

## The "Back of the City": The Landless and the Conception of Another City

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However precisely and complexly one desires to reflect on a certain *fact*, in the exact moment in which it occurs, in whatever important social or political—and effervescent—field, and with relatively unusual evolutions, it would be difficult to try to grasp all of the nuances, equivocations, corrections, and potentials included in the process of its development, especially if we consider the primary character of the events that comprise it. In addition, if we immerse ourselves in the quotidian of this fact, we feel obliged to analyze it systematically, and at a suitable distance. Even so, it is true that sometimes we only see the appearances. On the other hand, what comes to the surface can bring us, if we are attentive to it, signs whose distinctiveness will only be noticed as the fact evolves. If we take these signs at face value, we run the risk of accepting what the fact appears to indicate.

The present work is one of those cases: it is a reflection regarding the emancipatory potential that is conceivably identifiable in the process of conceiving a *city* that proposes to invert the production dynamic of modern cities: instead of thinking about it with itself as a starting point, to think about it from its *inverse*, that is, in this case, from the countryside; instead of conceiving of it as purely a place for the circulation of goods, to imagine it as a place of meeting and differentiated sociability; instead of constructing it on the basis of essentially mercantile relations, to erect it out of its political significance. To initiate the reflection from this point, however, has still only been an exercise of imaginary emancipation of the restricted field of possibility emphasizing the field of utopias: a process still running its course.

The object in question is the *conception of a city of agrarian reform*, in west central Paraná, in the southern region of Brazil, which emerged from the establishment of the Ireno Alvos dos Santos Settlement, one of the largest

settlements of agrarian reform in the country. With about 1,500 families, this settlement is the result of a conflict-ridden negotiation between the Movement of Landless Rural Workers—MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) and the federal government, through the National Institute for Land Settlement and Agrarian Reform—INCRA (Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária)—the organ responsible for the country's agricultural and landed property policy. A risky attack by the Movement, on 17 April 1996, when approximately 15,000 people invaded and occupied part of an extensive latifundium—on which the settlement is presently standing—was part of this process. This latifundium is located in the middle of the state of Paraná, on a large lake that was created by one of the many dams on the Iguaçu River, one of the most important bodies of water in this region of the country. The Salto Santiago Power Plant, for which this dam was created, makes up part of the complex responsible for the generation of electricity for the whole of the southwestern region of Brazil.

Already in this moment we were seeing, therefore, a condition of compounded adversity: on the one hand, the area of conflicts that had manifested itself when the right of ownership and the social function of the land was questioned; on the other hand, there is the dangerous proximity to an area of strategic domination, the installations of one of the components of the system responsible for lighting the most economically important region of the whole country.

The tensions become aggravated still more to the extent that, beyond the already tense context established by the dispossession of property for the ends of agrarian reform, the municipality that shelters the new settlement has seen that it is in danger of losing—in juridical and political terms—almost half of its territory. To propose a "city" conceived as its *inverse*, the landless are disputing territoriality established via legal statutes that also determine the conditions of civil life in Brazilian cities and that, therefore, also determine the mechanisms of social ordering that condemn as "disposable" those considered "incapable" of participating in an increasingly urbanized and globalized market. It is for this reason that we refer to inversion: it is this "disposable" population that is put back into the middle of the dispute, not only for the city's space, but also for a new conception of "city." In addition, in proposing the construction of a *city of agrarian reform*, the landless go beyond the field described by bureaucratic logic—simplistic, compensatory, and pacifying—established through the official programs of agrarian reform in force in the country. Constituting a new area of conflicts, they bring, as political subjects that speak—or that redeem the possibility of speaking—the possibility of imagining a citizenship in the countryside, or, as we say, a "citizenry without a city" (Rizek and Lopes, 1999: 2). This is why we can look at the city from the back to the front: it is the countryside itself thinking itself into the direction of a transformed urban existence. But to what point beyond

the walls of the city can we bring our reflection on the city itself without inverting as well the possibility of stating its contradictions? This is to say, would it be possible to imagine a constitution of rights and citizenship starting precisely with the non-city?

Beyond this question, this study is grounded in the restrictions of an essentially technical action within a very specific context: an association of professionals—including myself—composed principally of architects and urban planners who have worked during the last eleven years directly with social movements concerned with the question of housing. This association is responsible for the development of discussions, consultations, and technical applications—including projected ones—for the conception and establishment of the “city of the landless.” If, on the one hand, it is the group’s experience itself that legitimizes this function, then, on the other, there is that which is unusual in the proposal, which might be described in the following way: how to think of a city through its “inverse”? How to deal with the objectivity of an ordered and authoritarian planning, heavily grounded in the conceptions established by what we know as modern urban planning, within a context full of conflicts, interweavings, tensions, incongruities, and disputes? Are we not reinstalling and reproducing the utopias that gave birth to contemporary urban thinking, even as we recognize, in the terms of Habermas (Habermas, 1987), the “exhaustion” of their “energies”? To what extent are we not running the risk of reproducing the same equivocations that we realize today are mistakes?

The central question that motivates the present discussion—if it is possible to distinguish some emancipatory potential in the standard procedures of conception and establishment of this *city*—is embedded in the quotidian of the very organization of the settlement and of the Movement as a whole. Thus, the parameters of dialogue, over which is laid the process of discussing this other *city*, fuse and confuse themselves in the space of conflicts in which the MST is inserted, taking in not only the local context, but also the context of disputes that is unfolding nationally. Such permeability ends up hindering a separate evaluation of the question, imposing—at least as a reference—an approach that is more ample in relation to aspects that, apparently, do not demonstrate immediate links with the case under discussion. And such an expedient is justifiable if we argue that this permeability does not contaminate whatever “essence” this undertaking might have. That is, to what extent does the discourse of the leadership of the political body that makes itself the subject of this *fact*—the construction of a *city of agrarian reform*—organize or bureaucratize procedures, defending a false internal “social harmony,” and formatting through language an inverted paradoxical process of “the robbery of speech” (Oliveira, 1999: 61, 71)? Will we not be reproducing certain representations that mirror the very negation of that which is intended to be counter-hegemonic and emancipatory?

Beginning with a description of the context in which this *fact* unfolds, I will try to state certain possibilities for the questions that have been formulated here. As to the last one, given that it is part of a larger context, and that, in a certain way, it defines the contours that could bring into better focus the central question of this work, I will try to submit it to a deeper interrogation in the final part of this text.

## I

We are talking about an enormous landed estate: a latifundium of 84,000 ha,<sup>2</sup> located in the central-western part of the state of Paraná,<sup>3</sup> in the south of Brazil. Productivity aside—considering that this is a country of starving people—the limits of the Giacometti Estate extended beyond the borders drawn by either geography or the municipalities. Justified in terms of the law that establishes the social function of land in the country,<sup>4</sup> the Giacometti Estate was registered as a “reforestation area” and its owners contributed to public funds through the tax levied on rural property, an amount that did not even add up to ten American dollars annually.

The chronicles, memories spoken and sung, the small stories told, sometimes in the form of a joke, and other times dramatically, but always formulated as an epic of collective identity—they all call back to mind the memory of the morning of 17 April 1996: as though in a procession, fifteen thousand ghostly characters slide away into the mist, the landless marching past the boundaries of the estate, certain that they were overcoming the boundary between what was and what would come to be.

The slender tool of curving steel carries within it a piece of the history that has marked the daily life of these numberless peasants who, “risen from the ground,” bend like the curve of the sickle’s metal arch over the land which had always been denied them. The crowd that slid over the land in procession—their throats choked with fear—waited for something because it had nothing. Dispossessed of everything, perhaps this land would be the ground of some new possibility for existence.

However, the solemnity of the procession led by the tool that symbolizes work is nothing more than a single frozen moment. Also, out of this pilgrimage of pure necessity come clashing expectations before the unknown, under the heavy shadow of the majority, woven out of possibilities and desires that have been mixed into the weft and warp and woven by the logic of *property* that the moment seemed to deny.

## II

It had taken twenty-two days of careful planning. Each individual, each family, was placed a few kilometers away in precarious shanties of black plastic

erected along the side of the road that leads across one of the boundaries of the estate. They waited there as long as it took to gather their strength. Coming from diverse regions, near and far away,<sup>5</sup> they had been informed about the existence of the encampment at the edge of the road through many different sources.<sup>6</sup> The families organized themselves in groups that shared in the activities necessary for the maintenance and security of the camp itself, and for the occupation.

To lead such a crowd over the fences that marked the estate, however, did not constitute an action free of risk: on the orders of their owners, warned about these near nomads that were encamped on the roadside nearby, the estate had hidden almost a hundred security guards, who, armed, watched the movements of the indigents. Just as in an ambush, a moment of inattentiveness on the part of the hired gunmen—a practice that has become a dubiously “justified” routine in Brazil—allowed them to be neutralized and for a path toward the occupation by the landless to be opened up.

The long wait had come to an end: at the sign that the guards had been overcome, a command spread, from shanty to shanty, lifting the mass of men and women, children, adults and the aged; the landless overran the stretch that separated them from the estate until, reaching one of its flanks, they broke the chain that—only symbolically—kept the gate from opening before their advance.

### III

As though they were offerings for some grace bestowed, stoves, furniture, tools, and domestic utensils accompanied them, step by step, over the twenty kilometers until they reached the administrative compound of the estate. There, at the heart of the estate, near some buildings that used to shelter the colonists and support the intense mining operations that justified its owners in using the term “productive,” the landless set up shanties they had brought from the roadside encampment, establishing a new site of resistance within the folds of the territory they intended to share. This was no longer a temporary stopping point, some tenuous or ephemeral limit between the need to move and the ability to remain, a place of accumulation, of having nothing more than the company of those who also have nothing left. It was about digging one's fingernails into the ground and beginning as one who puts up barricades to build the accumulation of strength needed to face the days that would follow.

As a place that represented the pure manifestation of need, the encampment established in the entrails of the estate liberated, however, another possibility for collectively meeting adversity. Just as they were in their previous encampment, pressed by hunger, by risk, by cold, and even by the bureaucratic indifference of those who saw them as vague occupants of some

“no-place,” the landless learned, strategically, to implement mechanisms, according to sectors, designed not only to mitigate necessity, but also to subvert certain purely functional practices.

In this way, just as in the ranks of some vague army, the encamped divided themselves according to tasks that were regulated by an Internal Rule, “with internal laws with which everyone must comply.”<sup>7</sup> The realization of these tasks was organized by sectors responsible for answering the needs that arose out of their inhospitable daily existence. There was a sector for hunger and thirst that “parceled out in an equitable manner food donated by friends, by rural workers' unions, and other groups devoted to humanitarian aid.” A sector for security treated questions of order and fear, and was responsible for not only “the application of internal rules” but also for the vigilance and defense of the encampment itself. An education sector treated problems related to the future and the care of children, holding classes in “simple canvas huts for the education of the children, young people and adults of the encampment.” For shelter, a sector of infrastructures “planned and constructed tents, sanitation facilities, the distribution of water, canvas, and other materials.” To learn what was going on there and in the world at large, a communication sector was created and made responsible for “the divulgence of information about all of the work in the encampment and socio-political events at a national level, as well as for leisure and entertainment.” To understand what was happening, a training sector was assigned the task of “working with the social and political consciousness of the workers, and impressing upon them the importance of Agrarian Reform and of the evolution towards a society without exploiters or exploited.” There was a health sector that supplied and distributed medicines, and organized checkups based on a program of alternative medicine run by the MST. For the imagination, “mystique,” which re/presents the dimension of the possible—despite its precariousness—re-established their own history—in spite of the fact that it had always been a history that had been systematically denied them—and reaffirmed their own condition as subjects.<sup>8</sup> To lead that army, there was a General Executive Committee “consisting of 13 members, whose names were indicated by the families in the encampment.”

Centrally coordinated management practices permitted routines for meeting necessities to be preserved, and re/presented them as possibilities for the inversion of a merely functional practice. This implied constructing such possibilities in a way that would directly confront necessity itself—something that differs radically from a situation in which ostentation merely segregates necessity, revealing the context that reproduces and affirms it.

On the other hand, this almost militarized “centrality” presupposes a rigorous ordering of movement, of gestures and looks, reproducing the impact of a fearful sociability under surveillance: who is arriving, who is

leaving, who is present, what are they doing, etc. However, if we take the encampment as a "battlefield," this guarded centrality would be perhaps the only way of defending this territory against "being nothing," a measure justified by the agony of a time in which life is bound to the cadence of days and nights.

From January 1997 onwards, when lots were distributed and settlement contracts written for each family—which defined their condition as "settlers"—a process of dispersion occurred, inverting this "centrality" and causing it to lose strength, all of which indicated a certain weakening of the coalition established initially as a function of the pragmatic order demanded by the strategy of occupation. Each family on its own lot, having, as we will see, only the cooperative as a structure that mediates between it and the Movement, and which makes production viable, ends up allowing that organic structure established initially to come unglued. This fact is important for understanding the two moments that we will discuss in this specific case: first, the time when the MST was established as an unequivocally articulating order, in which mediations between individuals and the political community were structured out of strategic and profoundly pragmatic demands; then, later, with the dispersion of families to their separate lots, when the possibilities for mediation between simple subjects and the collective subject became diluted as they began submitting themselves to the demands of the micro-economy established through the routine ebb and flow of production inherent to the cooperative practice.

It is exactly out of this second moment that the idea arises of establishing a new "centrality," conceived out of this insertion of life relations into the territory of the utopia of a *city* that is constituted by its *inverse*: a *city of agrarian reform*.

#### IV

The occupation of the Giacometti estate, directed that morning with the precision of a military operation, was promoted and organized by the MST, as so many other occupations all over the country. It certainly contributed to deepening the roots that the MST, as an organized social movement, has cultivated over the last fifteen years. In the wake of so many other peasant struggles, the landless—the generic label they ended up with—have reinvented, for example, the struggles of the Peasant Leagues<sup>9</sup> decimated by the military regime instituted by the 1964 coup. By promoting marches all over the country, organizing occupations like the one of that morning, supporting cooperativism as an operational structure to make collective production viable, defining and implementing programs for the formation of agricultural workers, or proposing alternatives to child labor, the MST has established itself as one of the most impertinent subjects that—whether or not you agree

with their means—has been able to upset the false consensual tranquility imposed by neoliberalism upon Brazil.

Occupying the flanks of that enormous latifundium is therefore part of a process that transcends the scale of a single regional agrarian conflict, and involves a new scenario that has come to be constructed in this country in order to deal with the deficiencies of an agrarian structure that, even beyond the question of property, has been unjustly and perniciously maintained since the time when land was transformed into an object of law, even as far back as the period of Portuguese domination.

Furthermore, those 15,000 peasants bending over that land carried with them the echo of an arithmetic that opposes—not so much because of the sum of its numbers as because of the noise it makes—the permanent exercise of "rendering the excluded docile"<sup>10</sup> to the beat of the unified chant of consensus promoted by the owners of power.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the occupation of the Giacometti estate was able to call our attention not only for its scale, but also for its significance and daring.

The INCRA (National Institute for Land Settlement and Agrarian Reform) was compelled to support the expropriation of 16,800 ha for the settlement of 900 families (on 17 January 1997) and, subsequently, more than 10,000 ha (on 13 August 1998) in order to meet the needs of 1,478 families who are at present settled in rural lots of 12 to 14 ha.<sup>12</sup>

Established as the Ireno Alves dos Santos Agricultural Reform Settlement Project (Projeto de Assentamento de Reforma Agrária Ireno Alves dos Santos)—a name that honors one of the leaders of the local MST who was killed in an accident on the road that crosses through the whole area—today the settlement shelters a population of about 9,000 people, almost one and a half times the population of the municipality that makes up the territory. Logically, the admission of this new contingent of inhabitants has brought to the municipality an enormous demand on public services and the need to attend to the basic necessities of life, all of which has provoked an intensive economic reordering in the region as a whole, and in the municipality in particular.

#### V

The municipality of Rio Bonito do Iguaçu is located between the towns of Laranjeiras do Sul and Chopinzinho, in the region of Central-West Paraná. Before the establishment of the Ireno Alves dos Santos settlement, it had around 7,000 inhabitants in its small urban nucleus and the extensive rural lands that surround it. Rio Bonito do Iguaçu comprises an area of approximately 70,140 ha, almost 40 percent of which is today occupied by the settlement—a fact that clearly indicates the importance of the conflicts that preceded and succeeded its establishment.

Rio Bonito makes up part of a group of towns in this region that banks the Iguaçu River, and which, during the 1970s and 1980s, suffered—or perhaps benefited—from the construction of innumerable power plants along its course: for example, Itaipú, on the river's estuary—which has made Paraná an exporter of electric energy—and also Segredo, Salto Osório and Salto Santiago. The latter dam is located in the territory of Rio Bonito, and the history of its construction followed the developmentalist policy of the period. Promoted by ELETROSUL—Centrais Elétricas do Sul do Brasil, S.A. (Electric Power Plants of the South of Brazil, Corp.), the power plant of Salto Santiago resulted in the creation of a large artificial lake that caused the expulsion of innumerable small landowners and submerged immense areas of land. It led as well to profound structural changes in the cities of the region, principally the ones closest to the high-water marks, due to a growing demand for labor and services, not to mention those caused by the exodus from the flooded areas and the consequent transference of large numbers of the population to neighboring municipalities that were not affected by the formation of the lake.

With the arrival of the landless and the creation of the settlement, the city saw its population suddenly grow from 7,000 inhabitants to almost 16,000, which implies an almost uncontrollable increase in new public service users, new consumers, and—to the understandable distress of local power—new voters.<sup>13</sup>

This last fact did not go unnoticed by the settlers. In the words of one of the settlement leaders, “while we were camped out along the edge of the road”—the first stage I mentioned above—“we were considered bandits. Once we conquer the land and credit and become consumers”—the next stage—“we come to be considered ‘very important’ for the local economy.” Then, they start being harassed by innumerable merchants selling everything from seeds to agricultural machinery, from clothes to food, commercial benefits to political benefits.

They also notice the precariousness of the municipal infrastructures. Elementary education, an MST priority, became an early issue in the negotiations between the settlers and the local authorities.<sup>14</sup> It is significant that one of the first conflicts—after overcoming those that stemmed directly from the occupation of the land to its division into small lots, and the effective settling of the families on these parcels—occurred with the municipal administration when the establishment of basic education in the area of the settlement was demanded. In defense of local political and commercial interests, the mayor of Rio Bonito himself promoted the attempt to co-opt the settlement families, throwing a huge barbeque, and offering new public facilities and privileges under the condition that they reconsider their obligation to join, as new small producers, the cooperative organizations that the MST maintained as a fundamental part of the agrarian reform policy.

In effect, the settlements of this region were supported by COAGRI—Agrarian Reform Cooperative of the Landless Rural Workers of west central Paraná (Cooperativa de Reforma Agrária dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra do Centro-Oeste do Paraná)—one of the largest cooperatives affiliated with the MST, bringing together around 4,500 families, among which could be found settlers and small rural producers, and which turned over something like R\$3 million annually (close to US\$1.74 million). Commercializing approximately a million sacks of grain (principally corn, soy, beans and rice), COAGRI, representing nearly all of the agricultural reform cooperatives connected with the MST, is responsible not only for the support and commercialization of crops, but also for the management of credit destined for the settlers; that is, the whole application of resources of this credit follows directives derived from parameters based on minimum standards of viability, and on subsidies procured by technical staff hired by the cooperative itself.

One should highlight the fact that the MST has had to confront innumerable problems with the model of production that they have taken on as an alternative: incompatibilities between the cultural standards of family-style production and the structure of cooperative production; resistance to the implementation of new procedures; management limitations that end up being imposed by virtue of the insufficiency of the mechanisms for enabling personnel, or the inexistence of adequately trained administrators; disparities between the quantity of work invested and the returns obtained—relation [(product/area)/worker], etc. These difficulties, when proclaimed by the right, justify the accusations of inefficiency (of the movement's inability to come up with solutions appropriate to a dynamic agricultural market that is competitive and globalized) and of retrograde positions that maintain the condition of structural misery in the countryside, etc. When these difficulties are made explicit by the left, the proposals for the solution of the agricultural question are criticized as non-“socialist,” since they do not promote the effective abolition of private property and the socialization of the means of production, nor do they account for the “strangulation” of agricultural production, or even the fact that they are not proposals widely accepted by the “agrarian mass” (Sampaio, 2001: 8). This is not the place to develop this discussion but we should try to explain the context in which this model is established and to what extent it ends up determining, for this second moment that we are defining, the conditions that make it possible to establish a *city of agrarian reform*.

The Agricultural Reform Cooperatives are today one of the principal targets of the Brazilian government's “artillery” in its fight against the MST: innumerable fragile flanks are left exposed, especially since they are working under conditions of extreme precariousness, both technically and financially, and are forced to rely on hardly recommendable administrative expedients

(if we consider that what is recommended is the strict submission to rules that were instituted in order to ensure that such cooperatives would never come into existence in the first place), etc. In this way, a wide spectrum of criticisms—from the right to the left, as we have already seen—have castigated the cooperative structure of the MST. The cooperatives are seen as a kind of “apparatus” destined to co-opt the uninformed and to promote the diversion of resources in order to finance the Movement itself; they are accused of forming “bands of land invaders,”<sup>15</sup> or even—the other extreme—of being a hierarchical institution manipulated by the few, to the detriment of a possible “productivist democracy” oriented by a collectivist perspective of production (Navarro, 1997). From what I could gather, both versions are quite plausible if we filter out the official discourse—the one put forward by the Movement’s detractors, as well as the one formulated by its leaders. On the other hand, each settler has his own version and understands, in his own way, the mechanism that links him with the cooperative. This is exactly the point at which ordinary analyses seem to skid out of control. First, because the settlers—at least in the context I was familiar with—cultivate an exacerbated, opportunistic posture: their link with the system of production promoted by the Movement is calibrated as a function of the advantages that are offered to them in the moment. If it is possible to obtain credit from the suppliers of agricultural input through the cooperative (to buy seed and fertilizer, for example), the settlers are swift to become members. Once the harvest is upon them, if one offer does them better, the settlers do not hesitate to bring in a local intermediary in exchange for favors that go beyond “hard cash,” canceling their initial commitment to the cooperative. This dynamic is not usually included in the analyses of the production system defended by the MST. The evaluations of the official discourse cultivate the idea that the settlers constitute merely a “maneuverable mass” in the hands of the cooperatives directed by the Movement, susceptible to the despotism of a centralizing and excluding management.

Picking up the same thread, this question is vital for us to understand the frame in which conflicts with the municipal power unfold in Rio Bonito. What occurs is that, invariably, the interests that COAGRI has tried to articulate cannot be reconciled with the local political and commercial interests. In a typical situation of tension, conflicts emerge, sometimes, in questions that make explicit neither these interests nor who the interlocutors actually are.

Understanding the threat represented by the special conditions offered by the mayor, the local MST promoted a large demonstration in front of the Rio Bonito do Iguacu Town Hall, mobilizing the families already settled as well as new ones integrated into a group encamped on the same roadside that had sheltered those who were now Giacometti “plot holders,”<sup>16</sup> demanding the infrastructures necessary for the basic needs of the settlement: schools, the opening of roads graded with gravel, basic health care, public transport,

etc. Urged on by the leadership of the Movement and the settlement, the 800 peasants who literally “embraced” the Town Hall building ended up demonstrating an *essentially collective* reaction to the mayor’s pledges, standing in counterpoint to a certain confusion already present due to the mobilization of the individual wills of the settlers. Facing the demonstration, the mayor resisted, to the point of almost complete obduracy, recognizing the MST as the representative body of the settlers, insisting on the thesis that “each one was free to choose his own way.” A meeting at the Town Hall, hurriedly organized, counted among its participants members of the state government—from Health, Education, and Environment—and INCRA, as well as secretaries and functionaries of the municipal government of Rio Bonito, and MST leaders. With such stubbornness on the part of the mayor, the local and state government officials themselves at a given moment tried to convince him to soften his position, arguing that “even the president of the Republic recognized the MST.” Beaten at last, the mayor was forced to swallow the bitter pill and promise publicly, before the demonstrators, to fulfill the responsibilities of the municipality. As though that were not sufficient, he was compelled by one of the children in the crowd to don the movement’s cap, one of their most recognized icons.

This account tries to give the bare outlines of a context of conflict derived from the presence of the settlement in the region, and the diversity of positions and interests that flourish within the Movement itself and within its structures of production. Such a situation reverberates with the noise between the local powers and the mass of the destitute, principally for the fact that this is a region that has always been immersed in the violence of land-swindlers, gunmen, and ranchers—who are often one and the same. In addition to this, this context also amplifies the noise from various conflicts of interest, which are only suspended (though they do not cease to exist) by a collective action that is the expression of a *political community*, in Arendt’s sense. In the words of one local leader, it is necessary for the Movement to learn to “administrate in a situation of conflict” instead of “administering the conflict.” The constitution of this *political community*, then, would not be based on a simple sum and on the preponderance of one term of the equation over the others. Searching for a more complex image, I think that we are dealing with a differential equation, in which each term shelters another equation, composed of variables and functions completely beyond the capacities of mathematical logic.

## VI

With the establishment of the settlement, all the demands concerning the basic necessities of the group were organized around two fields of action: on the one hand, the “embrace” of public authority, demanding an active stance

to promptly meet those needs relative to local infrastructure (schools, health centers, roads, rural access to electricity, telephones, etc.) as well as production credit and a policy of technical support adequate to the dynamic of the kinds of production systems envisaged by the MST: production and credit cooperatives, promotion of alternative technologies in the areas of husbandry and agriculture, programs to train technicians, etc.

On the other hand, the Movement proposed to articulate actions that would direct the settlement toward what we might call "self-appointed sustainability," understanding that even if an efficient structure for the production of wealth were achieved and became effectively self-managed, the equitable distribution of this wealth among its producers and their real participation in the formulation of a policy of management for the project as a whole would not, by itself, be capable of accumulating enough wealth to effectively overcome conditions of precariousness. To not dare to go beyond that would mean perpetuating a cycle that merely attenuated momentary tensions. Therefore, to consider "self-appointed sustainability" as a project for rural existence is more than simply stoking a process of production already in place, sanctioning a cycle that would not be equipped for the kind of internal rupture of the mechanisms of reproduction of a model that condemns the peasants to such precariousness. It would also signify the opening up of new territories for the reinvention of practices, for the institution of new trades, for the creation of alternatives for traditional production processes, for the constitution of a new sociability, etc. It would mean raising proposals as well in the field of collective life, of leisure and culture, of health and education, of knowledge and technology, and of the possibility of creating an existence in the countryside without abdicating the benefits that urbanism has achieved throughout the centuries. It would mean imagining that a reinvented *polis* could be possible, whose *agora* would extend well beyond the restricted territory of the cities. It would mean reaffirming the "will to remain in the countryside, inventing the prospect, at first sight bizarre, of the construction of a 'citizenry without a city'" (Rizek and Lopes, 1999).

Ever since the expropriation of part of the Giacometti estate was decided upon and the settlement of 1,478 families of the landless took place, the regional MST had been discussing the necessity of thinking about and implementing alternatives that would subvert the tautologies of a mechanical order that the inertia of a program of "domesticated inclusion"—buried in the belly of the official program of Agricultural Reform—always tries to establish as the sole condition (assured by the same old consensual tune of an "Agrarian Reform without conflicts") to secure the success of any rural settlement process.<sup>17</sup>

In this way, in May of 1997, the process of discussion about "the settlement we want" led the settlers to reflect on their precariousness, on the limitations imposed by the reduced volume of resources devoted to the

financing of production,<sup>18</sup> and the perspectives that stemmed from presuppositions established by the official program of Agricultural Reform. Already from this moment, it had become clear that what was needed was to go beyond the ambit of production and management of that production. It had become necessary to discuss the meanders of collective life, the constitution of life beyond the strict satisfaction of material existence, attempting to break away from that which necessity stubbornly imposes on existence.

It was clear, however, that the proportions of the project were growing beyond control: an exercise in utopia with its hands tied from the outset. Out of such a conception, how could one contemplate, as was proposed in the first document that discussed the settlement—"Ireno Alves Santos: o assentamento que queremos" (Ireno Alves Santos—the settlement that we want)—a "principal agro-village with services and large community investments centralized" that was serviced "by an efficiently planned internal system of transportation"; or "a large educational center including pre-school through secondary school, with ample space, good services and a professionally trained staff," where there would be "spaces for everyone" as well as "all the material and human conditions that are needed for a quality education"; or, even more, "a spacious recreational and cultural center [...] linked to the educational center" where "various activities geared toward all age groups, though primarily youth-oriented" would be developed in a way that would allow young people "to remain in the settlement instead of leaving for the city"; or, furthermore, the nearly improbable notion of "bringing the city and its advantages to the country," even without minimum structural conditions set up beforehand? On the contrary, the official program presupposes the isolation of the settlers, physically as well as functionally, ascribing to them only the position of "small producer," reducing them to the status of an "economic subject" who perhaps, in the future, might gain some of the crumbs of the improbable benefits of a self-regulated agricultural and land market.

Because of this process of discussion, the local leaders, the settlement's coordinating committee, and the settlers from Ireno Alves dos Santos started talking about the idea of building a "new centrality" for the group, something that had been lost since the end of the encampment and the settling of each family on their own lot, a kind of stigma in the passage from that first moment to the second moment about which we spoke above. This "new centrality" would allow for better articulation within the group and would be able to establish more organic systems for the management of the settlement, offsetting the dispersal and isolation that, paradoxically, was increasingly accentuated as more families were installed on their parcels of land. In this way it would also be possible to implement certain production alternatives that need to be dovetailed with a centralized infrastructure: agro-industrial stations to benefit the settlement's production, micro-industries (cabinet



making and weaving, for example), alternative forms of generating jobs and income (consumer and civil construction cooperatives, systems for leisure and recreation, cultural activities and training, etc.), or small installations geared to the service sector (machine shops, shoe stores, barbershops, etc.).

Furthermore, this "centrality" would allow for the merging of a certain group of services that, spread over the almost 27,000 hectares of the settlement, had become practically unviable: secondary schools, hospital services, training centers, cultural and sports centers, etc. An area of 264 ha was reserved that, initially baptized the "the big center," was supposed to hold all these services and equipment—by default, it reminds us of the precarious, but consolidated, infrastructure already set up at the Town Hall in Rio Bonito.

## VII

Meanwhile, to the rear of the area that surrounded the large lake formed by the Salto Alto dam, the remains of a "dam town" were hidden: a camp-town built to accommodate workers, technicians, and supervisors, hired for the construction of the Salto Santiago Power Plant. A product of the developmentalist policy of the 1970s, the town had been planned and constructed with a view to its posterior dismantlement. As such, all of the houses, public facilities and installations were conceived and executed with an eye to their subsequent removal when the construction was completed—which happened in 1983. At this point, as though from one day to the next, the contingent of workers—a population that reached almost 13,000 inhabitants by the point of peak production of the dam—had to find another way to live, and a new place in which to do it. The ruins that were left, the circuit of roads, drainage installations, sewage system, a reservoir with a capacity of about 1.4 million liters, two swimming pools, cinemas and a bus station, the remains of an old hospital with 68 beds, as well as the foundations of the rest of the buildings, remained hidden beneath the overgrowth, and stayed like that for the next fifteen years.

In the middle of 1998, a few settlers that had lived in this town, proposed to salvage the ruins from the overgrown forest. After the initial efforts, the whole settlement and the management of the MST understood that they might establish the bases for the construction of the "centrality" they sought by promoting the constitution of an urban nucleus that might extend the conceptions of *production, management, and collective life* out of the reinvention of the very idea of city.

During the same period, at the suggestion of the MST National Office, we made a guided visit to the Ireno Alves dos Santos settlement.<sup>19</sup> Already, on this first visit, the ruins of the old dam town were in the process of being cleaned up and were beginning to reappear out of the forest, suggesting that

this would be the place for the installation of that new "centrality" that had been talked about as a possibility for the sustainability of the settlement.

It had been clear after the first contacts that the Movement was quite worried about the possible direction of its proposals regarding the settlements: should they keep defending the kind of Agrarian Reform that was based exclusively on the logic of food production as an irreducible condition for the eradication of poverty? In other words, was it enough to redistribute land, plant more, harvest more, and feed more to undo the foundations of an unjust and exploitative social structure? This argument has fed a lot of discussion: it is logical that, starting with highly developed technological resources, it is possible to extract a maximum level of productivity from the land, attending to, if not surplus, at least the strict alimentary necessities and the demands of profit. If this is possible, why has the MST refused to adhere to the standards established by the official policy of Agrarian Reform, refusing to become a "partner" in the implementation of this policy, and combining forces for the process of technologizing the countryside?

In the first place, if we analyze the idea of "productivity" itself—a bone of contention between public authorities (particularly INCRA) and the MST—we will see that it obscures political postures, and that the technicians responsible for its definition use biased parameters, even applying them in a way that excludes many of the properties from the Agrarian Reform processes of expropriation.<sup>20</sup>

Second, is it enough to argue the obvious: who are the owners of "highly evolved technological resources"? And it is also obvious that this process of technologizing the countryside does nothing more than contribute to the constitution of huge contingents of people in misery who continue to wander around the countryside, or who (the majority of them) end up migrating to the cities—leading to results already well known.

The fundamental issue in question concerned the object of the struggle for land. It would not be enough to set fire to the circle, and then simply refrain from asking what might be beyond it. It was not a question of promoting the isolation of the settlers in their (new) state of precariousness, condemning them to a ritual process that only delays their exile while it offers temporary compensations for the pressures generated by the tensions of this movement.

If it is the model itself that promotes the perpetuation of this circle of fire—through the combination of an unfair landed-property structure with a biased technical-bureaucratic conception of the elements of evaluation and management and of the actions on behalf of Agrarian Reform, and with the limited ownership of the means of production, of the qualification of this production, and of the circulation of goods produced in the countryside—then one would have to consider whether a different Agrarian Reform project that could go beyond, or even fight against, this model, would be



sustainable.<sup>21</sup> This possible sustainability would emerge out of the construction of alternatives that would assure the possibility of overcoming the limits of the MST's field of action, looking for ways to subvert the confinement imposed by rules established by power.

Even INCRA's Regional Superintendence, revealing the precariousness of a cohesive and uniform governmental posture, manifested tendencies that were different from the official discourse of this administrative body. Impressed also with the possibility of constructing Brazil's first *city of agrarian reform*, the Superintendence invested decisively—even with financial resources—in the recovery of those ruins. However, a new flank of conflicts and collisions was opened, since obviously the “city” the MST wanted was not the same as the one the regional management of INCRA envisaged. If, on the one hand, the Movement did not have the resources to support the cleanup of the town, and, in addition, wished to remain on good terms with the Superintendence,<sup>22</sup> then, on the other, it was arguing for an idea of this new “city” that had nothing to do with the idea intended by the representatives of INCRA.

In a meeting between the coordinating committees, the settlers, and the regional MST, in August of 1998, we proposed a set of questions with the idea of initiating a debate about the conception of the *city*. We began with an apparently simple question: “What do each of you mean by ‘city’?” In spite of the fact that the meeting was intended to trace the discussion of a range of questions, trying to establish initial parameters for our work, that first question so mobilized the participants that the rest of the questions ended up being irrelevant.

“We were thinking about another type of city,” different from the type that is seen as a place of “exploitation”; a city in which it would be possible to bring together, “at the same time,” agricultural production and urban activities, that would permit a “more ample condition,” bringing together “peasant or rural life with urban life”; it was not a question of imagining a city whose physical space would be different from others in the region, but one that would be differentiated by its “form of organization”; a “city without discrimination,” i.e., without excluding the peasants themselves from typically urban activities, in which “the settler himself” could “create his own job,” where he could become “master of himself”; a city that would not be sought out exclusively “for questions of survival,” only for “the jobs that it could offer”; really, a city that was constituted as “a means for bringing people together,” as “a structure built out of another social conception,” one that would be permeable to the “consciousness and way of living” that the rural environment produces.

Taken by a certain “dialogical wonder” *vis-à-vis* a discourse that only minimally reflected something of the imaginary of the peasants concerning their idea of the “city,” we were—as technicians in planning and constructing such

cities—contradictorily immersed in a discourse of apparent submission to the designs and orientations proposed by INCRA. As such, in yet another meeting, now with the presence of the Regional Superintendent of this Institute, the conversation went in ways in which he, determining the next steps, suggested the criteria for the distribution of town lots, for the orientation of processes necessary for the recuperation and setting up of at least basic infrastructures, as well as for deciding on what to call the city. Feeling extremely uncomfortable with the off-handedness with which questions of urban planning were being dealt with, and somewhat surprised at the apparent subservience of the same group that had occupied the largest estate in the state of Paraná, we applied ourselves to the defense of a more rigorous approach to questions of urban planning, while assuring everyone that the city's future users would not be excluded from the discussion of its conception. Beyond the methodological canons of contemporary urban planning, our experience with social urban movements and with the logic dictated by these movements in their collision with public authority was being put into question. After defending his point of view, alleging that he had already “created innumerable cities” and that “cities start like that,” with “someone living here, another over there,” the Superintendent softened his discourse—though at the same time discrediting the architects: “As the ‘caboclo’<sup>23</sup> says: once the cart leaves, the pumpkins settle down!”

What was at issue at that moment was a course of strategic action in which each word, gesture, or look either consented or dissented in the clash of interests concerning the possibility of building a new city. If the municipality's own interests, or the interests of the local government, or of the regional businessmen, and of the large neighboring producers who saw the settlement as a powerful competitor were not enough, who was there were also the interests of INCRA itself, in the figure of its regional superintendent, there to impose his own ideas. On the other hand, the central question for the settlement was to guarantee access to credit. To momentarily lean toward INCRA meant avoiding difficulties and possible conflicts that could derail negotiations over what was most central—credit for production—even if, for this, it would be necessary to submit the project of the city to the political ambitions of the regional superintendent. In questioning the group about this particular position, they affirmed that it was only a temporary strategy. As one of the leaders of the settlement said at the time: “The superintendent won't be around forever. But we're staying.”

## VIII

And the superintendent did leave.

As early as the middle of November of 1998, the settlement started the procedures that would enable it to apply for credit for house building. These

resources corresponded, at the time, to R\$2,500.00 per family (approximately US\$1,450.00), which is a laughable amount if we take into account the fact that a new car, from a popular series, could not be purchased for less than R\$14,000.00 (around US\$8,000.00).

In spite of the transference, around the same time, of INCRA's regional superintendent, and some minor meddling by the Institute in the directions established for the occupation of the old dam town, certain procedures for achieving this had already been implemented—among them, the parceling out, demarcation of, and distribution of the first 500 lots in the town. This fact obviously produced a series of questions and contretemps, since no one had any idea what a *city of agrarian reform* would be like, not to mention having to live in two places at the same time: innumerable families thought it useless to have a lot in the city, since “the farmer's place is with his crops, his livestock and pastures”; others imagined that this presented the possibility of bettering their domestic routine, maintaining just a small farm on the rural lot, in which they could stay during the week while their family lived in a house near the jobs and services that would soon be offered; still others proposed that the urban lot be used for accommodating parents and relatives, while the rural lot would house their nuclear family. However they saw it, it was not asked, at any time, if each and every one of the settled families would have a lot in town. In addition, there were hardly any questions—except by the mayor of Rio Bonito—about the fact that the town was located in the margins of the great lake formed by the power-plant dam—which, according to Brazilian legislation, meant that all this area was an environmentally protected zone.

In spite of the numerous questions that we introduced in an attempt to shore up an operational routine that would seek, in the first place, to plan the *city* in order to be able to occupy it afterwards, what we really were doing at this moment was digging our heels into the ruins of that which had once been a “city” in order to build on top of them what was meant to be its *inverse*. This meant, therefore, starting, strategically, at the end, planting our feet in a territory that had once served the developmentalist policy of the military government. Instead of a camp town that was stratified, administered, and controlled, supporting the mechanics of an immeasurable exploitation of a migrant work force, we would build a city that was predisposed to the exercise of citizenship; instead of an entrepreneurial city, erected and populated with a built-in expiration date, using its extravagant resources and the lives of its inhabitants as though lives and resources were discardable, we would have a *city* in which a dignified existence would be possible, a permanent and non-homogeneous space devoted to the production of life.

But what steps should we objectively take in order to construct this other representation of the “city,” when this was so decisively hindered by the concreteness of a fragmented and unequally shared space, which was the

result of a process conducted in such a ridiculous form that it reproduced the design of a city completely parceled out, hierarchized, and singularly controlled and administered—as the old dam town was?

Perhaps the solid ground of adequate and predisposing conditions, built in a place that is subject to conflicts and clashes of such an order and magnitude, does not exist, as often we—architects and urban planners—might hope it would. As one of the agronomists who works at the settlement said, defending the conception of this new “city” as at least something that represented the possibility of “accumulation” based on “new experiments”: “Large cities end up losing their character for economic reasons [...]. But the city is always a ‘meeting place,’ a place for the realization of accumulation.”

So it was on this unstable ground, and with only the resources and conditions available at that moment, that the first houses of the town began to be built. Based on a process of discussion with each of the family groups from the settlement, which tried to establish a program that would contemplate everything from local building culture to the daily use of the house, we developed the necessary projects and helped the settlers set up a civil construction services cooperative, COOPROTERRA, aimed at training and enabling the group, not only in the reception and management of resources destined for the construction of houses, but also in the execution of services, thus creating jobs linked to civil construction for a small contingent of settlers—representing an alternative occupation for members of the settlement families now available due to the progressive drop-off in the need for agricultural workers.

In our experience with the urban housing movements we developed a procedure for the discussion and distribution of space within a house that tries to avoid either simple exposition and the reference to options taken from previously formatted models (that is, models that are completely imbued with the logic of those who create them) on the one hand or, on the other, representations formulated by the interlocutors themselves, without any technical criteria or viability—declining the responsibility of assuming precisely the function for which we, as professionals, were called upon, and respecting, mostly, representations of houses whose references are derived from images and ideas that would be difficult to realize. In this way, seizing on the elements of pedagogy proposed by Paulo Freire—one of the great Brazilian educators—we have tried to construct an approach that seeks to dismiss as much as possible references to form, instead seeking to illuminate, as content, the subtleties of the organization of quotidian life inside the house, turning it into a *generating theme* for the formulation of project guidelines. In this way, we believe that it is possible to construct a *program* that emerges from the quotidian rituals, showing the real “culture of living” of a particular interlocutor, valorizing more the references established by *time* (the history of the relations between the dweller and the space of the dwelling)

than those formulated by space (the form in which relations in time are ordered).

It would not be overstating the case to say that when this procedure was applied to the landless, we came upon attitudes diametrically opposed to those experienced with the urban group. This might seem an obvious fact, but the ideas we got from our dialogue with the settlers pointed to a conjunction of relations that seemed to clarify a certain set of images that went beyond the commonly held notion of a "peasant culture." There is an intense mixture of elements of rural culture and profoundly urban bourgeois anxieties, which shape quotidian routines according to a dense and complex world of the imagination. In spite of distinct conceptions of what it is to "dwell," the patriarchal logic of the household as a "kingdom" is always present, as are also the ideas of "stability," "accumulation," and "prosperity." This reproduction of the idea of property and bourgeois individualism seems to be out of tune with the collectivist ideology of the MST. Besides this, simple quotidian activities unfolding inside the house revealed the need for a care that negated the condition of precariousness previously experienced, in which not even a bit of privacy was possible. One of the situations that came up in the dialogue with the settlers caught our attention: the fact that the bathroom was located outside the house. Not that this was unknown; it is very particular to peasant culture. But we had not thought about this, and one of the arguments put forth to explain this precaution brought with it some of that restrained humor typical of Paraná: one of the settlers commented upon the fact that, during a visit to the house of a friend, he began to feel a certain intestinal indisposition and asked to use the bathroom. Much to his embarrassment, the bathroom was located inside the house, next to the living room. As there were no other options, and his colic prevented him from waiting any longer ... He concluded the story saying: "You can't imagine the symphony!"

It was out of these elements that the projects were developed and executed. It is clear, however, that it was not possible to avoid hitches, conflicts, and equivocations.

On the one hand, to the surprise of even the technicians involved, it was possible to construct a good house, of 48m<sup>2</sup>, with ceramic brick masonry, cornerstones and the necessary installations—something that seemed impossible at first due to the scarcity of resources. It was also possible to give a minimum salary to the settlers who worked for the cooperative.

On the other hand, the training of the group did not meet with success. This was because of the enormous difficulty of synchronizing, in the middle of a process of accelerated production, the time needed for training with the pace of work. This divergence also gave rise to administrative equivocations, resulting in a deficit, by the end of the construction of the first 500 houses, of almost 10 percent of the total budget, which is only now being audited. It is clear that this fact brought up conflicts and accusations of all kinds, from

improbability—particularly on the part of the city council, who used this fact as ammunition against the local MST—to internal questioning, especially about the operational capacity of those in charge. Clearly there was no justification, as some leaders proposed, for pleading that a lack of capacity was an extenuation for administrative confusions. Such a fact indicated, rather, the precarious conditions in which the settlers and their structures of production operated, in counterpoint to the easy accusation of improbity, so often transmitted by the press, by the government, by certain academic analyses—as we have already seen—and even by the settlers themselves. On the other hand, the context serves up a full plate of immediate comparisons: in a very superficial evaluation, there must have been resources of up to US\$8 million dollars literally abandoned in the dam town, revealed by the remains of infrastructures, streets, buildings, etc. Before such a number, how can we reach a fair evaluation as to the administrative capacity of this or that structure of management of public monies?

## IX

At any rate, the construction of the houses promoted definitive possession of the old town. The impression was clear that quotidian life in this context—clearing plots, pouring foundations, putting up walls and roofing—promoted a certain habitability, which, in turn, supported the appropriation of the place itself. Perhaps a bit of that intended accumulation, made explicit in the words of the previously cited technician, would be realized through these walls, and roofs, and, principally, the new residents.

It is important to comment on the fact that not everyone who was expected to apply their portion of resources earmarked for construction of a house in the old town in the first stage decided to do so. With the option to choose guaranteed from the beginning, many preferred to build their houses on the rural lot, leaving today a total of 300 houses on the urban lots.

However, the occupation has remained precarious: still today there are no water mains installed, no electricity, no sewerage system or garbage removal. Therefore, recourse to traditional methods of sewage removal is prevalent—accumulating in cesspools, which were often constructed without any criteria for hygiene; water collection implies a daily trip of dozens of meters to the water mines; without refrigerators the conservation of food implies salting the meat; and the garbage is accumulated in ditches for subsequent burning. Nothing is different, really, from the situation on the rural lots, where there is also no rubbish collection, no electricity or system of water treatment, not to mention the treatment of sewage. That is, the context of precariousness continues, whether in the new urban nucleus, or on the rural lots of the settlement.

At any rate, it was over these meager urban leftovers where they began to live that the settlement would begin to construct a means of criticism, of

evaluation, and the re-nourishing of mechanisms of reflection over an imaginary that would have been difficult, it seemed to us, to constitute on its own. Throughout the second semester of 1999, we maintained contact with the Program of Urban Management (PGU), directed by the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (HABITAT), and, through their Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, it was possible to raise the resources to finally promote a series of Seminars with the settlers that tried to establish a group of references that would permit the consolidation of a "conception of a city," providing guidelines for the planning of a new urban nucleus whose establishment would be based on the living reality of the peasants, associating "peasant or rural life with urban life." Logically, to build up a reference base in order to conceive of a city with more than 9,000 peasants as interlocutors, few of whom had ever experienced permanent urban residence, is similar to the task of thinking about something from a non-empirical reality.

The process of *Urban Consultation* (as this group of seminars that have been taking place since July 2000 is referred to), following the same method established for the discussion on housing with the urban homeless, has sought to use arguments that momentarily delay discussing the physical space of the city, adjusting its focus on the *network of relationships* that would be established there. Such a procedure permitted us to construct references, as *generating themes*, based on representations proposed by the settlers, and articulated out of the internal economy of their practices, their quotidian, their experiences and desires, all of them manifested in the way in which they deal with their own history and the way they struggle to become subjects. The sung testimony of one of the settlers is quite significant: when urged to say something about the occupation, he could hardly mutter a word. It was necessary to put a guitar in his hands to evoke a long ode to "the collective hero," inventing himself while he affirmed himself as a subject, pouring forth a complex plot in music, even though he did not know how to read or write. Another settler, who had worked on the construction of the dam town, when he saw some photographs taken when the town still existed as a "city," told the story about how one day he was barred from entering the sector where the engineers' houses were located, even though he had worked so hard there; he imagined himself inviting the engineer who had lived in the same place where he lived today "for a barbeque." Or there were the reactions of an attentive audience of more than 400 settlers as they watched a play in the ruins of the town's old cinema, put on at the first seminar by a São Paulo group, which discussed the relations between capital and labor in the contemporary world. And there was even the visceral identification with the story told by the same theater group about the death of a comrade in the region, a victim of state police savagery.

*Production, Management, and Collective Life* were the *generating themes*, constituted during the first stages of the Urban Consultation process. In the wake of the inquiry initially proposed regarding "the city that we want," the background was broadened to include "the settlement and the city that we want," which led to the question of how to deepen the relations between the production of existence, the autonomous and collective management of common activities, the construction of the possibility for a life that would transcend the limitations imposed by the yoke of precariousness, and the territory of a city *that overflows the traditional space of a formal city*. This notion of territoriality, more imbricated in the manner of articulation and occupation of the settlement, ended up being implicated in the extension of the process of Urban Consultation and in the promotion of Community Seminars that were initiated in each of the five communities, around which the different family groups from the settlement came together according to territories, establishing intermediary *nuclei* for the articulation of services—primary school, general stores, cooperative warehouse, etc.—as well as meeting places for leisure and religious activities.

For the technicians involved in the discussions, to illuminate the idea of "city," starting with its extension into a fabric that transposes the very urban geometry to which we are accustomed, led also to an inversion of the canons of contemporary planning, and took us back to the origins of modern urban planning itself, provoking us to consider the idea of the "city as a region" (Geddes, 1994) and to look again at pre-Marxist conceptions of the city, particularly those associated with anarchist thought. We also considered the representations formulated from utopian conceptions that have always manifested themselves in the history of humanity.

But, in addition to the normal practices of the job, there is a question that transcends its quotidian and introduces other kinds of content into the logic of planning, letting us believe that it is possible to detect, in this process, some truly transforming potential. We are talking about the form in which the parameters of the work of planning would be established: as has already been seen, there were no pre-formatted or pre-established conditioners in this case, the kind we would normally see in the usual planning procedures. The field of tensions that we have described is not sufficiently stable ground for such conditioners, and we believe that it should be so. In this way, it is possible to liberate *time* and history for a discussion about *space*, and it seems to us that this can only occur if we base the standard procedures of planning upon the knowledge of relations embedded in space. However, such relations, if we are to understand them fully, are permeated by innumerable contradictions, differentiated conceptions, particular wishes, often expressed in a very pragmatic fashion. This is, therefore, the quintessential field of conflicts. To eliminate conflict would be to suffocate expression and, in the terms of Rancière, to eliminate the possibility of Politics. In terms of urban planning,

to conceive a city as the place of Politics would signify broadening and giving space to the explicit manifestation of conflicts through a qualified expression that is democratically constructed from a heterogeneity of lived relations, inverting the logic of homogeneous space, which is the space of the commodity and of purely mercantile relations.

It is significant that, already in discussions with each of the communities, the most vital aspects from our point of view were those related to *Collective Life* as a *generating theme*. The pragmatic shading that ended up sustaining the discussion about *Management* and *Production*, the other two *themes*, was imbued with the economic and financial logic, so that not even a cooperative like COAGRI was able to achieve happy results. In this second phase of the movement, when the MST was no longer functioning as an unequivocal binder of individual wishes, it seems that there was a reduction of the settler to an "economic subject," a pure agent of production and consumption, who began to be seen more as a cog in the logic of the cooperative dynamic. Perhaps here the MST did not achieve the same results that it did in the first stage, precisely because it reduced human relations to market relations in the same way that neoliberalism and bourgeois ideology have been doing, as we will see below. When we place our thinking about urban planning *outside* this dynamic of reduction, we move ahead into a new field of operations, and it is precisely this context that also turns *inside out* the possibilities immersed in this whole process of the conception of the *city*.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. There is, however, a great difficulty in this process, since the conceptions of "city" in play are innumerable. Particularly when we encourage reflection on relations that constitute the contents of urban form, tensions inherent in the political game are also made explicit. In this weave of interests, diffused or fully delineated, the wounds, the suspicions, the anxieties and desires of innumerable settlers all take up their part.<sup>24</sup> Other elements are also in play: political ideas, often permeated by official conceptions or discourses, formulated by the management of the settlement, and by the MST's local board of directors; the objective necessities of the local cooperative, often shrouded by administrative ineptitude; the MST's guidelines at the national level, which often shape the official discourse locally proffered; the political interests of public power, of businessmen and local political forces, which see the settlements positively when considering only the settlers, or as a threat when considering them as a *locus* for MST activity; INCRA's strategies to implement a policy of agrarian reform put in motion, which are in constant mutation, trying to neutralize the activities of the Movement; the police-like concerns and the contempt of the multinational that holds the right to exploit the Santo Santiago power plant; and even

our own concerns as urban planners and architects enter into the warp of this fabric. In this intricate set of positions and oppositions, how should we evaluate the emancipatory potential of the conception and construction of a *city of agrarian reform*?

It seems to us, however, that there is a set of references that circumscribe a *common field of dialogue* that would be able to establish some internal cohesion inside the MST and a system of connections between disparate and apparently contradictory postures. We do not believe that it is possible to achieve such cohesion through the force of a unified discourse, or through a "technology" of popular mobilization, or if the cooperative were to hold the settlers hostage to the Movement (we have already seen that this is not what, in effect, happens), or, still, through the devotion to the MST that we might eventually identify in certain militants.

No matter how strong, centralizing, and authoritarian the structure of the direction and orientation of a certain political body is, it behooves us still to question whether any form of alienation or acquiescence of individuals who are part of it would survive, consciously or unconsciously, merely because of the yoke imposed through some obscure "technology" of domination, engendered by the particular interests of small groups installed as leaders of the political body in question. Additionally, it would as well behoove us to question if the convention originally established for the constitution of this body does not convey the elements of its own particular constitution, where individual interests would also include residues of the general will, abstracted, from that point on, as autonomous in relation to particular wills.

To what extent can the constitution of a "political community" do without the conscious or unconscious adherence of its members, if not by force? And even if it is by force, is it not important to verify the nature of that force? Is it a part of the pre-established conditions for ingress into the community? In other words, to what extent does this presumption end up excluding a latently "tragic popular consciousness," in which those who ignore that they know, know that they ignore (Chauí, 2000: 311, 312)? And, as this adherence occurs, how do particular members shape the general will—which is not at all defenseless or inert—and promote its autonomy through the constitution of a new collective subject?

To think of a "city" through its *inverse* is to reconsider and re-envision the place of the original agreement, to redeem the space of the city for the full exercise of the composition of *óikos* and *nomos*, of an economy of relations that are articulated *in space and in time*. If there is an agreement—and it seems to us that there is—it starts in individual interests expressed in the form of contradictions that often fog our capacity of intellection. To deny any rationality to atomic members of a political body is also a tortuous form of narrow-minded paternalism.

2. On the other hand, why does the Movement not engage with the established structure of the local municipality and attempt to change, even if it is by "inversion," the correlation of forces installed there? Would the MST not be promoting the subversion of a socially legitimate institutionality, the basis of an urban order that sustains that municipality? Would it not be encouraging destabilizing attacks on this order without recognizing it as consolidated and legitimate, founded on law and reason—as even the dictionaries lay down?

This question is related to the position assumed by the Movement in relation to institutionality, the very institutionality that makes Agrarian Reform viable. Why does the MST seem to almost indefatigably insist on the apparent destabilization of this order that sustains a program of Agrarian Reform that could be implemented without conflicts, as its defenders affirm? We should remember Rousseau: "They will say that the despot assures his subjects of civil tranquility. So be it, but what advantage is it to them, if the wars they are thrown into through the despot's ambition, his insatiable avidity, the vexations imposed by his ministry, ruin them more completely than dissension itself? What do they gain with this, if this very tranquility is one of their miseries?" (Rousseau, 1997: 61).

It is enough to verify that the institutional representatives that the MST has targeted in several of its actions—including the mayor of Rio Bonito, in the case in question—have not formally fulfilled the role theoretically attributed by the same law that establishes that they should "ensure the common good"—if at least some of the presuppositions of classical political theory are still valid. It would be equivocal, in this analysis, to take into account only the ideality of a mediating state, purveyor and promoter of collective benefits, legitimized by a possible "civil tranquility" that its institutionality would be able, eventually, to assure. We also have to take into account the profound imbalances—paradoxically institutional too—caused by the intense practice of corruption, "vexing impositions imposed by our ministries,"<sup>25</sup> and despotism practiced in name of a supposed "civil tranquility."<sup>26</sup> All of these elements can be found, without much effort in recent Brazilian political life, and they have contributed a great deal towards the perpetuation of the condition of "pacified misery" that has historically afflicted the people of this country ("We also live peacefully in dungeons; will this suffice for us to feel well in them?" [Rousseau, 1997: 61, 62]). In this respect, we would risk affirming that the MST is hardly emancipatory: in fact, the actions it has undertaken *vis-à-vis* established institutions have more to do with the re-establishment of its primary bases—those that could, or should, sustain the agreement on which this kind of state is based, that is, the promotion of the common good and not of individual interests (which are nothing but those rights that are preserved as "bourgeois rights")—than with the establishment of a permanent process of de-legitimation of the state

and destabilization of institutions. What the MST seeks is, therefore, nothing more than the recognition by the state—and the municipality of Rio Bonito—of its status as a "*subject by right/law*" and, in this case, as the legitimate promoter of a "collective will," in the classical sense of the term. In this way, the MST is doing nothing more than defending, contrary to what is thought, the *very legitimacy* of this "*subject by right/law*," so that, through it, there would be the possibility of constituting a free and democratic urban existence that would effectively promote citizenship. To invert this logic would be also to propose it in its *inversion*, even though it only constitutes another term of the same equation. Thus, it implies the emergence, through the same territory, of (an) *other* conception of "city."

3. If we insist on this analysis, it would be convenient, through this matrix, to associate the idea of the construction of a new "centrality," concretely structured in the forms of the management of a new urban territory, with "the militarized vision of social structuring of new reformed areas. This vision is hardly democratic and scarcely tolerant of the wills and family histories of the farmers themselves" (Navarro, 1997: 126). We believe that what emerges here again is the mistake of defining the "collective will" as the simple sum of "individual wills," as if the imposition of specific "individual wills" could by itself establish a consensual order, free of diversity, conflicts, and indecisions, identified as the "collective will," as we have sought to make evident throughout the text. Taking this line of reasoning, the analysis could point to the fact that, through the force of a disciplinary "democratic centrality" commanding the permanent confrontation with local public order—and also regional and national orders—the MST seeks to subvert the established institutional order in order to establish the one that it defends. We should remember, however, one of Rousseau's maxims, namely, that "might does not make right": if the effect takes the place of the cause (as in Aristotle or in Hobbes, in which the rights of the strongest are treated as "natural"), there is only a succession in the exercise of force. Therefore, what is at stake is the place of the exercise of force, rather than rights. It does not seem to us that this is the project proposed for the *city of agrarian reform*, nor even the one proposed by the MST. The fact that members of the Movement, and even settlers, have participated in the Rio Bonito electoral dispute, puts back the institutional basis that sustains the logic of local power at the center of the dispute for the space of the city. And once again it is here that the MST seems to be running out of breath: at this moment in its trajectory its prominence before the settlers is not as unequivocal as when it was working toward the conquest of land. It seems that the result of its actions end up being confused with the dispute for the place of the exercise of force—despite the fact that this is not its goal. It is symptomatic that, in the 2000 electoral dispute, of the more than twenty candidates for local administration

in the municipalities of the region, none was elected. Not even the candidate running with the support of the Movement, who conceded the office of deputy mayor to one of the leaders of the settlement, gained success, and considering the fact that the settler-electors made up a majority. The only exception is the present deputy mayor, a settler who agreed to run as a candidate of the party in power. If, on the one hand, the Movement involved itself in this dispute, believing that once in power the settlers could obtain the conditions to finally establish their conception of "city," on the other hand, it lost the control that an apparently determining political "centrality" could have given it in the municipal elections, precisely for having accepted the rules of the game.

From the case in question, the suspicion of a vertical organicity profoundly articulated to a "militarized" centrality promoted by the Movement's leadership does not seem sustainable. What moves the great mass of people in the MST is not just a voice of command. Again, recalling Rousseau, in the face of a despotic rule, "to affirm that a man gives himself freely constitutes an absurd and inconceivable assertion; such an act is illegitimate and null, if only for the fact that he who practices it is not found to be in control of his senses. To affirm the same thing of a whole people is to suppose a people of fools: folly does not create rights."

4. It is true that the MST has not been able to achieve significant prominence, beyond the stir promoted by the press, and, at times, by the government itself. If the country still has around 25 million people living in the countryside, what does a scant half million mean? It is also true that the MST's field of action is narrowing, to the extent that it is becoming increasingly associated with only the "occupation of land," obscuring the whole set of proposals that the Movement has formulated, beyond the mere confrontation of the landed property conflicts. There is also no doubt as to the planned precariousness that is imposed on its settlements, sealing any possibility of development of more adequate technological resources that would raise productivity and, consequently, raise living standards beyond levels of mere subsistence.

Their representations, constructed throughout the last years, do not materialize when immersed in—or when they emerge out of—the established order. We know how questionable it would be to imagine that some process of radical transformation would be possible without trying at least to shake up the representations of the established order. On the other hand, in circumscribing the field of a "single thinking," the Movement—as self-constituting subject that succeeds in affirming itself as such—has at least been able to uncover the archaic conservatism that lurks behind the pretence of neoliberal modernity, exposing a little of what hegemonic ostentation can not digest.<sup>27</sup>

However, up to what point is the absorption of actions promoted by the MST by the hegemonic order not simply a question of time? Up to what point do these actions not become compensatory, to the extent that—in spite of the arch of conflicts that they presently create—they lose themselves in the field of a utopia that ends up realizing itself through its *inverse*, becoming domesticated and then grouped together with the set of strategies used to transform Brazilian society into an inoffensive "community of solidarity"?

A key, perhaps, to the understanding of what allows the MST to gather together a remarkable contingent of the peasant population around the struggles that it promotes and, starting with them, to still establish itself as a minimally cohesive political body *vis-à-vis* the hegemonic order, could be the individual forms of representation and elocution by which individual subjects that compose it are able to define themselves. Discussing the neoliberal movement and its ideological discourses, Francisco de Oliveira analyzes, identifying as a simulacrum, the "reduction of the return to the individual, with the exclusive prevalence of the market as the only regulating institution, as self-regulating in the allocation of economic resources as in social relationships and sociability in general." In this way, to understand the individual as a molecular entity reduced to a fraction of market logic—which constitutes itself based on the simple sum of individual wills—obfuscates and maintains "under suspicion" the "understanding of the market as a self-constructed regulating institution." He concludes: "If the reduction to the individual remains merely ideological, although it is still constituted today as an ideological expression 'par excellence' of the neoliberal movement, the reduction to the private—which is not the same thing as the individual—is based on another foundation, sociologically different, whose origins can be traced to the process of accumulation, concentration and centralization of capital" (Oliveira, 1999: 55, 56).

It seems to us that, based on the reflection over the context described here, the slippage promoted by the equivocal understanding that the MST has constituted itself from a centralized discourse that operates in a centralized way is nothing more than to project over the Movement the same reduction that neoliberalism promotes as a consensual format for establishing a single thinking. The pretension of formatting the Movement from an analytical filter that reverberates this reduction would be nothing more than an attempt to "domesticate" our understanding of it. On the other hand, the MST itself, highlighting cooperativism as one of its principal strategies for the settlement—observing the question from the case under study—ends up hostage, or as if in a trap, to the very system that, paradoxically, guarantees the amplification of its struggles beyond the conquest of land. Due to the economic and productivist logic that ends up being implemented by cooperativist practice, the Movement would not be doing more than backsliding and reproducing the same "reduction of the return to the individual,



with the exclusive prevalence of the market." In addition to this, this fact ends up also obscuring the expressiveness of the Movement's other fields of action, in particular the potential for the work of training and the program of education that it has been developing in the encampments and settlements with which it has maintained ties.

We do not reject, certainly, the idea that the viability of the settlement depends on production. But it seems to us that the fact that the Movement has shown a real capacity to effectively compose *individuals*—and not exclusively private subjects—leads to a permanent tension between its own exhaustion and the effective potential for transformation that it could have at hand.

When the Movement prescribes itself as a *collective subject* starting with the *individual* who produces a *life* and not only *commodities*, it seems to us, from our impressions of the Ireno Alves settlement, that it is making major advances in terms of social emancipation: that the possibility of a project for the construction of culture is emerging is obvious from the contents of courses taught in schools, and it is impossible to not recognize the difference in the community radio programming, while the demands by the settlers for spaces for theatres, music, and dance also calls out for attention. Perhaps this is the field of a counter-hegemonic and truly emancipatory order.

It would be difficult to defend the "mystique" created by the MST as a pedagogic practice in which it is possible to treat the imagined as a mediation between understanding and pure sensibility, that is, as the field that can possibly unite concept and intuition. If it is understood as a vague *paidea*, a pedagogic exercise put to work within and on the basis of those individuals' cultural universe, creating in itself a "collective history" that allows them to glimpse the consciousness of self-operating subject, it would then perhaps be possible to understand how false it is to attribute the relative prominence the Movement currently has to simply the pure exercise of blind faith in the "processions" that take the property of others by assault, or to a dogmatic rationality that formats an army of automatons.

It seems to be through a "quasi-symbolic quasi-ritual," in which the contents of the new form are prescribed, that representations imperceptible to the hegemonic order take shape: they are not part of the pre-established script, there is no dialogue with the established order without mediation, and they do not lend themselves to pure instrumentalization, and are realized in the field of conflict itself.

Permit us the redundancy to say that it would be out of this set of images that it becomes possible to conceive of the possibility of imagining an "other city": a city that allows itself to become its *inverse*, that is able to germinate on the obscure backside of a piece of land that both shelters and denies it. Established for its transforming potential, for everything that it proposes to create there, to think and to realize this "other city" takes in the spectrum

of MST actions: in the fight for the subversion of hegemonic structures of domination, and through the reinvention of practical action invested as political action, the Movement reinvents the *place* of politics itself.

#### Notes

- 1 This study was elaborated with the help and contributions of Professors Maria Célia Paoli and Cibele Rizek, as well as many of the members of USINA, especially Pedro Fiori Arantes and Joana Barros.
- 2 Approximately equivalent to an area enclosed by a 29 x 29-km polygon, that is, 840 km<sup>2</sup>. In this specific case, the area is larger than an average Brazilian municipality: one has only to consider that Curitiba, the capital of the state of Paraná, extends over an area of 432 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of about 1.4 million inhabitants.
- 3 In spite of the fact that more than two thirds of the population of Paraná live in towns (Curitiba, Londrina, Maringá, Ponta Grossa, and Cascavel being the largest), the state's economy is mostly based on agriculture and cattle raising: Paraná is one of the most important cereal producers in Brazil and is responsible for approximately a quarter of the domestic production in agriculture and cattle. It is one of the states where the influence of immigration (particularly German, Polish, and Italian—besides other groups, for example, Ukrainian) promoted by official programs around 1850 was more strongly felt.
- 4 The Federal Constitution, passed in 1988, determines (although this has not yet been regulated) that the fundamental legal regime of landed property is its exclusively social function (which in fact can be read as one pleases).
- 5 The families who composed that group were primarily from the interior of the state of Paraná. There are, however, numerous cases of migrating families, almost nomads, that have spent a large part of their lives looking for a place to stay; they have lived in other parts of the state, looked for places to stay for a while in other states, lived in cities, and some of them have even tried to find a living in other countries, as is the case of those individuals that are called "brasiguaios": the border with Paraguay is near and they have spent part of their lives there, alternating with periodic stays in Brazil and, as a result, have an undefined nationality. All of these situations, however, reflect the same migration dynamic imposed by the impossibility of any kind of fixed lifestyle being economically viable.
- 6 What the MST calls the "front of the masses" seems credible: innumerable militants that travel around the interior of the country, regimentalizing squatter families (those who occupy lands irregularly or under the supervision of owners), people living on the peripheries of cities, or in rural areas, etc. But it seems that what prevails is what we

call "mouth to mouth": someone learns about the encampment, tells someone else, who, in his turn, passes the information on, until it reaches a family or group who are willing to risk the possibility of joining the Movement. At any rate, it is impossible to make a systematic verification of the origin of each individual, since there is no disciplined attempt to sort out the registers at the moment they enter the encampment.

- 7 Ireno Alves dos Santos (1999).
- 8 The "mystique" consists of an almost "ritualistic" activity, in which the Movement, as a self-affirming collective subject, celebrates its presence and its capacity to organize and mobilize people. Through signs and symbols represented in T-shirts, caps, hymns, songs and gestures that characterize the MST, the "mystique" incorporates a group of meanings that seem to transpose the mere reproduction of an ideological corollary. It seeks to incorporate a set of ideals that mixes traditions, history, personages and memory, delineating a kind of "collective hero" who represents the whole history of agrarian struggles and the struggles of the oppressed that the movement believes it can bring to life.
- 9 It is important to highlight that the Peasant Leagues, in spite of their significance during the 1960s when they appeared in the northeast of Brazil, brought together only about 3,000 peasants. Throughout the last fifteen years, however, the MST has managed to establish itself as a mass movement, bringing together approximately 500,000 peasants (see note 11).
- 10 This is based on a set of references: Foucault, with the idea of the constitution of the "docile man" (Foucault, 1987), and an expression that has become current, expressing the form of exclusion of a contingent of "useless for the world" (Castell, 1998) *vis-à-vis* the process of modernization occurring in Brazil over the last decades.
- 11 Like any other social movement, the MST is incapable of calculating, or even approximating, how many people are involved: 500,000 is the figure that normally comes up, with about 200,000 people in camps and another 300,000 already settled or in the process of being so.
- 12 It should be noted that initially 3,038 families were camped inside the estate. The form of the negotiation started by INCRA resulted in a surplus that today is still waiting for a solution.
- 13 It is appropriate to mention that, outside the large urban centers, the Brazilian political structure still maintains clear parochial contours that result in a division of local power determined by local events and disputes, and, as such, foreign to any party structures. Thus, the impact of the Ireno Alves dos Santos settlement assumes the dimension of a collision that outstrips the capacity of the political "locus" to absorb it mechanically, and interferes drastically in the daily life and the comings and goings of the little "colonels" who share power.

- 14 Since its beginning, the MST has been developing education and training programs that are differentiated from those promoted by official authorities and implementing them in an almost symbiotic manner in articulation with the formally established structures of education. This is done through the training of teachers who will be working within the official education network—and who meet all the requirements for that.
- 15 It would be a huge task to mention the extensive list of press references that formulate this version. One of the crucial attacks against the MST was most notably that by the large daily *Folha de São Paulo*, which attacked COAGRI and the regional management of the Movement. The virulence with which the reporter, Josias de Souza, took up the question reinforced the impression that there had been a certain "orchestration" between the newspaper and the federal government. On the day following the "denunciations" that the cooperative had embezzled resources (the title read: "MST embezzles money from agrarian reform") and that the MST had "compelled" settler families to make financial contributions to the Movement ("MST Director confirms fees of 3 percent"), the federal government, demonstrating an efficiency lacking in other situations, suspended all of the resources for the settlements in Paraná state that were connected with the MST until such "irregularities" were investigated (*Folha de São Paulo*, 14 May 2000: A13/14, and 17 May 2000: A9).
- 16 "Parceleiros," in the original, a reference having to do with the "parcela," the lot of land allocated to each settled family.
- 17 An example of this is the official program "Rural Town" promoted by the state government of Paraná. The leaflets that disseminate the government's action included pictures portraying happy families gathered around baskets and hampers replete with "produce from the land," misleadingly large and fresh. The title immediately clarifies the content: "Agrarian reform with efficiency and without trauma." The program foresees the settling of families in towns composed of 5,000 m<sup>2</sup> lots with a house, storehouse, coop and infrastructure. The financing costs about R\$80.00 a month (approximately US\$46.00), which, according to the statement of one of the dwellers, is impossible to pay if "you don't have a job." Such is the "efficacy" of the agrarian reform as defined, depending, as it does, on a condition that is external to the very object of the reform.
- 18 The credit to be granted to each family within the official program, symptomatically called "National Program for the Strengthening of Family Agriculture" (Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar—Pronaf), would amount to R\$9,500.00 (US\$5,520.00) until May 2000 (when a number of alterations in the program changed the subsidy policy), to be made available in installments, for the purchase of

agricultural input (seeds, preservatives, fertilizers, etc.) and for the promotion of production. Besides that, the program also granted an initial subsidy for the family's settlement: basic food baskets, aid for house building, purchase of tools and equipment, etc.). Resources aimed at the purchase of agricultural input and the promotion of production to subsidize crops yearly for an average period of ten years are contracted by means of the relevant legal document—the "Settlement Contract"—signed by the government and each family. To explain how cooperatives manage to operate with these resources it will suffice to say that each "lot-holder" transfers his responsibility for the application of these funds to the legal collective person he is a member of—his cooperative—as well as his responsibility for the commercialization of products, and the distribution of profits. That is how cooperatives manage to secure the capital necessary to obtain better prices and business conditions when dealing in the formal market. By way of comment, it would certainly be naïve to suppose that the settled families are irresistibly enticed through certain pressures exerted by the cooperative leaders as if—as both the government and the media like to suggest—the relationship between the agrarian reform cooperatives and the settlers did not involve conflicts, private interests in conflict with collective interests, besides those which stem from the collision between leaders and settlers. What has often been more than just suggested is that the settler is part of an ignorant, naïve race, manipulated by the MST as a mere "docile mass for maneuvering."

- 19 The first contacts were held in São Paulo in April/May 1998, at the MST National Office, through CONCRAB—Confederação Nacional de Cooperativas de Reforma Agrária Brasileiras (National Confederation of Brazilian Agrarian Reform Cooperatives)—an MST-affiliated structure that provides institutional support and promotes the consolidation of the cooperative structure operated by the MST. These contacts were established by the author and other technical staff of the non-governmental organization USINA—Centro de Trabalhos para o Ambiente Habitado (Center for the Study of Inhabited Environments). Created in 1990 and based in São Paulo, USINA brings together architects, urban planners, engineers, sociologists, and lawyers, as well as groups of experts from other areas, and acts in close contact with groups that, in the cities, struggle for access to housing—*os Sem Teto* (the homeless). Since the 1980s, with the relaxing of the military regime, and the resurgence of social movements, the Housing Movement has been able to validate some of its proposals. By the end of the decade, it was able to open a breach in the mechanics of institutional housing financing, which had been in place since the creation of the Financing System of Housing (*Sistema Financeiro de Habitação*) responsible for national housing policy starting in 1964 with

the installation of the dictatorship. The Housing Movement attempted to find another avenue for resources destined for housing production and to invert the financing logic of private and public sector intermediaries, obvious "sieves" from which a great part of the resources often drain away. Starting with a large demonstration in Brasília, in 1988, the Housing Movement was able to negotiate a financing program that foresaw, for the first time in Brazil, the transference of resources directly to the users, organized in associations, for the collective management of their application. USINA's history of action in favor of the urban homeless includes acting alongside the Movement's organizations, designing projects, accompanying construction, assisting in the management of resources and promoting training and empowering programs. What has made this a different project in the last ten years has been the preservation of a principle of self-management—certainly fraught with difficulties, it must be recognized—that has characterized both the action of the Housing Movement (especially in the large urban centers) and of the groups that provide it with advice and assistance—including USINA. It is very much because of this kind of work that this group of professionals has become a partner of the MST, particularly in relation to the Irene Alves dos Santos settlement.

- 20 That is, for instance, the case with the enormous amount of lands used for extensive cattle-breeding considered "productive" by INCRA: they occupy 1 ha of land per animal unit, each unit taking about four years to raise and to slaughter, resulting, in this period, in a profit of R\$500.00/ha (approximately US\$290.00), creating only three direct jobs. On the other hand, this same hectare of land producing cassava can yield up to R\$1,600.00/ha (approximately US\$930.00) in less than one year—possibly involving a larger number of producers.
- 21 As a matter of fact, the Fernando Henrique Cardoso government—repeating the old argument that the country's production structure is backwards and incompatible with the desired "modernity"—has been conveying the idea that the landed-property and rural production model should be developed with the aim of attaining the American model, where, at present, only 4 percent of the population remains in the country—against the approximately 25 percent of the Brazilian population who do not yet live in towns.
- 22 Their relations had always been confrontational up to the time when a new INCRA official was appointed regional superintendent. Maintaining cordial relations meant, to a certain extent, assuring that obstacles to the liberation of resources would be raised, a common practice by government agencies that manipulate the mechanisms of public financing according to political interests and positions.
- 23 A "caboclo" is a descendant of white and Indian parents (TN).

- 24 In the discussion of the housing project, one of the settlers insisted that his house be made adequate for the installation of a storefront, particularly since the location of the house in the town suggested a commercial vantage. His insistence ended up producing a certain unease, since we had been discussing the collective organization of commercial services in the town with the leaders. Another settler, finding an opportunity for gaining some advantage, proposed to supplement construction resources to build a larger house. He promised to reimburse COOPROTERRA for the extra materials as soon as the house that he owned in the city was sold. After finishing the house, at a much higher cost than was initially approved, he neither sold his house in the city, nor did he reimburse the cooperative. There were also insinuations that the COOPROTERRA management had profited from the deal. These situations, among others, demonstrate how private interests are always in a state of tension *vis-à-vis* the expectations formulated by the Movement.
- 25 One example is the current energy crisis in the country, the result of complete administrative ineptitude and lack of structural planning.
- 26 Here, we should keep in mind the quantity of provisional measures promulgated by a government that supposes itself democratic, an expedient result of constitutional mechanisms that secure the permanence of a dictatorial state in this country, even if it is camouflaged.
- 27 As José de Souza Martins has already said, "a movement like this [MST], that brings together populations whose social conflict affects the very foundations of the system, i.e., property rights, has an indisputable modernizing function." And, disagreeing with the president of the Republic, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, when he asserted that the "Movement represented the archaic against the modern," Martins concluded: "It is the Movement of the Landless that is the bearer and the agent of the modern, because it questions the structure of property and by doing so questions the structure of power: it questions property concentrated unjustly, anti-socially, and, consequentially, questions power that is oligarchic, and, ultimately, anti-democratic. The Movement is the only social agent that proclaims everyday that the agrarian question is not only a question of economics. It is a political question" (Martins, 1997: 34).

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