (1987a), Holston (1998), Santos (1995), and Scharmer (2009). Based on such a multidisciplinary body of scholarship, I have identified seven key principles representing the main ideas concerning the process and how the imagination of humane urban futures could look. These main principles focus on (1) destabilization, difference, and transgression; (2)
making (lived experience or experimentation of new social and epistemological forms); (3) the exploration of tensions; (4) the exploration of reality as a multi-layered structure; (5) shifting the perspective of time; (6) the inclusion of space as a dimension of utopianism; and (7) outcomes as uncanny models rather than orderly and harmonious representations. Based on these dimensions, which are discussed on Appendix C, I propose to think the public imagination in terms of imagination tensegrity. Furthermore, although the term decolonization of imagination provides useful insights, I suggest the use of the terms “unleashing” or “opening” the imagination. The delusional totalities (the “colonized” and “the decolonized”) can be distracting from the core task of opening the collective imagination: to reveal the tensions or juxtapositions between ideal and real, humane and inhumane. Opening or unleashing the imagination emphasizes its importance as a process, not an event or attribute of an entity.³

Imagination Tensegrity

I propose thinking about the collective dimension of imagination as imagination tensegrity, by building on the concept of tensegrity discussed since the 1920s across disciplines such as architecture, biology, and psychology (IUED, 1978; Judge, 1984; Marsico and Tateo, 2017). Tensegrity, or a tensional integrity, is a design principle developed by the architect R. Buckminster Fuller in the 1960s. It refers to dynamic systems of oppositional forces in balance or a system where “discontinuous set of compression elements is opposed and balanced by a continuous tensile force” (Ingber and Landau, 2012).⁴ Originally developed within architecture, the concept was later applied to understand how muscles function and the structure of cells.⁵ In the 1970s and 1980s, a few publications⁶ discussed the application of tensegrity to understand organizations and networks. Organizational tensegrity explores human systems as the arrangement of elements interconnected in tensions of communicative flows. The nodes are the formal roles within a specific organization or beyond the organizational boundaries (Judge 1984).

Figure 1.1. R. Buckminster Fuller holds up a Tensegrity sphere. 18th April, 1979.

Marsico and Tateo (2013, 2017) applied tensegrity for the first time the concept in psychology by defining the psyche as a tensegrity system. Previous perspectives in psychology framed the psyche in a state of static equilibrium, where tension was only a disturbance to the balance, and the individual shall eventually return to a balanced state. The limitation of these previous models, however, is that “change can be triggered and explained only in terms of external forces applied to the system” (Marsico and Tateo, 2017). Inspired by, among others, Kurt Lewin (1935, 1936, 1939), William James (1950), Hermans et al. (2017), and Paul Klee (1961), Marsico and Tateo (2013, 2017) see tension not as a temporary state to be overcome, but as a driving force within the system. According to Marsico and Tateo (2017), “tensional tensegrity or dynamic tension” should replace “stability and continuity” as the organizing principle of psychology life. The psychology space of the individual should be understood as a field of tension generated by a multitude of positions in conflict and negotiation. It is within this negotiation between two or more different positions, the buffer zone, that a new third position, new possibilities, emerge. The new
emerged possibilities do not solve the tension, but integrate the old tensions and create new positions, generating new tensions from the new created positions. It is “a transformation of the field that reconfigures the tensegrity structure of the self and feeds forward a new dynamic tension” (Marsico and Tateo, 2017).

Transferring this concept from an individual to a social level, we can understand a tensegrity system as composed of sub-systems with their own tensegrity structures. An organization’s sub-systems, such as departments or individuals, are embedded in a network of overlapping tensions. This flux of tensions comprehend two types: centripetal (what divides –a border, such as incompatibilities and conflicts) and centrifugal (what unites—a connector, such as the shared information and values among subparts). The unique balance between the dynamic tensions configures the integrity of that system (IUED, 1978; Judge, 1979; Marsico and Tateo, 2017).

The idea of imagination tensegrity is grounded on the literature review on urban utopianism (Appendix C) and philosophy of mind (Appendix A), as well as the key principles of Theory U. The scholarship in urban utopianism has highlighted destabilization, the exploration of tensions, the idea of reality as a multi-layered structure, and the importance of uncanny models, among other factors, as central elements to forge a new political imagination. Scharmers (2009) presented that the leverage of a human system is in the intertwine between the invisible and the visible. Even if a pulse driving a collective experience is not defined, it doesn’t mean it is not existent. The imagination tensegrity, the dynamic tensions between memories from the past, possibilities in the present, and projections of the future, is a metaphor that plays with the invisible and visible realms of experience. Tension was a central element, across several fields, underlying the main discussions in the literature review. The purpose of introducing the idea of tensegrity as a metaphor to understand the collective imagination, is to emphasize the centrality of tension. If we remove tension from a tensegrity system, the structure stops to exist. If we remove the complex dynamic tensions between the multiple shapes (past, present, and future) by the multiple actors, if we suppress deeper layers of knowledge such as the body, emotions, and memories, we cannot imagine humane futures. The advantage of defining the collective dimension of imagination as imaginative tensegrity is that it highlights the systemic tensions between pulses, visible and invisible, embedded in a certain subjectivity. Before we have a complete picture of the imagination tensegrity as applied in planning, we need to understand one more piece of the puzzle: the city palimpsest.

The Future Layer in the City Palimpsest

Future as a Constellations of Amorphous Shapes in a Field of Power

As previously discussed, opening the imagination involves a nonlinear engagement with time. Because imagination is mysteriously related to the perception of time, rethinking its role in planning urges us to decolonize our own epistemological framework. In addition to the commonly perceived linear representation of time, we shall add a new perspective of time as a multilayered structure and place, as an
accumulation of multiple temporal meanings. Donald (1997) and Epstein (1998) mentioned the idea of city palimpsest to describe the accumulation of experiences in the urban space, a topography of memories. The idea of palimpsest, illustrated on Figure 1.5, refers to something that has “diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface.” I propose to extend the city palimpsest metaphor to frame the urban space not only as the accumulation of past experiences and present perspectives, but also as the juxtapositions of future projections. Future is a myriad of holographic forms in constant change and dispute. This understanding adds a new explanatory layer both to the idea of future as a space of struggle and to the definition of colonization of future (Miraftab, 2018). In sum, this section proposes a new metaphor to represent space and time: the city as a dynamic tensegrity system formed by spatiotemporal arrangements of memories (past), possibilities (present), and projections (future).

Figure 1.5. Cambridge Palimpsest by Issam Kourbaj. The art piece illustrates the multiple temporal layers, and their stories, of the city of Cambridge, UK. Retrieved from http://issamkourbaj.co.uk/cambridge-palimpsest/

The modern notion of progress and linear time, “now deeply rooted in nearly every intellectual corner of the Western world” (Hägerstrand, 1985, p. 36), is only one among multiple possibilities to perceive and represent time. For example, in “The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay”, Nancy D. Munn (1992) discusses the time perspective present in Apache and Iraqw prophet narratives. In Apache narrations, the names of places integrate the spatial and temporal dimensions. The Apache narratives manifest the time perception, past-present-future, as connected and superimposed spatial layers —“here-now” and “then-there”. Mainly it is the idea of places as being saturated with varied temporal meanings (Munn, 1992, p. 114), which is different from considering future as a place, outside of the present, towards which we are moving to. The Iraqw prophet narrative also puts forward the idea of “future as ‘the matter which I see’, ... the future is thus contained “in potentia at the [prophetic] moment” (Munn, 1992, p. 115). Therefore, the usual linear perspective to frame time is not the only option available.
To open our collective capacities to re-imagine the future invites us to move from the perspective of time as a linear progression to a multilayered structure. Figure 1.6 represents the linear perspective of time. Past being behind, Present here, and Future somewhere forward. As if the passage of time were a race, where we move from the past, abandoning it, and towards somewhere in front of us, the future. Figure 1.7 represents another metaphor: space as a saturation of temporal layers where past, present, and future co-exist and influence each other, as memories, possibilities, and not-yet-embodied knowledge in the here and now. Cities are multi-layered temporal structures. The space is saturated by memories and not-yet-embodied knowledge in the here and now. The idea of spatial-temporal continuity and non-linearity of time are otherwise manifested through the metaphor of seeds of future (Scharmer, 2009). Time is not only a linear progression of mutual exclusive frames linked by logical causality. Instead, time and space are also a nonlinear and multi-layered structure from which we can learn. Confining ourselves to the linear perspective undermines our capacities to open the imagination. The future is a multitude of seeds of potential existing in the present and the past. The metaphor of the city-palimpsest as extended to the future layer offers an opportunity to move from the linear representation of time (abandoning the past behind/forgetting, moving toward the promising future) and enhance the public capacity to interact, influence, and reinvent the future city layer.

The multilayer structure of time helps to reframe the role of the future in planning theory and practice, which, I argue, is a blind spot. According to Pieterse (2000) the future is open, since it cannot be a property of anyone, and also it is many, since each place has its own future (p. 6). In Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s (1995) perspective, the future is empty, susceptible to be reinvented and be “opened by a horizon of possibilities” (p. 479). Openness and plurality are not intrinsic features to the future, they are consequences of human agency. The future is not open and plural per se. Santos’ (1995) definition of the future as being empty, while simultaneously open to be defined by paradigms in competition, is a contradiction. I argue that the future is never empty. The Script Elaborator, an idea immerse in controversies within the field of philosophy of mind, refers to our ability to fill the gaps left by the aspects our beliefs or experiences did not predict. What is not given or explained, our imagination fills up with something else (Langland-Hassan, 2016, p. 73). It implies that anything that is unknown gets filled by something that is known. Thus, the future, the realm of the unknown, is filled by the scripts and forms we...
experienced in the past. The future is populated by projections, possibilities, and expectations. Projections that, however, might have been outlined by others and bought by you in the Future A la Carte menu.

The logical conclusion is that the future is never empty; the future is a constellation of amorphous shapes embedded in a field of power, intertwined with past and present. It is a shape because it is moldable. It is amorphous because the future is not a static form. It is continuously changing, beholding diverse degrees of clarity, textures, and tones. It might be a blurry, unclear extension of the present, or a mix of incongruent collages assembling into a misunderstanding. It is intertwined with past and present because past experiences are the main materials that compound future projections. In congruence to Santos’ (1995) perspective on the competition between paradigms, the future is a myriad of holographic forms in constant change and dispute. The idea of an empty future would refer to a perception of a future projection as lacking meaning, not as a future without any kind of visualized form.

Closing Down the Imagination

If the space is a temporal multi-layered structure, what does it mean to talk about “colonized futures”? Based on this perspective, it is necessary to extend Miraftab’s (2018) argument that future is the last colony, a space of struggle between opening and closing down our imaginations, by defining the future also as a spatiotemporal layer. Extending this argument is fundamental to avoid reproducing the misguiding linearity of time under the label “decolonizing the future”. The application of the linear perspective to the “future as the last colony,” harms our possibility to experience the future as if it is a seed of potential within the present. Even engaging with “decolonizing the future,” (i.e. trying to amplify our vision of alternative futures) we end up trapped by “colonization of imagination” by reproducing the linearity of time that puts the future as a distant frame, because it is through the nonlinear and unusual engagement with time that we can reshape the visions of future. In other words, if the future—an object of political struggle—is not there, by what means is it being colonized here? If the future is a space of struggle, we need to consider it under a multi-layered structure of time, a city palimpsest where place is saturated by temporal meanings.

Closing down the imagination is not the annihilation of form (since the future is never empty), it is the stabilization of form. The future as a space of political struggle is a layer of experience composed by multiple forms in a potential state in our present reality. By being precluded to experience and reshape these forms, the future is a distant, strange, and stable possibility. Therefore, the “colonized future” is not an empty future, it is a frozen future. The colonization of imagination is the attempt to transform the imagination tensegrity into a static form, stabilizing the existent spatiotemporal arrangements between past, present, and future representations. In Appendix D, I further discuss how the suppression of experience with reality and time (colonization of the imagination) produces the stabilization of the form of future possibilities (colonization of the future).
Opening the imagination

By integrating the idea of imagination tensegrity and the city palimpsest, the city is a scenario of multiple pasts, futures, and present possibilities in tension with each other. These spatiotemporal arrangements are structures of knowledge (a constellation of tensions) that involve three layers (past, present, and future) in three scales (space, people, and vision), because everyone imagines something from somewhere:

(1) space: experience of what is real and possible (as well what is not) in the social space.
(2) identity: experience of who I am, what I want, and how I achieve what I want.
(3) vision: experience of the not-yet-embodied knowledge, how one’s desirable future manifests in the present.

Opening the collective imagination requires these structures of knowledge (constellations of tensions) to be destabilized to allow the emergence of new tensions. Destabilizing the static arrangements and reinventing these tensions involves creating experiences that overflow beyond the grammar of the present, the boundaries of what is considered real and possible from one’s perspective. Using Paul Klee’s perspective on Gestalt (as a living being) and form (a still life, “nature morte”), imagination tensegrity is the living being, an inner level animating the more visible and stable forms of “space,” “identity,” and “vision.” Therefore, opening the imagination refers to making territories visible, making people visible to themselves, and making the future visible.

Figure 1.9. Imagination Tensegrity. The Imaginative tensegrity refers to the spatiotemporal layers (past, present, future) which can be analyzed through the perspectives of space (making territories visible), identity (making people visible to themselves), and vision (making futures visible). Source: images drawn by the author.

Making the invisible visible is the act of revealing, deconstructing, and reinventing tensions in experience. Making territories visible is enabling social learning (seeing) and power (being seen) in a territory through the transgressive use of the space. Making people visible to themselves opens the collective imagination by opening the realm of experience, unleashing the individual and group
Making the future visible is the capacity to shape visions, expanding the capacity to both express and mediate the constellation of projections. It is the challenge of moving from hope, to hegemonic dreams, to counter-hegemonic dreams, and finally to generative visions, which relies on our capacity to experience the higher future possibilities and translate them into expressive (and inclusive) forms. Sandercock’s (1998) renowned work “Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History” congregates perspectives from multiple scholars in the effort to make silenced planning histories visible – those which are omitted or suppressed, under the official mainstream planning historiography. In this thesis, I suggest to expand the idea of making the invisible visible to go beyond learning from the past, which is based on the concept of double loop of learning in radical planning (Friedmann, 1997).

The metaphor of imagination tensegrity is not alienated from the debates on utopianism in the 20th century. As discussed in Appendix C, the literature review suggests seven common themes approached in Harvey (2000), Donald (1997), Davoudi (2013), Foucualt (1966), Unger (1987a), Holston (1998), and Santos (1995) that present similarities with Scharmer (2009) and the scholarship of the philosophy of mind. Imagination tensegrity, therefore, reflects seven common principles in the imagination of a humane urbanism: transgression, making, tensions, multi-layered structures, time, space, and uncanny models. Opening the imagination refers to the destabilization or deconstruction of the existent spatiotemporal arrangements and the reinvention of new tensions - moving from crystalized structures of knowledge to a dynamic constellation of a flux of tensions in reformulation. Based on the MTST’s case, I propose such spatiotemporal arrangements in a scale of three dimensions. The first dimension refers to space, the experience of what is real and possible in the social space/one’s environment. The second dimension is identity, the experience of who I am, what I want, and how I achieve what I want. The third dimension is vision, the experience of the not-yet-embodied knowledge, how one’s desirable future manifests in the present. Ultimately, imagination tensegrity is my proposal to frame structures of knowledge embedded in three overlapping levels: space, people, and time. Opening the imagination refers to making territories visible, making people visible to themselves, and making the future visible.

**Synthesis**

Friedmann (1987) created the foundation of social learning in radical planning by exploring the link between reason and democracy, based on the concept of double loop of learning in organizational development. In 2018, I propose to extend his legacy on the meaning of social learning by exploring the link between imagination and democracy. This inquiry is grounded on a sense of practical urgency: many people in the outskirts of the Global South stopped dreaming or are reproducing into the future dystopian possibilities or images from propaganda. How can we open the imagination of humane urban futures in the public domain?
Scharmer (2009) developed *Theory U*, a promising framework of a triple loop of learning, that investigates how we can learn from the future that wants to emerge, rather than reproducing past mental models into the future. The leverage for changing a system relies on the articulation of the visible and invisible dimensions of experience. As affirmed by Scharmer (2009), *Theory U* is still at its early stages and is mostly applicable to the individual and conversational levels. Therefore, on one hand we are extending Friedmann’s legacy in radical planning by exploring what it means to learn from the future, and on the other we are extending Scharmer’s framework in organizational learning to understand urban planning. But bringing the discussion of imagination to the public domain is not simply a translation of organizational learning principles into radical planning.

Miraftab (2018) argued that future is the last colony, a *space* of struggle between opening and closing down our imaginations. Based on the literature review and the case study, I integrate her perspective with Scharmer’s (2009) theory of the future as a source of learning and explore the argument further, by (1) framing the collective imagination as imagination tensegrity; (2) discussing the future as a spatiotemporal layer of urban space; (3) defining the concepts of opening and closing the imagination, and (4) in the next chapter, exploring the future not only as a space of struggle, but also as a disciplinary instrument orchestrating urban planning. The city’s imagination tensegrity is a prototype to provoke a conversation about the imagination in the public domain. Before we continue, the reader shall note that I use the collective imagination and the public imagination interchangeably across this thesis. For the sake of limiting the literature review, I don’t discuss what the nuances are of thinking imagination in these different scales. Chapter 2 explores the future as a disciplinary instrument in planning and the following chapters seek to define opening the imagination by exploring the case study of an insurgent practice – the Homeless Workers’ Movement.
CHAPTER 2

The Invisible City

Invisible Territories, Invisible People, Invisible Futures

Under the skin of the believed developed, rich, and beautiful city, there is a city that is believed to be barbarian, poor, and ugly. The “developed” city is made visible, and is everywhere: the television publicly portrays the private dramas lived in large and decorated houses. The invisible city is hidden: we need to spend hours in public transportation to be there, and the public dramas remain silenced as private failures among the walls of unfinished buildings. The developed and visible city is a hyper-reality, the utopia of the invisible city. When the invisible city is made visible in the news, it is mostly to show its state of brutality and violence. Occasionally stories of hope and “success” reinforce that the private utopia is always reachable for those with the right amount of talent and will. After the glimpses of dystopia, the under-city comes back to the invisibility it deserves. Because, of course, nobody wants to live and see such a dystopian world. The periphery is the underlayer that nobody wants to be, from which everyone wants to escape. The utopian city of the rich neighborhoods floats over the heads of the periphery as the layer of future possibilities which, however, has scarce chances to gain any trace of materiality in the peripheral territories. Although unachievable, this utopian layer of the developed neighborhood has its own purpose: it keeps the future as motivational as it is untouchable. The future is a vitrine to be seen (and desired) from distance. But this vitrine needs to be broken with new epistemological frameworks.

This chapter expands the critiques against mainstream planning beyond the division between theory and practice (Friedmann, 1987): it is also a sterilizing segregation between past, present, and future. Future (i.e., the images of future in the present) is a disciplinary instrument orchestrating planning. I adopted the Foucauldian perspective of discipline, understanding that the images and narratives of ideal urban futures within the present serve as both a coercive and productive force molding discourse and bodies in the planning field. The division between the theories of the planners or decision-makers and the actual experience of the low-income citizens (i.e., the single loop of learning) contribute to produce exclusionary cities. Radical planning would facilitate the emergence of a more humane urbanism through the reflexive engagement with theory and practice (i.e., the double loop of learning). The invisibility of the “problem” produces the invisibility of territories. Mainstream planning in the Brazilian context, with focus on housing policies and the urbanization process in São Paulo, is apart from people both in terms of process — by being blind to their experiences —, and outcome — by producing non-places where people become invisible to themselves. I expand this analysis, based in the single and double loop of learning, to understand how future has occupied the role of a disciplinary instrument in urban planning. The (colonized) future, the idealized images of American and European cities in particular, is a fuel catalyzing exclusionary processes of urbanization. The shapes of future have an agency in the present, they are hidden drivers in both mainstream and counter-hegemonic planning. Planners’ imaginative
bubbles are trapped in the vicious cycle of reproducing both the categories apart from the peripheries’ realities, and (colonized) images of future.

This chapter does not reduce the creation of segregated cities to “lack of imagination;” it does not ask “who” is the agent of imaginative planning, and it does not extrapolate the causes of an unimaginative paradigm. Several social, economic, and political aspects shape the scenario of an inhumane urbanism, such as accumulation by dispossession. Imagination is one of the possible lenses to look at the problem – not a reduction of the problem – a slightly complementary perspective to the focus on political economy. Nor is this thesis trying to answer the question of who is imagining a humane urbanism: grassroots or the State. It is tempting to announce the government as the space of the non-imaginative planning and the civil society as the space where a new humane urbanism is emerging. However, to sustain this statement is beyond the scope of this thesis. First, because it requires an in-depth understanding of the process, the micro-relations of power and knowledge, by which the policies where formulated. This thesis does not dare to enter the discussion of who are the agents responsible for policy-change. The struggle between the new and the old, transformation and adaptation, is intensely lived by the grassroots movements. The State, in the other hand, is a heteronomous structure, also embedded in contradictions and disputes. I am not equalizing “imaginative” to grassroots or civil society, and “unimaginative” to the State. Additionally, this thesis does not explore in any form the causes of the presence or absence of imagination in planning. How far the single loop of learning is intentionally perpetuated, a result of economic or political dimensions, a vicious cycle that planners cannot abandon, a denial, or a complete blind spot are not issues I am evaluating here. In any case, as we can see so far across several housing policies and regulations in Brazil, this sort of non-imaginative urbanism has been the norm, not the exception in mainstream planning. I am not investigating the causes or the agents, but suggesting that a phenomenon exists: there is a long run defining the problem, before we can attribute a cause or define who are its agents. Because my concern is not only to theoretically justify how imagination matters, but also to contribute to how “opening the imagination” can happen in practice, I avoid treating “imaginative” and “unimaginative” as the attributes of entities. Defining such mutual exclusive totalities preclude us from seeing the juxtapositions between old and new, inhumane and humane. It is within these tensions where we find the nuances to guide practice.

**Portraits of an Inhumane Urbanism**

*How Policies and Laws Produce Invisibility*

The literature review of the urbanization and housing policies that affected São Paulo starts in 1850 with the Land Law (*Lei de Terras*) and how it impacted the posterior exclusionary patterns of the Brazilian cities. Until 1920s, the housing market lacked any form of regulation or public policy. In the 1930s the first housing policies emerged, grounded on the perspective of the State as a development actor. From 1940s to 1980s the Center-Periphery mode of urbanization took place, shaping a highly socially and
spatially segregated cities. The *Lei do Inquilinato* (1940) and the *Lei Lehman* (1979) contributed to aggravate the housing deficit and increase urban informality. Historically, the legal parameters ignored the needs of the low-income citizens. The formal and legal city is unaffordable, leading to high rates of informality, the marginalization and criminalization of the urban poor. The parameters of legality produced the illegal city. Social and spatial segregation is the Brazilian urbanism. In response, a decades-long effort lead to the creation of a counter-point in 2001: the City Statute. An urban utopia manifested in regulatory tools to help civil society and local governments to create democratic cities. Although its implementation by local governments remains limited, the City Statute influenced cities’ master plans and federal policies, as well as has been appropriated by civil society. From 2007 to 2009 a consistent federal housing policy, the PlanHab, coherent to the right to the city was been formulated, engaging several societal sectors. In 2009, however, mobilized by the global economic crisis and the interests of real state companies, PlanHab became marginalized. The program *Minha Casa Minha Vida* was born: a financing program to boost the economy. Although it is the largest investment in housing in the Brazilian history, the program failed to conciliate housing production and the democratic urban development, reproducing the existent patterns of social and spatial segregation. Furthermore, it ignored the democratic discussions of the previous decades, incorporated in the PlanHab, and prioritizing the interests of real state companies. This section presents the inspirations and limits of these policies and laws, and their role on shaping an inhumane urbanism, by starting with a central historical element: the access to land.

**Free, But Not for Themselves**

*From Slavery to Landless*

Fourteen days after a law abolished the slave trade to Brazil, another law established a new land-ownership structure that would prevent the future ex-slaves and the masses of impoverished European immigrant workers to access land. Together, these two laws are considered the ground zero of capitalism in Brazil (Gadelha, 1989). In September 4, 1850, the Law *Eusébio de Queirós* prohibited the entrance of African slaves in Brazil, under the pressure of England. The law signalized the abolition of slavery in the horizon, which would be officially declared in 1888. In September 18, 1850, the Land Law (*Lei de Terras*) established a legal framework that marked the end of a pre-modern notion of property to a modern conception (Fonseca, 2005). According to Fonseca (2005), the key elements of *Lei de Terras* included:

1. Land tenure would not be possible anymore through land occupation. Until 1850, the colonial regime determined the system of *Sesmaria*, where land was donated by the Portuguese Crown to stimulate the occupation and production in the colony. Additionally, due to the extensive availability of land in Brazil, occupying land was equally a main process to gain the property of land. By shifting this paradigm, land became a commodity: it started to have an exchange value and should circulate in the market.

2. The occupation of land became a crime subject to severe punishments.
(3) The definition of which lands would be considered in the public domain, under the property of the State, as well as the adequate procedures to define which existent properties would be recognized as private property. Some of the requirements to affirm the land tenure included the need for the occupants to measure the terrains and the need for the land to be productive with crops. Both requirements restricted the possibilities of small properties. The landlords who failed to follow the requirements would have the land tenure revoked.

The Land Law was a result of an accumulation of discussions since the 1830. In 1843, the law project Land and Colonization (Projeto de Terras e Colonização) was a clear expression of the rural elites who wanted to preclude the free access to land by the disadvantaged. The project envisioned to increase the land prices in a way that immigrant workers would be forced to work for the rural elites, rather than occupying a parcel of land and working as small landowners to themselves, perspective clearly elaborated by the congressman Joaquim José Rodrigues Torres in 1843: “we want to avoid that free workers who come from other parts of the world can come to Brazil and instead of working for the landowners for some time at least […], just find vacant lands that will work for their own account” (Gadelha, 1989). The “some time at least,” however, did not mean much, since the working conditions of the migrants barely allowed them to move their dreams forward. In 1850, the abolition of the slave trade reignited the discussion, transforming the increasing mass of Black ex-slaves and immigrants into a bank of free workers whose only property was their capacity to work for the legislators of the country - not for themselves.

**The Place of the Poor in the City**

*The Urbanization Process in São Paulo*

The Brazilian urbanization process occurred mainly during the twentieth century as a continuity of the concentration of land, power and income, which characterized the colonial and imperial periods (Maricato, 2003). In such a context, the spatial segregation that characterizes the largest Brazilian cities, such as São Paulo, are not a consequence of a “disordered” urban growth or the absence of planning. Instead, the way governmental policies approached and framed the issues of housing, informality and poverty played a fundamental role to reinforce the historical social injustices.

São Paulo, in the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, accommodated the immigrant workers in denigrating housing conditions. From 1886 to 1920, the population in São Paulo grew 16 times, from 40,000 habitants (1886), to 260,000 (1900) and 580,000 (1920). Rural and European migrants supplied the labor demand in the city for the coffee economy, provoking an increase in the urban land prices. Renting was a profitable business corresponding to 90% of the population housing status in São Paulo in 1920 (Bonduki 1994), suggesting the degree of land concentration in the period. During this period, although the market supplied quantitatively the housing demand, the majority of the migrant workers lived in insalubrious conditions in São Paulo. The so called *cortiços* were born, multifamily
renting constructions hosting rural and foreigner migrants with working journeys up to sixteen hours a day. *Cortiços* were overpopulated housing units around 15m² (160ft²) in central areas, often sheltered four or more families, with 5 people by room, who could not afford the renting prices (Blay, 1985). The proximity with the work allowed the extensive work journeys. The population growth lead to increase the land value, the super-utilization of plots, and the overcrowding of *cortiços*. The lack of adequate housing and sanitary conditions propitiated the environment to several epidemics in the period. The public health crises represented costs to the state. In 1886, the legislation prohibited the construction of new *cortiços* and other forms of popular housing in the city’s center. If in a first moment the government was inactive in the regulation of the housing production and the rent prices, it become the protagonist of the *hygienist* public health campaigns to ban the *cortiços* from the city center (Blay, 1985; Kowarick, 2013).

The emerging Brazilian urbanism combined hygienism and profitability by importing two contrasting models: the French urbanist project of Paris in the 19th century, or the medicalized city, and the North-American “Model Housing Law” from 1914 (Sobrinho, 2013; Rolnik, 1997). The hygienist urbanism equalized high density, poverty, insanitary, and immorality (Rolnik, 1997). The engineer Victor da Silva Freire (1869-1951), influenced by the zoning debates in the U.S.A and Germany, proposed to align public health concern with the perspective of urban soil as a profitable investment. Although the zoning regulation in São Paulo would be fully implemented only in 1972, Freire’s perspective influenced the conceptual foundation of such new urbanism, adapted from the European and North American traditions: “Legislation has a positive role - to protect investments - and a negative one - to avoid the threat posed by the contagion of indecent and unhealthy uses and social groups” (Rolnik, 1997). Within this paradigm, the law protected the spaces for the elites by establishing unaffordable lot sizes and building regulations: “single-family houses isolated in large terrain and separated from the street and neighbors” (Rolnik, 1997). Urban policies and regulations referred to the definition of social territories, reflecting the principles of prioritizing profits and segregating social classes.

The ideal of a “clean city” flirted with the ideal of progress. The elites had the dream of living the ideal of European civility through the negation of poverty (Sobrinho, 2013). Poverty was a disease to be cleaned off from the growing cities. Factory workers, the poor, and *cortiços* were synonymous (Blay, 1985). The barbarian city of the poor was pushed to the city’s borders, separating poverty and wealth (Sobrinho, 2013). While the hygienist campaigns evicted the poor to the periphery, the government concentrated investments on small central ares of the city. The “Capital Improvement Plan” (*Planos de Melhoramentos da Capital*, 1899-1911), coordinated by Victor da Silva Freire, sought to shape “a new public image for the city, that of a clean and ordered setting that corresponded to the bourgeois respectability with which the coffee elite identified” (Rolnik, 1995, p. 67). The civilizing utopia, the images of the European and North American cities, became the justification and fuel in the production of a segregated city in the Global South.
In 1942, the *Lei do Inquilinato* froze the abusive rental prices for two years, provoking the retraction of the renting market. Meanwhile, in comparison to rent, the construction and sale of real estate generated higher profitability margins. The available credit for urban interventions bumped the construction sector, revitalized the previous “degenerated” areas occupied by the urban poor, and increased the land prices. The housing crisis of 1940 was born, resulting in 10% of São Paulo residents being evicted between 1945 and 1948 (Bonduki, 1994; Melo, 1992). Low-income citizens were forced to abandon the central areas, and self-construction in the vacant plots in the urban peripheries started to grow as the bottom-up solution for the housing deficit. The policy, which had the purpose of improving the conditions of the urban worker class, produced the opposite effect: the eviction of the poor from the center, in continuity with the previous decades.

Influenced by social, economic, and legal factors, the urbanization process between 1940 and 1980 in São Paulo followed the Center-periphery pattern (Caldeira, 2003). The birth of São Paulo as a Metropolis dates to the 1950s, when the industrialization processes started to move from the city to the broad region. Between 1950 and 1960, the population in São Paulo City expanded from 2,151,313 to 3,667,899 residents. The total population of Greater São Paulo, with a total area of 7,946.84 Km2 and formed by 39 municipalities, grew from 2,653,860 in 1950, to 4,739,406 in 1960, 8,139,730 in 1970 and 12,588,725 in 1980. In three decades, the population increased six times. The urbanization mode that shaped the population growth reinforced the historical social and spatial segregation. The elite lived in the center and legal areas with well-developed infrastructure and commuted with cars. The working classes lived in the periphery, often in illegal plots, and commuted with public transportation. The geographical distance and difficulties in accessing the central areas were the guarantees of the desirable separation by the high-income classes.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the economic crisis and exclusionary legislation worsened the condition of the urban working classes, leading to sharp growths in informal housing. Known as the lost decades, the period achieved high unemployment rates and created the conditions for the increase of the informal economy. In 1979, a federal law (Lehman Law/Lei Lehman) established a regulation for urban land subdivision, criminalizing clandestine occupations and defining the minimum area of urban plots as 125m². The legislation made the acquisition of lots by popular classes impossible. Favelas in São Paulo, which started to form in the 1950s, presented the largest expansion during the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1991, 60% of the population growth in the period occurred in informal settlements (Fix et al., 2003). In 1981, 80% of the antique colonial houses located in central areas were transformed in *Cortiços*, high-density rented housing with small rooms and poor sanitation conditions. The law reinforced the self-construction of homes in the outskirts of the formal system (Zuquim, 2012).

The center-periphery pattern favored land speculation in a process called “leapfrog development.” The multiplication of informal settlements and the construction of housing projects in the periphery forced the government to invest in urban infrastructure connecting these areas to the center of the city. In
this gap between the center and the periphery the improved infrastructure increased land values. The urban sprawl was costly for the State and profitable for large landowners (Freitas and Pequeno, 2015). Between 1914 and 1963 the population density dropped by 50% (Caldeira, 2003).10

In the 1990s the urbanization process presented a few different characteristics. Called “fragmentation of the social fabric,” it has involved the peripheralization of elites through fortified enclaves and high-income residential condominiums; and the distribution of poverty across the territory through the occupation of land with low economic value, such as wetlands and railroad tracks (Ribeiro & Lago, 1994; Freitas and Pequeno, 2015).

Urban planning in São Paulo and other major Brazilian cities simultaneously included the concentration of public investment in the formal/legal central areas occupied by the higher income classes (Freitas, 2017; Villaça, 1998), as well as the creation of regulations that made land unaffordable for the low-income citizens, who were left only with the option of squatting vacant plots in the urban peripheries (Fischer, 2008; Magalhães, 2013; Rolnik, 1997; Freitas, 2017). Therefore, the social and spatial configuration of the Brazilian cities is not a consequence of lack of planning, some sort of urban growth that escaped the hands of an incapable public sector. Instead, the social disparities are direct consequences of policies that perpetuate and often aggravate the life conditions of the poor.

The Production of Illegality

It is Unaffordable to be Legal, it is a Crime to be Informal

The urbanization process generated cities where illegality and informality are the norm, not the exception. According to 2010 Census, at least 11% of the population in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area lived “illegally,” in informal settlements under physical, social, and legal vulnerability. The illegality is an essential part of how the cities are produced in the peripheries of capitalism. Unattainable and unaffordable regulations, ignoring the needs of the low-income citizens and prioritizing the financial interests of the real state market, determine the place of the poor in the cities. In consequence, “an increasing number of people have had to break the law to have a place in cities” (Fernandes, 2001, p.22).

The parameters of the “legal city” establish the contours of the “illegal city.” The legal system, formed by its laws, principles, norms, values, and decisions, produce exclusionary frameworks that have ignored the needs and experiences of the poor. The urban illegality is socially produced. Fernandes (2001) attributed to the Liberal Legal Order one of the main causes of the failure of Brazilian cities. The ideology of the liberal legalism, which sees the individual property as absolute, sacred, and almost ahistoric, was consolidated in the Código Civil (Brazilian Civil Code) of 1916, when the urban population was significantly smaller. One century later, Brazilian jurists were still reproducing the individualist perspective of property rights. "Consciously or not, Brazilian lawyers have been at the service of economic interests that see in cities only the stage of capital accumulation, without concern for other social and environmental interests in the use of urban land” (Fernandes, 2001, p. 17). Moreover, different
forms of informality receive different legal treatments, according to the social and economic status of the law breakers. There are cases, for example, where the illegal squatting by elite groups have been “forgiven” due to the amount of investment in the property and the economic benefits generated for the city. Therefore, unimaginative urban planning refers not only to the creation of exclusionary legal frames, but also to the selective insistence on reproducing these parameters.

The urbanization of São Paulo, thus, is a tale of spatial segregation, social disparities, and urban sprawl, as if the fairy of private property – the most central organizing principle of urbanism – would magically make the city good. In reality, these financial interests prevail over others, holding planning a hostage to a model incapable of making social, environmental, and economic interests compatible. It is a planning mode that has failed in leading with the complex conciliation of individual and collective interests. As a result, the weaker links of the chain pay the price. It is a history of people treated as objects detached from land, the balls in a bingo cage. It is a history where low-income citizens were double evicted: evicted from rural areas by the lack of employment and evicted from urban land by the pressure of law. It is a history of laws that, ignoring the needs of the poor, established the limits of legality under unbearable parameters, worsening their housing conditions and criminalizing the few options left. Despite all of these issues, the history of urbanization in São Paulo and in Brazil is also a history of innovation in law and policies, and resistance from grassroots movements.

A Counterpoint

The City Statute and the Right to the City

After a decades-long democratic effort integrating multiple sectors of Brazilian society, the City Statute was approved in 2001: a “universal utopia” to “guarantee the right to the city and housing for everyone” (Maricato, 2010). The City Statute (Federal Law Number 10.257) is a policy device to be used, mainly by civil society, to catalyze social transformation in urban settlements, and overcome the inhumane scenario of segregation and inequality across Brazilian cities. The City Statute achieves this purpose by guaranteeing the social function of urban land – the restriction to urban land ownership in favor of collective interests, and the conciliation of social and environmental issues (Rodrigues & Barbosa, 2010; Maricato, 2010).

The City Statute represents a paradigmatic shift from the primacy of individual property rights toward the social function of property, where the interests of the real estate market co-exist with the cultural, social, and environmental interests of other groups and communities (Fernandes, 2001). The City Statute origin dates back to 1963, when the Architects Congress introduced the concept of idle property as being illegal. In 1987, the year prior to the approval of the new Brazilian Constitution, the Urban Reform Forum succeeded bringing together several societal actors, such as the public sector, professional associations, churches, academia, and social movements— who have been a catalyzing force from the design and implementation of urban reforms since the 1980s. As the result of this effort, the limits to
individual property rights are present in the Constitution of 1988 in the articles 182 and 183 (Rodrigues & Barbosa, 2010; Maricato, 2010). However, only the 2001 approval of the City Statute strengthened the principle of the social function of property, and helped to consolidate the Urbanistic Law as an autonomous body in relation to the Civil Law. In this new paradigm, the balance between the individual and collective interests regarding the use of urban land – “a nonrenewable good essential to the sustainable development of city life” – would be defined by the public sector (Fernandes, 2001, p.15). Therefore, the City Statute, a historical mark in urban planning and law, aims to democratize the access to urban land and reconcile individual and collective interests, as well as economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of the cities’ life, deconstructing the hegemony of financial interests in urban governance (Fernandes, 2001).

Several legal and planning tools serve the purpose of catalyzing such urban utopia of a democratic city. These instruments operate in three fields: (1) promoting the access to land tenure; (2) proportionating the access to the city (an inclusive urbanization where the costs and benefits are more fairly distributed across the city, for example, by protecting part of the service land from real state speculation); and (3) strengthening the access to democratic decision making (Freitas, 2017; Rodrigues & Barbosa, 2010; Maricato, 2010). Some of the legal instruments to achieve these goals, prescribed in the 58 articles of the City Statute, are (1) participatory master plan, (2) Special Social Interests Zones (ZEIS), (3) compulsory parcelling, building or use, (4) expropriation with payment in bonds, (5) Special Usucapião Rights for Urban Property, (6) The Right to Preemption, (7) Consortiated Urban Operations, (8) Transfer of the Right to Build, and (9) Neighborhood Impact Study (NIS) (Barros et al., 2010). Since a comprehensive overview of the City Statute is beyond the purpose of this study, I will use one example, ZEIS, the Special Social Interest Zones, in the city of São Paulo, to illustrate its use.

São Paulo Master Plan in 2002 (Plano Diretor Estratégico - PDE) increased by 23% the number of ZEIS in the city. ZEIS is an anti-gentrification zoning tool from the City Statute that designates a vacant or occupied urban area to the restoration of production of social interest housing, i.e. housing units dedicated to low-income families, as well as to the provision of facilities, public spaces, and local commerce. The instrument contributes to avoid the eviction of families occupying land within a ZEIS as well as helps to reserve land to social housing in areas with good urban infrastructure. This tool has been largely used in cities’ master plans by municipal governments, and adapted according to local characteristics and regulation needs. In São Paulo, for example, there are four specific ZEIS. ZEIS 1 refers to precarious and informal housing (favelas, subnormal conglomerates, or informal settlements) and is intended to serve the purpose of producing social housing (covering at least 60% of the property), improving the existent units, or non-residential uses. ZEIS 2 refers to idle plots, vacant or underutilized properties that can be use both for social housing (covering at least 50% of the property) or non-residential uses. ZEIS 3 refers to idle land or buildings in central areas, usually well-served with infrastructure and job opportunities. ZEIS 3 can be used for both social housing (covering at least 50% of
the property) or economic development projects to generate job opportunities and increase income. ZEIS 4 refers to areas of environmental protection where social housing is allowed (covering at least 80% of the property). ZEIS 4 is designated to supply the housing deficit of populations living in areas of risk, such as in dams areas and in river banks. Additional to the four categories of ZEIS, São Paulo Master Plan in 2002 proposed two different definitions of social housing: HIS and HMP. Social Interest Housing (HIS) are units dedicated for low-income families that have maximum of one toilet and one parking space. HIS has two modalities: HIS I, which attends households receiving between 1 and 3 minimum wages, and HIS II, which attends households between 3 to 6 minimum wages. (In Brazil, salaries are measured in multiples of minimum wages. For example, if the minimum wage is R$200 or US $60.97 a month in 2012, a salary of R$600.00 or US $180 would be accounted as 3 minimum wages. From 2002 to 2018, the minimum wage increased up to R$ 954.00 or US $291.00 a month.) HMP, which stands for Habitação de Mercado Popular or Housing of Popular Market, are housing units, with up to two toilets and one parking space, designated to household monthly income up to 16 minimum wages, between R$ 4,344.00 and R$7,240.00 (approximately US $ 1,324 and US $2,207). The designation of different areas in São Paulo as ZEIS is one of the tools used to democratize the access by low-income citizens to service lands, and reduce the housing deficit.


The implementation of the City Statute, a tool embedded in urban utopian principles, is constrained by the structural limits of the neoliberal urbanism it aims to overcome. The legislation solely is not sufficient to solve the dilemma between social function of property and property rights rooted in structural historical problems (Rodrigues & Barbosa, 2010; Maricato, 2010). As the food does not cook itself, a law is doomed to be in the drawer without the political will to enforce it. The activation of the City Statute instruments is a political process, where civil society, as well as real state lobbies, pressure the public sector to implement the regulations according to their interests. The “balance” between
individual and collective interests is trespassed by conflicts, of who has the major influence over the political process. In the case of São Paulo, for example, the increase in the number of ZEIS along the years, and the definition of their location, was directly related to the pressure of grassroots movements, such as MTST (Movement of Homeless Workers). The tensions between the paradigms of social function of property and individual property are also manifested in the legal disputes around land occupations, where the principles of the Urbanistic Law and the Civil Law dispute narratives, presenting conflicts between ideological premises of the judges and the grassroots movements. Freitas (2017) also calls the attention to how the implementation of the right to the city is embedded in power dynamics where the use of a discourse of “right to the the city” might walk hand in hand with its deterioration in practice. The dream of a democratic city, crystallized in the legal instruments of the City Statute, is embedded in the structural historical dynamics it seeks to transform (Freitas, 2017). After 13 years of its creation, no city has already implemented the City Statute systematically and integrally: the Brazilian urban reform has not yet happened (Ferreira, 2014).

The principles of the City Statute influenced the federal housing policies of the following years. In 2003, the former president, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula), created the Ministry of Cities at federal government, aiming for the coordination and management of the National Politics of Urban Development. In 2005, the program of favelas urbanization with local, regional, and national scopes, and the “National Fund of Social Interest Housing” were created (Fundo Nacional de Habitação de Interesse Social, SNHIS/FNHIS, 2005). In 2007, Lula’s administration launched the Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), a keynesian plan to invest in infrastructure from which R$106 billion was designated to housing and R$40 billion to sanitation (Maricato, 2010). From 2007 to 2009, the PlanHab (Plano Nacional de Habitação – Housing National Plan) formulated strategies for the national housing policies for the following 15 years. In coherence to the accumulated discussions on the right to the city in the last decades, the plan was the result of a democratic composition across several sectors, with significant participation of social movements and other civil society organizations (Jesus, 2015). A consistent federal housing policy was in its way to be implemented, when, from night to day, a new program stole the scene: the financing program Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV).

The Deviation

The Financing Program Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV)

In 2009, the federal government launched the program Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV - My House My Life), assigning the largest amount of investment in social housing financing in Brazilian history. However, MCMV was initiated outside of the FNHIS, the national fund created in 2005, and ignored several aspects of the PlanHab. If the PlanHab was the result of a democratic process and in coherence to the City Statute, the operationalization of MCMV ignored the major policy debates and expertise, and emerged through a partnership between the government and the private sector, specially the
civil construction companies (Jesus, 2015). Although PlanHab had the appropriate social control and institutional design, corresponding to a legitimate process, it ended marginalized: the major proportion of the federal housing budget was allocated to MCMV (Jesus, 2015).

MCMV is an umbrella of federal housing programs that access diverse funding mechanisms and reaches diverse income levels. The program comprised three ladders each corresponding to different income levels. Faixa 1, one of the three ladders, referred to households receiving the up to 3 minimum wage of R$555.00 (US $169.00) and 3 times this amount (R$ 1,600.00/month). Faixa 2 included the income level between R$1,600.01 to R$3,275.00/month, and Faixa 3 between R$3,275.01 to R$5,000.00/month. In 2009, the federal government announced the goal of producing 1 million new units, with an estimated investment of R$34 billion. In the first phase of the program (2009-2010), 100.5% of the goal was realized. In 2011, the federal government announced the goal of constructing 2 million housing units, with an estimated investment of R$ 125.7 billion (Rodrigues, 2013; Jesus, 2015). In the second phase of the program (2011-2013), 74.1% was achieved. From 2009 to 2013, 1,247,859 units were delivered, from which 27.3% corresponded to Faixa 1 (until R$1,600.00), 65.9% to Faixa 2 (R$1,600.01 to R$3,275.00), and 6.8% to Faixa 3 (R$3,275.01 to R$5,000.00). However, several authors compare its numbers with the existing housing deficit to assert that MCMV was more of a strategy to boost the economy than an effective housing policy (Jesus, 2015).

The program Minha Casa Minha Vida (MCMV) is subject to critiques. The program has not impacted the population suffering with the housing deficit. As table 2.1 presents, announced goals for the first phase of MCMV would reach only 8.7% of the housing deficit in Faixa 1. Responding to the critiques, phase 2 increased the goals to produce 1,200,000 units for Faixa 1, corresponding to 31.6% of the housing deficit in 2011 in that salary range. However, by the end of 2013, only 340,774 units announced were completed corresponding to 8.2% of the housing deficit in that salary range. In comparison, we see that Faixa 2 and Faixa 3 present incomparably higher rates for both the announced goals and the percent of execution by 2013. As we see below, the announced goal for Faixa 3 surpassed the housing deficit for that income level by 25.4%, and the amount of housing units built in Faixa 2, by the end of 2013, surpassed 36.6% the deficit in that income level, suggesting the financing of secondary homes.
Table 2.1. MCMV Goals for Phases 1 and 2 Versus the Housing Deficit by Income Category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Level</th>
<th>Phase 1: 2009</th>
<th>Phase 2: 2011</th>
<th>2009-2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goals of housing units announced</td>
<td>% of Housing Deficit</td>
<td>Goals of housing units announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faixa 1</td>
<td>400000</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>1200000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faixa 2</td>
<td>400000</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>600000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faixa 3</td>
<td>200000</td>
<td>280.7</td>
<td>200000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1000000</td>
<td></td>
<td>2000000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although MCMV is the largest investment in housing in the Brazilian history, it did not provide a substantive solution for the national housing deficit and contributed to perpetuate the scenario of social and spatial segregation in cities. MCMV has been primarily a strategy to boost the economy, following the interests of the civil construction companies after the international crisis in 2009. The program MCMV, which elaboration was lead by the private sector, framed housing as a commodity disconnected from land policies and from a broader perspective of urban development and the right to the city (Maricato, 2010). Because of the large federal investment in housing, the land prices steadily increased. In consequence, the housing projects are mostly built in peripheral areas, where the private sector could buy land with lower prices. As cited in Marques and Rodrigues (2013), research conducted in the metropolitan regions of São Paulo (Marques and Rodrigues, 2013), Rio de Janeiro (Araújo, Cardoso & Jaenish 2013), Fortaleza (Pequeno, 2013), Belém and Goiânia (Mercês, 2013, Moisês et al 2013) confirm that the implementation of MCMV has followed, if not aggravated, the existent historical patterns of spatial segregation in the Brazilian cities. The program produced units with low quality and limited access to urban infrastructure.

In the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo (RMSP), the MCMV perpetuated (but not aggravated) the pattern of spatial segregation (Marques and Rodrigues, 2013). The Metropolitan Area of São Paulo is responsible alone for 11.7% of the national urban housing deficit in 2014. According to Fundação João Pinheiro, the housing deficit increased from 589,940 households in 2007 to 623,680 households in RMSP in 2014. From 2009 to 2013, MCMV financed 557 projects in RMSP, corresponding to 107,589 housing units, from which 34.1% was invested in Faixa 1, 38.5% in Faixa 2, and 27.4% in Faixa 3. As table 2.2 indicates, the new units built in São Paulo for the lower income range (Faixa 1) represents only 7% of the local housing deficit of that income level, while Faixa 3 had 192.7% of the housing deficit attended, suggesting the financing of second homes. Therefore, there is an inadequate proportion of investment by income level to effectively solve the housing deficit. Furthermore, the majority of Faixa 1 projects were located in the outskirts of the city, having significantly lower access to urban infrastructure and services than the Faixas 2 and 3 (Marques and Rodrigues, 2013). MCMV failed to attend the vast majority of the residents under inappropriate housing conditions, reinforcing the patterns of spatial segregation in RMSP.
As Ferreira (2014) pointed out, "to give housing does not only mean to give a roof, but to give a city" (p.111). Making democratic cities requires housing policies link to strategies that reshape the territorial order, connecting “right to housing” and “right to the city” to shift the logic that produces segregation, inequality, and intolerance. It is not possible to attribute the failure of the MCMV, in particular, and Brazilian urbanism, in general, to a single social actor or sector. Conciliating the right to housing and the right to the city requires a compromise of government in the federal and municipal levels, as well as a commitment of real state companies (Ferreira, 2012, 2014). Ferreira (2014) argues that, beyond the well known critiques against the program MCMV, its negative impacts could have been minimized if municipalities had implemented the City Statute properly. For the first time in Brazilian history, a federal policy dedicated high investments in housing for popular segments. The local governments, however, did not have the political power (or will) to implement the Statute, opposing powerful local interests. Partially, the failure of the program MCMV to contribute to more democratic cities, relies on the limited implementation of the City Statute by local governments.

**Control-C, Control-V**

**The Ideological, Institutional and Operational Inspirations of MCMV**

Jesus (2015) discussed the ideological, institutional, and operational inspirations of the MCMV program. During the 1990s, multilateral agencies, mostly the World Bank, would be key players influencing the ideological directions of the housing policies in Latin America. As a financing program, its institutional design reproduced the models of American organizations, such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Finally, real state companies in Brazil incorporated operational aspects from the contemporary Mexican models of mass housing production.

In 1993, the World Bank proposed the *Housing Enable* framework that would shape the housing policies in Latin America in the next decades. In this perspective, housing is seen as a productive sector of the economy. Instead of producing and managing social housing, the government should guarantee the conditions for the market to be efficient and produce houses for the population in the lowest income range. These conditions would be provided by applying seven legal, institutional, and economic instruments. The State shifts its role from a “provider” to a “enabler,” where the market, non-profit
organizations, and families become the protagonists deciding where, what, and how to build. It is not a coincidence that social housing in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Chile have been produced according to the same logics, and perishing by the same problems (Jesus, 2015).

The institutional design of the housing programs have followed the same parameters of the U.S. financing system. While the SFH was an heir of the BNH, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, the SFI absorbed the Mortgage model sold in world scale by multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank, and American institutions, such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Land became a pure financial asset. However, copying and pasting a framework from the Global North to the Global South is not effective. The Brazilian housing deficit is concentrated in a range of the population with very limited payment conditions. Furthermore, in contrast with the U.S., Brazil has never had a previous Welfare State to facilitate the further development of housing as a commodity. This reproduction of external models in the Brazilian context created a shock between the institutional design of SFI and the concept of housing as a social right (Jesus, 2015).

Additionally, the institutional design generated the concentration of financial and political power on the construction companies. The companies had incommensurable profits. According to Shimbo (2010), as cited in Jesus (2015, p. 72), between 2006 and 2008, the real state company she was studying multiplied its housing production by eight and its profit by thirteen. The concentration of capital increased their influence in decision-making even more, and the companies started to form “banks of land.” By accumulating land titles, the process contributed to increasing the land prices, diminishing the possibilities to redirect well served lands to social housing.

The transnational networks of influence between the elites in Latin America and the U.S. were not only related to ideological and institutional aspects, they also directly impacted the operational aspects of the housing programs. In 2007/2008, Brazilian construction businessmen went to Mexico to learn how to mass produce houses and how to provide de-bureaucratized credit, a model itself that was influenced by the World Bank (Jesus, 2015). In Mexico, construction companies such as Homex, Ara, Urbi, Geo, and Sara already produced mega housing projects up to 70,000 residential units. The leaders of the civil construction sector acquired knowledge about how to execute (size, location, patterns) housing units that could be profitable and massively reproduced. The superproduction of the urban space generated the homogeneity of architecture forms in cities (Ferreira, 2012). The “production of hundreds of identical dwellings in size, material, internal division and adopted technology that does not take into account ... the cultural, economic and climatic differences of the immense Brazilian territory” (Jesus, 2015). The similarities of MCMV with the architecture form of other Latin American housing programs is not a coincidence. Neither are the slogans a coincidence. Jesus (2015) highlights the similarity between the Homex Slogan in Mexico, “It is your house.” (Es tu Casa) and the slogan of the housing program in Brazil: “My house, My life” (Minha Casa Minha Vida). Both programs activate and reinforce the homeownership dream. Inspired by the Mexican partners, the civil construction sector elaborated a
proposal and presented it to the federal government; poetic and passionate gesture between the private and the public sector that would give birth to the program *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (Jesus, 2015).

**Figure 2.2.** Project by the Mexican company Homex in Marília, São Paulo state (2012). The figure illustrates the reproduction of architectural forms in popular housing across Latin America. Reprinted from Jesus (2015).

**Figure 2.3.** *Conjunto Habitacional Urbi Villa Del Campo*. The project located in Tecámac, metropolitan region of Ciudad del Mexico, was built by Urbi. For detailed architectonic similarities please check Jesus (2015). Reprinted from Jesus (2015).

**Figure 2.4.** Project MCMV in Manaus-AM, Brazil. The photo illustrates the process of super-production of the space in Brazil. Reprinted from Ferreira (2012).
Figure 2.5. Project MCMV in Natal-RN, Brazil. The photo illustrates the process of super-production of the space in Brazil. Reprinted from Ferreira (2012).

Figure 2.6. Housing units in Ixtapaluca city, in the Metropolitan Region of Ciudad del Mexico (2015). This and the other images illustrate the process of super-production of the space across Latin America. Reprinted from Jesus (2015).
However, if Brazil copied the model from Mexico, what is the origin of this Mexican model? It is a transnational chain of influence that traffic categories, discourses, and practices, reproducing models detached from the experiences of those the programs aim to improve the life conditions. Jesus (2015) adds that such reproduction of ideological, institutional, and operational forms have perverse impacts in already complicated scenarios of the cities in the Global South: “The materialization of such policies transforms the landscape of our cities in an absolutely perverse way. And not only! It also transforms the way people appropriate (or not) their space of coexistence and dwelling” (Jesus, 2015).

The Response to the Deviation

The Program Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades

In response to the MCMV, a deviation from the ongoing construction of PlanHab and the Right to the City debates with consistent popular participation, the grassroots movements pressured the government to create the program *Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades* (My House My Life Entities - MCMV-E). According to the leadership of national housing movements in Brazil, who were engaged in the debates of the PlanHab and interviewed by Jesus (2015), the program *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (MCMV) was presented to them when it was already formulated. They described MCMV as a surprise and a deviation from the democratic debates around the PlanHab, which were consistent with the City Statute. However, in other perspective, MCMV was not a deviation, but a continuity to the historical paradigm, such as in BNH, where the housing deficit would be solved through the incentive to real estate market. As a response to the fear from the possible effects of the economic crises, MCMV was born from the proposal presented by the real estate market businessmen, but also it incorporated elements of previous policies (Jesus, 2015; Shimbo, 2010). In this situation, the grassroots movements saw themselves in a dilemma. On one side it was the largest investment in housing in the Brazilian history, on the other side, the program was disrupting the ongoing democratic construction of a solid federal housing policy. In response to this dilemma, the grassroots movements pressured the government to “get a piece of the cake,” and the program MCMV-E was created (Jesus, 2015).

*Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades* (My house My home Entities - MCMV-E) is a federal housing financing program, under the umbrella of MCMV, targeting households that receive up to $1600/month organized in civil society organizations, such as grassroots movements and neighborhood associations. MCMV-E corresponds to only 3% of the total MCMV budget, against the 97% of resources designated to private construction firms (Arantes and Fix, 2009; Jesus 2015). The program involves several operational and institutional aspects that will not be covered here. However, in addition to the income criteria, MCMV-E prioritize the population in situation of social vulnerability, such as women that are the head of households, disable, elder. The *Entidade Organizadora* (Organizing Entity-EO) organize and represent the families to access the fund in every step of the construction, from the design to the execution. Becoming an EO is an extremely long and judicious process to avoid fraud, since for profit
organizations have tried to access the fund. The public sector select and monitor the EOs, and finance the construction. The construction can happen through the system of self-management/self-help or by hiring private sector organizations to execute the work. The resources can be used to build new units or to renew existent buildings to accommodate the families (Jesus, 2015).

MCMV-E has been a living organism in constant dispute and adaptation, which was pushed mainly by the insistence of grassroots. The operational and institutional design often made the projects impossible for the EOs. For example, initially the government did not finance the acquisition of the terrain and the technical studies for the construction, turning MCMV-E infeasible for the EOs. Additionally, the boom of the real estate market, caused by MCMV, increased the prices of urban land, hampering the EOs access even more. The housing grassroots movements pressured the government and several aspects of the program, including the example above, changed. The problems with MCMV-E were not only related to ill-framed policies. A substantive part of the challenges were due to the fact that the public institutions have never had civil society organizations occupying the places that are usually hold by real estate companies. The innovation in policy was not followed by institutional and operational innovations in the civil service, having the bureaucracy leading with categories they had never led before, increasing the processing time even more. The operational challenges of MCMV-E present how the creation of the new (even if it is a “new” limited as MCMV-E) find numerous obstacles in systems stiffen to old categories and procedures (Jesus, 2015).

Exclusion is Planning as Usual

In this overview, the regulations and policies present a few similarities. With exceptions, they have prioritized the interests of those in power – the landlords, the real estate companies, the urban elites; have ignored the needs of the low-income citizens, closing down their possibilities, and criminalizing their alternatives; have turned to the American and European cities as the sources of inspiration and learning; have reproduced models from elsewhere, ignoring the historical and geographical differences; have served to produce placelessness, where the super-production of the urban space create homogeneous landscapes. Based on this overview, part B will explore in which ways the mainstream planning is non-imaginative, and part C will discuss the meaning of imagination in insurgent planning by problematizing the relationship between grassroots, the City Statute, and the program MCMV.

The Production of Invisibility

Or the Machine of Forgetting (Past), De-sensing (Present), and Absencing (Future)

Closing down the imagination has been the norm in the Brazilian mainstream planning and it involves three major dimensions:

1) making territories invisible through exclusionary legal frameworks;
(2) **making people invisible to themselves**, through the exclusion of the poor and their experiences from the process of policy making, and through the super production of non-places;

(3) **making local futures invisible** by being hostages of colonized visions of future.

**Planning Separated From People**

Based on the literature review of the Brazilian housing policies, it is possible to affirm that the imagination from the State is isolated from the realities of the periphery, and has historically produced the invisibility of these territories. Exclusionary regulations define parameters of legitimacy and possibility that devaluate the experiences, the history, and the needs of the poor, shut down their possibilities, and criminalize their exits. Such regulations perpetuate the primacy of the financial interests of the ruling elites, failing to conciliate the complex tensions between individual and collective interests, and between economic, cultural, social, and environmental aspects. The Land Law in 1850 was explicitly in favor of the interests of the property owners and precluded the existent and future generations of the working poor (immigrants and ex-slaves) to legally access land. The Lehmann Law in 1979 adopted technical parameters that turned the acquisition and regularization of plots impossible for low-income citizens. MCMV prioritized the interests of the real estate market, perpetuating the patterns of spatial segregation in cities by treating the housing deficit apart from the right to the city. Eviction of the poor, gentrification, and the maintenance of privileges have been the norm of Brazilian cities, as has been extensively well established as a point in the Brazilian academia. Exclusionary regulations and policies have produced, perpetuated, and aggravated social disparities and spatial segregation, condemning territories, and their populations, to invisibility.

The policies and regulations of such non-imaginative urbanism are separated from the experiences of people on the ground, being reproductive in terms of (a) process—ideological, operational, and institutional design, and (b) outcome. They copy and paste operational and institutional aspects of policies from other contexts, usually ignoring local and regional characteristics. They are encaged in a single loop of learning, reproducing categories either by the pressure of lobbyists or the incapacity to regenerate the frameworks. Such reproduction in the making creates massively produced placenessless, spaces without the sense of place. In all these aspects, the policies are isolated from the experiences of people living in the peripheries, ignoring either the experiences and inputs to create something new, or disinterested about the impact the policies generate in their lives. The reproductive character of mainstream planning finds an example of the insistence of decision-makers on framing informality as illegality, and the production of new units as the solution “for the housing deficit.” Similarly, judges have historically favored property owners in urban land legal disputes. MCMV, discussed earlier in this chapter, illustrates how a policy, reproducing foreign models, produce “solutions” that ignore the historical and geographical context. The experiences of low-income citizens are marginalized in the process and the products of policy making.
Making People Invisible & the Single Loop of Learning

“I don’t Know you, but I Know What you Have Been Through”

The reproductive nature of the mainstream planning relates to the concept of a single-loop of learning, discussed in chapter 1. Friedmann’s (1987) definition of radical planning used the concepts of single and double loop of learning. The single loop of learning refers to the detachment between theory and practice, where planners are prisoners of their mental models (espoused theories of action - how they explain the reality and, therefore, the city) and are separated from the realities of those they should be working for (theories in use - how reality actually works). They live the city in the level of their representations about the experiences of the poor, rather than having any form of engagement with the space as lived in by the poor. Therefore, a double loop of learning would be necessary, where the espoused theories of action (theory) are defined by the theories in use (practice). The planners would have the task of being reflective, intertwining theory and practice, to ultimately change both. Mainstream planning, however, remains in a single-loop of learning, reproducing categories that reinforce the belief systems and interests of the decision makers.

On one side the systematic failure on creating humane cities is a consequence of economic and political causes, on the other side the exclusionary policies are also grounded on the mental models, experiences, and needs of the decision-makers: planners living in their imaginative bubbles. In 2015, the World Bank published a report with the purpose of gaining insights from psychology, sociology, and other behavioral sciences to improve decision-making and development outcomes. In this report, among other topics, the authors discussed how development professionals, independent of their intentions and level of expertise, can make bad decisions. Among the factors influencing these mistakes are the confirmation bias and the gap between the decision makers and the those who live in poverty. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency where reasoning confirms one’s belief system. Alternative hypothesis are invisible, and information gathering tends to reinforce the hypothesis held, reaching the desirable conclusions (World Bank, 2015; Nickerson 1998; Fischhoff and Beyth-Marom 1983; Wason 1960, 1977; Wetherick 1962 as cited in World Bank, 2015). “Confirmation bias may arise from a fundamental tendency of human beings to use reason for the purposes of persuading others and winning arguments” (World Bank, 2015, p. 182; Mercier and Sperber 2011 as cited in World Bank, 2015). In addition to the confirmation bias, the decision makers base their frameworks in assumptions about the poor, since the large majority have never experienced poverty. Based on these assumptions, policies are designed, implemented, evaluated. The development professionals tend to reproduce consensual categories that bring social recognition. Their mental models, rooted in experiences that largely differ from the experiences of the poor, hold representations of the lived experience of the poor. Rich and poor frequent different spaces, access completely different services and opportunities. Moreover, “the widening inequality in society makes it less likely that people from different walks of life will encounter one another, even inhabit the same ‘moral universe’” (World Bank 2015, p.187; Skocpol 1991 as cited in World Bank, 2015). The aspirations
and needs of people living in poverty are marginalized in the process of policy making. The decision
makers, therefore, are engaged in a single loop of learning, reproducing their mental models in an
imaginative bubble, nourished by representations, rather than experiences.

The invisibility of the problem makes territories invisible. It is well known that exclusionary
policies create invisible territories: territories that are out of the sight of any serious consideration of
structural reforms to improve life conditions. Such “invisible territories” are partially produced by the
invisibility of the problem – a single loop of learning, when planners, policy advisors, and decision
makers live in the cage of their mental models (automatic thinking), reproducing their categories of
thought, their representations of the experiences of the poor. City planning reflects the perspectives of the
elite and how planners problematized reality. Therefore, the single loop of learning makes people into
objects to be managed in the city according to the mental representation of the space carried by the urban
elites in charge of development plans.

Making People Invisible and the Mass Production of Placelessness
Planning-induced Amnesia

If the experiences (not the representation of the experiences) of the poor are neglected in policy
making, their needs are ignored in the policies outcomes through the production of placenessless. First,
what is the sense of place? According to Abreu (1998) and Santos (1994) place is the space of
intersubjectivity, spaces of shared memories. Because the images in the individual and collective
memories are anchored in spaces (we cannot separate the “what” from the “where”), the (shared)
memories we have in a space are the pivots shaping collective identities (Abreu, 1998). However, the
dominance of corporations generates the super-production of the urban spaces: the landscape of capitalist
cities become placenessless, homogeneous, standardized spaces (Arefi, 1998; Ferreira, 2012). The
tendency is the abolition of the space as singularity (Abreu, 1998). The mass production of non-places is
rooted in the centrality of “future” and “progress” (Abreu, 1998), “the negation of the past,” “the
glorification of the new” (Arefi, 1998).

The Program Minha Casa Minha Vida is an example of the mass production of placelessness.
Following profit at its higher imperative, MCMV reproduced operational models and similar architecture
forms from other places. The result is the production of real states without urbanistic and architectural
quality. The history of Brazilian urbanism is about the separation between people and land. The
superproduction of the urban space is a continuity of this historical process: the separation between
people and place, a space of collective memories. If the land is obtained, the sense of place is not.

The production of placenessless relates to the gap between the mental models of the decision
makers and the people living in poverty who they are meant to support. In the World Bank report (2015)
mentioned earlier, the authors remind the development professionals that “development” must not “begin
from scratch. Every human group has a system of some kind already in place for addressing its prevailing
challenges and opportunities” (World Bank, 2015, p.187). The hygienist models of the 19th century, where planning insisted on “cleaning” the city, is not distant from the paradigm of the program MCMV, where homogeneous spaces sprout from scratch and present no marks of time. The invisible past is just another layer of the marginalization of the experiences of those living in the peripheries. If we still need medical metaphors to make sense of planning, we might remember that removing the hippocampus, and other parts of the brain related to long-term memories, is not a legal (and recommended) protocol – but since human beings are rational economic monads, disconnecting them from any of those “social/cultural/historical stuff” is pretty much a standard procedure.

**Future: a Disciplinary Instrument of Planning**

“One day I will be Like you, Until There I Will be Nothing”

Brazil is the same country that simultaneously erased from its cities the traces of history and proclaimed itself the “country of the future.” Almost nothing from the colonial past has survived. The urbanization process in the end of the 19th century and along the 20th century “was based on the hope of a better future and the rejection of the past, the abolition of its vestiges and its overcoming” (Abreu, 1998). But what are those images of future populating our imaginary? As presented in the overview of the housing and urban policies, American and European cities have always been the mirror of learning in Brazilian urban planning. This pattern prevails in the urbanism of the first decades of the 20th century, in the formulation of “Capital Improvement Plans” (Rolnik, 1995), in the discussions of the Leahman Law, and it persists as a commonplace in the discourse: the images of the safe and prosperous cities of the first world are the reminders of what we might become one day. In Brazilian history the images of the urban developed world have been always a protagonist. “It was for the future, not for the past, that societies should look!” (Abreu, 1998, p. 20).

The concept of aspirational urbanism express the pivotal role of the images of “world class cities” in shaping planning (Ren, 2017). State and non-state actors would engage in practices to bridge the gap between “global aspirations (such as national ambitions and global city dreams) and local realities (such as economic instability, inadequate infrastructure, poor urban services, and proliferation of informal settlements)” (Ren, 2017, p.895). Such urbanism is not restricted to the Global South or any point in the political spectrum. In occasion of the realization of mega-events in Brazil, the then-president Lula (from PT, a center-left party) said “I never felt more pride in Brazil. Now we are going to show the world we can be a great country. We aren’t the United States, but we are getting there” (Philips, 2009; as cited in Ren, 2017). The aspirational urbanism ends reinforcing the contrasts between the “world class ambitions and the developing-country realities” (Ren, 2017).

The images of “world cities” are placeholders of local futures that will never flourish. Alien representations of the good city function as hyper-realities replacing the local peculiarities and perpetuating socio-spatial segregation. As illustrated by housing policies, the exclusionary ambitions,
disguised as urban utopias, are the fuel of an urbanization based on the negation of past and poverty. The fragile fantasies of “world cities” (note - fantasies are detached from reality, imagination refers to the tension between intention and reality) survive only through isolated bubbles - urban islands afloat in the ocean of poverty. Once, when I was checking out a magazine in my hometown (São Paulo), I came across an advertisement selling bulletproof glass for cars to protect me and my family against “the violent actions of marginality.” The iconic add, showing a peaceful White female face looking at a blue sky (behind a bulletproof glass, sitting in the comfort of her car), finally spat the pearl: “Use X and leave the violence outside your car.” The phrase sounds quite functional or culturally relevant considering it happened a decade ago and it is still in use. The price of living the fantasy of the unreachable developed futures is the production of lifeboats – the segregated, developed and legal fortified enclaves – in the ocean of the informality and violence of the illegal city. In the rhetoric of development, future images function as the catalysts of hegemonic, exclusionary planning processes. The desirable future-there prevails only through the invisible future-here.

The image of the future is a disciplinary instrument of urban planning. It establishes the direction and with it the ruler, the stages of development to reach the colonized future. The direction, a constructed and artificial hyper-reality, is a pure totality: the world without crime, without poverty, without problems; the world of abundance, intelligence, and opportunities, unrelated/divorced to the idiosyncrasies, anthropophagic and uncivilized, of the informal third world. This hyper-reality serves as justification and fuel to cleanse the present from its imperfections and conflicts. The essence of the colonized future is the negation of the past and the present, in order to discipline the imagination and ensure the status quo reproduction. While we have not been able to reinvent the techniques that allow us to unleash the imaginative tensesgities, we remain slaves of futures that we have not created. *Se faz necessário devorar o futuro, para fazê-lo nosso.* It is necessary to devour the future, to make it ours.

**Inhumane Urbanism: a City Without Past, Present, and Future**

Planning defines the scope of people’s possibilities: who they are and who they can become in the present; which collective memories will have or not have the opportunity to flourish, what will be consolidated in the city’s history; and what will be the desirable collective futures. Forms of unimaginative planning close down these possibilities both in terms of process and outcome; they dehumanize the city. The single loop of learning (i.e., the division between theory and practice, or the mindset of the planners and the experiences of the impoverished citizens) keeps planning trapped in an imaginative bubble, reproducing ideological premises and organizational models. The poor (and their experiences) inhabit the policies’ frameworks as representations and assumptions, not as co-authors in problem solving. If the body of the poor are object, not subject, in the planning process, their bodies remain marginalized in the results. The individual lives are evicted or precluded to have access to land and to belong to a place, remaining fluctuating objects in the social space. Low-income citizens are
denied the access to the city as place where collective memories can form. The architectural quality and the localization of housing for low-income citizens are not prioritized because their experiences in these projects are not a priority. What matters in the end are the numbers to show in elections and power-points. In this amnesia-conducted planning, the mix of single-loop of learning (process) and placenessless (product), future has a fundamental role: it is a disciplinary tool to justify atrocities (we will become as x), and to keep people disengaged with their own realities (the future is not here, it is there). As discussed in chapter 1, the colonization of the future is the creation of stability overtime. Frozen ideal images of future function as hyper-realities loosing the connections with the historical and geographical realities in which one is involved in. The inhumane urbanism is a machine of forgetting (past), de-sensing (present), and absencing (future).

Imagination in Insurgent Planning

In the Search for a Triple Loop of Learning

Moving theory from a critique based on the double loop to the triple loop of learning requires an understanding of the ways in which future is a blind spot not only in mainstream planning, but also in progressive and insurgent practices. Inclusive forms of planning, where the government invites the public to participate, present several limitations (Angotti, 2008; DeFilippis, 2001; Mayer, 2003; Miraftab, 2003; Harwood, 2007, as cited in Miraftab, 2018). Though participatory spaces are considered legitimate by the mainstream media, grassroots practices are extensively criminalized (Miraftab, 2017; Silva, 2014). However, grassroots movements have generated profound impacts in planning and policy around the globe (Sandercock, 1998b; Harvey, 1999; Beard, 2002; Friedmann, 2002; Friedmann, 2011; Meir, 2005; Roy, 2009; Meth, 2010; Sweet and Chakars, 2010; Stello, 2012; as cited in Miraftab, 2018). The recognition of their impact led to the theorization of a new form of planning in the 1990s. Based on the concept of insurgent citizenship (Holston, 1998), insurgent planning (Sandercock, 1998a; 1998b) was born to recognize the existence of grassroots in planning theory.

Insurgent planning (IP) represents an ontological and epistemological shift in planning theory by recognizing the direct actions organized by self-determined political bodies as forms of planning (Miraftab, 2018). Based on the principles of participatory democracy, IP validates a multicentered perspective whereby citizens are also planners. Inclusive and insurgent planning are not binaries, but poles in a dialectical relationship. Insurgent practices move across invited spaces of citizenship (i.e., the official spheres of participation created by government) and invented spaces of action, such as insurrections that defy existing power structures (Miraftab, 2018).

According to Miraftab (2018; 2009), the capacity of IP to defy existing power relations relies on three features. IP are counter-hegemonic: they “destabilize normalized relations of dominance and ... determine their own terms of engagement and participation” (p. 282). Insurgent practices are transgressive: they defy “false dichotomies, transiting between formal and informal realms of
participation.” IP are imaginative: they involve the “consciousness of the past and the imagination of an alternative future” (p. 282). Therefore, insurgent planning is not an all-inclusive term for any kind of insurrection, nor does it fit within the framework of liberal democratic inclusion (Miraftab, 2018).

In the effort to foresee a triple loop of learning in planning theory and practice, it is necessary to problematize the concept of imagination in insurgent practices. The insurgent practices are also spaces of struggle between opening and closing down the imagination, they are entangled in the conflicts of trying to imagine the new while living in the old. Their existences require to sustain some level of dialogue with the government, the private sector, and other instances of civil society. The imagination of alternative futures is embedded in a field of power. Instead of asking “Are insurgent practices imaginative?”, we can ask “How is imagination manifested in insurgent practices?”. To accomplish this, we need to go beyond the ideas of “imaginative” and “unimaginative” as totalities, an event (noun) or attribute of a group (adjective). Instead, we can look at imagination as a verb, processes of opening and closing down possibilities that coexist in several spaces and organizational settings. "Transformation does not take place as if it were the life cycle of a butterfly – one society does not end in a revolution and then starts another. The biggest mistake is not to see how one way of life infiltrates the other" (Rolnik, 1997, p.33). We can learn about imagination by analyzing MTST practices, catching the nuances that potentially can help to improve our collective capacities to imagine humane urban futures.
CHAPTER 3
MTST and the Housing Deficit

"The occupations are the cry of the people who cannot stand to live in their holes anymore."
MTST, Cartilha de Princípios

This chapter presents the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST), one among several urban grassroots movements struggling for housing and right to the city that are present in the Metropolitan Area of São Paulo. After discussing the housing deficit in São Paulo, we focus on their history, philosophy, land occupations, and organizational structure. It discusses the difference between land invasion and land occupation, how an occupation is formed, including main roles, infrastructure, the engagement path to acquire a house, and MTST’s organizational structure that supports the coordination of such an extensive network. Finally, the chapter explores the complex position of MTST in relation to the program *Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades* (MCMV-E) and the City Statute.

The Housing Deficit

This section presents the definition of housing deficit and how it has evolved in São Paulo between 2007 and 2014. The time range gives a scenario of the housing deficit before and during the implementation of the program *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (MCMV), as discussed in the previous chapter. The focus on this period can help to understand the impact of MCMV in the local and national Housing Deficit and MTST’s critiques of MCMV. Also, the chosen date range is based on the available data (from 2007-2014) related to the housing deficit definition developed by Fundação João Pinheiro. Although limited, the date range serves the section’s objective well of contextualizing MTST’s insurgent practices to a lay audience.

*Housing Deficit is not Only Homelessness*

Housing deficit is a far more inclusive term than what the common sense associates to homelessness. Such a narrow definition leads to delegitimize grassroots movements engaged in improving the working poor’s housing conditions: if people do not live on the streets, and are still engaged in the housing struggle, they would be considered “vagabonds trying to take advantage of the system.” Understanding housing deficit on a deeper level can help one to frame the housing struggle correctly.

According to the Fundação João Pinheiro, there are two angles to look at the housing condition: *housing deficit* and *housing inadequacy*. The first suggests the need to increase affordable housing units and the second refers to the need for improving existing units. The definition of *housing deficit* refers to the lack of sufficient units caused by (1) family cohabitation, (2) rent burden, (3) precarious housing, and
(4) crowding in permanent rented houses. In addition to the housing deficit, there is the problem of housing inadequacy, which refers to the households that do not offer adequate living conditions to the residents, suggesting the need for policy to approach the improvement of the existent stock. Housing inadequacy comprises five subcomponents: (1) the lack of at least one basic infrastructure (Electric Energy, Water Supply, Sanitation, Waste Collection), (2) absence of a toilet, (3) crowding in durable urban owned homes, (4) durable urban housing with inadequate roofing, and (5) unclear land titles. Housing deficit suggests the need of constructing new accessible housing units to attend the demand, while housing inadequacy suggests the improvement of existing units. Table 3.1 synthesizes the two components and their subcomponents. The definition does not include property needing reposition due to the lack of available data on property depreciation. The housing inadequacy does not enter in the calculation of the housing deficit.

Table 3.1. Subcomponents of Housing Deficit and Housing Inadequacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Deficit</th>
<th>Housing Inadequacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Precarious Housing</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Durable urban housing with inadequate roofing:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rustic Houses: households physically deteriorated or homes constructed with precarious materials, such as without masonry walls or fitted wood, which condition of insalubrity present risk to the health condition of its residents and need to be reset.</td>
<td>households with durable walls but with roofs made of harnessed wood, zinc, tin, or straw.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvised Households: places or buildings not designed with residential purposes, such as commercial buildings, under bridges, boats, abandon cars, and caves.</td>
<td><strong>Electric Energy:</strong> Instead they have oil, kerosene, canister gas or other form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Family Cohabitation:</strong> it refers to the families living together who have the intention to compose an exclusive household but are precluded to do so.</td>
<td><strong>2. Lack of Infrastructure:</strong> At least one of the following infrastructure component lacks:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Excessive crowding in durable urban rented homes:</strong> more than 3 people per bedroom. A bedroom is any room used as a permanent bedroom by the residents.</td>
<td><strong>Sanitation:</strong> Instead they have rudimentary mole; Ditch; Direct to the river, lake or sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Rent Burden:</strong> Households spending more than 30% of their income in rent.</td>
<td><strong>Waste Collection:</strong> Instead they burn or bury in property; dump in vacant lot or backyard, on river, lake or sea, or another destination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Unclear Land Titles:</strong> when the dwellers own the house but do not own, partially or totally, the correspondent fraction of land where the house is located.</td>
<td><strong>3. No Toilet:</strong> The lack of sanitary for exclusive use.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table created by the author based on information from Fundação João Pinheiro, 2014.
The Brazilian Housing Deficit is Increasing, but at a Slower Rate Than the Population Growth

In absolute values Brazilian urban housing deficit increased in 2.6% (an increase of 651,138 people) in the period between 2007 and 2014, reaching a total of 5,315,251 citizens. In absolute values, the housing deficit decreased in the Northeast and South, and increased in the other regions. However, if considered the increase in the total number or households in each region, the relative housing deficit decreased in all regions. The Southeast region, where São Paulo Metropolitan Area is included, contains the largest urban housing deficit in absolute numbers: 2,376,198 people live in inappropriate housing conditions in 2014. Compared to 2007, the region has an additional 153,241 people in the housing deficit.

The Housing Deficit in São Paulo Metropolitan Area is Increasing, and Mostly Caused by Rent Burden

Approximately one third of the Brazilian housing deficit refers to the metropolitan areas, and São Paulo has a large contribution to it. The percentage of the total population in the Brazilian metropolitan areas affected by the housing deficit decreased from 10.5% (2007) to 8.7%, (2014), but the metropolitan areas remain responsible for 32% of the urban housing deficit. São Paulo Metropolitan Area (RMSP), which alone contributed to 11.7% of the national urban housing deficit, is responsible for 36.3% of the deficit related to Metropolitan areas. The housing deficit in RMSP increased from 589,940 households in 2007 to 622,680 households in 2014. Therefore, São Paulo Metropolitan Area has the largest urban housing deficit, and it is growing.

In São Paulo Metropolitan Area, the increase in the housing deficit refers mostly to rent burden and Excessive Overcrowding. From 2007 to 2014, the housing deficit decreased in absolute values for the sub-components Precarious Housing (from 51,587 in 2007 to 20,789 people in 2014), Familiar Co-habitation (from 184,759 in 2007 to 135,130 people in 2014). For the sub-component Excessive Overcrowding in Durable Rented Houses, referring to more than 3 people per bedroom, the number of people impacted increased from 86,292 in 2007 to 89,393. The rent burden is the most critical aspect. From 2007 to 2014, the number of people impacted grew from 267,302 to 388,763, an increase of 45.4 %, making rent burden the cause of 61.1% of the housing deficit in 2014.

In terms of Housing Inadequacy, all the subcomponents decreased in the period of 2007-2014. The subcomponents unclear land titles and lack of infrastructure are the ones affecting the largest population contingents. In 2007, 490,521 households didn’t pursue land titles, and 413,613 households didn’t have access to at least one basic infrastructure. In 2014, the number decreased to 348,211 people without land titles and 355,503 people without access to urban infrastructure. Among the main infrastructure components, the lack of sanitation presents the most important contribution, corresponding to 155,377 households without sanitation in 2014. The lack of water supply presented the largest increase, from 40,427 households in 2007 to 107,485 in 2014. The lack of electric energy grew from 0 in 2007 up to 2128 in 2014, and the lack of waste collection impacted 5,513 households in 2007 and duplicated to 11,706 in 2014. The number of households without electricity and waste collection increased since 2007,
however, we can say that the universalization of these services has almost been achieved in the Metropolitan Area.

The Housing Deficit Increased, as Well as the Number of Vacant Buildings in São Paulo and in Brazil

In urban areas, the total of vacant buildings in 2014 surpassed 386,357 units the existent number of people in inadequate housing conditions. In Brazil, the period 2007-2014 presented simultaneously an increase in the urban housing deficit, from 5,179,763 to 5,315,251 people, and an increase in the total number of vacant buildings with potential for occupation in urban areas, from 5,213,751 to 5,701,608. The number of vacant properties remained stable in the period, and the Southeast region corresponds to 44.3% of the total vacant units, a total of 2,525,780, from which São Paulo Metropolitan Area is responsible for 523,876 units, which is 9.2% of the national stock of vacant buildings or under construction buildings. The number of vacant properties decreased in the urban area of São Paulo Metropolitan Region in 57,402 units since 2007.

In 2014, 83.9% of People Affected by the Housing Deficit Received up to 3 Minimum Wages

The largest population impacted by the housing deficit receive 3 minimum wages or less. The housing deficit impacted 89.4% of the total urban population within this salary range in 2007 against 83.9% in 2014. It is also important to notice that the Metropolitan Regions in Brazil had a shorter decrease in the housing deficit in comparison to the national deficit. In RMSP, regardless of the housing policies, the housing deficit remains stable when evaluated according to income levels. The housing deficit presented a small decrease from 2007 (81.9%) to 2014 (80.2%) in the percent of the lowest income range in the Metropolitan Area of São Paulo.

The Homeless Workers Movement (MTST)

Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto (MTST), or Homeless Workers’ Movement, is an anti-capitalist grassroots movement present in the urban peripheries of Brazil since 1997. MTST is part of what is called “new social movements,” a concept under intense academic debate, which refers to the civil society organizations holding critical perspectives and seeking to pressure the State to enact concrete responses to their specific demands. The new social movements emerged during the period of democratization in Brazil, and differ from the social movements of previous decades in the sense that they do not engage on a universal counter-hegemonic struggle; the new social movements focus on particular counter-hegemonic struggles across several sectors of civil society (Black, Women, Housing, LGBT). The focus changed from the conflict between capital and work in the manufactories, to the conflict between civil society and State in the city. If in the past, the struggle was “the right to have a right,” in the present the movements focus on the strategies to concretely achieve these rights, in the particular, not in the general sense (Gurza Lavalle et al, 2004; Laclau, 1986; Gohn, 2008; as cited in Jesus, 2015). Moreover,
the movements perceived that if fighting against the State was “impossible,” pressuring the State looked possible. Through their pressure, the social movements achieve greater legitimacy, inventing the spaces to be invited by the state: “More recently, from 2000 onwards, their struggle for institutional spaces ‘obliged’ the State to no longer ‘avoid’ them, instead, "inviting" them to participation” (Jesus, 2015, p. 155). In this new context, “the State no longer sees the movements only as its opponents, but legitimizes its claims”(Jacobi, 1989; p.12 - as cited in Jesus, 2015). More interactions and negotiations between the grassroots movements and the government, however, increase the chances for co-optation and increase the tension between transformation and adaptation (Jesus, 2015).

MTST has three main goals: they aim to improve the housing conditions of the residents in the outskirts of the cities; to fight for urban reforms; and to create people’s power (poder popular) The movement’s method consists of occupying vacant plots mostly in the peripheries of medium and large cities. The land occupations, in addition to other strategies such as rallies, pressure the federal government to buy the land and invest in affordable housing. In 2017, MTST was present in nine Brazilian states: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Distrito Fereral, Goiânia, Rio Grande do Sul, Ceará, Tocantins, and Roraima. MTST estimates 35,000 camped families in Brazil in 2017, of which 20,000 are in São Paulo.16

MTST’s insurgent practices defy the established power relations, making the periphery visible. Their main methods include land occupations, trancamentos (highways blockings), rallies, temporary occupations of public and private buildings, Acorrentamentos (chainings), and hunger-strikes. Such mobilization strategies assume a fundamental role to open negotiations with diverse government bodies. Facing the advance of neoliberal reforms, MTST catches public attention to make the interests of the cities’ have-nots heard. MTST transforms the housing deficit and the social, civil, and political rights into a collective shared experience, beyond an abstract and extraneous idea. Their practices are both political denunciations and assemblies to empower the worker class.

**MTST's History**

MTST originated in 1997 from this encounter between the existent urban movements and MST (Movement of Landless Workers), one of the largest grassroots movements in Brazil. MST had an important influence in the origin of MTST (Goulart, 2011).17 Initiated during the 1980s, MST fights for agrarian reform, the democratization of the use of land, and the construction of a popular project for the country. In 1995, in response to urban growth and the expulsion of workers from rural areas, the III MST National Meeting formally affirmed its intention to expand the fight for agrarian reform to the cities. Following this agenda, MST attempted to approach urban movements in the interior of São Paulo during the 1990s. Two narratives are often offered in explaining the relationship between MST and MTST. In one, MTST was the urban arm of MST. In the other, MTST was from the beginning a hybrid movement joining existent urban movements and MST. In any case, the origin of MTST relates to a broader scenario of convergence between urban and rural movements in Brazil during the 1990s (Goulart, 2011, p. 26).
MTST began in Campinas, a city located 100 km (60 miles) from São Paulo, where local socioeconomic conditions and events that took place in the region played an important role in their foundation. In 1997, 15% of Campinas’s residents, or 150,000 people, lived in precarious housing or informal settlements. In the same year the city hall registered 86 land occupations. In 1996, MST was invited to help organize workers to occupy lands in Campinas. In this context, the National March for Agrarian Reform, Employment, and Justice (Marcha Nacional por Reforma Agrária, Emprego e Justiça) happened in the city in 1997. The march is considered as MTST’s beginning. Thus, in contrast to several housing movements in Brazil, MTST was not born from a political party or from disputes among leaders of a previous movement (Goulart, 2011, p. 20).

In February 1997, MTST organized their first land occupation in the city of Campinas-SP. Named Parque Oziel, the area had 1 million square meters, 1,135 plots, and 144 landowners. In 2001, the occupation counted more than 10,000 families and had more access to education projects, health assistance, and basic infrastructure, such as electricity and sanitation. The year 2001 was also when MTST decided to leave the occupation to review strategies. This evaluation was an important moment where MTST became autonomous from MST, constructing their own principles and objectives, with focus on the urban context. In 2007, after a 10-year journey that included the murder of four leaders, an 18-km march, and an extensive legal dispute, the occupation Parque Oziel attained the expected land expropriation (Goulart, 2011, p. 21).

MTST’s first occupation in the metropolitan zone of São Paulo happened in March 2001, in the city of Guarulhos. The occupied area of 250,000 square meters was named Anita Garibaldi and received 12,000 acampados in the interval of a few weeks. According to Goulart (2011), the experiences in this occupation shaped what would become “a form of living in the occupations,” causing reflections that would direct the movement’s practices in other locations (p. 53).

From 2001 to 2007, MTST lived a period of regionalization by advancing to other cities of São Paulo Metropolitan Region. During this period, six occupations happened in four cities: Osasco (Occupations Lamarca, 2002; Rosa Luxemburgo, 2004), São Bernardo do Campo (Occupation Santos Dias or Ocupação da Volks, 2003), Taboão da Serra (Occupation Chico Mendes, 2005), and Itapecerica da Serra (Occupation, João Cândido, 2007). In 2005, MTST created their webpage and started to publicize news, documents, and pictures. In April and May 2017, MTST blocked four different important highways: Rodovias Castelo Branco, Raposo Tavares, Régis Bittencourt, and Anchieta-Imigrantes. (Goulart, 2011). The period was marked by numerous cases of police brutality and criminalization against MTST (Goulart, 2011).

According to Goulart (2011), MTST’s expansion in the State and national levels had several causes. After 2000, MTST deepened their connections with housing movements in other states and got involved with the national mobilizations, such as the Frente Nacional de Movimentos Urbanos (2009) and the Frente “Minha Casa, Minha Luta” (2010). In 2005, the movement had already invested time in the
formation of their *militantes*: the leaders who identify themselves with the movement’s principles and objectives, and assume greater levels of responsibility. In May 2009, the movement made official the objective of nationalizing MTST during their State meeting. In September 2010, MTST hosted their first national meeting. The main reason for the expansion to other territories was to increase their power of negotiation with the federal, state, and local governments (Goulart, 2011, p. 54).

From 2011 to 2017, MTST expanded their activities to eight other Brazilian states and realized 56 land occupations. In 2014, MTST inaugurated its first apartment complex, as a result of nine years of pressure. The 192 families were *acampados* in the occupations João Cônego (2007) and Chico Mendes (2007). The families pay 10% of their monthly income over 10 years to own the apartment. In 2017, while many properties wait for the construction phase to begin, the second condominium is being constructed in Santo André, which will receive 310 families of *acampados*. In the period, MTST has mobilized around São Paulo’s master plan, the protests against the World Cup in 2014, and the occupation *Vila Nova Palestina*, one of the largest urban land occupations of MTST, with 3000 families in an area of 1 million km².

MTST’s international relations, although important for the movement, are still a fragile because several factors. MTST has sporadic contacts with other grassroots movements in Argentina, Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Spain. According to Guilherme Boulos, one of the national coordinators of MTST, international solidarities are important for the movement for two reasons: they make possible the exchange of experiences that can improve local practices, and they expand the movement’s visibility, which is essential in supporting the movement’s causes and protecting them from criminalization and police brutality. However, because they lack infrastructure and a membership available to dedicate themselves to establishing international contacts, MTST remains mostly a grassroots movement within the Brazilian borders.

**Beyond the House: Shifting Power and Changing the City**

Capitalism is MTST’s enemy. In MTST’s analysis, the capitalist city is a machine to generate profit through the eviction of the workers to the peripheries and the provision of precarious services and infrastructure in the urban outskirts. The state, serving capital, is nothing more than an instrument for maintenance of inequalities. In the segregated capitalist city, rights become merchandise that only a few can afford. Therefore, the movement focuses on insurgent practices to pressure the government to attend the demands of the working class. Seeing the State and capital as their enemies, MTST seeks to preserve their autonomy and combativeness while still negotiating with the government.

*The MTST is defined . . . as an anti-capitalist movement. We understand that capitalism is incapable of meeting the most essential demands of most of humanity, of most people. Especially in the Brazilian peripheral configuration of capitalism that is extremely perverse. . . . So we understand that for all these reasons it is necessary to make an anti-capitalist struggle, for a model of society that is a more equal, distributive model with equal opportunities, with rights guaranteed. Brazilian capitalism has never been able to assure this and gives no sign that it will*
succeed, on the contrary. The way is an ever-greater path of plunder. That is why we say that the MTST project is an anti-capitalist project. At times we say socialist. Because the historically constructed model of anti-capitalism, of opposition to capitalism, is socialism. This does not mean compromise with any of the socialist experiences that have occurred. We don’t want to repeat, we don’t idealize the Cuban model. We don’t idealize the Russian, Chinese, or any other model. That’s not the point. We think that the mechanical transposition of social models is the worst thing that can be done. The MTST evidently has reference and admiration for innumerable historical experiences in Brazil and abroad. But we think we have to build our own model of social transformation. (Guilherme Boulos, interview, Taboão da Serra, January 18, 2017)

MTST is not a housing movement. The right to housing is indeed the central issue MTST is organized around, because people historically organize around concrete demands. However, MTST sees housing only as a piece of a broader struggle. It is a mobilization aiming to achieve more dignified life conditions, which entail access to housing, transportation, health, education, and basic urban infrastructure. Therefore, MTST’s goal is to realize urban reforms that will solve structural problems. Moreover, urban reform is one among several popular reforms, such as political, agrarian, and tax reforms, that MTST sees as fundamental to overcoming historical inequalities. Acting in coalition with other grassroots movements, MTST pressures the local, state, and federal government to advance with this agenda.

MTST is a grassroots movement that acts from and within the urban peripheries of middle and large Brazilian cities. An increasing number of unemployed, informal, and temporary workers compromise the capacity to organize workers in the factories. MTST thus sees the territory of the peripheries as a promising stage to organize workers. The stage is no longer the factory floors; it is the neighborhood. Living in the periphery is never a choice for the workers; they are forced to move from the center. And by sharing a common reality, they can form a collective identity based on the issues of the territory. Therefore, MTST aspires to be a reference on the peripheries, by organizing workers and local organizations around shared challenges.

The formation of a popular power is the path to achieving a structural urban reform. Popular power is based on the principle that only workers can solve the problem of the workers. If the current forms of organization do not embody the interests of the workers, they have to create alternative spaces elsewhere. In practice, this means to claim the rights by constructing autonomous spaces and alternative forms of collective decision making. As we will see in this chapter, land occupations are the materialization of the anti-capitalist project of creating popular power. The occupations allow the emergence of alternative forms of power.

**Land Squatting v. Land Occupation: From the Illegal to the Right**

Occupations are the core of MTST methods and philosophy. All other insurgent practices gravitate around the dynamics generated within the occupations. Between 1997 and 2017, MTST realized 56 land occupations, of which 36 were in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area. In 2010, MTST expanded to other states, realizing its first land occupation in the federal capital of Brazil. From 2010 to 2017, MTST

Table 3.2 presents an overview of MTST’s land occupation in the state of São Paulo. The majority of the occupations are in private property, and a few are in lands classified as Special Zones of Social Interest, Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social (ZEIS), which designates priority areas for the construction of social interest housing. The extension of the occupied lands varies from 3,330 m² to 1,300,000 m². Some of them last for a few hours, others for years. However, the majority of the evictions, which correspond to frustrated attempts to occupy properties that were evicted in their first hours of existence, are not included in this list. Further research to collect and analyze the documentation of eviction notes and law suits involving MTST can provide a more comprehensive scenario of MTST’s success rate and the nuances of land conflicts.

MTST does not occupy the land and demand, necessarily, housing on that specific land; they use it as leverage in the negotiation of land and governmental investment in low-income housing for the families of acampados. Although incomplete, Table 3.2 gives a taste of the variety of cases and the complexities in negotiation involving each occupation. The outcome column presents the situation of each occupation and comprises four major types: active occupations (with acampados and shacks), occupations which ended and are under some stage of negotiation (at this point the land is usually empty, without shacks), occupations that ended in eviction, and occupations that resulted in supply of the housing demand. While some occupations are able to negotiate a sales agreement with the property owner, others are not able to obtain that specific land, but negotiate the designation of other lands to attend the housing demand of the acampados. Moreover, there is need for collaboration with federal and local government to realize housing projects. In simple lines, the government needs to buy the land (the one occupied or another bargained) to build housing for the families organized through MTST and also has to liberate resources to start building the MCMV apartments. Therefore, once some sort of satisfactory agreement with the landowner and/or the government is achieved, the families leave the land. If the housing project will take place in the land of the occupation, a symbolic infrastructure stays in place (such as the central shack). At this phase, the occupation is usually empty and waiting for the next stages, but it does not mean nothing is happening. The families of acampados remain actively participating. The housing struggles extrapolate the physical occupation of land. Following the diversity of negotiation paths, the trajectories of the families also vary: some start in an occupation and move to another due to eviction. Since a housing project can benefit families from one or more occupations, one family who started
engaging in one occupation might end up benefiting from the collective struggle of MTST from other occupations. Similarly, the terrains negotiated through the pressure of one occupation can go beyond those acampados, for example by including families from other occupations. Therefore, the occupations function as an integrated system of mutual support in the level of negotiation, protest, and everyday challenges.

Table 3.2. MTST’s land occupations in São Paulo State (1997 -2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation’s Name</th>
<th>Year Started</th>
<th>City, State</th>
<th>Property Type</th>
<th>Area (m²)</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parque Oziel</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Campinas, SP</td>
<td>Private (144 landlords)</td>
<td>1,000,000 m²</td>
<td>Became an informal settlement. Families received a permission of use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Garibaldi</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Guarulhos, SP</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>250,000 m²</td>
<td>Became an informal settlement. Unclear land titles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Lamarca</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Osasco, SP</td>
<td>Private. Indústrias Matarazzo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Housing demand attended by the local government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa Luxemburgo</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Osasco, SP</td>
<td>Private. Hicks Muse</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Eviction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chico Mendes I</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Taboão da Serra, SP</td>
<td>Private. Cooperative Paulicoo</td>
<td>80,000 m²</td>
<td>Eviction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frei Tito</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Campinas, SP</td>
<td>Private.</td>
<td>120,000 m²</td>
<td>Eviction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvério de Jesus</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Embu das Artes, SP</td>
<td>Private. Teresa Basile</td>
<td>100,000 m²</td>
<td>Eviction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terra e Liberdade/ Nova Mauá</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Mauá, SP</td>
<td>Private/Petrobrás</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Eviction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cristina</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Santo André, SP</td>
<td>Private. Roberto Harada</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandara</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Hortolândia, SP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estaiadinha</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novo Pinheirinho no Embú</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Embú das Artes, SP</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>433,000 m²</td>
<td>In 2018: under construction of 910 apartment units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faixa de Gaza</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Public. FINEP</td>
<td>10,000 m²</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2014. Sales agreement with property owner. Waiting for investment from federal government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation's Name</td>
<td>Year Started</td>
<td>City, State</td>
<td>Property Type</td>
<td>Area (m²)</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Nova Palestina</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>300,000 m² occupied in a land of 1,000,000 m²</td>
<td>ZEIS 4, Occupation active in 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos Marighella</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Carapicuíba, SP</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>97,000 m²</td>
<td>Occasion ended in 2014. In negotiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capadócia</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2014. Families will be attended by housing project Parque Laguna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dona Deda</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>3,330 m²</td>
<td>100 housing units provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chico Mendes II</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2014, after agreement to designate 2 other lands to housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vila Esperança</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2016. Families of acampados will be attended by housing project Parque Laguna.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandara</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>150,000 m²</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2016. Prevision of construction of 800 housing units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oziel Alves</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Mauá, SP</td>
<td>Private. Hicks Muse</td>
<td>300,000 m²</td>
<td>ZEIS, Occupation active in 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo Freire</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Embu das Artes, SP</td>
<td>Private. Construtora Ingá</td>
<td>300,000 m²</td>
<td>ZEIS; 664 housing units provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Bonita</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Itapepecerica da Serra, SP</td>
<td>Private.</td>
<td>1,300,000 m²</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2017. Sales agreement with property owner. Waiting for investment from federal government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>João Goulart</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Itapepecerica da Serra, SP</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>80,000 m²</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2016. In negotiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Povo Sem Medo de São Bernardo</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>São Bernardo do Campo, SP</td>
<td>Private. MZM Construtora</td>
<td>60,045.96 m²</td>
<td>In March 2018, MTST announced the result of the negotiation: the state government signed a contract designating four other lands to social housing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Povo Sem Medo de Guarulhos</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Guarulhos, SP</td>
<td>Private.</td>
<td>54,000 m²</td>
<td>Occupation active in 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novo Sonho</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>São Paulo, SP</td>
<td>Private.</td>
<td>6,200 m²</td>
<td>Occupation ended in 2017. In negotiation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table prepared by the author based on news media about MTST, phone interview with MTST’s secretary in March 2018, and information available on MTST social media channels, in conjunction with the works of Goulart, (2011), Lima (2004) Miagusko (2008), and Oliveira (2010).
Occupations are completely different from land squatting in terms of physical characteristics, objectives, and formation process. First, occupations do not aim to provide definitive housing in that plot for potential squatters. Instead, they are temporary political statements to open dialogue with the government and make pressure to attend the local housing needs. Consequently, MTST does not sell plots or allow the commercialization of plots. The subdivision of the land exclusively organizes the area for the construction of shacks. A shack is a temporary and symbolic structure made initially with black canvas as a roof and a structure made of bamboos or wooden sticks. The reason that MTST does not allow the construction of shacks with bricks, as is done in land squatting, is to avoid a possible financial loss in case of eviction. Finally, occupations are under an organizational structure that implicates several rules, roles, and expected behaviors that will be discussed later on this chapter.

Figures 3.2 (above) and 3.3 (below). *Occupation Povo Sem Medo de São Bernardo, September 2017.* The photo presents the spatial configuration of a MTST occupation in contrast to the surroundings. In the second picture (3.3) the red points in the right side indicate the area of the stage. The private land, owned by MZM Construtora, was empty for 40 years. On September 2, 2017, the occupation started and in a few weeks achieved 7000 families of *acampados.* Photo Credits: GICA TV/Mídia NINJA. Retrieved from: https://www.facebook.com/mtstbrasil/photos/a.466755456696124.100595.464790330225970/1557083470996645/?type=3&theater and https://www.facebook.com/mtstbrasil/photos/a.466755456696124.100595.464790330225970/1555754827796176/?type=3&theater

In MTST, there is a constant effort to clarify the contrast between occupation and invasion. Many *acampados* explained their own processes to understand the difference:
When I started in November of 2013 I thought one thing and the movement taught me another. I thought we were going to invade. We were going to make our homes, our mansions. When I got here I thought, “Thank God. There’s a lot of land, I’m going to build a mansion here, I’m going to make lots of houses to rent”. But after about three days the coordination arrived and said, “It’s not like that, get it out of here.” I think I had marked almost a million meters of land for me. Then the coordination arrived and said, “No, it’s just a little bit here to make your shack.” Then I say: “But that does not give me a home. That’s when they started explaining it to me. Oh, it is not so, you will not build. . . . You will only mark your small piece to have your house. Then I began to understand what the occupation is. We are not invading. We are trying to guarantee that we have our house in the future, which is an apartment building. (João, coordinator the occupation Palestina. Focus group, São Paulo, January 9, 2017).

The act of attributing different names to different practices is a form of resistance to criminalization. If invasions are widely understood as illegal, occupations try to unleash themselves from such framework insistently thickened by the media and other institutions. “Land occupation” is the spearhead of a narrative that confronts the discourses massively reproduced by the media to criminalize social movements, treating their participants as “vagabonds” and “opportunist.” Their attempt to separate these notions aims to reinforce occupation as a practice in the realm of a legal democratic struggle to guarantee social rights.

The Process of Occupation: The Politics of the Concrete

An occupation requires two preliminary steps. First, a specific movement’s sectors and levels engage in the evaluation and selection of vacant plots. Ultimately, MTST intends to pressure the federal State to purchase the land, the one occupied or a substitute plot, and to dedicate federal funds to the execution of a housing project. Legally fragile lands, such as those with landlords with high tax debts, are more likely to be susceptible to accept sale agreements with the government. Along with the evaluation of the legal and tax status of the land candidates, MTST maps the housing deficit and potential partner organizations in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Following the preliminary information gathering, MTST evaluates the housing deficit in the area. This evaluation assumes a variety of forms. The movement can contact local associations, and cultural and religious institutions, to investigate the demand in the area. Additionally, MTST can also be invited by residents to neighborhoods where the housing conditions are perceived as unbearable. This interface with the networks present in the territory happens before the occupation starts, and it continues as a fundamental strategy of mobilization.

New occupations start at dawn. If the new-born occupation survives the risky initial hours, it has a better chance to survive in the next months. The next 24 hours are the most tense, since the risk of eviction is highest. In a few hours, MTST members fill part of the plot with shacks. Each person, with his/her own Kit sem-teto (wooden sticks or bamboos and a black canvas) runs into the terrain and builds shacks.

In the first days, MTST zones the terrain, builds three main structures, and elects a name for the occupation. The three main structures are the central kitchen, the stage, and the barracão, the large shack.
where meetings will take place. It is on the stage that the assemblies will unfold. The terrain is zoned in
groups: G1, G2, G3, G4, and so on. In case the occupation is too large, the movement may choose to
create brigadas, which include several groups. The location of the plots are raffled among the acampados
to avoid favoritism and conflicts. Each group has its own group of coordinators, who have volunteered to
assume the role in one of the first assemblies. It is also in one of the first assemblies that the acampados
and MTST leadership will elect a name for the occupation. Usually the leaders prepare a list of names
from which the assembly will democratically choose. The names normally make reference to historical
figures or places that are symbols of resistance, such as Anita Garibaldi, Chico Mendes, Palestina
(Palestine), and “Copa do Povo” (World Cup of the Poor).

In the few weeks that follow the initial occupation, the political organization of the occupation
develops around the solution to their physical challenges. The need to solve the infrastructure problems in
order to sustain the occupation creates the urge for its organizational structure. Water, sanitation,
electricity, and waste get in the way of the sustainability of the acampamento. To solve these challenges,
the movement uses both illegal and legal methods. On one side they create clandestine connections and,
on the other, the established formal requirements to the local municipal organs to provide basic services.
To solve their immediate demands for water and sanitation, the participants of the occupation need to
organize protests and reach out to local government.

The kitchens are important communal spaces where people congregate to have meals. Each group
constructs its own restrooms and kitchen, searching for refrigerators, stoves, pans, and food supplies.
Since the shacks are small and highly inflammable, acampados are not allowed to have candles or to cook
inside of them. Since energy is scarce and to avoid the power overload, acampados are also forbidden to
have power sources and household appliances in their shacks. Thus, the kitchens are the communal spaces
with both food and electricity. Some of the occupations have community gardens next to the kitchen and/
or individual food gardens next to the shacks. The search for food donations is a constant task. Especially in the beginning, older occupations support the newborns with donations of construction materials, food, and other urgent needs.

Figures 3.5. Individual garden in the occupation Vila Nova Palestina (January 2017). Planted next to the shack, the garden serves one or more families, and the harvest distribution follows the friendship ties.

Figures 3.6. Community garden in the occupation Vila Nova Palestina (January 2017). Planted next to the kitchen, the garden provides meals for collective events or meetings.

Figures 3.7. Beans produced by an acampada in her individual garden, occupation Vila Nova Palestina (Jan. 2017). During one interview, 71-year old Ana arrived with this bag of beans to give to my interviewee, becoming herself an interviewee. She proudly emphasized how delicious her harvest was.

The shacks of occupations are covered with a black plastic that is cheap and available. It protects from rain and wind, but not from sunburn. Although the occupations try to have access to water, electricity, and sanitation, it takes months to build some basic infrastructure. At night the occupation is in the dark except for the central kitchen. Bathrooms are improvised, with cesspools or chemical toilets, for example. For those who live in the occupation, taking a shower depends on carrying water in buckets, clandestine water connections (if the occupation is advanced), or asking neighbors to shower in their houses (this last option depends on the level of sympathy or hostility of the surrounding neighborhood, which varies a lot across the occupations). Snakes, scorpions, and spiders lived in the terrain before the occupation arrived—and of course, they remain there. Fire is a constant risk. Storms make occupations oceans of mud. Food depends on donations. But “nobody suffers from hunger in an occupation,” people insist on saying.
Shack in the Occupation Vila Nova Palestina (January 2017). Well-maintained shacks, as the one presented in this picture, usually shelter residents and have doors with locks. The letters and numbers are made by the occupation coordinators to organize the space. G refers to group and B to brigade. A brigade is a conjunction of groups, usually used in large occupations.

Shack in the Occupation Vila Nova Palestina (January 2017). The shack was built with black canvas, wood, and transportation signalization (orange and white stripes). This occupation started in 2013.

Abandoned shack in the Occupation Vila Nova Palestina (Jan/2017). The picture presents few abandoned units. The occupations have routine *mutirões* (self-help collective efforts) to do the maintenance of the shacks, monitor which families still active, and remove abandoned units. The removal is important to keep the coordinators aware of the engagement rate (in addition to attendance at assemblies and rallies), and to keep an image of an active occupation. Destroyed shacks reinforce the criminalization discourse that the area was “invaded by vagabond opportunists who have their houses.”
In such a way, to occupy is to resist. The resistance against all the hazards would not be possible without a cultural construction of resistance as a highly valuable trait. The three most important and common mottos that circulate among members are about resistance: Ocupar e resistir! *Occupy and resist!*
Não desiste da luta. *Don’t give up the fight;* MTST, a luta é pra valer! *MTST, the fight is for real!*”. According to Zelideo, a male, age 38, state coordinator of MTST and several occupations in the metropolitan area, resistance is what forges the *militante*, and the experiences of suffering are what forms the legitimacy and authenticity of the real activist:

*Occupation is what forms militantes. It's the suffering, it's stepping in the mud. It's that you're sleeping and the canvas has a hole and there's a leak falling on your head. It's you starving inside an occupation, getting thirsty. And when you look behind and the years are gone . . . Now you have an argument to speak with a person who is coming: This is social work. This is you being the example to the people . . . because the rest are stories.* (Zelideo Barbosa Lima, interview, Guarulhos, January 4, 2017)

MTST’s social basis is entirely based on the solidarities forged on the occupations which initially emerged from individual residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. The *trabalhos de base* prepares the community before the occupation happens and continues as the *acampamento* unfolds. These interactions comprise residents’ neighborhood associations, art collectives, churches, public schools, and universities. The engagement of some pioneer residents reverberates and attracts a growing number of curious folks based on their family ties, friendship bonds, and professional contacts.

**Participation: The Journey to Have a House**

An occupation comprehends four main formal roles: *acampados*, dwellers, coordinators, and *militantes*. *Acampados* are those who joined the *fight* by constructing a shack in an occupation, taking care of it, and participating in the activities as requested. Dwellers or residents are *acampados* who live, alone or with their families, in a shack. Usually, they correspond to individuals who do not have any place to live and are forced by such vulnerable condition to remain in the *acampamento*. Furthermore, residents are also engaged in daily activities such as cooking and cleaning. The majority of *acampados* are not
occupation residents, but people who live in the surrounding neighborhoods and suffer with rent burdens and/or are at risk of eviction. Coordinators are *acampados* who volunteer for higher levels of responsibility. Their tasks include the participation in daily or weekly meetings, the control of attendance of *acampados* at assemblies, rallies, and other events, and other logistics support. *Militantes* are those dedicated to the movement’s cause who ideally incorporate the principles and methods of MTST, providing the guidance to new members and assuming higher levels of decision making. Some *militantes*, although they have a house, choose to live in the occupation to inspire and create stronger bonds with the community. The responsibilities of these roles are described in the internal statute. If an *acampado* does not follow it, he or she is asked to leave the occupation.

Although there is not a study of the socio-economic profile of MTST social base, the survey realized in 2017 (Marcolino and Horie, 2017) about the occupation *Povo Sem Medo de São Bernardo*, provides an important sample of 575 participants out of 12,123 families in the occupation. According to the survey, 53.4% of the *acampados* are women, 61.6% Black, 41.1% migrants from other regions in Brazil, 6.7% homeless families, and 30% received social assistance from the government. In terms of work conditions, 41.8% were unemployed, and 60.4% salary workers. The profile of MTST *acampados*, therefore, are of working poor, unemployed or with precarious jobs and low salaries, who cannot afford their rents. For 77.3% of the families, the rent corresponded to more than 30% of their income, and 59.4% joined the occupation because they could not pay their rents anymore. Among the 575 families, 271 were evicted from their houses for not paying the rent or were at risk of eviction. According to the same survey 67.9% have never had access to housing programs. There are multiple motives that lead people to join the occupation, but the majority of MTST’s social basis goes to the occupations because they want to improve housing conditions. The movement is the instrument to own a house that otherwise would be impossible:

> That's why people go to the occupation. Sometimes one has some illusions, "As it can, the guy just wants the house!" Sure, man. 99% of people who go for an occupation is because they want their home. And this is natural, this is the dynamics of the struggle. People struggle for concrete reasons always, historically. (Guilherme Boulos, interview, Taboão da Serra, January 18, 2017)

Participation is the key to achieve the dream of homeownership. MTST does not adopt level of income, housing status, or any other socioeconomic criteria to prioritize who will receive their apartments first. The only criterion is presence in the movement’s activities. Participation is not mandatory, and MTST forbids the charge of any kind of payment. It is almost a mantra: they are not required to pay to join the movement, but they are required to actively participate in the activities. Many interviewees attributed the legitimacy of the movement to the prohibition of charging the *acampados*, which was also emphasized as an important differential from other housing movements requiring monthly payments.

The *acampados* are invited to participate, and the participation is measured by points. When people arrive in the occupation, they fill out a registration form, with basic information about their families. The opportunities for participation include assemblies, rallies, support to the sectors, and
engagement in daily tasks in occupation. Each action equals a certain amount of points defined by the *militantes*: more points, more chances to be at the head of the list. The coordinators, however, have to be present at all actions. At the end of each rally or assembly, the coordinators of an occupation collect the presence of their *acampados*. Since some of the activities occur in periods that might conflict with the work schedule, the participants are allowed to send representatives. Once a year, the organizational sector tabulates the presence of each person in the occupation, summarizes, categorizes, and makes them publicly available in the kitchens. MTST uses three categories of presence: red for *acampados* with low attendance, yellow for those who have skipped some events, and green for those with higher attendance. The numbers are not standardized and can vary from year to year.

Four main spheres of community organizing form an occupation: (1) the assembly, where all the involved participate (i.e., *acampados*, *militantes*, *coordinators*, *dwellers*, and *activists*); (2) the meetings of coordinators, at which the coordinators of all the Gs (the zones of the terrain established by MTST in the first days of occupation, see page 62) discuss formation, delegation, feedback, organization, problem solving, and conflict resolution; (3) meetings of the dwellers, where *acampados* who live in the occupation meet to organize the occupation, and solve problems and conflicts; and (4) organization sector meetings, where the *militantes* responsible for coordination discuss the instructions received from the upper level and define the overall plan for the occupation, including the guidelines for the meetings with the coordinators. The local *militantes* interface with the state level, as well as with other occupations. *Activists* are referred to by the *militantes* as sporadic contributors to their work, for example, as volunteers who participate in occupations to contribute to training or food gardens.

The assemblies are the spaces that congregate all the *acampados*. At the beginning of an occupation, the assemblies and other meetings usually occur on a daily basis, at night when the majority can attend. As the occupation develops, the regularity decreases. Assemblies are also meant to be a space for informing the *acampados* about coming events and activities, and about the progress and setbacks in the negotiations with the government; to inspire them to engage in the activities; and to reinforce the occupation’s principles and rules of conduct. Assemblies are simultaneously spaces of hope and social control.22
Communication: Establishing the Contours of the Occupation

Acampamentos have hundreds or thousands of families and have permeable boundaries. They are open to any person interested in joining the movement. Communication is the key element defining the occupation boundaries for the neighborhood, the local powers, and the acampados themselves. Knowing what the occupation is, what is permitted and forbidden in the space of the occupation, is essential for MTST.

Beyond the weather, the physical obstacles, police brutality, and criminalization by the media, the occupations need to resist internal conflicts. Those conflicts include, to mention just some of the dramas, fights between couples, domestic violence, hostility among community members, and clashes between gangs. Because the occupations are vulnerable places, exposed to a variety of risks such as fire and opposition from outside the occupation, they need to achieve a certain level of internal harmony inside in order to resist. In this context, private conflicts become community issues. Maintenance of the harmony, discipline, and safety in the occupation is essential to avoid the disintegration of the acampamento.

Militantes and coordinators assume the position of mediators to solve conflicts and create spaces of safety, order, and harmony. The sector of “Self-defense” has the role of keeping the discipline and safety of the occupation. They are not allowed to use any type of guns, so communication is their strongest tool. Militantes explained during their interviews how they facilitated conflict resolutions. When couples started fights, the women would sit with the spouse, and the men with the husband, to calm them down and have conversations. MTST’s search for creating an environment of discipline results in producing spaces that are safer, in comparison to the usual settings in informal settlements. If a person breaks the rules, she or he is asked to leave the place. In January 2017, I interviewed Swellen, a 29-year-old...
old Black woman who had recently being evicted from her house. She was homeless with her three sons and heard about the occupation, having joined it in the last few weeks. She had lived in favelas before and said she could feel safer inside an occupation:

*Because people are very troublemakers there [in the favela she lived before]. You do not have a discipline [there]. Here there is order. Quarrels are not admitted, lack of respect is not admitted. Did you understand? So here I feel more peaceful. Because I know my son already knows that he cannot get into fights. And the other children also know they cannot hit each other. But there [the favela] was very messy.* (Swellen, interview, São Paulo, January 7, 2017)

Since there is no way to verify the motives and socioeconomic status of all *acampados,* there is also an undesirable presence of those called “opportunists”—those who have houses or local commercial establishments and are looking to use the movement to increase their family patrimony. Their presence is not welcome in the occupations, since they are stealing the space from those who actually need a house. The sector of “Self-defense” also keeps watch for the “opportunists” through several means, such as informal conversations. The identification and exclusion of these unwanted members is essential to protect the coherence, therefore the legitimacy, of the movement.

The *militantes*’ mediation role goes beyond the resolution of internal conflicts. Since drug traffic is a commanding presence in the Brazilian peripheries, the *militantes* have to speak the same language and to establish clear boundaries to avoid the influence of the traffic inside the occupation. According to Zelideo, 38-year-old male, a state coordinator of MTST and in charge of supervising seven occupations, communication with local informal leaders is key to establish diplomatic boundaries and guarantee the safety of the occupation against the local crime:

*How are you going to tell me to do a self-defense in an occupation when you cannot work armed, but what still has to guarantee the safety of the people who are sleeping? When you speak the language of the guetto (a língua da quebrada). You have to approach the guy that is from that guetto, that guy who thinks he is the owner there. At the same time you cannot let him rule over you. But you have to make it clear to him: “This is my space. I will respect you until here. You respect me until here.”* (Zelideo Barbosa Lima, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)

Communication is also key to connecting the occupation and the residents surrounding it. In consequence of discourses reproduced by the media, MTST members have to deal with those narratives as they are reproduced in the periphery by some of the residents, as well as by passersby during rallies in the center: “*A bunch of vagabonds who have nothing to do and invade the land of others.*” The reproduction of prejudice has a fundamental function to trim the highest sin of impoverished citizens: curiosity. Many of the interviewees narrated their experience of approximation to MTST as motivated by glimpses of curiosity. Thus, at the local level, the *coordinators* understand that education is an essential part of their work. The coordinator and *militantes* mobilize an effort of community engagement to reach out to *acampados* and converse with the residents in the vicinity to clarify doubts and communicate the movement’s objectives and methods. The discourse of rights is an essential tool to combat criminalization. In the focus group realized with coordinators of the occupation *Palestina,* participants
described their job as talking to the *acampados* to “open their minds” that they have rights, that “we have the right to live”; pressuring the authorities is the only way they can pursue their rights.

**MTST, Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades (MCMV-E), and the City Statute**

*The Complex Position of Grassroots*

Chapter 2 presented that lack of political will from the local governments to implement the City Statute was partially responsible for the urbanistic failure of the programs *Minha Casa Minha Vida* (MCMV) and *Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades* (MCMV-E). In this context, MTST’s political strength relies on their capacity to mobilize people to join the protests and occupation. They pressure the government to implement the City Statute’s tools and to attend the housing deficit of low income citizens in São Paulo Metropolitan area.

MTST engages simultaneously with the federal program MCMV-E, to access funding for housing, and the City Statute, to access land. The movement fights to access the funding available from the MCMV subsidiary program *Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades* (My house My home Entities - MCMV-E). They occupy vacant land in urban areas, most of them private, and pressure the government to buy the property and invest in housing for families in *Faixa 1*. During the formulation of São Paulo’s master plan (2012), MTST was very active and pressured the government to create several ZEIS (a City Statute tool) that would benefit their land occupations. The definition of a land as ZEIS increases their power of negotiation, in favor of social housing, with the local government and the propriety owner. Therefore, if MCMV-E and the City Statute diverge in significant programatic points, they are complementary tools in the practice of grassroots movements.

This, however, is a twisted integrated use of both policies. While one of the most prominent actors pressuring for the implementation of ZEIS, MTST focused on MCMV-E and homeownership in areas of low access to urban services, the majority of their land occupations are in properties in the outskirts of the São Paulo Metropolitan Area. Although MTST is catalyzing solutions of the housing deficit, it is not enabling the realization of one of the main purposes of the City Statute, that is, to increase access to service land. They use the mechanisms created by the Statute, and the concept of social function of property, to increase the chances of low-income people finally realizing their dreams of homeownership, represented by the program MCMV-E. The social function of property and the right to the city are part of MTST’s ideological and long-term goals. However, for their social basis, majority of which is looking for a tangible apartment, rather than an ideal city, the right to the city is a means, not an end, to realize the dream of having the safety of an estate wherever it is possible. As Ferreira (2012) argued, there is a contrast between wanting a house and desiring a city – and this is why discussing imagination in the public domain matters. More about that will be discussed in chapter 6.
MTST Organizing Practices in a Nutshell

The following list provides an overview of the organizing process of land occupation. The summary was made with activists in mind, to facilitate the exchange of experiences and transnational solidarities:

1) Preliminary information gathering about vacant properties. Legally fragile lands, such as those with high tax debts, increases the movements’s negotiation power to pressure the government to buy, and the landlord to sell;

2) Initial assessment of housing deficit in the area by contacting residents and local organizations;

3) “500-shack flashmob”: Before dawn, MTST’s members, with their construction kits, build 500 black plastic canvas shacks in the chosen plot;

4) Construction of the core infrastructure:
   • Build the central kitchen, the central large shack for general meetings, and the stage of the assemblies;
   • Passing the built shacks to local residents;
   • Zoning the terrain;
   • Creating the groups of coordinators for each zone;
   • Defining the name of occupation.

5) Strengthening of the organizing capacity by solving infrastructure problems (water, electricity, sanitation, waste) and maintaining the flow of donations (food, construction materials, cooking appliances);

6) Nourishment of a culture that values resistance, resilience, and solidarity as the traits of legitimate leaders;

7) Constant work of engagement with the local organizations, establishing local and regional solidarities across similar causes, needs, problems, and interests.

Additionally, this chapter highlights a few strategies of community engagement and organizing in MTST’s practice:

1) A clear and attractive goal, grounded in a powerful cultural symbol. In the case of Brazil, homeownership (to pursue a house or an apartment through the program *Minha Casa Minha Vida*) is a highly desirable and very often unachievable dream for the working poor in Brazil. MTST acknowledges that and channels this goal as a driving force in their engagement process;

2) Based on this goal, MTST established an engagement process based on a punctuation system. Each movement’s activity corresponds to a certain number of points. The participants receive points for participating. The organizers compute the points and group the participants in three
categories (green, yellow, and red), corresponding to the levels of participation. Those with a higher engagement have more chances to obtain their houses;

3) MTST keeps a relatively clear set of roles and spaces of decision making;

4) A training system allows the participants to access higher levels of decision making;

5) A clear set of rules in the occupation, a form of discipline code, and its application by MTST leaders increases the safety in the occupation;

6) An entrance form provides basic information of each acampado. The lack of infrastructure and partnership with academia preclude the potential of these forms to became useful research tools to understand the social profile of the homeless engaged in MTST. The forms are only in physical paper, neither digitalized or organized in a data bank.

7) The interviews suggested that MTST’s land occupations are schools where the coordinators and militantes have opportunities to develop communication skills, mostly related to conflict mediation, outreach, and education;

8) Their organizing capacity is based on an organizational structure that combines horizontal and vertical modes of decision-making, as well as working groups organized around territories (e.g. city regions, states, etc) and objectives/tasks (e.g. communication, self-defense, and negotiation) (see Appendix E).

9) Their ability to make territories visible rely on the capacity to be unpredictable and yet coherent as a grassroots organization (see Appendix G).

10) Their organizational capacity is higher in São Paulo Metropolitan Area and is expanding to other regions in Brazil. However, the formation of international solidarities remains weak, yet desirable. One of the obstacles are the lack of financial resources, as well as the members available with the necessary skills to operate on an international level.
CHAPTER 4

Making Territories Visible

Shaping the Public Attention Through the Transgression of Urban Space and Political Time

Making territories visible implies a two-fold process: opening the possibilities to see and to be seen. MTST’s performative acts (e.g. rallies and *trancamentos*) enhance the chances for the working poor to *be seen* as a political risk and opportunity. Additionally, by crossing the lines between the legal and the illegal (such as through land occupations), MTST’s practices create nuisances compelling the public attention for a specific territory. *Seeing* is the other dimension of making territories visible, it refers to the capacity to enable changes in subjectivity in a territory, shifting the citizen’s perceptions of problems, rights, and dreams, from *individuals* holders of *information*, persecuting dreams detached from their places, to a public with shared experiences, seeing the contrasting between real and ideal in their surroundings.

**Invented Spaces: MTST’s Performative Acts**

“That's where we'll put the flag, on the street here in Guarulhos . . . to make it clear to the authorities that the people here have woken up.” Zelideo Barbosa Lima

Making the periphery visible in the urban space is to engage in a performative act where there is an audience, a message, and the perception of a message by the audience. The audience can be on site or remote, present or future viewers. Those who are there to presence the act, and those who watch the action, live in social media or later though images, videos, or texts produced. The audience can be sympathizers or opponents, local or international. Politicians, neighbors, the social base, the passers-by, the local or international media, the driver of the bus that is waiting for the fire from the tire burning to end, or the student watching the news. Different audiences perceive the actions in different ways, and some actions are directed toward specific groups. All these insurgent practices carry messages that are beyond the visual signs, such as billboards, bands, or messages painted on the roads. The message content is the performative act as whole; it is not possible to separate the text from the action. It is the agenda for the protest and how it is performed that determine the power of the act. The performative uses of the urban space is double faced; they are learning processes that shape the perception and affect both performers and audience. Chapter 5 will approach how the participation in these acts affects MTST members. This chapter introduces MTST performative acts of insurgency and focuses on how they affect the public, both the government and civil society.

MTST performative acts of insurgency that complement land occupations take five forms. These forms are rallies, *trancamentos* (road blocking), temporary occupations of public and private spaces, *acorrentamentos* (chasing), and hunger-strikes. The occupations are an interconnected network of centers of mobilization from which these practices are organized and spread across the city. MTST’ members call...
these practices fights: “Vai ter luta hoje. We will have a fight today.” or “I have never been to a fight before.” If the occupations are the core that catalyzes the peripheries, the fights are the tentacles that reach the center.

In MTST’s experience, rallies are protests that can assume a broad range of forms. Taking place in the streets of central or peripheral areas, and varying from short paths to routes as long as 16 km (10 miles). In 2014, MTST organized 64 rallies, with some of them mobilizing more than 25,000 people. The participants are the directly affected population, such as the acampados of one or more occupations, with a broader public included when the protests where related to city-wide or national causes. The times for the rallies vary, being on weekdays or weekends, during the day or the night. Employed acampados have a family member represent them in the rallies and sign the presence list, or negotiate with one of the parties: the movement or the boss, using documents to justify absences when necessary.

Figure 4.1. Rally of 23 km demands land expropriation to attend 7,000 families in São Bernardo do Campo-SP (Oct/2017). Retrieved November 9, 2017 from https://jornalggn.com.br/noticia/ocupacao-povo-sem-medo-segue-em-luta-e-caminhada-de-23km-ate-alckmin

Trancamentos are incidents of interrupting traffic on busy highways through tire burning. A very small group of people may throw tires and burn them on the roads, leaving the place right after the act, or the event may consist of a large number of people protesting and remaining in place while the tires burn. According to an interview with Guilherme Boulos in January 2017, the movement learned the practice from unofficial contacts with the grassroots movement Piqueteiros in Argentina in 2001.
Temporary occupations of public and private buildings involve a group of MTST members who refuse to leave a place until the achievement of an agreement beneficial to the movement. It can begin with a forced entry or the refusal to leave a public place. These occupations can last a few hours or as long as the movement deems necessary and is not evicted. During the city’s master plan, MTST occupied the front of the City Council to pressure for the voting on the plan that favored the movement’s objectives. According to MTST, politicians allied with construction companies were trying to postpone the approval of the plan. After seven days of occupation, but months of pressure by MTST and other grassroots movements, the plan was approved.
Acorrentamentos (chainings) consist of chaining militantes in a public space where they will reside twenty-four hours a day, performing all their survival needs in public, until they achieve the results that led them to the act. On the first day, a few members have their wrists chained together, forming a stream. The stream is not broken under any circumstances. A group of people supplies the enchained performers with food and helps them walk to provisional restrooms. Temporary shelters protect them.
from the sun and the cold at night. But they need to remain visible all the time, to prove that the chain has not been broken. Each new day, a new member joins the chain, increasing the pressure on the state. On July 9, 2009, MTST protested in front of the house of then-president Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, in São Bernardo do Campo, metropolitan area of São Paulo. Each day the movement chained one more person who volunteered, if the negotiation had not shown any progress. The aim of the protest was to reclaim specific demands of three occupations. After eight days, eight members had been chained, and they achieved an agreement with the federal government.


Greves de Fome (hunger strikes) are more radical practices that demand a higher level of resilience from their participants. MTST’s members, while occupying a public space, abstain from any kind of food for a period of time that can reach several days. Hunger strikes can start right away with a number of members fasting, or they can follow the same progression as the chainings. In this case, the number of militantes fasting increases over time as a way to escalate pressure. The logistics are similar; the full-time visibility of the performers is critical for the legitimacy and power of the act.

MTST’s performative acts explore the diverse uses of urban space in a way that calls for attention from multiple audiences, especially the government, the media, and the civil society. These practices are open to different interpretations, therefore to critiques and controversies. In the case of trancamentos, many workers who get stuck on their way to their job get upset, curse, and do not identify at all with those “vagabonds.” Others applaud and support the action. Antonio Martins, editor-in-chief of the alternative media center Outras Palavras, who identifies with several points of MTST proposals, criticized their approach using trancamentos. He pointed out that their actions might be counterproductive since people get stuck in traffic and don’t understand that the protest is also in their favor. On one side, trancamentos
explicitly strengthen their power to negotiate with the government. But how much do they attract or repel public opinion in their favor?

MTST insurgent performances have the capacity to open negotiations with the government over time. Guilherme Boulos, one of the main national leaders of MTST and part of the negotiation sector, described an emblematic case of how invented spaces open invited spaces. The governor Alckmin, a politician well known for his repressive use of police with grassroots movements, refused to negotiate with MTST. In 2007, the movement organized three main actions that shifted this relationship: MTST camped with hundreds of people for 20 days in front of the government palace, chained; they blocked several highways at the same time in São Paulo; and a 20-km rally with more than 50,000 people for more than six hours. Guilherme noted that “These three events occurred along months. Before that there was no negotiation. After that the governor was receiving us personally...The negotiation led to the expropriation of several lands, including the one here, of the João Cândido condominium, and that the MTST family rent paid by the State government.” My interviewee used the example to illustrate how MTST is able to open a space even with conservative governments. Such obstacles are not absent from leftist governments, either. The modus operandi, regardless of the general political orientation, is a closed government that needs to be opened by the civil society.

By defying existing expectations of behavior in the space, MTST’s performative acts destabilize existing power relations. The *utilization* of the space as a means of communication—of sending a message to someone else—sets up the stage to start a negotiation with the government. The periphery is not normally invited to participate. MTST’s strategies create the momentum that makes it impossible for the authorities to ignore them and not discuss the demands of the working poor. The tension between space and communication reenacts the *presence* of the periphery in the territory.

**Be Seen: Crossing the Line of Legality and Setting Public Stages**

The peripheries have no power; they are the forgotten territories trapped in political patronage. How can they create power to negotiate with the state? The transgressive use of the urban space generates the necessary visibility to empower the movement. In the case of MTST, this happens in two ways: by crossing the line between legal and illegal, and by setting a public stage. When the movement flirts with illegality (e.g., land squatting), it redirects the attention of the government to a specific place, because the State has to eliminate the illegality, and because the landlords apply pressure through political and judicial means for repossession of the property. When the movement brings thousands of people to the streets, it draws the public eye, which forces politicians to choose a performance in front of the created audience. The rallies create an audience that can be both a risk and an opportunity for politicians. “The public stage” and “illegality” are two poles of the creation of visibility that can happen together or separately. The transgression of the space, and the consequent strengthening of their negotiation power, leads to a
transgression in the bureaucratic time. The grassroots movement is disputing time with the State apparatus: instead of waiting for a day where the poor would be in the city’s agenda, they seek to define when the change will happen. The dispute of time, however, is not prominent in formal participation, where the time of change remains controlled by the bureaucracy or the city hall. Therefore, MTST participates in those spaces judiciously, when they see an opportunity to move their agenda forward.

MTST’s power of negotiation with the government relies on the streets. Mobilizations create the opportunity to have a negotiation and to have a voice in the process. Guilherme Boulos, an MTST national leader, has become the best-known representative since he assumed the role of spokesman of the movement with the media. But he is also in the negotiation sector responsible for bargaining with the government. In his interview he explained that there are two forms of negotiation: “You can bargain by asking for favor, by begging for crumbs on your knees. Or you can negotiate by standing up, establishing conditions.” The difference between negotiating kneeling and standing is mobilization on the streets. The number of people the movement can put on the streets is what allows them to establish conditions during the negotiation. This need to have popular pressure is the standard, not the exception. Similarly, Jussara, a black woman militante, coordinator of a MTST occupation and also member of the Negotiation sector, affirmed: “Everything that we conquer . . . is conquered with popular pressure. Because our biggest weapon is this, it's the amount of people the movement can put on the streets.” MTST’s capacity of mobilization, the number of people they can bring to the street, opens the possibility for the periphery to have a voice.

They need to see us: the visibility of the poor translates into power of pressure. In 2014, 12,000 families were camped in the occupation Copa do Povo. The coordination of the occupation found it necessary to have chemical toilets to attend all the families and formed a commission to go to the borough to request temporary bathrooms. When the commission arrived at the borough on a Thursday, the public office sent the delegation away from the entrance. On the next day MTST organized 6000 people to go to the borough and ask for the toilets. On Saturday the toilets arrived at the occupation. Claudio, a 44-year-old militante, male, unemployed metalworker, told me this story and added: “Did they need this? No. They could have received the commission there and talked with us in the first place: ‘Oh, I'll send the chemical toilets.’ Instead, we had to dislocate from the occupation, go to the center of Itaquera for the sub-mayor to see that we were there. Then he sent the chemical toilets to the occupation.” The poor need to be seen to enact the political will of those in power. In the following passage, a coordinator at Palestina who attended the focus group expressed the need to be seen by the authorities and related how the occupation becomes an exchange coin in the negotiation process:

And to get a house is just by knocking on the door of the ruler, show them that we are really in need. To show this to them, what do we have to do? Occupy and go to the door of his house and say: we occupied this land, it is your obligation to pay the expenses because we need a home. (Reginaldo, Focus Group, São Paulo, January 9, 2017)
The potential of the crowd on the streets relies on its dual role: the crowd is not only seen by the broader city; the crowd also sees. If the grassroots attract a spotlight, they force the politicians to prove themselves. The transition between the threat and the opportunity occurs at the moment when the politician, the posing hero with the microphone, joins the march to compromise with or respond to the movement’s demands. The stage established by the insurgency makes the absence of the government response more noticeable or the politician’s showing off remarkable. The irresistible momentum is created by the movement’s acts of resistance, carrying both risk and opportunity. Claudio, 44-year-old militante, male, and part of the Self-defense sector, described the following emblematic moment that shows the importance of visibility and setting a public stage:

When we went there at the door of the mayor in Santo André, he came down from his building, from the office, all cute, went up there on the stage, which is in open area at the square, went up there, made a beautiful speech, shoved the land title. He signed there, in front of that whole population . . . there were 3,000 people around him. He signed that in front of everyone. He wore the MTST shirt. He put the MTST hat on. He kissed Dona Maria on the forehead. And I was filming it all. Because I thought that, first, was a great hypocrisy. That he could have done all this without the 3,000 people being there. He could have done it inside his office. But look at the visibility that this man had on the eve of elections. And that was shown on television. It was shown by a lot of institutions. And all that mass that was around him there. [...] that he took advantage of that, he took advantage. So most of them do that, right? First they want to show you what they’re oppressing. Then, when they see the mass of the people arriving there . . . Because the strength of the Country is the people . . . Unfortunately, it is only the people who do not know this . . . and when they see the mass getting there, they have to attend. Or that will turn out to be a clash, it ends up being a turmoil. And usually the MTST does not back off. Then they will receive us.

(Claudio, interview, São Paulo, January 7, 2017)

Invented spaces not only send a message to an audience; they also create an audience that previously did not exist. The performance, which is a nuisance, creates the public and the stage. Setting the stage opens a field of power full of political opportunities for the movement, the government, and the media.

The creation of momentum is not only a chance for dialogue; it is also a chance to demonstrate the movement’s power over the image of ill-disposed politicians. In 2014, when MTST organized protest in front of the Câmara Municipal to influence the voting of the city’s new master plan, MTST identified politicians that were against their interests, and they created puppets that represented and denigrated those politicians to the public. Similarly, the politicians who passed proposals aligned with MTST expectations were invited to join the sound car and speak in the microphone with the audience. The element of visibility creates the capacity to open dialogues because of the possibility to enhance or damage the public images.
In case of MTST, land occupations are the source of their mobilization, the engine to bring people to the streets. Between the illegal—the invasion of a private property—and the legal—the constitutional right to have a house—land occupations disturb the order. Their illegality brings power by attracting the attention of the state: they are a problem. The government needs to solve it, and the property owner starts to pressure the state. By transgressing the *scripts* of the urban space, they make territories visible. Their inadequacy is also hard to ignore for the local residents who know the illegality of land squatting. Through such visibility, the occupations forge political denunciations of the housing deficit.

Setting a public stage and transgressing the legal are two poles of the creation of visibility that can happen together or separately. As noted earlier, MTST also occupies buildings or public open spaces in central areas. On February 15, 2017, MTST started an *acampamento* in front of the presidential office at Avenida Paulista, one of the most important avenues in São Paulo and in Brazil. The occupation protested the changes in the national housing program *Minha Casa, Minha Vida Entidades* (MCMVE - My House My Life Entities) and the austerity reforms of the government of Michel Temer. After 22 days, MTST achieved an agreement with the Ministry of the Cities to reopen the investments in housing for the *Faixa 1*, for families with total monthly income up to R$1,800.00 (US $549.00).

The transgression of space potentially unfolds into the transgression of bureaucratic time and the time of land speculation. According to Guilherme Boulos, “If you're going to negotiate with the city councilor to schedule a meeting with the mayor, asking 'Please' for an agenda, [the meeting] will never happen. They will do whatever they want. You cannot have strength in the negotiation process.”

Disputing time, setting the “when” in state’s apparatus, relies on the public’s attention. Furthermore, the occupations transgress the city’s natural time of land speculation that each day expels the poor to areas further away:

> Here this land was assigned for housing for 30 years. And it was never built here. They tried to build here two or three times. [...] Why? Because the owner of the land, the entrepreneur here, he will always hope that this land is appreciating, is valuing itself, which is what has happened—that previously had no street, today has two avenues in the face of the goal there, transportation to everywhere. So this brings improvement to the terrain. The land is getting more and more valued. And one day he would build a set of buildings here and never a poor man could enter here. We workers who are here inside could not enter here ever. (Claudio, interview, São Paulo, January 7, 2017)

The power dynamics that permeate institutionalized spaces of participation make them immune to change: they unfold according to the bureaucratic and land speculation time. Insurgent practices, such as the land occupations, rallies, and trancamentos, are, however, able to shift power relations and open the doors to make the demands of the urban poor heard. The movement does not have any principle against engaging in these spaces, as clarified in my interview with Guilherme Boulos, one of the national leaders of MTST and spokesman with the media. They believe that the “invited spaces” are not effective, that poor people don’t have real power of decision to influence public policy: “the power of decision continues through the same paths and the same places.” So, by principle, MTST is not against engaging in formal spaces of participation. But they do so only when they find it appropriate according to their agenda. This is a way they found to preserve their autonomy and “combativeness”—and not getting their energy channeled to what they often consider innocuous spaces. Although power of negotiation relies on their insurgent practices, MTST engages sporadically with invited spaces, when such participation serves an overall strategy to achieve their goals.

**Seeing: Making the Housing Deficit and the Right for Housing Visible**

*How Occupations Enact Learning in the Territory*

MTST’s land occupations make the housing problem and the right to housing visible and tangible. The occupations are bottom-up territorial symbols that appeal simultaneously to the local residents and the state. Rather than a spatial representation developed by official planners in their computers, the occupations are spatial experiences representing the local housing conditions. They are also a territorial catalyzer of learning the experience of having a right. By illuminating what is absent in the space (dignified housing), occupations illuminate that the right to housing is missing. In MTST’s perspective, land occupations are simultaneously the gathering of people who want to fight for housing and the political denunciation of the housing problem. Only at a theoretical level is it possible to think
about these two aspects separately. In practice, the accomplishment of MTST’s central goals (i.e., housing, urban reform, and popular power) relies on the symbiosis between both aspects.

The occupations make the periphery visible to themselves when they transform the perception of housing from a private problem, such as the financial failure of the household, to a public concern. The housing deficit, the dream of house ownership and the vulnerability attached to it, become visible as a common shared problem. It progressively assumes a form of reality that cannot be easily ignored. MTST’s occupations make the housing deficit assume a commanding presence. They simultaneously reveal a local problem among neighbors (how many we are) and open spaces of reflection on the causes and solutions for this common reality in the neighborhood. It is evident that if we consider the occupations as local and city-wide symbols, they are subject to multiple interpretations. The interpretation I focus on here concerns the perspectives of those who were attracted by these symbols and joined the movement. How does MTST in practice achieve such change in people’s perception?

When a new occupation is planned, MTST mobilizes militantes and acampados from other occupations to start the new occupations. The participants of already established MTST’s occupations will start the new occupations in other places. Those pioneers will build the first 500 shacks and stay in the occupation for the next few days. The solidarity among occupations is key to the reproduction of occupations in the territory, providing donations of food and materials for the new occupation. In this way, when the residents of the neighborhood surrounding the plot see the new occupation—they see it already populated and with a basic infrastructure in place. The new occupation has a visibility from the beginning in the neighborhood. After a few days, the pioneers from other occupations have to leave, “donating their shacks” to let the residents of the neighborhood assume the new occupation. The “massification” of the occupation is a visual statement that populates local residents’ imagination. The way MTST organizes, land occupations have a fundamental element of surprise that awakens both curiosity and opposition in the neighborhood. It is a practice that makes the periphery perceive its own reality, visually presenting the lack of housing as a shared local problem. In other words, they make it real. Zelideo, 38-year-old male, state coordinator of MTST living in and coordinating an occupation, with years of experience of community organizing, describes the process and the reactions to newly created occupations:

*When the people of the community see all that and they talk “Damn it, bro! Where did so many people come from?” He comes to the occupation. The occupation is already widespread. You have already built more than 500 shacks. Because our goal is to build 500 shacks in 2 clock hours. [...] After the 3 days there comes the slowest process that is to hand over the occupation to those people who do not know anything about MTST.* (Zelideo Barbosa Lima, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)

The land occupations are symbolic and political statements, rather than an immediate solution for the local housing problem. In the past, people were obligated to live in the shack in order to be considered acampados. In 2015, this rule changed, and the shacks became symbolic structures. The grueling life of residing in a camp as a prerequisite for the housing struggle was a burden that kept many families in
precarious housing conditions from joining the occupation. Although some people do not have options and need to live in the *acampamento*, a typical occupation is formed by numerous empty shacks. This fact has been used as an argument to delegitimize MTST.\(^{30}\)

MTST translates the right for housing from an abstract idea to an experience. Most people know vaguely they have rights, but it remains an intangible notion. In this context, learning about social, civil, and political rights means convincing people they have rights, presenting the content of these rights, and opening the space for people to learn in practice how to pursue these rights. By participating in the occupations, the *acampados* start to understand that fighting for their rights is the condition for achieving them. Denouncing their housing conditions and proclaiming the absence of their rights are necessary to pressure the government to attend their demands and overcome the systemic failure to provide minimum life conditions for the residents of the urban peripheries. In the focus group with 12 coordinators of the occupation Palestina, I asked them how they managed to inspire people to stay in the occupation. After a few contorted faces and comments expressing how hard it was, Reginaldo said:

*I think our role is to make everyone aware of our day-to-day lives. I have a simple example. We spend 10, 12 years paying the rent. That rent you paid, that's 200, 300, 500 . . . that money will never come back. Because I base it on my own experience. [...] So we make people aware that we have to fight for this right of having our dwelling. Because we have the right. In the Brazilian constitution . . . is not there that every Brazilian is entitled to decent housing? Where is it?! How many millions of Brazilians do live without housing? So we have that right. It's in the constitution.*

(Reginaldo, coordinator at Palestina, focus group, São Paulo, January 9, 2017)

MTST’s consciousness raising regarding rights goes beyond the residents directly involved in the occupation; it extends to the articulation of a broader range of fights and issues present in the territory. MTST inserts itself into the local networks and seeks to form a *Frente*, a coalition of local organizations. A housing coalition congregates leaders of the nearby communities, such as *favelas* and neighborhood associations, nonprofit organizations, and other grassroots movements to discuss the basic needs of those communities. Through the exchange of experiences and the focus on solving pressing common issues in the territory, Zelideo, 38-year-old male state coordinator of MTST, describes how MTST contributes to the capacity building not only between *acampados*,\(^{31}\) but with a broader range of local organizations:

*So we make a meeting, bring those people together and define where they have to go. If you have to go to the city hall, we'll go with you . . . And in a meeting, we'll take the referrals, what is a priority, what we will fight for those communities immediately. But this is collectively. Did you understand? Everyone puts their needs, and within a vote we are prioritizing what is the most urgent immediately for those communities. But this is collectively. Everyone puts their need and within a vote we prioritize what is most urgent for these communities.*

(Zelideo Barbosa Lima, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)

Being the holder of a right transcends the access to information; it is also the activation of a collective performance. Learning a performance is making it together. MTST makes itself visible in the territory: “MTST flag is there.” And local leaders approach them and ask help, for example, to organize actions and mediate meetings with the government. In January 2017, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the *Frente de Moradia* in Guarulhos, a city in the metropolitan region of São Paulo where MTST is also present. That attendees demonstrated different levels of experiences with community
organizing. The representative of MTST, a state leader responsible for coordination of several occupations, diplomatically articulated and motivated the group to organize a rally in the following month. When organizing the rally they discussed the time of day, the point of encounter, the profile of the participants, the end of the march, the extension of the route, the demands that would be presented, the interlocutor, the risks, the desirable and the expected outcomes. Knowledge about these practices was way beyond the logistics of the action. A performance and an identity were supporting the why and the how to enact those methods. Such identity is grounded in philosophical principles and the accumulation of practical experiences. Consciousness raising regarding basic citizens’ rights is an experiential learning involving the transmission of practices among civil society organizations. These experiences refer to making it together, where people engage as equals exchanging perspectives with the purpose to solve practical challenges. The learning processes of such democratic levers, of how to create invented spaces, happen in the fissures of city. Expelled from the formal educational structures, organizing enters a zone between legal and illegal, as if learning how to protest were a school of illegalities, rather than democratic skills.

Moving from “right as information” to “right as an experience” also means seeking to see beyond the right for housing. If it starts with a reflection on housing as a right, it expands the perception toward a broader range of issues, such as health, transportation, and day care. “If I can get here, I can get there too!” The engagement in the fight for rights potentially unfolds to the recognition of the importance of a broader social change beyond housing, expressed by a coordinator at Palestina occupation:

I have learned a lot from the comrades who are here. I learned a lot from the movement, fighting for our rights . . . that we have them and we did not know. Because nowadays we will complain, but sometimes we do not know where to complain. Here we are learning to complain in the right places. [...] Because the land is our right. [...] We have the right to our home, dignified. And it's not just housing, it's school, it's health, it's safety. We are fighting for everyone. But the housing we have to have. Because without housing we do not live well. (João, focus group, São Paulo, 2017)

Furthermore, to hold a right is perceived as a condition associated with experiencing respect and dignified living conditions. It is to have access to basic living conditions marked by humane interactions. The quote below is emblematic. Though the path is to shift the relation between the government and the periphery, the goal is a scenario where access to basic needs is remarkable by humane interactions:

To create a popular power . . . is to make the government listen to you, and to assist you. (Sobbing) And meet the need of that oldie man, that oldie woman, without him going there to humiliate himself. Only that. Only that. No need for humiliation. It's the guy coming in and saying, "Oh, I came to the doctor here because I'm sick." And the doctor says, "Come here, sit here. I'll see what you got. Did you have breakfast yesterday? Let's have some coffee with me here." But today for the guy to see the doctor, he has to make an appointment six months in advance. He dies on the way. He dies and is not attended. (Claudio, interview, São Paulo, January 7, 2017)

On top of the learning processes involving the acampados and the local organizations, MTST continually works to learn from the communities they are trying to mobilize. The success of an occupation depends on the identification of the acampados with MTST, and the capacity of the militantes
to communicate in a way that inspires and dissipates doubts or fears involved in land squatting. The achievement of this result implicates the need to understand the community dynamics. People come to the occupation, but the militantes also have the job of visiting the families, talking to the leaders, and getting to know the neighborhood. Zelideo, explained how he, as a coordinator, learned from visiting places such as local bars and churches, and how this experience led him to rethink and change his own organizing practice.

The majority of MTST members met the movement when an occupation started in their neighborhoods. Occupying land in the periphery, therefore, has an educational purpose of increasing the awareness of the housing deficit and the right for housing and mobilizing new members to join the movement. In addition, fighting for housing in the periphery increases the possibility of attracting changes in infrastructure and improving the quality of the local public services. The occupations are instruments for shifting a territory from being a guetto or quebrada\textsuperscript{32} to being a neighborhood:

\textit{Today we talk so much about the house, but housing goes beyond occupying a land, to make a shack. Because after that, it will be transformed into a building, you need the transport, you need basic sanitation in the place, you need energy, internet. [...] Surely, if you create houses here with the program Minha Casa, Minha Vida, you will benefit not only here. You will benefit the whole community here. You will change basic sanitation, you will change structure of that community. (Zelideo Barbosa Lima, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)}

However, since they have one apartment building built and another one being constructed as a result of their pressure over 20 years, it is inconclusive how far these new apartments provoke a transition from the quebrada or guetto to the neighborhood. There is need for further research to learn how much the presence of the new apartments provokes change in the neighborhood, through the engagement of their residents or the area’s infrastructure development.

The land occupations enact learning in socially and spatially segregated territories by transforming information into an experienced reality. The shared housing condition among neighbors assumes a \textit{commanding presence}. The right to housing itself begins to have a \textit{commanding presence}, being translated from an abstract symbol into a collective performance. MTST increases the communication among local residents and organizations, facilitating the formation of local solidarities and contributing to develop the local organizing capacity. MTST’s land occupations are thus spaces of translation: from citizenship as an abstract idea (and rights from a dead letter) to the living experience of practicing a right. It is through the articulation of what is present and what is absent in the territory, the observation and communication of such numerous contrasts, that the occupations enable \textit{learning} as a spatially circumscribed practice. There is also a translation from the reality to the dream, and the dream back to reality; and a translation between the periphery and the center. (These aspects will be further discussed in chapters 6 and 7.) Such translation is possible only through the transgression of the space. The next section approaches in further detail the meaning of transgression in MTST’s insurgent practices.
**Transgression: The Making of a Consistent and Unpredictable Threat**

Enacting learning in a territory is based on the transgression of the embedded scripts, the existing power relations that retain the periphery invisible and segregated. Transgression of existing power relations and expected behaviors brings the periphery’s attention back to the periphery, and makes the territory visible to the center. Therefore, opening the imagination towards humane urban futures involves a power-shift through the intersection between communication, experience, and space—that is, the activation of learning through the communication in the territory, the creation of spaces of intersubjectivity that forge new perceptions of what their life conditions mean in a place, and the utilization of space as means of communication by disrupting or frustrating embedded scripts of what reality means in a certain space. In this section, I intend to explore MTST’s insurgent practices that are able to transform the city into a stage. Ultimately, I seek to understand what “transgressive use of the space” means in MTST’s practice.

MTST has to be perceived by the authorities as a consistent and unpredictable threat. The coherent repetition of their practices contributes to form a public image that strengthens their negotiating power with the government. But a movement whose practices are predictable and consistent is easily controlled. In this sense, consistency and unpredictability are two sides of their insurgent practices. They are unpredictable because they strategically disclose their objectives, articulating the spatial and temporal dimensions of experience to create visual interruptions in urban life. They are consistent, because they articulate the present possibilities aligned with their long-term perspectives to shape a coherent public identity.

**Intentional Layers in the Transgression of the Space**

Making the periphery visible involves the capacity to activate the space as an instrument to achieve a collective objective. The intentional use of the space has three dimensions, at least. First, there is the philosophical or ideological dimension that is rooted in the key objectives of MTST’s anti-capitalist project. Some of their documents present this philosophical perspective. Beyond this broader vision, their insurgent practices carry explicit messages or agendas, defending causes such as the fight against the pension reform. Finally, their protests aim to achieve immediate objectives, such as occupy a building or gaining the attention of the media. While the cause they are fighting for must be declared, the immediate objective of the practice can be open or hidden, according to the movement’s tactics.

Trancamentos are connected to larger causes, such as the fight against regional, state, or national policies. Since they present a higher level of radicalism, they are rarely used to fight for local demands of specific occupations. The philosophical dimension of trancamentos is to stop the city and the capitalistic economy. As the following passage from the MTST “Cartilha de Princípios” presents, trancamentos increase the time of transportation of workers and products, generating a financial loss:
When we block an important road we generate a huge loss to the capitalists. They need to transport the products from the factories to the market or ports (in the case of exportation). The blockages create delays in the transportation system, generating financial losses. [...] Now, imagine all the major roads blocked! And blocked not only for a few hours, but for days! We would be able to impose a great defeat to the Capital and advance in the transformation we want. This is a large objective of MTST.

Temporary occupations of public and private buildings pressure institutions to change or ensure compromise to a specific agenda. On May 8, 2014, MTST occupied the offices of three construction companies: Odebrecht, OAS Empreendimentos, and Andrade Gutierrez. The focus of the protest was to denounce the eviction of families for the construction of the stadium that would host the World Cup games in São Paulo. On September 25, 2014, 5000 MTST members protested in front of Sabesp, the water company of the state of São Paulo. The rally applied pressure for a meeting that “opened a permanent channel of dialogue between MTST and Sabesp.” The objective of the protest was to denounce the water crisis affecting the peripheries of São Paulo, when people were often without water for up to four days a week.

The rallies organized by MTST can involve the fight for specific local demands, such as waste collection for an occupation, or they can address issues as large as national reforms. The causes can follow a national agenda, such as the protests against the president’s impeachment in 2016; they can aggregate several regional demands of the movement, such as the change of municipal zoning codes; or they can refer to specific demands of an occupation, such as the need for water provision. As a tendency, not a rule, rallies in the periphery address local or regional causes with specific demands to local agencies, and protests with national agendas involve more central areas of the city.

The objectives of a rally can be hidden or openly disclosed, according to the movement strategies. At the beginning of each rally, MTST leaders dialogue with the police to reach agreement about the route, the respect among the two groups, and the use of the space. These agreements might be followed or
broken along the march, in case the element of surprise is strategically required. As I illustrated earlier, some rallies culminated in the occupation of buildings of private companies, and others opened dialogues with politicians.

The passage below illustrates a situation where MTST publicly announced that they were heading to the house of the governor to open a negotiation. The posture of declaring their goal and keeping the route even with the denial of a dialogue is part an effort to shape an identity in the public arena. Although consistency builds the movement’s strength, it would not mean much if it would be predictable:

_We went once to make a march from Largo da Batata to the Government Palace, and when it arrived halfway there came the message that it would be of no use to go there . . . that he [the governor] was not going to attend. Then Guilherme [Boulos] said, “Guys, let's not be intimidated. Shall we go and see if he'll talk to us or not?” And we went there. And when we got there, as always, there was the shock battalion in front of the gate. And the protesters were concentrating, concentrating, concentrating. In a while, there was no other alternative. We had to go in, we had to talk. And we had to be well received. And then even government secretaries from inside came out, climbed in the sound car, came to give some explanations about the meeting that had happened inside, about the results. This was the first time I saw a cluster of people head-on with the government and the government having to step back, having to receive, and people be welcomed. I said: “Damn, what movement is this that causes the government to retreat?”_ (Claudio, Interview, São Paulo, January 7, 2017)

The certainty that “what MTST says is what MTST does” elevates the spoken word to the level of potential reality, a real threat. Consequently, written or spoken notices can win a power of negotiation. During the World Cup hosted in Brazil in 2014, MTST threaten the presidency that they would occupy the stadium to watch the inauguration of the games. They had their demands heard, and the politicians protected themselves and the event from the possible terrible international repercussions. Thus, the cumulative demonstrations of the movement’s consistency built a power of negotiation with the public sector.

Visible There, Visible Here: Enabling the Possibilities of the Space

Each location has its own potential to activate a discourse. According to their different purposes, MTST enacts diverse forms of insurgence in different places in the city: in the periphery or in the center; the public or the private space; the land, the building, the street, or the highway. Their performances in the urban space assume a multiplicity of forms, serve a variety of purposes, encompass a broad range of route possibilities, and occupy diverse spatial dimensions. Occupations are territorial symbols, functioning as an interconnected network of mutual support.

MTST’s demonstrations vary according to the location in the city, the territorial relevance of the cause, and the number of participants mobilized. The rallies can move across short or long distances. They can remain in the periphery, move from the periphery to the center, or start in central areas. The choice of the place varies according the purpose of the action. Demonstrations addressing national and regional causes occupy central areas with more visibility, mobilizing members city-wide: the so called Grandes Atos.
Trancamentos might be an isolated action on a highway or simultaneous actions in many roads to “Stop São Paulo.” The location and the number of highways or streets blocked vary according to the political objective of MTST. For example, on March 18, 2015, MTST realized 20 trancamentos of highways in 13 states, as part of the Jornada Nacional para Reforma Urbana, or National Journey for Urban Reform. The day was organized by the Frente Nacional de Resistência Urbana, a coalition formed by 10 grassroots movements, including MTST. The protest presented specific demands related to the program “Minha Casa, Minha Vida,”37 and it pressured the cities to apply the mechanisms of the City Statute.38

Chasing and hunger strikes happen in public spaces of great visibility, usually in front of buildings or strategic spaces in central areas. On December 19, 2005, MTST organized an occupation in front of the house of the then-president Luís Inácio Lula da Silva to protest against the legal decision to evict 800 families from the occupation Chico Mendes. Seven militantes fasted for four days until MTST got a meeting with the Housing Federal Department. The eviction was to happen on December 21, but the government made a compromise that enabled the families to have provisional housing until they received a definitive solution.39

Time: Creating Momentum

MTST has a set of practices used according to a political strategic orientation that is both diachronic and synchronic. It is diachronic because their insurgent practices involve repetition and a historical accumulation. The strategies are motivated by long-term thinking, the formation of an identity in the urban space. The practices will become memories of those who participated and those who watched, influencing the expectations for upcoming performances. They are synchronic because the definition of the strategy involves analysis of the circumstances, the intention to impact an immediate context, and the need to improvise in response to the momentum created in the political game. Every insurgent practice is an improvisational act that carries the potential for the new, the surprising, the risky. Shortly, each insurgent act is part of a chain of acts of insurgence, a response to historical events, and a circumstance, a response to the unpredictable possibilities during an act. MTST’s practices manipulate both diachronic and synchronic time frames.

Time is key to understanding the strategy of trancamentos. Since tires are difficult to remove when in fire, firemen and police have to wait until they are completely burned. This time is enough to provoke traffic jams. The choice of the material to burn determines the expected duration of the protest. MTST gets the reputation of having the capacity to create these instances of interruption in the normal flow of city life.

The creation of momentum is also essential in the practices of chasing and hunger strikes. In both strategies, each day one or more MTST’s members join the performance. The tension increases as time passes without appropriate responses from the government. In addition, both performances are in essence
durational. The performers are engaged 24/7 in the act and do not leave the performance until the objective is attained.

On one hand, rallies are incremental; in the other, they set up a stage where multiple possibilities can unfold. The accumulation of routes is able to build the perception of resistance and consistency, whereas the capacity to read the opportunities and change routes without previous notice is what makes the movement unpredictable and uncontrollable. The repetition and the risk force the doors to open, creating the opportunity for the movement to be heard by the authorities.

Since their acts are organized with the objective of opening negotiations with the government, the practices are connected, creating a system that forges an identity that is at once consistent and uncontrollable. Each practice relates to different degrees of radicalism, according to the level of impact intended. If an initial attempt at dialogue is unsuccessful, the movement organizes rallies. Trancamentos involve more radical cards in the game that are not lightly played. For example, during the arrest of Guilherme Boulos in 2017, the day before I would interview him, the movement chose not to organize tracamentos that day, because they saw that was not necessary. Thus, a pattern to understand the rationality behind their strategies would be a spectrum varying from their presence in formal spaces of participation to hunger strikes. Based on the interviews and field observations, I suggest the idea of a scaling of radicalism, whereby different performative acts correspond to different levels of radicalism. These levels are not static categories, but practices dynamically articulated by the movement according to the circumstances to forge an unpredictable and yet coherent urban force:

*It depends a lot on each process. It has different degrees of radicalism in the forms of struggle. Let's say that a first moment is a march for a public office, to claim something. It does not always work. Sometimes we stop at the door. Did not the march work? So maybe we're going to occupy this public organ to try something more forceful. If it did not work out, so we're going to do some trancamentos, which is a more intense action. Well, did the trancamento have no effect? So you have acorrentamentos. We even went on hunger strike, that's the most extreme. [...] The hunger strike is the limit. We went on hunger strike in 2005, in the Chico Mendes occupation.* (Guilherme Boulos, interview, Taboão da Serra, January 18, 2017)

The power shift desired by the movement comes across a spatial dimension. Their insurgent practices challenge existing *scripts* embedded in the urban space, such as the sanctity of private property, and the use of streets solely for the circulation of vehicles, passengers, products. The transgression of the space involves the capacity to experiment and formulate different forms, performances, or gestures in a space; the capacity to understand the different potentials of each place and to actively engage with them to achieve a specific goal; the capacity to actively engage with the diachronic and synchronic potentials in the space; and the possibility to create forms with different degrees of intensity or textures. The transgression of space means the construction of a coherent yet unpredictable urban presence that defies spatial and temporal scripts.
Making Territories Visible: Destabilizing Imaginative Lines in the Public Domain

Hsu (2017), in the case study about insurgent practices fighting against land expropriation in Taiwan, compared the authorities’ and farmers’ imaginations as two parallel lines that could never meet, and where the interests of the elites prevail. In other words, a single loop of learning where planners are trapped in their imaginative – and classist – bubbles. This chapter adds to the comprehension of imagination in the public domain the understanding of how the transgressive use of the space by insurgent planning is able to create cracks in such imaginative crusts, defying the scripts (expectations) and codes (language) entangled in the planning policies. In MTST’s case, opening such a “crack” in the public imagination is twofold: opening windows in the protesters’ lenses to see the reality and new possibilities, and creating a wound on the face of the authorities to be seen as a reality, a risk, and an opportunity. If the imaginative lines might never meet, transgressive use of the space creates lapses that momentarily destabilize both. Making territories visible refers to the transgressive performances that destabilize frozen scripts embedded in space, creating the momentum to shift the imagination tensegrity by creating new dynamic tensions.
CHAPTER 5

Making People Visible to Themselves

The Dialectical Imagination, the Overflow of Experience, and the Proliferation of Paradoxes

This chapter has three parts: the dialectic of imagination (Part I), the overflow of experience (Part II), and the proliferation of paradoxes (Part III). Part I emphasizes that opening the imagination is a nonlinear process that, by shifting how people perceive themselves, reshapes the possibilities they imagine for their futures. Participation in the occupations widens the experiences of people who become more than someone who wants a house; they become people who want to be respected and want to realize their multitude of rights.

Part II explores opening the experience, which refers to the occupation of a position in a system where one is affected by others and also affects others. Occupying a position in a system is the revelation of deeper layers of knowledge—the overflow of experience—where people engage their memories, emotions, reason, voice, and body to be present in a community, as agents in a historical and geographical reality. Naming such experience an “overflow” emphasizes that people carry mental models that determine the contours of what is expected to happen in their environments. When people are invited to occupy a position where they bring a more whole dimension of who they are, this experience pushes the boundaries established by the old mental models they carry. Therefore, Part II discusses that the kinds of experiences that open the collective imagination are those where people and their multiple dimensions of humanness occupy a space in a system.

Part III discusses how those overflowing experiences, which are resistant to any form of explanation according to one’s old mental models, provoke the proliferation of paradoxes. Based on the interviews, I identified four main paradoxes alive in their discourse: reality (Is it real, what I am living and what I have lived before?) which is discussed in depth in Part I; moral action (Is what I am doing morally acceptable?); knowledge (Is what I know intellectually and practically valuable?); and purpose (Is what I desire or consider a goal for myself and for others individually and collectively fair?). These tensions are lived with great intensity due to the transgressive nature of MTST’s work, which navigates the limits of legal and illegal, provokes encounters between segregated realities, and defies conventional definitions of knowledge. In response to these tensions, the language can be reinvented to yield appropriate contours for acknowledging the existence of the emergent experience. Or the language can remain fixed to the old models and fail to legitimate the new lived reality. How does MTST lead with these tensions? They turn upside down the categories of reality, valuable knowledge, and ethical action, resetting the framework that values the experiences of the residents of the periphery and MTST members. Furthermore, one of their efforts is to learn from paradox: collapsing of the previous forms of knowledge, substituting old contradictions for new contradictions. Therefore, MTST operates a power inversion by resetting references that validate their insurgent practices. In other words, making people visible to
themselves is the dialectical process by which deeper layers of experience are revealed; this is followed by the reinvention of language, reshaping how people see themselves in the past, present, and future.

*Making people visible to themselves* opens the collective or public imagination by opening the realm of experience, unleashing individual and group possibilities. MTST enables processes through which new experiences emerge. These experiences defy the scripts (i.e., expectations of what is real and possible to happen in a context) and codes (i.e., verbal and nonverbal forms of communication) that permeate social relations, the perception of identities, space, and time. Therefore, there is an initial rigid collective imagination orchestrated by the past experiences, projecting into the future the scripts (expectations) and codes (language) from the past. The activation of new experiences, however, collapses old tensions and creates new tensions that amplify individual and collective possibilities: a new imagination tensegrity emerges. Thus, to open the collective imagination means to create processes that intensify the tensions between past (old) and future (new, not-yet-embodied knowledge, or a higher future possibility), reveal deep layers of knowledge (i.e., feelings, memories, senses, and voice), multiply paradoxes (knowledge, moral action, and purpose), and destabilize knowledge structures. To make people visible to themselves means to catalyze new experiences of “who I am” (identify), “what I want” (desired outcomes), and “how I engage to pursue what I want” (process). This is not a linear process: The new and the old coexist, and the actors keep moving from the ideal to the real, and from the real to the ideal. The coexistence of both paradigms (the dominant and the emergent) and the active engagement with them challenge the structures of knowledge and allow the emergence of new tensions.

Before we continue, I would like to emphasize three points. “*Making territories and populations visible*” and “*Making people visible to themselves*” are two inseparable faces of the same phenomenon in the MTST case. The transgression of space is key to empowerment. According to Theory U terminology, refers to MTST’s capacity to engender a shift in the structural field of attention by some of their members, *militantes* and *acampados*. And finally, it would be an overstatement to assume that MTST decolonizes the imagination of its social base. The experiences explored in this chapter refer to a minority within MTST. Rather than affirming that insurgent practices are per se opening up the collective imagination, this chapter is an inquiry to identify which elements within the practices of MTST allow some members to open their imaginations.

**PART I: The Dialectics of Imagination**

*The Journey of Presences and Absences*

“Silence was always imposed, not the word. Stupidity, not knowledge. Failure, not success. The movement reverses this key in the group, in the micro, not in the macro.”

Gabriel Simeone

The search for the dream changes the dreamer. By changing the dreamer, the dream itself changes. By enabling processes that reveal deeper layers of our humanness, of who we are, we shift what
we want, amplifying our capacity to imagine the new. In other words, the collective practical experience of hope shifts how people perceive themselves and allows them to imagine new possibilities for their lives. This process is not a linear evolution from the old toward the new. The new and the old coexist: the new as the sprout inside of the seed, the old as the crust encapsulating the new. “Making people visible to themselves” is to enable the emergence of new experiences within the old, which defy the old categories of understanding. The crust must collapse to let the new emerge. Such emergence is a nonlinear process where one keeps navigating the tensions between real and ideal, future and past, old and new. Such zigzagging evolves by contrasting experiences in different spaces that reveal what is present and what is absent. The dialectical process of imagining, which differs from the free flight of fantasy, is to move constantly between reality (past-present) and dream (future-present). The dialectical imagination refers to the individual and collective performance of the tension between past and future, real and ideal, which, by provoking the overflow of experience and the proliferation of paradoxes in communication, shifts how dreamers perceive themselves in the social space and reshape what they want.

Chapter 1 and Appendix A present imagination as a dialectical flow between intention and reality (Kind, 2016b) or a zigzagging between the emergent and the dominant paradigm (Santos, 1995). Such dialectical flow is also key in Theory U to describe both the relationship between presencing and absencing, as well as the “intersection,” or dialogue, between past and future streams of time, past self and future self (Scharmer, 2009). Furthermore, the literature review also suggests that imagination is grounded in one’s life experiences: who you are (the position you occupy in the social space) influences the scope of your will. Based on these principles, I propose the dialectics of imagination as the process of shifting the perception of who I am in the social space, what I want to pursue, and how I engage to achieve what I want, by activating the tension between past and future possibilities at the individual and collective levels.

Table 5.1. Elements in the dialectics of Imagination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Desired Outcome/Purpose</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>Who I might become</td>
<td>What my new self wants</td>
<td>The process my new self engages in to achieve my purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Who I am</td>
<td>What I want</td>
<td>The process I engage in to achieve my purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td>Who I was</td>
<td>What my old self wanted</td>
<td>The process my old self engaged in to achieve my purposes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: table developed by the author.

Shaping Identities: “Who I am” and “What I Want”

The Tension Between old Self and new Self

In a first-person perspective the dialectical movement between utopia, dystopia, and reality is lived as a tension between the past self and the emerging self. A tensional dance between the resistance
and the desire to change—who I was, who I am, and who I might become, and what I was allowed to desire from my position in time and space. The change is on the comprehension of what reality is and should be, as well as who I am in this reality, the place I hold in the world. The reference to a shift in the persona before and after the occupation, the comparison between the past and the current life, is a constant across almost all the interviews, often described as a rupture.

Maria is a 47-year-old Black woman and one of MTST’s national leaders. She joined the movement in 2007. The first time I saw her, she was speaking to an audience of 3,000 people. Her discourse fired up the audience, and I personally had several goosebumps. In the passage below, she tells her story of profound transformation:

I had a health problem, that is over now. I had a horrible depression. It also came out of me, because the movement made me feel important in society, regardless of my race, my color. Being black is just a skin color. Character does not have to change. [...] When I joined the movement, the first time they invited me, the group actually chose me to represent them at coordination meetings. Then automatically I was the coordinator of that group. [...] And I did not talk. I was afraid to talk to whites. I had no contact with the Whites, with the fair-skinned people. And then I saw there were plenty of white people. And I was very scared because I was very suppressed in my childhood because I was Black. Then I had this fear. And that fear was breaking through coordination. I remember Guilherme as much as Gabriel, Natalia, was gradually taking it from me.

I remember a phrase that was the question of collective kitchen. But what the hell is collective cuisine?! We had lunch all in one place. A very large place where everyone would eat there in that kitchen. But do I feed myself? Then I got a little out of it. Then I remember one of them calling me and saying, "Why are you here?" Then I said, "I do not want to eat." "But why? What's the reason?" "I'm not hungry." "Come, have lunch with me." And I ate on the plate with them. And that to me was marked because people are White and do not disgust me. [...] And that marked me a lot. On the day I ate on the same plate as the people … that leadership of the movement. That was for me. … Then I felt alive. I did not feel rejected. I did not want to leave the occupation at all. Like I was a kid you got the candy and I want that candy and I'm going to get very close. And you satiate what I desire not to be criminalized in the space where I live. And this was very striking: eating the same food, the same dish as a White person. That marked a lot, a lot. That was fundamental to me.

There's a passage in my job. There I was very criminalized. People laughed at me, they called me black with hard hair. I knew that people could not talk like that anymore. But I also could not go after my rights that I have. And even if I ran after them it would not work. Because the damage has already been done. A misplaced word hurts more than physical aggression. This for me was a great pain to know that in our society, in the workplace, we suffer from this prejudice, racism, anyway. This actually happened in my work. When I joined the movement I worked in this same company that always criminalized me. And I was like a slave. Because besides doing everything that people tell you to do, [...] and if you are too slow or you did not fill the expectations, the color of your skin is enough to say, "You're right, it's because it's Black." You know that it hurts. It hurts a lot. [...] I have worked a lot in very heavy work. I was away for a year and 9 months for health reasons. Very high pressure. I had cardiac arrhythmia. I weighed almost 90 kg at the time, to my height this was a lot, besides depression. That broke up with me. [...] When I first met the movement I was still in that company, and after I saw everything I could do, everything I could contribute, then I got to work and kicked the tent stick. Then I talked about all my rights issues, they kept looking at me. I said now I do not work for you because I'm not a slave. Then I asked for my own resignation. That was for me to wash my soul. Everything I wanted to talk about and did not have the guts. And then I learned that I have to express myself and people have to listen, I have to scream. I also grew a lot because I, whether I wanted to or not, had a prejudice against my own race. I was prejudiced with other people. And because I was so criminalized up there, all the time, I was getting away. That is why I say that the movement itself has transformed me, in the sense of opening my mind to say, look. And I see it with my own eyes. [...] It totally changed my life. What do I want more? I feel alive. I feel like a woman. I'm a beautiful Black woman. Back there I thought I was too ugly. Today I look in the mirror and I think I'm a beautiful Black! [...] You can point flaws. I do not care. Because I am myself. So I'm what I want to be. So no one is going to put obstacles in my way because I'm going to bring down the obstacle. Or dribble it and step on
In Maria’s narrative alone, the main notable point is the contrast between her old self and her new self in the present. I found this contrast in several interviews. Maria established a clear contrast: “That Maria, who did not even know her rights, that Maria was left behind.” Such transformation happened through experiences that defied her previous scripts. For example, when she first faced the idea of a collective kitchen (“But what the hell is collective kitchen?!”), the experience of eating with Whites marked her profoundly: “Then I felt alive. I did not feel rejected.” The empowering experiences showed her who she could become (“after I saw everything I could do, everything I could contribute”) and gave her the courage to resign from a job that threatened her physical and mental health. The sense of belonging to a community, of having a role in MTST, was clear and fully expressed by Maria’s words: “I feel alive.” Finally, the experience shaped her identity and amplified her purpose: “Today I am Maria, a MTST militant, and I am fighting for better living conditions of the worker class.” The experience in the occupation amplified her possibilities of who she was and could become, and how far she was allowed to desire.

Changing one’s position in the social space also refers to the experience of new social relations that shift racial and class dynamics. In the Maria’s narrative, it was an accumulation of new gestures —“eating in the same table as the White people,” “acting as a coordinator”—that shifted her understanding of who she was and what she wanted. In chapter 4, we saw that MTST operates a translation from rights as information, to rights as experience. This learning journey refers to the embodiment of a new performance in the social space. In Maria’s past life, she somehow knew that what she was living was racism and was not okay. However, she did not feel she could do anything about it. The situations of racism in her life impacted her psychologically, physically, and socially. But her experience in MTST opened her to embodying a right and being able to defend her interests. The impact of such “new gestures” in the social space is relevant, if we consider that many of those in MTST protests are newcomers. Often the interviewees recalled as their most remarkable moments the performance of new gestures in the physical space: shouting in the middle of the street or walking in central urban areas, “squatting together on a terrain during the night.” Therefore, “making people visible to themselves,” can be framed as one of multiple facets of the widely used concept of empowerment. By empowerment here I refer to the processes that humanize people by revealing deeper layers of “who I am” and “what I want.” Such an empowerment process involves the experience of different gestures and interactions in the social
space. Opening the possibilities of “who I am” and “what I want” requires experimentation with new individual and collective performances in the social space.

**Experience That Opens the Will**

“You can be More Than a Person who Needs a House”

The majority of MTST members enter the movement as a way to solve their precarious housing conditions and realize the dream of home ownership, but there is a possibility that the engagement in the struggle will open their desire to want more than a house, to long for urban reforms and structural societal changes. When the contrast between the objectives of the base (home ownership/private property) and the *militantes* (anti-capitalist struggle) became clear during the interviews, I provoked one of MTST leaders responsible for the education programs: Is it not a contradiction for a movement aiming for socialism and contesting the roots of property rights to use home ownership as the catalyzer to mobilize people? Wouldn’t it be the unauthorized political appropriation of an immediate interest of people [housing]? Wouldn’t the acquisition of a house make people increase their trust in the government to solve problems, rather than cultivating the need of a systemic change? Gabriel Simeone is a *militante*, male, White, with a bachelor’s degree in history, who is responsible for the MTST formation sector. In his interview, he argued that the engagement with MTST would open up new possibilities for the *acampados*, whose communitarian and political experience in the occupations and rallies would mobilize them to want more than just a house. The leap from wanting a house to desiring a home would be, however, a leap made by only a minority of the acampados. In other words, the experience of the social base in the movement’s activities opens their possibilities, potentially amplifying their objectives beyond home ownership.

My interviewee, Gabriel, also illustrated the experience of the *acampados* with Greek myth. Odysseus and his sailors sail across the seas and stop by Circe’s island. Circe is a sorceress who transforms Odysseus’s sailors into animals. Odysseus, under the guidance of Hermes and Athena, drinks a potion that prevents him from becoming an animal when in contact with the sorceress. When Odysseus meets Circe, he forces her to liberate his men. She agrees, but she also invites him to stay a bit longer: “You do not have to hurt me. Lie down with me, make it a pleasurable thing.” The occupation presents the same concept. The *acampados* are there to defend the interests of their families, fighting to save their sailors. In the occupation they have different experiences, such as being a coordinator. They do not just have to save the sailors or the families, they can actually start to enjoy the process of fighting for their rights. Thus, MTST invites people to join the movement and enjoy who they can be and what they can do as housing fighters.

Therefore, MTST opens up the possibility of engaging in a journey that might (or not) shift one’s identity and amplify its objectives. In his interview, Gabriel described the *acampados’* journey as different stages on a bell-curve, which I systematized as follow: the entrance (lack of belief), the fight (opening the experience), the conquest (the climax of getting the key), the frustration (the dystopia), and
the rationalization of experience (the new contour), represented in Figure 5.1. When people arrive in the movement, they want a house, with different levels of belief in their chances to realize this dream and some ideas of what is the adequate way to realize this dream. They join the movement and start participating in rallies and occupations, often holding the internal moral conflict (explored in Part III of this chapter) between what they are doing and what they think is the correct way to do it. During the fight they discover that they can be much more than what they are: “You may be little more than a person who needs a house. ‘What do you mean?’ You can be heard and respected. ‘Oh yes? Let’s see if it does.’ And he goes into coordination” (Gabriel, interview, São Paulo, January 13, 2017). MTST invites people to be more than a person fighting for a house; it offers an opportunity to be a person who is respected and heard. According to Sumara, a Black informal worker in her 50s who lives in João Cândido, MTST’s apartment buildings in Taboão da Serra, receiving the keys is the climax in the housing journey: “My most beautiful memory was the day we won here [the apartment], the day they spoke of receiving the key. Wow! I jumped with joy. Because you fight so much for something that you got with your sweat and paying so little […], it’s a great joy” (Sumara, interview, Taboão da Serra, December 23, 2017). After receiving the keys, people can choose whether they stay engaged in the movement. Although this thesis has not engaged with Turner’s (1974) theory of the ritual process, many elements indicate similarities that might deserve future research.

![Figure 5.1](image)

**Figure 5.1.** The bell-curve journey in MTST. The figure illustrates how the engagement experience works as a womb engendering new wills. *Source:* Figure developed by the author.

*Opening the Imagination as a Series of Expansions and Contractions*

**The Tension Between Real and Ideal**

This journey is not a progressive linear process toward the new; it requires both the expansion of the will through new experiences and its collapse against the limits of reality. Opening the imagination is not only the capacity to nourish hope, but also to open up their experience such that in the end, if getting the apartment fulfills the dream at some level, it is accompanied by a frustration: it is not only the house
that is missing. What is missing is home and a series of more complex needs. The person longs for the sense of unity and community in the occupation. In January 2017, I had the opportunity to interview some of the new residents of MTST’s first apartment complex, João Cândido. Although the gratitude and contentment are there, the housing struggle ends in a dystopian experience:

“So that was the greatest joy. When I entered this apartment ... I did not believe it.... I swear. But here ... we are also very displeased to live here. Because some people live [...] who do not understand, people who only like quarreling. I stay inside my house, [...] It is father beating son. It's son beating father. And it’s a damn mess. Because the places they lived were periphery. He did not leave the periphery, brought it along with him. [...] He left the periphery and instead of arriving here and behaving, no. They brought it all together. They brought the package together. A person who does not have scruples, a dirty person, you know. He does not know how to take care of what he has. They throw trash from [the window] above and it falls down. It's sad, it's sad. I expected something else here. I am upset. [...] Here is [the result of] our struggle. We who fought, it was not anybody that gave it ... for later to have quarrel? Discussions between wife and husband fighting, beating, you know? There's police here all the time. This is ugly. I do not like it. I was waiting for a quieter place. I was even talking to my husband. I'm going to travel now on the 30th, when I arrive I'll see. We can’t sell the apartment now, but there are people who've even sold it, you know. You can't sell the apartment now before 10 years. I'll think seriously and see if I change my apartment for a house. Because for you to fight and win something like that and then you see out there and you can't even have a leisure out there, because you went out and see this spectacle, ugliest, ridiculous thing. If I do not get better by then I'll be thinking about doing it, understand? Because a lot of people here already did it. Already changed the apartment for another house, already has rented apartment here. [...] I would like the people to come together. [...] I wanted everyone to be united, united even, you know? But it is not. When it is in the movement, everyone united. But when you come here it is not. [...] When we were in the occupation, it was a lot of unity. But here ... when you came here it seems like it's everyone for himself. [...] I do not know what's in the heart of these people. You see it's hard to get out here, except for work. I do not go out, I was not out there. Because sometimes you go out there, someone's fight starts. You can’t even stay out there. (Sumara, Interview, Taboão da Serra, December 23, 2017)

In this passage, Sumara points out how she was happy to receive the keys of the apartment to such a degree that she could not believe it. But then the new home became a dystopia because “they brought the periphery along with them.” If the participation in the MTST somehow shifted people’s trajectory (contrast between old and new self) for a minority, the new apartment did not reflect a new paradigm. The newly built form did not incorporate the dreams of a new life, but rather became the container for the reproduction of the social dystopias from the past. This is only one way to interpret such frustration. There are at least four ways we can start to look at the degeneration of the dream into a dystopia. In addition to domestic violence, some of the interviewees pointed out unemployment, the lack of income to pay the new bills, the distance from urban infrastructure, the lack of social cohesion, and the lack of commerce in the neighborhood.

The process of engagement suggests that opening the imagination is a dialectical process between the ideal and the real. The dream mobilizes people to engage in the movement. Those who persist live an experience that somehow goes beyond the right to housing. The desire to have not only a house, but also a home, grows. Finally, when the utopia of having an apartment is attained, for some interviewees, the dream turns out to be a new dystopia: the apartment as it is not enough anymore. At least for a minority, the experience of participating in the occupations changes their perception of reality. The experience has expanded the dimension of the dream. It implies that the construction of one’s perception of having a right
to something better is not a rational process, but a social experience. Also, it implies that both the
expansion and the contraction (frustration) of the dream are fundamental aspects of shifting people’s
imagination. It is the dialectical movement that reveals what is present and what is absent in one’s
experience.

In sum, the dialectical imagination refers to the processes that activate the paradox of
imagination, the tensions between the old and the new. Such tension is catalyzed through the creation of
experiences that proliferate tensions in three different dimensions: identity (who I am), desired outcomes
(what I want), and process (how I get what I want). Therefore, integrating all the tensions described
earlier, we can illustrate *imagination tensegrity* through the graphic below. In an engagement process,
such as the one presented in this case study, identity, desired outcomes, and process are mostly blended
and expressed under a larger umbrella: the contrast between the experience of the old (past) and the new
(future). Therefore, talking about *imagination tensegrity* in making people visible to themselves involves
enabling experiences that awake the tension between the old and the new at the individual and collective
levels, creating new tensions among identity, desired outcomes, and process.

![Diagram of Imagination Tensegrity](image.png)

**Figure 5.2.** A sketch of the Imagination Tensegrity in *Making People Visible to Themselves*. Source: Figure developed by the author.
The imagination tensegrity is a result of new experiences that defy old scripts and create new tensions. The new dreams emerge both from the overflow of experience (i.e., living situations that reveal deeper layers of one’s experience that incubate new individual and collective possibilities) and from the collapse of the previous consciousness. For two other angles to look at the dialectics of imagination, see Appendix G. Part II will explore what “new experience” means, and Part III will explore the three other tensions that the MTST case study suggests: knowledge, moral action, and purpose.

PART II: The Overflow of Experience

Revealing Deeper Layers of Knowledge, Shifting Scripts

“The reality is what is here. Now, do we have to live this reality? No. We can be much more than that here”

Zelideo Barbosa Lima

The literature review presented the idea of experience as multilayered. Part II explores the idea of opening the imagination as the overflow of experience: the expansion of one’s perception of reality, of “who I am” and “what I want,” through engagement with deeper layers of knowledge: body, emotions, memories, and voice. Such engagement involves storytelling, dialogue, and a deep dive into practice (the protests and the daily life of the occupation). Revealing deeper layers of the individual and collective experience make unowned pasts and futures assume a position in the system. As discussed on chapter 1, imagination is constrained by scripts. The expansion of the realm of experience with yourself, others, time, and space, however, changes the perception of what is possible (the scripts). The realm of possibility thus becomes populated by the multiple hidden pasts and futures.

Being Present, Being Affected: Sharing Memories and Feelings, Recognizing Absence and Suffering

One January afternoon I was lucky enough to have a three-hour interview with one of MTST’s state leaders. His trajectory of activism started with the influence of his father, who was engaged in MST (Movement of Landless Workers). Before he decided to join MTST, Zelideo himself had started a few nonprofit organizations. At the time of this interview, he was responsible for the supervision of several occupations. Even though he had an apartment, he was living in one of the occupations he coordinated as a way to strengthen it. The occupation in Guarulhos, where the interview happened, was shrinking, each day with fewer participants, until the movement was about to decide to close it down. Then Zelideo assumed leadership of the occupation and it started to grow again. I asked him how, in his experience, he inspired people to engage. After a pause, he shared with me an emblematic moment that shifted the occupation in Guarulhos from being the edge of closing, with 22 people in the assemblies, to a thriving one with 600 participants. Zelideo started to conduct the assemblies to create conversations rather than just give information, using them as spaces of dialogue to share personal experiences. Instead of
following an agenda, he started to improvise. The turning point was the moment he shared his past, his suffering, his objectives:

Then one day ... I needed to tell something to these people so they’d stay here for sure. Then I told a story of my reality, of what I had already spent in the occupation, to be there with them in an assembly on a rainy day, a rainy night, at 8 o’clock in the evening. And I told a real story of my life. [...] For example, I get home and my wife charges a lot, that I do not have time for my son, I do not have time for her. And it’s a reality, right. [...] Because I have to do a task for the movement. [...] Then I had to pass on to them the reality in my house, with my son, my day-to-day. From staying a week out of my house. [...] As it is for me to live away from my wife, my children, my house, not having my bathroom to take a shower. And I believe it here. I came here to live their dream. It's not even my dream, it's their dream there. It is sharing the dream with them. What I already spent and how I survived in the occupation and was not for me, was not wanting a plot for me. He wanted to defend a plot of that father of the family that needs it. And that I put my life at risk, put my life at risk. Here I have had to hold meetings that I would not want to have done with the parallel [drug traffic leaders]. And it's not that I'm doing it for myself. I am doing this for those people, those people who are afraid, who are oppressed by organized crime. And I had to tell these details of what I have already experienced in reality, which is my reality of occupation. [...] When I finished, no one left the assembly. Everyone was there. And I look at the face of the coordinator who was with me. Those who were not crying, had a tear-filled eye. And I said, I think now they understood the purpose of me being here with them. Since then the assembly has only been increasing. Today it is on average 600, 700 people. And we get people on a day-to-day basis trying to understand the movement, wanting to get into the movement. How do you do it together, to have the right to housing. (Zelideo Barbosa Lima, interview, Guarulhos, January 4, 2017)

Zelideo’s testimony reflects both the cultivation of an intersubjective soil and the crafting of sacrifice as a trait of being an authentic leader in MTST. The assemblies eventually became conversations, when he shared his own story of sacrifice to motivate people to join the occupation. By participating in the occupation, people have opportunities to engage in dialogues and connect to their neighbors in different ways. The bonding happens through sharing and validating memories and feelings, which is mostly an informal activity. The assemblies in MTST are not usually structured as dialogues, but as informative sections where the leaders are on the stage and the acampados are in the audience listening and sporadically interacting. The chances of dialogue increase with the engagement. Coordinators, militantes, and acampados living in the occupation participate in regular meetings.

Furthermore, the connection between the self and the other creates the possibility of reinterpretation of past experiences. Lourdes, a 47-year-old Black woman born in Pernambuco who had worked as a housemaid since she was 12, lived in the occupation Palestina with her husband and two kids. After the first hour of the interview, she shared with me a traumatic experience of racism she lived when she was younger, getting very emotional and bursting into tears:

Forgetting the past is better. The past hurts. Really hurts. [crying]. See people beat you and you can not do anything. Watch people yell at you. People who have never been part of your family and say like this: “You’re a sissy, you have to be tied to the trunk.” It hurts. I went through it for being a sissy. I had afro hair, a lot of hair I had. You pulled my hair like that. "Come here, you little blackbird. You have to be beaten a lot." And I got it. That’s why it hurts to work in a family home. I was beaten a lot. [...] After I grew up I did not let anyone to have prejudice with me. I fall on top. MTST taught me too. I do not lower my head to anybody else. [...] At the time I did not have that knowledge of prejudice. I came to know the prejudice, the racism when I started to talk to a lot with people. [...] Seeing, participating, that is the day-to-day that teaches us... They saying that we do not have to bow our heads to anyone. (Lourdes, interview, São Paulo, January 12, 2017)
In addition to those with MTST, Lourdes narrated a few encounters in her life that made her reinterpret her experiences with racism. The conversations allowed her to understand important episodes of her life under broader historical and social perspectives. *Acampados, coordinators, and militantes* share and validate experiences, finding new meanings for past experiences. The process shapes the individual and collective perspectives about both present and past realities. By sharing realities, those involved end up creating a new common reality.

Insurgent practices create fields of attention in cities when and where people can perceive what is missing and to remember the size of the loss. The construction of absence and the recognition of suffering have fundamental roles in shaping the collective imagination. Perceiving yourself as the holder of a right is an experience, more than an intellectual or abstract construction. Basic needs, such as housing, can be innate. However, the need might not be perceived as a need—an individual and collective need. Sharing stories of painful moments was a frequent topic across several interviews. What Turner (1957) calls “community of suffering” refers to social ties created based on sharing experiences of suffering. Vieira (2010) used the concept to understand the experience of the victims of the nuclear accident in Goiania, Brazil, in 1987 (p. 90). By sharing the experience, the individuals involved in the experience gained a position in a system. The understanding of suffering as a shared experience is not given; it is constructed. Going further, we might ask if it is possible at all to understand suffering without dialogue. Weaving narratives about suffering and the embodied experience of absence shapes a collective impression of what is missing.

When suffering is no longer a private concern hidden in the past, it becomes a new shared reality among neighbors. In the passage below, Claudio, a 44-year-old militante, male, unemployed metalworker, shared his experience in the occupation *Copa do Povo* in response to the question of what the hardest part of being in an occupation was. He started to remember and cry profusely, telling the experience of seeing the suffering of other families while connecting to his own painful experiences:

> When I started to do this fight there in the [occupation] Copa do Povo where I began to see what really was the suffering of the Brazilian people. Because while you are in a reasonable situation you do not care what your neighbor is going through. Sometimes he does not have a crumb of bread to give to his son ... [sobbing] ... Unfortunately you do not know, you cannot change. So when you see an entire family inside, husband, wife, child ... and the guy with nowhere to run. Nowhere to ask. And you see a lot of government people there snobbish, taking everything from the good and the best. And you see the suffering of people there by your side. And you see those family there are all honest people, all working people. Who was born working, will die working ... and does not reach the goal. What's the point? It's just housing, health, education ... what's written in the constitution there ... that you're entitled to it. [...] And there was much suffering. And it's not just there. It is in most occupations. You see the suffering from even close. [...] And I went through all the hardships that they have gone through too. [...] Then you see the suffering in the person's eye. And that's one of the hardest parts of the job, that's it. (Claudio, interview, São Paulo, January 7, 2017)

The dimension of the paradox and the dimension of suffering are connected. Emotions denounce the existence of latent contradictions. When these feelings are recognized as having a position in this pedagogical journey, they offer hooks to shift the collective imagination:
In the process of struggle appear contradictions in the way in which she does not know to explain ignores and changes of subject. [...] For example, when she leaves the occupation someone asks her: “Wow! You are such a nice and beautiful person. What are you doing in the middle of all those vagabonds?” The person stops and does not respond. “Oh, I need.” But that gets hurt inside her. The challenge is to take this hurt and turn it into politics. (Gabriel, interview, São Paulo, January 13, 2017)

People assume a presence in a system when they are affected (Favret-Saada, 2005; as cited in Vieira, 2010). The dimension of one’s experience expands by making emotions and memories assume a position in the system. The projective capacity is based on emotionality and somatic marks. Therefore, the overflow of the experience refers to opening space for the expression of human experience as a whole. Such engagement intertwines past experiences, future expectations, present perspectives, and emotions.

**Reinventing Trajectories of Bodies in the Urban Space**

As performative acts, MTST’s practices impact not only the perception that government and other institutions have about the protesters, but also the perspectives of those performing the act. The rallies and occupations impress new somatic marks on the protesters. They contribute to reinvent trajectories in the urban space, not only how the center perceives what the periphery is capable of doing. It also communicates to the residents of the periphery the new limits for the use of public spaces.

Although access to information from MTST courses was not well retained, sensorial and affective experiences stood out in the narratives of my interviewees. When answering the question “What do you like the most about participating in MTST?” the interviewees mostly referred to affects and memories related to their senses. The experiences in the protests and quotidian of the occupation were far more central in their discourses than “access to information” or participation on MTST educational courses. Confrontations with the police also reinforce or shift representations about who the police and the State are. The somatic marks, however, are not only negative memories. Three elderly ladies in their 60s, still very active in the movement, gave me surprising answers about their favorite things as participants in MTST. They expressed how good they felt to be together with a lot of people walking and shouting in the middle of the street. Lourdes, a 47-year-old Black woman resident in the occupation Palestina at the time of the interview, told me what she loved the most was singing together the movement’s songs, that she got goosebumps. Sumara, a Black woman in her 50s who resides in João Cândido, said something similar. After 30 minutes we were immersed in a discussion about her dystopian experiences in the condominium João Cândido, I could see again some sparkle in her eyes when recalling her experience in rallies:  

*Oh, I like to walk in the street. I don’t know! It is delicious! I feel very good. [...] I liked it. First because it is necessary for us to get the house, but also it is a lot of adrenaline. You see everything, do you understand? And also cheerful, right, we made a bonfire [in the acampamento].* (Sumara, interview, Taboão da Serra, December 23, 2017)

Women from different age groups expressed that one of the things they liked the most in MTST was the adrenaline. Teresa, a 68-year-old black woman who resides in João Cândido, the apartment buildings MTST won through social pressure, is a frequent participant in MTST activities. I asked her
what she liked the most in participating with MTST. Excited by the question, with her eyes opened wide and sparkled, Teresa stood up and started physically telling me a story about how an occupation starts, saying how much she loved the adrenaline. Several times in her discourse she referred to how much she loved “the mess” and started to shout MTST war cries:

*I like the mess [...] So many people walking. [Imitating people screaming on the street:] "MTST, the fight is for real!" "Create, Create, Popular Power!" That's it! [Laughing]. "MTST! The fight is for real!" I like it. [...] First, I really like to walk, to distract myself. I do not like staying indoors, no. Cause I feel good when I walk. When the movement speaks: "Such a day we will go to such a place, to Brasilia" [expressing enthusiasm]. [...] And I like the mess. I tell my daughter: “On such a day, at that time, I'm out in Largo da Batata, or at MASP, Avenida Paulista, at the Government Palace."* (Teresa, interview, Taboão da Serra, December 23, 2016)

Learning passes through the body and the senses. For example, the *acampados* learn what it means to be respected and heard by imitating the *militantes*. It is one thing to *talk* about connection and resistance, but another to expose people to opportunities where they experience engagement, rights, connection, and resistance in their own skins. For example, there is a distance between discussing social exclusion from an abstract point of view and seeing in the occupation how many people in your own neighborhood might have the same problem you have. To “believe we are many” is different from “seeing we are many.” As discussed in chapter 4, the *massification* of the occupation is key to its success. When a dweller suddenly sees an occupation in his neighborhood with hundreds of people and shacks, it provokes a change in his perception about how many of those are ready to act. Feeling the collective presence of the neighbors in a few square meters to participate in an assembly has a completely distinct quality from the dispersed encounters we might have walking in the neighborhood or waiting for the bus. In Maria’s narrative referenced earlier, she did not refer to the formal studies within MTST as the transformative movements that empowered her. Instead, she remembered the moment she ate together with White leaders at the same table. She brought an embodied experience, the memory of gestures and words that compound a scene the defied her beliefs. The experiences in the occupations and rallies leave marks that accumulate overtime and can become or not rationalized. In any case, such experiences represent the potential formulation of new meanings. In this sense, opening the imagination is an embodied inquiry involving a composition of performing gestures that are salient and productive reminders articulating new possible meanings.

**Opening Imagination is Holding a Voice**

In many interviews when I asked people what have they learned through the years, I received three main categories of answers. The first group was “*I learned I have rights and how I can conquer my rights.*” The second group of answers referred to reality: “*I changed the way I see my reality.*” The third group referred to communication, “*I learned how to speak.*” Again, I was intrigued. I went to the field searching for the footprints of imagination, and I kept meeting “reality” and “communication” everywhere. The interviewees often said, “Here we can talk,” referring to both the opportunities of
conversations they have, and how they overcame the fear of expressing themselves to others (some associated certain spaces of interaction as “spaces of no fear”). How much space do blue-collar workers have to speak up and communicate with each other while working? One day, when my grandmother was young, she almost lost her finger when working on the factory floor. She left the factory without telling anybody that day and the days that came after. As the previous section discussed, MTST opens up reality by creating spaces where people can see each other by sharing their stories, validating and reinterpreting them. As discussed more deeply earlier in this chapter, the experience in the occupation is often described as a threshold between an old and a new self. Having or not having a voice is a central element in this narrative. According to Suzete, a female coordinator in her 40s who has been active in the occupation Palestina for the past three years, the movement allowed her to express herself and learn. She described a past life described as “a life of retraction” and the fear of talking, and a new self with freedom to express herself in a community:

> And I also learned a lot inside the movement because before I could not say anything. I could not speak. My life was only a retraction, I could only speak at home. [...] Because sometimes a social movement teaches you a lot. It opens a very wide range of possibilities in your mind. And I believe that [this situation of not having the possibility to speak is true] for many women whose primary duty is to take care of the family... today I changed, oh, a lot, I have changed my mind. I am even astonished at who I used to be and who I am today. Very different. (Suzete, focus group, São Paulo, January 9, 2017)

Interestingly, holding a voice has a spatial dimension in social learning. In the passage below, Zelideo explained that the process to discover a voice starts with the discussions about the street you live (the closest) and expands to broader scenarios (the farther). To speak is to speak about something in a place, as if the voice would also have a territory:

> (...) when I start a course, I set up a course that will talk about those people's day-to-day lives. I'll make the course come to you. (...) You will tell us a bit about the history of the quebrada [periphery]. You start by talking about the street you live in. From the street where you live, you start talking about your city. From your city you start talking about your country. And people come into this world when you start talking to people, when you give people the opportunity to talk. (Zelideo, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)

People come to this world when they start to talk to each other. Being present in the space, revealing who you are and what you want, relates with the capacity of one’s voice, as a social muscle, to amplify the space one occupy in the world.

**Holding a Place in a System: Affecting and Being Affected**

The occupations are spaces that open up reality by cultivating an intersubjective space in the peripheries. Problems are no longer entirely hidden personal issues. Communication nourishes the seeds of a new common sense. By cultivating this space of intersubjectivity, MTST provides opportunities for the periphery to exist as a shared experience, to make the periphery visible to themselves. The periphery assumes a presence in the urban space. A presence not subsumed in the narrative of ugliness, poverty, or criminality, and one that escapes from the position of being a shadow of the center (the symbol of order, morality, and beauty). The periphery stands up by being a weaver of its own past identities and, possibly,
future projections. Using Scharmer’s (2009) terminologies, MTST establishes through the occupations a *structural field of attention* that is able to articulate what I have interpreted as an epistemological reversal, even if timidly, in the Brazilian urban peripheries.

Through the creation of such spaces of intersubjectivity, one’s experience overflows: past experiences gain other interpretations, shared feelings are revealed, the use of the voice unfolds, the perception of what is present and absent develops. The core of the overflow of experience is the nonlinear collective engagement with past and present stories (in the present case study), and possibly future stories. Multiple pasts and presents proliferates through dialogue. The occupations produce experiences that are *resistant to language*: one does not know yet what it means, but it feels good to be there. The overflow of experience creates paradoxes in language, as when Maria (narrative in Part I) could not understand the idea of a collective kitchen, of eating at the same table with White people. Conventional explanations can no longer explain one’s own experiences. Communication must *follow* the new experiences, giving contours to legitimize and somehow provoke the experience to evolve even further. If the communication fails to reinvent such codes and narratives, the pre-existing codes of communication prevail and suffocate the emergent experiences. To open the imagination involves the creation of experiences that shift both scripts and codes. This is the tension between experience and communication, topic we will turn our attention now.

**PART III: The Proliferation of Paradoxes**

*Revealing Tensions, Resetting References, Shifting Codes*

> “By shifting perspective and scale, utopia subverts the hegemonic combinations of all that exists, detotalizes meanings, de-universalizes universes, disorients maps.” (Santos, 1995, p. 481)

Part II might suggest the space of intersubjectivity and the access of deeper layers of experience as a romantic exercise. It is not. The encounters between different realities in MTST are embedded in tensions. Part III explores the idea of opening the imagination as the proliferation of tensions and paradoxes in language. The highly diverse spaces of MTST land occupations reveal unresolved tensions and generate multiple conflicts. As chapter 1 discussed, imagination is constrained by codes: language shapes one’s perception of what is real and present in the space. The encounter between diverse realities creates an auspicious container for the destabilization of codes. These unusual encounters provoke changes in one’s perception of one’s position in the social space, destabilizing power dynamics crystallized in language. Therefore, the reinvention of communication and knowledge transmission occupies a central concern in the role of mediation as described by part of MTST leadership.

There is a significant contrast between the leaders’ leftist objectives and ideas, and the conservative profile of its base. Gabriel Simeone, *militante* who coordinates MTST’s political formation, expressed this dilemma with the question, “How can we work this contradiction between a practice that is
left-wing, with a reactionary world consciousness, that hegemonic consciousness of the people? And how do you build a world for the working class which is anti-capitalist, if the working class believes in capitalism?” The underlying assumption is that the working class is not proto-revolutionary. Being exploited does not make one desire to bring positive change to humanity. In other words, the freed expression of the masses does not lead directly to emancipatory paths. Gabriel described the base and the leadership in MTST as two poles with contrasting objectives. Using exaggeration, he said that if the objectives of the base colonized the movement, MTST would become a conservative organization. If the leadership abandoned the objectives of the base, MTST would become what the normal left represents: a radical body disconnected from people’s material struggles. What makes the experiences of participants in MTST different from other contexts is not the existence of these poles, but how they overlap.

The occupations provoke encounters between groups with diverse profiles in terms of social class, race, and level of education. The majority of MTST members are adults and elderly residents of peripheral areas, mostly Black and women, who realized that was almost impossible, after years trying, to get their houses through formal processes. Encounters between different realities reveal tangible unresolved tensions between the center and the periphery, the periphery and the periphery, the militantes and the base. The existence of these tensions requires a constant effort of mediation. On one side, MTST needs to make the periphery understand the center in terms of the language and experience of the periphery. On the other, MTST needs to mediate the multiple perspectives inside of the periphery itself to solve internal conflicts and develop the camps.

To talk about opening up the collective imagination, it is necessary to include unusual inputs to a system of thought that is addicted to its own habitus. In the narrative presented earlier, Maria’s perception about herself and others, more specifically what meant to be a Black woman interacting with White people, changed radically not (at least solely) through lectures on racism. It was impacted by the exposure to an experience which destabilized rooted beliefs. Without undermining the value of the intellectual narratives, she received throughout the following years, the disruptive memory was not related to the transmission of information. The accumulation of enabling gestures catalyzed change. The encounter that she described was radically different from the types of encounters she had in her life before. The encounter between different realities ignites the emergence of paradoxes.

Opening the imagination refers to the production of experiences that are resistant to language. The heterogeneity of occupations generates multiple unusual, unwanted, or risky encounters that provoke necessary changes in communication. In order to reinvent codes, it is necessary to embrace conflicts and paradoxes as a source of movement and invention, and to reset references that validate the experience and language of those usually marginalized. The realities of the periphery and the center, as well as the multiple realities within the peripheries themselves, are distinct from one another. Opening the imagination requires encounters between different realities that reinvent both experience and
communication, facilitating the emergence of new subjectivities. In Part III, I explore some of the main paradoxes MTST faces and how they deal with those paradoxes.

Four Tensions: Reality, Moral, Knowledge, Purpose

The occupations are spaces more heterogeneous than the neighborhoods surrounding them, since it increases the overlap among different groups. An occupation provokes contacts beyond religious affiliations, age groups, sexual orientation, criminal status, housing status, and the usual circles of friendship. So partially the tensions refer to interpersonal conflicts between stranger-neighbors who start to interact because of common activities. Additionally, the occupations are inserted into a territory where a network of relationships and power already exists. Therefore, it holds possibilities of alliance or conflict with the existent local powers. Militantes and coordinators assume the position of mediators between the acampados, between the occupation and the political powers, such as the landlord and local heads of the drug traffic, and between the occupation and the surrounding neighborhood. But the main tensions I will focus on belong to a deeper order. As the literature review pointed out, the mere proliferation of diversity does not mean much. Heterogeneity and conflict do not necessarily lead to imagination, ethics, or creativity. So the question that remains is, what kind of tensions and paradoxes are we looking for that would be able to expand the collective imagination?

The MTST case study suggests four main tensions: reality, moral action, knowledge, and purpose. The first refers to the tension between past and present experience, old and new. The emblematic case is Maria’s narrative about the collective kitchen. Her new experience makes the old scenarios enter into a crisis. *Is it right (real) what I am living and what I have lived before?* The second refers to moral tensions, the internal conflict lived by the acampados between their behavior and beliefs, or their practices and theories of change. They have their own understanding of how the world functions and the right and wrong ways to behave. Land squatting puts them in a crisis: the method of fighting for their houses differs from their internalized beliefs in the sanctitude of private property. The question “*Is what I am doing right (morally acceptable)?*” synthesizes the second main tension. The third tension refers to the paradox of knowledge and authority, what is recognized as valuable knowledge and what is not. This tension is prominent in the encounters in activities between “educated” and “uneducated,” categories that often coincide with social class: *Is what I know right (intellectually and practically valuable)?* The fourth main tension I was able to identify in MTST’s practice relates to purpose—the conflict between what different people consider as desirable goals or objectives of change. An example is when leaders who are centered in their purpose of an ideal society become blinded to the practical short-term challenges and objectives faced by the social base. *Is what I desire or consider a goal for myself and for others right (individually and collectively fair)?* In the following paragraphs, we will explore these tensions and how some of MTST members respond to it.
Is what I am doing right (morally acceptable/ethically adequate)?

MTST’s own existence depends on the militantes’ capacity to handle the contradiction between a radical practice and the common sense of their social base. The acampados live this as a contradiction between what they think is right and what they are doing, the difficulty of justifying for themselves that what they are doing is morally acceptable. The critics and criminalization contribute to the internal conflict. The way some acampados lead with this crisis is to abstain from the responsibility: they are only following the leaders. Others try to justify the prejudice against their practices because “people don’t know MTST well.”

Is what I know right (intellectually and practically valuable)?

In MTST practice, the conventional meaning of “knowledge” becomes obsolete. The following example illustrates the multiple tensions in the encounters between the realities of the center and the periphery, in a conflict between a teacher with college education and an illiterate coordinator. MTST invited a teacher, who pursued a college degree and spoke correct Portuguese, to help to improve their training courses. At a certain point of the training, the teacher offended a coordinator by saying that no illiterate person should be a coordinator. Feeling ashamed and humiliated, the coordinator decided to leave MTST and went to talk with Zelideo (my interviewee who was sharing this story) to explain the situation. Zelideo felt puzzled and embarrassed: they had an intention to be better by inviting a person with higher education, and it turned out to be dis-empowering people. He convinced the coordinator, who was a wonderful leader and improviser in assemblies, to stay in the movement, and Zelideo himself started to teach her how to write and summarize the assemblies. “I started to sit with her ... we started to make text together.” Through this process she developed her skills, and became a militante in the movement. When Zelideo narrated this story, he emphasized how it turned out to be an example for the militancy of how pursuing a diploma does not necessarily makes someone a good educator. In this example, both the militantes and the coordinators had the initial idea that a certified professional would have the knowledge to improve their training. However, practice contradicted this prejudice, and the objective of empowering people in practice led to the deconstruction of the existent categories of authority: “How valuable is the knowledge of the illiterate coordinator? How valuable is the knowledge of the certified teacher?”

Language has a central role in reconstructing the meaning of knowledge. The militantes translate the knowledge produced in the center—such as public policies and progress in negotiations—into a version that can be assimilated according to the periphery’s language. Their versions are always guided by Marxism. However, the militantes cannot articulate their ideological perspective in a form that makes their discourses inaccessible from the reality of the periphery. Any information they produce is valuable only if it is accessible. Without the effort of mediating knowledges, the information produced both in the center and through the Marxist lenses of the militantes would remain fantasies detached from their social
base. The translation between the knowledge and language produced in the center and in the periphery requires one to speak the *língua da quebrada* (*quebrada* literally means “broken,” and is what the periphery calls the periphery). The *militantes* conducting assemblies have to use a discourse that people can interpret and stay engaged with, with terms that are accessible. Social and spatial segregation also refers to the discrimination against the language of the periphery in the center. The hegemonic discourses emphasize the authority of formal education and “the right Portuguese.” Empowerment, or the creation of popular power, requires valuing marginalized knowledge and the language attached to the experience and learning of those living in the peripheries. The spaces of intersubjectivity in heterogeneous spaces are far from romantic settings. They are wrapped in tensions that destabilize the existent categories and forms of authority crystallized in language.

Theory disconnected from the everyday experience in the periphery is a *fantasy reality*. One of the dilemmas faced by MTST when training people is between (a) skills necessary to be a good coordinator or (b) broader ideological themes. In my interview with Zelideo, 38-year-old male state coordinator of MTST, he narrated how the previous modes of training, which focused on ideology, created coordinators who did not know how to lead in the local situation, the conflicts and daily problems of an occupation. They were “in a fantasy reality” that had nothing to do with the reality of the periphery. Later training had a mixed content—focused on both short- and long-term perspectives. The pressure of the local situation assumed a more central position, where the theories and ideology held by MTST leaders had to follow the practical demands and be translated into versions that made sense in the reality of those living in the periphery.

*Is what I desire or consider a goal for myself and for others right (individually and collectively fair)?*

The upside world of the occupation destabilizes what is considered desirable and fair when different experiences collapse. For some of the newcomers, in particular upper-class members who join the movement to become activists, *favelas* are a novelty, a reality apart from them that contains different language, other codes and scripts. In addition, the majority of the new activists idealize the periphery residents as *proto-revolutionaries*. The established, experienced members of MTST, however, instead of arguing with them to deconstruct their perspectives, give them tasks to accomplish within the occupation—for example, to discuss the importance of abortion with women in the occupation. The enthusiastic activists soon get frustrated when the women participating destroy their ideas by counterposing their direct experience: "*I had to abort and I'm ashamed of it to this day. And you come here to tell me what I have to do, your girl?? Respect me!"* The coexistence is the prerequisite for transformation, where one’s normative and ideological statements get crushed by other’s practical experiences. As we will see later, collapsing the existent worldview is also a practice used to deconstruct a discourse. This, however, does not answer the question of how the *militantes* are themselves able to learn and avoid being trapped by
their own “fantasy realities.” How are the beliefs and ideas sustained by the militantes themselves being transformed?

The big question that remains is how MTST approaches those four forms of tensions. In my interviews I found two answers. First, MTST resets references of what is valuable and provoke a power inversion. Second, the militantes explore the existent paradoxes from practice to collapse the existing worldviews and replace old contradictions with new contradictions. These approaches will be discussed in the next two sections.

Power Inversion by Resetting References

“To the extent that the contours of the future city can be outlined, it could be defined by imagining the reversal of the current situation, by pushing to its limits the converted image of the world upside down.” (Lefebvre, 1967, p. 172)

How does MTST approach the proliferation of contradictions through their daily practices? The occupations, as spaces mediating the dialogue between the periphery and the center, turn the framework upside down. It is not the center inviting the periphery to participate. It is the periphery producing its own logic and validating its own methods, languages, and resources, then inviting the center to participate according to the logic of the periphery, in this case, the occupation. The effort is not only to translate information from the center to the periphery in the assemblies and other events. Mediation also involves making the local situation the central reference in the formation of coordinators and militantes. Forging a new common sense implies the allocation of new values as the references for decision making. In the encounter between center and periphery, it is the center that needs to adapt to the language of the periphery. The passage below illustrates this inversion of what it means to have knowledge:

That’s when people think they know everything right. That sometimes a person who enters the movement, sometimes has college [degree], and there ends up thinking that he knows more than a person who does not have a college [degree]. Zezito has no college, right. And Zezito is a guy he teaches anyone. The life story he has, and the way he has to do a negotiation. Because Zezito sits at a table with any representative of the state, and he can talk better than any lawyer. (Zelideo, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)

By inverting references, the occupations contribute to the emergence of leaders from the periphery. The language of the senzala may be ridiculed in the casa grande, but in the occupation the language from the periphery is one of the traces that makes an authentic leader. In the upside-down world, communication is a means of identity and power, not exclusion. Speaking the language of the periphery brings the marks of their stories and their pain, shaping the meaning of authority and legitimacy:

It’s that person who suffered. For you to talk about thirst, you must have been thirsty. For you to talk about hunger, you must have been hungry. So you will not tell a story. You will speak your reality to those people. [...] So I knew the good side and the bad side. Then you have the authority to talk to people right. You have a popular language. (Zelideo, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)

Some of my interviewees described how MTST helped them to “live inside of reality,” to look back to their immediate context. This shift of getting back to reality was also described as an inversion,
“my reality turned upside down.” Turning the reality upside down can be connected to the shifts in language and communication, the way one explains the experience.

The multiple encounters in the occupations require a constant effort of mediation between the periphery and the center, to make the knowledge produced in the center, such as laws and negotiation procedures, accessible to the periphery. The mediation among groups within the periphery involves the communication with local residents and organizations to engage them in the occupation; to protect the occupation against the drug cartel; to mediate conflicts among camped members; and to keep the coherence and legitimacy of the MTST by identifying and persuading opportunists and other troublemakers. The proliferation of encounters multiplies the complexity and transforms mediation into a central aspect of their practices. However, such mediation is a power inversion, since the periphery is the validated reference to forge the communication.

**Learning From Paradox**

The challenge MTST faces is to deconstruct the internalized belief in the inviolability of private property, deeply rooted in their social base, and to provide new explanations for why they don’t have a house and how it is possible to get one. Instead of lack of competence, an individual fault, the _acampados_ start to see a social and historical problem. The role of the Formation Sector is to take care of the pedagogical dimension of the struggle, presenting new logical arguments aligned to the premises of Marxism. The new arguments include the introduction of legal and historical facts about access to the urban land in Brazil, as well as the logical demonstration of how it is impossible for a minimum wage worker to own real estate in Brazil. Under a Marxist analysis, MTST also discusses the juridical dominance of property rights, instead of housing rights, in terms of class struggle. The legal system is classist and does not favor the working class. Also, the _acampados_ learn alternative paths to achieve the dream of having a house. Therefore, the learning process involves both the deconstruction of their previous understanding and the substitution with a new strategy. The old rationality, such as “I will be able to own a house receiving a minimum wage,” needs to be substituted by a new rationality, for example, that “the current available housing loans do not contemplate our salary range, so we have to organize for our rights.”

However, the learning journey cannot be limited to the introduction of information and the substitution of one paradigm for another, because changes of perspective are not linear and progressive. The change to a new social consciousness requires the collapse of the one preceding it. According to their pedagogy, the social consciousness is constructed not as a product of the former, but as a collapse of the former. Since changing the worldview is not a continuous construction, MTST’s perspective on education differs from practices conducted in formal spaces, such as schools and universities. According to Gabriel, responsible for the education sector, those methods are incapable of forming social activists because they focus on continuity instead of provoking crisis in people’s perspectives: “Social militants are forged
under another logic. Because everything he does is against the logic of everything around him. It does not make sense” (Gabriel, interview São Paulo, January 13, 2017). The worldview in crisis can lead to the emergence of a new knowledge.

And here enters the fundamental premise of MTST’s pedagogy: paradox. How does MTST practice this principle? The quotidian praxis generates multiple contradictions. The Formation Sector works to synthesize the evidence of contradictions from practice. For example, if the police as the hand of the State hits me when I am protesting for my rights, is the State against my rights? As Part II discussed, the experiences in the occupation hurt. MTST’s challenge is to transform the mobilized and unowned feelings into politics. The collective inquiry process breaks down previous conceptions by showing how they do not make sense as a totality. The objective is not to kill the contradiction, but to replace the old contradiction with a new contradiction. The formation organizes the experience, giving new contours to what was lived in practice by their social base:

What we do is try to explore a contradiction between the principle of private property, which is in the heart of every Brazilian worker—that property is inviolable—with the necessity of housing. If you squeeze the conscience of that guy until the end, he'll say what he's doing is wrong. “It's wrong.” Deep in his heart is wrong. [...] At some point you need to break, to present a break. Present an unanswered question. A question that brings together all the fundamental categories of the guy, put it on the table and say: what about here? A question that seems simple. [...] A paradox. The guy looks: “It makes no sense to me.” [and the facilitator asks] How come it does not make sense to you? It's right there in front of you. It does exist. [...] My role is to be asking questions [...] And to show you that if one makes sense, all of them do not. [...] The maieutic procedure is this. It's taking what's within there. It's almost always a little monster. People do not even realize that it exists. Do not do it for evil. They bring within them a world reading without the benefit of the inventory. [...] Our job is that this reading of the world collapses. It's a long work. And often fruitless. You do not win her by arguing with her. You win by demonstrating that it does not make sense. (Gabriel, interview São Paulo, January 13, 2017)

Experiences That Destabilize Structures of Knowledge

When one’s experience cannot be explained by the usual categories, the categories have to change or the experience has to be suppressed. The encounters enabled within MTST practices provoke moments that are resistant to language: the black woman who could not understand why Whites are eating with her. The upper-class activists who could not understand why the women in the periphery were against abortion. The acampados who could not reconcile the experience in the occupation with their moral orientation. The teacher who cannot educate, and the uneducated who can negotiate. The militante whose theories became fairy tales in the periphery’s ground. Such encounters dislocate the usual perspectives held in the social space and reveal invisible layers of experience, catalyzing the destabilization of existent notions of who I am (the ugly and devalued Black woman; the smart and revolutionary leftist activist) and what reality is (Whites are superior and my place is as a subaltern; the women against the legalization of abortion in the periphery are uneducated). The overflow of one’s experience (by accessing deeper layers of knowledge or by pursuing unusual encounters) creates a tension with language. The contours of reality, crystallized in language, entail what one thinks is moral and desirable, and what constitutes authority and
knowledge. When the notion of who you are expands, these four tensions expand as well. Communication has two options. It can remain fixed to previous structures of thought crystallized in language and discourse, and suffocate the complexity of the emerging paradoxes. Or language can follow the contours of the unusual experiences and generate narratives that support the emergent. It can collapse previous structures of thought, reset references, and exchange old contradictions for new contradictions.

The challenge of "making people visible to themselves" is an imaginative challenge, and an imaginative challenge is a challenge of mediation, since imagination is not a given individual talent. It is an imaginative task because one needs to gain new interpretations of what is possible and real (scripts and codes) in their contexts, and who they are, what position they assume in such new setting. As we defined in chapter 1, the accumulation of somatic marks and past experiences highly influences one’s imaginative capacity. And this is a challenge of mediation because shaping the imagination of who we are, what we want, and how we achieve what we want is a core task in radical planning. Shifting “oppressed” toward “empowered” has hardly achieved anything if it has not provoked at some level a deeper knowledge of one’s identity, purpose, and strategies. If this task is not clearly articulated as an imaginative challenge in mediation, it is already incorporated in the performance of uncountable practitioners and activists around the planet. In MTST’s case, for example, it characterizes the performance of a few leaders, not all of them. Revealing the interface between empowerment and imagination in practice and theory will benefit from further research.

**Empowerment Does not Reinvent the Grammar of the Future**

MTST brings people together based on their existing yearnings. The organization takes place through the attraction of symbols capable of mobilizing deep unfulfilled longings. The method for achieving such a symbol needs to expand the scope of the person and the group, an extension of the understanding of "who I am" and "what I want." This enlargement occurs by accessing deeper levels of human experience. Emotions, memories, the voice, the senses, and the body are revealed through dialogue and the immersion in practices that decrypt bodily postures and social relations. What is present and absent in the past and present is revealed. In other words, spaces of intersubjectivity and trans-subjectivity open the imagination by revealing suppressed levels of human experience in a way that both tensions and potentials emerge and become visible. Language collaborates by following this resized experience, creating the new contours that facilitate its birth in the field of the real and the visible.

This definition assumes that, through the expansion of the field of possibilities of the group and individual, the notions of "who I am" and "what I want" is extended. Thus, by means of the transformation of, for example, "an individual without housing and without rights," the identity expands to "a citizen with rights and part of a community in which he is recognized and respected." Wanting, in this way, can possibly lead from hopelessness to wanting a house, to a dream of conquering his apartment, and then to expand to other levels, for example, the desire to have access to quality education and
healthcare. Logically, processes that expand the "space" that the person occupies in the world (how one sees oneself, sees others, and is seen by others) broaden the spectrum of desires and possibilities that this person carries. The conclusion is that the notion of mediation in radical planning processes should thus focus on processes that broaden the "who am I," through spaces of intersubjectivity or trans-subjectivity that reveal invisible and potentially suppressed levels of individual and collective experience. People would dream more if they had wider understanding of their humanity.

Though attractive, this perspective persists in a blind spot: the imagination of “what I want" feeds on the vocabulary of what exists in the city. The lived experiences and things seen in the city of the present and the past will be the compositional material articulated by desire. The "enlarged self," however, tends to merely widen the range of wanting the things it has already experienced in the world. This tendency is the reproduction of the present and past in the desired future. In this way, it is more understandable how a counter-hegemonic movement can, in practice, be essentially a process of distributing the resources produced by the same system that it intends to overcome. In the end, access to housing is increased. Families visualize and want to realize the dream of home ownership. The militants carry the intention of a post-capitalist society/anti-capitalism expressed simultaneously as a pursuit for social justice and the articulation of a program. Between the deep inner longings and the rational articulation of principles, there is a vacuum. This vacuum refers to the difficulty of extracting the possibilities of post-capitalism from the present material reality of capitalism. If families can visualize the experience of home ownership, being motivated to pursue this dream, the militants cannot articulate the materialization of a socialist society or dwelling in the form of images or experience. There is a counter-hegemonic discourse on the part of the leadership that expresses itself as the political agenda of the movement, but not as a vision of alternatives of ideal forms of social organization. Maria’s empowerment trajectory leads her to fight for a world where the working class has a better life. But this intention does not necessarily articulate a practical scenario of how that society would be, beyond short-term strategies and agendas. The logical conclusion is that empowerment, making people visible to themselves, does not necessarily lead to unusual or creative projections of humane urban futures. We still use the same grammar or structural elements from the present to imagine the future. We next approach how can we make futures visible.
CHAPTER 6

Making the Future Visible

From Hope to Counter-hegemonic, From Counter-hegemonic to Generative

Imagining counter-hegemonic and generative futures (i.e., futures that transgress the grammar of the present and let humane possibilities emerge) is beyond the task of empowerment. Making people visible to themselves is a foundation for imagining the future. However, one can be empowered and still be imprisoned in the texture of the present—failing to see possible humane futures either by attributing low probabilities to an event or failing to imagine the outcome at all. This chapter expands the concept of imagination tensegrity by defining the collective imagination as a dynamic constellation of diverse projections of future. The projections vary in form, which I categorized as sensorial, discursive, emotional, or nullified, and compose a field of tensions among different projections by different actors.

In this chapter, I suggest that opening the collective imagination is a mediation task in radical planning that involves the challenges of experiencing the future unfolding in expressive forms and imagining together. Making the future visible involves the challenge of shaping vision by translating rudimentary individual and collective expressions of how the future looks like into more sophisticated communicative forms. Many people have in their hearts an unelaborated feeling of what a good city is or should be. These feelings, however, are unplanted seeds that have not assumed a significant expressive form. To facilitate this task of experiencing the future, I suggest a recursive hierarchy that includes the nullified dream, emotional glimpse, propositional/discourses, sensorial landscapes, and performance. More sophisticated forms of vision hold more potential to influence engagement. The second mediation challenge is to facilitate the process of imagining together without suppressing the tensions in the collective imagination. We often seek the peaceful and stable metaphors of paradise as an outcome. But imagining as a process is the capacity to hold tensions between real and ideal, past and future (see Appendix A). Groups and cities potentially hold multiple utopias, and our imaginations are alive through tensional pulses between intention and reality. Therefore, this chapter illuminates how the territory of imagining together with the future is unknown and far more complex than sitting in a group, holding pens, minimizing risks, speaking about priorities, and looking at a white board. Finally, I propose to think the process of opening the imagination through a scale that moves from hope, the possible dream (hegemonic), the impossible dream (counter-hegemonic), to generative visions. Generative visions refer to the experience of higher future possibilities that shift and provoke the emergence of new grammars of making. I argue that MTST does not make the leap between counter-hegemonic to generative.

Constellation of Futures

I propose understanding the dimension of utopia in MTST’s case as a constellation of futures or a constellation of projections. Multiple and contradictory projections of future inhabit the social field.
These projections have three important features: they vary, they are relative, and they are instrumental. These shapes of future vary in terms of content, or what they portray, and form in which they portray it. The forms of expression, or shapes of dream as discussed on the next section, include (1) discourse or propositional (without images), (2) first-person sensorial narrative (with images), and (3) diffuse, as the glimpse of an intuition. Moreover, the utopian dimension cannot be understood out of context: the imagined futures are not absolute ideas fluctuating above everyone’s heads. Utopias are relative to the aspirations of those imagining them, and are instrumental, since they encourage people to take action.

What is considered utopian in the militantes’ perspective (socialism) is not the same from the perspective of their social basis (homeownership). Each is utopian from the perspective of those dreaming it, and both are instruments for catalyzing action. This implies that the intrinsic tension pointed out in Santos (1995) between utopia and reality is a subjective relation, a tension lived by an individual or group according to their own notions of reality and expectations for the future. The collective dimension of imagination, therefore, is a collection of individual pulses, or subjective tensions between what one wants and what one gets, held in tension with each other. Since these projections differ, and because they are relative and instrumental, there is tension between multiple different utopias.

The potential of utopias to form political coalitions is not by suppressing such dynamic tensions, but being able to juxtapose or intersect them through powerful common symbols. Initially, MTST does not try to shift what people want. They want a house, and that is the main reason they would join the movement. MTST does not defy either the content behind “the house” (what kind of house they want) or the fact they want a house. The statement “we are not fighting for housing, we are fighting for a socialist society” would not make sense to their social base. MTST operates not in an “or” but an “and” logic: housing and their macro objectives. Therefore, they use the symbolic power of the house to engage people in broader issues.

In the MTST context, the house is a powerful symbol intersecting the more abstract and policy-oriented thought of the leaders, and the more sensorial descriptions of the base. It articulates a societal long-term projection of the militantes, and an immediate demand of the base. The highly desired shape is present in discourses and everyday interactions, articulating anti-capitalism in practical actions. The symbol, which is already powerful to the working class, is appropriated and strengthened in the discourse of the leaders. The symbol of having the keys, the desire to feel safe, physically and emotionally, to have a home, permeates MTST as the driving emotional force. Therefore, the value of utopias is not in their content per se, but in the capacity to integrate impulses that are in tension with each other to coexist.

Additionally, the importance of utopia depends on its capacity to make people engage in a process that changes the way they see their own realities (Santos, 1995). MTST leader Guilherme Boulos argues that the utopia is the moral center from which one can see reality. The dimension of the dream delimits principles, gives the parameters of what is desirable and what should not happen. Without utopia we lose the references, we fall into a place where everything serves, where anything is fine. Utopias, or higher
future possibilities, create tensions with the past and present; they amplify the meaning of right by legitimating existent desires in their social base. The process of engagement might amplify what people want: they want more than a house, a home, health, education, safety. The presence of utopia shifts the quality of the presence: it illuminates everything we could be—and how far we might be from getting there.

Therefore, the role of utopia is also to provoke tension, between ideal and real, and produce attraction. By overlapping projections into a symbol, MTST keeps the diversity of possible futures together in the same social field. Different projections are in an inherent tension with each other. However, such tension does not lead the system to collapse, because a core symbol contributes to keeping people together despite differences.

The Four Shapes of Dream: Discursive, Sensorial, Emotional, Nullified

Through the interviews, I found that utopias, or the projection of dreams, assumed four main forms in the context of MTST: they can assume (1) discursive forms or (2) sensorial forms; they can manifest as (3) an emotional glimpse; or they could be (4) nullified. The militantes formulated utopias as discourses, which relates to propositional imagining. Propositional imagining comprehends a belief-like or language-like imagination that do not contain images—for example, “socialism” and “urban reform.” This discursive form works as a moral guide or intellectual argument about how things should or should not unfold. Alternatively, the movement’s base articulated utopia in terms of images and sensory impressions, which relate to sensory imagining. In this mode, the imaginers project themselves from their own perspectives, presenting visual representations or sensory impressions—for example, “I see myself walking in the living room of my future apartment.” A third group presented a very subtle form of dream: a diffuse yet intense feeling about how their future may look, usually followed by some sort of gesture. Finally, there was a group that could not express any dream at all (the nullified dream), which relates to assigning low probabilities to an event and the lacking articulation of a dream in any specific form (discourse or image).

The form of imagination held by the leaders of the movement was mostly a propositional imagining. MTST’s official narrative, i.e., the narrative produced by its leaders and circulating in their official documents, advocates for the construction of a socialist society and the formation of popular power. As described in chapter 3, this goal is articulated in terms of an anti-capitalist ideology, proposals for urban reform, and organizational principles. MTST also does not identify with any socialist historical experience, since they do not believe in the replication of models. This does not exclude, however, the use of historical socialist figures to name the occupations. Thus, they articulated anti-capitalism practices and a socialist society in terms of a robust corpus of theory and values. However, the militantes I interviewed, even when I invited them to do so, rarely translated those principles into sensorial images, what they
would look like in an imagined future. When they did, it was often in negative statements, negating the realities they want to overcome—a world “without x” or “where you don’t have to do y”:

*The world that I imagine is a world in which these potentialities can be liberated, where people can live without the mediation of the commodities or without the fear that the lack of them brings. [...] A world in which the potential of concentrated capital accumulation is not at the center of everything. [...] A better world is a world that does not force humanity to become worse and worse to be alive within itself. It means to abolish the need for one to pull a fast one on someone [...] A better world is a world in which we do not have to fragment our personality to live in society.* (Gabriel, interview, São Paulo, January 13, 2017)

In contrast to the movement’s leaders, the imagination of the base of the movement is mostly a *sensory imagining*, an imagination that is filled by images and sensory impressions. They do not articulate their actions in terms of a struggle against capitalism and the construction of a socialistic model. The dream is concrete and has a projected presence in the near future: a house. In contrast to the abstract answers provided by the leaders, the answers of the *acampados* were mostly sensorial and positive. They could provide me rich descriptions of how their houses would look. Ivete, a 71-year-old Black woman, lives in precarious conditions with her daughter and two granddaughters in a house of two rooms and a garage which they transformed into a kitchen. When I asked her how she imagined her future house, she answered with the description of several gestures:

*The thought changes ... changes completely ... I really think. I keep thinking I'm in there, opening my bedroom window, I'm opening the kitchen window ... I'm opening the bathroom window ... I'm organizing well the little things in there... my living room is like that... the couch ... [laughing]. ... I cannot wait ... the suffering is too much.*” (Ivete, interview, São Paulo, January 12, 2017)

Additionally, the interviewees clearly engaged memories in their articulation. For example, one of the residents of the apartment building *João Cândido* described her ideal house as similar to one she had lived in when she was a child in Bahia. The house of the past was the metaphor for the house of the future, always referencing details from *that* time. Similarly, Lourdes, a 47-year-old black woman who was born in Pernambuco and has worked as a housemaid since she was 12, described her dream house using as a reference the houses in high-income neighborhoods where she worked as a domestic cleaner. The roomy and well-ventilated house would be “even better” than the houses she had worked in.

In the example of Maria’s ideal house, her description engages memory and contrast to the places she has seen. Maria’s ideal house was equal to or better than the house of the upper classes. Experiences had become the elements in a collage of the possible. And, since visualization provokes emotional responses (Van Leeuwen, 2016b), her description evoked strong emotional reactions of joy and hope. The dreamer actively engages memory to compose a future possibility.²⁵ The third form I could identify in their interviews was the diffuse yet intense feeling about how this fairer world would look. Once, during a casual conversation, professor Faranak Miraftab asked a colleague and me what humane urbanism would look like from our perspectives. Nobody could answer it, but we all shared a common feeling that was not yet formulated in terms of images or text. On another occasion professor Stacy Harwood asked in a class what we meant by community development. Luckily, I had just left my dance classes, and I threw my arms in the air, with a smile on my face, the chest open, and said, “*this is community development.*”
Similarly, many of my interviewees, before they answered their questions about their dreams, showed micro expressions—a glance, a smile, a head shake. Those gestures revealed an emotional engagement with something they could not yet formulate. But the act of bringing utopia, dream, or future to the table somehow changed the quality of their presence. The feeling could not yet be expressed, but had the power to influence the thinker and change the level of attention.

Beyond the propositional imagining of the militantes, the sensory imagining of the base, and my observations of the glimpses and emotional responses during the interviews, a different and important type of answer on ideal futures appeared. Swellen is 29-year-old mother of three sons, and in state of homelessness, who at the time of the interview had just joined the occupation Anastácia. When I asked how she imagined herself in the future, she could not visualize anything. In Swellen’s discourse, she said, “I just see myself walking with my kids from one place to another,” a continuity of her present nightmare. While Maria’s reaction to her description of her future house was joy, Swellen’s started sobbing during the interview because she could not find an answer:

*I used to make a castle, you know, in my head. Nowadays I do not have it anymore. You know? I don’t know, sometimes I think I can’t make it through. Sometimes I do not know. I used to think a lot. Nowadays I can’t ... I can’t imagine ... [sobbing] ... I only see myself walking with my children from one side to the other. You see? [Sobbing] I don’t know, I don’t know ... I cannot ... They tell me: "Mother, when I grow up, I'll give you a mansion." Then I'll say, "Okay." "When I grow up, I'll build my house next to you ... Mom, did you ever think of us in our apartment?" Then I say, "Good." But I do not see it. "Ah mother, but we will ...and we will not have anything, right? Oh, but we put the mattress on the floor. There it is ours, mother. Have you ever thought of us in an apartment?" You know, so this is it ... My imagination is theirs. I imagine what they imagine.* (Swellen, interview, São Paulo, January 7, 2017)

In this passage, Swellen could only reproduce her past into the future. And the future she saw was terrifying enough to block her from expressing it. Hopeless, she cedes her imagination to others, borrowing elements from her children’s dreams as a prosthesis.

**To Experience the Future**

*The Prototype of a Recursive Hierarchy*

In the literature review and in MTST’s case, imagination cannot be restricted to the formulation of images. We imagine in rudimentary forms when we have feelings or glimpses of what something might be in the future. Einstein had a vision of chasing a beam of light in his adolescence. People have emotional glimpses of how good their lives might be. But imagining can also be a “supposition-like” imagination where you don’t see any image attached to it, and yet you are imagining it. We also imagine social justice through discourse—often without a clue of what it would look like, but with strong feelings for the good city. The flexibility in the definition of imagination refers to the juxtapositions between, for example, imagination and reasoning, imagination and memory, imagination and belief, and imagination and perception, which will be approached later in the discussion of the implications to mediation in radical planning. However, there is a limited knowledge of how these different forms of imagination,
sensorial and propositional, influence each other and how they impact action, decision making, empathy, morality, belief, and reasoning.

We know that imagery is a strong driver of human agency and moral appraisal. Experiments in psychology and neurobiology endorse this perspective by proving that visualization increases empathy and impacts decision making. According to Van Leeuwen (2016b), emotions impact the way we think about the future by “(i) accessing of information that might not occur through purely discursive thought and (ii) generating affective states that support evaluation of possible actions” (p. 99). Furthermore, Van Leeuwen (2016b) argues that emotions “put us in positions—not always, but often—to act well as agents in our present environments, in relation to the future and in relation to others (p. 106). Believing and seeing are an intricate pair. José is a 68-year-old senior who has been participating in MTST for several years. He is one of those who got his apartment at João Cândido. In his interview, he told how he visited the construction site every day because he didn’t believe that was happening—he needed to keep watching the construction. How much of our capacity to believe in something and decide are independent from our capacity to see and foresee? Imagination-related theory and practice in city planning depend on the advancement of research in philosophy, psychology, and cognitive sciences. However, there are already strong indicators that seeing fosters engagement, empathy, and other key elements in civic life.

**Figure 6.1** Shack at the occupation *Vila Nova Palestina* (Jan/2017). The picture symbolizes the poetics of a political imagination in MTST, the tension between the new that can emerge (the door and the future house) and the hardness of reality (the walls of black canvas).

**Figure 6.2** Condomínio João Cândido (Jan/2017). The picture presents the first MTST’s apartment complex. During their annual meeting in December 2016, MTST leaders used pictures and videos of the victory of João Cândido to motivate families of *acampados* attending the event.

Since social struggle gravitates around concrete (visualized and experienced) physical demands, making humane urban futures tangible realities might be a treasure in the convoluted path of learning and engaging with the future and the present. The visualization of post-capitalism as a new paradigm, in a first-person perspective or a sensory way, if possible, could increase our capacities to bridge past and future societies. The limits and benefits of visualizing future complex outcomes, in comparison to articulating these future in terms of discourse, are not clear. But if mental imagery does have such power, we cannot abandon the importance of the sensory modes of imagination in planning alternative urban
futures. Therefore, the lack of mental imagery about the future is in fact a problem that planners should be concerned with.

Concerned with how civil society can apply the body of knowledge on imagination to urban planning, I propose a recursive hierarchy of imagination forms. Although theoretically inappropriate, since there is limited knowledge of how different forms of imagining function and are related to each other, such hierarchy would be an initial step with the purpose of helping to guide mediation processes that would open collective imaginations. The smallest circle in Figure 6.3 represents the nullified dream, where a disruptive reality is such a strong force that it destroys any emerging alternative. The reason to keep this as a level within the hierarchy is that imagination is not fantasy, which is detached from reality, escapes from it. Imagination is in an intricate love story with reality, and the capacity of holding this tension is at the core of the imaginative act. The nullified dream needs to be there as a realistic house that reminds the dreamer of the tension of being human. The second level is the emotional dream, or glimpse, a powerful and deep driver that, however, lacks communicative forms. The third level is propositional imagining or discourse. One can imagine linking an emotion to a discourse without having a vision of how that reality will unfold in the future. The fourth level is sensorial imagining, where one imagines engaging her senses—seeing forms, relationships, and processes, touching, smelling, and listening. Finally, the fifth level is performance, an embodied sophisticated expression that integrates all the previous levels.

This hierarchy emphasizes the relevance of experiencing the future, rather than accumulating empty signs that only reproduce the grammar of the present. Discourse is not the highest level because it is easier and more common to get lost in words without actually having a vision and because the potential friction between an unclassified and dislocated emotion with language can generate the need to translate a vision into expressive forms. However, the sensorial imagining requires the use of language and discourse to establish contours and to enhance the capacity to communicate the experience, suggesting that sensorial and propositional might be in a reinforcing loop. For example, I hope about living a good life. When I start to speak and write about it, I perceive my incapacity to express this subjective experience through language. The investigation, however, helps shape my dream into more sensorial and tangible forms. The good life gains the shape of a house with a porch and a garden, a small dog barking in my living room, a home office, a street with a cultural center, etc. This hierarchy assumes (1) that imagery has substantial impact in engagement and decision making, (2) that language molds imagination, and (3) that the failure to imagine refers to the incapacity to unfold the future in images or other sensorial descriptions.
Failure to Imagine the Future in MTST

The Lack of Expressive Forms

Van Leeuwen (2016b) articulates the idea of failure to imagine as a consequence of assigning low probabilities to certain outcomes and/or failing to imagine the outcomes at all. (p. 98). Somebody might fail to imagine if the probability attributed to an event is too low, or she cannot articulate it in terms of sensorial impressions or discourse. MTST inspires people to attribute higher probabilities to achieving the dream of a house. However, they are not re-imagining the outcome (house), and the leaders’ imagination of a socialist society is articulated not in terms of images, but as an anti-capitalist discourse, a set of principles and objectives. In this section I will explore the meaning of failure to imagine the future in the case of MTST.

The graphic below represents my adaptation of Van Leeuwen’s framework of “failure to imagine” as a continuum with two axes forming four major categories applicable to MTST’s case. “The absence of the dream” (A) indicates those who attribute low probabilities to the event (in this case to have their own house) and fail to visualize it into the future. Swellen would be an example for this case. The “lack of faith” (B) refers to those who can visualize their dream houses, even creating rich descriptive scenarios, but do not quite believe it is a real possibility. The third quadrant (C) I am calling the “possible dream”; people see their house in the future and believe they will have it. I argue that MTST is mostly moving people from quadrants A and B to quadrant C—from not seeing and not believing to seeing and believing. The fourth quadrant refers to a “Social Justice Call” that drives the leaders to fight for housing rights, urban reform, and ultimately structural transformations in society. How much they do in fact believe in the materialization of their objectives is a more complex discussion. But what I noticed in the interviews is that they articulate their dreams in terms of narratives using universal or general propositions (e.g., a communist society) and negative statements (e.g., anti-capitalism). Considering the leaders’ goals as counter-hegemonic and the dream of a house as hegemonic leaves us with an interesting fact: Hegemonic is articulated with sensorial content (people can see, smell, feel the experience of their houses), whereas the counter-hegemonic dream is articulated in terms of discourse without mental imagery (the interviewees could elaborate complex ideas, but could not translate them into visual expressive forms).
Figure 6.3. MTST as a space of hope. MTST moves people from not believing and not seeing, to seeing and believing. Source: Diagram developed by the author.

The “absence of the dream,” as the one illustrated by Swellen’s discourse in the previous section, is not an isolated or rare phenomenon. Why can some people not visualize or dream about their futures? In the introduction I shared that it was very common in my work as a community organizer to meet people who could not dream or express their dream. In January, I asked Maria, one of MTST’s national leaders, about the importance of the dream:

“When a person stops dreaming, something is wrong. Or she suffered too much and lost hope of fighting for what she thinks is the right thing to do, which is the right thing to do ... If she does not have that, she’s a person who needs help. You have to relive that hope. Because there are a lot of people who have lost that sensitivity of dreaming of a better future. So it is as if you live in extreme slavery and surrender to it. [...] So from the moment that person can’t dream and fight for that, he feels defeated ... and he looks like millions of Brazilians. We need to pick up and say, you’re not alone. Because she was probably trying to fight alone and got tired of fighting alone. Alone we really can not. We have to reach out to these people in a different way. And to say: you are not alone. We’re with you, you’re with me. And that creates strength to rebound. Because he fell in the middle of the road and can’t fight, because fighting alone really can not. The union makes the force. So I think these people stopped dreaming because they did not believe that one day they could have a change, not only within, but also in the environment, in the society in which they live. She lost hope. If I have hope, I have the dream. If I have no hope, I'll dream what? If I have nothing to grab. (Maria, interview, Santo André, January 10, 2017)

Her analysis is brilliant: the absence of the dream is the absence of hope. The absence of hope is the absence of the collective. Swellen’s frustration when she could not imagine a dream, but only reproduce her traumatic past experiences into the future, might refer not only to the existence of a trauma, but also to the absence of a supportive community. Hope is a plural verb. Imagining is uncannily singular and plural. The projection and the belief in an alternative future requires a space of intersubjectivity.
In this context, MTST creates spaces of hope; their actions strengthen people’s beliefs in their chances to attain houses (people are assigning higher probabilities to the event). They are creating the conditions to make people believe they can live better. Some of the interviewees could imagine themselves living in an apartment, but assigned low probabilities to the fact. Others, such as Swellen, could neither imagine themselves in a future house nor believe that in it as a real possibility. The movement would ideally promote a mobility from a perception of low or zero probability to high probability. As presented in the graphic above, from quadrants A and B to C. It is not coincidence that faith is such a frequent word in the discourses of the acampados and coordinators I had the chance to interview.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, MTST is not re-imagining the outcome, the idea of “house,” home ownership, or the architectural form. In other words, they are not reinventing the outcome. The concrete outcome, a house, is still the same. It is an apartment, an apartment larger than what real estate would build with the same budget, but still an apartment entangled in the same dilemmas of the buildings constructed by the public and private sectors. According to MTST’s perspective, the proposal of other models of housing would have to force the consciousness of people, which is not ahistorical. MTST does not defy the powerful symbol of “house” or “home ownership”; instead they use it as an attractive force to mobilize people to engage in the movement. The projected futures by the majority of the base are most likely not counter-hegemonic, even though they are engaged in transgressive practices. The experience of participating in the movement would potentially open people’s desires to want more than a house.

The most puzzling quadrant, however, is quadrant D. The militantes I had the opportunity to interview could not visualize how a socialist society would look. In some answers I found a resistance related to holding an identity of being “Marxists” rather than “utopian socialists,” following a rejection of the value of engaging in utopian explorations. In other answers, the interviewees reproduced their current anti-capitalist struggle into the future. The future would not be different at any time in their horizon: they would keep fighting and fighting against the system. Other answers demonstrated they were trapped in the level of discourse in universal statements or principles, and the negation of the status quo. In the last section I presented a quote form Gabriel Simeone, militante who understood central principles and theories of MTST practices. This is an example of propositional imagining, representing a sequence of negative statements such as “A better world is a world that does not force humanity to become worse.” Later in his interview, he tried to articulate his dream in a different way and expressed the difficulty of visualizing “something so incredible as communism”:

But this better world is a difficult world to even imagine. [...] Communism is such an incredible thing that it is even hard to imagine. [...] It would be an experimental process. It’s hard to imagine it complete. [...] Because we live in an infinite present. [...] That's why we have so much difficulty imagining the future. [...] For many years I have not sat down to imagine. I liked the invitation, I'll do it when I get home now. A different world, how would it be? [...] So to rediscover the imagination is to rediscover the time to imagine. No one can stop to think anymore. (Gabriel, interview, São Paulo, January 13, 2017)
Therefore, there are two imaginative processes within MTST: one that is counter-hegemonic in content and discursive in form (connected to the *militantes*), and another that is hegemonic in content and sensorial in form (connected to the social base). MTST is not translating socialism into a “socialist” housing or into the visualization of a “post-capitalist society,” nor are they translating anti-capitalist principles and theories into sensorial images. Instead, they are articulating anti-capitalism in terms of practical reforms (such as urban and political reforms), organizational principles that solve immediate problems faced by the movement, and a theoretical framework that lays out who they are and which kind of actions are ideologically acceptable. By pointing out these elements, I am not arguing what they should specifically do. I do say that they are not articulating a socialist or post-capitalist society in terms of images. This paradox is represented in the Table 6.1.

### Table 6.1. Counter-Hegemonic Discourses, Sensorial Hegemonic Futures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form and content in MTST’s Imagination</th>
<th>Counter-Hegemonic</th>
<th>Hegemonic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensorial</td>
<td><em>Militantes</em> did not have a mental imagery to express a “socialist society” or a society beyond capitalism. <em>Is it possible to develop a sensory imagining for the complex scale of a society?</em></td>
<td>Social base had a sensory imagination of a house, based on their life experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discursive</td>
<td><em>Militantes</em> articulated a counter-hegemonic narrative.</td>
<td>Social base articulated a mix of counter-hegemonic and hegemonic narratives.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* Table developed by the author.

While the leaders are guided by a propositional imagining, sensory imagining prevails in the base. It means the future “socialist” or “post-capitalist” society is not visualized. How can we understand this scenario? MTST leaders might not visualize a post-capitalist society because (1) they are failing to do so; (2) it is not possible for anyone to do so; (3) it is possible but not useful; (4) it is possible and useful, but MTST members don’t value it; or (5) they don’t have the resources to do so. I will focus on points 1, 2, and 3, since point 4 refers to a moral judgment, and number 5 seems self-evident in the context of grassroots movements under the pressure of tons of demands and limited resources. Moreover, if we don’t know how far can we imagine and how useful it would be to open our imaginative capacities, it sounds like an act of ignorance to eliminate such inquiry by saying that it doesn’t have value and we don’t have the resources to do so. It is like throwing out a toothbrush without knowing what a toothbrush is and what it can do. Since it is inconclusive from the interviews how far MTST leaders are dedicated to visualize the alternative and aligned around the importance of holding a vision for human urban futures, I cannot affirm they are failing to imagine. But it is possible to abstract the learning from their experiences to illustrate the challenges of imagining a humane urbanism. Is it possible? Is it useful? That said, let’s explore points 1, 2, and 3.
Is it Possible to Imagine a Humane City?

Imagining a post-capitalist society is not possible as an individual act. Is human cognition able to visualize in terms of images or sensory first-person experiences in complex forms such as the future of a city or a neighborhood? Aristotle believed that our minds are not able to visualize a geometric form with 1,000 sides. Fishman (1977) questioned the possibility that a single mind could imagine an ideal city as a complex juxtaposition of thousands of images and desires. Therefore, imagining a humane city is beyond individual capacities or the work of an expert delivering an ideal urban form.

Accordingly, imagining a humane urbanism demands the engagement of multiple perspectives. This is true because imagination is attached to one’s past experiences, to stakeholders with diverse social, economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds, with diverse historical and geographical trajectories in the city. Since imagining is, unfortunately, a skill not taught in the school system, imagination is also an ill-developed collective and individual muscle. Engaging in imagining urban futures would require enhancing the capacity of the stakeholders to unfold and express their perspectives. Such commitment signifies a long-term engagement into a consistent space of collaboration that does not bounce according to electoral mandates. The risk of co-optation would make such space barren. The coexistence of differences in the group does not reflect naturally in the plurality of future visions. Imagination tensegrity is not in negotiating the encounter of middle-ground adjustments between opposing parties. The dilemmas of mediation in planning would contribute to define the challenge of formulating models of humane futures.

We can extend what we learn from the MTST case to affirm that our capacity to imagine humane urban futures is atrophied: we don’t know how far it can go and how useful it can be to enact a humane urbanism. We don’t know how far it is possible to develop our individual and collective capacity to visualize complex forms and how it relates or contributes to other forms of imagining that don’t use visual mental images. Assuming it is indeed possible to a certain degree, it is unclear in which ways it would be useful to visually imagine a post-capitalist city. The house is clearly visualized in the near future, evoking strong emotions and engagement. Visualizing a post-capitalist society as easily as we are able to imagine a future apartment could potentially increase engagement, provoke empowerment, and enhance the collective intelligence to solve complex urban problems. Opening the collective imagination demands the exploration of how different processes (from diverse forms of pedagogies and decision making), media, and technologies would enhance the collective capacity to imagine and to see which models would best provide a way to visualize the complex tensional field of imagined outcomes in the collective imagination. What does it change in the way we organize, when we allocate in the center the development of the collective capacity of imagining and regenerating cities toward humane forms of urbanism?
The Silenced Imagination

We are failing to imagine. But let me amend that statement: we are not even trying to imagine humane urban futures because we do not have time for it. We do not even know how imagination and the act of imagining function together, nor do we know how useful it is for citizens and governments to spend their scarce resources on systematically imagining of how their communities could and should look. If the imaginative process occurs and is not just a checklist of items everybody is already tired of repeating, it is unclear how much of it would in fact be acknowledged and integrated as useful data. Furthermore, since we barely know how the collective imagination works, we do not know how can we enhance it.

Imagination is a wild beast—but not because it is not constrained. As we have discussed, experience constrains imagination with such intensity that is hard to understand how possible imagining something beyond the dictatorship of reality is. Imagination is a beast because it is a silenced provocative and uncodified driver in planning. We celebrate how the powerful of imagination. But this relationship sounds more like a mystification of a painting hanging on the wall, rather than a grounded statement. We don’t know how the collective imagination functions, we don’t have time to imagine, and any practical attempt to make it happen meets resistance. Let’s leave imagination to children; afterward, they have time for this kind of thing. When imaginative products nevertheless appear and become valuable commodities, we glorify imagination and remember she is a lady sitting in the room and awkwardly watching us lying to others and ourselves on how much we appreciate change.

We silence the collective imagination when we silence our understanding of how different media, varying from sculpture to audiovisual and dance, can help us to translate blurry feelings about desirable urban futures into expressive forms. Instead, we silence the possibility of experiencing the future, and are satisfied with talking about the future using the words of the present. We silence the collective imagination when we fail to recognize and enhance the imaginative tensegrity. We silence the tensions, the plurality of the unowned and unexpressed possible futures, present in the space, and are satisfied with attractive unidirectional propaganda about the future. Unleashing the collective imagination should be considered a mediation task in the role of radical planners.

Making Futures Visible: Mediating Imagination of Humane Urban Futures

Mediating the imagination of humane urban futures is like remaking a magical feast. A group of blindfolded people are transported to a feast. Everybody is delighted with the food. But each one has access to different menus. Nobody has ever tried any of those dishes before, not knowing the names and ingredients of the recipes. When the feast is over and the bandages removed, they have the challenge of re-creating the feast. The source of their knowledge is the memory of delightful tastes they can no longer name. The ingredients exist, but they don’t know where to find them or what they look like. The multiple possible ways of cooking that transformed the ingredients are inaccessible. Furthermore, they need to
create the feast together, without having the proper language to communicate their experiences and the ingredients needed. This is the challenge of imagining humane urban futures.

In the previous chapter, I ended by sharpening the border between empowerment and opening the imagination. Even though imagination is a fundamental piece of empowerment, empowerment does not lead to a non-reproductive imagination. One might be empowered but still use the grammar of the present to think about the future. Learning from the future evolves by thinking the present not in terms of the structures of the present solely, but by inventing a grammar from the future—the not-yet-embodied knowledge that wants to emerge. If one of the main sources of imaging is one’s somatic marks, reinventing a grammar is to grasp unusual compositions from past experiences, unowned feelings, and suppressed voices, changing the parameters of design and references in decision-making. If imagination is a territory beyond empowerment, it makes sense to think about the meaning of mediating imaginative processes.

In this chapter, I have outlined the contours of what opening the collective imagination looks like by defining what failure to imagine means. The failure of imagination refers to the lack of expressive forms attached to it (one cannot visualize an outcome) and the suppression of the multiple tensions embedded in the act of imagining together. The assumption is that, in the act of imagining, future assumes a shape or uses a structure to be communicated. Examples from MTST include four forms of future: (1) sensorial descriptions, where people can see, attribute a smell, a size, an audio landscape to their future house; (2) discourse, where people used words to describe general principle and programs, but without attributing images to it. Without these expressive forms, future (3) exists in a rudimentary state, such as a feeling or a desire not further elaborated, or (4) cannot be formulated at all (nullified). Additionally, I assume the visualization of future possibilities presents advantages in comparison to the creation of suppositions (imagining without images) about the future. The advantages include increasing empathy in decision making, evoking emotions, and fostering community engagement. In this sense, I propose a functional hierarchy where imagining with imagery has a higher relevance to opening the imagination of a humane urbanism. Sensorial imaginings are followed by imagining with language, by feelings and desires without further elaboration, and finally, at the bottom, by the absence of any form. Additionally, by applying the concept of imaginative tensegrity, I suggest that the imagination of groups reassembles a dynamic constellation of future projections embedded in a network of tensions.

Finally, I would like to propose that making the future visible as a scale that involves four layers: Hope, the Possible Dream, the Impossible Dream, and Regeneration. It is impossible to have hope alone. Hope is possible only in community, being part of an extended network including not only the people with whom we directly interact, but also those who have gone before us and made us believe that life could be something more between birth and death. Hope, therefore, means the attribution of high probabilities to events, without necessarily holding any form of expressive form beyond an emotional glimpse, an intuition, or a symbol. In the interviews, faith and how MTST helped people to have faith was
a constant narrative. The possible dream is a step forward: people believe that something is possible and are emotionally attached to it. They also can visualize their dreamed futures into sensorial forms, such as the future apartment. The existent context nourishes the vision, reproducing the present into hegemonic and likely possible futures. The impossible dream is counter-hegemonic and goes beyond the attribution of probabilities; it is guided by a sense of justice or morality. However, the impossible dream is also an unthinkable future: one cannot express it as an experience, a sensorial form. Finally, a generative mode refers to the emergence of a higher future possibility that shifts the grammar of the present, including the challenges of experiencing the future and mediating the processes of imagining together. MTST partially activates the other layers at some extent, but they do not make the leap between counter-hegemonic and generative.

Based on this analysis, I argue that the work of mediating imagination refers to two main tasks: enabling the future to gain expressive forms (experiencing the future) and facilitating the tensional composition of these multiple projections (imagining together). The first mediation challenge is how to translate desires to the future into expressive forms. Many people have in their hearts a desire for a humane city. The work of mediating imaginative capacities in radical planning is the task of crystallizing the imagination from rudimentary to more expressive forms. Diverse kinds of media, such as video, photography, painting, drawing, sculpture, dance, and drama, could make special contributions to unfolding alternative futures. When we restrict imagining to language-like structures, we limit the potential for accessing deep layers of knowledge and translating unfulfilled desires into cracks that can bridge past and future societies. What are the multiples images of “the good city”? Unfolding a feeling of a good city in different expressive forms exposes multiple angles of the desire and refines its clarity. Opening the collective imagination requires a work of expressive mediation to expand both the variety of media and depth of expression.

The second challenge is how to enhance people’s capacity to imagine together. Utopias are subjective, relative to the position people occupy in the social space. As humans we share deep common needs, but when we unfold them in practice, they go in thousands of different directions. The collection of utopias from multiple actors would healthily present several tensions and contradictions; we should be suspicious about clean and non-conflictual ideal scenarios. There is little knowledge of how constellations of projections look and behave, and how can we enhance the collective capacity to imagine together. In chapter 1, we saw that in response to the static and non-conflictual utopian forms, a new political imagination was celebrated as the proliferation of heterogeneity. Harvey (2000) criticized this approach, saying that the spread of divergence would lead nowhere. Imagination tensegrity, as a dynamic system constantly seeking balance through standing tensions, is an interesting response for this dilemma. The aerial photograph of a collective imagination flourishing would look like the proliferation tensions and interconnected expressive forms in a given system. What would be the process to model such tensegrity system, and how would we benefit from it? These are questions to guide future research. There is a need
to produce uncanny tensegrity models that resist existent conceptions and language structures, opening
the space for the emergence of the new. A “new” that springs not from abandoning the past and a
colonized linear conception of time, but from the juxtaposition of silenced layers of knowledge. In
uncanny imaginative tensegrity models, convergence and divergence coexist. How far can we imagine is
an inquiry on how we can mediate tensions among diverse projections to unleash the collective
imagination?

The field of philosophy of mind presents numerous and complex aspects of imagination. These
should be addressed to refine what the mediation of collective imagination should look like to catalyze the
emergence of humane urban futures. For example, the process of imagining can be autonomous (when
you start to imagine something by yourself) or guided (for example, when a process or technology helps
you to imagine); it can be voluntary (when a group of people engage in imagine the future of their
neighborhood) or involuntary (for example one women imagine potential abusers when walk in dark
alleys); it can be internally driven by emotions and memories, or externally motivated when you perceive
something in the space. Also, some forms of imagining are reliable for decision making while others are
not. Without a deeper exploration of imagination in its complexity, it is hard to give any consistent
practical orientation in mediation, specifically related to imagination, without falling into a repetition of
the already excellent available methodologies to facilitate group dialogues and future visioning.

The complexity around imagination incites multiple questions for future research, from which I
would focus on two. Imagining together is both a cognitive and social challenge. On one hand, the
cognitive architecture of the imagination influences in unknown ways our capacity to create humane
futures—for example, how beliefs, reason, memories, senses, actions, and emotions influence our
imaginative capacities. The understanding of these subtle influences could help to enhance our capacity to
let new futures emerge. On the other hand, imagining together is a social learning experience embedded
in power dynamics, conflicts, technological and ethical considerations, cultural and social differences.
Therefore, imagining together the new, while living in the old, presents the challenge of understanding
both its cognitive and social dimensions.

**Back to Urban Planning: Why Imagination Matters**

*The Imaginative gap From Counter-hegemonic Discourses and Generative Visions*

Ferreira (2012) argues that there is a gap between “building a house” and “building a city:” “The
idea of a fair city has not yet been assimilated by society” (p. 34). The image of hundreds of houses built
are strong marketing tools in the hands of politicians. He points out that the appearance of house-
ownership seduces and overshadow the importance of a good urbanism. The lack of consciousness does
not only concern to a specific social group, it indiscriminately affects all classes. The problem with the
city of walls is that people desire the walls, and there is little knowledge on how to unleash the public imagination to want something else:

"How can we make people aware that condominiums enclosed by walls, fences and guardhouses, even though they appear to be safer, actually segment the urban fabric and eventually generate even more insecurity? That these same walls eliminate the vitality of the streets and kill their role of convivial space, transforming them into corridors for cars? That green areas inside the condominiums are insufficient and, above all, much smaller and less pleasant than the large and well maintained public squares? That many parking spaces can mean status and comfort, but feed into the urban model of dazzle with the automobile, to the detriment of public transport policies much more efficient, safe and sustainable? That the spaces that are reserved for parking the cars take from the residents much healthier areas of leisure and rest?" (Ferreira, 2012, p.35).

The imaginative gap – the lack of power images to emotionally engage people in the idea of a democratic city – is a blind spot that undermines the implementation of policies for the right to the city. While the dream of homeownership, culturally ingrained for decades, assumes clear and attractive images, imagining a democratic city is a much harder and rare exercise. It implies that the program MCMV, and the dream of homeownership, has an emotional appeal that lacks in the City Statute. The City Statute formulated a consistent and sophisticated counter-hegemonic dream, but it lacked the emotional appeal that homeownership has for the worker class - and we might guess almost every Brazilian. MTST’s engagement with the federal program Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades (MCMV-E) and the City Statute is emblematic to problematize the complexity, and importance, of generative visions.

MTST, as other grassroots movements, are in the interesting position between the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic: they need to acknowledge hegemonic dreams, while pursuing counter hegemonic narratives. In case of MTST, they do not confront the concept of homeownership or private property because abandoning these ideas would mean to loose any form of engagement with their social base. The dream of homeownership is in the core of the mobilization. They need, thus, to act within the realm of practical possibilities to achieve concrete goals. Their political force, necessary to put in practice the tools for the right to the city, originates not from the dream of a democratic city, but from the dream of the physical and legal safety of a patrimony. MTST’s transgressive use of the space and in engagement with the dream of homeownership that make it possible the implementation of the policy mechanisms.

In this context, the social function of property and the right to the city, therefore, are ultimately means, not ends, to realize the dream of having the safety of an estate. Freitas (2017 jul) pointed out such contradiction under the concept of “undoing the right to the city,” where low-income residents often desire to be included in the city, not to change the city. MTST is an example of grassroots movement that lives this tension, simultaneously turning the desire of inclusion as a political force, and eventually channeling it towards the desire of wider change. In a theoretical level social function of property and private property are pure non-inclusive categories; in the practice of grassroots they are complexly juxtaposed. The dream of homeownership is the goal of MTST social basis, while the right to the city and the dream of a socialist society permeates its leadership.
The images of the future are disciplinary instruments of planning; they have an agency that is beyond reasoning or morality. Try to convince someone on how inadequate their dreams are and you mostly like will win an enemy before any trace of changes in the aspirations. If reason is not enough, what planners should do? In the context of housing and urban policies, the symbol of a house, of owning a small piece of paradise within the unsolvable problems of the chaotic and unsafe cities, dominate our imaginations of future. That said, if the counter-hegemonic aspect of insurgent planning corresponds to intellectual and moral premises, imagination asks to give a step forward, crystalizing hopes and desires into generative visions of future. It is necessary to move from the democratic city as an idea for the future, to the democratic city as an experience of the future.

The future is a blind spot in both the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic proposals. Stable images of a colonized future (stabilized tensions) justify and nurture exclusionary planning; the lack of visualization of alternative futures (generative visions) boycotts the realization of a democratic city. Intellectually, the program MCMV, and its mass production of low quality and distant housing, deteriorates the City Statute and the right to city. In practice, grassroots movements appropriate the legal tools of the right to the city to realize the dream of homeownership of their social bases, possible through the program MCMV. This paradox reveals that the dream of a democratic city is not imagined. Although formulated in sophisticated legal tools and a counter-hegemonic discourse, the right to the city lacks an emotive and sensorial ballast crystalized in powerful collective visions. The experience and the images of a home have a much higher engagement power to mobilize citizens. The jump between counter-hegemonic discourse in insurgent and progressive planning have not been done. It is necessary to move beyond reason, shaping visions, experiences and representations, that conquer people’s heart. It is necessary imagination.
CHAPTER 7
Imagination as Mediation

The Contours of a Triple Loop of Learning in Planning

Sandercock’s (1998) renowned work “Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History” congregates perspectives from multiple scholars in the effort to make silenced planning histories visible – those which are omitted or suppressed – under the official mainstream planning historiography. Its objective was to learn from the past, strengthening the planning transformative capacity to create alternative futures. In that publication, “making the invisible visible” refers to giving voice to hidden histories that shaped cities, simultaneously investigating the shortcomings of the modernist project and amplifying the category “planners” to accommodate not only those within professional boundaries, but all the social actors shaping the cities’ history. In this thesis, I suggest expanding the idea of making the invisible visible to go beyond learning from the past, which is based on the concept of double loop of learning in radical planning (Friedmann, 1997). We need also a triple loop of learning: to recognize the future as a source of learning and an instrument of power. Scharmer (2009) developed Theory U, a process to orient leadership and organizations to learn from the future, imagining and materializing higher future possibilities in the present; Miraftab (2018) argues that the future is a space of struggle between opening and closing down the imagination. In this thesis, I intertwine both learning and power dimensions of imagination through the case study of a grassroots movement in the Global South.

This thesis presents exploratory research on the meaning of imagination in the public domain, seeking to answer the main question “How can we unleash the collective imagination towards the flourishing of more humane urban futures?” I explore this question through the ethnographic case study of the housing grassroots Homeless Workers Movement (MTST - Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto) that I conducted in December 2016 - January 2017 in the São Paulo Metropolitan Area. The field data was collected through (a) 27 in-person interviews with MTST’s leaders (militantes) and participants (acampados and residents) of their land occupations; (b) one focus group with the coordinators of the land occupation Vila Nova Palestina; (c) content analysis of MTST’s key materials, including forms, booklets, and websites, as well as news about MTST available on the internet; and (d) the participant observation of three land occupations (Vila Nova Palestina, Anastácia, and Hugo Chavez), MTST’s office, the MTST’s general annual meeting of occupations of 2016, and one meeting of the Frente de Moradia de Guarulhos, which congregated neighborhood associations and housing grassroots movements in the region. The literature review includes perspectives of imagination in philosophy of mind; the cross-disciplinary discussions on urban utopianism; insurgent planning and radical planning theory; the housing policies and the urbanization process of São Paulo; the concepts of single, double, and triple loop of learning in organizational development, with focus on Theory U; and the concept of tensegrity as borrowed from architecture and applied in psychology and organizational studies. The literature combined with data from
MTST helps to frame imagination in the public domain, overcoming (1) the idea of imagination as an automatic outcome of the democratic process as well as (2) the narrow definition of imagination as an individual trait, which usually ends up attributed to great men with the capacity to envision the future of cities. This inquiry also expands the notion of imagination beyond the act of envisioning the future itself. Bringing imagination to the collective sphere demands framing imagination as a practice which is spatially and socially circumscribed.

The main findings of my research include, first, framing the future as a spatiotemporal layer in the city palimpsest, a set of images of futures in tension with each other and with the multiplicity of memories and present possibilities. This future layer functions as a disciplinary instrument orchestrating planning. Second, thinking of the collective imagination as a prototype of a model – the imagination tensegrity. Third, based on MTST’s case study, conceptualizing the process of opening the imagination as a threefold process: making territories visible (space), making people visible to themselves (identities), and making the future visible (vision). Anything imagined is imagined by someone from somewhere. This thesis moves imagination from being framed as an individual trait or the automatic outcome of the democratic process, to a spatially and socially circumscribed process. Finally, I argue that unleashing the collective imagination is a key task within the planners’ role in mediating social learning, and it involves three dimensions (space, identity, vision) in three layers (past, present, and future).

The case study of the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST) in São Paulo, Brazil, aims to problematize imagination rather than to evaluate how imaginative this insurgent practice is or should be. Although it does not provide a blueprint for practice, this study aims to evoke the importance of imagination and to provoke further interdisciplinary conversations. Understanding the imaginative process creates the potential to provide a conceptual basis to improve planning practice. This chapter summarizes the main points discussed along the thesis, adding considerations about the planner’s role, implications to planning practice, and thoughts on further research.

In this thesis, I outline some possible contours of a triple loop of learning in planning theory and practice. Imagining the future has both power and learning dimensions. Future is a disciplinary instrument of planning, in a Foucauldian perspective, where the images and narratives about the future are present as a layer of the urban space, functioning as a perspective vanishing point in decision-making. The future is also a source of learning, an immaterial wax holding the potential to be shaped by the warmth of imagination. In the planning literature, imagination has been entangled with democracy. Being intertwined, however, can lead imagination to be forgotten, or marginalized, in the planning process. By expecting imagination to be an automatic outcome of the democratic process, we become slaves of hidden images of future orchestrating planning. Future, a spatiotemporal layer influencing decision-making in the present, is never empty: it is filled by projections, dreams, expectations, fears. Colonization of the future stabilizes the future shapes which are an invisible driver both in mainstream and insurgent planning. The development dreams of authorities create exclusionary cities. The counter-hegemonic practices fail to
translate the democratic city from an idea for the future to an experience of the future, therefore unable to channel the richness of critics into powerful visions to engage people. Hope is essential, but we also need imagination to stop reproducing the old paradigms into the future and to start regenerating the frameworks of action. Exploring the meaning of imagination in radical planning requires understanding both dimensions: power and learning. Dismissing future as a field of power and a source of learning reinforces the unidirectional flow from the future to the present and cuts down the flow from the past-present to the future. As a result, we remain hostages and consumers of an à la carte menu of stabilized dreams. A triple loop of learning is necessary. We need imagination – the capacity to bridge past, present, and future – to destabilize crystalized spatiotemporal arrangements and reshape the individual and collective possibilities.

**Figure 7.1.** The power and learning dimensions of imagination. The images and narratives about the future function as disciplinary instruments shaping our imaginations. Future is also a source of learning, an immaterial wax holding the potential to be shaped by the warmth of imagination. However, if our imaginative capacities are ill-developed social muscles, the flow from imagination to the future fades away. Instead of a two-directional flow, we have a unidirectional flow: the future as an à la carte menu. **Source:** Image created by the author.

**Triple Loop of Learning and Imagination Tensegrity (Chapter 1)**

Imagination is a blind spot in planning theory: it is considered either an individual trait or an automatic outcome of the democratic process. In chapter 1, I argue that a triple loop of learning is necessary in radical planning, reframing future as a realm of learning and imagination as a fundamental feature of the democratic process. We want imaginative humane futures, without knowing how to imagine together. When trying to create the new, we end up reproducing the old. This chapter highlights the discussion of single and double loop of learning in Friedmann (1987) and introduces the key ideas of Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) as a promising third loop of learning in radical planning theory. Additionally, it illuminates the paradoxical nature of imagination (Santos, 1995; Holston, 1998; Harvey, 2000; Sampaio 2008; Kind, 2016a; Kind and Kung, 2016; Miraftab, 2018) and how insurgent practices are insightful case
studies not for being islands of the new, but because they live in great intensity the challenge of trying to create the new, while facing the old. Friedmann (1987) explored the connection between reason and democracy. I start a conversation about the connection between imagination and democracy by discussing the role of future in radical planning. Scharmer (2009) argues that future is a source of learning; Miraftab (2018) argues that future is a space of struggle; I propose to integrate both the learning and power dimensions. A triple loop of learning acknowledges both the power of the future as a disciplinary tool in planning and future as a layer of learning.

I extend Miraftab’s (2018) argument that the future is a space of struggle between opening and closing down the imagination, by (1) framing the collective imagination as imagination tensegrity; (2) adding a new conceptual layer to the definition of the urban space; (3) defining the concepts of opening and closing the imagination. I define closing the imagination as the suppression of the experience with reality and time (“colonization of imagination”) that generates the stabilization of future possibilities (“colonization of the future”). Based on key scholarly proposals to a new poetics of imagination (see Appendix C), I propose the concept of city’s imagination tensegrity and opening the imagination. Future is a spatial layer in the city palimpsest. The urban space is a dynamic tensegrity system of spatiotemporal arrangements, where past, present, and future are coexistent layers on people’s experiences. The collective imagination is a dynamic constellation of memories, possibilities, and future projections in tension – the imagination tensegrity. Opening the imagination destabilizes and reinvents such spatiotemporal arrangements, crystallized in structures of knowledge and power, through the creation of experiences that make territories visible, people visible to themselves, and the future visible.

The Power of Future and the Invisible City (Chapter 2)

Mainstream planning produces the invisible city: invisible territories where people are invisible to themselves and from where they cannot see the future. Chapter 2 discusses federal housing policies and the urbanization process in São Paulo, expanding the critics against mainstream planning beyond the single loop of learning, the division between theory and practice (Friedmann, 1987): it is also a sterilizing segregation between past, present, and future.

In terms of single loop of learning, mainstream planning is separated from people both in terms of process — by being blind to their experiences —, and outcome — by producing non-places where people become invisible to themselves. The process consists of the reproduction (copy and paste) of ideologies, institutional design, and operations from other contexts, disregarding historical and geographical differences. It is based on the negation of the problems faced by entire populations, and the devaluation of local historical and cultural realities. The invisibility of the “problem” produces the invisibility of territories. Plan making is within a glass dome, isolated professionals in their air-conditioned offices, separated from people’s experiences. Actively or passively ignoring and devaluing people’s knowledge, skills, history, interests, aesthetics. They are ready to “start from zero,” “clean the mess,” as if
the city was a white board waiting for their interventions. As a result, exclusionary policies preclude the access to a good quality of life for entire populations, in service of the interests of the elites in power. Lacking creativity and political will, financial objectives cannot share the room with other human needs. The super-production of spaces, massively produces non-places, cities without historical or geographical indioscrasis. Placeness became a commodity for those who can afford.

Future (i.e., the images of future in the present) is a disciplinary tool orchestrating planning. The goal is to achieve the images of future of the developed world. Fortified enclaves proliferate in the cities of the global south, the production of isolated urban islands of high-income residents pretending to live the fantasy of a “developed world” in the periphery of the capitalism. Utopia is nothing more than a fuel to justify cleansing and hygienist projects. The (colonized) future, the idealized images of American and European cities in particular, is a fuel catalyzing exclusionary processes of urbanization. The shapes of future have an agency in the present. They are hidden drivers in both mainstream and counter-hegemonic planning. Therefore, it is also necessary to problematize the concept of imagination in insurgent practices. The complex position of grassroots movements provokes the discussion to go beyond the dualism of “imaginative” and “unimaginative;” it is necessary to frame imagination as a process.

Opening the Imagination: Making Territories, People, and Futures Visible

The Mediation of Imagination in Social Learning

The threefold definition of opening the imagination (making territories visible, making people visible to themselves, and making the future visible) aims to apprehend both learning and power relations. It would be simpler, but misguided, to approach imagination only as the capacity to visualize alternative futures. Framing the imaginative problem detached from social and spatial considerations leads to defining technology and the development of individual cognitive capacities as the solutions for the problem. Opening the collective imagination would be, for example, the effort to use a set of technologies, such as augmented reality, to make people visualize a future layer in their neighborhoods. This approach presents several limitations. First, it might be blind to social and power dynamics. Without questioning how imagination is formed, it inserts technology – which would be pretending to open the public imagination – in an existent system of relationships which are possibly reproducing the conditions that closed down people’s imaginations in the first place. My approach consisted of framing imagination as a core aspect of social learning, embedded in power dynamics. In practice, it means that everything imagined is imagined by someone, somewhere: we cannot think about opening the imagination of humane urban futures apart from space and identity. Furthermore, my approach aims to break down any form of propaganda beguiling people to believe that moving forward to the future is about forgetting the past. Without validating our memories and experiences, we cannot be protagonists to imagine the future.
Making Territories Visible (Chapter 4)

Making territories visible implies a two-fold process: opening the possibilities to see and to be seen. MTST’s performative acts (e.g. rallies and *trancamentos*) enhance the chances for the working poor to be seen as a risk and an opportunity. Their acts generate public stages that present political opportunities to either damage or foster the images of politicians: the crowd is not only seen, they see. When grassroots movements bring the protesters to the streets they are not only setting a public stage, they are also creating an audience that previously did not exist. Additionally, by crossing the lines between the legal and the illegal (such as through land occupations), MTST’s practices create nuisances compelling the public attention for a specific territory. They create a problem, for those in power, that has to be solved. This new tension opens the possibility for solutions that might benefit the area residents, previously ignored. Therefore to be seen refers to a political dimension, the capacity to destabilize power relations and increase the negotiation capacity. Ultimately, insurgent practices are disputing the city’s time, the agenda of what will happen when and for whom.

*Seeing* is the other dimension of making territories visible, it refers to the capacity to enable changes in subjectivity in a territory, shifting the perceptions of problems, rights, and dreams. In the case of MTST, they shift the perception of problems from the level of the household to the public sphere, from an individual problem to a shared local reality. This translation happens through the transgressive use of the space, bottom-up territorial symbols that make a problem assume a visual presence in the space. Their practices also contribute to shift the perception of rights from abstract information to embodied experience. This translation happens by enabling collective performances, by making it together. Finally, insurgent practices illuminates potentialities, the gap between real and ideal in the territory, shaping the perception of what is present and absent in the urban space. Therefore, making territories visible involves the capacity to shift citizens’s experiences from *individual* holders of *information*, searching for dreams detached from their places, to a public with shared experiences, seeing the contrast between real and ideal in their surroundings.

Enabling social learning (seeing) and power (being seen) in the territory happens through the transgressive use of the space. Insurgent practices enable social learning as a spatially circumscribed practice. If some sort of pedagogies can deterritorialize students from their everyday lives and neighborhoods, insurgent practices potentially destabilize structures of knowledge through the transgression of the space. The urban space is embedded in scripts, it is filled by our expectations of certain spatiotemporal arrangements. We hold expectations of what, who, where, and when things will happen in our surroundings: if someone starts screaming and running and hitting her head against a lamppost you will think there is something wrong going on. Our imagination about our surroundings is a survival strategy. When we ask ourselves these “who/what/where/when” questions about the expected performances in a place, we find our scripts for that space. In this context, transgression is the capacity to
destabilize such spatiotemporal arrangements, building a coherent and unpredictable identity. In MTST case transgression involves an intentional engagement with the following:

- The creation of visual interruptions in the city’s life, creating “surprises” (Appendix A approaches this topic in more detail);
- The activation of the political potential of diverse urban spaces to open dialogue;
- The experimentation of different forms/textures of protests, according to different objectives;
- The articulation of different intensities of insurgency, in a scale of radicalism;
- The attention to both circumstantial and historical possibilities in the insurgent practice.

**Making People Visible to Themselves (Chapter 5)**

*Making people visible to themselves* is the recognition that people are not machines: you press a button and they start to imagine some sort of future. What we imagine is deeply rooted in our memories and somatic marks, the experiences that make who we are influence what we imagine for our future. The social space is embedded in scripts (expectations of how reality is likely to unfold) and codes (the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication we use to refer to this reality). Therefore, opening the imagination of the future, a mediation task in social learning, requires making people visible to themselves: creating experiences that change their positions in the social space, opening their realm of individual and collective possibilities. The collective imagination, as a tensegrity system, is a composition of spatiotemporal arrangements of past experiences, present possibilities, and future projections. Making people visible to themselves is the creation of experiences that shift people’s perception of themselves, by expanding and destabilizing the notions of who they are, what they want, and what are the possible actions to achieve what they want.

One of the core principles of Theory U is the creation of dialogue between past and future. Imagination is not a movement towards the future, abandoning the past. Imagination is the capacity to keep navigating between the new that wants to emerge and the old paradigm that needs to be overcome. The dialectical nature of imagination was discussed in depth on Appendix A. By integrating the thought of Boaventura de Sousa Santos and philosophers of mind, I adopted the framework of imagination as simultaneously shaping, and being shaped by, reality. The first section of chapter 5 presents such dialectical character of imagination in the case of MTST. Opening the imagination is not a linear progression towards new future possibilities, it is, instead, a not linear navigation across coexistent paradigms. Through the experimentation of new gestures and interactions, as well as unusual individual and collective performances in diverse spaces, contrasts between what is present and absent come to light. The weaving between the old and the new self – the past and the future possibilities – ultimately shape the perception of both the real and the ideal. Opening the collective imagination, therefore, requires adequate social spatial containers for individual and collective journeys to unfold, weaving the tensions between dream and reality, dominant and emergent paradigms. Opening the imagination is never an act of building
isolated and perfect paradises; it is the capacity of traveling between heaven and hell, reinventing both. Such tensional navigation destabilize the existent imaginative tensegrity, the spatiotemporal arrangements of a group, opening the stage for new configurations to emerge.

Because reality influences imagination, opening one’s realm of experience expands their horizon of possibilities. Opening the experience refers to the creation of spaces of intersubjectivity (self-others) and transsubjectivity (self-self), revealing deeper layers of the individual and collective experience. Bringing the idea of transsubjectivity, mentioned in Theory U, into the planning context emphasizes that participation, engagement, or direct democracy cannot be evaluated only by how far they allow the overlaps among diverse social groups, but also the quality of these overlaps: how deep they enable the individual expression, and embrace forms of interaction that go beyond reasoning and debate. Making people visible to themselves departs from the premise that unfolding voice, enabling the experimentations of new embodied performances, sharing and validating memories and emotions are sources of knowledge and, therefore, fundamental dimensions of social learning. The projective capacity relies on our somatic marks. These dimensions are the hooks to shift subjectivity, to access and shift the scripts in experience (the expectations about what reality is) and codes in communication (how we talk about reality) orienting our actions, and unclamping our imaginations of the future. The expansion or overflow of experience makes such marginalized sources of individual and collective knowledge assume a presence in a social system and create a new common reality. In synthesis, amplifying the space people occupy in the world (widening their own perspectives about who they are, who they were, and who they can become), expands the realm of possibilities, of what is possible and desirable. The overflow of experience make unowned layers of the past, present, and future populate the realm of possibilities, enabling the emergence of new imaginative tensegrities. Since the prominence of reason as the source of knowledge so often hijacks the practice of social learning, I highlight below some key dimensions of opening people’s experience, from MTST’s case study:

**Table 7.1. The Overflow of Experience: Takeaways for Social Learning Practice**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> Memories: create safe spaces where people have the opportunity to share, validate, and reinterpret past experiences, moving from individual memories, to collective and city memories to shape the perspective of past realities and present possibilities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2.</strong> Emotions: acknowledge emotions, and catalyze their power to reshape the individual and collective perspective. The sense of absence or the perception of lost is not given, it is part of the role of mediation in social learning to build a shared perception of what is missing, silenced, and desired.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> Body: create the opportunities for people to experiment new trajectories and gestures in the urban space. The accumulation of these not-yet-marked experiences create possibilities for new somatic marks, therefore the formulation of new meanings, identities, and uses of the space.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4.</strong> Voice: create the possibilities for people to experiment new uses for their voices. The use of voice include (1) mode: talking (such as in dialogue, education, negotiation), singing, acting, screaming; (2) content: about (a) who (themselves, the periphery, the center), (b) where (the neighborhood, the city, the country, abroad), (c) when (in the past, present, future) they are expressing, and (d) for whom, the audience (peers, politicians, pedestrians, etc).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source*: Table developed by the author.
Making people visible to themselves is on one side the expansion of experience, and on the other, the destabilization of rooted beliefs, specially the notions of power and authority crystallized in language. In the case of MTST, the land occupations intensify the encounters between multiple realities, leading to the inevitable proliferation of conflicts: tensions between the periphery and the periphery (such as the tensions within the *acampados* in the occupation, and between the occupation, the local powers, and the residents in the surrounding neighborhood), and between periphery and center (such as the tensions between members with different class, gender, and education status within the occupations, and between the MTST members, politicians, and property owners). More specifically, MTST has a huge ideological contrast between the leftist ideology of its *militantes* and the conservative profile of its social base. The coexistence of these polarities is relatively common in different settings, and we could argue a pre-requisite for transformation. However, what makes the occupations auspicious containers to the destabilization of codes and knowledge structures is how these poles overlap. The potential to open the collective imagination relies not only in the production of heterogeneous spaces, neither only on the capacity to access deeper layers of experience; it depends also on the capacity to generate and hold specific tensions that are able to destabilize spatiotemporal arrangements. Based on MTST’s case, I argue that these tensions are in experience, moral action, knowledge, and purpose, explained as such:

1) The tension in experience, between past and present experience: Is it right (real) what I am living and what I have lived before?

2) The tension in moral action, between behavior and moral codes: Is what I am doing right (morally acceptable)?

3) The tension in knowledge, between what is valued knowledge and what is not: Is what I know right (intellectually and practically valuable)?

4) The tension in purpose, between what is considerable desirable and ideal from different positions: Is what I desire or consider a goal for myself and for others right (individually and collectively fair)?

In MTST’s case, the capacity to destabilize the categories in experience, moral action, knowledge, and purpose can be synthesized in two learning strategies: reseting references to provoke a power inversion and learning from paradoxes. The first strategy, power inversion, refers to the practices that allocate the local situation as the reference in communication and decision-making. People’s experiences and language are the sources of authority, they become the traces of an authentic leader. The periphery produces its own logics and validates its own methods, languages, and resources, then invites the center to participate according to the logic of the periphery. The second strategy, learning from paradox, based on the principle that learning is not a linear and progressive process. One objective of social learning should be to provoke crisis in people’s perspective, rather than continuity. Shifting subjectivity requires the deconstruction or collapse of the previous rationality, and the substitution of the old contradictions for new contradictions. In the case of MTST, the process consists of synthesizing
evidence of contradictions from their practice: (1) organizing unowned and conflictual feelings from experience; (2) acknowledging these feelings and, “squeezing them” through a dialogue that reveal core beliefs in contradiction that leave behind unanswered questions; (3) holding a mirror to an existing paradox, demonstrating how that perspective does not make sense. The effort of mediation, therefore, is to illuminate the paradoxes in people’s practices, and reset the references of what one thinks is possible, valued, ethical, and motivational.

The process that expands the “space” that the person occupies in the world (how one sees oneself, sees others, and is seen by others) broadens the spectrum of desires and possibilities that a person carries. It implies that mediation of imagination in radical planning should focus on expanding the notion of “who I am” through spaces of intersubjectivity and transubjectivity that reveal invisible and potentially suppressed layers of individual and collective experience. However, the imagination of “what I want” feeds on the vocabulary of what exists in the city: we end up reproducing the past and the present in the desired future. Making people visible to themselves opens the collective imagination by opening the realm of experience, unleashing the individual and group possibilities. However, I argue that such an empowerment process might not lead to imagining counter-hegemonic futures. Since imagination feeds in reality, the desired good city might be just a new composition of old elements. Although imagination plays a fundamental role in empowerment, opening the collective imagination requires further steps. Making the future visible adds an additional layer in the practice of mediation in radical planning.

Making Future Visible (Chapter 6)

Our capacity to imagine humane urban futures is atrophied: we don’t know how the imaginative process functions; why should we spend time imagining the future; and how the outcomes of the imaginative process could be integrated as useful data in urban planning. As a result, we do not have time to imagine, we are resistant to the idea of spending time on it, and we attribute a marginal value to imagination. “Imaginative” is an adjective, either an ornament in the planning process or an automatic outcome of the democratic praxis. Since the future is a disciplinary instrument of planning, the blind spot of imagination make us hostages to the propagandas of the future. We are fed by à la carte menu of possible futures, while the social muscles to bridge past, present, and future are ill-developed.

The layer of the future in the city’s imaginative tensegrity is a dynamic constellation of future projections embedded in a network of tensions. The projections of the future vary in form (discursive, sensorial, emotional glimpses, and nullified); they are subjective pulses (relative to those imagining it, – what is utopian for a favela resident might not be utopian for the director of a multinational); and they are instrumental (they have a power to mobilize the dreamers to action). Because all these projections differ, and because they are relative and instrumental, there is tension between multiple shapes of the future. As humans we share deep common needs, but when we unfold them in practice, they proliferate in thousands of different directions. Therefore, the public imagination of the future is a complex juxtaposition of
uncountable images and desires; imagining humane urban futures is beyond the individual capacity and requires the engagement of multiple perspectives carrying a variety of historical and geographical trajectories.

Utopias have the double purpose of enabling social learning and the formation of political coalitions. The political potential of utopias relies not on the suppression of these dynamic tensions between diverse future projections, but on the capacity to (1) attract people through powerful common symbols, and (2) overlap projections into a symbol. Utopias do not only inspire people to engage, they provoke learning through the engagement. The learning potential of utopia refers to its capacity to change the way people see their own realities. Utopias are mirrors, revealing the contrast between the ideal and the real, and establishing a reference of what is desirable, a moral center for decision-making. The utopias I am referring to do not stimulate passivity, false non-conflictual paradises, or continuity. They teach about loss and longing, encouraging action. The symbolic power of a utopia leans on the capacity to provoke convergence (centrifugal), while acknowledging divergence (centripetal) and increasing the tension between real and ideal.

While utopia is a successful attempt of the imaginative exercise, we also need to examine the inability to imagine the future. In this context, failing to imagine the future accounts for not believing, not seeing, and not seeing together. Failing to believe stands for attributing low probabilities to an event. Failing to see indicates the lack of expressive modes, the incapacity to articulate the future in terms of sensorial and/or discursive forms. Failing to see together is the suppression of the multiple tensions among projections, where the supremacy of one symbol prevails and nullifies others. The approximation of imagining the future to seeing the future is based on the premise that the imagery is a strong driver of human agency and moral appraisal, and radical planning loses a great opportunities to catalyze change when we do not have imagery attached to counter-hegemonic discourses and theories.

Applying the failure to imagine and utopia as a pair of lenses (with slightly dislocated angles) to look at MTST’s case has a stereoscopic effect: it demonstrates the ambiguity of making people believe into the future, while not seeing alternative horizons. MTST channels the emotional driven force of “home” and “homeownership.” This symbol intersects the abstract thought of the leaders with the sensorial and immediate demands of the social base. It is a point of convergence between the leftist perspective of the leadership and the conservative profile of the basis. MTST creates spaces of hope, helping people to move from not believing and not seeing, to have hope (to believe), and to see their possible futures. Therefore, in one side, MTST is not failing to imagine the future. They are increasing people’s hopes, the faith that they will pursue their objectives of homeownership. On the other side, the leaders are not translating their counter-hegemonic discourses into expressive forms that use imagery and go beyond language. Their imagination of the future happens through the articulation of abstract and universal principles, the negation of the world’s disruptive reality, and the articulation of strategies operating in the urban cracks: maneuvering across the economic and political interests, catching
opportunities in law and policy making. The leaders are making their social basis see and believe in a better future, but they themselves are not able to see the future in visual forms. In this research, it is inconclusive how MTST leaders value, and engage on, the translation of counter-hegemonic discourse and practice into a vision of future. However this inquiry is not to define how imaginative MTST is or how they are failing to do so, but to problematize imagination through their experiences. The way to lead with such ambiguity is to understand that imagining the future is not one category, but four.

Based on MTST’s case, I analyzed the imagination of the future in four categories in a scale: hope, possible dreams (hegemonic futures), impossible dreams (counter-hegemonic futures), and generative visions. Hope is a consequence of making people visible to themselves. The absence of the dream is the absence of hope. The absence of hope is the absence of the collective. Hope can be an emotional driver, related to certain symbols without necessarily having imagery attached to it. The possible dream is a step forward, it includes the visualization (or other sensorial forms) of the future, in accordance to the grammar of the present. Someone can visualize and describe herself experiencing a future dream. For example, when the acampados could describe vividly their future apartments. The impossible dream is the simultaneous engagement in action and critique, guided by a sense of social justice, yet without holding any form of visualized future. For example, when some militantes were skilled to translate their objectives into strategies and principles, but could not visualize how their ideal society would look like, beyond discourse and arguments. They act and think about the future in terms of the negation of the grammar of the present. The fourth ladder in this scale is generative visions: the experience of higher future possibilities that shift and provoke the emergence of new grammars.

According with these categories, MTST is successfully creating spaces of hope, making people believe and visualize their dreams. A small fraction move even beyond, from the possible to the impossible dream, engaging in a struggle for social justice.

Although MTST is doing an incredible work on making people believe in their chances to solve their housing conditions through social struggle, the leap from counter-hegemonic dreams to generative visions is missing. The principles from history and theory, and the present strategies in practice, do not gain the form of a powerful symbol, of visual statements to populate the future layer. In this gap, a series of others images of future occupy the space: the apartments of the program Minha Casa Minha Vida, the images of the richer neighborhoods, the propaganda of the American and European developed cities. The dream of homeownership outruns the dream for a democratic city. A problem with the city of walls is that people desire the walls. The imaginative gap between counter-hegemonic principles and generative visions matter to urban planning because it undermines the realization of progressive policies and the right to the city.

Please note that I am only indicating that the leap between counter-hegemonic to generative visions is not being made by MTST. I am not saying what MTST should or not be doing. This blind spot in their practice is equivalent to the blind spot in theory. My role here is to point out that the blind spot
exists. I am also not saying what should be done to overcome this blind spot in practice. Developing strategies to approach this gap depends on a clear definition, first, of the contours of this blind spot. My purpose here is to start a conversation about these contours, the limits and potentialities of imagination in planning practice and theory.

Making the future visible is a mediation process with two main tasks: making people see the future and making people see the future together. Since hope is a consequence of making people see themselves, making them to believe in the future is not considered a task in this ladder. Experiencing the future is the first mediation task to expand the expressive capacity: to translate abstract concepts and blurry feelings of what a good city is, towards more sophisticated expressive forms, such as sensorial landscapes, narratives, images, gestures. It is a form of expressive and cognitive mediation, searching both for a variety of media and the depth of expression. This task requires insight from the interface with fine arts, new media, and psychology. Imagining together is the second mediation task: to facilitate the tensional composition and overlaps of multiple projections. Considering the future as a field of tensions, a new political imagination urges for models that embrace thousands of tensions and the juxtapositions of the city’s desires and expectations. The urban imagination cannot be reduced to the individual effort of experts. Imagination tensegrity stands as an alternative to think the static and non-conflictual utopians models prominent in the 20th century. Imagining together generates an incredibly complex field of projections (expressive forms) presenting similarities and contrasts. Making the future visible is the capacity to shape visions, experiencing higher future possibilities and translating them into expressive (and inclusive) forms, while mediating a constellation of projections in a tensional field. The challenge of creating democratic cities requires moving from counter-hegemonic discourses to generative visions, making the experience of higher future possibilities engage citizens’ hearts. If the images of future are stable and rigid as iron bridges dominating planning, it is up to planners, who care, to cannibalize its shapes and catalyze processes to dismantle and generate new bridges.

Making the Invisible Visible

In this exploratory study of the role of imagination in MTST’s case, I aimed to highlight the major mediation tasks of imagination in insurgent planning. The leverage of systems is within the articulation of the visible and invisible realms of experience (Scharmer, 2009). Making the invisible visible is the act of revealing, deconstructing, and reinventing tensions in experience, involving the dimensions of space, identity, and vision, and the past, present, and future layers. Opening the imagination in the public domain, or making the invisible visible, refers to making territories visible, making people visible to themselves, and making the future visible. It means to make the silenced assume a commanding presence, to become a perceived reality. In the cities, forgotten territories belong to the promising future - a lie - that never comes. Yet, the future bounces between well shaped propaganda sold to us or a blurry cloud of undefined propositions or feelings. While emotions, body, and memories are the
silenced counterpart of knowledge, people remain displaced. Displaced of assuming a position where they are affected and affect others, they see and they are seen. Change requires unusual engagements with time and space, that disrupt our perception of what is possible and what is real. A ball is rolling on the top of a table and falls on the ground. We imagine it will kick, at least a bit depending on the type of ground. Instead, it breaks. The ball was made of glass. The space is a collection of scripts, of expectations of how things are going to behave, and codes, our narratives designing the borders of what is real and what is not. Experiences that interrupt this tissue reveal constraints and possibilities, what is absent and present in the city. The experience of surprise or mystery transcends the noise we use to explain who we are and what we want, and are beyond the reach of language. If the existent narratives fail to explain, new references need to follow the emergent. Opening the imagination is to create experiences where we can see and be seen as unique compositions of past-present-futures.

The idea of mediating imaginations as a necessary dimension in planning is aligned to Sandercock (2004) proposal of four characteristics of a planning mode for the 21st century: political, audacious, creative, and therapeutic. This emergent planning imagination involves a new kind of sensibility, where both hard and soft infrastructures matter, and where planners are ready to give up control, take risks, and audaciously engage the public to have voice. This mode of planning is political in the sense it questions who is getting what and where, shaping the public attention around issues. Creative planning reaches for collaboration with artists to use techniques to foster lateral thinking and engage the senses, emotions, and other marginalized sources of knowledge. Finally, the therapeutic dimension of planning claims to engage the underlying emotional layers of experience and overcome the fake binary thinking that opposes reason and emotion. Such engagement can enable regeneration and collective growth. Aligned with this new qualities for planners in the 21st century, making the invisible visible in insurgent planning involves spatial and epistemic transgressive duties to reshape, empower, and enhance the public imagination.

The extended metaphor of the city palimpsest, including the future layer, influences the representations of the planners’ role. Instead of running cities to reach progress, which relates to the linear perspective of time, the view of time as a multilayered structure (which is part of Theory U discussed on chapter 1) suggests alternative representations, such as fishing or mining. The work of imagining humane urban futures resembles the work of discovering gold within the soil (which is closely connected to the idea of Archeology of the Present coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, also discussed on chapter 1). It also resembles the surreal image of fishing simultaneously in the sea and the sky, with a twofold fishing rod. The planner is a mediator of the three spatiotemporal layers (who we were, who we are, and who we might become) in three dimensions (space, identity, and vision). We are not running to achieve futures designed by others. We are discovering which kind of unique futures can flourish based on the idiosyncrasies of our individual and collective stories.
Suggesting to initiate a conversation about the role of imagination in planning theory and practice aligns with the epistemological shift started in the 1970s, the feminist and post-colonial critiques, and the post-positivist movement in social sciences (Sandercock, 2010). This shift expands the meaning of knowledge to include a broader range of the human experience, such as emotions, senses, intuition, and non-scientific knowledge. Introducing a triple loop of learning to this framework not only reaffirms the importance of the multiplicity of knowledge, but states that, without recognizing their centrality to make territories, people, and future visible, it is impossible for us to imagine the future. Note that the definition of imagination is not neutral. The discussion about imagination refers to the processes that can open the individual and collective possibilities, based on Friedman’s (2000) definition of the human flourishing: “Every human being has the right, by nature, to the full development of their innate intellectual, physical, and spiritual potentials in the context of wider communities” (p. 466).

The guiding question of this thesis is what imagination means in the context of planning (theory) and how can we unleash the collective imagination toward a humane urbanism (practice). The city’s imagination tensegrity, presented on chapter 1, is a prototype of an instrument to change theory, auxiliary lenses to decolonize our epistemological frameworks. The knitting of public imagination (presented bellow) is a prototype to change practice, an initial grid that direct the attention to three dimensions (space, identity, vision) in three layers (past, present, and future). Both instruments, the imagination tensegrity and the knitting of imagination, are in their initial phases. Further research has the potential to increase both their sophistication in theory, and their value for practice.

The knitting of the public imagination represents making territories, people, and future visible as integrated processes of opening the imagination. Opening the imagination is not a linear journey, starting with “making territories visible,” then “making people visible to themselves,” and finally “making futures visible.” The process is nonlinear, each aspect can happen at the same time as reinforcing loops. The objective of this diagram, developed based on MTS’s case study, is to synthesize the main findings and, hopefully, contribute to a conversation of how to improve our imaginative capacities in planning practice.
To assist planners in the task of mediating the birth of new poetics of urban imagination, we can think about a new paradigm of engagement with the future. In this new paradigm, future is a source of social learning, rather than an exercise in controlling and reducing uncertainties. Imagining the future is a collective inquiry that involves deeper sources of knowledge, such as emotions and memories, and creates a dialogue between past and future. Instead of moving towards stabilized representations of the future embedded in the narratives of progress and development, stories are intertwined to create unique compositions of the meaning of a valuable life. In the third loop of learning, the planners’ role change. In the single loop of learning, planners are the experts designing policies, envisioning futuristic landscapes, or producing forecasts. The public passively consumes the symbols of future created by professional bodies and propaganda. People are consumers of visions of futures. In the third loop of learning, planners are aware of the learning and power dimensions of future, and their role includes opening the collective imagination, cannibalizing the future according to the historical and geographical idiosyncrasies. The public is involved in the making of urban futures, learning how to use imagination as an individual and
collective muscle. People are co-creators of visions of future. Table 7.2 summarizes some of the key contrasts, implied in this thesis, between the single, double, and triple loop of learning:

**Table 7.2. The Three Loops of Learning in Planning Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Single loop of learning</th>
<th>Double Loop of Learning</th>
<th>Triple Loop of Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perspective of imagination</td>
<td>Imagining is a personal trait, and imagining alternative futures is mostly an act of the expert(s) or the individual genius.</td>
<td>Imagination is entangled in the democratic process. Because it is loosely defined, it ends forgotten.</td>
<td>In the context of urban planning, imagining is a highly complex task of juxtapositions of individual and collective perspectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of the future</td>
<td>The attempt is to “control” the future. The function is to reduce uncertainty and predict the future as far as possible.</td>
<td>Imaginative futures are an automatic outcome of the democratic process.</td>
<td>The objective is to learn from the future. Imagination has an epistemic value as a moral and inventive exercise to guide decision making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the past</td>
<td>Imagining is an act of forgetting and leaving the past behind. The logical consequence is to crush the forms of the past into the present in order to move forward to the future, producing a-critical and decontextualized utopias.</td>
<td>Past and present are the sources of learning.</td>
<td>Past experiences are a fundamental source in the imaginative process. We cannot imagine without remembering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective of Time</td>
<td>Linear perspective of time. Leaving the past behind, moving forward to the future.</td>
<td>Non-linear perspective of time. Imagining the future requires the archeology of the present: the investigation and unusual compositions of past, present, and future experiences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective of Space</td>
<td>Sanitization of the public space: the city is a technological device where memories and identities do not stick to the space.</td>
<td>City palimpsest: Space is a topography of memories and identities.</td>
<td>City palimpsest: space is saturated by temporal layers including the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective of Knowledge</td>
<td>Rationality is the mean method to approach the future. There is an attempt to identify and extrapolate past tendencies into the future.</td>
<td>The focus is on the connection between theory and practice. The meaning of knowledge is expanded to include local knowledge that escapes the western scientific narrative.</td>
<td>The focus is on the dialects of making, on the social and epistemological experimentation. Experience is the realm of re-imagining and it englobes reason, emotion, senses, social interactions, symbols, language, narrative, and space. It is not a negation of rational modes, but it is an invitation to move beyond information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor for the imagined</td>
<td>The imagined is cleaned from tensions. The metaphor is paradise.</td>
<td>The future is the continuity of resistance and struggle. The metaphor is the flow of history.</td>
<td>The imagined is the manifestation of a dynamic tension. The metaphor is tensegrity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradigm</td>
<td>This paradigm relates to a narrative of progress and development towards fixed or stable models of the good city.</td>
<td>The paradigm bounces between development and emergence.</td>
<td>This paradigm relates to a narrative of emergence and the flourishing of human potentials.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Table developed by the author.*
A triple loop of learning represents several challenges. In planning education, the epistemological shift invites us to decolonize planners’ own imaginations by (1) expanding the understanding of knowledge as beyond language (emotional, intuitive, somatic), (2) recognizing how imagination affects planner and non-planner behaviors in shaping the city, and (3) assuming how unskilled we are, as planners, to lead with models that escape our computer screens or the traditional settings of public meetings. It is also a challenge to rethink professional boundaries, the division of work among planners, artists, and therapists, to develop methodologies that can enhance the capacity of citizens to imagine, and co-create, their futures. Some inspirations include work with multimedia by Sandercock (2010) and improvisational performance by Farmer (2005). Increasing interdisciplinary dialogues includes encouraging planners to reach out to fine-arts communities and increasing art-based components in planning curriculums. It also means creating spaces, within the planning field, to accommodate the perspectives of artists, educators, and psychologists in the development of art-based methodologies that shift imaginative tensegrities in planning practice. Integrating imagination to shape theory and practice also requires discussing technological improvements that accommodate non-conventional sources of data as reliable data. As a planner in training, I learned how to analyze the city using quantitative data. Citizens’ emotions and dreams, however, can only be approached in the micro-level of organizing.

Regarding spatial or policy analysis, imagination belongs to an alien world. A triple loop of learning also finds challenges in governance. In this thesis, I discussed imagination based on the case study of an insurgent practice. Hsu (2017) defined the imagination of authorities and grassroots as parallel lines that could never meet. Is there any chance that the imagination of alternative futures can grow in cross-sector dialogues, considering all the intricate power relations between public, private, and civil society sectors? The influence of a triple loop of learning on planning practice, therefore, involves exploring the challenges in education, professional boundaries, technology, and governance.

Thus, this thesis is not describing a methodological blueprint or suggesting specific recommendations to existing planning practices. Neither am I enumerating existing art-/therapeutic-based methods – some of which are popular across grassroots movements and civil society organizations – related to this thesis’s framework for opening the collective imagination. The purpose is understanding the theoretical value of imagination and how can we collaborate to unleash collective imaginations about urban futures in practice. Further collaborative and interdisciplinary research is necessary before this framework is applicable, mature, and consistent enough to guide practice. The planning field can learn so much from the cutting-edge research in, for example, education and psychology, which the present work hardly addressed. A comprehensive framework, based on a triple loop of learning, has the potential to accommodate and orient the interface between urban planning and art-/therapeutic-based methodologies, possibly translating the epistemological shift in an organized system of interconnected practices. More than tracing imagination as a component of an alternative route for planners who care, the challenge is
how to move forward the core of the discipline to approach the complexity of imagination and future in plan making.

**Future Directions for Research**

For readers intrigued by this thesis, also refer to the following possibilities of future research:

*MTST and Grassroots Housing Movements in São Paulo Metropolitan Area*

A comprehensive study of the grassroots housing movements in São Paulo Metropolitan Area has not been conducted. Mapping occupations and displacements since the first registered “squatting” activities in the 1970s can help to understand how they shaped the urban space. Another angle is understanding how the City Statute influenced their practices and how the movements influenced the implementation of Statute’s policy tools.

Even now there is no research on the socioeconomic profile of MTST’s social base nor comparative research contrasting the profile of nearby residents engaging in the occupations and those who do not. A study of this kind would be a valuable contribution to the literature.

Further research can examine the interactions and narratives in the complex field between MTST, government, and the landlords to explore the question of how far MTST’s occupations are catalyzing political, economic, and cultural opportunities. In other words, in places where the government has low expectations of receiving tax debts from that property, where the land has low market value, and where the public has the potential to see in-debt land owners as law breakers instead of MTST.

Finally, I propose to compare (1) MTST’s attempts to realize land occupations that are subsequently blocked by the police; (2) land occupations that survive the risk of eviction in the first 24 hours; and (3) land occupations that actually are successful in providing some sort of housing solution for MTST’s base. Land occupation attempts can be tracked through police documents like eviction orders and repossession suits, *ação de reintegração de posse*. A comparative study of these different land occupations might reveal relationships between the different lands (in terms of value, tax debt, zoning, physical characteristics, use, surroundings, and location) and the decision making process of the different actors involved (MTST, government, police, and property owners) to reveal the political and economic dynamics underlying city making.

*The Cognitive and Social Basis of the Imaginative Process in Planning*

Enabling our capacities to imagine humane urban futures requires exploring the cognitive and social basis of the imaginative process, including experimentation with diverse forms of media and methodologies. How can we enhance the imaginative capacity? How can we enable the capacity to imagine together? The act of imagining is trapped within cognitive limits and potentialities. The act of
imagining together is entangled in social and power dynamics. Further research, based on an interdisciplinary dialogue, is necessary to achieve a solid theoretical framework about imagination in planning. Having a certain degree of consensus on the contours of imagination is the necessary condition needed to investigate (1) how certain planning practices affect people’s capacities to imagine the future (social learning); (2) how existent dreams of the future impact planning practice (power); and (3) if it is possible or desirable for imagination and future to become reliable and manageable data in plan making.

**Imagination, Plan Making, and Urban Governance**

In a social learning dimension, studies of planning experiences and methodologies, such as scenario planning, improvisational performances, and digital ethnography, could contribute to understanding their impact on people’s capacities to imagine the future. This investigation can lead to a deeper understanding of the imaginative process as well as to contribute to both the improvement of practices and the development of a comprehensive framework of imagination to guide planning practice. For example, a participatory action research study would benefit the understanding of future as a source of learning by measuring how diverse processes (such as Theory U and future research methodologies) influence how groups act, relate, and perceive their past, present, and future possibilities.

In the power dimension of imagination, there is much to explore about future as a disciplinary instrument orchestrating urban planning. Researching the connection between representations of ideal urban futures and decision making includes (1) the exploration of the interface between empowerment and imagination; (2) the research of the representations of ideal future cities present in the mental models embedded on the transnational networks that allow the transmission of certain policies instead of others (both in North-South and South-South collaboration), and how these representations reinforce certain power dynamics; (3) the investigation of how imagination manifests in cross-sector dialogues and multilateral organizations, how the conflict between different images of the future influence the negotiation of different stakeholders in urban planning; (4) investigation of images of the future orienting grassroots movement leadership behavior to test the hypothesis that counter-hegemonic narratives often lack affirmative visual representations of alternative futures, further exploring why it happens, how it impacts their practices, and how it could be changed (if it should be changed); (5) research of the hypothesis that the images of the future held by planners influence their behavior and the making of plans, regulations, and policies, by assessing the specific case study of an urban policy or plan, or collecting data from multiple planning professionals; (6) research of the hypothesis that images of American and European cities consistently serve as models for Brazilian urban policies, through a historiography of the future in the Brazilian urbanism; (7) the investigation of the connections between future and place, how the imagination of ideal places are formed and how they influence policy making, problem framing and solving, community engagement, and the decisions about where to live; (8) research of the interface
between hope and imagination through further exploration of the hypothesis that belonging to a community increases the sense of hope in the future.

Further research on imagination does not only benefit planning theory and practice, it also impacts planning education. Investigating planners’ imaginations, how their mental models influence urban planning decisions, can contribute to improving learning methods and technologies to interrupt the vicious cycles of the single loop of learning – bursting imaginative bubbles. A planning education aware of the imaginative dimension of planning would increase the professional capacity to operate in – as well as facilitate cross-institutional spaces based on – a double and triple loop of learning.

_The City’s Imagination Tensegrity as a Planning Tool_

So many tools exist to help analyze the dynamics of inhumane urbanism. But how far have we developed our collective capacities to imagine a humane urbanism? What if we could transform the idea of a city palimpsest (past, present, and future layers) in a planning tool? For example, in a neighborhood, the agglomeration of thousands of geotagged narratives and pictures could recompose the past (memories) and the future (dreams) layers of that community. Artificial intelligence technology could facilitate the composition of the tensegrity system, translating narratives into images (such as in Microsoft’s recent drawing bot technology[^56]), merging similar projections, and mapping tensions among diverse future perspectives. Existing technology does not yet allow planners to manage a high amount of qualitative data in spatial analysis, and we do not yet have holographic systems to visualize a 3D dynamic model of a tensegrity system. Technology, however, is not the biggest challenge. The ability to transform imagined futures, and memories, into reliable sources of data faces ethical and power dilemmas. If the imagination tensegrity is a possible model, is it ethical to model collective imaginations? Modeling a place-based imagination, by collecting narratives and images of the future in an area, easily becomes a dystopian ultra version of panopticism, now including not only the present, but also how people interact with their futures. It would be the materialization of “future as a space of struggle,” capturing not only how people interact in the present, but how they foresee their future and remember their past, and using it as an instrument of social control. Foucault would be shaking in his grave. Conversely, if these technologies could become dystopian control systems, they could also be some kind of learning tools. The models could serve as mirrors in social learning processes to help people see, understand, reshape, and give voice to their collective visions. Again, planning should not be blind to imagination’s two sides, learning and power: a path of emancipation and an instrument of control.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A. How Reality Shapes Imagination & How Imagination Shapes Reality

How Reality Shapes Imagination

_The Epistemic Value of Imagination and Utopia in Boaventura de Souza Santos and Philosophy of Mind_

Let’s start by examining the definition of imagination chosen to frame the problem. An extensive body of literature in philosophy, cognitive sciences, and psychology elaborated has multiple perspectives of the complex phenomenon of imagination. Since the objective of this thesis is to develop an exploratory research rather than provide a comprehensive review of literature, the definition of imagination will be based on the works of Kind (2016a; 2016b), Langland-Hassan (2016), Van Leeuwen (2016a and 2016b), Jackson (2016), Damasio (1994), and Warnock (1994).

Imagination is the interplay between intention and reality in a cyclical processing (Langland-Hassan, 2016, p. 65). An initial intention finds limits that get realized in the environment. In response to those limits, the person adapts her initial intentions, which would then find other blockages in her surrounding reality. Intentions and constraints are in a feedback loop. We understand the meaning of possibility by experiencing the limits of experience. Such experience is sensorial and affective. The somatic marks are the base of rational choices that orients decision making about the future and guide the present actions (Van Leeuwen, 2016a; Damasio, 1994). Therefore, our imaginations are bounded by sensorial constraints (Langland-Hassan, 2016, p. 81).

The past is not stored as information: to remember is to revive an experience. We do not store data as machines do, we are impressed by experiences (Epstein, 2016). Reality is embedded in scripts, representations of how the reality is likely to unfold. In this sense, we project in our surrounding reality generalized expectations or predications about how the objects and people in our context behave. Such “forward model’s predictions are grounded in learned perceptual regularities and contingencies” (Langland-Hassan, 2016, p. 70). Such representations orient how we perceive the constraints-and-possibilities reality and coordinate our decisions about how to interact with our surroundings. If we observe an input in a context, we expect specific outcomes, based on our beliefs and past experiences (Langland-Hassan, 2016, p.72). If we watch a plate falling from a cupboard, we expect it will break when it hits the floor. If it doesn’t break, we will learn that the plate was made of plastic, not porcelain. On a collective level and in the context of community planning, Briggs (1998) also defines scripts as the conventions or expectations of the actors (p. 6). In a public meeting, the participants hold diverse beliefs about how the conversations will unfold, what is likely and not likely to happen, what is forbidden and undesirable. Therefore, imagination is not boundless as Rousseau averted (Jackson, 2016; Kind, 2016b); the imaginative process involves a continuous clash between intentions and reality, that potentially reshape intentions (Langland-Hassan, 2016).
In addition to the sensorial limits, propositional constraints operate as limits of imaginative processes (Langland-Hassan, 2016). *Propositional constraints* are language-like or belief-like structures that do not assume necessary imagery forms and are related to background beliefs. (Langland-Hassan, 2016). For example, the strong belief that women are inferior might preclude somebody from imagining a woman in a leadership position: “Reality constrains beliefs, and beliefs govern imaginative inferences” (Van Leeuwen, 2016b, p. 93). We can think about such limits of experience strictly as the limits imposed by representation and culture, or as the intersection between media and content, mutually shaping the communicative act. Such limits can be experienced in terms of codes, which are the verbal and nonverbal forms of communication (Briggs, 1998, p. 6). In a public meeting, there are not only past and present experiences that shape the participants’ imaginations about what is likely and desirable to happen. The narratives they carry coordinate their senses to predict others’ intentions and behaviors.

Therefore, imagination is embedded in tension, and it is because this tension exists that we are able to learn from it. Imagination operates in a multitude of transactions between what we want, what we see as possible, and how we communicate these tensions. The essence of imagination is holding oneself within the multiplicity of tensions embedded in experience. The epistemic value of imagination does not reside in a glance of a fantasy or paradise. Instead, the epistemic value of imagination and utopian thinking relies on holding the (creative) tension between the glimpse of a state of ultimate freedom and its affirmation in the present, to unfold possibilities and maneuver the contrast—the struggle to see the unknown and to encounter the awkward from a deeper knowledge about reality itself. Learning processes are, therefore, at their core imaginative.

The acceptance of the hypothesis that imagination functions through the *tension* between an intention and reality implies five logical consequences. First, imagination is not an individual “hat,” but an interweaving dynamic process between individual, others, and the environment. It is a social fact, not only a cognitive or neural phenomenon. Based on the same structure of perception (Jackson, 2016, p. 50; Van Leeuwen, 2016b, p.93), imagination relies on social experiences, grounded in language, body, and emotionality. Since both experience and language are social phenomena, imagination is socially circumscribed. This affirmation itself defies the historical understanding of imagination and urban utopianism, characterized by solitary thinkers projecting the future of cities to be massively consumed...
(Fishman, 1977). Therefore, the collective imagination is always a fabric of numerous tensions between subjective pulses. Second, if imagination is defined by the narratives and experiences one has, it means that what I want is defined, to a certain degree at least, by who I am. The place one occupies in the world defines the range of possibilities and desires it will be likely to hold.

Third, it is not possible to talk about imagining the future as an act of forgetting. If the raw materials of imagination encircle the past, memory has a fundamental role to play in this process. Requesting someone to forget the past to imagine the future is another way to say to stop imagining and start to blindly reproduce the present into the future. Fourth, if imagination is constrained by somatic marks, the process of imagining cannot be only through intellectual discussions or the crafting of narratives. It somehow has to involve deeper levels of experience that go beyond language, aspects approached when discussing the triple loop of learning. Opening the imagination, imagining something that escapes the reproduction of the present into the future, needs to reach the dimensions beyond the rational self, such as emotions, perception, and body. Fifth, the hypothesis implies that intention differs from the immediate reality.

**Table A.1** Key ideas from Kind (2016a, 2016b), Langland-Hassan (2016), Van Leeuwen (2016a, 2016b), & Jackson (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imagination is reality-oriented, operating in the tensions between intention and reality. Because such dialectical movement exists, we learn through imagination.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imagination is reality oriented; therefore it is constrained by scripts (sensorial and affective past experiences that are guidelines for what is possible and probable to happen) and codes (the narratives that structure the beliefs about what is real in a social context).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination is not restricted to an individual process within someone’s head, but happens through an interplay between self, others, and space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therefore, in certain degree who I am (the place I hold in the world, one’s trajectory) defines what I want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination cannot happen by forgetting the past and moving forward into the future. Past, present, and future have singular contributions to the complex task of imagination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If imagining is entangled in our bodies, opening the collective imagination must access deeper levels of experience that are beyond language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: table developed by the author.*

The fifth logical implication presents two unanswered questions. What if such difference between intention and reality gets weakened along time through a process of adaptation such that the intention stops being frustrated by reality? In that case the intention would mostly produce something that matches the environment and can be satisfied by reality. *As the flame of a candle, imagination would stop as soon as the tension is not there anymore.* How would that phenomenon look? The second unanswered question is, if who I am has such an influence on what I want, how can one desire something that defies most of their own direct life experience? If imagination is reality oriented, how can one imagine something that escapes his immediate surrounding reality, that is not hegemonic? The first question, by which means
imagination can be sedated, is explored in Chapter 1 and Appendix D with the concepts of colonization of imagination and colonization of the future. The second question we will start to discuss in the next section and explore the case of MTST in Chapters 5 and 6.

How Imagination Shapes Reality: Imagination in a Dialectical Move

*Holding the Tension: Absence, Transgression, and Time*

If imagination is constrained by experience and is reality oriented, how can someone imagine something that is beyond her immediate experience? Langland-Hassan (2016) defines this dilemma as the *deviance objection*. The *deviance objection* is “the capacity of useful imaginings to deviate from” the constraints discussed above (p. 72). For example, if a citizen lives his whole life surrounded by high rates of crime and violence, it is mostly likely that he will project a continuity of that environment into the future. Similarly, the resident of the impoverished outskirts of a Brazilian metropolis would not visualize himself spending 10 minutes by bike to commute to work. The dominant subjectivity is intertwined in the experiences we live, the spaces we cross, the relationships we hold, throughout a series of scripts: representations, stereotypes, and expected behaviors. Even so, the emergent subjectivity is able to flourish. The questions is, how is this possible?

A hypothesis can be generated by revisiting the contributions of Santos (1995) to the study of utopianism. As we will see, it is necessary to change the perspective of imagination as constrained by reality to an imagination that is in a dialectical relation with reality, in which they mutually define each other’s limits. In this perspective, imagination refers to the capacity to hold the *tension* between these two poles: on one side reality and on the other an intention that does not find fulfillment in the present reality (which we can refer to as utopia, or an ideal projection). In this model, *tension* assumes a central role in the imaginative activity that leads us to question by which means we can invoke the tension in a given system to increase its imaginative capacity, or “open the collective imagination”. The literature review suggests that such tension between imagination and reality refers to (1) shaping the perception of what is present and what is absent, (2) the generation of surprise and mystery that transgress the existent structure of knowledge, and (3) the time transgressive nature of imagining.

Whereas Kind (2016b) argue that reality constrains imagination, Santos (1995) argues that imagination shapes the perception of the limits of reality. If we learn whenever imagination finds a counterpoint in reality, we also learn whenever reality finds a counterpoint in utopia. The dialectical tension between imagination and reality is twofold. We learn about the real, because the ideal illuminates what is present and absent in reality. We learn about what we conceived as ideal, because it gets frustrated by the limits of reality: the act of experimenting with the ideal (trying to enact an intention in the environment) illuminates what is present and absent in the ideal itself. Therefore the process of imagining a more humane city (formulating urban utopias) requires *and* provokes a deep knowledge of reality. The more knowledge you have about the present increases your chances to imagine more grounded and
impactful utopias. The experimentation with utopian projects in practice provokes reflection about what reality is and the nature of one’s real desires for change. The *imagined* outcome (if it is not a reproduction of past mental models) has the potential to produce a “hyper-deficit,” or a distorted mirror of the present reality that shifts our lenses about our direct experiences. Rather than being merely directed by reality, imagination is in a dialectical movement with reality.

Santos (1995) describes the paradigmatic change as a competition between a dominant paradigm (or dominant subjectivity) and an emergent paradigm (or emergent subjectivity), or between regulation and emancipation. The shift in the paradigm does not happen by replacing the dominant center with the emergent center. Instead, it happens through the “proliferation of margins” that ends up undermining the efficacy of the dominant paradigm as a center. The new center will be the result of a new “constellation of margins” (Santos, 1995, p. 496). According to Santos (1995), the paradigmatic transition is enacted by the emergent subjectivity, which is simultaneously an act of societal and epistemological experimentation, as well as a form of resistance. The emergent subjectivity is “a subjectivity capable of taking risks and being willing to take risks,” yet also willing and able to “explore the emancipatory possibilities of the paradigmatic transition” (Santos, 1995, p. 489). The paradigmatic change performed by the emergent subjectivity includes a societal dimension, which implies the experimentation with new social practices (Santos, 1995, p. 488), and an epistemological turn, reflected in the emergence of new forms of knowledge. The emergent subjectivity is also an act of resistance, since it is in a constant search to avoid “being collapsed into regulation” (Santos, 1995, p. 489). The emerging alternatives have to resist the process of crystallization into static identities (p. 498). The experimentation enacted by the emergent subjectivity is defined as *coasting*, the zig-zagging between the emergent and the dominant paradigms. The emergent subjectivity uses the dominant paradigm as a guide, navigating once near, once far from it. By seeing and playing with these limits, the emergent subjectivity is ultimately shaping the limits themselves (Santos, 1995, p. 497).

In both Santos (1995) and Kind (2016b), *tension* between the intention and reality, or ideal and real is where the epistemic value of imagination and utopia resides. Experimentation reveals unsolved tensions that provoke learning. The unconformities are the source of inventions (Scharmer, 2009). The special kind of experience provoked by the attempt to change reality destabilizes petrified structures of knowledge: “By shifting perspective and scale, utopia subverts the hegemonic combinations of all that exists, detotalizes meanings, deuniversalizes universes, disorients maps” (Santos, 1995, p. 481).

Experience destabilizes our representations of what is possible and what is real. We learn because we dream that reality can be something else, and because we experiment with it together.

Utopia holds a fundamental role in such social and epistemological experimentation. As defined by Santos (1995), utopia is a metaphor of hyper-deficit. The pertinence of the dream is the generation of a contrast; it illuminates what is present and what is absent, as the “silenced (counter) part of what exists” (Santos, 1995, p. 479). The emergent subjectivity navigates by articulating new combinations of
the present and new tones of understanding about what is missing. The void between the utopian and the real provokes the need for the archeology of the present, a “deep and comprehensive knowledge of reality” that see “the present as the site of excavation” (Santos, 1995, pp. 480–481). Such excavation searches for what “is part of a particular epoch by the way it stands apart from it” (p. 479), for the tensions present within the contradictions, interruptions, and silences:

**But I also mean a virtual archeology, in that its point is excavating only where nothing has been accomplished, and finding out why not, that is, why alternatives have stopped being alternatives. In this case, excavation concerns itself with silences, silencings and unasked questions: the suppressed traditions and subaltern experiences, the perspectives of the victims, the oppressed, the margins, the periphery, the South of the North, the famine of abundance, the misery of opulence, the tradition of what was never allowed to exist, unended beginnings, ununderstood intelligibility, forbidden languages and lifestyles, the intractable trash of mercantile welfare, the sweat ingrained in the spotlessness of ready-to-wear, nature inside tons of CO₂ lightly touching on our shoulders.** (Santos, 1995, p. 481)

Therefore, if imagining is an act of experimentation, it requires a vortex of a desire that constructs the perception of an absence. When what one wants cannot be fulfilled by the immediate reality, it reveals an absence in the space. Absence is not given, but formulated. The construction of the absence refers to the creation of a void to be filled, forming a notion that there is something wrong that needs to be fixed: Someone can feel a hole by touching its borders and seeing the empty space inside (Sorensen, 2015). If the desire provokes the perception of absence, the construction of absence insufflates the desire. What is present and what is absent are in a feedback loop.

The cyclical processing between intentions and reality changes through the introduction of new inputs that are elements of *surprise* and *mystery* (Langland-Hassan, 2016). The introduction of a new element that is unusual to the system generates conflict and destabilizes pre-existing premises (p. 76). By inserting new paradoxes within a system, the new experience entails an *encounter* with a *counterpoint* that breaks expectations and illuminates the previous reality as only one among several possibilities. The new, unseemly input transforms what was given as a concrete reality into a contingency that is possible to change. Consequently, “surprise” predicts the need for the encounter with what is different, unwanted, conflictual, unreadable, or absurd. The role of the contrasts produced by differences is also presented in Foucault’s proposal of heterotopia, as discussed by Harvey (2000) and Holston (1998). The introduction of counterpoints into a system creates “cracks” in the situational script, as mentioned in Scharmer (2009). Utopia therefore involves the destabilization of scripts and codes, of our notions of what is possible and what is real.

*Mystery* suggests the encounter with a gap or a crack in the situational script that lacks any immediate explanation. Langland-Hassan (2016) discusses the Script Elaborator, an idea immersed in controversies, that refers to our ability to fill the gaps left by aspects our beliefs or experiences did not predict. What is not given or explained, our imagination fills up with something else (p. 73). It implies that such a “mysterious” gap (1) can be filled by reproducing beliefs and past experiences to explain it, or...
(2) can be resistant to language, a puzzle that resists the transposition of outer narratives and remains a mystery. As an example, consider two different people attending a dance performance. At the end, one did not understand any of it, filling this gap with a series of prejudices and general statements such as “ugly,” “stupidity,” the “destruction of morals and family.” The other person, who also did not understand anything at all, would leave the performance with strange and dislocated feelings. However, the latter attendee would hold herself in the tension of not knowing, which eventually can generate new knowledge. The second behavior suggests that being engaged with “mystery” as a feature that opens up the imagination presupposes (1) a belief that you are able and allowed to perceive this unknown reality, (2) the capacity to legitimize your own interpretation about what you see, and (3) the capacity to hold yourself in the unknown, rather than quickly adopting a set of prejudices to explain the gap. Without having one’s own place in a system to be in active engagement with the unknown, the subject would abstain from imagining beyond what is given.61

We can outline the principle behind surprise and mystery as the capacity to produce experiences that are resistant to language, “not-yet-marked, not-yet-meaningful,” based on Alva Noë’s work on live performance:

My sense of performative that is also a performance is very close to Peggy Phelan’s understanding of live performance as “representation without reproduction,” an event that leaves a nonvisible remainder that is resistant to language. However, I theorize this remainder as salient, productive, and interoceptively available, rather than abject, negative, and out of reach. Performing gestures can generate sensations that are not-yet-marked, not-yet-meaningful. These sensations exact change; they may be productive of new movements, new meanings. Culture is, of course, limitlessly recuperative, and the sensory excess of gesturing is only one part of a recursive loop in which the body is freed only to be, once again, enchained. (Noë, 2015, p.17)

Again facing the paradox of imagination, we can say that on one side we tend to adapt and transform the world in a predictable way, and on other side mystery and the existence of surprises are conditions for generating new knowledge. When facing new input that won’t fit their structures of knowledge, children have to shift the structure of knowledge themselves to embrace the uncanny events (Piaget, 1952; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; as cited in Wilson and Gilbert, 2003). People tend to become skillful explainers of their worlds, transforming them into predictable environments (Gilbert, 1991; Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967 as cited in Wilson and Gilbert, 2003). But also making sense of and “ordinizing” the world dilute any trace of surprise and the emotional response attached to it. The “disenchanted world” has lost emotional power (Wilson and Gilbert, 2003). In other words, we tend to normalize the environment around us and lose our emotional response to it as a process of adaptation. However, emotional responses are great catalyzers of action. Thus, from a planning perspective, to mobilize action, we need to provoke experiences that are surprising or disruptive—that do not make sense according to one's existing categories of representation. It follows that performative forms of protest should keep changing to transgress imaginative boundaries. Furthermore, new knowledge requires the transgression of the current explanations of the real, the existing epistemological boundaries. Mediating
process to open the collective imagination requires a certain level of transgression to shift the existent structures of knowledge, by producing experiences that are paradoxes resisting language.

In addition to the proliferation of paradoxes in experience and the construction of presence-absence, the nonlinear engagement with time catalyzes tension in a system. According to Warnock (1994), “imagination enables us to move from the present both backwards and forwards in time” (p. 151). Embracing this complementary definition of imagination makes it a paradoxical beast. Imagination is an encounter with the spatial-temporal continuity of reality, since it is in a dialectical relationship with experience, and the capacity to engage with the nonlinearity of time—in other words, the possibility to navigate across time frames, composing and re-composing moments, through a nonlinear engagement with time. I propose the integration of both definitions: that imagination, as a dialectical movement, is at once reality oriented and time transgressive. That is, one’s chain of thought is applied to the same circuits of remembering and projecting, by awakening memories and dreams that destabilize the perspectives about reality. The provocation of an experience that shifts the perception of time would disrupt the usual modes of thought and performance. Therefore, the logical implication is that imagining is not a movement forward to the future, crushing the past and the present. Instead, imagining alternatives is the nonlinear engagement with both past and future, in a search for forgotten layers of experience and desire.

It is the imaginative capacity to perform a nonlinear navigation across past, present, and future that makes possible the regeneration of future forms. Opening imagination refers to one’s capacity to transgress current tensional arrangements of memories and representations, which generates unusual compositions. In fact, it is such nonlinear agency/intentionality that makes future a shape-shifting hologram. Otherwise, future is the reproduction of the past. The suppression of the nonlinear thought freezes the structure of expectations, or the myriad of symbols of future, creating stability over time.

A discussion of the cognitive architecture of imagination and utopia presents numerous similarities. Santos (1995) argued that because utopias move us beyond our reality, we are able to learn from it. Kind (2016b) argues that, because imagination is constrained by experience, we are able to learn through imagining (p. 146). Both utopia and imagination have an epistemic value. Langland-Hassan (2016) argues that “the epistemic value of imagination is at odds both with its being completely unfettered and with its being completely under intentional control” (p. 61).
### Table A.1. Key ideas: How imagination shapes reality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imagining refers to the capacity of sustaining the dynamic tension between intention and reality, ideal and real.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Therefore, imagination is in a dialectical movement with reality, rather than simply constrained by reality. The ideal shapes the limit of what is real. The real imposes limits of possibility to the ideal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The dialectical movement of imagination is dynamic experimentation between what is present and absent in the space. The archeology of the present, or the imaginative investigation of the tensions embedded in the lived experience, shape the boundaries of what one considers “real,” “possible,” and “desirable.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The imaginative tension relies on the transgression of structures of knowledge by producing experiences that are resistant to language (surprise and mystery), and the transgression of time: the capacity to engage with time in unusual and nonlinear ways, recomposing past, present, and future experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagination is paradoxical: it is simultaneously under intentional control and unconstrained, reality oriented and time transgressive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both utopia and imagination have an epistemic value: we learn through the tensions between intention and reality. If learning is in a certain degree the capacity to transgress boundaries, social learning is a transgressive and imaginative act.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* table developed by the author.

The production of paradoxes and absence, as well as nonlinear engagement, as the only answers for the meaning of opening the collective imagination is unsatisfactory. They guide us toward an endless fragmentation, or proliferation of infinite grains, without any clear suggestion of how convergence would be achievable to realize the utopian power of forming the coalitions mentioned by Friedmann (2000). The present explanations emphasize *destabilization* of existent notions through experimentation, and the tension between ideal and real. But how can destabilization and convergence coexist? Can we explain how the imaginative tension exists in the form of convergence in terms of process and projected outcomes? In other words, we have an aerial photograph of the paradigmatic transition as the proliferation of divergence and heterogeneity. But what would a photograph of a collective imagination flourishing look like?
From Closed Doors to Mass Consumption

The Faces of Utopia in the 20th Century

"Designing a dream city is easy; rebuilding a living one takes imagination." (Jane Jacobs, 1961)

Historically, the production of images of future has occurred mostly behind closed doors, not as a public exercise. In contrast, images and narratives of future have been widely distributed and circulated as a final product for mass consumption. Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928), Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) and Le Corbusier (1887–1965) were pioneers of urban utopianism, heirs of the early contributions of the utopian socialists, inspired by Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Plato’s *Republic* (Fishman, 1977). Each of them created an ideal city, a rigorous “ideal type” of the future city explained in extensive writings and detailed drawings. Assuming the urban forms as expressions of the inner social structure, these visionaries strived for radical social, economic, and political changes. These manifestos of urban revolution were reactions against the nineteenth-century metropolis. American and European cities presented an explosive population growth and shifting ways of life in the early stages of the industrial era. This scenario was “the hell that inspired their heavens” (Fishman, 1977, p. 33). And their heaven was enhanced by the optimism about modern advances in technology and the belief that progress would lead society toward an age of brotherhood and freedom: “the conflicts of the early Industrial Revolution were only a time of troubles that would lead inevitably to the new era of harmony” (Fishman, 1977, p. 33).

Outsiders in the contemporary academic and social movements’ scene, they forged solitary works. Their visions were disregarded by the architect-administrators concerned with technical issues and by the middle-class reformers whose philanthropic performances barely attempted to defy the common preconceptions about wealth and poverty. Without support of professional planners or socialist movements, their work remained as masterpieces carved by their own personal values, life trajectories, aesthetic preferences, and political perspectives. Holding their perfect plans, they intended to develop their own movements embedded in the belief of the crucial role of imagination to change the world. As Robert Fishman (1977) states, “the ideal city is the genre of the outsider who travels at one leap from complete powerlessness to imaginary omnipotence” (p. 29). Aside from its contemporary isolation, the utopian reflections of Howard, Wright, and Le Corbusier are remarkable in further manifestations of urban utopianism in the 20th century.

Though the production of images occurred mostly behind closed doors, the circulation of the future as a final product for mass consumption was not ignored by the media. An American cartoon series in the 1950s, named “Closer Than We Think,” is an example of the diffusion of utopian thinking through mass media. Launched in journals over a period of five years, the comic strip achieved a peak of 19 million readers in the United States and Canada (Novak, 2012). Inspired by the ideas of the English landscaper Geoffrey Jellicoe, American car designer Arthur Radebaugh became a utopian cartoonist. The colors and general style of his work express the widespread belief in progress and a better future after...
World War II. The car is a central element in the landscape. And, in general, technology is preeminent in his drawings (Dunn, Cureton, & Pollastri, 2014, p. 19). The media—in newspapers and movies, for example—are not only instruments of optimistic utopian expression; they also form a sphere wherein thinkers discuss and visually represent disruptive future scenarios. Dystopian expressions include numerous examples such as the movies *A Clockwork Orange*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1971), and *Children of Men*, by Alfonso Cuarón (2006) (Dunn, Cureton & Pollastri, 2014, p. 76). Utopias and dystopias have filled the collective imagination. The future becomes a product to be consumed by a mass of passive subjects who are excluded from the processes of future creation.

The potential that utopian thinking might contribute to paradigmatic change is amortized by exclusionary processes. It is nourished by the idea of imagination as the exercise of the solitary genius, where future thinking is ideally a restricted private or professional exercise with public impact. The objective is largely the prediction and creation of novelty, rather than the understanding of future as a source of collective learning. Therefore, collective prospective inquiry is far from being a naturalized part of civic life. However, the inherent complexity of the task of thinking and creating urban futures cannot be satisfactorily achieved by private imagination—it cannot be outsourced to specialists. Robert Fishman (1977), referring to Lévi-Strauss’s definition of city as a “social work of art,” reflects thus:

> Its densely interwoven structure is the product of thousands of minds and thousands of individual decisions. Its variety derives from the unexpected juxtapositions and the unpredictable interactions. How can a single individual, even a man of genius, hope to comprehend this structure? And how can he devise a new plan with the same satisfying complexities? (Fishman, 1977, p. 36)

If utopian thinking embodies a political character, as Friedman (2000) stated, and its complexity cannot be perceived by a single social actor or, we might add, specific societal segments, urban utopianism as a restricted or private exercise cannot sustain its own legitimacy. The complexity of the urban environment drains any possibility of efficacy from the exclusionary process of urban utopianism. Its confinement to the geopolitical sphere of the Global North, the social boundaries of the economic elites, and professional associations of architects and urban planners transforms utopian thinking into a hegemonic discourse that is reproduced to be passively assimilated by the masses, instead of a political and ontological instrument forwarding an increase of freedom and social justice. Thus, the legitimacy of those narrow processes is in check. Utopian thinking is doomed to fail because its exclusionary processes create both illegitimate and infecund results.

The potential of utopian thinking, however, is surrounded by multiple sources of rejection. During the 20th century, utopianism faced resistances from both sides of the political spectrum, as well as from the societal trend of the rationalization of life. On one side, TINA (there is no alternative) constructs capitalism as a solid and inevitable destiny, transforming the imagination of alternative futures a dead-end street. On the other side, part of the left believes that imagining the future is a useless romantic exercise, a reformist attempt, or a dogmatic effort: “The faith in the spontaneous creative powers of revolutionary action have disarmed the constructive political imagination of the left” (Unger, 1987a, as cited in Harvey,
In planning, utopian thinking has been associated with the failures of the modernist project and considered a tool of control and an expression of totalitarianism. In addition, the rationalization of social life and the development of a scientific rationality since the 19th century have created a hostile environment to utopianism (Santos, 1995). Harvey (2000) interprets such resistance against utopianism as a sign of the “collapse of specific utopian forms” (p. 195), rather than a rejection of the politically liberating purpose underlying some practices of utopianism. If utopian thinking is not per se an act of political domination, Harvey’s proposal leaves us the challenge of reevaluating and re-creating the purpose, the process, and the form of urban utopianism in the 21st century.
APPENDIX C

Principles for Imagining a Humane Urbanism

Moving Toward Urban Utopian Forms for the 21st Century

In this appendix, I discuss the seven key principles to think about how an imagination in the public domain integrates the discussions on Theory U, philosophy of mind (see Appendix A), and utopian thinking in the 20th century. Several authors and their multidisciplinary scholarship help us investigate what an urban utopian or a new political imagination could look like. These bodies of works include those by Harvey (2000), Donald (1997), Davoudi (2013), Foucault (1966), Unger (1987a), Holston (1998), Santos (1995), and Scharmer (2009). Based on such a multidisciplinary body of scholarship, I have identified seven key principles representing the main ideas concerning the process and how the imagination of humane urban futures could look. These main principles focus on (1) destabilization, difference, and transgression; (2) making (lived experience or experimentation of new social and epistemological forms); (3) the exploration of tensions; (4) the exploration of reality as a multi-layered structure; (5) shifting the perspective of time; (6) the inclusion of space as a dimension of utopianism; and (7) outcomes as uncanny models rather than orderly and harmonious representations.

Transgression

The first element refers to utopia as the capacity to provoke change by transgressing the existent meanings crystallized in language and discourse. Foucault was the first to propose the term “heterotopia” in 1966, although he later abandoned it. According to Hetherington (1997), as cited in Harvey (2000), heterotopia refers to “spaces of alternate ordering”:

_Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language...Utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language ... [heterotopias] desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyrics of our sentences._ (Foucault, 1966, cited in Harvey, 2000, p.184)

Similarly, Santos (1995) argues that the emergent subjectivity de-totalizes meanings and provokes the “proliferation of margins.” Holston (1998) emphasizes heterogeneity and the investigation of experiences escaping the norm. Donald (1997) argues that “it is a poetics of imagination in that it makes those codes strange in order to liberate new ways of thinking” (p. 185). The imaginative tension relies on the transgression of structures of knowledge (see Appendix A) by producing experiences that are resistant to language (surprise and mystery), and the transgression of time relies on the capacity to engage in unusual and nonlinear ways with time. However, Harvey (2000) argues that the celebration of multiplicity alone leaves us with an endless deconstruction and proliferation of new meanings, without any substantial insight into the formulation of a new utopian mode. Transgression by itself cannot do much to disclose humane urban futures. In synthesis, the first principle to guide the practice of opening the collective imagination is the transgression of existing power structures manifested through space and language.
Making, Experience

A trend in the literature review indicated a focus on lived experience (Holston, 1998), as well as social and epistemological experimentation (Santos, 1995). The site of utopian exploration is more precisely the present. Similar to the archeology of the present (Santos, 1995), Harvey (2000) proposed that a spatiotemporal utopianism would be focused on the “tangible transformations of the raw materials given to us in our present state” (p. 191). The challenge of this investigation is to identify in the present the possibilities of change, the signs of alternatives to the existent geographical development (p. 196). Foucault (1966) and Unger (1987a) also suggested the exploration of alternatives through practical engagement with existent social processes, institutions and personal behaviors, disrupting homogeneity (Harvey, 2000, p. 186). Harvey goes further, arguing that such spatiotemporal urbanism refers to engagement with the dialectic of making, a “process rather than a thing” (2000, p.184), that dissolves the perception of living in “a stable world already made and discovered” (2000, p. 190). The dialectic of making would simultaneously be a personal and institutional transformation: “Only by changing our institutional world can we change ourselves at the same time. [...] The objective [...] is to build a more radically empowered and empowering system of democratic governance that can be both liberatory and transformative.” (Unger 1987a, cited in Harvey, 2000, p. 187).

This discussion about social and epistemological experimentation resembles Scharmer’s (2009) proposals on presencing as the reconnection of self-others and self-senses discussed earlier in this chapter. Imagination is reality-oriented, therefore it is constrained by scripts (sensorial and affective past experiences that are guidelines for what is possible or probable to happen) and codes (narratives that structure the beliefs about what is real in a social context). Therefore, in certain degree who I am defines what I want. Imagination is not restricted to an individual process within someone’s head, however; it happens through an interplay between self, others, and space. Furthermore, this perspective implies that experimentation is beyond a narrow definition of abstract, intellectual, or rational inquiry. The process of revealing possible and desirable futures involves more complex learning modes. If imagining is entangled in our bodies, opening the collective imagination has to access deeper levels of experience that are beyond language (see Appendix A). Therefore, a second principle to guide an investigation of the disclosure of collective imaginations refers to a dialectics of making that explores the possibilities in the present, at both the personal and organizational levels.

Tensions

The literature contains a special attention to exploring tensions and understanding imagination as a dialectical process. Harvey (2000) emphasizes the need to search for internal contradictions (p. 193). Holston (1998) defines the search of alternatives as the investigation of “deformations,” or counter forms of the lived experience. Santos (1995) proposing a virtual archeology of absences and interruptions,
presents the role of utopia as the creation of tension between ideal and real (hyper-deficit), and discusses the paradigmatic transition as a zig-zagging between the dominant and the emergent paradigms. Scharmer (2009) notices that presencing and absencing are in dialectical movement, and that learning from the future is far from a linear process. In philosophy of mind (Appendix A), we see that imagination is reality-oriented, operating in the tensions between intention and reality. Imagination is in a dialectical movement with reality, rather than just constrained by reality. The ideal shapes the limit of what is real. The real imposes limits of possibility to the ideal. Imagining thus refers to the capacity of sustaining the dynamic tension between intention and reality, ideal and real.

The dialectical movement of imagination is dynamic experimentation between what is present and absent in the space, revealing the tensions and shaping the perception itself of presence and absence. Because such dialectical movement exists, we learn through imagination. Therefore, the archeology of the present, or the imaginative investigation of the tensions embedded in the lived experience, shapes the boundaries of what one considers “real,” “possible,” and “desirable.” In the previous principles we saw a focus on the emergent possibilities, but the third principle suggests that the process of enabling the collective imagination should include attention to the tensions embedded in the unexpressed, the repressed counterparts that though hidden, are present. Furthermore, it suggests a close connection between transgression and learning. Both utopia and imagination have an epistemic value because we learn through the tensions between intention and reality. And if learning is in a certain degree the capacity to transgress boundaries, social learning is a transgressive and imaginative act.

Multilayered Structure

Across the proposals of new utopian modes or imaginations, there is the common idea of experience as a multi-layered structure to be explored. In Scharmer (2009), we have the interface between invisible and visible, the proposal of accessing deeper layers of experience and knowledge through the U-Journey, and the metaphor of seeds of future, a future that is here and about to emerge. In Santos (1995) the metaphor of archeology of the present sees the existent reality as a site of excavation of alternatives within experience. Holston (1998) proposes that reality is double-encoded: the norm is a surface beneath which is a realm of possibilities. Harvey (2000) suggests that utopias are the “hidden signifiers of our desires” (p. 195). In this sense, all these authors are talking about revealing or turning visible layers of experience, time, and desire. The fourth principle suggests framing reality as a multilayered structure from which visible and invisible counterparts mutually exist.

Time

Shifting the perception of time is a central aspect of shaping a new utopian mode. According to Scharmer (2009), “the social field is a time sculpture in the making.” and shifting the field requires establishing a dialogue or intersection between two streams of time: one from the past and other from the
future (p. 250). As discussed in depth in Appendix A, past experiences exercise great influence in the content of one’s imaginings, and one’s capacity to engage in nonlinear ways with time can possibly expand the imaginative scope. Imagination cannot happen by forgetting the past and moving forward into the future. Past, present, and future have singular contributions to the complex task of imagination. Davoudi (2013) argues for a shift in the way we approach the future. In the past, the perception of the world was mechanical and predictable, with outcomes caused by a linear chain of cause and effects. Perception of the world has changed toward complexity and unpredictability, and nonlinear connections between cause and effect. Therefore, the perception of time should change from linear to nonlinear, and the relationship with future from control or prediction to imagination: “we may not be able to control the future but nothing stops us from carving out opportunities from past memories, present experiences and future aspirations all linked together not in a linear but in a cyclical way” (Davoudi, 2013).

Space

The role of space has received peripheral attention in the literature reviewed. Santos (1995) and others focused on the social and epistemological levels, leaving space outside their framework. Scharmer (2009) referred to space as a container for the social processes that unfold in the U-Journey, but again his focus was on the individual and group levels. Harvey (2000) also treats space as a container, suggesting that any sort of utopian experimentation requires “some sort of space in which it can function” (p. 177). Harvey (2000) contrasts two forms of utopianism: utopianism of temporal process or social process, and utopianism of spatial form. All forms of experimentation are limited by the dynamics of spatialization. The author suggests that the relationship between utopianism and the production of the space is an unexplored field, leaving the reader with the following questions: “How, then, can a stronger utopianism be constructed that integrates social process and spatial form? Is it possible to formulate a more dialectical form of utopianism, construct, even, a utopian dialectics?” (Harvey, 2000, p. 196). The sixth principle, especially important in urban planning and left as an open question for future inquiry, refers to the use of physical space to support the systemic realization of the other principles.

Uncanny Models

Most of the discussions regarding what a new form of utopianism should look like has focused on process. However, if in part the work of imagination is to destabilize the fixity of the existent forms, it also requires the remaking of new images of the good city (Kearney, 1991; Donald, 1997). Some attention also has been given to how an outcome would look under the light of a new political imagination. Holston (1998) argued in favor of the creation of models that include ambiguity, indeterminacy, the unintended, and the unexpected. Davoudi (2013) suggests treating change as the norm and order as the exception, thus thinking in terms of outcomes characterized by flexibility and adaptability. Instead of producing non-conflictual arenas or paradises sanitizing the collective intelligence, the outcomes should embrace a
dynamic tension. A review of literature revels no more precise definition of outcomes in new modes of utopianism.

The seventh principle to open the collective imagination is the design of uncanny, highly flexible and responsive models embedded in tensions. Instead of producing a painting of how the future should look (and seeking a harmony that eliminates the hidden tensions), I suggest visualizing an outcome in terms of dynamic tensegrity sculptures that would serve as learning models for the collective intelligence. Imagination tensegrity, explored on chapter 1, refers to a field of dynamic oppositional forces in balance where the existence of the system depends on the existence of the tension. When trying to understand the peculiarity of utopia, I conducted a short experiment with some of my friends. I asked them the following question: If a chair were a utopia, how would it look like? What would it do or say? Two of the answers, copied below, help to illustrate a shift in the understanding of utopia as a harmonious and static end to be achieved, to a dynamic learning tool that illuminates the multiplicity of deep needs and silenced dreams hold in tension within groups:

*Something like a bean bag chair with an artificial intelligence. A chair that could adapt to your varying moods and the various needs different parts of your body have for support. [...] So you know sometimes your neck hurts, sometime your legs hurt. Sometimes you want to sit up straight, sometimes you want to lean back. So it is like a chair that can adapt and respond to your needs. Like a pillow that not only can adapt to whatever shape you want it to take or function you want it to perform, but actually helps you to figure out/works with you to find the best shape/function for you in that moment.*

*It would be upside down. And everybody could sit on a different leg or in the middle. Enjoying watching each other from different angles and with space for everyone who has different ideas about perspective.*

These principles are clues for a long-term investigation of how imagination can serve the flourishing of a humane urbanism. The task worth pursuing is not how to “fix” the city and make it more “transparent.” Planning is the work of discovering ways we can live—and imagine together—worlds that are worth living:

*Those who fantasize about turning the city into an efficient machine, with all its component parts flawlessly engineered and geared, misrecognize the space of the city. They see it as a territory to be bounded, mapped, occupied and exploited, a population to be managed and perfected. This is the overweening dream of Enlightenment rationality: to render the city transparent, to get the city right, and so to produce the right citizens. It is a dream which, in disavowing them, is doomed to reproduce and repeat the anxieties, repressions and censorships that provoke the dream. It wishes away the aggression, the conflict, and the paranoia that are also part of urban experience. The city is not a problem that can be solved. It is the eternal, impossible question of how we strangers can live together. Rebuilding a living city—a city which jumbles together multiple and conflicting differences—therefore requires less a Utopian plan than a poetics of political imagination.* (Donald, 1997, p. 182)
APPENDIX D

Colonization of the Imagination and Colonization of the Future

Not Seeing Reality, not Seeing the Future

Closing the gap between democracy and imagination extends the discussion from learning to power. If philosophy of mind and organizational development contribute to understanding the intersection between imagination and learning, the ideas of colonization of imagination and colonization of the future illuminate the intersection between imagination and power. In this appendix, I argue that the suppression of experience with reality and time (colonization of the imagination) produces the stabilization of the form of future possibilities (colonization of the future). Colonization of imagination produces generic civilians disconnected from historical and geographic processes, objects (not subjects) of knowledge production, filled by desires for promised, yet unachievable, lands. Colonization of the future is the search to produce stability in the representation of the desirable future.

In the Three-Dimensional View of Power, Lukes (1974) proposes that it is possible to differentiate subjective and real interests. The most effective and subtle use of power is to shape the preferences and desires, what people want, in a way that a layer of artificial interests substitute people’s real interests, draining the impetus of discordance in the first place. There is no conflict, because everybody wants what those in power want:

*Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial?* (Lukes, 1974, p. 24)

The concepts colonization of imagination and decolonization of imagination were born independently and almost simultaneously during the 1990s. In 1995, Pieterse and Parekh edited Decolonization of Imagination: Culture, Knowledge and Power, which came as a result of a conference about the topic in Amsterdam (1991). In 1997, Higgs and Cypher published the article “Colonizing the Imagination: Disney’s Wilderness Lodge” without direct reference to Pieterse and Parekh. Based on the case study of Disney’s Wilderness Lodge in Orlando, Florida, Higgs and Cypher (1995) defined colonization of imagination as the reconfiguration of people's imaginative capacities through the dissociation of a person from its own context and the obliteration of the value of reality and experience. In 2007, Quijano referred to colonization of the imagination and/or imaginary in the context of epistemology, modernity, and colonialism. In his perspective, colonization of imagination happens by perpetuating the objectivist view that divides body from mind, emotion from reason, subject and object, and by formulating a linear evolutionary continuum: from the uncivilized to the civilized. A rational subject, possessing a superior mode of knowledge, has the authority to analyze and control objects, ultimately defining the nature of the object.
Higgs and Cypher (1997) coined the concept *colonization of imagination* as “one piece within the larger project of colonialism” (p. 110), a process that relies on the capacity to massively reproduce a carefully constructed narrative that turns out to be perceived as common sense and assimilated as reality itself. Representations of “improved” realities (hyper-realities) dissociated from geographic and historical contexts replace people’s experience with reality. Such timeless and self-proclaimed objective representations are cleaned of tensions, conflicts, paradoxes, disparities, or “unwanted” attributes (such as danger and dirt). Reality becomes devalued as something easily constructed and worse than the improved hyper-realities. Through the systemic devaluation of reality and the massive reproduction of these hyper-realities, the hyper-real eventually becomes naturalized and occupies the center from which people make moral decisions: instead of trusting their own immediate experience, the artificial reality turns into the base from which evaluate and decide. The ethical reasoning is dislocated from the direct embodied experience to an artificial representation of reality forged by an external device. In the center of their definition of colonization of imagination is the contrast between simulacrum and reality, influenced by the ideas of Albert Borgmann, Jean Baudrillard, and Umberto Eco. According to Borgmann (1995, cited in Higgs and Cypher, 1997), the fundamental difference between simulacrum and reality is that reality has a “commanding presence and a telling continuity with the surrounding world,” a spatial-temporal continuity, while a simulacrum, such as a skiorama, “provides a disposable experience that is discontinuous with its environment” (p. 38). Thus, colonization of imagination is the suppression of one’s experience with such spatial-temporal continuity.

According to Quijano (2007), a universal and superior mode of knowledge paved the way for an *epistemological genocide*. Knowledge formation as defined by Descartes emerged as a justification of the power dynamics in the colonization period: “Cogito, ergo sum.” “I think, therefore I am.” Rooted in Cartesian theory, the objectivist view advocates for two dimensions separated by a gap: the rational, cognitive, conceptual, and formal on one side, and the bodily, imaginative, emotional, material, and perceptual on the other side (Johnson, 2013, p. xxv). While the first set is elevated, the second is neglected as inferior. The rational and isolated *subject* apprehends the *object*. The superior rationality of the European society was able to dominate the objectified indigenous populations all around the globe (Quijano, 2007). In consequence, this binary perspective separated subject-object, and subject from its own nonrational self, creating devastating cultural and epistemological consequences. Such narrow epistemology shapes the perception of time as a linear evolutionary continuum and the notion of modernity (Quijano, 2007). The Western, “well-educated” society has a superior way of knowledge, while the Eastern and poor habitants of the cities are immersed in ignorance and superstition. The goal is to be like the First World, the American and European societies. We are not just seeing the world through the same channels; we are walking in the same direction, the same image of future—modern times. The modern notion of progress elaborated during the Renaissance and relying on a linear notion of time is “now deeply rooted in nearly every intellectual corner of the western world” (Hägerstrand, 1985, p. 36).
In Quijano (2007) what he calls epistemological genocide involves the objectification of the other, the suppression of a whole dimension of human experience, and the transformation of time into a linear continuum.

Colonization of imagination is the atrophy of human imaginative capacities by suppressing their possibilities to interpret and value their own direct experiences, therefore undermining their capacities to trace stories about themselves, about others, and about their places. By weakening the link between people, their historical and geographic reality, and their capacity to reflect on and reimagine their own experiences, an extraneous unchangeable reality (hyper-reality) overtakes one’s direct knowledge about one’s own reality. The reconfiguration of imaginative capacities ends the human condition of being storytellers with a place in the world, eroding projective agency, and shaping subjects as timeless and placeless objects. If we learn through the play between imagination and reality (see Appendix A), what if reality is not present and imagination is replaced by a fantastic already-constructed hyper-reality? In sum, colonization of imagination is the suppression of humane experience, the dissociation of subjects from their own life experiences/own right to acknowledge the world, shaping a generic civilian disconnected from historical and geographic processes.

Connecting to the discussion in philosophy of mind (see Appendix A), the erosion of the imaginative capacities refers to the suppression of the tensions between intention and reality, and replacing reality by a hyper-reality. This closes down of the imagination is the atrophy of one’s capacity to acknowledge reality, or engage with the emotional and sensorial experimentation of the scripts in order to think and learn about them, and the sedation of the ability to interpret the codes or narratives and formulate new or different meanings for reality. And instead of perceiving or exploring directly the reality or such spatial-temporal continuum, one connects to a form of hyper-reality, a fantasy that replaces and undermines the value of reality itself. In a sense, stopping imagining requires an end to seeing and sensing reality. Colonizing the public imagination is the production of invisibility as a performative act. In the common parlance, we used to think about imagination as the act of flying, being detached from the ground. An alternative metaphor could be the act of jumping: where one feels the constraints of gravity, learning about the limits and potentials of one’s own body, and yet without abandoning the project of trying to achieve higher heights. Colonization of the imagination involves the sedation of tensions and the consequent disengagement with reality—since real engagement, in practice, is always a courageous movement toward a tissue full of fissures, and glimpses of joy.

If we apply this same framework of colonization of imagination (i.e., the suppression of the experience with reality and replacing it with hyper-reality) to the dimension of time, we can access the core definition of colonization of future. Hägerstrand (1985) coined the idea of colonization of future as the effort to create stability over time by manipulating embedded time or one’s perception and experience of time (p. 40). Such stability refers to the “stability in human interaction” that is enacted by physical means, such as buildings that can prevail over centuries, and non-physical instruments, such as the
promise or social contract. Changing slightly the angle, we can say that colonizing the future is the suppression of one’s experience with the future, which is replaced by a fixed idea of progress or development—for example, when a low-income neighborhood dreams about having the surveillance equipment in public spaces of higher income areas, instead of deepening the knowledge of what unique reality they live and what kind of unique future they would like to create. Following Quijano (2007) when discussing the epistemological damage caused by the idea of a linear evolutionary continuum, I argue that closing the imagination is to impose the linearity of time (perception) that segregates past (forgetting), present (de-sensing), and future (absencing) as frames ontologically apart. Therefore, the definition of closing the imagination entails the suppression of one’s experience with reality and time, provoking frozen future possibilities. By colonizing the imagination, we colonize the future. The “colonized future” is the stabilization of a shape of future or possibility to create continuity over time. Table D.1 summarizes the main ideas of colonization of imagination and colonization of the future.

Table D.1 Colonization of Imagination and Colonization of the Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonization of Imagination</th>
<th>Colonization of the Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Colonization of Imagination is the suppression of one’s experience with reality by (1) undermining nonrational dimensions of human experience, (2) undermining the value of reality and direct experience, (3) creating hyper-realities that are better than reality, (4) shaping the perception of time as a linear evolutionary continuum pointing towards a developed reality.</td>
<td>• Colonization of the future is the attempt to produce stability over time by stabilizing the shapes of future possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Through the suppression of experience, reality is replaced by a hyper-reality, which occupies the center of moral decision making.</td>
<td>• Such stabilization occurs through a linear conception of time that allocates future as a distant place, “outside” the present, to where we are moving. Such linear conception suppresses one’s experience with the future as a layer of not-yet-embodied knowledge that can be accessed and played with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Colonization of imagination produces generic civilians disconnected from historical and geographic processes, objects not subjects of knowledge production.</td>
<td>• Imagining the future is, therefore, an ill-developed muscle, picking alternatives from a future a la cart. One can choose between a set of alternatives, but not change the range of possibilities itself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: table developed by the author.
MTST: A Hierarchical and Horizontal Organizational Structure

How MTST Functions as a Sensitive and Articulate Organism

Over 20 years of accumulated experience, MTST has created a complex and sophisticated organizational structure. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an in-depth analysis of the idiosyncrasies, tensions, or historical evolution of their organizational practices. Thus, the aim of this section is to introduce the movement’s formalized and publicly available features, as well as its informal dynamics. These are drawn based on MTST interviews, as well as their Regimento Interno and Cartilha de Princípios.

In terms of transparency (i.e., how much information is available to the public), MTST walks a thin line between safety and legitimacy. Since the movement’s strategies include legal and illegal methods, safety concerns arise around the disclosure of information. For example, the decision-making processes and the formation of the higher levels of the organization, which are responsible for the formulation and delegation of strategic interventions, are intentionally undisclosed. On one hand, MTST needs to have the ability to legally and politically protect its members. On the other, the organization needs to reveal some aspects to public appreciation, such as their principles, goals, and practices, in order to sustain a position of legitimacy in the democratic game. This second aspect is also an issue of protection. The support of their causes by the general public and the visibility of their interventions protect the movement from abusive uses of violence by police and military forces, and also strengthens their power of negotiation with the public and private sectors. The art of building itself as a legitimate threat encompasses the need to calibrate the level of transparency that generates an unpredictable consistency.

MTST’s organizational structure has four main levels—national, state, regional, and local—and three major dimensions—political, organizational, and territorial collectives. Political collectives define the political strategies, corresponding to the national and state levels. Organizational collectives, or sectors, are responsible for the functions necessary for the movement’s operation, being present in the state, regional, and local levels. The territorial collectives, or nuclei, coordinate the local works, and, by being directly connected to the acampamentos, they represent the strongest link between the militantes and the social base.

The organizational collectives represent seven sectors: (1) Political Formation (Setor de Formação Política); (2) Negotiation (Setor de Negociação/Articulação); (3) Organization (Setor de Organização); (4) Self-defense (Setor de Auto-Defesa ou Segurança); (5) Self-sustenance and Finance (Setor de Autosustentação e Finanças); (6) Communication and Symbolism (Setor de Comunicação e Simbolismo); and (7) Community Work (Setor Comunitário). A sector might have a few members or be as large as hundreds of participants. Some of them are present in the local level (the occupations) and the state, while others refer to the state level only. For example, the Communication and the Political
Formation sectors are not permanent collectives in any occupation; they circulate across many occupations in a region. However, Self-defense and Organization might have a fixed group or representatives in each occupation as well as regional and state sectors. Each sector has specific functions and goals, as well as different processes of admission and training. Since their responsibilities vary so much, the composition of each sector might vary from others in terms of skills and background of their members. Before we outline some of the main features of each sector, this section will establish some preliminary notions.

In addition to the political, organizational, and territorial collectives, MTST organizes *Brigadas* (brigades) and *Frentes* (coalitions). *Brigadas* are forms of engagement not related to a single occupation, for example, the communication brigade that work with a specific task across occupations. *Frentes* are the coalitions among several organizations that MTST initiates or in part form, such as the *Frente Povo Sem Medo* (Coalition People with No Fear) and housing coalitions involving civil society organizations in an area struggling around common problems.

MTST translates their philosophical perspective into six organizational principles: (1) unity in action and freedom in discussion; (2) collective decision and individual responsibility; (3) Only those who are engaged in action have the right to participate in decision making; (4) militant discipline and socialist values; (5) transparency in relationships; and (6) construction of popular power.

MTST’s organizational structure embraces both hierarchical and horizontal modes of decision making. As a consequence, three main flows of communication happen: within the collective (horizontal), between that collective and the correspondent collective in the superior and inferior levels (vertical), and between the different organizational and territorial collectives in the same level. The interactions between the different levels can only be grasped through an ethnographic study, which is beyond the scope of this project. However, a few basic dynamics can be highlighted. The local level, such as the territorial collectives and *acampamentos*, have a certain degree of autonomy to decide the projects and actions within their jurisdiction. At the local level, the *militantes* of the upper levels occupy strategic leadership positions, such as negotiation, and engage in the formation of new *militantes* by quotidian interactions related to their responsibilities and/or specific events of political formation. In addition, the sectors in upper levels have the power to activate and delegate responsibilities to the lower levels. The lower levels have the right to access the upper level to request support or assistance for actions that are beyond their jurisdiction. In terms of representation and decision making, a variety of forms, roles, and rules compose their processes. So it would be a gross generalization to define the decision-making process within the collectives as voted by majority or consensus, due the complexity of the power dynamics and communication flows. The coexistence of hierarchy and cooperative is far from a solved tension.

The combination of horizontality and hierarchy might be a key component in promoting favorable conditions to the creation of popular power. First, the movement social base is composed of working poor who might or not have been involved in organizing before. Although only a survey could
confirm such a statement, it is possible to assume based on the interviews and my field observations that many of the participants are engaging in horizontal processes of decision making for the first time. Second, the hierarchical component guarantees a capacity to articulate fast and coordinated responses to the environment. Since timing is a fundamental element in the political game, this agility increases MTST’s capacity of negotiation with the state. Thus, the combination of horizontality and hierarchy simultaneously articulates the empowerment of the members with the strengthening of their organization’s political power in the urban struggles.

In January 2017, I went to MTST’s head office to complete the collection of some documents and to conduct the second part of an interview. As arranged, I arrived at 10:00 AM. A wide-eyed Antonio, the executive secretary, approached me. “You don’t know, right? Guilherme Boulos was arrested at 7:00 AM this morning.” Although all my plans for that morning changed, I could not have been more grateful that I was there in that exact moment. During the next hours I would see a drama unfold that demonstrated how connected and agile their social fabric was. Each minute a new militante arrived and left the office. The communication wildly appropriated all their social media groups and channels. New information and decisions were being quickly transmitted all around the city. I could feel the urgency and the patience coexisting in a lively tension in their bodies. Groups were ready to start trancamentos (road blocking) all around the city, constantly asking for permission to start. Many questions popped up: “Are you going to block the roads?” “All the people are upset and want to do something. Can I tell them to go to police station [a 3-hour distance at least]? They want to go there.” “All the occupations close to the area are already communicated and organized to go to the police station.” The live dialogue, with back and forth, persisted. Ideas of social media campaigns appeared and were implemented, communication noises solved, news monitored in real time. The movement decided strategically not to make trancamentos (road blocking) as a form of protest that day. However, the tension was so large that the leaders could not hold back two trancamentos that ended up happening that day. This incident demonstrates how the existence of a hierarchy, and relatively clear communication channels and jurisdictions, made the movement a sensitive and articulate organism that is able to prompt and strategically act upon the environmental events.
APPENDIX F

Visibility is the Chance for Respect: Protection, Legitimacy, and Dignity

Visibility functions as a way of protection and legitimation. Opening a dialogue with a broader audience in the cities contributes to the movement’s protection from criminalization and police brutality. Communication is an instrument of resistance. If the periphery is invisible and secluded, thus subject to abuse, MTST breaks this communication gap and seeks to gain the public support by constructing an identity of a legitimate organization with a legitimate cause. The production of visibility also contributes to building a sense of dignity: being respected, regardless of income level and race, when protesting for their rights. Visibility provides a ground to build respect for who they are and what they are fighting for.

MTST’s visibility has increased over the years; there is more awareness of who they are, or at least a recognition of their flag. In the past, MTST relied solely on their communication committee to publicize their protests. Today, both mainstream and independent media cover their actions, although from different perspectives. In recent years, with the increased access to social media, the emergent independent media groups, such as “Mídia Ninja,” “Jornalistas Livres,” and “Outras Palavras,” have started to introduce alternative perspectives to the mainstream media and shape public opinion. Although with smaller audiences than the corporate media, these groups didn’t ignore or criminalize the practices of grassroots movements. In the case of MTST, they cover protests and open spaces of dialogue with an audience beyond the peripheries. In addition, journalists inside the mainstream media who identify themselves with the movement’s objectives follow main events publicized by MTST and have access to the movement to follow up and double-check information. Even those in the press who criminalize the movement, “selling” tragedies and chaos to win audience, contribute to giving attention to MTST.

Visibility is fundamental to protecting MTST from police brutality. MTST faces the abuse of power from the military police during rallies and occupations. The examples vary considerably, from threats of setting fires in occupations to unjustified arrests and use of stun bombs in forced evictions. The interactions between the militantes and the police is full of tension and nuance, interchanging moments of negotiation, dialogue, and confrontation. Zelídeo has been a militante in MTST for several years. In his opinion, criminalization, though harmful, is still a better option than silence that would leave the movement more vulnerable to police abuse. Before he joined the movement, he coordinated land occupations and other housing fights with smaller associations. When comparing both experiences, he explains how MTST is a “showcase” that increases the chances to protect the protesters from police brutality. “From five years to now, the MTST is known outside the country, too […] Some speak well, others speak badly, but they have to divulge.” Recanting MTST acts at the local, national, and international levels helps to strengthen their identity and protect them from State violence.

But if visibility is a means of protection, it is also a territory in constant dispute, where what is at stake is the legitimacy of their cause and methods. Making public opinion acknowledge the housing
deficit as a real problem increases the movement’s legitimacy, and thus their negotiation power. The
denunciation of the housing condition implies a confrontation with different versions of reality. It is a
dispute of narratives. MTST wants to show that people are suffering and the need is real, seeking to
intellectually justify their practices and conquer the hearts of a public who can support and legitimize
practices widely criminalized. Furthermore, calling attention to the housing deficit in the area represents a
hook for discussing other needs for urban infrastructure and services. According to Zelideo, 38-year-old
male, state coordinator of MTST, their performative acts confront the existing representations of the
housing condition:

When you do the occupation, you automatically bring these people, and it shows to the
government: you need housing for the people. The idea is always to show to society, to show to the
government that people are suffering, that people have no housing. But the government is always
mapping this . . . it's all pretty . . . and it's not. It is not the reality of this people. [...] And the years
go by and it's the same. That's why we keep doing occupations. Always sending the message to the
government, showing society that everything that happens on television is a lie. It is not the reality
that we are living. [...] The aim of the occupation is to draw attention to all this: housing,
education, basic sanitation, health. (Zelideo Barbosa Lima, interview, Guarulhos January 4, 2017)

Seeking legitimacy, political support, and protection from police brutality, is also a search for
dignity, for being treated with respect. In January, I visited the occupation Anastácia and interviewed
Claudio, a 44-year-old militante, male, unemployed metalworker who joined the Self-defense sector. He
stared at the black canvas of the communitarian kitchen for a few seconds and then, looking back at me,
started to narrate one of the most remarkable moments in his participation in MTST. They had just
finished occupying a vacant plot, in Santo André, which would become the occupation Rosa Luxemburgo.
A group of acampados was leaving the place when the police appeared. A soldier said to a boy, “You look
like a thief.” The boy said, “What a coincidence. You look like a cop.” The soldier used pepper spray. The
boy unholstered his cellphone to film it. “If you turn on this cellphone, I'll arrest you.” He turned it on,
and the cop handcuffed the boy. A fight started. The boy was knocked to the ground, a pile of cops started
to form on top of him, and acampados from the occupation ran toward the pile. A militante appeared and
started to separate the fighters: “I'm going to talk.” The boy was handcuffed and the cop was stepping on
his back. “What's going on with him there?” The cop: "He defied us and we're going to get him arrested."
The militante takes his cellphone, calls the mayor: “If you do not let go of mine now, we will talk to you at
your door.” A little later, other cops arrived, removed the boy from the ground, raised him from the
ground, removed the dust off his body, and apologized. Claudio commented, “The militante asserts the
movement. One day I want to be like him.” In this context, cellphones and networks of influence increase
the chances for real-time, decentralized communication, protecting MTST members from repression. The
use of cellphones in insurgent practices opens a dialogue with a broader, non-present audience whose
existence has the power to restrict the use of violence by military forces. But more than protection, the
narrative suggests a sense of dignity and respect conquered through the collective action.
APPENDIX G: Dialectics of Imagination (Continued)

As the Search for the Dream Changes the Dreamer, the Dreamer Reshapes the Dream

The Tension Between Identity, Desired Outcome, and Process

The dialectics of imagination can be understood as a method through which participants reveal deeper layers of who they are and who they want to become. Opening their experience eventually opens up what they want: the house is not enough anymore. As illustrated in the graphic below, A (the subject, the *acampado*) wants B (the outcome, the apartment), through C (the method, saving enough money to get a loan). A is invited to engage with MTST, which implies a new method D: *fighting* for the right for housing through “illegal land squatting.” By engaging in process D (organizing), the *acampado* experiences different realities and changes some aspects of her identity, becoming E, which is a new, empowered self. But the newly emerging self still wants B (an apartment), which eventually gets expanded to F: the desire to have a home, health, education, to enact more profound changes in society. In Maria’s narrative presented earlier, she shifts her perception of herself and amplifies the realm of her objectives. “*Today I am Maria, a MTST militant, and I am fighting for better living conditions of the worker class.*” This process started not by defying a symbolic desired outcome, but by engaging in a process that unfolds the perception of *who I am, who I want to become, and what I want.* The expansion of the space one occupies in the social fabric reveals deeper layers of one’s purpose. Note that it does not refer to “wanting more” in a quantitative way, but “wanting what is meaningful” in one’s unique place in the world.

![Figure G.1. Imagination: subject, outcome, and method. Source: figure developed by the author.](image)

Breaking down the journey into the tension between subject, desired outcome, and method highlights how opening the imagination is a gradual process that activates new tensions between what one is and what one wants. In this process the desired outcome potentiality changes when one’s realm of experience changes. Opening the imagination involves a process that simultaneously expands and frustrates one’s perspectives and identity. I would add that in an ideally progressive spiral, the frustration is followed by new expansions, rather than being completely annihilated by a disruptive world. Rather than focusing on shifting the dream, the attention is directed to changing the conditions that generate the
dream. The focus, therefore, should be on the creation of an experience that widens the horizons, cultivating the conditions where the desire for a new outcome will grow—and be frustrated.

Thinking the dialectical process in terms of a gradual change in method (i.e., process, identity, and finally outcome) presents some advantages. First, it suggests stages that may or not be reached by different people. Most of them will remain with the same identity, wanting their houses, and being engaged in a practice that they morally disagree with. Part of them will change their identities but will remain focused on their primary objectives, whereas others, for example Maria, will be transformed in such a way that will amplify their objectives to new levels. Another advantage of thinking in a gradual model is that it reveals the centrality of the process in opening the imagination. The practice is the mediator between one’s identity and desires. Creating processes that open the realm of people’s experience of who they are prepares the soil for the emergence of higher levels of what they want. It implies that opening the imagination would be a more fruitful process not by questioning at first the imagined outcomes, but by cultivating the quality of collective and individual presence in the space that eventually can amplify the dream, to be the expression of deeper layers of one’s existence (Scharmer, 2009). Finally, this angle reveals the importance to acknowledge the existent archetypes and use them as a catalyst to form political communities. The symbols are contours carrying layers of hidden desires, emotions, and ideas, which can later be revealed and possibly transformed.

**Shifting Temporal and Spatial Arrangements**

*The Tensions in Time and Space*

So far the evidence from MTST suggests that opening the collective imagination involves (1) a dialectical process between (a) an old self and a new self, (b) the real and the ideal, and (c) identity, desired outcomes, and process; (2) a journey of expansions (amplifying the dream, creating hope) and contractions (frustration); and (3) an engagement process that by cultivating a quality of presence leads to amplifying what people want. The dialectic of imagination also involves a temporal and spatial dimension. Opening the imagination evolves through experimentation with the new and the collapse of the old, where, however, both the new and the old coexist in tension. Both the new and the old have their own temporal and spatial compositions; they are coexistent performances. Figure I.2, inspired by similar graphics by Marsico and Tateo (2017), presents the tensions between contrasting spaces, and between past and future possibilities.
The transition between those coexistent and contrasting spaces provokes learning. In Maria’s story, we can see the back and forth between her past and future selves related to different spaces (her job and the occupation). The actor moves between multiple spaces, and the occupation forges a counterpoint to the present and past experiences lived in those spaces. When the time of the occupation ceases, the world takes its place. The new self tends to move back to the same places occupied previously, but without the counterpoint, generating a feeling of placelessness, or not-belonging. According to Gabriel, coordinator of MTST’s formation sector, this crisis is often the moment where some people become more engaged in the movement, as well as the most propitious moment for *politicization* when the movement helps them to rationalize what is happening. A study to identify the biographic journeys and how activists describe their identity transformations would benefit from attention to the spatial dimension. How much do “the old identity” and “the new identity” relate in fact to the different spaces they cross? Is it possible to track spaces, as containers of social experience, in terms of those provoking or suppressing the expression of one’s higher future possibilities? If these questions remain open, at least one implication can be drawn from MTST’s case. Opening the imagination relies on both the *existence* of spaces that allow new experiences to happen and the *contrast* between them and dystopian spaces.

Changing the perception of possibilities also operates by shifting people’s perception of time. In the Odysseus myth described by Gabriel when explaining the experience of the *acampados*, time was key: the *time* on Circe’s island is different from the real world’s. The eight days Odysseus stays on the island equals one year in the outside world. As discussed in the literature review, the social field is a temporal sculpture in the making (Scharmer, 2009). One’s social identity, and therefore its comprehension of possibilities, is a collection of temporal arrangements. The change in the temporal arrangements contributes to shifting perceptions of who one is and what one wants. The occupation shifts people’s perception of time, producing an opening in their reading of the world. “The convulsion of new questions that appears in an occupation, the infinity of material demands, crises, contradictions, turns every day...
into a month” (Gabriel, interview São Paulo, January 13, 2017). Gabriel describes the experience of participating in the movement as an experience of being in a “twisted time.” The “twisted time” involves being vulnerable and facing risks that leave profound somatic marks, making people create stronger connections with each other. Gabriel works as motoboy as a source of income, since being a militante in MTST is a voluntary position. He compared the deep experience of the twisted time with the feeling of motoboys in cities, protesters during a confrontation with the police, and soldiers returning from war. Soldiers live to the limit of their needs, face personal challenges, suffer through difficult conditions, and learn to use tools never used before. Similarly, motoboys face this physical risk to such a degree that when one of them suffers an accident, all of them stop to help, in contrast with cars that isolate people. “You do not see a person. You see a lot of iron and glass” (Gabriel, interview, São Paulo, January 13, 2017). In the case of protesters, the physical risk produces deep emotions that connect them to each other. Smelling the gas, feeling the fear of being trapped, and being helped by someone else create strong moments of connection. “You are not the same person the next day” (Gabriel, interview, São Paulo, January 13, 2017). Participants’ perception of time changes through a “convulsion” of diverse material needs, questions, and contradictions. The deep risks and connections experienced within MTST enact profound transformations on people’s perception of time, reality, and themselves.

In the perspective of time we find the most enigmatic puzzle. Risk, vulnerability, and intense challenges leave somatic marks and create deep connections among people. But how much more do we really know about the ways we can shift the perspective of time to open the collective imagination? Scharmer (2009) suggests that the social field is a structure of time in the making. Making the new, therefore, would refer to the capacity to reshape temporal relationships between people, objects, and space - a task more closely related to a dance choreographer than to the writer of a contract in a white board. Reshaping the time of making is a Pandora’s box to understand the process by which we can shift the collective imagination of urban futures.
In a later work, *The Good City: In Defense of Utopian Thinking* (2000), Friedmann discusses the importance and meaning of utopian thinking and argues that the production of guiding, normative images about the future is a central task in planning. According to Friedmann (2000), utopian thinking is “the capacity to imagine a future that departs significantly from what we know to be a general condition in the present” (p. 462). Understood as an inherently human ability, utopia assumes several forms, such as religion, national feelings, hegemonic ideologies, and trust in the power of technology. A conception of a “common good” is the foundation of the sense of local identity and political community. For this reason, utopian thinking is an intrinsically political issue holding the capacity to build political coalitions around common visions (Friedman, 2000, p. 463). Therefore, Friedmann shares in this article his own utopian perspective, proposing a series of principles to serve as templates to evaluate the planning processes. The concept of a good city should be based on multipli/city, i.e., “an autonomous civil life relatively free from direct supervision and control by the state. . . . [Moreover,] every human being has the right, by nature, to the full development of their innate intellectual, physical and spiritual potentials in the context of wider communities” (Friedman, 2000 page 466). But if future-oriented perspectives again win the center of the debate, the images of future for forming political communities, along with the nature of the processes and outcomes of the imaginative practices, remain misty.

2 The march was a protest against the construction of the Brokdorf Nuclear Power Plant and was part of the antinuclear movement in Germany (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-nuclear_movement_in_Germany).

3 The problem with the use of the binary “colonized/decolonized” or “outside” and “without” when discussing imagination of humane forms of urbanism is that it evokes misguiding totalities. “Decolonizing the imagination” implicates the “colonized” and the “decolonized” imaginations. In the lived experience, the delimitation of the humane and inhumane should generate a proliferation of juxtapositions of the ideal and the dystopian, the humane and the brutal. If you do the exercise of defining in your life what is humane and what is inhumane, you will find these two spheres coexisting in complicated yet interesting ways. Imagination operates in the multiple tensions between intention and reality, ideal and real, logically opening the possibilities of humane futures by relying on the collective capacity to reveal such juxtapositions and tensions: “In the paradigmatic transition, competing paradigms lose solid fixity and become liquid and navigable. More than ever, they become the product of individual and collective actions that lean on them” (Santos, 1995, p. 497). The totalities of “colonized” and “decolonized” create two artificial pure categories that eliminate the tensions between ideal and real, where in fact the possibilities of imagination exist. Decolonization of imagination would be better left aside to avoid the possible distraction to the core significance of opening, unleashing, or unfolding the imagination. Similarly, the work of imagining humane futures would benefit from the preposition across: rather than trying to be “outside of the system,” “move forward the future,” through the “development of communities,” we need to find paths to “move across and beyond the system,” to make a humane urbanism flourish and catalyze the emergence of the uniqueness of communities. In this sense, the metaphor of the city palimpsest might help to shift our focus and improve our capacity to imagining the higher future possibilities that want to emerge. Although the term decolonization of imagination provides useful insights, I suggest use of the terms “unleashing” or “opening” the imagination due to the limitations the idea of “decolonized” might inflict to reveal the tensions between utopian and dystopian worlds.


5 For more information access: http://time.arts.ucla.edu/Talks/Barcelona/Arch_Life.htm


7 Similar to Santos (1995) who talks in terms of proliferation of margins, Marsico and Tateo (2017) refers to the multiplication of bordering.

8 Retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/palimpsest
According to Caldeira (2003), the spatial and social segregation processes in São Paulo presented supplementary characteristics after 1980. The two posterior decades (1980 and 1990) presented more complex techniques to guarantee the division between classes in the urban arena. While the expansion of public services attempted to expand the access for low-income classes, the elites devised sophisticated ways to maintain the social distances. Fortified enclaves, surveillance, specialized services and devices contributed to social fragmentation and destruction of public spaces.


The term anthropophagic/cannibal refers to Antropofagia, the modernist movement in the Brazilian arts in early 20th century in response to the European cultural domination. The central idea is that “Brazil's history of "cannibalizing" other cultures is its greatest strength,” absolving its qualities and becoming more Brazilian. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto_Antrop%C3%B3fago

In Brazil, salaries are measured in multiples of minimum wages. For example, if the minimum wage is R$200 or US $60.97 a month in 2012, a salary of R$600,00 or US $180 would be accounted as 3 minimum wages. From 2002 to 2018, the minimum wage increased up to R$ 954,00 or US $291.00 a month.

Estimate according the interview with one of MTST national leaders, Guilherme Boulos. There is no official data produced about how many members the movement has, and their registrations are not digitized.

MTST may have started from MST or from urban movements with some kind of relationship with MST. For specific information of each version, check Goulart (2011). Although two versions try to explain how it happened, MST had a fundamental role.

The murders occurred within four months: Gentil Ribeiro (April 4, 1998), Expedito Souza Silva (July 1, 1998), and Mauro Filho Garcia and his wife Sonia Nunes Garcia (July 19, 1998) (Goulart, 2011).


These occupied properties are often chosen because of their fiscal defaults that strengthen MTST’s negotiation power with the private sector. For example, the terrain of the occupation Povo Sem Medo de São Bernardo, which started in 2017, has a fiscal debt of half million reais. Note that those terrains might present considerable competitive disadvantages in the real state market. Further research can explore how far MTST acts in a political, economic, and cultural rift: where the government has low expectations to recover that money; where the property owner might not see the land as a profitable investment; and where the public might see the land owner as a tax law breaker.


For other pictures of assemblies in several occupations in 2017: http://www.mtst.org/mtst/domingo-com-rodada-de-assembleias-nas-diversas-ocupacoes-do-mtst/

As we see in chapter 3, they have their own political views that justify land occupations in the periphery.
As we see in chapters 5 and 6, the dream of homeownership is just one node in a chain of events. However, throughout the engagement with this process, hopefully, the MTST’s participants realize they want more than a house.

Interview, Guarulhos, January 4, 2017.

It is an introduction only, and an ethnographic study of their practices would be able to apprehend the nuances.


Estimate provided by MTST leaders during interviews.


To understand more about MTST’s organizational structure, see Appendix E.

In Portuguese, quebrada literally means broken, and is a common way people refer to the peripheries.

MTST, Cartilha de Princípios, 2015.


“Are you going to break anything today?” Antonio jokes when informally talking to the police after an interview. The smiles can forge an atmosphere of respect, but they know they are not in searching for the same interests.


For more information on the City Statute, see chapter 2.


On one hand, the power of MTST grassroots practices comes from the transgression of space: their capacity to open public stages shift the public attention and make certain populations and territories visible. On the other hand, their engagements generate empowerment: the participants become visible to themselves, and they start to see new layers of who they are, what they want, and how they can achieve what they want.

As discussed in chapter 1, the structural field of attention is terminology used in Theory U (Scharmer, 2009) and means the quality of attention from which a person or a group operates. Scharmer (2009) defines a few structural fields of attention, including downloading, seeing, sensing, presencing, crystallizing, prototyping, and performing. Considering these categories, MTST provokes a change on the quality of attention from downloading (repeating the patterns of the past, not recognizing what you see) to seeing (wherein people start to discover the power of seeing and seeing together).
42 Many of the interviews were conducted with *militantes* and coordinators whose extraordinary experiences of transformation, reflecting their close engagement with numerous opportunities of dialogue, cannot be generalized for the whole movement. However, the majority of the *acampados* do not have a close engagement with the movement, for example, by participating in courses or meetings, living in the occupation, or assuming leadership roles. The story of Maria, the cornerstone of this chapter, is not the norm in the movement and is not representative of the social base.


44 A second way refers to the intersectionality of the problem: being homeless is also being unemployed. And the new house does not come with a job and a monthly paycheck. A third way to tackle the problem is to look at how MTST understands their role in the organization of the residents after they receive their keys. Some *militantes* argue that “now it is up to them” to keep applying the organizing skills learned in the occupations to improve the neighborhood and the apartments. Interestingly, although many residents remain engaged in rallies and occupations for several reasons, they do not have a consistent local organization to create projects in the apartment complex and solve problems affecting their surrounding neighborhood. While some of them explained how they organized to fix small problems, such as a broken elevator, others reported having meetings once every 3 months. Thus, part of the residents stay engaged in MTST, to help other family members get their houses or to support the movement’s cause. However, the local organizing, with the focus on the apartments and the surrounding area, still lags behind the level of organization we see in the occupations. Since the center of MTST organization is land occupations, the apartments remain their blind spot. The condominium João Cândido was the first project conquered in MTST’s history, making it a quite new situation for the movement. After the house, so what? A fourth way to look at the problem is to look at the structure of the federal housing program, in terms of both architecture and policy recommendations. The apartment follows a regimen elaborated by the federal government which prescribes what is permitted and what is desirable in new apartments. Informal economy was among the initial prohibited behaviors. However, unemployment led the residents to ignore (or change?) the regimen. As a flow of services and products takes place among the apartments, from snacks to manicures, an informal micro-economy flourishes.


46 “Sharing an experience does not assume the sense of empathy, of identification with the point of view of the victims, nor does it assume a communion of affections. Following the notion of affection of Favret-Saada (2005), being affected is to occupy a place in a system” (Vieira, 2010; translation by author).

Original version: “Compartilhar uma experiência não assume o sentido de empatia, de identificação com o ponto de vista das vítimas, tampouco se trata de uma comunhão de afetos. Seguindo a noção de afeto de Favret-Saada (2005) ser afetado consiste em ocupar um lugar em um sistema” (Vieira, 2010).

47 It is interesting that MTST courses or formal spaces of education occupied a peripheral role in the majority of the answers. Most of the *acampados* do not assume any kind of leadership role and consequently do not participate in the formation workshops. Their experience consists of going to the occupation, attending the assemblies, and participating in rallies. However, even among those who attended, the workshops’ real influence varies greatly among the participants. While some forgot everything about them, others described as an important and interesting experience, without demonstrating any kind of special enthusiasm about it. In fact, none of my interviewees referred to the formation as a climax or eye-opening moment. Instead, almost all referred to experiences in the occupation or in street protests.

48 Since MTST’s social base is composed mostly of women, there are several similar stories of empowerment.

49 In Brazilian history, *senzala* was the place where Black slaves lived and *casa grande* was the place where the White enslavers lived.


51 The process of making the working class secure a right is part of an anti-capitalist struggle. However, the outcome is pretty much limited by technology, urban policy, and the existing framework of what “house” means in a capitalistic society. The result is that MTST is building popular power to affect distribution, not reshaping the production.
I. Imagination can be reproductive or creative.

II. Imagining can be formed by recollected memories (R-memories, a recollection of experiences of past events) or sensory imaginings (S-imaginings, mental imagery related to possible events) (Debus, 2016).

III. Imagining can contain a multitude of shapes that can portray oneself, others, objects, spaces, interactions.

IV. Imagining can be imagistic or lack any form of image, being supposition-like imagining (Gregory, 2016).

V. Imagining can be in a first-person perspective or in a third-person perspective. The first view includes seeing through your own eyes (projecting egocentric scenarios) or through someone else’s eyes (such as if I imagine I were Madonna, seeing the world through her eyes). The third view includes seeing yourself from outside or seeing an experience without being there (Ninan, 2016).

VI. Imagining can refer to abstract or concrete spaces—you can visualize getting fatter without any space around you, or you can imagine getting fatter in your living room (Nanay, 2016).

VII. Imagining can have different kinds of focus. A person can imagine things under or outside her control, as well as action or inaction, what she would be doing or not doing in a certain occasion (Byrne, 2016).

VIII. Imagining can involve objects that are present (you see) or absent (you imagine). For example, you can visualize objects that are not present in the space at all or visualize additional properties to objects that are in the space (Nanay, 2016).

IX. Imagining can be constrained internally (for example by the cognitive architecture of imagination, one’s memories and feelings) or externally (when you read a fiction and the narrative guides your imagination, or when you don’t have time to imagine due to social pressure) (Currie, 2016).

X. Imagining can be autonomous (when you start to imagine something by yourself) or guided (for example, when a process or technology helps you to imagine) (Currie, 2016).

XI. Imagining can be voluntary or involuntary. Examples of involuntary include entering your office and spontaneously starting to imagine your co-workers naked, or entering a dark alley and you involuntary starting to imagine all the possible crimes that could be happening to you, possibly nourished by news in the media about that neighborhood (Nanay, 2016).

XII. Imagining can be conscious or unconscious. This aspect imposes a horde of questions related to psychoanalysis. How do conscious and unconscious aspects influence one’s imagination? (Nanay, 2016).

XIII. Imagining can be reliable or unreliable for learning and decision making. For example, it might be useless to a planning process that you imagine your co-workers naked (Currie, 2016).

I. Imagining can be top-down (based on internal impulses, such as memories and beliefs) or bottom-up (initiated from perception) (Nanay, 2016).

52 Gabriel, interview São Paulo, January 13, 2017. In his narrative a few elements stand out: (1) the lack of a visualized model of a post-capitalist model of housing; and (2) the impracticality of articulating the goal to people around a “socialist” model of housing or of a society.

53 Notice that the expansion of the capacity to express the future is the convergence of the silenced into the existent, not the annihilation of the silence. Silences are always the fundamental places from which anything can emerge.

54 Just to give a notion of the complexity of the task in turning crystal clear the mediation of imagination of humane urbanism, I enumerate a few different aspects of imagination and the mediation questions attached to them:

I. Imagination can be reproductive or creative.

II. Imagining can be formed by recollected memories (R-memories, a recollection of experiences of past events) or sensory imaginings (S-imaginings, mental imagery related to possible events) (Debus, 2016).

III. Imagining can contain a multitude of shapes that can portray oneself, others, objects, spaces, interactions.

IV. Imagining can be imagistic or lack any form of image, being supposition-like imagining (Gregory, 2016).

V. Imagining can be in a first-person perspective or in a third-person perspective. The first view includes seeing through your own eyes (projecting egocentric scenarios) or through someone else’s eyes (such as if I imagine I were Madonna, seeing the world through her eyes). The third view includes seeing yourself from outside or seeing an experience without being there (Ninan, 2016).

VI. Imagining can refer to abstract or concrete spaces—you can visualize getting fatter without any space around you, or you can imagine getting fatter in your living room (Nanay, 2016).

VII. Imagining can have different kinds of focus. A person can imagine things under or outside her control, as well as action or inaction, what she would be doing or not doing in a certain occasion (Byrne, 2016).

VIII. Imagining can involve objects that are present (you see) or absent (you imagine). For example, you can visualize objects that are not present in the space at all or visualize additional properties to objects that are in the space (Nanay, 2016).

IX. Imagining can be constrained internally (for example by the cognitive architecture of imagination, one’s memories and feelings) or externally (when you read a fiction and the narrative guides your imagination, or when you don’t have time to imagine due to social pressure) (Currie, 2016).

X. Imagining can be autonomous (when you start to imagine something by yourself) or guided (for example, when a process or technology helps you to imagine) (Currie, 2016).

XI. Imagining can be voluntary or involuntary. Examples of involuntary include entering your office and spontaneously starting to imagine your co-workers naked, or entering a dark alley and you involuntary starting to imagine all the possible crimes that could be happening to you, possibly nourished by news in the media about that neighborhood (Nanay, 2016).

XII. Imagining can be conscious or unconscious. This aspect imposes a horde of questions related to psychoanalysis. How do conscious and unconscious aspects influence one’s imagination? (Nanay, 2016).

XIII. Imagining can be reliable or unreliable for learning and decision making. For example, it might be useless to a planning process that you imagine your co-workers naked (Currie, 2016).

I. Imagining can be top-down (based on internal impulses, such as memories and beliefs) or bottom-up (initiated from perception) (Nanay, 2016).
Langland-Hassan (2016) discusses four major forms of the cognitive architecture of imagination - Guiding Chosen imaginings, Misguiding Chosen imaginings, Guiding Unbidden imaginings, and Misguiding Unbidden imaginings. *Chosen* refers to being subject of the will, while *Guiding* stands for suitable for guiding action and inference. The one I am focusing on in this chapter is the Guiding Chosen imagination. Guiding Chosen imaginings pursue three main components: top-down intentions, lateral constraints, and cyclical involvement (Langland-Hassan, 2016, p. 65). Langland-Hassan (2016) names the limits imposed to our intentions as *lateral constraints* or “imaginative algorithms.” These constraints define what is possible and probable to happen in our contexts. There are two types of lateral constraints: propositional and sensory. To save the reader from an engagement with technical terms, I am bringing the central ideas in a more profane language.

Example: Our experiences shape what we consider possible to exist. Assume you want to bike to your work tomorrow (intention). Your brother has a bike he hasn’t used for months. You consider asking him to lend you his bike. Then you remember that the last time you asked him a favor, he refused (constraints—previous experience). Consequently, you reflect, you assume very low probabilities that he would help you this time. Then you imagine yourself experimenting with one of the bikes in the bike shop close to your house (new intention). Since it looks possible to find one there (constraints—belief) you decide to visit the store the next day. Therefore, imagination works in this interplay between our intentions and what our past experiences say it is possible.

Sensory constraints introduce the predictions “shaped by one’s sensory motor expectations” (p. 81). For example, you have the sensory experience that porcelain plates break when they fall from a cupboard.

People have the tendency to imagine things that are possible and integrated into their immediate environment. In this sense, the tendency of imagination to be “realistic” implies a “conformity with familiar patterns of causation” (Van Leeuwen, 2016b, p. 94).

Example: When a citizen cannot explain why his street is always full of trash while high-income neighborhoods are clean, he will fill the explanation gap based on the extrapolation of his experiences or assimilated discourses. The street is dirty because his neighbors are dirty people (rather than being an issue related to a broader urban planning panorama).

The interesting aspect of this statement is the contrast of powerless and omnipotence. As it is discussed below, in the last section, the complex task of thinking an entire city in the future cannot be fully addressed by a single mind. So, if the fathers of urban utopianism experienced the imagination as omnipotence, they equally experienced it as the lack of power. Their visions created images that filled the public imagination, but a public that does not have a well-developed imaginative ability cannot support the imagination as a continuous challenge of idealization and implementation.


Thanks to my friends Christopher Di Franco (first image) and Giulio Vanzan (second image) who, among others, participated and provided these insightful contributions.
Hägerstrand (1985), contrast two different kinds of time: symbolic and embedded time. Embedded time refers to “the visible and tangible reality” that is present in nature and in man as part of nature; it is partially cultural and refers to “our inner subjective feeling of the flow of time and duration” (p.35, 39). Symbolic time is “an abstract and ‘freestanding’ entity, invented to summarize a large number of experiences and observations.” (p. 35). Hägerstrand (1985) defines this contrast by affirming that embedded time is nameless. In order to simplify the discussion, I am classifying embedded time as perception of time. We can illustrate the difference between symbolic and embedded time with an experiment. Let’s imagine that you got intrigued with these ideas and decided to sit in the middle of a room alone to discover by yourself, to think. You start to observe your breath and the fan moving. There is movement there. but you cannot name it or understand it (embedded). Then you remember your schedule and how much time you are losing with contemplation. You look at the clock, and you realize that you lost 15 minutes. (Cultural). Although the difference between these two forms of time is very complex, it is useful in this context for a couple of reasons. To distinguish symbolic and embedded time relativizes the idea of progress. Symbolic time, as a cultural phenomenon, presents multiple variations across cultures, with several examples from music, history, and anthropology. Hägerstrand (1985) cites the works of Edmund Leach (1966) and Clifford Geertz (1966) to illustrate how other cultures present alternative notions, such as now and not now, or the present as a motionless category where days are independent and self-sufficient time sections. (Hägerstrand, 1985, p. 37) His argument relativizes the modern notion of progress elaborated during the Renaissance and relying on a linear notion of time, “now deeply rooted in nearly every intellectual corner of the Western world” (Hägerstrand, 1985, p. 36). Colonization of the future is one, among four aspects, that characterizes the ways through which humanity manipulates embedded time. The other three features include speed of movement, the search for making things stronger and faster to gain environmental advantages; the population of artifacts, the presence of artifacts that shape the human use of time and space; and piecemeal engineering, a critic of the social processes involved in problem solving (Hägerstrand, 1985, p. 40).

Although the author does not provide in this article any conclusive definitions of nonphysical instruments, he gives one example. The promise or contract, in his perspective one of the most important human institutions, is one example of an arrangement that guarantees such stability of a system. Property rights, as an example of a promise, set up several agreements, rules, and expected behaviors that are transmitted across generations. (Hägerstrand, 1985, p. 41)

The national level is at the top of the hierarchy, while the occupations are at the bottom.

In case of confrontation with the police, the members of the self-defense sector are the ones who assume the frontline, giving the protesters the chance to run from bombs or gas and find safe shelter. They are also the ones who are ready to get arrested if necessary. The legal sector of the movement, in collaboration with other civil rights organizations, activates the necessary legal procedures to safeguard the protesters, a legal protection a working-class member would not likely receive if acting alone. This element makes a fundamental difference, considering the composition of their social base.

There is no consensus about it among the interviewees.

Further engagement with the sociology literature would certainly benefit this discussion. According to Bourdieu, habitus—the embodied dispositions of that organize how we read the world—influences perspectives of the future. If one’s identity is a performative act, and a performative act is a temporal arrangement of gestures in the space, such temporal dimension is key to understanding transformation in the collective imagination.

Motoboys are workers who deliver products and documents using motor bikes in Brazil.