

Rizomas periféricas: Reterritorialização do espaço urbano no *Estação Terminal de Sacolinha*

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RESUMO: Este artigo examinará as representações do terminal no romance *Estação Terminal* de Sacolinha, e fará o argumento que o romance enquadra a reterritorialização como um processo no qual personagens marginais negociam espaços controlados pelo estado através de redes rizomáticas.

Palavras-chave: Sacolinha; terminal; espaços urbanos; reterritorialização; rizoma.

*Quero dar voz àqueles que não tinha voz na versão oficial. Como Saramago, odeio qualquer tipo de injustiça.
I want to give voice to those who have not had a voice in the official version.
Like Saramago, I detest any kind of injustice.*

-Sacolinha

Sacolinha's¹ fictional works frequently question how inhabitants of São Paulo, in particular residents of the city's peripheral communities, negotiate their marginalized social status through the ways in which they navigate the urban landscape. In particular, his novel *Estação Terminal*, focuses entirely on urban spaces related to public transit, and the residents who appropriate it for uses related to transportation, work, consumption or social gatherings. Sacolinha's personal experiences working as a *cofrador*² in the *peruas* that circulated around the Corinthians-Itaquera Terminal in the eastern peripheral zone of São Paulo adds depth to his novel by providing details about why residents and workers from the periphery occupied and used public transit spaces in ways that created conflict with the state. There are no heroes or villains in his novel, but only everyday people whose struggle to survive unfolds within the space of the terminal.

In Sacolinha's novel *Estação Terminal*, the public transit terminal functions not only as the principal setting, but serves as an urban space that can offer new possibilities through the continual redefinition of its purpose by marginalized characters seeking to negotiate their place in São Paulo. Here, members from the informal economy, in particular the *perua* workers from the peripheral zones of the city, remake the meaning of the terminal to meet economic needs and to facilitate their ability to move about the city. These new ways of interfacing with and using urban space that simultaneously occur in the terminal can be framed as a rhizome in order to understand how the periphery is a site of creation, productivity and life and not only a place of lack. This article, therefore, examines representations of the terminal in Sacolinha's *Estação Terminal*, and it argues that the novel frames reterritorialization as a process in which marginalized persons negotiate state-controlled spaces through rhizomatic networks.

As a part of the *Literatura Periférica*³ tradition responding to the lack of representation of marginal communities in literature, Sacolinha's work concentrates on voices that inhabit segregated, marginalized spaces of the modern Brazilian city, in particular São Paulo. The protagonists in his novels and short stories are confined to spaces that Regina Dalcastagnè notes is⁴ a common experience for poor people represented in contemporary urban Brazilian literature: "para estas pessoas, ocupar um espaço é sinônimo de se contentar com os restos – as favelas, a periferia, os bairros decadentes, or prédios em ruínas" (2004, p. 43). In his first book, the novel *Graduado in Marginalidade* (Major in Marginality), the protagonist, a young man from the *periferia*, loses his parents, friends

and loved ones to the violence of crime and police corruption. The title of the novel plays with the notion of achieving a degree or certification after completing one's studies. In the case of the protagonist, the diploma he receives after majoring in marginality is one of two experiences common in the *periferia*: death or prison. Sacolinha builds on this portrayal of one young man's experiences in the novel through his second book, the short story collection, *85 letras e um disparo* (85 Letters and a Gun Shot). He examines the lives of a diverse sampling of individuals from society's margins (the philosophical musings of a homeless man, a young boy skipping school, a criminal seducing a young woman for personal gain and a man who lives in an abandoned rail car to name just a few of the protagonists). These different perspectives found in the text echoes echo Dalcastagnè's analysis of how marginalized persons move about the city as represented in Brazilian literature: "olhar o espaço urbano também pelo ângulo daqueles que estão impedidos de se mover...a única localidade que habitam movendo-se sob seus pés" (2003, p. 42). In other words, Sacolinha's literary works critique problems to do with social inequity that impact peripheral communities by examining how the characters move about (or the lack thereof) the city landscape. Sacolinha's second novel and the focus of this article, *Estação Terminal*, continues the practice started in *85 letras e um disparo* of questioning the marginalized status of *periferia* residents by how they occupy and traverse public spaces found in São Paulo. All of his literary works have a unifying thread: the subjectivity of invisible persons who now become the focus of the narrative. Their daily experiences, particularly how they unfold within urban spaces, come to the foreground as a way to develop a complex portrait of the Other.

In the novel *Estação Terminal*, a series of smaller narratives on the workers of the informal economy⁵ weave together to create a tapestry of the space they occupy and reterritorialize: the public transit terminal of Corinthians-Itaquera located in the eastern periphery of São Paulo. The novel is divided into five parts – the opening section introduces the main characters, most of whom work as *perueiros* and *cobreadores* for the *perua* system, and the displacement they experience in the city due to their low social status (e.g. as street children, migrants to the big city, urban youth being harassed on the streets by police). The second part provides a brief history of the Corinthians-Itaquera terminal, explaining why it was a prime location to be reterritorialized by workers from the informal economy. The third part recounts the history of the *peruas*, and how they redefined the use of the terminal and the surrounding streets for public transportation. The fourth section introduces two corrupt police officers and their relationship with the informal economy, symbolizing how the state attempted to control and regulate the *peruas*. Part five, the final section of the novel, functions as an epilogue that shares the fate of the characters introduced in section one, which functions as a metaphor for what became of the *perua* system. My analysis focuses on the key protagonists of the novel: the workers of the *perua* system who worked in and around the terminal. Functioning as a mini-bus, *peruas* were privately owned vans that transported *periferia* residents throughout São Paulo's *periferia* until the early 2000s. The novel, taking place from 1995-2006, chronicles the *perua* workers' appropriation of bus routes, strategies to avoid capture by state and municipal authorities and their personal relationships to each other. In sum, the ways in which Sacolinha frames the *perua* workers' use of the terminal and the surround streets can be interpreted as a subjectivizing process for marginalized persons typically invisible to the world.

Reterritorialization of State-Controlled Spaces

The negotiation of the space of public transit in Sacolinha's novel can be understood through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of reterritorialization: the redefinition of existing spaces and structures wherein social actors take preexisting social aspects, incorporate their own meaning and establish new social identities (1983, p. 224-25). By adapting the existing transportation infrastructure, *perua* workers in Sacolinha's novel redefine the use of the street as a way to control their environment. While working for the *perua* system on the streets of São Paulo can at times be dangerous and unpredictable, what is important to note is that the street becomes a site of struggle between the state and these marginalized characters. The *perua* workers use the existing public transit to create their own transportation that operates outside state control, which results in the transformation of urban spaces into sites of new possibilities related to social and economic exchanges.

Renato Ortiz's examination of the dynamics tied to the reterritorialization of public spaces in Latin America provides further insight into the how and why marginalized identities repurpose city spaces:

La desterritorialización tiene la virtud de apartar el espacio del medio físico que lo aprisionaba, la reterritorialización lo actualiza como dimensión social. Ella lo "localiza". Nos encontramos, pues, lejos de la idea de "fin" del territorio. Lo que ocurre en verdad es la constitución de una territorialidad dilatada, compuesta por franjas independientes, pero que se juntan, se superponen, en la medida en que participan de la misma naturaleza. Viajar, desplazarse por esos estratos, es permanecer en el interior de un tipo de espacialidad común a pueblos diversos. Esta perspectiva cambia radicalmente nuestra concepción de espacio (1998, p. 37).

Ortiz's explanation that reterritorialization results in localizing the space it redefines applies to the *perua* workers in Sacolinha's novel. They are transforming the hegemonic social and economic meanings tied to the terminal and reinscribing it with a purpose and functionality that reflects the local demands of the urban periphery. What the characters are doing then is not the end, or demise of the territory they are appropriating, but as Ortiz observes, the creation of an ever expanding territory made up of many different strands of experiences that intersect with each other to form a heterogeneous space. The *peruas*, *ambulantes* and vendors that occupy the terminal with their different experiences and interests, therefore, are transforming it into a place with many more possibilities for communities in the peripheral zones of the São Paulo that usually experience a lack within the spaces of the city.

The ways in which the *perua* workers in Sacolinha's novel reterritorialize the use of the terminal and the surrounding roads resonates with Leila Lehen's argument that urban spaces in contemporary Brazilian literature do not serve only as the "narrative backdrop, but also deploy it as a trope for differentiated and/or insurgent citizenship" (2013, p. 15). James Holston defines insurgent citizenship as a form of social and political mobilization that emerges from the urban peripheries and involves finding alternative ways to engage with the state, whether sanctioned or not, as a means to participate as full members of society (2008). Holston in particular examines one important aspect of insurgent citizenship within the *periferia* communities of São Paulo to do with how public spaces are occupied and used: the practice of *autoconstrução*, or auto-construction. *Periferia* residents had to build their own homes, neighborhoods and services, which then extended to the idea of creating a new realm of citizenship, rights, political mobilization. The novel's social significance lies, therefore, in presenting the *perua* workers not as law

breakers, but as part of this citizenry from the *periferia* who find ways to create their own housing, infrastructure and services (or transit system in the case of the *perua* workers) by occupying state-controlled sites like the terminal and the surrounding streets and adapting it to their social and economic needs.

In the novel, the *peruas*' reterritorialization of the bus routes in the neighborhoods surrounding the Corinthians-Itaquera terminal create ne The *perua* functioned as a shadow of the bus system, allowing laborers to engage in the informal economy. In the opening chapter, Sacolinha juxtaposes descriptions of how the legal bus system and the *peruas* traverse the city streets in order to emphasize the contrast in how both navigate the urban infrastructure:

O transporte legal feito com ônibus de empresas cadastradas vivia com atrasos, e sempre estava lotado. Os passageiros começaram a optar pelas kombis, que, por serem velhas e barulhentas, ganharam o apelido de *peruas*. Era o meio mais rápido de se chegar em algum lugar, pois lotava rápido, não ficava parando em todos os pontos de ônibus, cortava caminhos e, quando possível, deixava o passageiro na porta de casa ou do serviço (Sacolinha, 2010, p. 22)

Legal transportation made up of buses from registered companies were chronically late and always full. Passengers began to choose the *kombis*, which, due to being old and loud, earned the nickname of *peruas*. It was the fastest way to go somewhere because it filled up quickly, did not make stops at every bus stop, took shortcuts, and when possible, dropped off the passenger at the front door of their home or work (My translation).

Adjectives, such as “late” and “always full” used to describe the authorized transportation system functions as a critique of its unreliability and of how it prevents people from being able to easily move about the city. Ironically, the sentence reveals that the *periferia* residents experience the state sanctioned transportation system as chaotic, disordered and restrictive. James Holston, in his analysis of why *periferia* residents developed their own infrastructure, points to the development of São Paulo's transit system during the 20th century as a major factor. Transportation specialists' design of the public transit system prioritized the needs of the upper classes, but invested few resources into the peripheral communities through a few suburban rail lines, resulting in residents having insufficient access to the city center (Holston, 2008, p. 160). Thus, Sacolinha's discourse on the state of public transit in the peripheral zones of the city confronts the lack of prioritization by the state to provide better access to other areas of the city.

In contrast, the way in which Sacolinha describes the *peruas* as “old” and “loud” amplify the distorted facsimile of transit *perua* workers generate in response to peripheral communities' exclusion from urban modernization. These adjectives denote that an object or a person may be out of place, outdated or untrendy. This *fora de lugar* positionality – using Mário Augusto Medeiros da Silva's term to describe characters from *Literatura Periférica* literary works – creates the conditions in which the *perua* workers in Sacolinha's novel can deterritorialize how the state defines the use of the streets for public transit (2013). The notion of being out of place, therefore, takes on a positive and empowering connotation. Old implies resourcefulness, as the *perua* workers restore or maintain seemingly obsolete vehicles to make a living. The vans and *perua* workers, therefore, do not fit in with the ordered, modern system of the city; not out of refusal, but because they use the resources at their disposal to create an alternative transportation system that will allow them to participate as citizens of the city.

The way in which Sacolinha describes how the *peruas* move about the city – faster way, quick and shortcuts – illustrates how the characters negotiate the state’s control of spaces to do with public transit. Their ability to deviate from the buses’ fixed routes can be framed as tactics that challenge what de Certeau defines as strategies, or how the state determines how citizens should inhabit and move about the cityscape (1984). By shifting routes to do with traffic flows and arriving at destinations much faster, the *peruas* are not only offering more public transportation options, but are changing how the previously disempowered *periferia* residents can move about the city. The change in their relationship to the city becomes even more evident when Sacoinha describes the door to door service offered by the drivers. This action implies that an intimate relationship exists between the driver and the rider, indicating a sense of community within the spaces occupied by the *perua* system. A practice of sociability ensues, which contrasts with the feelings of isolation, detachment and dehumanization that are associated with the experience of riding the city bus system.

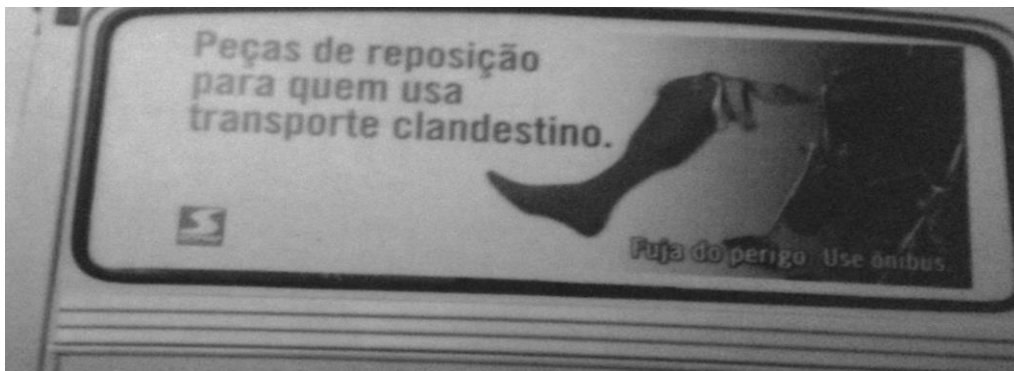
Another manifestation of the reterritorialization of state-controlled spaces in the novel occurs with the drivers’ creative initiatives to appropriate negative state propaganda about the *peruas* and transform it into a guerilla marketing campaign. One driver in particular, Batata, strategically places an advertisement on the back windshield of his *perua* as a way to engage in a public debate with the government’s anti-clandestine transportation propaganda:

1 ÔNIBUS = 80 PASSAGEIROS POR VIAGEM:
2 EMPREGOS
1 LOTAÇÃO = 10 PASSAGEIROS POR VIAGEM:
2 EMPREGOS
NO CASO PRECISAMOS DE 8 PERUAS PARA
CARREGAR IGUAL AO ÔNIBUS = 16 EMPREGOS
E AÍ, QUEM TÁ GERANDO MAIS EMPREGOS? (Sacolinha 92)

1 BUS = 80 PASSENGERS PER TRIP:
2 JOBS
1 VAN = 10 PASSENGERS PER TRIP:
2 JOBS
IN THIS CASE WE NEED 8 PERUAS TO
TRANSPORT THE SAME AS THE BUS = 16 JOBS
AND SO, WHO IS CREATING MORE JOBS? (My translation)

Batata’s actions echo Holston’s argument that practices to do with insurgent citizenship result in a more politically engaged community. Because the workers do not have input on the development of the city’s public transit system, Batata’s actions reterritorialize the street as a site of political debate on the prejudicial treatment of *perua* drivers and *cobradores*. The disagreement that ensues between Batata and the government reinforces how city is frequently a space in dispute in contemporary Brazilian literature, involving threats, violence and negotiations (Dalcastagnè 2014, p. 41). Batata’s guerrilla marketing challenges the government propaganda that presented the *peraus* as a “threat to the city,” as a kind of “mafia of perueiros” who had supposed connections to organized crime and jeopardized the established order of the city (Hirata, 2012, p. 23). The signs, therefore, serve an important role in not only countering the negative publicity, but in moving forward the Greek idea of the *ágora*, or creating a space where individuals are encouraged to engage politically with ideas presented in the text (Resende, 2008). Batata

cannot stop the government's public service campaign, but he can make the street into a political space where he can present counter arguments to the city residents about the working poor finding creative solutions to problems the government does not address in a timely fashion.



Propaganda placed on the back windows of buses to advertise the dangers of using clandestine transportation.
Photo from back cover of Sacolinha's novel

Rhizomatic Networks of the Terminal

In Sacolinha's novel, the terminal⁶ encompasses an important role as a fluid site that enables the establishment of informal networks by the *perua* workers that is rhizomatic in nature. The transportation authority built terminals, which are located throughout the São Paulo metropolitan region and serve as commuter hubs. As sites of the continual movement of people, vehicles and goods, the terminal resembles Babel, or an urban space full of disharmony and confusion – not in a negative aspect – but as a location that opens up all possibilities (Dalcastagnè 2003, p. 34). The terminal's transitory nature made it conducive to appropriation by the unauthorized networks of the *perua* system. Sacolinha provides a list of marginal subjects who regularly inhabit the terminal.

Chegariam por ali traficantes, taxistas, promotores de venda, perueiros, bicheiros, catadores de ferro-velho, ciganos, mendigos, pedintes, ladrões, prostitutas e homossexuais (*Estação Terminal*, p. 52).

Drug traffickers, taxi drivers, sale promoters, *peruas* drivers, illegal gamblers, junk collectors, gypsies, beggars, pan-handlers, thieves, prostitutes and homosexuals would pass through there [the terminal]. (My translation)

The terminal's fluid nature makes it conducive to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the rhizome. The long list of individuals engaged in informal economies and illicit activities, and how they intersect with each other within and around the terminal resemble a rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari's use of biological concepts like mutualism, or when two different species interact, forms a multiplicity, or a unity made up of multiple things, which in the case of Sacolinha's novel, are the different workers and suspicious individuals occupying the terminal. The opening up of new possibilities from these interactions in the terminal can be framed through Regina Dalcastagnè's observation that urban literature in particular focuses on what is uncapturable about the city – the multiplicity of trajectories that can unfold in any given space or time (2003, p. 35-36). By interfacing with different people and looking to modify how the existing transportation infrastructure is used, *perua* workers in Sacolinha's novel engage in practices that generate new opportunities before unimaginable.

The effectiveness of the rhizome becomes evident when the *perua* workers⁷ in *Estação Terminal* create adaptive, decentralized networks to find protection from the authorities. These informal social associations operate in a “horizontal, de-centralized and rhizomatic form,” which “contrast with the centrally organized, extremely hierarchical public policies that failed to resolve social inequalities or reduce them to a desirable level” (Bentes, 2013, p. 29).⁸ The creation of teams tied to radio communication points to a coordinated effort on the part of the drivers and *cobradores* to introduce rhizomatic networks that do not use a formal, rigid structure that resembles state institutions but instead are adaptive in nature in order to meet their needs by circumventing authority:

E foi assim que todas as peruas foram equipadas com radio PX, para se comunicar umas com as outras. Por isso vinham com enormes antenas na parte traseira. E nesse meio criou-se as Equipes de Lotação, com nomes para identificar quem era do grupo de quem. Até que alguns desses nomes eram criativos: Vagabundo de Luxo, 20 buscar, Coyote, Só Diretoria, Stoa Toa, Só o cheiro, Bafo da Cobra, Vapt Vupt, Cara de Pau, Fura-Fila e Pé de Pano.

And so all the *peruas* were equipped with PX radios to communicate with each other. That’s why they had huge antennas on the rear of the vehicle. And in this context, the transport teams were created with names to identify who belonged to which group. Even some of the names were creative: Vagabundo de Luxo, 20 buscar, Coyote, Só Diretoria, Stoa Toa, Só o cheiro, Bafo da Cobra, Vapt Vupt, Cara de Pau, Fura-Fila e Pé de Pano.

Their ability to avoid the authorities while simultaneously working on the *peruas* indicates the presence of support systems that react to challenges that may arise unexpectedly. Due to their ability to split up and alter routes, the *cobradores* and drivers continue to provide services in the face of adversity, which echoes Diego Coletto’s observations on workers from the informal economy in Brazil who establish unofficial organizations and unions to offer support to each other and to protect their economic interests (2010, p. 130-137).

Rhizomatic help networks abound in Sacolinha’s novel: from the installation of a secret, privately owned gas station as a way to keep fuel costs low for the *peruas* to the creation of a communal pot to pay fines in case one of the *peruas* was apprehended by authorities (Sacolinha, 2010, p. 84). Organizing crews that provide opportunities for social mobility reflects Ivana Bentes’ analysis that urban, peripheral communities are not merely “factories of poverty and violence,” but function as “territories and networks of creation” that offer relief from poverty (2013, p. 2). By continually seeking out ways to not only escape poverty, but also to create informal social structures that allow them to thrive in the face of adversity, the *perua* workers working on the streets goes beyond the stereotypical images of delinquency by belonging to a larger sensibility of individuals attempting to create a better life for themselves. In “Collaborative Networks and the Productive Precariat”, Bentes elaborates on the possibilities that emerge from urban networks:

[The] outskirts produce new neighborhood relations...as well as rhizomatic help networks — the culture of parties, religious rituals, samba, funk and hip-hop, an entire cultural and affective capital born in an environment of brutality shared by different social groups. From these territories arise cultural practices, aesthetics and networks of sociability and politics forged in the ghettos... (2013, p. 2)

As rhizomatic help networks, street crews tied to the *perua* system create opportunity in the face of socio-economic disparities found in the *periferia*.

The *perua* workers' efforts to reterritorialize the terminal and the surrounding streets in Sacolinha's novel may not permanently change their precarious socio-economic status, but circumventing government regulations to do with the use of city space functions as a political action. They avoid persecution from authority figures through their involvement in the informal networks of the *perua* system, which function in a decentralized and rhizomatic form, creating opportunities to acquire resources by adapting to the unexpected challenges that may arise on the streets of São Paulo. The *perua* crews' need to adjust to the constantly changing environment of the streets coupled with their ability to provide support to groups members frames them as networks of creation and possibility, contrasting the image of death and destruction propagated by the government. The constant adaptations of public space by the *perua* workers in *Estação Terminal* emphasize how urban literature effectively captures the power relations that unfold between marginalized citizens of the city and the government.

In sum, the *perua* workers form networks that contest and ultimately, redefine the state's control of urban space.

Conclusion

Urban space in Sacolinha's novel plays a much more important role than just serving as the narrative's setting. It becomes the mechanism by which the displaced characters from the *periferia* can negotiate and affirm their subjectivity. The underdeveloped infrastructure of the *periferia* described in the novel forces local residents to generate their own solutions to the lack of adequate public transit to and from their neighborhoods. The terminal becomes a symbol of marginalized subjects' response to the infrastructure inequalities that segregate the *periferia* from the rest of the city. Within the fluid space of the terminal, the *perua* workers establish supportive, rhizomatic networks to counter the stigma they experience as criminalized individuals. The *perua* workers represented in *Estação Terminal* seek out ways to find meaning in the city through the creation of collaborative networks that offer new possibilities for creation and production. They formulate tactics with each other in the terminal to avoid the authorities and grow their fledgling businesses. They may never fully escape the stigma of being an outsider, but Sacolinha highlights how the reterritorialization of state-controlled spaces opens up opportunities for marginalized person to experience social mobility.

Peripheral Rhizomes: Reterritorializing Urban Space in Sacolinha's *Estação Terminal*

ABSTRACT: This article examines representations of the terminal in Sacolinha's *Estação Terminal*, and it argues that the novel frames reterritorialization as a process in which marginalized persons negotiate state-controlled spaces through rhizomatic networks.

Keywords: Sacolinha; terminal; urban spaces; reterritorialization; rhizome.

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¹ Sacolinha's real name is Ademiro Alves de Sousa. He received his pen name while working as a *cobrador* during his youth.

² In the case of Sacolinha's novel, the term *cobrador* refers to young males from the *periferia* who collect fares from passengers on the *perua*. The *cobrador* is commonly from a working-class background, male and non-white. The term *cobrador* can also refer to the fare collector who works on one of the government sanctioned buses.

³ *Literatura Periférica*, or Peripheral Literature, is a literary movement emerging out of São Paulo's *periferia* during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

⁵ For the informal economy, I use Diego Coletto's definition: "In the metropolitan areas of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, streets and sidewalks often represent an "extralegal zone" where a multitude of vendors, artisans, artists, preachers, shoe-shiners, delivery boys, and garbage collectors work and live. Within these zones individual qualities can emerge—talent, creativity, and the ability of human beings to get by starting from basically nothing. "Ingenious" and peculiar local arrangements provide essential goods and services, and often such pro-vision is becoming the only supply of those services and goods for an increasing number of inhabitants of large cities in the South of the world" (xiii).

⁶ Itikawa's study, "Geometrias da clandestinidade: o trabalho informal no centro de São Paulo" provides a brief overview of the informal economy sector in the center of São Paulo, particularly in areas surrounding public transit stations.

⁷ See Ana Paula Maia's collection of novellas, *Entre rinhas de cachorros e porcos abatidos: duas novelas* (2009) for additional fictional works from contemporary Brazilian literature that focus on individual figures from the working-class economy.

⁸ Bentes' study, "Collaborative Networks and the Productive Precariat," focuses on informal networks in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas*, but the ideas she outlines in her essay can be applied to other marginalized communities in Brazil's cities, namely São Paulo's *periferia*.

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