

VILA AUTÓDROMO IN DISPUTE:

SUBJECTS, INSTRUMENTS AND STRATEGIES
TO REINVENT THE SPACE

VILA AUTÓDROMO EM DISPUTA:

SUJEITOS, INSTRUMENTOS E ESTRATÉGIAS PARA A REINVENÇÃO DO ESPAÇO

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ABSTRACT: The struggle of the residents in Vila Autódromo to reinvent their territory, violently affected by the onslaught of urban restructuring during the times of Olympic urbanism in Rio de Janeiro, is taken as an emblematic case of the production of conflictual space. The present article describes the various instruments and strategies that the residents and their supporters have used in order to resist the current city project. The imaginative capacity of the subjects over recent years has helped to bring the case into the public sphere on several different levels: local, national and international. The present article is made up of the following sections: a brief description of Vila Autódromo as a disputed territory; the media as an active tool in the production of space; institutional violence on the territory; places for communicating the struggle; and insurgent territorial grammars. In the final considerations a number of the key ideas are taken up so as to emphasize the transformative, emancipatory learning possibilities for all those who have participated within the process.

KEY WORDS: conflictual space; public sphere; Vila Autódromo; Rio Olympics.

RESUMO: *A luta dos moradores da Vila Autódromo para reinventar seu território, violentamente afetado pela marcha da reestruturação urbana na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, em tempos de urbanismo olímpico, é tomada como caso emblemático de produção do espaço conflitual. Este artigo evidencia os diversos instrumentos e estratégias que os moradores e apoiadores fizeram uso para resistir ao atual projeto de cidade. A capacidade imaginativa dos sujeitos ao longo dos anos permitiu inscrever o caso na esfera pública em múltiplas escalas: local, nacional e internacional. O trabalho constitui-se das seguintes partes: Vila Autódromo como território disputado; a mídia como instrumento ativo na produção do espaço; as violências institucionais no território; lugares para a comunicação da luta. Nas considerações finais são retomadas algumas ideias-chave relacionadas às gramáticas territoriais da insurgência, que enfatizam as possibilidades de aprendizado e emancipação para todos aqueles que participaram do processo.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *espaço conflitual; esfera pública; Vila Autódromo; Rio de Janeiro olímpico.*

Contribution of each author: **A.** theoretical and conceptual basis and problematization; **B.** research data and statistical analysis; **C.** producing figures and tables; **D.** photographs; **E.** preparation and drafting of manuscript; **F.** selection of references.

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The present article is supported by one thesis: the case of Vila Autódromo, in the city of Rio de Janeiro, a territory targeted by big business interests that have impelled the current restructuring of the space, may be taken as a reference for conflictual space, since its residents, as subjects of the production of space, have resorted to various instruments, resources and strategies in order to resist the city project, to reinvent the space and to reestablish it as a public sphere.

It is estimated that much of the political power in this case, which has become a symbol of popular resistance to the so-called “Olympic City” for the 2016 Games, is contained within the imaginative capacity to disfigure, in various dimensions, the codes of power and to reconfigure the territory in the struggle.

In order to develop its reflections, the present article is composed of the following sections: a brief description of the Vila Autódromo as a disputed territory; the media as an active tool in the production of space; institutional violence on the territory as power strategies; places and spaces for communicating the struggle; insurgent territorial grammars – messages in dispute. In the final considerations some key ideas regarding the case are examined so as to assess the initial thesis presented herein.

VILA AUTÓDROMO, A TARGETED TERRITORY

We are of no threat to the environment, nor to the landscape or to anyone’s safety. We only threaten those who wish to violate our constitutional right to housing. We are a threat only to those who want to speculate on urban land and to the politicians who serve their interests. They have their plan, which is to wipe us from the map. We have our plan, which states our right to continue to exist. Our history of struggle now continues within our People’s Plan (A statement by Altair Guimarães, President of the Vila Autódromo Residents Association in the video *Vila Autódromo: a neighborhood marked to live*¹; author’s translation).

Vila Autódromo is located in an area owned by the State Government of Rio de Janeiro on the shores of the Jacarepaguá Lagoon, in Barra da Tijuca, which is the main area of residential expansion for middle and high income earners in Rio de Janeiro. It was on this land, which is also public and adjacent to the people’s settlement, that the Olympic Park was constructed, and constituted the main cluster of sports facilities for the 2016 Olympics.

In 2009, when it was announced that Rio de Janeiro would host the 2016 Olympic Games, Vila Autódromo was a small settlement with around 1,300 residents. Since 1993 the population had resisted plans by the Mayor’s Office which, for a wide variety of reasons², had declared its intention to remove the settlement in its entirety. From 2009, these threats became progressively more intense.

By 2016, the reasons for its removal included arguments related to vacating the side strip of the Jacarepaguá Lagoon and especially, the alleged need for the evacuation of hundreds of homes in order to construct two access points to the Olympic Park. The Mayor’s project included the removal of the entire population, who would be transferred to a housing estate located at a distance of around two kilometers, in apartments often much smaller than the homes occupied by families in the community.

¹ *Vila Autódromo: Um bairro marcado para viver* (Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-MgRZ-60i_l>. Accessed on: 21st September 2016).

² For information on this subject, please see Vainer *et al.* (2013).

Map 1: Location of Vila Autódromo indicating the community area in 2011, and the land which was later used for the Olympic Park



Source: Produced by the authors based on Google Earth.

The terms of the edict from the public-private partnership established to build the Olympic Park, estimated that once the games had finished, the consortium, which had won the bid, would be entitled to use around 70% of the land to construct a real estate project that included residential and commercial buildings and hotels. Consequent changes to planning legislation permitted new uses and intensification of the occupation, thus enabling this new business venture (MEDEIROS, 2016). The consortium, which had won the bid, consisted of two of the largest public works contractors in Brazil – Odebrecht and Andrade Gutierrez – and Carvalho Hosken S.A., which owned much of the land in Barra da Tijuca, especially within the vicinity of the Olympic Park. In May 2016, on the land owned by Carvalho Hosken S.A., the Athlete’s Village, which at the time was near completion, was launched as a future residential project with the suggestive name of “Pure Island.”

Alliances between the executive power and large landowners linked to real estate development in Barra da Tijuca date back to the 1960s, and over the years have involved huge public investment in transport, which has significantly improved access to and facilitated occupation of the region. From the early 1990s, a new wave of investments in mobility structures (such as the *Linha Amarela* – the Yellow Line Roadway – and, more recently, the implantation of specific corridors for the Bus Rapid Transit System – the BRT and the Metrô) resulted in the gradual occupation of the area immediately north of the Jacarepaguá Lagoon, a large part of which was owned by Carvalho Hosken SA (CARDOSO, 1988; COSENTINO, 2015). In 1995 this area was virtually empty, and over the last twenty years this area has become a new centrality complementary to the older concentration of shopping centers built between the 1970s and 1990s in Barra da Tijuca.

Moreover, as demonstrated by research from the Instituto Mais Democracia (IMD), a civil society organization based in Rio de Janeiro, Odebrecht and Andrade Gutierrez were involved either individually or in partnership, in the construction or

operation of most of the projects related to the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics (IMD, 2013). According to the institute, Odebrecht, for example, was involved in the construction or the control and operation of the subway system, the metropolitan commuter railway (Supervia), the BRT Trans-Olympic, the Light Railway in the central area (VLT Rio), the metropolitan ring road (Arco Metropolitano), the cable car in one of the city's largest slums (Complexo do Alemão), the Porto Maravilha project in Rio's port area, as well as the public-private partnership of Maracanã Sports Complex and the renovation of the João Havelange Football Stadium (Engenhão). More recently, in August 2015, the municipal government authorized a consortium formed by Odebrecht Infraestrutura and Queiroz Galvão Construções to develop studies in order to carry out a project in a 52 km² area in districts of the administrative region of Barra da Tijuca³.

Thus, these are the partners of the Mayor involved in constructing the Olympic Park, a project that allegedly requires the eradication of Vila Autódromo: the landowner of the vacant surrounding areas and the contractors, whose construction works and interests span across the entire municipality, and a vast part of the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro. Hence, it is not only the Olympic Park and its financing, which is at stake when decisions are made involving financial calculations, impacts and the removal of local residents. Rio de Janeiro, as a whole, has become a huge public-private partnership involving powerful businesses and, in the case of Barra da Tijuca, longstanding local real estate developers who, taking advantage of the advent of the Olympics, saw the opportunity to conclude the real estate development project in the region, which has been under development for more than 40 years, in a discontinuous albeit persistent manner, systematically draining public resources and progressively increasing property prices in the regions, with virtually no private counterpart (RIBEIRO *et al.*, 1987; COSENTINO, 2015).

What could the Mayor's Office deny such powerful, ubiquitous partners? What did the residents of Vila Autódromo intend to deny them?

The Vila Autódromo resistance strategies have activated innumerable resources, and have been brought together from a wide range of sources including internal mobilization through to cooperation from allies and supporters from many different social movements and networks⁴, alternative media, representatives from municipal legislative directives, technical advisory services, individual activists and even government agencies, as in the case of the State Public Defender's Office, which had provided legal defense services to the community since the 1990s (VAINER *et al.*, 2013; OLIVEIRA; BIENENSTEIN; TANAKA 2016).

Outstanding among the various strategies is the creation of the Vila Autódromo People's Plan developed by the residents with the assistance of two federal universities. The plan sought to demonstrate how the continuing presence of the community could be compatible with the installation of equipment for the Olympic Games. Given that the official justifications were based on supposedly "technical" arguments, especially those related to environmental protection or to the impossibility of an urbanization project, the university – an authority with social recognition within the scientific and "technical" fields – was seen by the locals as a necessary support to certify the possibility and viability of the conditions so that the entire community could remain where they were.

3 This area covers the districts of Vargem Grande, Vargem Pequena, Camorim and parts of Recreio dos Bandeirantes, Jacarepaguá and Barra da Tijuca, areas in which there is an expansion of real estate for the middle and upper classes in Rio de Janeiro.

4 Special mention should be given to the performance of the Popular Committee on the World Cup and Olympics, which from the initial pressures to remove them, accompanied and supported the resistance of the Vila Autódromo residents. The Committee was formed by a group of "social movements, NGOs, academic institutions, popular leaderships and those affected by the arbitrary actions of the Mayor's Office" (COMITÊ POPULAR DA COPA E OLIMPÍADAS/POPULAR COMMITTEE ON THE WORLD CUP AND OLYMPICS, 2015).

The Vila Autódromo People's Plan rejected the eviction of any of the residents, and preparation of the plan involved conducting field surveys, questionnaires, document analysis, aerial photographs and cartographic databases and a discussion process that culminated in a list of proposals for the areas of housing, sanitation, infrastructure, environment, public services and cultural and community development, as well as defining strategies for popular organization and communication (ASSOCIAÇÃO DE MORADORES E PESCADORES DA VILA AUTÓDROMO, 2012).

Map 2: A comparison of the Mayor's proposal for the urbanization of Vila Autódromo and the People's Plan prepared by the residents with technical assistance from UFRJ and UFF, demonstrating how the evictions could be avoided despite the works on the Olympic Park



Source: The Association of Residents and Fishermen in Vila Autódromo (2012).

In Vila Autódromo People's Plan the context and nature of the conflict guided the planning process, the content of the proposals and even the design of the architectural projects (VAINER *et al.*, 2013). Hence, the process may be interpreted as a process of “conflictual planning,” contrasting not only with the participatory planning processes produced in the “invited” spaces of the public bodies (MIRAFTAB, 2009), but also with certain autonomous processes, referred to as “insurgent” or “radical”,

which were based on complete documents, strategies or specific guidelines that have remained unchanged throughout the process.

In the case of Vila Autódromo, the dynamics of the conflict led the insurgent subjects to define new political spaces in different places and on multiple scales. Public acts were conducted in clearly visible urban areas, such as in the central area of the city of Rio de Janeiro, and religious celebrations and rituals from the social life of the neighborhood intentionally began to move into other areas, such as Copacabana Beach, thus crossing over spatial scales in search of recognition. In turn, on many occasions, local leaders sought spaces that legitimized and enunciated their struggle, and took part in both national meetings, such as the Human Rights Commission in the Senate in September 2015, and international, such as the League of Nations in Geneva in June 2016.

Successive attempts to hold meetings, all formalized in protocols at municipal and state government secretariats, or meetings at the City Hall and the Land Institute of Rio de Janeiro (ITERJ) reveal both the continuing movement of the conflict subjects throughout the years, and in various scales, in the “invented spaces” of the struggles, the occupations and insurgencies, and the “invited spaces” from within public institutions, which sought to extend the chances of negotiating the Plan. Throughout this process, the analytic pair of “invented and invited spaces” by Faranak Miraftab (2009) characterizes this necessary transit between the formal spaces of participation and those that are created, forged during the struggle. The subjects of the conflict sought to redefine possibilities, activate tools and occupy spaces in confrontational situations.

The first document with the principles and main proposals of the People’s Plan was completed just two months after the planning process began, and the ongoing struggle with the Mayor’s Office required adjustments to the uncertain temporality, and to the inaccurate, unforeseen stages of the process of struggle and resistance on the part of the residents.

According to the dynamics of the conflict, the struggle highlighted the legal aspects – with the support of the Public Defender – the promotion of political articulations – either with other social movements affected by the mega-events in progress or with broader social articulations – holding events and festivals, public demonstrations, among other actions. There is no scope herein to analyze the impasses, defeats and partial victories that characterize the different moments of the struggle by the residents of Vila Autódromo, whose organizational and planning processes – as well as the results of their long, hard fight – may be interpreted from many different perspectives. In the present article, written in 2016 during the denouement of the conflict, which had raged since 2009, the relative cohesion of the few who resisted until the end – albeit with varied, alternating and volatile internal divisions – is emphasized in contrast with the dispersion of the residents violently removed or indemnified with amounts close or equal to the market value, an unprecedented fact in the eviction processes of low rent settlements in Rio de Janeiro.

Instead of highlighting the desolation regarding the almost total destruction of the community (in May 2016 only 10 houses remained standing), we prefer to emphasize the learning and emancipation possibilities, which have transformed all those who participated in the process – both residents and supporters. We also

highlight the victory of those 20 families who, through their resistance, attained the commitment set out in the contract signed by the Mayor's Office with the Public Defender, which ensures that the urbanization project will be undertaken and that new homes will be constructed within Vila Autódromo on individual lots for all the resistant families, with more favorable dimensions and characteristics than those offered on the housing estates erected by the Municipality.

THE MEDIA AS AN ACTIVE INSTRUMENT FOR THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE

As from 2009, the starting point for urban restructuring motivated by the 2016 Olympic Games, intense battles were fought within the field of communications. The protagonists of these battles were on the one hand, the Mayor's Office and the coalition of companies linked to the Olympic Park project – Construtora Norberto Odebrecht, Andrade Gutierrez and Carvalho Hosken – and, on the other, the neighborhood residents struggling to remain, alongside the various collective supporters – the state public defender's office, universities, defense groups for human and housing rights, the Popular Committee on the World Cup and Olympics.

The narratives on resisting eviction sought to delegitimize the present state power constituted by the articulation between public authorities, contractors and media companies, especially the Globo organizations. The subjects of resistance sought to rebuild a critical public sphere, against the establishment, and to break the network of manipulated messages with which the media influenced public opinion and legitimized the city project in the search for a broad consensus.

Immediately after it was officially announced that Rio de Janeiro would host the 2016 Olympic Games, on October 2nd, 2009, a media campaign got under way regarding the projects involved in the construction of the so-called Olympic City. The following day, from among the first measures, the newspaper *O Globo* featured the removal of the favelas, and more specifically the removal of Vila Autódromo.

Over the years, the mainstream media – particularly the *Globo* organizations – has operated as an instrument of symbolic violence in favor of territorial inequality, exclusion and gentrification. Affirmative narratives on the urban projects for the Games have reinforced the more spectacular projects, and legitimized the current coalition of power, of which this communication conglomerate makes part. The existence of informal areas is treated with superficial determinism, and expansion of the favelas is condemned, by this media vehicle, as a established process that must be fought with repression.

Thus, campaigns developed in the newspapers and on TV, such as the one entitled “Illegal, so what?”, have led to favela dwellers being represented as “undesirable”, “inconvenient”, “opportunistic” and “illegal.” Such types of narratives, as for instance, “Rio: Favelas without limits” (07/05/2015) and “Expanding favelas require a firm government hand” (10/05/2015) set out to criminalize people and poor families for standing in the way of new landscapes of power with their glassy towers and reconfigured territories, all in the name of the Olympic era.

The current apparatus of symbolic production, driven by the coalition forces commanding this city project – businessmen, politicians at various levels of

government and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) – promoted the city as a ‘theme park’, through images of spaces and places for worldwide consumption; a kind of “urbanization” (MUÑOZ, 2010) of the “Wonderful City”, which has now become the “Olympic City”. “Pacified” scenarios, with diluted differences, erased inequalities and homogenized values have long-term consequences, as Broudehoux (2014) has indicated citing the case of Beijing and the 2008 Olympics. In Rio de Janeiro, the spectacularization of space and place branding has its downside face, which effects on the appropriation of public spaces, the construction of citizenship and the conquests of urban rights. In order to operate this “spectacle machine” (GUSMÃO DE OLIVEIRA, 2015) we may perceive the intense actions of national hegemonic media groups whose main aim is to sell the renewed city.

Symbolic instruments applied to different publicity items, emblems, videos, movies, commemorative jingles, international festivals and an intense schedule of events were woven into the scenarios towards the 2016 Games, which thereby justified the exceptions and violence that fell upon those who were considered as obstacles to the free consecration of Olympism or, to be more precise, the business city. Statements by the mega-entrepreneur in Barra da Tijuca, Carlos de Carvalho, published in the British newspaper *The Guardian* on August 4, 2015 (WATTS, 2015) left little doubt as to his eloquence regarding the real purpose of this “pro-development” coalition: the removal and social “cleansing” of the territory for the victorious march of the real estate enterprises. This same newspaper report ironically hailed this real estate mogul as the great leader of the Games, “the medal winners of the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games will not be known for another 12 months, but there is already a clear frontrunner in the race for Olympic gold.” (WATTS, 2015).

But the residents of Vila Autódromo, who identified themselves as a community that has fought for its living space for over thirty years, have learned to reinvent their territory and defend it by resorting to many different resources, among them the communication tools, in their different formats, support and actions, in order to disclose the moments of conflict. Through these tools, and with the help of several other supporting collectives, the residents of Vila Autódromo have continuously nurtured a campaign to publicize and validate their struggle.

Using their Facebook profile as their main communication channel, the Vila Autódromo resident’s collective published allegations of the human rights violations, with the intensified evictions and demolitions in 2014, and published the various stages and strategies of their struggle.

The official narratives and the resistance narratives may be regarded as part of the symbolic and political struggle for the territory of Vila Autódromo. Indeed, the various forms of violations committed by the Mayor’s Office were interpellated by speeches and actions by the residents, however, from within an asymmetric and unequal power relationship. With each new onslaught by the Mayor’s Office in the mainstream media, whether in authorized releases, editorials or campaigns to criminalize the local residents, they responded quickly, by activating the communication resources available to them. When a group of teachers and students from the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and the Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF) was invited in 2011 by the Vila Autódromo Residents Association (AMPVA) to advise them on their struggle for space, there were over 550 families living on site. After years of evictions and conflict, in May 2016, only 20

families had managed to stay on.

The video “*A neighborhood marked to live*” was one of the emblematic syntheses of this case of conflictual planning, used for the joint production of the People’s Plan of Vila Autódromo, and was both a technical and political instrument against eviction and for remaining. This synthesis sought to build counter-narratives for each of the numerous arguments deployed by the Mayor to legitimize the total eviction, which was for them, “A neighborhood marked to die.” On October 4th, 2011, the newspaper *O Globo* announced: “Registration for eviction from the favela begins on Wednesday.” On this occasion, the Mayor presented the future site of the Olympic installations to the residents of Vila Autódromo, together with the Parque Carioca housing project, which was to be built through the program “*Minha Casa Minha Vida*” – “My House, My Life” (PMCMV). Some of the residents, in subsequent years, eventually accepted eviction and resettlement on the housing estate. Other families, under various forms of pressure, came to accept compensation for moving away from the neighborhood. Over half of the families, however, continued to resist for another three or four years.

In March 2012, *The New York Times* reported that “A fierce property battle is under way over Vila Autódromo.” “The authorities think progress is demolishing our community just so they can host the Olympics for a few weeks,” said one resident, and continued, “But we’ve shocked them by resisting.” Also in 2012, the international media highlighted the “impressive demonstration” that marked the start of the Rio+20⁵ Conference. Over two nights and two days of vigil, thousands of national and international activists gathered at Vila Autódromo. The *Rio on Watch* site showed the potential of the Vila Autódromo conflict to cross over spatial scales and join numerous other subjects and movements to the struggle against eviction, and thus become transformed into a reference case for urban struggles.

Both the collectives of supporters (such as the Popular Committee on the World Cup and Olympics and the NGO – *Rio on Watch*), and some of the national and international media that slipped through the shielding of the local mainstream media on various scales, (*UOL/Folha de São Paulo*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, the *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, among others) joined the local alternative media to report the territorial violence of the case. In 2013 for example, *UOL/Folha de São Paulo* published a report on the People’s Plan: “To avoid eviction, the neighboring community of the future Olympic Park has developed an [urbanization] proposal for the Mayor’s Office in Rio de Janeiro.” “We cannot pay for the right to host the Olympic Games with our homes,” declared a resident at the time, who had helped to draw up the Plan.

The massive demonstrations of the *Jornadas de Junho* in June 2013 across the whole of Brazil and in Rio resulted in a number of retreats on the part of the Mayor’s Office and some gains for the Vila Autódromo collective. At the time, headlines announced that the mayor “Eduardo Paes opens negotiations to maintain the neighboring favela of the Olympic Park”. After fresh meetings with the Mayor, residents came away with renewed hope that they would be able to remain in their space. Another report by *UOL Esporte*, in the *Folha de São Paulo* highlighted that the: “The Task Force compares the People’s Plan and the Mayor’s proposal. Both projects were analyzed at the time by experts from various fields, who issued an opinion in favor of the People’s Plan”⁶.

5 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in the city on 13th – 22nd June 2012.

6 The Report, published in July 2014, was drafted by the Multidisciplinary Professional Academic Working Group (GTAPM) formed by representatives of the following institutions: Associação Brasileira de Antropologia (ABA), Associação dos Geógrafos Brasileiros (AGB), Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais (ANPOCS), Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Planejamento Urbano e Regional (ANPUR), Conselho Regional de Serviço Social (CRESS-RJ), Instituto de Arquitetos do Brasil (IAB), Sindicato dos Arquitetos no Estado do Rio de Janeiro (SARJ) and the Sindicato dos Engenheiros no Estado do Rio de Janeiro (SENGE).

In December 2013, the same Vila Autódromo People's Plan was the big winner of the *Deutsche Bank Urban Age Award*, sponsored by the London School of Economics and Social Sciences. Disclosure of the prize, however, went completely unreported by the local media. With many families facing forceful pressure and negotiations so that they would leave the Vila, the Mayor's Office appealed to the newspaper *O Globo* to strengthen the positive idea of change, moving from a "favela" to a "condominium". In April 2014, on its front page, the paper published in its Neighborhood sections, an article entitled "My house, another life", subtitled "Emotion marks the transfer of residents from Vila Autódromo to Parque Carioca". Alluding to the "My House, My Life" program, this representation, interposed by journalistic narrative, sought to construct the opposition between a "better life" and a "worse life" associated with "favela dwellers". In December 2014 a new title appeared on the front page of the newspaper *O Globo Barra*: "Bye bye, favela".

However, in March 2015, with the date of the games fast approaching, the Mayor radicalized his actions, "Paes changes his discourse and with the lack of an agreement, expropriates the neighbors of Rio-2016". This was a violent, new step in the fierce war for territory: expropriation by decree, which now came to the homes of residents who were still resisting eviction. After the decree, evictions were intensified in the community.

In April 2015, the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* published an article, which reflects the overwhelming advance of the Olympic Park onto the territory belonging to the popular neighborhood, under the title, "The favela devoured by Rio 2016". In the article, Luiz Claudio da Silva, a resident in *Vila Autódromo* stated that, "the feeling is that our homes are now inside the Olympic Park". The violent seizure of territory is described by Carlos Vainer, in the newspaper *Extra* on February 25th, 2016: "There were unnecessary demolitions in the very core of Vila Autódromo. We have demonstrated that it would be possible to widen the access avenues of the Olympic Park by affecting much less than has actually been affected. There is no technical or economic reason to justify so many evictions, only social prejudice. They ran the avenue over the people to clear the way for real estate speculation. The widening of the roadways was a pretext for social cleansing."

A new date was established that marked the media struggle for Vila Autódromo: on March 8th, 2016, the Mayor's Office demolished the family home of Maria da Penha Macena, a key community leader. For the resistance movement, this demolition was of symbolic significance, and was widely reported by different media vehicles: *O Globo*, *UOL/Folha*, *River on Watch*, *Record*. On that same day, just a few hours later, the Mayor's Office announced that it would hold a press conference to present the urbanization plan for Vila Autódromo, and since they were not invited to the presentation, residents called their own press conference of the Vila Autódromo community an hour before the official press conference, in exactly the same place. On being informed of the initiative, the mayor changed the location of his press conference. Nonetheless, many reporters turned up at the original address, thus guaranteeing the residents a counterpoint to the voice of the Mayor's Office.

On the same day that her house was demolished, Dona Penha received the *Female Citizen Diploma* conferred by the state Legislature as part of the International Women's Day celebrations. During the week, several articles were published and the media made use of the dramatic climate and the contradiction between the demolition

of Dona Penha's home in the morning, and the tribute she received that same night. Thus, adding to this contradiction, the political fact created by the tension between the two press conferences. From that day, the narrative tone changed, including that of the mainstream media, with criticism and complaints of the violations. On March 9th, the NGO Global Justice issued an interview with Dona Penha:

They may bring down my house, but they won't bring me down. I remain firm in the struggle. I will stay in this community. Because of a mega-event, they take your house and leave you on the street. What I hope is that they give me another house. Unfortunately, this Women's Day will be marked as the day I was evicted, but life goes on (AUTHOR'S TRANSLATION).

DEGRADATION OF THE TERRITORY AS A POWER STRATEGY

Demolitions in Vila Autódromo began in March 2014, and there followed a sudden degradation of the community. In less than a month, 123 buildings were demolished by the Mayor's Office. The accumulation of debris and the precariousness of the carriageways and of the water supply and sewage infrastructure, caused by the heavy traffic of large vehicles working on the Olympic Park, soon transformed life within the community.

Eviction, which began with the resettlement of residents in the Parque Carioca⁷, intensified with the Mayor's strategy to increase the amount of compensation offered, and negotiations took into account the market value⁸. The conflictual process⁹ culminated in a court decision authorizing the demolition of houses that had negotiated resettlement, but did not however, allow buildings to be demolished if they were destined for compensation. By default of the court's decision, the Mayor's Office intensified the demolitions both illegally and unsafely by demolishing adjoining buildings or even the second floors of houses, which had been partially negotiated, leaving the rest of the structure with exposed rebars and cracks caused by the impact of demolition.

Construction work on the Olympic Park started moving towards Vila Autódromo in May 2014, and the first offensive undertaken by the Mayor's Office was to cut down the trees located at the entrance to the community, many of which had been planted over the years by the residents. Residents organized themselves into shifts so as to prevent new trees from being cut down, but tree felling intensified over the following months, causing the environment, already precarious and de-characterized, to become increasingly more arid. "We tried to stop it, but we were unsuccessful. There was little with which to argue, since they had been licensed to do so by the Mayor" (testimony by Dona Penha, a resident in Vila Autódromo).

The Mayor's second offensive, with the clear aim of gradually decreasing the area of the community, to gain territory and increase pressure for eviction, involved erecting a site hoarding that ran parallel to the old race track wall separating the Olympic Park from Vila Autódromo, and ran along Avenida Autódromo, which was the main access road to the settlement. The official justification was that the corridor between the hoarding and the wall would allow large vehicles to move around more

⁷ The Parque Carioca was constructed on the Bandeirantes Highway in Jacarepaguá, approximately 2km from Vila Autódromo. The building standards were different from those of the PMCMV, and the distance between the new homes and the old was different when compared to other eviction processes promoted by the Mayor's Office during the first decade of the century.

⁸ Compensation at the going rate, and considering the value of the land is another exception in the history of evictions in Rio de Janeiro.

⁹ For further information see Mendes (2014).

safely. Despite resistance from residents, the hoarding was erected and residents continued living with the insecurity and damage caused by the intense movement of tractors and excavators on what remained of the main road of the community. The Mayor's Office tried to demolish the children's playground, built many years before on the Avenida Autódromo by the residents. This time, however, the intense mobilization of the residents managed to provisionally save the only community recreation area.

Figures 1 and 2: Demolitions carried out in 2014



Source: Authors' collection.

Demolitions continued throughout 2014, in total opposition to the current legislation¹⁰, leaving a trail of cracked buildings, broken sewage and water pipes, exposed rebars, mounds of demolition debris and multiple foci attracting rodents and insects. However, the area of the community known as the *core*¹¹ was to a certain degree still intact, despite the general degradation of the urban structure. Despite the systematic transmission of false information, which stated that most residents had consented to leave Vila Autódromo – a complementary strategy of the Mayor's Office to undermine the resistance of residents and legitimize the eviction process – a resistance map developed by the technical advisors to the residents, identified that 187 families were still resisting at the end of 2014.

In March 2015, the main blow to the Vila Autódromo struggle, was the Expropriation Decrees¹² issued by the Mayor's Office, which declared 48 properties within Vila Autódromo as public utility for purposes of expropriation. The headquarters of the Residents Association¹³, as well as the houses belonging to the main community leaders of Vila Autódromo, Altair Guimarães, Jane Nascimento, Inalva Mendes Brito and Maria da Penha Macena, were included in these decrees. Most of the houses mentioned in the decrees had been demolished by the end of 2015, and the gradual degradation of the community, plus the daily terror imposed by the Mayor's Office, prompted other residents to negotiate and ultimately leave Vila Autódromo. By the end of 2015 over 117 houses had been demolished, including

10 Municipal Decree N° 23.235 on 4th August 2003 establishes the safety requirements that need to be observed during the demolition process of real estate in the Municipality. For further information see: <http://wpro.rio.rj.gov.br/decretosmunicipais/>.

11 The core of the community corresponds to the Special Zone of Social Interest (SZSI) installed by Complementary Law N° 74, on 14th January 2005, and is restricted to the portion not affected by the construction works of the Olympic Park, in the expansion of Avenida Embaixador Abelardo Bueno and the rectification of the Pavuninha Stream.

12 Decrees N°s 39.851, 39.852 and 39.853.

13 According to the road map project presented by the Mayor's Office in October 2013, the AMPVA headquarters was not affected by the Olympic Park road works.

those belonging to the old community leaders. Only the Association headquarters and Dona Penha's home remained, thus becoming symbols of resistance and a space of sociability and struggle.

Alongside the actions of the Olympic Park's territorial advance into the neighborhood and the simultaneous destruction of houses, residents faced daily intimidations by employees, together with a stream of hostile, conservative legal decisions, and false news reports and biased rumors in the media. The effects of the incessant pressure by the Mayor's Office however, did not always meet the desired result, and very often brought greater cohesion and impetus to the residents' resistance. New coping strategies were conceived, new negotiating channels were tested, and residents who had previously been less involved began to engage actively in the deployment activities. On the other hand, new supporters appeared while older allies – such as the Public Defender's Office, technical advisors and the Popular Committee for the World Cup and Olympics – intensified their actions and new initiatives unfolded in the battle to maintain the territory of Vila Autódromo.

OCCUPY THE VILA, A TERRITORIAL STRATEGY

As morning broke on June 3rd, 2015, Vila Autódromo was surrounded by representatives from the Public Order Department (SEOP) and the Municipal Guard of Rio de Janeiro. Officials from the Mayor's Office accompanied by a bailiff, attempted to gain possession and demolish the property of Ocimar Silva Miranda, located on Rua Francisco Landi No. 39. The hostile actions of the Municipal Guard left several residents injured, including Dona Penha whose nose was broken by a blow from a baton. Resistance from the residents and actions of the Land and Housing Center (Nuth) from the state defender's office prevented them from obtaining possession, and when the Mayor's officials left the scene in the late afternoon no property had been demolished. The victory of the resistance strengthened the struggle to remain. The urgency of the community's defense further encouraged the union of the residents and their relationship with other communities and social movements. It was within this context that the #Occupy Vila Autódromo Movement was born, and that promoted events and activities, which made the constant presence of external supporters possible, in order to inhibit the intimidating practices of the Mayor's Office.

Throughout the year various activities were promoted by the new movement, in addition to the traditional festivals of the community, such as the June Festivities and the feast of the Church of St. Joseph the Worker on Labor Day. The Vila Autódromo occupation movement continued to gain strength, and on 15th August, the 1st Cultural Festival of #Occupy Vila Autódromo was held with great success and joy. Thus, there was a sequence of events promoted during the years 2015 and 2016, such as plays, musical parades, orchestras, film shows, clowns and mimes performances, concerts, book launches, and especially the joy of bringing new meaning to this territory, which had been plagued by violence and destruction.

Figure 3: Closing ceremony of the 1st Cultural Festival of #Occupy Vila Autódromo



Source: Authors' collection.

Figure 4: Barbeque on children's day with the rapper BNegão



The terror of the demolitions resumed in 2016 when, after an intense legal dispute, the courts extended their authorization to regain possession of the AMPVA headquarters and later the homes of Heloisa Helena Costa Berto and of Dona Penha Macena. The headquarters of AMPVA was demolished on 24th February surrounded by residents and supporters who by witnessing this act, experienced at close hand the violence perpetrated by the Mayor's Office against the material symbol of the community struggles. However, despite their consternation, residents organized themselves and challenged this act by painting on the walls of all the houses in the community, the words "Residents Association of Vila Autódromo." While one symbol had been destroyed, a new code had been created and resistance was expressed on every home of every remaining family.

Figure 5: Residents demonstrate on the day the Residents Association Headquarters was demolished



Source: Authors' collection.

Figure 6: One of the resident's homes with the inscription written on the day the Residents Association Headquarters was demolished



DISFIGURE THE CODES OF POWER AND RECONFIGURE THE TERRITORY IN THE STRUGGLE

Space is constructed from the multiplicity of social relations on all scales, from a global level to social relations within the city, the neighborhoods and the home. **Space** is generally associated with the universal and the global, and **place** with the exact spot or even the contingent and the specific (MASSEY, 1994), generating a hierarchical antagonism that loses much of its meaning in conflictual contexts of territorial disputes. The struggle of Vila Autódromo activated various strategies, and established itself from within explicit political actions, thus positioning the community as a space of international importance that reflected a deepening global process, which was commodifying the city. It also involved unseen quotidian actions, which are essential to the resistance and position of Vila Autódromo as a place of community life, collectivity and even playful, witty expression of a situation that is extremely precarious, vulnerable and violent, which the eviction process imposes onto the residents on a daily basis.

The global and the local are connected in the strategies of the Vila Autódromo struggle, and reflect and represent the realities of the various places rendered invisible by the powers that be. The People's Plan for Vila Autódromo, which over time, has been transformed and updated to reflect the changes imposed upon them by the demolitions, was the first political action that highlighted the community as a place that exists, that resists and that has rights, which have been systematically violated by the government. The residents of Vila Autódromo restructured their territory on a daily basis with visible and invisible actions that actively responded to the materiality of violence and coercion evidenced by the gradual and intentional degradation of the community. In Vila Autódromo's struggle for housing and right to the city, political action is always being materialized and exposed within the territory.

One of the many community responses to everyday degradation was the erection of a watchtower at the entrance to the community so as to prevent the entry of tractors, excavators and trucks, which in the act of demolishing homes, also damaged the water and sewage pipes. Residents constantly interrupted the construction works, and traffic flow was only allowed to resume after damaged facilities had been repaired. This strategy allowed residents to maintain the minimum conditions of habitability needed for their resistance. Moreover, in situations where the Mayor's Office refused to carry out the repairs, the residents repaired the urban infrastructure themselves with a community task force. These were every day unseen actions that not only allowed them to stay in Vila Autódromo, but also strengthened community ties among the residents.

A playful reinterpretation of the destruction has also been a permanent strategy of the residents. During the traditional feast of St. Joseph the Worker, some of the partially demolished homes were re-appropriated with an installation of games, such as the popular tin-can game, and were used for selling food and drinks for the celebrations. In the 1st Cultural Festival of #Occupy Vila Autódromo, the buildings were used by the *Coletivo Projetação* as a platform for audiovisual protest with projections on past rights violations and violent evictions. The re-development of the children's playground in Vila Autódromo was an important activity for the #Occupy Vila Autódromo movement, and strengthened the strategy of reoccupying and qualifying spaces that had been degraded by the demolitions.

Figure 7: Re-development activity in the children's playground in Vila Autódromo



Source: Photo by Diana Bogado.

Figure 8: A disfigured, semidemolished building used for the tin-can game during the community party



Source: Authors' collection.

The destruction was also made more apparent and re-signified by the use of graffiti over the site hoardings of the construction works in the Olympic Park, which acted as a very appealing means of communication throughout the struggle and that clearly exposed the political violence that existed between the landscape of the glassy towers, erected for the Olympic festivities, and the landscape of a popular neighborhood destroyed to make way for a party that, effectively, was for the real estate capital.

The graffiti, which also marked the rubble, debris and vestiges of what the neighborhood had once been, are constantly changing, depending on the different junctures of the struggles. By challenging the powers that be, by ironically challenging the ruling coalition, the businessmen, the mayor, the judges, the governor, by remembering the rights conquered by the people in this neighborhood, built over decades of struggle, this copious narrative has impacted other media and has been reported by many journalists in prominent international media, such as *The Guardian*, *Le Monde Diplomatique* and *The New York Times*.

Figures 9 and 10: Graffiti in Vila Autódromo as a form of protesting and demonstrating against the violations and illegalities of the evictions



Source: Photos by Delmo de Oliveira.

The activities of #Occupy Vila Autódromo in 2015 and 2016 were organized to stimulate the occupation of the remaining areas directly affected by the intensity of the evictions, and at the same time to strengthen the resistance of the residents. By promoting communicative cultural dynamics among the residents and other groups affected by urban operations, the #Occupy movement created bridges with supporting institutions and social groups, and recuperated community spaces seized by the Mayor's Office. In February 2016, the *Desafio#UrbanizaJá* movement started, in which people recorded short videos challenging the Mayor to urbanize Vila Autódromo. Artists, intellectuals, students, residents from other communities and occupations, international collectives and representatives from social movements participated.

Figures 11 and 12: The first and second Cultural Festival #Occupy Vila Autódromo, respectively



Source: Authors' collection.

The space used for the #Occupy activities became a milestone in Vila Autódromo by being recovered by the community for the struggle. The demolished building, which had previously been a Pentecostal church, became a place for community living and celebrations. The former altar became a stage, the stairway a makeshift viewing gallery. The Mayor's Office gradually degraded and reduced the area of *Espaço#Ocupa*, but the activities of the cultural occupation continued. A task force of urbanization and community rehabilitation of the *Espaço#Ocupa* was promoted in February 2016, and new cultural activities were held weekly until April, when the Mayor's Office definitively demolished the space, pledging, however, to construct a new cultural space for the community in Vila Autódromo, once it has been urbanized.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS: THE INSURGENT TERRITORIAL GRAMMARS

“Territorial grammar” (GUTERMAN; SÁNCHEZ; LAIBER, 2015, p. 110) allows relational analyses to be undertaken in a space in order to map the territorial actions of the subjects from the ruling coalition and of the subjects in the field of resistance. Such a category is defined as a set of combined, recognizable actions in the territories, in their spatial applications and displacements, in the transscale relationships that the subjects establish, in the locational choices taken by individuals according

to different conjunctures, in the use of communication tools in public spaces, in activating contrasts to the official images of places, in subverting the traditional meanings attributed to urban places and iconic buildings, and in searching for the limelight in the mainstream media by careful territorial application of conflicts, in order to give them centrality

Indeed, urban conflicts and symbolic disputes within the current urban scenario in Rio have generated new territorial grammars. Such grammars challenge the so-called “power geometries” (MASSEY, 2008), whether in the body-spellings and micro resistance (JEUDY; JACQUES, 2006) or in large demonstrations in public spaces. They interfere with the relational forms of the subjects, in the search for the spread of democracy.

Throughout the years of struggle, the residents of Vila Autódromo have gained a circulatory knowledge of the indistinct boundaries of the formal and informal city, in that they have learned to move from one level to another, from district meetings to those with representatives from the federal government. Meetings with the Mayor’s Office, negotiations with the state government, mediated by the public regulator, testimonies to the Human Rights Commission of the Senate and representations to the ministries, at a federal level, are evidence of the type of expertise they have gained regarding the ability to move across different scales of power (SWYNGEDOUW, 2000), and inscribe the struggle simultaneously within these spheres and departments in search of recognition. From the microscale of the graffiti painted across the houses, site hoardings and blank walls through to the massive demonstrations, from the local festivals to the activism of social networks and global platforms, references have been forged from the struggle of a neighborhood to remain on the map of the Olympic city.

The communicative actions of the residents in Vila Autódromo transcend the local territory and have been established in the emblematic spaces of the Olympic city. These actions, in addition to bringing this specific struggle into the public eye, dispute the narratives of the city with the official media and collaborate by weaving links with other collectives that are also struggling for their rights.

Stickers appeared on urban equipment in the city center, on information panels at the new Museum of Tomorrow, and on BRT bus stations with the message “Long live Vila Autódromo. Rio with no Evictions”. There were also the mobile media, such as cars and buses, circulating since 2013 also with this message. Even hundreds of orange rental bicycles advertising the Brazilian bank Banco Itaú, identified as media objects of the enterprise-city, were taken over one weekend in May 2015 and re-designed with the slogan “Long live Vila Autódromo” on their baskets. The so-called “insurgent bike” dawned as more of a threat to the symbolic integration of the “Wonderful City and the Olympics” by showing that, for some, “The Wonderful City is one that fights” translating the synthesis of *Coletivo Projeção*.

With just one hundred days to go, in the month of May, the atmosphere in Rio in relation to the 2016 Games was pretty quiet. With the Brazilian political and economic crisis that conspired against an atmosphere of optimism regarding the Games, with epidemics of dengue and Zika caused by the mosquito *Aedes aegypti*, the city residents did not seem overly excited, and were not embracing the Olympic spirit in the manner that the Mayor’s Office had hoped. However, the struggle of Vila Autódromo has already constituted a landmark in conflictual planning and in the urban history of Rio de Janeiro on course for the Olympics.

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