

Occupied Spaces, Occupied Texts: Literary Heterotopias and the Right to the City

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“Change life! Change Society! These ideas
lose completely their meaning without
producing an appropriate space.”

—Henri Lefebvre.

The Production of Space (59)

In November of 2012, members of the social movement Movimento Sem Teto do Centro (Homeless Movement of the City Center, or MSTC) occupied the building of what was formerly the Hotel Cambridge. Located on the Avenida 9 de Julho, in the center of São Paulo, the erstwhile luxury establishment, which lodged Nat King Cole in 1959, had been vacant since 2004. In 2010, the city of São Paulo confiscated the building. The plan was to convert the site into affordable housing. Nonetheless, the structure remained vacant and neglected until 2012.

Nowadays, the former hotel houses approximately 175 people and is one of the largest urban occupations in Latin America. Displacement is a common denominator among the different residents. Dwellers include war refugees from Syria, Paraguayan immigrants, Haitians who came to Brazil after the 2010 earthquake, and people from many other parts of the globe. But the building is also home to Brazilians seeking shelter and opportunities in Brazil's largest and most affluent city. One of Latin America's most expensive metropolises, São Paulo, has approximately half a million homeless people. To provide all its residents with housing, the city estimates that it would have to build around 474,000 residences. Currently, there are 554 vacant buildings

in São Paulo's center, seventy of which are occupied by homeless citizens. Among these is the Hotel Cambridge.

Urban occupations assuage housing needs but are also emblems of resistance. They provide shelter and serve as terrains of social involvement and empowerment. Some occupied buildings, such as the Ocupação 9 de Julho, which is also in the center of São Paulo, have communal kitchens that offer meals prepared by local chefs and residents (Martinelli). The same space also houses a library, a second-hand clothing store, and the Galeria Reocupa. Opened in 2018, the art gallery aims to be a nexus between the residents, artists, and the local community.

For Carmen Briers et al. (2016), the Cambridge, and by extension other urban occupations, respond to an existential necessity but are also examples of what James Holston calls insurgent citizenship. Insurgent citizenship disrupts the patterns of differentiated citizenship. The latter is "inclusively inegalitarian" and therefore normalizes differences (Holston 7). Insurgent citizenship reveals the shortcomings inherent in this pattern and seeks to remedy them. Insurgent urban practices are not limited to occupations but rather encompass various types of performances that, in one manner or another, (re)appropriate urban terrains. Teresa Caldeira asserts that:

These interventions in public spaces are transforming and, at the same time, articulating anew the profound social inequalities that have always marked them. Expressed as both artistic production and public performance, they not only give the subaltern new visibility in the city but also express new forms of political agency. However, these interventions are contradictory: they affirm rights to the city while fracturing the public; expose discrimination but refuse integration. They test the limits of the democratization process by simultaneously expanding the openness of the democratic public sphere while challenging it with transgressive actions ranging from the mildly illicit to the criminal. ("Imprinting" 385)

Caldeira suggests that phenomena, such as tagging (*pixação*) and skating, challenge the democratic limits of the metropolis. These expressions reveal the inequity that scars the urban tissue but do so in ways that defy legal limits.

Although the occupations defy legal boundaries, organizations such as the MSTC argue that such enterprises fall well within the parameters of Brazilian democracy as they fulfill the social function of urban planning. In 2001, congress approved the City Statute. Based on the idea of the "right to the city"

(Lefebvre), this law dictates that urban planning should be guided by social interests. Law 10.257 sought to promote social equality in urban settings. Article 2 of the decree explicitly states that citizens have the right to “sustainable cities” “understood as the right to urban land, housing, basic sanitation, urban infrastructure, transportation, and public services, work and leisure, for the present and future generations.”¹

Though scholars recognize the inherent value of the City Statute, many also decry its shortcomings. Ester Limonad and Jorge Luiz Barbosa, for example, point out that the law, in its current iteration, reinforces a mercantile conception of the city. Limonad and Barbosa argue, “The regulatory aspects of the Statute are revealed as tools of social control that aspire to discipline the ways in which urban space is appropriated” (101). As such, the City Statute preempts not only the possibility of a diversified urban landscape but also the utopian potential implicit in the right to the city that—supposedly—informed the legislation.

Likewise, for Ana Fani Alessandri Carlos, the idea of the “right to the city” that shaped the City Statute is distorted by a neoliberal ideology that empties the decree of its utopian undertones. Urban occupations counteract the for-profit logic that dictates the organization of cities, and, in this manner, it can be argued that these actions reintroduce the utopian content that is at the heart of Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city. Additionally, in their defiance of the purely mercantile view of urban propriety, occupations also reintroduce the idea of the social function of real estate that permeates the City Statute.

For Carmen Ferreira da Silva, leader of the occupation and of the MSTC, the seizure of the Cambridge granted the building a social function. In 2016, the Associação Paulista dos Críticos de Arte (APCA) recognized the tenants’ efforts to revitalize the former hotel and awarded the project the APCA’s prize for architectural work in the category “urban appropriation” (*apropriação urbana*) (Fernandes).

Since its takeover by the MSTC, the Hotel Cambridge has become the site of legal and symbolic disputes, turning it into a cultural icon of sorts. In 2016, Eliana Caffé released her film *Era o Hotel Cambridge* (It Was the Hotel Cambridge). Caffé’s film, which combines documentary and fiction, chronicles a day in the life of its residents’ lives. Andrea Miranda’s 2018 documentary *Ocupação Hotel Cambridge* (Occupation Hotel Cambridge) uses the same proposition to showcase the struggle for affordable housing in São Paulo city. Finally, Julián Fuks’s novel, *A ocupação* (2019) (The Occupation), also focalizes the real and invented inhabitants of the Hotel Cambridge.

An artistic residence at the Cambridge inspired Fuks’s text. Curated by Juliana Caffé and Yudi Rafael, the program sought to elaborate collaborative

projects at the occupation. Between March 2016 and January 2017, cultural producers conceived initiatives that engaged the tenants and the general public.² Activities included a film club, a speaker series, and communal meals that the resident artists hosted. Ventures aimed to strengthen the community and generate social and professional networks that went beyond the Cambridge's walls. During his residency, visual artist Ícaro Lira organized a workshop with the editorial collective *Dulcinéia Catadora*. Residents created covers for books that the collective published. Another byproduct of the venture was the publication of the tome *Vocabulário Vivido* (2016) (Lived Vocabulary). The Cambridge's inhabitants were asked to explain the meaning of a word contained in the joint publication *Jornal Linha de Frente*, organized by the Frente de Luta por Moradia (FLM) and the MSTC. Definitions from an online dictionary were juxtaposed alongside the dwellers' descriptions of the words and compiled into a volume.

Visual artist Virgínia de Medeiros, who stayed at the Cambridge between November 2016 and January 2017, organized a women's choir with the tenants. Medeiros's residence also resulted in an art project. Medeiros's series *Alma de Bronze* (Bronze Soul) comprises photographs and video testimonies from several of the women who live at the occupation.

Many of the cultural enterprises inspired by the Cambridge have both a social drive and a communal modus operandi. While Medeiros's recordings are structured as conversations that focus on the women who live at the Cambridge, *Era o Hotel Cambridge* was produced by a collective that included Caffê, the leadership of the Frente de Luta pela Moradia (Front for the Struggle for Housing, or FLM), refugee groups, and architecture students from the City School (Escola da Cidade). Residents of the occupation workshopped the film's script.

According to Medeiros, *Alma de Bronze* "is not only the register of an alterity, not just a question of listening, of lifting these people from obscurity. The installation is partially about these things, but it is much more than that. It is a mutual activation of worlds" (interview with Paula Alzugaray). Medeiros eschews the notion of the artist as a mediator between words. Instead, art becomes a manner through which different realities, subjectivities, and perspectives can touch one another, altering the other. In the video portion of *Alma de Bronze*, titled *Quem não luta tá morto* (If you do not fight you are dead), the artist interviews twelve residents in their apartments at the Cambridge. Residents speak about their lives and discuss how their move to the occupation transformed not only their existences but also their sense of self. Medeiros's videos reveal the interface between domestic space and subjectivity. The interviews also signal the utopian potential of the occupation, which becomes a manifestation of Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city.

Each of the twelve recordings begins with a low-angle shot of the Cambridge's façade. The busy street, caught in speed ramping, highlights the monumentality of the structure and its unequivocal insertion into the cityscape. The occupation is not a marginal(ized) terrain. Rather, it is a central element of the metropolis. From the street, the recording transitions to the domestic, hushed, and orderly space of the tenants' apartments. The accompanying soundtrack emphasizes the spatial shift, the fast-paced music giving way to more ponderous rhythms. Once inside, the camera captures the details of everyday life, such as plants, bibelots, photographs. Recordings emphasize the residents' individuality: the orixá dolls in the video "Luiza e Adriana" or the plant on the balcony of "Conceição." Many of the videos also showcase household appliances, such as microwaves, televisions, or washing machines. These devices speak of the women's upward mobility, a result, in part, of having a stable home. The compilation of decorative and utilitarian objects suggests how the women's residences house both dreams and the mundane gestures that punctuate everyday life (Bachelard 6). The homes of *Quem não luta tá morto* suggest the idea of a heterotopic space: they are both real and imagined terrains, both physical and utopian territories.

Michel Foucault describes heterotopias "as counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (3–4). Heterotopias are both material and figurative terrains of otherness and resistance. They encapsulate various forms of spatiality and can constitute what Edward Soja has termed "third spaces," territories that are material and imagined representations of spatiality (6).

The apartments in Medeiros's videos suggest the coexistence of two spatial realities: on the one hand, the neat, comfortable, and carefully arranged homes that we see, and, on the other, the lurking presence of disenfranchisement and dispossession, against which the residents' insurgent strategies are a counterpoint. As metaphors, the apartments and, by extension, the Cambridge, accommodate two contradictory experiences: marginalization and empowerment.

Quem não luta tá morto collates the women's domestic spaces with their personal stories. Each interview is prompted by the question, "você se considera uma guerrilheira contemporânea, uma mulher vitoriosa?" (Do you consider yourself a present-day warrior, a victorious woman?). All the interviewees answer in the affirmative. Medeiros's framing question avoids casting the women as victims. Though their stories are filled with hardship,

they are defined by their resilience. For Medeiros, the women's stories have the potential to induce us to "refletir sobre a insurgência de uma força coletiva, vinda das margens" (contemplate the collective insurgence, a power that emerges from the margins).

Carmen Ferreira da Silva comments on the relation between culture and collectivity: "culture creates community, its flow touches and connects all [social] classes" (qtd. in Ramos-Yzquierdo). As suggested by Medeiros' video series, culture can, beyond being a contact zone of sorts, also activate social engagement and can be synonymous with resistance.

This article examines the role of heterotopias as possible interventions into the dynamics of urban exclusion. To this end, the essay will discuss Julián Fuks's novel *A ocupação*. In Fuks's text, the occupation as a heterotopic space conveys both disenfranchisement and becomes an arena where insurgent tactics (such as occupations of empty buildings) actualize citizenship. More than just representing these spaces, however, Fuks's book proposes to partake in their construction. In other words, the novel's narrative fabric becomes an integral part of a dissensual heterotopia.

Fuks's text, though single-authored, incorporates the voices of several of the occupation's residents, such as Carmen Silva, as well as the speech of her daughter, Preta Ferreira. Invented characters complement the roster of individuals that move through the pages of *A ocupação*. Much like the sites that the novel portrays, the novel's characters also straddle the boundary between fictional and non-fictional existences.

Semi-fictional spaces, such as the rooms, halls, corridors, and stairwells in Julián Fuks's Hotel Cambridge, are emblematic of heterotopias. While they reference the real places of the former hotel, they also imbue these locations with a metaphorical valence. In particular, Fuks's novel highlights the spatiality of life stories and how they are embedded in different types of geographies: local, regional, national, and global, but also personal, affective, and mnemonic. On occasion of another occupation, Preta confronts the narrator: "[Você] Acha que todo esforço é por nada, por um terreno sujo, por um prédio caindo aos pedaços . . . não sabe que aqui era a casa da própria vida encarnada . . . você não imagina a quantidade de lembranças que guardo daqui, a quantidade de noites que volto a este jardim, não assim em sombras, a um jardim ensolarado" (97–98) (You think that all the effort is in vain, that we fight for a dirty plot of land, for a decrepit building . . . you do not understand that this place embodied life itself . . . you cannot imagine how many memories I have of this place, how many nights I return to this garden, not this shadowy garden, but a garden filled with sunshine).³ Preta's juxtaposition of the dilapidated site to her memory and imagination of this same place generates a third space, a possible home that is constructed both by physical struggle and through her creativity.

Like the author's previous novel, *A resistência* (The Resistance, 2015), *A ocupação* is partially auto and metafictional.⁴ Clues to Fuks's biography and his residency at the Hotel Cambridge litter the text. Referencing the apartment available to the artists during their residency, Carmen Silva addresses the narrator/protagonist: "Você é o escritor, isso eu já sei. Sei também que tem passado os dias no quartinho do décimo quinto" (82) (You are the writer, I know that. I also know that you have been spending your days in the little room on the fifteenth floor). Like Fuks, the novel's protagonist, Sebastián, hails from a family of political exiles who fled Argentina's 1976–83 military dictatorship. *A ocupação* playfully engages this confusion between fiction and biography. At a certain point, the narrator's father calls him "Julián" instead of "Sebastián." Tentatively, the narrator attempts to reinstate the boundaries between the fictional and the biographical: "aqui você me chama de Sebastián" (78) (Here you call me Sebastián). Nonetheless, in other circumstances, it is the narrator who blurs the lines between fiction and biography. For example, Fuks includes letters about the social significance of literature, which he exchanges with the Mozambican author Mia Couto, into the novel.⁵

A ocupação is an overtly political text, an example of what Fuks calls "literatura ocupada" (occupied literature). Fuks explains that it is: "Uma literatura que não quer se esquivar do presente, não quer se esquivar da política, não quer esquecer tudo o que nos assola. Uma literatura que se faz rua, praça, prédio, escola, e que deixa que reverberem em suas páginas as muitas vozes que gritam pela cidade" (qtd. in Carvalho) (A literature that does not want to avoid the present, that does not want to avoid politics, that does not want to forget everything that plagues us. A literature that becomes street, public square, building, school, and that allows for the many voices that cry out in the city to reverberate within its pages). Fuks's words propose that the literary text is not only anchored in a specific socio-historical context but that it also intervenes in this context by becoming part of it and, in a manner, by transforming this framework by imaginatively reworking it. In the same manner that residents occupy the vacant buildings in São Paulo's center and endow them with a new meaning, the literary text creates a symbolic space that references and expands the metropolitan streets, avenues, sidewalks, and buildings.

Spatial metaphors are central to Fuks's novel. *A ocupação* begins with the narrator strolling through an unnamed city with his partner. The couple comes across the "ruin of a man," "um ser em estado precário, um corpo soterrado em seus próprios escombros" (9) (a being in a precarious state, a body buried under its own detritus). Even as the narrator helps the man maneuver his wheelchair through the uneven sidewalks, he is unable to look him in the eyes, "nos seus olhos não cheguei a procurar a minha própria imagem" (9) (in his eyes, I did not seek my own image). The man's dilapidation, replicated in

the disintegrating sidewalks, allegorizes a breakdown of the cityscape and of its sociability: “era a perversidade da nossa cidade manifesta em insignificância, a sordidez replicada mundo afora todos os dias” (10) (It was our city’s perversity displayed in irrelevance, in a sordidness that increases every day). Sebástian’s inability to ultimately identify with the ruined man forebodes his simultaneous connection with and disconnection from the different people he meets in the text, as well as his attachment and separation from his partner and his immediate family, particularly his father. The encounter also forecasts the tension between habitation and visitation that haunts the narrator’s presence at the occupation at the Cambridge.

Ruins—human and architectural—reappear throughout the novel. They are insinuated in the ailing body of the narrator’s father who is hospitalized, as well as in other characters who have experienced a catastrophe (Carreira 89). Najati, a Syrian refugee who lives in the Cambridge and who becomes one of the novel’s focal points, is described in the same terms as the man that the narrator encounters on the street at the beginning of the text. Both are beings reduced to ruins: “aquele não era um homem, que aquilo não era um homem, era só as suas ruínas” (17) (he was not a man, that was not a man, it was only its ruins). The pronominal change from “he” to “that” and to “it” highlights the subject’s progressive devastation as he gradually loses his humanity. Individual subjectivity vanishes in the multiplication of tragedies. *A ocupação* partially recovers these stories. In so doing, the text retrieves the characters’ humanity in the textual traces that make up the novel.

As suggested earlier in the essay, the narrator’s apprehension of the man as a ruin at the novel’s opening portends his encounter with other types of wreckages, both human and non-human. Paradigmatic of the latter is the former Hotel Cambridge—a ruin that is nonetheless also something else. The structure allegorizes other buildings that lodge(d) the dreams of their residents, such as the Edifício Joelma: “[n]um esqueleto, de cujos ossos salientes tantos moradores saltaram ao vazio” (41) (a skeleton, from whose protruding bones so many tenants jumped into nothingness).⁶

Like the devastated bodies, images of burning buildings reoccurs in the novel. *A ocupação* ends with a scene of an incinerated occupied edifice, a tableau of mourning: “A montanha de escombros ainda fumegantes . . . senti estar num funeral incerto, numa cerimônia triste pela morte de algo vago, incórrpo-reo, algo mais amplo que aquele prédio ou que suas vítimas anônimas” (125) (The mountain of still-smoldering debris . . . I felt that I was at a precarious funeral, at a melancholy ceremony honoring something vague, disembodied, larger than that building and its anonymous victims).⁷ Mourning encompasses both the human lives that perished in the fire and the possibilities entailed in these lives. By equating buildings to shattered bodies that, in turn, beget other

broken (human) bodies, the narrator binds the urban tissue with the human material that inhabits this fabric. According to the author: “me fazer praça, me fazer rua, me fazer prédio vazio, e que enfim me ocupasse o incontível da vida” (105) (I want to become the public square, I want to become street, I want to become an empty building so that life’s incommensurability can take hold of me). The inhabited spaces of the city, its public terrains, are sites of interaction, locales that enable a possible meaningful sociability, that create potential encounters that can diminish the existential and experiential distance between the self and the people that surround her: “A coexistência pelas calçadas nos igualava, mesmo sem nos livrarmos da nossa origem e da nossa história” (81) (Our coexistence on the sidewalks made us equals, even if we still retained our origins and our histories). The narrator’s desire to embody the cityscape signifies his (to a degree impossible) yearning to connect with other beings, to become part of the various strands of lived experience that animate the metropolis.

Besides spatiality, the encounter with the “other” is one of novel’s thematic pivots. These two motifs reoccur in the three storylines that run through *A ocupação*. Sebastián, the story’s narrator and protagonist, is a participant–observer at an occupation in the city where he lives. He is also coming to terms with his father’s mortality. Finally, Sebastián also must deal with his potential fatherhood. All three storylines intertwine but also exist as separate threads in the textual fabric. As critics have pointed out, the novel’s title does not only reference the social act of taking over vacant urban real estate but also alludes to the Latin root of the verb “to occupy” (Carreira 89). Therefore, in *A ocupação*, the verb “to occupy” also describes the physical transformation of a pregnant body and the attendant psychological metamorphoses of parenthood. Finally, the title also alludes to Fuks’s profession as a writer and its accompanying ethical imperatives.

Shirley de Souza Gomes de Carreira points out that *A ocupação* strives to make space for other narratives that “occupy” the text we are reading. The book has multiple narrative voices that fluidly cohabit the story. In chapter 27, for example, the narrator’s speech transitions into that of Carmen, the leader of the occupation movement at the Cambridge. The only indicator of this shift is the change in pronouns in two adjoining paragraphs from “me” to “você”: “me vi paralisado . . . Você é o escritor” (82) (I was paralyzed . . . You are the writer). This seamless switch between narrative voices undermines the author’s/narrator’s authority. Sebastián/Julían is keenly aware of the debt he owes to his characters, who are also his co-authors: “Eles me contam as suas histórias, dizem coisas tão fortes que às vezes turvam os meus sentidos e eu já não sei quanto assimilo, e sobretudo não sei o que lhes devolver, não sei como retribuir” (107) (They tell me their stories, tell me such powerful things that I

become confused and no longer know how much I am assimilating. Above all I do not know what to give them back, how to reciprocate). Narrative fluidness opens a space for the “other” to express herself, to reach the reader, if not entirely without mediation, then at least in a less-mediated manner. Through narrative instability, Fuks creates a space of multiple encounters.

Perhaps one of the most compelling characters of *A ocupação* is Najati, a Syrian refugee who flees his country after being jailed for his political activism.⁸ Najati presents the narrator with an envelope filled with stories that he wrote. Through wistful memories of Najati’s life in Homs, the stories recount the experience of exile. Najati’s accounts form separate chapters in which his voice coexists with Sebastián’s. In this manner, Najati’s stories leaven the account that we are reading and, in effect, “occupy” Sebastián’s writing (36). Storytelling becomes blended with commentary about the story to create a study on tragedy and the written representation of tragedy. In a manner, Najati’s stories, much like the novel in which they appear, become narrative heterotopias. While they contain the lived realities of their characters/narrators, the fictional arena in which they exist and that they help to create is also a contestation of these experiences in that they transform the biographical into the fictional. But, the stories are also a resistance of sorts to the erasure of lives such as Najati’s. Finally, stories—including literary narratives—are a locus that enable dialogue.

While literature allows for the capture of another’s point of view, thereby making other worlds palpable, writing also inevitably highlights the distance that underlies textuality. Sebastián muses that he is only capable of producing:

uma literatura ocupada é o que posso fazer neste momento . . . Meus ocupantes me conduzem para fora dos meus domínios, e eu já não sei bem por onde vou. Estou escrevendo um livro sobre a paternidade sem conseguir me tornar pai . . . Estou escrevendo um livro sobre a morte sem tê-la jamais sentido apagar um corpo, numa especulação de sentimentos que um dia se fará risível, quando eu conhecer a dor. Estou escrevendo um livro sobre a dor do mundo, a miséria, o exílio, o desespero, a raiva, a tragédia, o absurdo, um livro sobre esta interminável ruína que nos cerca, tantas vezes despercebida, mas escrevo protegido por paredes firmes. (108)

(at this time, I can [only] produce an occupied literature . . . My thoughts take me outside my comfort zone, and I am unsure where I am going.

I am writing a book about fatherhood though I am unable to become a father . . . I am writing a book about death though I have never had the experience of seeing a body fade away, I preposterously speculate about a type of grief that only becomes real when lived. I am writing a book about the sorrow of the world, about misery, exile, desperation, anger, tragedy, the nonsensical, a book about this endless ruin that surrounds us, and that goes mostly unnoticed, and yet I write surrounded by strong, protective walls.)

Contrasts and repetitions organize the cited passage (“though,” “yet,” “I am writing a book”) and highlight the tension that traverses the entire novel and that, ultimately, imbues textuality itself. Writing, which in this passage becomes a mantra of sorts, accommodates these contradictions. As such, writing becomes a heterotopic space because it encompasses both real and imagined details. In that, it is a terrain that allows and even thrives on paradoxes. While writing harkens back to a concrete reality, it also expands these horizons, fertilizing it with the imaginary and the incongruous.

Writing also evidences the gap between different subjectivities and different life experiences. Perched between the approximation of a reality in which the author/narrator/protagonist of *A ocupação* nevertheless cannot fully partake and the consciousness of this unsurmountable distance, the novel provides entrance to a world where space is synonymous with both marginalization and resistance. Even as some occupations become regularized and their residents gain legal ownership to their properties, criminalization of these interventions and of the people who partake in them continues to be the norm. In December 2019, the São Paulo City council voted for a resolution that preempts housing assistance to members of groups who partake in occupations, and both Carmen Ferreira da Silva and Preta Ferreira have been jailed on accusations of extorting residents of occupations in the center of São Paulo.⁹ According to Preta Ferreira, the charges were trumped up to delegitimize the MSTC (Interview with Lu Sudré). For Preta Ferreira, the occupation is an ambiguous political space: a place where she actualizes her rights but also, paradoxically, a terrain where she becomes deprived of her legal prerogatives.

Michel Agier describes heterotopias as places where the encounter between self and other is possible. In Agier’s words, heterotopias “are ‘other’ spaces which can be imaginary (those of ‘parallel’ worlds), epistemic . . . , places where death lies (cemeteries), or places for illness, deviation, or crisis . . . ; in all these cases, heterotopias create an entity, real or fictional, which allows us to locate an otherness with which we can think the own self, or ‘us’” (15). Moreover, for Agier, heterotopias are also linked to urban segregation.

Heterotopias are a result of both exclusionary policies and less willful practices such as “subjective experiences” that translate into commuting routes, choice of leisure spaces, etc. (14).

The occupation at the Hotel Cambridge in São Paulo is paradigmatic of both concepts of heterotopia. Beyond being an “other” space in a physical sense, the site is also an imaginary terrain that encompasses the histories and aspirations of its myriad residents. It is a repository of both past, present, and a possible (hoped for) future. Finally, the hotel has also become a nucleus of dialogue between its residents and paulistas from different backgrounds. Collaborations with entities such as the Paço das Artes, a cultural organization under the purview of São Paulo’s bureau of culture, allows for projects that highlight the creative efforts of the hotel’s residents and their insertion within the urban landscape.¹⁰ Recurrent themes in such projects are space (especially the tension between home and homelessness), migration, and resistance.

When the narrator of *A ocupação* enters the Hotel Cambridge for the first time, he senses the conjunction between physical space and imagined place. In this heterotopic space, an unconventional sociability can flourish. It is a sociability that both centers on flux and transitions and that nonetheless is also more substantial: “a travessia diária das escadas parecia promover encontros mais lentos, e assim mais vivos, como se ao repartir o mesmo folêgo aquelas pessoas se vissem ao abrigo da pressa, do desinteresse, da indiferença” (41) (the daily passage through the stairs seemed to generate more leisurely encounters, as if, by sharing the same breath, those people were protected from haste, apathy, indifference). Corridors and stairwells are sites of dialogue, community, and interpersonal engagement. Not coincidentally, the narrator uses the noun “travessia” (passage) instead of “climbing” or “mounting.” Whereas the latter verbs suggest an individual pursuit, the former word communicates encounters and sociability.

Fuks’s narrative transforms what are generally non-spaces into what French anthropologist Marc Augé has termed anthropological places, or locales filled with affective meaning that enable shared, particular, and singular identity formation through social interaction. This sociability stands in contrast to the building’s original modus operandi. As a hotel, the Cambridge was emblematic of what Augé calls non-spaces, locales that are both physical and symbolic. Augé asserts that while anthropological spaces “create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality” (94). Hotels, airports, and shopping malls are emblematic of contemporary non-places. These sites are designed for limited interaction. Relations are frequently transactional. In contrast, Fuks’s portrayal of the occupation of the Hotel Cambridge resonates with the echoes of the stories that circulate within the building. At the occupied hotel, people establish emotional connections, partake in affective

exchanges, and participate in a collectivity. Communal endeavor is the operating principle of the Cambridge and other occupations. Luiza, one of the protagonists of Medeiros's video "Luíza e Adriana" explains that the Cambridge is "a escola da vida. Aqui você aprende a viver no que é o coletivo" (a school of life. Here you learn how to live as a part of a collectivity). Collaboration is fundamental to the occupation's functioning. At the beginning of the takeover, prospective residents jointly clean out shared spaces, which are subsequently maintained through monetary collections from the tenants. Many occupations also encourage community engagement through spatial features, such as communal gardens, and events, such as concerts or film clubs.

Even as the former hotel no longer exists as an establishment, its structure shelters many existences that are both material and the creation of the narrator's imagination. These unknown presences, in turn, are the impulse behind the story we are reading: "Não existia mais nenhum hotel, e no entanto suas portas escondiam uma infinidade de corpos tão firmes quanto o meu, suas portas filtravam vozes quase inaudíveis, vozes que me alcançavam em plena marcha, vozes que me mantinham em movimento" (14) (The hotel no longer existed, and yet its doors hid an infinity of bodies as palpable as mine, its doors filtered almost inaudible voices that reached me while I walked, voices that kept me moving). The juxtaposition between the narrator's body and the lives obscured behind the closed doors suggests both an approximation and an unsurmountable distance between the residents and him. This tension is underlined in the muffled voices that reach the narrator and in his continual motion. In the act of both listening and recording what he hears, the narrator effectuates a "mutual activation of worlds" (Medeiros). Recognition is accomplished by both the narrator and by the hotel's denizens. He sees the residents as much as he is seen by them. In this way, Fuks destabilizes a hierarchical mode of representation in which the (social) other occupies the position of observed but cannot observe. Encounters—or the possibility of meetings—in the heterotopic space of the Hotel Cambridge prompt an occupied literature.

The trope of the encounter suggests that while the occupied former hotel is a symptom of the urban segregation that defines the city of São Paulo (as well as many other Brazilian urban centers), it also defies the exclusionary logic that has distinguished the city's geography. Lúcia Sá notes how, since the proclamation of the Republic in 1889, São Paulo's urban planning has hinged on social segregation. She observes, "The creation of wealthy neighborhoods was accompanied by laws demanding that houses built in those areas be set back from the street and surrounded by gardens" (13). Poorer suburbs and rural areas around the city were not subject to the same provisions. In effect, São Paulo's peripheries remained mostly unregulated until about 1910 (Caldeira, *City of Walls*). This regulatory dichotomy intensified

in the first three decades of the twentieth century. According to Sá, between 1910 and 1930, São Paulo gained many of its modern avenues. It was also during this time that Francisco Prestes Maia launched his urbanization plan for the city. Sá remarks that the project, which was inspired by Georges-Eugène Haussmann's refashioning of Paris, exacerbated the city's geo-social differences and established the "center-periphery urban organization that has dominated São Paulo since the 1940s" (14). Historically, São Paulo's urban expansion has begotten different centralities. Carmen Brier explains that, in the 1950s, the city's historic center saw the construction of high-rise buildings, among them the Hotel Cambridge. Nonetheless, in the 1970s, this neighborhood was no longer deemed attractive to middle- and upper-class residents and businesses. Consequently, what was once considered prime real estate became abandoned. Spatial division—and accompanying social segregation—is still a distinguishing feature of São Paulo. Residents of peripheral neighborhoods spend between three to five hours on their journey to jobs in São Paulo's central districts (Van Mead 2017). Long commutes between peripheries, where most of the city's working-class population lives, and the center, where many people work, have led many residents to seek housing closer to their workplaces.

In light of this, movements for fair and affordable housing in central districts have been among São Paulo's most important social movements (Tagatiba et al.). Not only is São Paulo's real estate notoriously expensive, but it is also scarce. Further compounding the housing crisis is the high number of vacant buildings in the city. Teresa Caldeira maintains that São Paulo's center-periphery organization has made space one of the preeminent vectors of political engagement and social identity ("Social Movements" 128). How space is used, who has access to it, and what meanings are attached to specific places have socio-political significance.

Residents of occupations such as the Cambridge are keenly aware of the equation between access to the city and access to rights. Claudete Lindoso, a resident of the Cambridge, asserts:

We are not criminals, we are all hard-working people. All we want is the right to live in the city's center. We want quality of life. We are tired of being pushed to the periphery, to the margins of society . . . Why don't poor people have the right to live in the center of São Paulo, close to their work, enjoying better quality of life, where there are schools and daycare centers for our kids? (Betim)

Lindoso's words resonate with Lefebvre's conceptualization of the "right to the city" that—at least in theory—informed Law 10.257 and that also underpins the MSTC's effort to transform vacant buildings into affordable housing.

As stated at the beginning of the article, displacement is the common denominator of most of the Cambridge's residents: "Todos aqui parecem estar sempre fugindo de alguma coisa" (Fuks 83) (Everyone here seems to be fleeing something). Movement has become an essential vector of contemporary life, especially in urban settings. Not only is urban existence structured around transit, but transience is a noun that increasingly organizes the city. Alexandra Boutros and Will Straw suggest that "mobile technologies, mass transportation, mass media, and human migration (in its various forms) are perhaps the more visible structures of a city culture that is increasingly defined by vectors of travel, transit, migration, and other forms of mobility" (7). These migratory fluxes shape spatial and social dynamics in urban centers such as São Paulo.

In recent years, Brazil has received a record number of refugees from different parts of the world. Between December 2019 and June 2020, the number of displaced people in Brazil grew by sevenfold. Currently, around 43,000 refugees are living in the country (Vidigal). Most are from Venezuela, but there are also a significant number of Syrians and Haitians. Because of inadequate public policies and inappropriate relocation assistance, many of the refugees live in occupied buildings. In 2014, homeless refugees and immigrants associated with the MSTC formed the Grupo de Refugiados e Imigrantes Sem-Teto (Homeless Refugee and Immigrant Group, or GRIST). GRIST has several centers that address different needs (housing, cultural expression, health, solidarity). On the group's public Facebook page, one can find videos of members playing music, articles about displaced peoples, announcements for talks on exile and migration, etc. The content reflects how GRIST uses multiple venues of engagement, including cultural expression, to foreground the presence of refugees in Brazilian society.

The Cambridge's residential composition reveals how Brazil has become a territory of circulation for various types of dislocated populations. There are many foreign tenants from different parts of the world, such as Paraguay, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Residents of the Cambridge are exiles of war, natural disasters, and poverty. In *A ocupação*, this presence is sensed in the voices of the different characters who not only narrate their life stories but also co-create the fictional world that we experience throughout the novel. Some of the voices, such as Najati's, literally have an "accent": "Era uma escrita com sotaque. O mesmo que ouvira em sua voz" (34) (It was an accented writing. Tinged by the same accent that I heard when we spoke).

A ocupação highlights the centrality of migration as a reality and as a trope. Shirley de Souza Gomes de Carreira comments that displacement is a constant in Fuks's fictional output (88). His works touch upon not only physical movement but also the psychological and social shifts implicit in this action. While displacement is an integral part of the identities of the novel's characters, most of them refuse to be defined as victims. Ginia, the Haitian immigrant who loses her daughter in the 2010 earthquake, instructs the narrator to speak about her pain, her tragedy, but also about "algo mais que a dor, algo mais que a desgraça, se quiser escrever qualquer coisa que valha a pena" (73) (something other than the pain, something other than misfortune, if you want to write something worthwhile). Though *A ocupação*, like Virginia de Medeiros's video testimonials, does focus on the calamities that underpin many of the dweller's lives, the novel, like the narrative of *Quem não luta tá morto*, also concentrates on the acts of resistance that organize the lives in the occupation. Fuks portrays both the collective actions that promote empowerment, such as the parties at the building, and smaller acts that defy disenfranchisement, such as Preta eating mulberries in the midst of a broken garden (97).

Carmen Ferreira da Silva, the leader of the occupation, states that "Eles nos querem vagabundos, nos querem banditos, maltrapilhos, indigentes. Querem que nos falte tudo, país, terra, casa para viver, chão para morrer. Esse é o erro deles: não sabem que somos todos refugiados, não sabem com que força os refugiados se fincam na pedra, como chega fundo a raiz do desterro" (Fuks 25) (They want us to be vagrants, they want us to be criminals, they want us to be shabby, they want us to be destitute. They want us to lack everything, country, land, home, a plot of land in which we can be buried. This is their mistake: they do not know that we are all refugees. They do not know with what strength refugees take root, how deep the root of banishment is). In the passage quoted here, the substantive "refugee" is an antonym to the material and symbolic dispossession that an anonymous but implicitly elite "they" tries to impose on the impoverished masses that inhabit the Cambridge and similar spaces. The passage confronts the narrative of prejudice that casts the poor, non-white subjects as social pariahs. Instead, Carmen's words re-signify marginality. "Refugee" becomes tantamount to resistance, and, therefore, to agency. And, paradoxically, exile ("banishment") is also synonymous with the idea of being embedded in the fabric of local life and becoming part of a community. This conception also reverberates in some of Virginia de Medeiros's videos. In "Sonia," the title character, a Paraguayan immigrant, states: "Não porque eu sou estrangeira, não faço parte desse (sic) aqui. Eu faço sim. Eu faço parte disso aqui" (Just because I am a foreign national does not mean I do not belong here. I do. I am part of this). Sonia explains that her sense of belonging comes about because and through her experience at the occupation.

It is here that she becomes conscious of her rights. Sonia's awareness is informed by her experience but also incorporates new knowledge: "Tudo aquilo que eu passei no passado, isso me fortaleceu muito porque chegando aqui no Brasil, eh na ocupação, eu me envolvi mais, de saber as coisas, a agir mais e não sempre ficar calada" (Everything I experienced in the past strengthened me. Upon arriving in Brazil, eh, at the occupation, I became more engaged, I became more aware, I became more active, I stopped being silent). Sonia describes how her understanding of herself as a woman changed and how this shift also transformed her relationship to her husband from subordination to parity. Sonia literally finds her voice by partaking in the sociality of the occupation. We hear her words; we listen to her.

The same sense of agency resonates in the pages of *A ocupação*. Rosa, who loses her home because of a rat infestation, explains that she is tired of having been occupied and being tyrannized. She defiantly proclaims, "Agora é a minha vez de ocupar" (54) (Now it is my turn to occupy). Rosas's transformation of the meaning of the verb "to occupy" from oppressive into emancipatory summarizes the potential of the Cambridge's heterotopic spaces. In 2019, renovations began at the former Hotel Cambridge. The occupation is to be transformed into affordable housing that will be available to its residents through the *Minha Casa Minha Vida* program. Both in its capacity as an occupation and, hopefully, in its future configuration as an affordable housing complex, the Cambridge contains the many lives of its residents, as well as their dreams and the potential for other experiences that contest the disenfranchisement that structures Brazilian metropolises such as São Paulo.

Notes

1. This and all translations from Portuguese to English are by the author.
2. Residencies included: Visual artists Ícaro Lira (March to May 2016), Jaime Lauriano and Raphael Escobar (June to August 2016), Virgínia de Medeiros (November to January 2017), author Julián Fuks (September to October 2016) and scholar Alex Flynn (March to January 2017).
3. The episode that *A ocupação* portrays references the takeover of the vacant former offices of the social security administration on the Avenida 9 de Julho. The FML seized the building in 2016.
4. In his blog *Página 5*, Casarín states that Fuks's two novels form a diptych.
5. Fuks and Couto collaborated through the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative.

6. In 1974, a fire consumed the Edifício Joelma, leaving 187 people dead and more than 300 wounded.
7. Fuks's novel references the 2018 burning of the Edifício Walter Paes de Almeida. Located on the Largo do Paissandu, in the center of São Paulo, the building was designed in 1961 in the modernist style. The "Prédio de vidro" (Glass Building), which for a while housed the National Social Security Office (INSS), was put on the city's register of historic buildings in 1991. It was empty until 2003, when it became occupied. In the 2018 fire, seven people died and two were never accounted for.
8. While Gina seems to be a fictional character, Najati is a true person. In the novel's acknowledgements, Fuks thanks Najati Tayara for his "comovente confiança no diálogo" (127) (touching faith in dialogue). Of course, Fuks is again playing with the porous boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. Even if Najati is not just a fictional creation, one cannot be sure that his words in the narrative are indeed his or if, instead, they are Fuks's fabrication.
9. In October of 2019, Carmen Ferreira da Silva was acquitted of all accusations. Also, in October of 2019, Preta Ferreira was released from prison on habeas corpus provision.
10. Between September and December 2016, the Paço Comunidade, a program of the Paço das Artes designed to enhance cooperation between the latter and its surrounding communities, sponsored a series of fashion upcycling workshops, round table discussions, and lectures at the Hotel Cambridge. The discussions focused on the notion of "clothing as shelter." In the words of the curators, Claudio Bueno and Priscila Abrantes, this concept intended to open "o campo de pesquisa em torno das arquiteturas provisórias, das migrações, do design nômade e daqueles artistas que problematizam a intersecção entre corpo e moradia" (the research field that deals with provisional architectures, migrations, nomadic design, and of artists that delve into the intersection between body and housing).

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