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Solidarity Economies, Networks and the Positioning of Power in Alternative Cultural
Production and Activism in Brazil:
The Case of Fora do Eixo

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Communication

by

Andrew C. Whitworth-Smith

Committee in charge:

Professor Daniel Hallin, Chair
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2014

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2014

DEDICATION

To Mia Jarlov, for your passion and humility, your capacity to presuppose the best in others, for your endurance and strength, and above all for your friendship.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CC	Creative Commons
CTS	Center for Technology and Society
ECAD	Central Bureau of Collection and Distribution
Embrafilme	Brazilian Cinema Company
FBES	Brazilian Forum on Solidarity Economy
FENAJ	National Federation of Journalists
FGV	Getulio Vargas Foundation
FNDC	National Forum for the Democratization of Communication
GOPAI	The Access to Information Public Policy Research Group
MinC	Ministry of Culture
MISC	Museum of Sound and Image
MLM	Mídialivrismo Movement [Free Media]
NINJA	Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action
PMBD	Brazilian Democratic Movement Party
PSD	Social Democratic Party
PSDB	Brazilian Social Democracy Party
PSOL	Socialism and Freedom Party
PSTU	United Socialist Worker's Party
PT	Worker's Party
PV	Green Party
SENAES	National Secretary of Solidarity Economy
UOL	Online Universe
WSF	World Social Forum

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Solidarity Economies, Networks and the Positioning of Power in Alternative Cultural
Production and Activism in Brazil: The Case of *Fora do Eixo*

by

Andrew C. Whitworth-Smith

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

University of California, San Diego, 2014

Professor Daniel C. Hallin, Chair

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the Brazilian cultural and activist network *Fora do Eixo* (FDE). Since 2005, FDE has emerged at local and national levels as a form of civic engagement in the digital age that connects political, economic and cultural fields of action. FDE has origins in cities outside the São Paulo—Rio de Janeiro axis that dominates cultural production in Brazil, where it began producing independent music festivals through a system of barter and trade of cultural services. This alternative

system soon morphed into an internal “solidarity economy” organized around a complementary currency, *Card*. FDE has since transformed into a full-fledge social movement, consolidating into communal houses across Brazil where members live and work full-time on a multiplicity of cultural projects and social campaigns and where a collective bank covers their material needs. Digital technology is as central to FDE’s daily operations as it is to its institutional identity and to the identity of its members; they have become masterful at harnessing the affordances of new media to elevate their online visibility and promote their agenda and themselves. Its highly sophisticated communication team has allowed FDE to mobilize large publics and capture the attention of mainstream media companies like Globo, as well as high-level politicians including President Dilma Rousseff. The network’s relevance as a social force was made particularly visible during the 2013 protests in Brazil where its latest initiative, Mídia NINJA, exposed police aggression and effectively debunked official versions of the protests espoused on mainstream news.

This study seeks to understand FDE as a particular model of economic, cultural and political organization for a networked public. I analyze the complex and often messy processes involved in FDE’s alternative systems of living, of cultural production and of political mobilization. Its ability to maintain a collective bank involves multifaceted strategies wherein “solidarity”, as a discourse, is parlayed into economic, social and political forms of capital. Understanding both the material and symbolic dimensions of FDE’s discursive strategies reveals important insights about how power is negotiated nowadays in the struggle for control of alternative cultural and political processes in Brazil.

Chapter 1: Introduction



Figure 1: Map of Brazil 2014

I. Roda Viva

On August 5, 2013, amidst the largest social protests Brazil experienced in over twenty years, two male activists in their early thirties, Bruno Torturra and Pablo

Capilé, appeared on Brazil's most respected national talk show, *Roda Viva*.¹ The topic of the night was scheduled to be Mídia NINJA (also called NINJA), a recent initiative of citizen journalism founded by Torturra and Capilé that came to prominence during the protests, where its footage exposed police brutality and effectively debunked mainstream news's negative portrayal of street demonstrators. NINJA, an acronym in Portuguese for *Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action*, is credited with shifting public opinion about the protests, and it became a central referent for a public interested in alternative sources of information about events unfolding in the streets. During the *Roda Viva* program that night, however, the conversation quickly turned away from Mídia NINJA. The five journalists presenting the program fixated on another phenomenon, a cultural network called *Fora do Eixo* (pronounced: Eh-show) known for producing independent music festivals, and which, the journalists had heard, used an alternative form of money and lived in communal houses across Brazil. They were interested in how the network's internal economy worked, but also in rumors that *Fora do Eixo*'s institutional structure resembled a religious sect, demanding devotional amounts of labor and placing strict controls on the interpersonal relations of its members.

This shift in conversation from a seemingly more serious line of questioning about issues of national concern, like social injustices that led to the protests and the

¹ *Roda Viva*, which means "Wheel of Life", is a long-standing interview program hosted on the public television, TV Cultura, since 1986. The presenters and guests change every episode depending on the topic at hand, which ranges across a spectrum of current social and political issues. Among the long list of past participants include: dignitaries like Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez; Brazilian presidents José Sarney, Itamar Franco, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, and Dilma Rousseff; intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and esteemed architect Oscar Niemeyer; and cultural luminaries such as José Saramago, Mario Vargas Llosa, Tom Jobim; and many other people of interest like Jimmy Wales, co-founder of Wikipedia.

control of representation in the press, to inquiries about the internal dynamics of a cultural network known for its alternative lifestyle was not arbitrary, because Mídia NINJA and Fora do Eixo are intimately intertwined. In fact, Mídia NINJA is Fora do Eixo, and the relationship between the two reveals particular features about the imbrication of culture and political mobilization in Brazil at a historical juncture in which the ability to create networks is stated as an increasingly vital form of power in the information society (Savazoni 2014).

Fora do Eixo (Outside the Axis [FDE]) is a network of young cultural producers and political activists in Brazil that since 2005 has emerged as a national phenomenon of sorts, representing a form of civic and cultural engagement in the digital age that cuts across and connects political, economic and cultural fields of action. FDE has its origins in cities in the interior of Brazil, outside the São Paulo—Rio de Janeiro axis that dominates mainstream cultural production, and where it first sought to create a local music scene by re-defining economic relationships among local cultural producers and by intervening in cultural policy. Central to the network's operations is an internal "solidarity economy" organized around an alternative, or complementary currency, the *Cubo Card*, or *Card*. As the network grew to over one hundred collectives across Brazil by 2013 and its agenda gradually became more politicized, it began to assert itself prominently first within national debates around communication and digital media policies, and then within broader struggles for social justice. Mídia NINJA is the most recent Fora do Eixo initiative to push up against the dominance of Brazil's culture

industry titans, such as the *Globo Network*, and that attempts to democratize media and open access to the production of information and culture.

This has not always been a neat process and, as suggested from the *Roda Viva* episode, *Fora do Eixo's* practices have often been controversial and at times contradictory to its espoused solidarity objectives. On August 7, 2013, two days following *Mídia NINJA's* appearance on national television, Brazilian film director Beatriz Seigner (2013) wrote a lengthy and glaringly critical Facebook post about her experiences collaborating with *Fora do Eixo*. Among other things, she accused them of duplicitous dealings wherein FDE secretly arranged contracts for exhibitions of her work for which they received money but offered her no compensation. Additionally, Seigner detailed what appeared to be a highly controlled and hierarchical internal structure within the communal houses where FDE members work and reside, despite the network's claim that hierarchies do not exist within FDE. *Fora do Eixo* responded just as quickly across social media platforms where it maintains a high level of visibility, such as Facebook and Twitter, adamantly denying Seigner's allegations, and deconstructing her argument point by point. These posts quickly received hundreds of 'likes' on Facebook, and included testimonies of current members who emphasized how happy they were in the *Fora do Eixo* houses and, above all, how they believed they were partaking in an historical moment of social transformation and democratization in Brazil. One day later, on August 8, another long and incriminating Facebook post emerged, written by a young woman named Laís Bellini (2013) who had spent several months living in the *Fora do Eixo* Houses. Bellini confirmed Seigner's observations and detailed her own experiences of

what she perceived as psychological bullying and other forms of social control within the FDE Houses.

Seigner and Bellini's posts opened the floodgates to an enormous deluge of public criticism directed at Fora do Eixo from all sides of the political and social spectrum, including from artists, journalists, academics, politicians, estranged former collaborators, businesses who partook in their alternative economic system, and many more. For the members of FDE and its close allies, the network represents the most recent instantiation of a solidarity economy, part of a broader form of political engagement that Gunkel and Gournelos (2012) have called *Transgression 2.0*, as this alternative economic arrangement "shifts lines of debates and pushes the limits of what is knowable, acceptable and containable," (1). Yet for people like Beatriz Seigner, FDE engages in exploitative practices of artists. And yet for others, pointing to the labor conditions and lack of leisure time of the youth who live in the FDE Houses, the network exploits even its own members and therefore stands in as the "new capitalists of culture." For social movements with long histories of political mobilization, Fora do Eixo's rapid entrance on the scene and its ability to quickly mobilize large crowds and position itself centrally in marches due to its savvy with communication technologies pushes up against their long established methods of social mobilization; they accuse FDE of attempting to coopt and unilaterally speak on behalf of the left. And for the political right, Fora do Eixo represents far-left radical ideology that channels state grants earmarked for FDE cultural programs towards funding its socialist agenda, which includes dismantling intellectual property regimes and restructuring free market principles.

Some of these criticisms may have been deserved. Others, however, like accounts from disgruntled individuals who had an axe to grind and those that may have been politically motivated, seemed to have a stake in the social demonization of the Fora do Eixo. The forum where these criticisms were expressed soon moved beyond social media and began appearing on a daily basis in the mainstream newspapers and on television. Yet for every negative bit of publicity received, Fora do Eixo supporters responded quickly and disseminated its defense across an extensive online network. In their view, this social demonization was part and parcel to being in the trenches of a much larger national battle over the control of information and cultural resources in the digital age.

This dissertation is an analytical and descriptive case study of Fora do Eixo that tries to understand it as a particular model for economic, cultural and political organization for a networked public.² I take this particular moment, the public fallout of Fora do Eixo, as a point of entry to tease out the stakes involved in the combination of alternative forms of cultural production and social activism in Brazil. This dissertation starts with an historical survey of the network, beginning with its embryonic phase around 2002 in the city of Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, and then works towards the emergence of Mídia NINJA during the 2013 social protests. Recognizing that social contradictions and political struggles produce important sources of knowledge, I give particular attention throughout these chapters to the messy processes and practices involved in Fora do Eixo's trajectory. The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to analyze the contributions and limitations of Fora do Eixo's alternative system, resisting the urge to

² This networked public by no means includes all of Brazil, a large portion of which does not have access to or participates equally in the type of media-based experiences described as central to Fora do Eixo's institutional practices and identity.

idealize or vilify its particular model of social, economic and political organization, trying instead to elucidate its efficacy and its dangers. Analyzing Fora do Eixo's controversies and contradictions, both internally and in its dealings with outside groups and actors, will reveal important insights about how power is negotiated nowadays in the struggle for control of alternative cultural and political processes in Brazil.

In the remaining pages of this chapter, I provide a brief sketch of the political, cultural and media landscapes within which Fora do Eixo is acting. I then speak about the methods employed in the collection and analysis of data for this project, which include empirical research based on observation, interviews and participation, and interpretive theorization of online sources and archives. These online sources were particularly important for analyzing events that unfolded after I left Brazil. In the final section of the chapter, I provide a review of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

II. Social Backdrop

To get a better sense of Fora do Eixo it will be helpful to situate the group within the broader social contexts from which it emerged, and that are referenced throughout the dissertation. I offer here a brief synopsis of select contexts that the network has identified as specifically influential to its history.

A Re-invigorated Civil Society

In the nearly thirty years since the end of Brazil's military dictatorship (1964-1985), there have been ongoing social campaigns against injustice and inequality, in all their iterations, the efforts of which have produced an invigorated and vibrant civil

society. By civil society, which is a contested term, I refer to the domain of social life that is separate from the state and business, and consists in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), institutions and other groups that manifest interests and will of citizens. In Latin America in the 1990's civil society was associated with, among other things, projects against neoliberal policies—the economic doctrine based on a market-oriented rationale aimed at dismantling the welfare state and restructuring the public sector in the name of “efficiency”. Neoliberal policies include minimalizing state functions, privatizing public services, and placing the individual pursuit of economic self-interest as central to liberty and to the optimal productivity of the nation. Civil society is a contested term because it is not necessarily a domain exclusive to the left although it is often naturalized as such in public dialogue. NGO's, however, are often established and managed in partnership with businesses and neo-liberal institutions, such as the World Bank.

Yet, with the shift to leftist governments in South America in the late 1990s and 2000s, civil society has by and large retained its association with the left. It was the efforts of social movements and civil society groups in the processes of post-dictatorship democratization that, for example, redefined citizenship as a “project for a new sociability” (Dagnino 2003, 214). Many groups who had long been marginalized within Brazilian society began over the last twenty years to mobilize more effectively and fight hard for the very “right to have rights” (Dagnino 1998; Holston 2008).

World Social Form: Um outro mundo é possível

In the 1990s and 2000s, a “global civil society” was also spoken about in terms of a direct challenge to the globalization of neoliberal economic policies. In particular, Fora do Eixo references the World Social Forum (WSF) as a point of departure for setting the social and media landscape that was necessary for its own eventual emergence. First held in 2001 in the Brazilian city Porto Alegre, the WSF has become an annual meeting where civil society organizations discuss alternatives to neoliberal globalization, foster solidarity among international activists, and challenge the monopoly of corporations over information, knowledge and culture by sponsoring “Free Media” campaigns. Indy Media was also founded within this milieu. The idea that *another world is possible*, the mantra of the WSF, underlies the social and economic sensibility of Fora do Eixo.

The Rise of the Left: President Lula and the Worker’s Party

For many left-wing groups in Brazil, the sense of hope inspired by the WSF was enhanced with the 2002 election victory and rise to power of the Worker’s Party (PT) under the leadership of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (“Lula” 2003-2011). Brazil was part of a region-wide shift to left leaning ideologies in South American politics that began with Hugo Chávez’s 1999 victory in Venezuela, and extended over a decade to include Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Ecuador. There was a sense among the political left and many within traditionally marginalized populations in Brazil—Afro-Brazilians, *pardo* (mixed race), and the poor majority—that Lula’s presidency signified the beginning of a new era that would begin to rectify injustices and dismantle social structures that have perpetuated centuries of subjugation. This has not, of course, fully

happened—discrimination and inequality continue to exist at all levels of society. However, state and civil society partnerships were strengthened in this period, especially in some democratic processes like participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, and state and civil society partnerships in co-writing legislation, like the 2010 Copyright Reform Bill. Also, over the last decade the state—including political parties other than the PT, such as the Green Party (PV) and the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL)—has significantly increased its commitment to create and, importantly, to carry through on social policies and programs aimed at economic and technical re-distribution to underserved communities. This is perhaps most visible in cultural and media policy.

Ministry of Culture (MinC) and Cultura Viva

In 2003 President Lula appointed internationally renowned Brazilian music icon, Gilberto Gil, as Minister of Culture (2003-2008). In 2004 Gil, a member of the Green Party (PV), launched the National Program of Culture, Education and Citizenship, also known as *Cultura Viva* (Living Culture), which aims to democratize access to the means of producing, disseminating and managing culture. The program's base is the acclaimed *Pontos de Cultura* (Cultural Points), a large grant of upward of R\$185,000 (\$92,500 U.S.) earmarked for the development of the telecommunication infrastructure and technical education of cultural NGOs that engage low-income communities in arts and media training with an eye towards economic development. The *Pontos de Cultura* program is an alternative to the top-down traditional cultural policies in Brazil that were often part of nation-building programs meant to produce a unified national culture that could compete globally with Hollywood and Western European culture industries.

Pontos de Cultura, in contrast, is a de-centralized, bottom-up policy that responds to the re-distributive claims that groups such as Fora do Eixo are making. Since its launch a decade ago, over 3,600 “cultural points” have been established in Brazil.

Lei Rouanet (Rouanet Law)

If the *Cultura Viva* program has invested hundreds of millions of *Reais* into supporting culture, this pales in comparison the Brazil’s cultural incentive law, the Rouanet Law. Since 1991 (long before the Working Party’s political ascendancy), the law has allowed companies of any size, as well as individual citizens, to invest up to ten percent of their income taxes to pre-approved cultural programs of their choice. For ‘pre-approval’ organizations, such as Fora do Eixo, send proposals to the local Secretary of Culture, or the national Ministry of Culture where they are evaluated. The law, named after then Minister of Culture Sérgio Paulo Rouanet (1991-1992), coincided with President Fernando Collor de Mello’s (1990-1992) installation of a neoliberal agenda that shifted responsibility of cultural funding to individual citizens and private companies, with minimized state intervention. This same agenda led Collor de Mello to do away with other important cultural agencies, like *Embrafilme* (Brazilian Cinema Company), the state agency that funded, managed and distribute national films. While the closure of Embrafilme had catastrophic results on Brazil’s film industry, which traditionally relied heavily on state funding,³ the Rouanet Law has funneled billions of *Reais* over the years

³ Brazilian film production took a dramatic dive with the closure of Embrafilme, from an average output of 100 films per year in the 1980s, to 3, 4 and 7 films for 1992, 1993, and 1994, respectively (Johnson 2005, 19). Despite the state’s reinvestment in cinema at the end of the 1990s, the establishment of a new government film agency (Agência Nacional de Cinema; Ancine), and a Brazilian cinematic *remontada*

into cultural initiatives and independent forms of cultural production; it forms the basis of grant lending that has allowed cultural organizations like Fora do Eixo to persist.

The Rouanet Law was not without its problems, however. Among the enticements for companies to participate in the cultural incentive law was that it served as free advertising for them since their logos were included in promotional material. The downside to this, however, was that it concentrated economic resources within big cities—companies interested in the promotional aspect of the law were more inclined to sponsor cultural programs in urban settings that attract larger audiences. This was to the detriment to smaller cities across Brazil, like Cuiabá where Fora do Eixo first began. It was precisely this lack of cultural investment outside of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Salvador de Bahia that motivated Fora do Eixo to create its own methods for stimulating a culture scene where there was none. Current President Dilma Rousseff, Lula's successor and also PT member, addressed this concern by placing quotas and incentives for companies to invest in peripheral areas. Competition for these economic resources remains fierce, and organizations that know how to navigate the system and write grants that overlap with the ideologies of funding institutions are well positioned. It is a domain where power relations in the field of alternative forms of cultural production are enacted and elucidated. FDE is particularly adept at navigating this terrain, as I discuss in several of the chapters.

(comeback), government funding is still more difficult to obtain, and national film output is a far cry from the levels reached in the 1980s (dos Santos 2009, 697).

Digital Culture

Brazil is also known for its “digital inclusion” policies that have at times pushed up against dominant political economic paradigms of both national and international culture industries. Among other nations, it leads in the number of institutes and policy research groups that tackle head-on issues related to digital technology, such as Internet governance; alternatives to copyright; open access to information, culture and knowledge; net neutrality and more. These media-related issues hold a central position in Brazilian public debate thanks to the efforts of institutes like the Center for Technology and Society (CTS) in the Getulio Vargas Foundation and Law School, and the Access to Information Public Policy Research Group (GPOPAI) in São Paulo, both of which play the role of “citizen advocate” against the private interests of media corporations like Globo, Warner, SONY, EMI, Universal, etc. The CTS is also the institutional home for Creative Commons Brazil (CC Brazil), which sets up alternative licenses of creative works in accordance with Brazilian law.⁴ CC Brazil was launched in 2004 when Gilberto Gil formed a partnership between the Ministry of Culture and the founder of Creative Commons (CC), U.S. legal scholar Lawrence Lessig. Gil placed the CC logo on the MinC’s homepage, and licensed all content on the website under a CC license that allowed anyone to share and repurpose the content freely.

⁴ Creative Commons was founded by Law professor and political activist Lawrence Lessig as an alternative, more flexible form of licensing cultural content that replaces the “all rights reserved” clause of copyright with “some rights reserved”. By providing a few ready-made and easy to understand licenses for artists to choose from at zero cost, CC places more legal power over cultural work in the hands of the actual creators of culture rather than in the hands of “middlemen”. This loosens the grip that record labels, publishing houses and other culture industry players have traditionally had over artists and authors. For more about CC licenses see www.creativecommons.org. For CC Brazil see www.creativecommons.org.br/.

A Copyright Reform Bill is also worth mentioning here, as Fora do Eixo played a part in a successful campaign to oust an unpopular Minister of Culture, Ana de Hollanda (2011-2012) when she walked back on the advances in copyright reform started by Gil and his successor Juca Ferreira, something I briefly discuss in Chapter 5. At its most basic level, the Copyright Reform Bill seeks to redress Brazil's 1998 Copyright Law, which is considered among the most restrictive in the world—though problems with its practical implementation have made it irrelevant for the majority of Brazilians. The Reform Bill is premised around a *Copyleft* and *Open Access* agenda, which have roots in, among others, Richard Stallman's *Free Software* movement and Lessig's *Free Culture* and CC movement. The common point of departure is a belief that a democratic and vibrant culture depends on people being able to use cultural content, comment on it, repurpose it, and so forth. If the dominant copyright ideology bolstered by Brazilian and international law equates tight copyright restrictions with moral, natural and economic rights, the copyright reform is also a rights-based ideology, though it sees rights attached to access to information, knowledge, and culture more broadly construed. The culture industry lobby, headed by the likes of Globo Network and its representative associations—most notably ECAD, Brazil's top royalty collection association that also represents the international culture industry players like SONY, Universal, EMI and so on, all of which have a strong presence in Brazil—has so far been successful in, at the very least, slowing down the reform process. While it seems likely that the bill will ultimately pass into law, as of 2014 this has still not happened.

The Center for Technology and Society was also instrumental in writing and advocating for the *Marco Civil*, a civil society-originated Internet legislation that adopts a civil and human rights framework (Marco Civil translates to “Civil Frame”) towards user activity rather than the normative framework that focuses on “cybercrimes”. Again, the culture industry lobby spent millions of *Reais* in an attempt to thwart the Marco Civil over intellectual property concerns. This time, however, their efforts were frustrated and President Rousseff signed the Marco Civil into law in April 2014. The Marco Civil is not only exemplary policy but also, since it originated from the demands of civil society, represents good democratic process.

That the Marco Civil passed in spite of industry opposition is an indication that there currently exists collaboration between the Brazilian state and media-centered social movements like Fora do Eixo and many others. The rise of media movements in Brazil over the last two decades that attempt to bridge relationships between the state and civil society, but also between civil society and media companies themselves, figures prominently in the history of Fora do Eixo, and is something I discuss in more depth in Chapters 2 and 5.

The measures listed above—*Pontos de Cultura*, the Copyright Reform Bill and the Marco Civil—certainly will not resolve the digital divide in Brazil, nor will they demolish other patterns of social injustice, like structural racism, gender inequality, police violence and poverty. However, they represent a shift in orientation towards redistribution of state resources and inserting civil society interests into the legislative decision-making process of communication policies, which has traditionally been the

domain of private interests. For our purposes here, they sketch the media landscape that Fora do Eixo is active within, and speak to the type of media issues that characterize some of Fora do Eixo's primary objectives for social intervention—the democratization of media and opening access to the production and management of culture.

Globo Network

I address Globo in more detail in Chapter 2, but as an introduction, Globo Organizations is Brazil and Latin America's largest media conglomerate.⁵ The Globo media empire, founded by mogul Roberto Marinho, began in 1944 with the launching of *Rádio Globo*. When television arrived to Brazil, Marinho quickly acquired a broadcasting license in 1957 and inaugurated his first television station, TV Globo, in 1965. The conservative Marinho's close ties with the military government between 1964-1985 helped consolidate Globo's dominant position in the Brazilian media market and conferred much political and social influence to Marinho (Porto 2012, 60; Mattos 2005, 269). Today, Marinho's three sons head the organization and its holdings extend to most areas of the culture industries and include: “newspapers (*O Globo*, *Extra*), newsmagazines (*Época*), radio (*Rádio Globo*, *CBN*), cable television (NET), *film* (*Globo Filmes*), music (*Som Livre*), publishing (*Editora Globo*) and the Internet (Globo.com),” (Porto, 70). While its market position has slightly reduced since the transition back to democracy and the opening of Brazil's media system to foreign competitors, Globo

⁵ A more detailed account of Brazil's media industry would also have to include the histories of other media corporations such as Rede Record (Record Network), Grupo Folha, Grupo Abril and Rede Tupi (Tupi Network—no longer operating) to name a few of Globo's top contemporary and past competitors. I focus on Globo because it remains the largest, most well known, and the most powerful media conglomerate in Brazil. Symbolically, it is often the primary critical target for alternative media groups, such as Mídia NINJA. This became particularly obvious during the 2013 protests, discussed in Chapter 5.

Network still retains 55% of the audience share (Lima, quoted in Albuquerque 2012, 78) with annual revenue nearing \$7 billion.⁶ According to Forbe's Billionaires list, the three Marinho brothers have a combined net worth of \$22 billion, making them the wealthiest family in Brazil.⁷ Globo continues to have influence and control in Brazilian politics and in framing public debates.

Brazilian Music Industry

Although Globo is a media colossus in Brazil, the country's music industry is overwhelmingly dominated by foreign companies. The notable domestic exception is Globo's *Som Livre* (Free Sound), established in 1969 to commercialize the "telenovela" soundtracks that were broadcast on T.V. Globo, and that today retains a small portion of the music market. The Brazilian music industry could be described as a "music oligopoly" controlled by four major music labels: Warner, Sony BMG, Universal and Som Livre/EMI (Mello 2012). Brazil also has a unique situation: it is the only country outside the United States where consumption of national music is higher than foreign music.⁸ According to the Brazilian Association of Record Producers, the Brazilian music industry reported sales (physical and digital) of R\$373 Million (\$186.5 Million U.S.) in 2011, a growth of 8.4% over the previous year. 73.5% of this music was produced nationally.⁹

This model has created an association between an exclusive ensemble of national elite

⁶ <http://globoir.infoinvest.com.br/enu/121/c-121-enu.asp>

⁷ http://www.forbes.com/billionaires/#tab:overall_page:20

⁸ Personal communication with Brazilian media scholar and copyright activist Pablo Ortellado in 2011.

⁹ <http://www.abpd.org.br/downloads.asp> (accessed August 27, 2014).

artists—for example, Caetano Veloso, Roberto Carlos, Elis Regina, Vinícius Moraes, Chico Buarque de Hollanda, Gilberto Gil, Marisa Monte, Vanessa de Mata, among numerous others—and international corporations. These artists all are icons of MPB (Música Popular Brasileira), a loosely understood genre of Brazilian urban music that, much like Bossa Nova, attempted to produce a unifying national music. As national icons, these MPB artists often represent “Brazilianness” at home and within international music circuits, often times claiming the mantle of what is considered specifically Brazilian music, and blocking alternative forms for standing in for “Brazil”, like RioFunk, rap, rock, and tecnobrega.

Alternatives to the mainstream model are emerging, especially with the affordances of digital technologies. Tecnobrega, for example, is a genre of music from the Northern city Belém, and its artists use homemade studios to mix local sounds with techno beats and international pop (tecnobrega literally means “cheesy techno”). Tecnobrega is a lucrative industry, and operates outside of traditional copyright regimes preferring to operate as an “open business” model wherein content is offered for free by the artists, or at a seriously reduced price, and money is made instead through the sale of ancillary goods and services (Mizukami and Lemos 2010). Unlike the traditional music industry, money is not generated through CD sales but rather through widely attended live performances and DJ parties that involve an extensive network of economic actors. Fora do Eixo works closely with these non-mainstream forms of music. In an interview with Gaby Amarantos—by far the most nationally renowned tecnobrega star—during a Fora do Eixo festival I attended, she attributed much of her success to FDE’s network of

music festivals that delivered her to a wide reaching audience. I discuss such festivals in Chapter 3 and again in the Conclusion.

III. Methods

Introduction to Fora do Eixo

I first met Pablo Capilé on Skype in June 2010. Capilé is one of Fora do Eixo's founding members and its most prominent and recognizable figure. I was in Rio de Janeiro on a month long preliminary research trip and he was in São Paulo. Cultural theorist George Yúdice, who had recently encountered the group, encouraged me to contact them. During our chat on Skype, Capilé appeared enthusiastic about working with me and thought my research project, to the degree that I understood and could explain it then, was *muito bacana* ("very cool"). It is my sense now that Capilé would have said that about any project that focused on FDE, since at that point academics were only beginning to approach the network, and it was seeking legitimacy and partnerships with universities and the academy. While we maintained contact along the way, two years passed before I met him in person at a conference on digital culture, hosted at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) in October 2012. Capilé and his colleagues invited me to visit the *Casa Fora do Eixo São Paulo* (São Paulo Fora do Eixo House—the network's "headquarters", though they resist this term) in November since they were preparing for a large conference in early December and it would be beneficial for my project to see how they live and work.

While approximately twenty people live in the house full-time, during the week of the conference there were no less than sixty people staying there, and hundreds more

coming and going during the day for the conference sessions. It was an impressive introduction to Fora do Eixo, who had invited, among others, international luminaries in the world of media and communication like Richard Stallman, founder of the Free Software Movement, and Andrew Jennings, a Scottish investigative reporter who famously writes about corruption in FIFA.¹⁰ The conference sessions were not only held in the FDE House, but also in the middle of city squares, at cultural centers and even in concert venues. At every instance, FDE's communication team was capturing events and live-streaming them on FDE's online channel, *PósTV* (Post-TV).

Initially I had intended to include Fora do Eixo as only one chapter in a dissertation that proposed to map out the intersection between digital media movements, cultural policy and informal cultural economies in Brazil. Yet I quickly realized that placing FDE centrally would provide a wealth of material that would also point out these intersections. Moreover, I was also aware of some of the controversies and critical tensions involving FDE that were circulating through the Internet and on social media at that time. It seemed that getting to the root of these tensions between outside groups and FDE, and interrogating the networks internal contradictions would provide an even deeper understanding of relations of power in the fields of alternative cultural production and social activism in Brazil.

Multi-sited Ethnography and the Messy Text

As Fora do Eixo is a network that extends across multiple cities in Brazil, this project required a *multi-sited* methodological approach rooted in *ethnographic*

¹⁰ International Federation of Football Association

participant observation. I draw heavily from George Marcus who in 1998 envisioned multi-sited ethnography as a response to what at that time were entrenched anthropological commitments to holism in the face of new understandings of culture as ever circulating. For Marcus, a multi-sited imaginary works towards deconstructing the totalizing notion of a whole self-contained culture read through the lens of its relation to macro processes, such as the world systems model. It accomplishes this deconstruction not by contextualizing cultural activity and identity through reference to a totality—in this case, “Fora do Eixo”—but rather by addressing the circulation of discourses, meanings, objects, people and identities between various locations (72-79). The examination of their dynamic interplay speaks to the system that binds them together (51).

Similarly, I understand culture in a postmodern sense that believes there is no possibility of a fixed, final, all-encompassing and authoritative meaning to social and cultural practices. Fora do Eixo, as a cultural network, is fluid and constantly extending the boundaries of its own definitions, practices, objectives, organizational structures, social composition, political affiliations and so forth. Therefore, its institutional identity and the subject positions that its members inhabit are fleeting and will always exceed my ability to analytically circumscribe them. This is compounded by the fact that, as I show in the ensuing chapters, reinventing itself is a vital part of Fora do Eixo’s on-going political project—not political in the traditional sense of, say running for office, but rather in shifting identities such that the network retains relevance and power in managing alternative cultural and social processes in Brazil. Whereas it started as a

group of youth who wanted to operationalize a culture scene where none existed, it has today become a heavily politicized social movement with, some might argue, a relative degree of influence in local and national political processes. Its commitment to “social transformation” involves a multiplicity of (not always well-defined) objectives, some of which include: Open Access and Copyleft agendas that include free access to media and loosening copyright restrictions; indigenous rights; the right to occupy public space; citizen journalism; the legalization of marijuana and much more. I therefore recognize that the social formations and practices that constitute Fora do Eixo as described in the pages herein reflect, at best, only partial knowledge of the network. Given this scenario, this dissertation instantiates what Marcus has called a “messy text” (185-89), which is to say a text that is comfortable in its open-endedness and incompleteness, and making no claim to descriptive objectivity.

Participant Observation, Situated Knowledge and Positioned objectivity

This project took place across five cities in Brazil between October 2012 and June 2013: Rio de Janeiro (Rio), São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Brasília and Uberlândia. During this period, I met with members of Fora do Eixo on numerous occasions and in different contexts. I spent extended time at three of the seven Fora do Eixo Houses: São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, and Brasília. I stayed at the FDE House in São Paulo during two separate periods for a total of three months—from mid-November to mid-December 2012, and again from February to April 2013. In May 2013, I spent one month between the FDE Houses in Belo Horizonte and in Brasília. In June 2013, I traveled with FDE to Uberlândia, in the state of Minas Gerais, and spent four days helping out with and

attending a music festival they produced called *Festival Goma*. I further coincided with the network at multiple conferences and roundtable discussions in Rio de Janeiro. While FDE does not have a house in Rio, they maintain an apartment associated with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). The network has a very close working relationship with Ivana Bentes, Chair of the School of Communication (ECO) at the UFRJ; FDE members are in Rio several times per month.

During the course of my investigations I collected approximately sixty hours of recorded data largely from structured interviews (sometimes more than one interview was conducted with the same person), but also in public and private meetings, at conferences, festivals and lectures, and other instances when members of Fora do Eixo spoke publicly. This also included informal conversations recorded in such settings as protests and marches, while traveling around the city, in restaurants, on Skype and more. If recording informal conversations, I consistently informed the subjects of the fact and ceased recording if they requested me to do so, which happened several times. While the majority of structured interviews involved residents of the Fora do Eixo houses, I also gathered interviews from artists, musicians, politicians, academics, social movement actors (both national and international), and heads of NGOs. As will be made clear in the following chapters, not all of these interviewees were supporters of FDE; some were disaffected former residents, members and collaborators of all sorts (academics, musicians, political officials, to name a few).

Aside from interviews I took on the role of participant observer. I watched Fora do Eixo's operations closely, attempting to always observe with an analytical gaze the

different categories and levels of social relations, organizational structures, discourses, hierarchies and other expressions of power, as subtle or explicit as they might have been. For example, what did the everyday interpersonal relations reveal about the role of gender in FDE? Importantly, and while it is perhaps not foregrounded quite as it should be in the chapters that follow given its centrality to structures of inequality in Brazilian society, how did the issue of race pervade the institutional unconscious of Fora do Eixo? I was particularly attentive to FDE's solidarity rhetoric and what I observed, *at times*, to be contradictory patterns of practice.

At the same time, I traveled with Fora do Eixo to cultural events, to *favelas* located far in the periphery of São Paulo, to protests and rallies, to meetings with public officials. I engaged with their alternative economy, went shopping for them, helped cook, clean dishes and bathrooms, transported bands to and from hotels, provided labor as a stage-hand in the set up of musical shows, sold beer for them at events, and many other activities. In exchange for granting me such open access to their operations, FDE requested that I register as an English teacher for the "Free University of Culture", a FDE initiative explained in Chapter 3. On several occasions they asked me to translate extensive documents from Portuguese to English. Such documents, which were usually explanations of and/or propaganda for the network, provided me with another source of textual material. One such document, a communication between Fora do Eixo and the founder of the Peer-to-Peer (P2P) foundation, Michel Bauwens, is a FDE manifesto of sorts, and figures prominently in the beginning of Chapter 4. Taken together, all of these experiences conferred a rich and textured understanding of the network.

The challenge in participant observation, of course, is retaining scientific distance and so-called objectivity, which is sometimes difficult to maintain especially when researcher and subject share similar political sensibilities and commitments to certain areas of social justice. For example, my own interest in alternative cultural economies, democratizing media, and broadening access to the production and management of culture is what ultimately lead me to the Communication Department at UCSD, and subsequently to Fora do Eixo. How does one navigate this?

Here I align with a group of activist scholars (Hale 2008; Lipsitz 2008; Postero 2007; Tang 2008; Vargas 2008) that draws insights from the feminist grounding of Donna Haraway (1988), who advanced the argument that greater objectivity can be produced through “situated knowledge”, which is often times more insightful, complete and accountable. Haraway reminds us (as did Weber many years prior) that objectivity is itself a historical and cultural frame that cannot be taken without critical analysis. Also, feminist considerations of *positionality* (Visweswaran 1994) urged me to consider the power relations embedded in my own *multi-situated* subject position (understood through different registers: race, gender, nationality, class, education, and so forth) in relation to the Fora do Eixo. Hale, who is reluctant to disassociate with objectivity completely due to valid concerns about de-legitimization within certain camps of the academy, suggests reclaiming the word and speaking in terms of *positioned objectivity* (13). The level of inter-subjective relations afforded by engaging with this type of positioning provides special insight, insider knowledge, and experience-based understanding (Hale, 21).

Lipsitz (2008) also provides some useful insights for case studies that involve social movements and the positioning of the ethnographer in relation to the object of analysis. Lipsitz points out that social movements carry unique knowledge of the social, political and cultural terrain that conditions their struggle and researchers are permitted to share these insights. In the case at hand, Fora do Eixo holds knowledge of a broad range of social issues in Brazil since its objectives are quite diverse. Such positionality acknowledges the inter-subjective exchange in data collection and the mutual production of knowledge (Hale 11).

Inter-subjective relations, however, are not always based on equal grounding. There are privileged positions and different agendas that must be taken into account at different moments. For example, Fora do Eixo had a privileged position in terms of holding the keys to knowledge that I, as a researcher, wished to translate to a different institutional culture for the purpose of producing an academic text. For them, I was a bridge to a perceived socially (and globally) privileged institution that they sought to have legitimacy within.

This understanding was very important in navigating my relationship with Fora do Eixo. Particularly because FDE members truly see themselves as caught up in (and even directing) a social and cultural battle with what they perceive as a “reactionary right” in Brazil, but in recent years they have also had to defend themselves from diverse groups on the left who accuse them of co-opting and speaking unilaterally on behalf the left, as already mentioned. Because they feel they are under attack from all sides, Fora do Eixo is very measured and strategic with its relationships. For example, they did their

“homework” on me. I realized this once when, upon my arrival in Uberlândia for *Festival Goma*, a young woman who FDE sent to pick a group of us up from the airport recognized me from a digital photo on her cellphone—a photo that I had taken off Facebook almost a year prior. This suggested that they had done a background check and created a file on me before I even reached Brazil. I did not press the issue. What is more, Fora do Eixo is aware that I am part of academic networks that include former FDE collaborators with whom they have fallen out. Some of these individuals have written critical articles and blogs, while others choose to have nothing more to do with them altogether.

Therefore, after a level of trust was earned, Fora do Eixo perceived in me the possibility of a countervailing force within academia. This was made explicit in many ways, such as asking directly for my loyalty, by which they meant to let them know in advance if I were to publish something critical. This was also expressed in more subtle ways, such as a qualitative shift in how they introduced me publicly in meetings and forums, which began as a *pesquisador Americano* (American researcher) and eventually turned into a *pesquisador colaborador* (collaborating researcher). At which point the question arises: Am I more of a participant observer, or an observant participator? The latter places the emphasis, as João Costa Vargas (2008) points out, on active participation in the organized group, “such that observation becomes an appendage of the main activity,” (175). Can I be both?

In summary, Fora do Eixo presented particular methodological challenges. While they provided me with rich insider-knowledge, and while my hope is that my research is

also useful for them, I have had to take a cautious and measured approach, lest I become simply a FDE apologist. Our different positionalities (e.g. cross-cultural, cross-institutional) and our different agendas required continual assessment. In order to navigate this challenge, I chose not to spend the entire nine-month research trip in the Fora do Eixo Houses, which they had proposed I do. This separation allowed me the time to also interview a broad spectrum of actors, some of who were not FDE enthusiasts and who provided counter-narratives. On two occasions I had the opportunity to interview individuals both while they were living in the FDE Houses, and after they had cut ties with the organization, which offered me with insights beyond and, indeed, about the institutional rhetoric that had quickly become unified in my interviews. This last point bears upon my use of data in the following chapters.

Data Sources

Soon after I began the interviews with residents of the Fora do Eixo House in São Paulo, it became evident that the information they were providing consistently reflected FDE's internal discourses and institutional rhetoric. Naturally there were some personal variations, especially with regard to residents' lives prior to Fora do Eixo and their explanations about how they arrived there. But even these were minor variations. By and large, when asked to describe, for example, their relation to the internal economy, what they envision Fora do Eixo's social intervention to be, how they understood their position within the organizational structure, and so forth, the answers were strikingly uniform. In fact, as I moved between FDE Houses, from São Paulo to Belo Horizonte and then Brasília, residents were privy to the questions in advance; they had spread them

quickly through G-chat and other online platforms that FDE members use daily to communicate across Brazil. Attempts to shift my line of questioning met the same fate: my questions circulated quickly. At some point I realized that these cohered and uniformly expressed narratives revealed something important about the inner workings of Fora do Eixo: they were actually reflections of the power relations within the network, and the narratives consisted in discursive formations that produced a particular type of subjectivity of the Fora do Eixo members. This became the topic of Chapter 4. Therefore, while I gathered approximately sixty hours of interviews, in the ensuing pages I chose to foreground those who I had the most access to. These ended up being individuals with high institutional standing and who were responsible for producing the very discourses that circulated throughout the network that I heard time and again. These people include Pablo Capilé, Lenissa Lenza, Isis Maria, Carol Tokuyo, Talles Lopes, and Felipe Altenfelder, all of whom I introduce in the chapters that follow. In particular, Altenfelder appeared to have a stake in making sure that I understood Fora do Eixo as the network understood itself. And while I recognize his own positionality and his agenda to promote the network, without his continued input and willingness to speak with me, this project would not have been fully possible. For that I am forever grateful.

Lastly, a large part of this project involves events that took place within the 2013 protests in Brazil. These include the emergence of Mídia NINJA, and the public demonization of Fora do Eixo that followed the appearance of Bruno Torturra and Pablo Capilé on the national talk show *Roda Viva*. Although I was in Rio de Janeiro in June 2013 during the initial phase of the protests, and while I participated in the single largest

manifestation of 100,000 people, these events unfolded largely when I had already returned to California from the field. As such, I have also had to rely on data gathered from a distance. These include newspaper articles, news clips, YouTube videos and other online streaming channels like USTREAM, government and non-government websites, political and cultural blogs, Facebook posts, Twitter feeds, online forums, Skype conversations, and more. Together, observations and interviews, experience-based understanding and interpretative theorization, contribute to the knowledge presented in this messy text.

IV. Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 offers a review of literatures, key concepts and terms that provide a basic theoretical framework that help me interpret and explain the extremely complex practices of *Fora do Eixo*. I give context to the rise of solidarity networks, both internationally and specifically to Brazil. I engage with economic theories that re-imagine alternatives to capitalism, including theories that attempt to dislocate its discursive dominance and that also consider money, including complementary currencies, as discursive formations in the Foucauldian sense that produce particular forms of economic subjectivity. In part two of the chapter, I provide a brief historical overview of mainstream media and journalism in Brazil that helps to understand *Mídia NINJA* and its goal to offer counter-narratives. I also situate *Mídia NINJA* within a broader trend of media movements in Brazil. Lastly, I qualify many of the key concepts that are relevant in the chapters including citizen journalism 2.0, alternative public spheres and counter-publics, and *Fora do Eixo*'s understanding of "social technology".

Chapter 3 maps the history of Fora do Eixo from an economic perspective. It is important to present the history in this way because the network's identity is so heavily invested in how its alternative and diverse economy—organized, at least symbolically, around its complementary currency, Card—grew from a desire to operationalize a cultural scene in the absence of the economic means to do so. Importantly, however, the history told in Chapter 3 closely echoes the institutional solidarity narrative of Fora do Eixo, which I look at through a more critical lens in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 addresses power and discourse in Fora do Eixo. I argue in this chapter that Fora do Eixo's alternative economy is largely made up of discursive formations, such as Card and the Collective Bank, that produce and sustain relations of power in the economic relationships that it maintains with actors across different registers—whether internally among its members, or in its dealings with artists, small local business that partake in their barter system, with the state through government grants, and with private or semi-private corporations that invest in culture. By focusing on the discursive dimensions of Fora do Eixo, I attempt to explain how the network has developed a degree of cultural, political and economic capital, while simultaneously becoming part of the very power structure involved in Brazilian cultural production, cultural policy and social change. I argue that their discursive practices are largely responsible for the network's success thus far, but that such practices have also created problems for them and fostered resentment. While Chapter 3 presents the history of FDE as rooted in ideologies of solidarity, in Chapter 4 I ask: Solidarity for whom?

Chapter 5 focuses on Mídia NINJA as a contemporary case study of citizen

journalism 2.0 in Brazil. As I make clear in Chapter 2, citizen journalism 2.0 is a borrowed term that denotes journalistic practices wherein public citizens rely on hand held mobile devices, 4G technology and social media platforms to gather, produce, comment on and circulate news content normally considered outside the purview of corporate media for a host of reasons. I explain how Mídia NINJA and its editing process work within the organizational structures of Fora do Eixo, which include both relations of solidarity and relations of power. The chapter then shifts focus to the 2013 protests in Brazil and discusses the underlying social issues that motivated them. I analyze Mídia NINJA's role in re-framing mainstream media's negative portrayal of the demonstrations, and how it helped to shift public opinion. This chapter considers how NINJA might contribute to contemporary theories on alternate public spheres, while also cautioning against deterministic assumptions of digital media's role in social change.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation. Based on reflections of the previous chapters, I ask: What is produced by Fora do Eixo? In responding to this question, I provide a brief summary of the different social, economic and political models of organization and action produced by the network. Each of these models has advantages and disadvantages, and transgresses borders in some directions while pointing to limitations in others. These pros and cons are addressed. Lastly, I consider the future of this project and hypothesize about possible directions to take moving forward.

Chapter Two:

A Theoretical Review

In this chapter I review literatures that the remaining chapters of the dissertation are in conversation with and specify my use of key terms that appear throughout. Though I will certainly invoke the insights of a wider range of theorists within the chapters, these literatures and concepts provide a basic theoretical framework that helps me interpret and explain the extremely complex practices of Fora do Eixo (FDE) and situate the network within broader social processes in Brazil.

I. Alternative Economies

In this section I turn to theories that re-imagine capitalism, that seek to expand and transform its values, and that open up space for pluralistic economic relations, including non-capitalist ones. These literatures allow me to situate Fora do Eixo as an experiment in alternative economic activism, which re-articulates the relation between culture, economy, politics and society. To what extent FDE confers legitimacy on non-traditional social and economic arrangements will be discussed in the ensuing chapters. I connect several bodies of literature, including the still inchoate literatures on solidarity economies and complementary currencies. This dissertation also draws from theorists (North 2007, 2010) that understand money, including complementary currencies, as a cultural discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, which implies the power of money to produce particular types of economic subjectivities. Understanding money in this way makes visible the embeddedness of currencies in social and political lived histories, in the

tradition of Marxist materialism and as understood by later political economists such as Karl Polanyi, Gibson-Graham and others.

Discourse and Discursive Formations

Before I continue with the literatures on solidarity economies, however, it makes sense to first briefly explain how I am using Foucault's theory of discourse since it is a concept that pervades the dissertation, including in the context of For a do Eixo's solidarity economy, as I alluded to above. Following Foucault, I use discourse, or discursive formations, to refer to an "organized dispersion of statements" (Foucault 1972, 38) that produce systems of thought and knowledge, that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and that define a system of conceptual possibilities and limitations on a particular subject or domain. Discursive formations are systems of representations that consist in a group of statements or pronouncements that "support a strategy...a common institutional...or political drift of pattern," (Hall 1991, 291). Since discourse places boundaries on what is knowable, this knowledge shapes perceptions and influences social action—it puts into motion certain practices that then serve to reify the very system of statements and pronouncements that constitute the discursive formation, such that pronouncement and practice mutually produce each other. In this way, discourse sets up "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1980, 201), and there is power in the ability to make something appear true since it sets up a frame through which subjects understand their environment and, importantly, themselves. For this reason, Foucault argues that there is an intimate relationship between discourse, knowledge and power. Indeed, discourse is one of the 'systems' through which power circulates (Hall, 294)—it

is a form of power that conditions social practices, produces new identities, destabilizes existing ones, and sketches new political spaces.

In the chapters that follow, especially in Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss in more detail how Fora do Eixo draws from a network of multiple discourses that, taken together, produce its institutional identity and the identity of its members. These include solidarity economy discourses (detailed below); discourses circulating around the idea of social change such as the World Social Forum's *another world is possible* mentioned in the previous chapter; and techno-utopian discourses that view technology as an irresistible force and that take for granted the liberatory potential of new forms of digital media. In Chapter 4, I make clear that, although it speaks about itself as a solidarity economy, Fora do Eixo does not escape relations of power, especially in its use of discourse. For example, I argue that FDE's complementary currency, Card, is a discursive formation, and its value in the later stages of its development resides less in an ability for exchange, but rather in the how the network parlays the solidarity economy discourse into other forms of social, political, and economic capital. Also, I illustrate how the solidarity economy discourse organizes the private and work lives of the Fora do Eixo members, conditions some of their interpersonal relations, and produces a particular form of self-governing economic subjectivity. It is important to acknowledge outright, however, that this is only ever part of the story as subjectivities are constituted, produced and even contradicted across and within the myriad social fields and interpersonal relations that make up daily life.

In the section that follows, I begin the discussion of solidarity economies. This is relevant because Fora do Eixo, in its Statement of Principles, identifies itself with the growing solidarity economy movement. Here I present a brief review of the history of solidarity economies in Latin America and Brazil, before connecting them to Karl Polanyi's theoretical endeavor to collapse the division between economy and culture as part of a project to insert ethical considerations into market exchange. Understanding the economy as involving complex processes that cut across different spheres helps me to think of Fora do Eixo as all at once a cultural, social, political and economic movement. Also, in the still nascent solidarity economy literature, there currently exists a striking gap in the treatment of *cultural* economies. The case of FDE contributes to this literature by making visible specific issues that arise when cultural production is included as a solidarity economy.

Afterward, I engage with Gibson-Graham's "politics of economic possibility", which involves dislocating the discursive dominance of capitalism in order to lend credibility to diverse economic formations.¹¹ Gibson-Graham help me to think through the discursive practices of FDE as both a counter-hegemonic challenge to the dominance of the traditional culture industries, and also in the production of new economic subjectivities. It is this later topic that will be discussed in Chapter 4.

¹¹ Gibson-Graham is the shared penname of feminist economic geographers, Katherine Graham and Julie Gibson.

*Solidarity Economy*¹²

Solidarity economies are not a new occurrence, for they have existed in myriad forms throughout human history. The term “solidarity economy”, however, is relatively new within contemporary economic theories, and it encompasses a broad range of issues. The concept does not arise from one single source, political tradition or set of ideas (Miller 2009, 26). The incredibly diverse and dynamic iterations of solidarity economies worldwide make the contours of its definition slippery. Different regions tend to ascribe their own definitions, which speaks to one of the issues common to solidarity economies—that is, their *embeddedness* in localized cultural understandings of economic relations.

Broadly speaking, solidarity economy refers to the emergence of heterogeneous forms of economic relations that are in some sense collectivist rather than individualistic, and in which substantive social values rather than the pursuit of a purely economic exchange value abstracted from them is central. In Latin America, labor issues have been a driving force of solidarity economies and, according to Argentine economist Heloisa Primavera, unemployed workers provide us with the most occurrences of new economic forms (Primavera 2010, 42). In addition to labor issues, many solidarity economies have developed in response to land rights, or to offset entrenched poverty and other forms of social exclusion. They have also made notable appearances at moments of national crisis, such as in Argentina following the crash of its economy in December 2001. In that

¹² I begin this section with an important qualification. I am fully aware of the dangers and power dynamics involved in mapping academic theories (especially ones derived from Western centers of authority) onto praxis (especially when said praxis involves social phenomenon from the global south). Where possible I have drawn heavily from Latin American theorists.

context, barter networks meant survival for millions of people in the face of a national shortage of money. In some countries, such as Colombia, Canada, France, Italy and Spain the term is conflated with social economy, traditionally reserved for the world of cooperatives. To varying degrees, solidarity economies receive support from governments seeking political alliances with labor and with civil society organizations (43).

Solidarity economies are often involved in alternative methods of financing, such as through community banks, microfinance, or complementary currencies. Some of the most frequently cited examples include the LETs system in Canada, the Ithaca Hours used in upstate New York, or the multitude of complementary currency initiatives across Brazil that serve as micro-credit and lending options, the most famous being Banco Palma.¹³ Each of these currencies has different qualities and stimulates local economic flow according to the needs of its respective community. In some instances, currencies are used to overcome economic barriers when other forms of money are unavailable, and in other instances they are deployed in the promotion of social ideology, such as campaigns in support of sponsoring and sustaining local markets. Fora do Eixo's "Card" is included in these solidarity currencies as well, and I will argue that its particular distinction is at least twofold: 1) its association with cultural production; and 2) it is largely a discursive formation that fosters trade between individuals and groups, but that is also brought into service for the capture of Reais.

¹³ www.gmlts.u-net.com/; www.ithacahours.com; www.bancopalmas.org.br/

Although they are diverse, multi-dimensional (Kawano 2009, 19) and develop unevenly, solidarity economies, understood as such, are growing phenomena worldwide. By some estimates, 15% of the world population use solidarity economies (Salgado 2008, 16). The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) calculates that there are more than 920 million persons in the world that are connected to more than 80,000 organisms of associative economies.¹⁴ In Latin America alone, there are over 50,000 organizations and 30 million people associated with solidarity economies (Salgado, *ibid*).

In South America, while alternative economies extend back a few decades to the time of the military dictatorships (Primavera 2010), the consolidation of solidarity economies into a network followed the first Meeting on Globalization of Solidarity hosted in Lima in 1997. It was there that the Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy was established, which since then has regularly convened every four years (Quebec City 2001; Dakar 2005; Luxembourg 2009; and Manila 2013). Other regional networks have followed suit, such as the Latin American Network on Solidarity Economy, the North American Network for the Solidarity Economy, the Intercontinental Social Solidarity Economy Network, and the Asian Alliance for Solidarity Economy.

The concept of solidarity trading and of complementary currencies extends to the supranational level as well. The recently created Banco del Sur (Southern Bank), ratified by the twelve countries in the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), will allow up to \$60 billion in loans to the countries of the region (Ugarteche, cited in Primavera

¹⁴ <http://ica.coop/es>

2010). Bi-national economic transactions have also taken place without the intervention of official currencies. For example, Venezuela traded with Argentina and Uruguay, with Venezuela providing oil in exchange for “technical assistance, pregnant heifers, and wool, anticipating the operation of The Unified System for Regional Compensation (SUCRE),” (Primavera, 45). SUCRE is a proposed regional currency to be used in commercial exchanges among members of the regional trading bloc, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), created as an alternative to the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). At the moment, SUCRE is virtual currency and intended to replace the US dollar as a medium of exchange in order to decrease US control of Latin American economies, to avoid transaction costs associated with using the US dollar in international trade, and to increase stability by making South American economies less impacted by global economic conditions (Mather 2010). Venezuela and Ecuador were the first to begin trading in the currency in 2009, and by 2013 international trade in SUCRE between member states exceeded \$850 million.¹⁵

Solidarity Economies: Brazil

In Brazil, perhaps more so than any other country, solidarity economies have managed to consolidate and organize collectively at local, national and regional levels. This is largely due to the partnership and continued collaboration between the Brazilian Forum on Solidarity Economy (FBES)—formed during of the 2001 World Social Forum—and the Worker’s Party that has ruled Brazil since 2003. Solidarity economies had already begun to emerge in the 1990s when the liberalization of capital markets

¹⁵ <http://www.sucrealba.org/index.php/noticias/139-noticia27082013> (accessed December 22, 2013).

threw the economy into a recession; unemployment reached high peaks, inflation soared and the official currency was repeatedly devalued resulting in a widespread lack of trust in official money and other financial institutions. Individuals and communities often sought out alternative avenues of economic exchange. It is the FBES, however, that truly formalized the solidarity economy movement.

FBES is a network of diverse collectives and associations working towards the goal of greater economic and social inclusion, and of building alternative practices, institutions and policies. It includes rural and urban co-operatives, students groups, churches, unions, universities, and government officials. It is the primary facilitator of research on solidarity economies; it coordinates state and regional solidarity economy fairs and conferences, campaigns for ecologically minded consumption, and regularly maps the over 22,000 solidarity economy enterprises throughout Brazil—accessible on its website—in order to connect these enterprises to consumers and to develop integrated solidarity economy commerce chains (Kawano 2009, 13; Luna 2013).¹⁶

The FBES is also the main interlocutor with the Brazilian State. In 2003, it sent a letter to the recently elected President Lula entitled “Solidarity Economy as a Political Strategy for Development”, recommending greater government involvement in supporting and stimulating solidarity enterprises. Lula responded by creating a new federal position, the National Secretary of Solidarity Economy (SENAES), housed within the Ministry of Labor and Employment. In 2004, the first National Meeting of Solidarity Economy Enterprises took place, and today more than 120 local solidarity economy

¹⁶http://www.fbes.org.br/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3748&Itemid=215&033e956d9f852cd72810941d7e818a97=5c69e487f34e0d5cf61788331979452e&Q3_0=33&Q3=3304557&distmax=0&formato=mapa&busca=&busca_nome=&farejar=Farejar! (accessed December 22, 2013).

forums and 27 state forums are held on a regular basis. FBES has a presence in every state and continues to dialogue with SENAES, offering policy recommendations based on what is unfolding on the ground. It is an important link between grassroots groups engaging in alternative economic activity, like Fora do Eixo, and the local, regional and federal government. Many networks, associations, forums, governmental entities, and grassroots organizations now exist to support the development of the solidarity economy including community banks, microfinance, complementary currencies, cooperatives, fair trade, and nonprofit enterprises (Luna 2013). The current Director of SENAES, Paul Singer, collaborates closely with Fora do Eixo, and helped script the network's statement of principles.

The values of the Brazilian solidarity economy, as cited on SENAES's website, are as follows:

1. Self-management
2. Democratization of economic relations
3. Co-operation instead of forced competition
4. Valuing diversity. Human beings are more important than profits
5. Valuing local knowledge, constant learning and training
6. Social justice and emancipation
7. Protection of the environment ¹⁷

In summary, then, and despite the differences among solidarity economies, in Latin America solidarity economy literature largely focuses on the emergence of counter-hegemonic and self-conscious challenges to neoliberal economic policy or, similarly, on cases that emerge to counterbalance the social exclusion and gap in income equality

¹⁷ <http://portal.mte.gov.br/ecosolidaria/secretaria-nacional-de-economia-solidaria/>

caused by these economic policies.¹⁸ Neoliberal thought promotes the belief that only through deregulation will competitive markets be self-correcting and provide an equal shot at prosperity for everyone unmitigated by race, gender, class, education, or other cultural qualities. In contrast, solidarity economies rally for self-managed markets in place of the myth of the “self-regulating” market. As an alternative they promote the insertion of ethical, social and human values into the economy. Such values include non-competitiveness in market exchange, social inclusion and cooperation, and placing the person and the environment above the private accumulation of wealth. Emily Kawano, economist and Director of the Center for Popular Economics at the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network, captures the collective tone of solidarity economy proponents when she compelling asks, “do we want a society in the service of capitalism, or an economy in the service of society?” (2009, 21). In this view, solidarity economies take a more communitarian than individualistic approach to the economy. We could also say it is more humanistic and holistic in that development is not measured in economic growth, but rather by its ability to foster human development, by which is meant the inclusion of democratic, social and cultural values (Santos 2006; Salgado 2008).

Lastly, while the focus on alternatives to neoliberal economic policy seems to be the dominant theme, and one that I agree needs to be addressed, it seems to me that we might deepen our understanding of the need for solidarity economies by also considering

¹⁸ While the focus on alternatives to neoliberal economic policy seems to be the dominant theme, and one that I agree needs to be addressed, it seems to me that we might deepen our understanding of the need for solidarity economies by also considering instances in which they emerge in response to social inequalities not necessarily tied to neoliberalism, but rather that are re-produced within entrenched cultures and structures of racism and prejudice. The Landless Peasant Movement (Movimento Sem Terra) in Brazil is a good example of this.

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This brief history provides a partial glimpse of the backdrop and the social stage upon which Fora do Eixo (at that time, Espaço Cubo) began its activism. Although it did not identify as a solidarity economy at first, the network came into being in the context of the World Social Forums, the economic crisis of Argentina in 2001, and a growing belief that alternative futures are possible. When explained together with the Brazilian state's renewed investment in culture beginning in 2003, especially into regions traditionally underserved in this regard, the social environment that made FDE possible comes into even sharper focus.

Karl Polanyi and Economic Embeddedness

In addition to solidarity economy literature, I situate Fora do Eixo within a broader movement taking in place in Brazil, and in other parts of the world, that is re-imagining economic relationships. As mentioned above, the aligning of human and economic values is central to the ideologies of solidarity economies and is gaining purchase in the context of a growing disenchantment with neoliberal paradigms. Unfortunately however, considering the ethical dimensions of markets, as a strain of thought, remains far outside the margins of dominate economic thinking today.

In neoliberal economics there remains a tendency to speak about the economy as

untied to cultural histories, as if “the economy” were a singular system, disembedded from social and political processes, and operating according to its own natural and immutable laws. For the neoliberal economists, economic activity is, as John Locke once proposed, the natural extension of an autonomous and rational individual pursuing its enlightened self-interest in the marketplace. This utilitarian narrative sculpts the image of our modern economic hero, *homo-economicus*, the atomized and self-reliant “active citizen”, isolated from social influence and who is economically calculating, individually responsible and capable of self-management, which really means “self-economization” (Dagnino 2003). Choice and logic are central to this model, and as such the market sits in a ‘means-ends’ relation to the individual actors who determine prices based on supply and demand.

Yet, in the history of Western economics there have been notable challenges to this view that align closely with the general values of solidarity economies. Karl Polanyi’s seminal work, *The Great Transformation* (1944/2001), serves as an important point of departure within this milieu of economic writing as he argues that markets must be able to stake a claim to furthering the ethical basis of social life (Chakravartty and Zhao, 5). Polanyi was a great admirer of Robert Owen, founder of utopian socialism and the cooperative movement who in 19th c identified capitalism as disrupting the ethical culture of society. Owen was among the first to understand the socially constructed self, casting doubt on Smith and Ricardo’s theory of a natural economic man. He recognized that “economic institutions have an impact on people’s cultural self-understanding,” (Baum 1996, 3). If for Smith et al the economy stands alone, for Polanyi the market economy should not be understood as a discrete element, but as intricately tied to social,

cultural and political elements that, taken together, comprise a human invention that he calls “Market Society”. However, what characterizes the *modern*, in a Weberian sense, is precisely this separation of spheres. And it is this shift in economic orientation—that is, disembedding the economic from social, cultural political processes—what Polanyi refers to as the ‘great transformation’.

Polanyi took further issue with Smith and the classical political economists at a very simple level: truck and barter is not innate, but rather it is an ideology. And the capitalist institutions that developed in support of this ideology, Polanyi argued, have abstracted the market from the *marketplace*. To help make sense of this, Polanyi drew parallels between the utilitarian and formal economy described by the classical economists and the Weberian notion of formal rationalization, in that it is a functional rationality that abstracts the individual.¹⁹ Weber (2004) argues that the bureaucratic organization is the most technically superior form of organization because of its formalist, functional rationalization, which is to say its calculability, its speed and precision, its objectivity and so forth. He observes that features of formal rationality get mapped onto capitalist rationality, which accounts for its pervasiveness in modernity. Today it is the capitalist market economy that demands such speed and precision in public administration. Furthermore, bureaucracies function most perfectly when

¹⁹ Weber differentiates between two types of rationality: formal rationality (the juridical and legal doctrine which is inscribed in legislation) and substantive rationality (how juridical, legal and economic doctrine are taken up and made meaningful in everyday practice). For Weber, formal rationality is a functional rationality expressed as legal domination that abstracts individual substantive goals, providing a relative maximization of freedom and the guarantee of legal certainty, allowing subjects to anticipate and predict the legal consequences of their actions. “Juridical formalism enables the legal system to operate like a technically rational machine,” (2004, 252).

operating ‘without regard to persons’. It is precisely this dehumanization and elimination of empathy that is specifically valued by capitalism (247-49). And it precisely these values that Foro do Eixo and other solidarity economies find misguided and are reacting against.

Polanyi further believes that the economic rationalization of modern society has changed peoples’ economic mentalities. Prior to the ‘great transformation’, people did not think about the maximization of rational utility, but based their economies on reciprocity and redistribution (Polanyi 2001, 47). After the ‘great transformation’, people began thinking like the economically rational and atomized individual that the classical economists predicted. This was due, in part, to the capitalist institutions that not only created laws, but changed people’s mentalities. It was only after the creation of these new market institutions that that the myth of our human propensity to barter and trade was disseminated in an effort to mold human behavior in line with these market institutions (41-44).

Polanyi distinguishes between markets and the market system. The market system, a modern phenomenon, means the integration of all markets into a single national or international economy (Baum, 5). Polanyi claims that formal economic analysis focuses primarily on one specific type of economy, the price-market economy, failing to account for non-market economies. For him, the *human economy is a process*, which achieves stability and unity through the institutionalization of both economic and non-economic means, such as tradition, policy, authority and fairness. That is to say, he translates Weber’s substantive rationality (how juridical, legal and economic doctrine are

taken up and made meaningful in everyday practice) into a socio-cultural approach to economics, which emphasizes the way economies are embedded in everyday social and cultural life. If the formal economy is based on laws, logic and ideas, the substantive economy is based on nature and social structure, in that one's livelihood is dependent upon an interchange between their natural and social environment.

Diverse Economies

Today, perhaps more than ever, understanding of the capitalist economy as a “whole” is inadequate to explain non-capitalist relations that are happening around the world. Contemporary theorists of alternative, plural or solidarity economies (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006; Braudel 1984; Santos 2006) carry on in the tradition of Polanyi and argue against this notion of a monolithic economic system. Gibson-Graham aligns with this sentiment when claiming that, “to create an all-encompassing meta-narrative of ‘capitalism’ occludes diversity of relations that construct an economy and, in particular, ignores the diversity of existing capitalist practices”. Braudel (1984), in his immense historical survey of material civilization and the rise of capitalism, urged against the assumption that capitalism has penetrated our entire existence or that it, “accounts for every stitch in the social fabric...that our societies are organized from top to bottom in a ‘capitalist system.’” On the contrary, he suggests, there continues to be, “a dialectic very much alive between capitalism on one hand, and its antithesis, the ‘non-capitalism’ of the lower level on the other,” (630).

While Braudel's point that non-capitalist forms continue to impact the economic lives of people worldwide is instructive, it also sets up a dichotomy of non-capitalist v

capitalist that perhaps falls short in accounting for the diverse and *multi-dimensional* economic forms that Fora do Eixo, and many solidarity economies engage in, *including capitalist forms*. In his edited volume, *Another Production is Possible* (2006), Brazilian sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos discusses many different forms of solidarity economies that present challenges to neoliberal economic structures but that operate within and depend on the capitalist system itself. In theorizing the case studies of alternative economies in the volume, Santos and César Rodríguez-Garavito (contributor and co-author of the introduction) remind us that, “the very feasibility of these alternatives, at least in the short and medium term, depends to a great extent on their ability to survive in a capitalist context,” (xxi). While these alternative economies stretch the values of the traditional capitalist canon, part of the survival of many of these experiments is competing successfully in local and global markets. In this way, Santos and Garavito step away from the old reform/revolution and reframe it as applying “non-reformist reforms”, with an agenda to present social experiments that transform and expand capitalist values and socioeconomic arrangements.

I see Fora do Eixo’s economy as building relationships in cultural markets that resist the normative capitalist mold while creating innovative, dynamic and diverse market systems rooted in reciprocity and redistribution, such as those in place before Polanyi’s great transformation. The difference, of course, is that FDE self-consciously positions itself against the current economic system of the culture industries, while also partaking in some of its markets.

Santos makes the important further point that there currently already exist

experiments in developing counter-hegemonic economic discourses, emanating mostly from the academic camps of classical political economy, economic anthropology, sociology and geography, public sector economies, feminist economics, and more. Yet he warns that these remain as “non-credible alternatives to what exist”. The challenge then becomes making these alternative discourses credible, perhaps with the input of experiments unfolding at the ground level.

This is a particular challenge that Fora do Eixo has taken on with varying degrees of success. Discourse is extremely important to FDE, and depending on who is asked, they have either conferred credibility upon alternative economic practices, or have fallen far short in doing so. What is certain is that FDE’s institutional narrative of solidarity has inspired some, while ruffling the feathers of many one might expect to be in support. To help consider how Fora do Eixo’s discursive practices might contribute to bolstering or hampering the credibility of alternative economic arrangements, I find Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) particularly useful.

Gibson-Graham: Dislocating the Discursive Dominance of Capitalism

Carrying on in the tradition of Polanyi, Gibson-Graham make an effort to destabilize representations of the economy as a singular, self-evident totality, as if it were “extra-discursive, natural, the ultimate real” (2006). To be sure, they seek to reclaim the economy as a space of representation, emptying it of its essentialism in order to multiply the possibilities for filling it back up with discursive and experiential alternatives. By pushing back on the immutability of certain seeming truths about “the” economy, the duo opens up space for a “politics of economic possibility” (ibid). Viewing the economy as

representation helps to also understand it as historical, and as such, in a constant process of becoming.

Writing from a post-structural feminist perspective, Gibson-Graham attempts to “dislocate the discursive dominance of capitalism” while constructing a “language of economic diversity” (2006). They break down the hierarchy on which capitalism rests by calling into question the very discursive binaries that tend to foster a hegemonic positive/negative relation. If post-structuralism suggests that social identities have been dispersed into a plurality of alignments, why, they ask, can we not think of capitalism in a similar pluralistic fashion? If for Marx, the power of capitalism emerges from the material base (modes of production) that produces human subjects and “false consciousness”, Gibson-Graham adopt a more Foucauldian approach by suggesting that capitalism is reified through discursive artifacts, such as “capitalist hegemony”, “the pinnacle of social evolution”, or conceptual fortifications such as the public/private binary (1996). Such artifacts sustain capitalism’s position of dominance through the circulation of what they call ‘capitalocentrism’, a discourse that distributes positive value to those activities associated with capitalist economic activity. Capitalocentrism assigns lesser value to all other processes of producing and distributing goods and services by identifying them in relation to capitalism as the same as, the opposite of, a complement to, or contained within (2006, 50). Capitalism is identified as the only viable economic option, which inscribes a sense of ‘otherness’, ‘lack’, or ‘absence’ to all other economic alternatives, thereby impeding non-capitalist imaginaries (1996, 3).

However, there are in fact many different modalities and variations of capitalism, as opposed to one unified identity. Likewise there exist a multiplicity of non-capitalist alternatives that get lumped together in a singular subjection (1996, 16). Gibson-Graham further re-envision certain categories normally associated with capitalism, such as class and labor, as also functioning within different economic formations, arguing that individuals can simultaneously “participate in a variety of capitalist and non-capitalist processes at one moment over time,” (1996, 19), an acknowledgement that speaks to Santos and Garavito’s point made above.²⁰

Creating a new language of economy that challenges ‘capitalocentrism’ and re-defines capitalist relations while legitimizing other economic arrangements, as Gibson-Graham and Santos argue for, is something that I will show *Fora do Eixo* endeavors to do. I will demonstrate the incredible aptitude of FDE in creating new terminologies and discourses that, in theory, serve to legitimize and sustain their alternative economy, but that do not always play out in practice so neatly (more on that below). In the case of FDE, however, they are concerned less with destabilizing capitalism, as such. To be sure, they are in the same camp as those solidarity economies in Santos’s volume that engage in diverse economic practices, including capitalist ones. Rather, FDE is particularly interested in finding ways to disrupt the hegemony of the culture industry titans. Their goal, at least in the beginning, was to create a scenario in which regions of Brazil that have traditionally been excluded in the production and circulation of cultural forms—due to lack of resources and infrastructure—could contribute to, and reap the benefits from the very fertile terrain of Brazilian cultural production, while also partaking

²⁰ *Fora do Eixo*’s complex relationship to labor will be explored in another chapter.

in national dialogue around cultural and social policies. FDE looks for solutions to include non-capitalist as well as capitalist elements in the development of cultural markets outside the São Paulo—Rio de Janeiro axis. In this way, we might draw from the idea of ‘capitalocentrism’ and interrogate the ways in which the traditional culture industries assign positive values to activities, institutions, legal frameworks, ideologies (e.g. artist as genius), and cultural forms associated with an economic model that has long secured their dominance. This interpretation is part of the Fora do Eixo project.

In addition to the need for a new language of economy that challenges ‘capitalocentrism’ and that widens the field of economic possibility, Gibson-Graham identify at least two other deficits and challenges to economic politics that are relevant, in my view, to Fora do Eixo’s project: 1) The self-cultivation of subjects (including ourselves) who can desire and enact other economies, and 2) the collaborative pursuit of economic experimentation (2006, xxii). The pursuit of economic experimentation is somewhat more “clean-cut”, and will be explained in the next chapter, which maps the history of Fora do Eixo from an economic perspective and that foregrounds the growth of its diverse economy.

The cultivation of different subjectivities is something I discuss in chapter 4, and this has much to do with the discursive practices of the network. I will show that despite creating a new language of cultural economy (and of culture more generally)—one that connects to discourses of solidarity—Fora do Eixo deploys discourse in a multiplicity of complex ways that do not escape the relations of power that Foucault believed to be part and parcel to discourse. In fact, I argue that FDE’s discursive practices often *de-*

legitimize, or at the very least complicate their claim to solidarity. The network's discursive power, I will show, involves both material and symbolic dimensions. Indeed, FDE's discursive power is both symbolic power that produces subjectivities and identities, and also material, in the Marxist sense, in that discourse organizes social and material lives, mobilizes actors to engage in social and political action, and gains the network access to state funds that help to sustain the material well-being of the individuals in the network.

It can be argued that FDE, and its individual members, position themselves discursively against that normative economic hero of neoliberal capitalism, *homo-economicus*, in favor of an economic (way of) being and identity in the likeness of what Kawano (2009) has called *homo-solidaricus*. The people living in the FDE houses have certainly developed a different relation to material culture. On the other hand, their language has become a game of internal semantics that fortifies institutional hierarchies and organizes the social and material lives of the FDE members that reside in the FDE houses, including their labor practices and, by some accounts, their sexual lives. I will also argue that while their complementary currency, Card, has material iterations, it is largely a discursive formation that allows them to trade amongst themselves, but also situates them in a position of advantage against other entities vying for the capture of state and private funds. This has led some to remark: "Solidarity for whom?" The question then arises: What happens when the discourse of solidarity economy becomes a node of power itself?

At root in this question is the perhaps obvious assumption underlying this dissertation, which is that Fora do Eixo's solidarity economy, and their broader social and media movement, are not perfect. But as Miller (2009) reminds us, solidarity economies rarely are since they are multi-dimensional and have different goals. For example, they may be in favor or against relations with markets and the state. They may act in solidarity for ideological principles, or they may do so based solely on need. Or perhaps solidarity networks are calculated as the best way to secure profits for particular businesses, and so forth. That FDE is not perfect and that its practices involve discourses and actions of power does not preclude its instructiveness and relevance to understanding contemporary cultural and social movements in Brazil today. At the very least, it underscores yet another base assumption of this dissertation, which is that Fora do Eixo, as an economy and as a network, is in a constant process of becoming.

Social Technology

In this section I explain Fora do Eixo's uses of the term *social technology*, which figures prominently in Chapter 3 and, generally speaking, is used to describe the systemization of its institutional practices for the purpose of achieving certain social goals. Under what conditions can the network's institutional practices be considered social technologies? It is important to clarify the term because social technology maintains other historical associations. For example, together with "social engineering", it has an association with the socio-economic projects of the Soviet Union. German philosopher Karl Popper (2011) claimed that Communism itself is form of utopian social technology. While some people might find parallels here in that Fora do Eixo's project

of creating an alternative economic culture to capitalism could also be construed as a utopian project, the network's use of the concept is somewhat different.

Nowadays social technology is often associated with digital media platforms that are also called social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, email and Youtube. For example, Stanford University offers a class called “The Power of Social Technology” with the objective of helping students “harness social technology in support of a clear single focused goal—and in so doing cultivate social good.”²¹ This definition, while not exact, begins to approximate FDE's use of the term because the network's practices are largely conditioned by digital technology and its institutional identity is heavily invested in an ability to channel the affordances of digital media for democratic purposes, such as broadening participation in the culture and media industries. However, to get a more satisfying and complete understanding of what social technology means to Fora do Eixo, I have to also ask what is meant by *technology* in this context, since it too has traditions of use across many disciplines.

At the most basic level, according the Merriam-Webster dictionary, technology is “the practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area”.²² We can also say that it refers to tools or techniques that may be used to solve real-world problems. Additionally, Fora do Eixo's use most closely resembles a sociological understand of technology—that is, a cultural force that shapes or changes a culture (Borgmann 2006, 353), within which I include institutional cultures. Taken together, we can say that FDE has developed and systematized a collection of techniques, methods and practices that are

²¹ <http://faculty-gsb.stanford.edu/aaker/pages/courses.html> (accessed August 19, 2014).

²² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/technology> (accessed August 19, 2014).

geared toward solving certain social and institutional problems. Institutionally, these problems include how to organize a network of members that extends across Brazil. The Fora do Eixo Houses, which I discuss in Chapter 3, are social technologies that solved this problem. The Collective Bank is a social technology that allows the FDE members to have their material needs met so they can dedicate themselves fully to the network. Finding a way to bypass the social and economic entrance barriers of cultural production, for example, led to the development of Card, yet another example of what FDE refers to as a social technology. Indeed, the music festivals themselves are considered social technologies—they are systematized methods and techniques that support and promote independent music in Brazil. Lastly, FDE’s social technologies are rooted in a peer-to-peer logic, which means that they serve as systemized platforms for a wider public who share similar social goals and organizational issues to use freely and, importantly, to build upon.

II. Mídia NINJA

Chapter 5 takes the dissertation in a slightly different direction as I focus on Fora do Eixo’s latest initiative, Mídia NINJA—an alternative form of citizen journalism, or what has recently been called *citizen journalism 2.0*.²³ Mídia NINJA still works within the ethos of a solidarity economy in that it is trying to find ways to bypass the traditional

²³ Citizen journalism 2.0 was the name of a 2007 conference in Seoul hosted by OhmyNews International (OMNI)—a South Korean online citizen journalism newspaper. In 2013, the International Journalism Festival of Perugia, Italy held a panel called Citizen Journalism 2.0, which can be viewed on YouTube (in English) here: <http://www.journalismfestival.com/programme/2013/citizen-journalism-2.0> (accessed August 22, 2014). To my knowledge, there are currently no scholarly publications specifically called Citizen Journalism 2.0, although several academic works have used derivatives of the term, such as Public Journalism 2.0 (Rosenberry and St. John 2010) and Civic Journalism 2.0 (Günther 2011). I chose to use Citizen Journalism 2.0 for reasons that will be explained below.

economic barriers of the mainstream media (MSM) industry, and professional entrance barriers of journalism (that are particular to Brazil) while producing hybrid forms of user-generated content. As it is an FDE initiative, it operates within the network's alternative economic structure, although there are different challenges with regard to Mídia NINJA because the initiative hopes to include people who are not necessarily associated with the network. How to deal with citizen journalists who do not partake in the FDE's communal living arrangement and its collective bank is something I discuss in more depth in Chapter 5.

Here I wish to provide a little background and context of mainstream media and journalism in Brazil, *as it relates to NINJA*. That is to say, the point of the following sections is not to present Brazil's long and intricate media history in detail, but rather to draw attention to some central issues about Brazilian media and the profession of journalism that will then allow me to discuss in Chapter 5 how NINJA may or may not be contributing to the democratization of media.²⁴ Of particular importance is the idea of news "framing", especially in the context of the 2013 protests in Brazil, because NINJA came to prominence due to its able to re-frame mainstream media's negative portrayal of the demonstrations. Providing alternative frames and perspectives from diverse populations has become part of its organizational identity. However, NINJA often falls back on the automatic and generalizing assumption that MSM outlets like Globo or *Folha* (São Paulo's most widely distributed newspaper) stand in for a unitary voice, one that is

²⁴ For a more detailed account of the history of Brazil's media system from the arrival of television in the 1950s to present, see Albuquerque (2012), Brittos and Bolaño (2005, 2007), Matos (2008, 2012), and Porto (2012).

always in collusion with the state and private interest and therefore represents an institutional and ideological bias. It is, however, more complex than that.

After, I focus on media movements that have arisen in Latin America in recent years, and then explain what is meant by citizen journalism 2.0. Lastly, I address how the key concepts of public sphere and counterpublics, which figure prominently in Chapter 5, are understood within this project.

A Brief Summary of Brazil's Mainstream Media System

During its twenty-year military dictatorship (1964-1985), Brazil's media system went through a restricted period characterized by, among other things, a high level of "political instrumentalization" and "political clientelism" (Albuquerque 2012; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Porto 2012). In Brazil at this time, media organizations were subservient to the government because they needed connections with political actors for their survival, and they were censored (Albuquerque, 78-82). The media mogul Roberto Marinho and the ruling military established a *quid-pro-quo* relationship in which Globo presented favorable coverage of the dictatorship in exchange for exclusive licensing rights and government investment in communication infrastructure that Globo and a few others had at their disposal (Albuquerque, 80; Porto 2012, 2).²⁵ By the beginning of the transition to democracy in 1985, the growth of Brazil's market economy and a cozy relationship with the government meant that Globo had secured a hegemonic position in Brazil's media market, and wielded enormous

²⁵ Recalling a point I made in the Introduction (footnote 5), a more detailed account of the rise of Brazil's media industry would also have to include the histories of other media corporations. Here I focus on Globo because it remains the largest, most well known, and the most powerful media conglomerate in Brazil. Symbolically, it is often the primary critical target for alternative media groups, such as Mídia NINJA.

influence on the political destiny of the country, as well as influence in the public sphere. And though Globo's monopoly has waned since 1985, Globo Network still has 55% of the audience share (Lima, quoted in Albuquerque 2012, 78) and continues to have enormous influence and control in Brazilian politics and in framing public debates.

In the mid-1990s Brazil's media system began to open up (relative to what it had been) due to several factors, among them Roberto Marinho's transfer of control of Globo to his three sons—José Roberto, João Roberto and Roberto Irineu (Brittos and Bolaño 2005; Matos 2008). The three Marinho brothers quickly instated a commercial model less beholden to the political ideologies of a single owner like their conservative father. Porto suggests that because they lacked the "authority aura" of their media mogul father, the brothers relied on audiences and ratings to give them credibility and power (69). They therefore sought a broad mass-market audience, and shifted away from explicitly biased journalism. While Albuquerque (2012, 82) notes that journalism had, since the 1950s, adopted the U.S. fact-centered text style and methods of gathering and processing information, it evolved in a very particularly Brazilian way given the authoritarian context and lack of press freedom. The transfer of power to the Marinho brothers gave renewed importance to "professionalism", which strives for (though can never fully achieve) objectivity in normal news reporting (Albuquerque 2012; Bolaño and Brittos 2005; Matos 2008; Porto 2012).

The political environment played an important role in Brazil's media opening. As Brazil's democratic institutions grew roots and the representative system was reinforced through the strengthening of horizontal linkages between an increasingly robust civil

society and the government, a growing “culture of rights and accountability” created incentives for the media sector to follow new societal demands. Indeed, it became risky for media companies interested in conserving their persuasive power and retaining audience cohesion to maintain old political alliances and misrepresent the social perspective (Porto, 54, 56). When media systems remain closed and biased, they run the risk of a “cultural disconnect” with much of their audience and may lose market share (Porto 2012; Matos 2008; Schudson 2003; Waisbord 2009, 2010). This point became particularly visible during the 2013 protests in Brazil, which proved to be a moment when mainstream media (MSM) reacted to civil society demands when it felt its credibility was at stake.

Framing

That Brazil’s media system is interested in credibility as much as profitability does not mean, however, that important societal issues like poverty and racism are routinely covered, or that the mainstream news regularly turns to civil society voices for content and perspective. While Brazil’s media system is far more open than it was in the past, mainstream media’s links with the state and the market tend to trump its links with civil society. This is not because of inherent bias, as groups like Mídia NINJA contend, but rather is due to several factors that Schudson (2003) argues influence media framing. Of course there are market considerations, but other aspects such as that the nature of the news organization, the personal assumptions of news professionals, and the desire for professional achievement under constraints of organizational routines and practices also have significance for the way news is covered (47-8).

While Schudson is speaking specifically about news in the U.S., there are indications that this applies to the Brazilian context as well. For example, Porto describes how shifts in management of the News Editing Division at Globo between 1995-2001 affected the freedom journalists had to cover stories from different perspectives—depending on who was in charge of the newsroom, there was vacillation between decentralized and centralized control over editing styles (2012, 65-8). Waisbord (2009, 108), seemingly in agreement with Schudson, argues that in Latin America “institutional issues”, by which he means the organizational routines and practices of the news rooms, and importantly the *journalist culture*—for example the level of professionalism that privileges official, state and market sources—influence news coverage and play into the perception of bias as much as the market does. My above emphasis on journalist culture is particularly relevant in connecting Schudson’s view about how the personal assumptions of journalists affect news framing in Brazilian journalism because, as I will now discuss, the profession of journalism had legal boundaries placed on it for forty years that created a culture of predominantly white, educated, middle and upper class journalists.

Journalism’s Forty-year Enclosure

In 1969, when an unconventional and complex relationship between leftist journalists from the Brazilian Communist Party and conservative newspapers that employed them in high positions was exposed, the military government imposed the *Decree-Law 972*, which required journalists to hold a university degree in journalism in

order to legally work in the field (Albuquerque 2012, 83).²⁶ The military government thought the law would produce journalists with a more technical as opposed to political background. The government found an unlikely ally in the National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ)—a professional syndicate that has lobbied on behalf of journalists since 1946. While FENAJ opposed the authoritarian nature of the decree, according to Albuquerque its support of the measure was motivated by corporatist interests, such as reserving posts for the people who had a university degree in journalism (85).

This law shaped Brazilian journalists' identity and the journalistic culture for a half-century by establishing entrance barriers to the profession that excluded those populations unable to attend university for a wide variety of reasons, most notably poor populations, black and mixed-race Brazilians. This certainly affected the way media coverage was framed—if we agree with Schudson's (2003, 45) belief that a level of empathy is involved in journalism to the degree that "journalists, like other human beings, more readily recognize and more eagerly pursue problems and issues when they concern people like themselves rather than those beyond their social circle," the Decree-Law 972 becomes problematic because it produced a professional group comprised of a narrow social composition and therefore had limitations on its ability (and desire) to accurately represent a diverse social world. NINJA positions itself as one solution to this,

²⁶ Albuquerque explains that the relationship between the Communist Party members and the media owners was mutually beneficial. He writes, "The newspaper publishers had commercial reasons and the communist journalists had political reasons for working together. The publishers had to modernize their newspapers to survive in an increasingly competitive market ... and that included adopting a more fact-centered style of journalism. To do so, they needed a new kind of journalist, and for many reasons, the communists were in a good position to be that kind of journalist. Meanwhile, infiltration in the newspapers provided the communists with organizational resources ... that they could use for the benefit of the party," (83).

as it endeavors to provide space for a plurality of alternative voices to represent themselves.

In 2009, after forty years, the Decree-Law 972 was ruled unconstitutional by Brazil's Supreme Court based on the fact that it was instated under a different constitution than the 1988 Constitution, which was adopted during the return to democracy. More importantly, it violated basic rights guaranteed in the 1988 Constitution, such as free speech and freedom of information. However, following intensive lobbying by FENAJ, the Brazilian Senate voted to reinstate the law in August 2012. In an attempt to circumvent the Supreme Court, the Senate included a draft amendment to the constitution that states that "non-journalists", by which is meant anyone "without an employment contract, who writes technical, scientific or cultural work related to his/her specialization, to be released with his/her name and qualifications", would only be allowed to publish as a "collaborator".²⁷ This measure did not pass the Chamber of Deputies.²⁸

Therefore, defining the terms by which journalism is understood and the conventions by which it must operate continues to be and hotly contested debate in Brazil today. These debates took on renewed importance in 2013 during the protests. Mídia

²⁷ The National Federation of Journalists feared that deregulating an employment structure built over forty years would worsen conditions, lower pay, create less stable employment and poor quality journalists in newsrooms. Those who agreed with the Supreme Court's decision claimed Brazil is a more democratic society than forty years ago, and requiring journalists to hold a degree presents a serious threat to freedom of speech and the press. Furthermore, they make the compelling argument that requiring journalists to hold professional degrees has not, in fact, enriched the quality news in Brazil, evidenced by the MSM's gravitation towards scandal, celebrity news, and other forms of tabloid press. See: <http://freespeechdebate.com/en/case/should-journalists-need-a-diploma/>; and <http://www.coha.org/press-freedom-in-brazil-sound-the-alarm/> (accessed July 20, 2014).

²⁸ Brazil's legislative branch is bi-cameral. The Chamber of Deputies, like the U.S. House of Representatives, consists of representatives proportionally elected to four-year terms. The Senate houses three representatives from each of Brazil's twenty-six states who serve eight-year terms.

NINJA had a role to play in this negotiation since citizen journalism presumes that everybody, whether claiming the title of journalist or not, can regardless have a voice in the production of information.

Media movements in Brazil have played a vital role in opening mainstream media to a plurality of social viewpoints and have, at times, challenged stereotypes and negative characterizations of traditionally subjugated social groups. In the next section I discuss several types of media movements, each of which provide elements that partly help explain Mídia NINJA.

Media Movements

Between them, Waisbord (2009, 2010) and Porto (2012) identify four different types of media-oriented movements to come out of Latin America over the last decades of political democratization in the region, and that attempt to mediate the influence of government and business in media systems while reinforcing the voices of citizens and civic groups.

First, “policy reform movements” lobby for policies related to ownership, funding and content (Waisbord 2010, 135). This type of movement pressures governments to enact legislation aimed at, for example, providing space for public media and regulating access to broadcasting licenses (Waisbord 2009, 107). In Brazil, the most renowned example of this is perhaps the National Forum for the Democratization of Communication (FNDC), formed in the early 1990s in the midst of what Porto has called a period of heightened “electronic clientelism”, referring to the politically motivated use of broadcast licenses as currency. The organization takes the role of “citizen advocate”

when pushing for media policies that take into account the interests of civil society, such as its proposed Democratic Media Law that would regulate diversity and plurality in television and radio stations.²⁹ Felipe Altenfelder, a primary spokesperson for Fora do Eixo, referenced the FNDC in our discussion about the origins of Mídia NINJA.

Second, a surge of “alternative media movements” has aimed to develop citizen-run initiatives that bypass both the state and markets (2009, 107). According to Altenfelder, Mídia NINJA owes a lot to such do-it-yourself (DIY) movements in Brazil as, for example, the Community Radio Movement in urban favelas and the Free Radio Movement connected to universities across Brazil that include *Rádio Muda* (Radio Change) in Campinas, or *Rádio Heliópolis* in São Paulo. Mídia NINJA certainly adheres to this description in that it responds to a perceived need for decentralized journalism independent of editing room constraints.

Waisbord calls a third media movement “civic media advocacy” (CMA), which strategically bolsters ties between civil society and the press vis-à-vis a pragmatic approach. Instead of perceiving mainstream media as oppositional forces, or demanding a complete media systems overhaul (which is unlikely to ever happen), CMA uses media organizations as “tactical allies” to help advance political and social causes (107-10). Recognizing that sources lead many news stories, and newsrooms over-rely on “official sources” partly due to the fact that they have easy access to these sources (Hallin 2000; Schudson 2003; Waisbord 2009), CMA employs strategies like “sourcing information” that provide newsrooms with readymade coverage of social issues normally absent from

²⁹ <http://brazilianpost.org/04/09/2013/democratic-media-law-the-process-of-a-movement/> (accessed July 20, 2014).

mainstream media, such as poverty, race, domestic violence, gay rights and more (Waisbord, 108).

Porto expands Waisbord's three types of media movements to include a fourth category, what he calls "Media Accountability Movements" (MAMs). As Porto defines them, MAMs are "a broad set of actions and strategies established by civic groups, often in close alliance with state agencies, to hold the media accountable for their performance," and include actions such as, "the systematic monitoring of media content; the creation of forums for media criticism; legal action and a variety of forms of social protest," (146). Among Porto's larger contributions is to illustrate how the efforts of MAMs, such as The Institute of Black Women Geledés, can hold deeper cultural implications to representative democracy than solely opening mainstream news coverage to a diversity of issues and voices. For example, Institute Geledés drew attention to Globo's pattern of negative representations of Afro-Brazilians in cultural programming such as telenovelas, and by successfully navigating legal channels pressured Globo, in some instances, to make changes in its racial representations (160). This is of extreme importance for a society with such high levels of cultural and racial paradoxes embedded and naturalized within its national psyche. Take for example the disconnect between a 2010 census that shows that 52% of the population identify as non-white, and mainstream news and cultural programming, which even the most cursory view reveals the absence of ethnic diversity.³⁰

³⁰ According to the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics, Brazilians trace their origin from four sources: Amerindians, Europeans, Africans and Asians. The 2010 census showed Brazilians identified

Mídiativismo

Porto and Waisbord provide useful analytical categories for understanding historic and current trends in media-related activism in Brazil that gives greater levels of social control over the media. While they map out in excellent detail the impact that different forms of media activism have had in the opening of journalism in Brazil to more diverse views, in strengthening the relationship between civil society and the media sector, and in working towards more inclusive cultural representations in fictional programming and news content, these authors gloss over two important factors that I find important. First, in practice the civic groups working on media issues—as Mídia NINJA, FNDC and others³¹—operate on multiple fronts of media activism and frequently blend and cross-pollinate strategies and goals from all four categories that the authors have provided, and some that they have not (more on that in a moment). For its part, Mídia NINJA has a monitoring component, it operates as DIY media producers while working at times pragmatically with Globo vis-à-vis providing ready-made source material (this was particularly relevant during the 2013 protests). Also, Fora do Eixo has used social media platforms to weigh in on media policies, like the aforementioned Decree-Law 972.

themselves according to the following groups: White, 47.51% ; Pardo (mixed race) 43.42% ; Black 7.52% ; Asian 1.1% ; Amerindian 0.42%. See: <http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/>.

³¹ One further example is *Intervozes* a social communication collective comprised of lawyers, architects, journalists and more. Intervozes promotes framing the “access to information and communication” debate within a human rights discourse. For the collective, which emerged in the early 2000s, the right to information and communication is inseparable from the exercise of citizenship and democracy, and “a society can only be called democratic when the different voices, opinions, cultures and races that comprise it have the space to manifest.” At times it acts in watchdog capacity, monitoring telecommunication policies and television footage, as a MAM would. Yet Intervozes also partners with social movements on public education campaigns related to media issues, and further works on media reform by devising communication policies designed in the public interest. Lastly, Intervozes has frequently collaborated with Fora do Eixo, especially when FDE has organized protests in São Paulo. <http://intervozes.org.br/quem-somos/>

Second, neither author addresses the contributions of digital media movements in opening Brazil's media system. Issues that surround access to digital technology have implications for the democratization of media in Brazil. Of particular relevance is the *Mídialivrismo Movement* (MLM [Free Media Movement])³² that operates on multiple fronts of media activism and democratization, and which Mídia NINJA claims attachment to on its website. The MLM is an association of multiple civil society groups, community leaders, university youth and more. In Brazil, it is mostly organized through the Communication Departments of the Federal Universities of Espírito Santo, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. For one, the movement seeks to give prominence to media produced outside of mainstream channels, especially those forms that emanate from within the favelas and other marginalized communities. More and more, these forms of media production entail interaction with digital platforms, such as online radio and television, and social media. Aside from opening media to a broader range of voices, the MLM also has a role to play in monitoring mainstream media as evidenced in the counter-representations that NINJA and others offered during the protests. The MLM has attempted to build partnerships with the state through a series of forums hosted at the respective universities in which participant groups and individuals meet with local state officials with the purpose of devising a wide range of agendas and policy proposals, including policies that would give financial support and visibility to these movements. Not only does the MLM speak to issues of democratic access and creating alternative

³² Rather than translate *Mídialivrismo* to English, I use the acronym MLM to avoid confusion with the "Free Media Movement"—a media watchdog organization of journalists in Sri Lanka, formed in 1991. <http://freemediasrilanka.wordpress.com/about/>

counter-publics and public spheres, but as the 2013 protests demonstrates, it has an impact on opening media systems, which is part of Porto's concern.

What is more, the MLM is also part of a wider international movement that originated in Brazil. To be sure, Brazilian civil society has been in the forefront of an international campaign to assemble networks of media movements that collaborate globally in efforts to build connections between civil society and media institutions locally. In addition to organizing three National Forums of Free Media (Rio de Janeiro 2008, Vitória 2009 and Porto Alegre 2012), Brazil also hosted the first two World Forums on Free Media (Belém 2009, Rio de Janeiro 2012). By the third World Forum on Free Media in Tunis (March 2013)—where the World Charter for Free Media was launched³³—Mídia NINJA was already established and sent a representative to cover events there, as well as to document the social unrest taking place the streets at that time. Mídia NINJA began in this way to make important connections with local journalists and media activists in that region in the hope of building a network for future collaborations.

In addition to broadening citizen participation in the public sphere, media movements such as the MLM also pertain to questions relevant to journalistic professionalism in Brazil. For example, can anybody be a journalist? While this is a question that I address in more depth in Chapter 5, in this next section I set up the concept of citizen journalism 2.0 that will ultimately help clarify that question.

³³ <http://www.fmml.net/spip.php?rubrique2> (accessed July 20, 2014).

Citizen Journalism 2.0

Citizen journalism 2.0 blends the concepts of *citizen journalism* and *Web 2.0*. By citizen journalism I mean public citizens participating in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and distributing information. It is a form of newsgathering that normally operates outside of mainstream media institutions (though Mídia NINJA will challenge this idea) and, borrowing from Karlekar and Radsch (2013, 16), is often a response to perceived “shortcomings in the professional journalistic field, that uses similar journalistic practices but is driven by different objectives and ideals and relies on alternative sources of legitimacy than traditional mainstream journalism.” In Brazil, the shortcomings in journalistic practice are often interpreted as an over-reliance on official sources that lead to misrepresentations of social conflicts such as the 2013 protests, a centralization in the editing room, an overall market driven mainstream media that bypasses important social issues in its news coverage, and a forty-year tradition of enclosure of the journalistic profession due to Decree-Law-972 that only allowed access to an educated middle and elite class, and that while it has recently been overturned, still penetrates journalistic mainstream culture. During the protests in Brazil, the alternative sources of authority that Deutsch Karlekar and Radsch speak about became the protesters themselves, various social movement leaders and above all the raw footage that (as is commonly argued) spoke for itself.

Web 2.0 is a term coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2004 to describe a shift in the development of Internet (Web) platforms wherein collaboration is understood as paramount to a platform’s efficacy. It is premised on the belief that there is wisdom in crowds, which logically guides the conviction that services get automatically better the

more people use and repurpose them. In the context of web-design, this implicit “architecture of participation” (O’Reilly 2012, 37) harnesses the power and intelligence of users to produce peer-to-peer (P2P) platforms such as Wikipedia and social networking websites, which stand in contrast to the Web 1.0 platforms that tend to be proprietary and therefore preclude modifications, like for example Encyclopedia Britannica Online or personal websites. Transferred to the context of citizen journalism 2.0, the collaborative quality of Web 2.0 translates to a shift from a one-to-many model of passive consumers of information to a many-to-many model “involving active participants who play a constitutive role in shaping the [journalistic] discourse,” (Tierney 2013, 33). Taken together, citizen journalism 2.0 is perhaps most succinctly explained by Jay Rosen’s oft-quoted definition: “When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another,” (2008, 2012). Today these “press tools” include hand-held 4G mobile devices such as cellphones or small digital cameras and video recorders, and they are also web-based as images and video footage are uploaded to the Internet and commented upon as they circulate on blogs and through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, G-chat, YouTube, Vimeo, USTREAM and more.

Citizen versus other frames

Citizen journalism has other common iterations, such as *public*, *grassroots*, *participatory*, *guerilla*, or *street* journalism. While there is obviously plenty of overlap in these adjectives, the nuances implicit in their distinct meanings emphasizes the fact that this type of journalism is not a bound category, but is rather contextual (in flux), rooted in

grounded practice and lived histories, and above all political. I also understand that there are limits to ascribing “citizen” to this type of journalistic practice because of its coterminous relation to the nation-state. Reflecting on the important work of several past and present scholars (Arendt 1958/2013; Benhabib 2004; Sassen 2004) leads to legitimate concerns about the applicability of citizen journalism to people who are stateless and without citizenship and rights, such as immigrants and refugees.

Acknowledging the inherent deficiency in its scope, I nevertheless choose to speak in terms of citizen journalism because Mídia NINJA is situated within a very specific socio-political context in which the Brazilian public was making rights-based claims upon the state. During the 2013 protests from which Mídia NINJA emerged, Brazilian citizens reacted out of frustration to what they saw as misappropriation of public money and because they were fed up with paying such high taxes into a system that did not provide them with basic benefits, such as adequate health, education and transportation services or infrastructure. The state also made what are widely perceived as calamitous missteps in terms of urban planning measures that displaced communities of poorer social classes in anticipation of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Game, which I talk about in greater detail in Chapter 5. All of which is to say that the coterminous relation between citizen and nation-state is a relationship that the 2013 protesters indeed wanted to make central.

Furthermore, Brazil has an interesting relationship to the notions of citizen and citizenship. James Holston (2008) makes the claim that Brazil maintains a differentiated citizenship (a term he borrows from Iris Young), wherein every Brazilian is included

formally within the law as a citizen, but a centuries-old “authoritarian social hierarchy” precludes egalitarian access to substantive rights and the equitable distribution of resources.³⁴ Yet he further notes that since the return to democracy in the 1980s the word *cidadania* (citizenship) has become ubiquitous, where its use is “evocative of alternative futures,” (17). It is therefore a familiar frame to Brazilians, as well as to Mídia NINJA.

And lastly, as Deutsch Karlekar and Radsch (2013, 18) point out, juxtaposing the terms “citizen journalism”—to which I add “2.0”—underscores the link that these words have to their associated qualities: *citizen* as civic minded and socially responsible; *journalism* as a profession that has come to be linked to democratic debate and transparency, but that in Brazil was regulated for decades and accessible to only an educated middle class; and *2.0* as focused on user-generated content diffused through digital media, especially P2P platforms. The connection between the journalistic profession and democracy was important during the 2013 uprising because at one point the public re-directed its anger towards the media company Globo, as will be addressed. Having been repeatedly misrepresented in the mainstream news, protesters drew conclusions about the intimate ties between the state and corporate media. Reacting to the handle that market and state forces have on the media, citizen journalism 2.0 initiatives like Mídia NINJA reflect a Gramscian fight back from civil society against entrenched interests, as Holston claims is a form of “insurgent citizenship” (2008).

³⁴ Substantive rights are understood as a right to the substance of being human (life, liberty, happiness), rather than a right to a procedure to enforce that right, which is defined by formal (procedural) law and includes, for example, the right to vote. Every Brazilian citizen has the right to—indeed they are obligated to—vote, but not every citizen has equal access to life, liberty and happiness.

Counterpublics

My above reference to Gramsci, of course, involves his notion of hegemony, which can be construed as processes through which social, political and economic forces maintain dominance through the production of consent. Mainstream news coverage and programming are usually representations of the dominant values and ideologies, thereby naturalizing and perpetuating them. Citizen journalism 2.0 connects to a desire of *counterpublics* to find a venue for alternative, or *counter-hegemonic* voices. To clarify my interpretation of counterpublics in the context of the 2013 protests in Brazil, I draw from Nancy Fraser's (1992) definition, with one qualification. For Fraser, counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs," (123). This is useful for understanding counter-cultural groups like Fora do Eixo and subjugated social groups like Afro-Brazilians, gays and lesbians, favela residents and more. These types of counterpublics are likely the ones that will continue to work with Mídia NINJA beyond the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics. However, the 2013 protests in Brazil reflected a much wider social demographic including mainstream middle-class and elite professionals, journalists who previously worked with mainstream media, and more. These citizens also took to the streets in angry reaction to the transportation fare-hike, to government misspending and corruption, and to the police aggression towards peaceful demonstrators. They too filmed events from the frontlines of the protests with their cellphones, sent texts messages, uploaded and circulated images, wrote and commented on blogs, and so forth. And they were not just talking to members of their own groups, but addressing demands of society as a whole. That is to say, they

also participated in formulating perspectives oppositional to the state and military's "official" perspectives displayed on mainstream media outlets.

Therefore, for the purpose of Chapter 5, I extend Fraser's delineation of counterpublics to include all of those who expressed dissent and dissatisfaction with the state, with the military repression and also with the mainstream media's initial portrayal of the protests. My use of citizen journalism 2.0, then, refers to a way of participating in the national dialogue through many different alternative channels that amplify the public sphere and give space to the voices of counterpublics, broadly construed. This wider social composition suggests that counter-publics are not entirely fixed or determined by class position but arise in response to specific moments of crisis and are therefore fluid rather than static.

Digital Media and Public Sphere

Several scholars characterize many-to-many communication and digital technology as broadening the public sphere (Benkler 2006; Bohman 2004; Clark and Aufderheide 2011; Curry et al. 2011; Tierney 2013). While moving beyond Habermas's attempt to theorize universal standards for democratic participation and communication, most scholarship on the public sphere retains at least the spirit of the Habermasian project: to have free and fair access to communicative opportunities in forums where people can rationally debate the social and political issues of the day. The Internet has certainly provided a wide variety of forums through which many people nowadays consume news and participate in public dialogue (for those who have access to such technology). In particular, Web 2.0 platforms like blogs and social media websites and

4G mobile devices have supplanted the idea that congregating in a physical place, such as the coffee houses of Habermas's idealized 18th century bourgeois society or the *agora* of ancient Greece, is a requisite for a healthy public sphere. Participating publics and counter-publics are now dispersed as we have moved from a spatial public to a networked public (Benkler 2006). This is not to say that there exists no relation to physical space, or that the spatial public disappears or is rendered irrelevant. To be sure, these spaces are not competing with each other but rather are intertwined.

In her recent book, *The Public Space and Social Media: Connected Cultures of the Network Society* (2013), architect and digital media scholar Thérèse Tierney (2013) offers the most lucid and convincing account of the entanglement of off-line and online activity in producing alternative spaces that, she advances, may be considered alternative publics. For the purpose of this project I adopt her interpretation of the public sphere as “a set of physical or mediated spaces where people can gather and share information, debate opinions, and tease out their political interests and social needs with other participants,” (22). I add to this the perhaps obvious, though important assumption implicit in her definition, which is that there is not one all-encompassing public sphere, but rather multiple different and sometimes overlapping iterations of public spheres that reflect a plurality of interests and identities of groups and communities.

The inclusion of “mediated spaces” in Tierney's definition is important because many people have argued, including Habermas, that social media dislocates local and political knowledge. The case of Brazil seems to challenge this perspective, as the Brazilian state has often employed digital forums for participatory debates in the

legislative process, both nationally and locally. Take for example the Copyright Reform Bill. In 2010, the Ministry of Culture (MinC)—the government agency that deals with cultural policies such as copyright—sponsored the “digital debate” using part of its website as a forum through which the public could weigh in on the copyright issue. From the standpoint of participatory democracy it was a successful initial experiment in political mobilization as close to eight thousand participants across Brazil voiced opinions on what to include in the final draft of the bill. I say this fully aware that eight thousand seems insignificant given the size of Brazil’s population, estimated in the CIA World Fact book in 2014 as 202,656,788, and that it raises questions about the nation’s digital divide. However, such processes are in their beginning stages, and this is a step in the right direction. Also, participatory budgeting in cities like Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre is another example of digital media’s utility as a space where the public can be involved in local political dialogue and decision-making.

Tierney’s response to concerns about digital media’s dislocation of local and political knowledge suggests that our everyday interactions with new forms of media have to do with shifts in the “changing structure of sociability,” and as a media-enabled public incorporates online activity into their everyday life, online social space becomes part of our everyday spatial environment. Online interaction not only records and reflects the actions of everyday life, but it has a role in producing it (32-33).

This is certainly not the first time new technologies have created disruptions and shaped social processes—the printing press, the gramophone, the telegraph, radio and television all reconfigured social practices in their day. However, there are certain

properties embedded within recent technologies that earlier forms did not have, and these properties provide affordances such as speed; ease of transmission of text, images and video; subaltern access (though not to everyone); self-production of information and commentary; and more (19). These affordances had consequence within the 2013 protests in Brazil. People engaged with social media *as if it truly was* a counter-space for the expression of grievances, sharing of information, building consensus, establishing community and mobilizing action beyond the online environment (ibid). Mídia NINJA, and other instances of citizen journalism 2.0, reconfigured political, social, technological and journalist practices during those protests. It is a case that illustrates that the divide between an online and off-line public sphere has become less distinct.

However, this is not an argument for determinism and indeed *cultural context matters* (29, emphasis added). As I will emphasize throughout Chapter 5, the issues that provoked the uprising were social and not media-based, and off-line mobilization and interpersonal relationships were perhaps the most important motivating factors in getting people to take to the streets during the protests in Brazil. Internet and digital technology should be seen as another and specific mode of communication. As Bohman (2004) reminds us in his reconsideration of what the Internet means to the public sphere, there is no intrinsic democratic quality in the hardware of the technology. Rather, Bohman asserts that these democratic qualities are given shape by the “software” of the Internet, a term he uses broadly to also include human uses of the medium and its organization (ibid). At the very least it can be said that social media “expands the scope of certain features of communicative interaction across space and time, solving some of the problems of scale inherent in the literary public sphere and the limitations on deliberation

in the institutions of representative democracy,” (Bohman 2004, 131). I would add to this that social media facilitates bypassing some of the economic barriers in the production of news through low transmission costs, resulting in the disruption of the gatekeeper functions controlled by media institutions driven largely by commercial interests.

III. Conclusion

I have presented in this chapter the theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation, as well as some historical context that is relevant to Fora do Eixo and its initiatives like Mídia NINJA. In this next chapter I offer a history of Fora do Eixo told in relation to its alternative solidarity economy, and from its beginnings as a collective called Espaço Cubo in the interior city of Cuiabá.

Chapter Three:

A Cultural Economic History of Fora do Eixo

In its statement of principles, Fora do Eixo claims among other things to be “a collaborative, decentralized network consisting in cultural collectives guided by the principles of solidarity economy, local associations and cooperatives....”³⁵ This chapter considers what, exactly, this means in relation to its rise from a collective of young cultural activists in a medium size city in the interior of Brazil, to a network of collectives with national reach. This chapter offers an economic history of Fora do Eixo. Specifically, it examines Fora do Eixo as an economically plural entity that operates in the field of cultural production through a complex web of economic relations at local and national levels that involve alternative currencies, non-monetary exchange (barter and trade), public and private financing, a large (un-remunerated) labor force, and capitalist market relations. I attempt to unravel the complexity of its diverse economic arrangements and explain how its different parts work in practice, always keeping in mind Polanyi’s insights that while this is presented as an economic history it cannot be disembodied from other social, cultural and political processes that bear upon it. It is also, therefore, very much a *cultural* history.

Since this account is also a cultural history, at least one qualification is warranted. Fora do Eixo is today in its twelfth year (if we include its initial configuration as Espaço Cubo, formed in 2012), and by some estimates it benefits from the participation of over two thousand people in the network. While this number might be a slight exaggeration, it

³⁵ <http://foradoeixo.org.br/historico/carta-de-principios/> (translation my own).

is nonetheless true that the number of personal life histories involved in the formation of this extensive network and in its daily operations over these twelve years far exceeds what is possible to incorporate here. The points of view of innumerable personalities important to the network, as well as the explanation of major events and ongoing projects will by necessity be left out. Therefore, the history presented in this chapter is at best a highly schematic portrayal of an immensely complex subject matter. That said, it does reflect a certain institutional narrative that was told to me and to others publicly during my time observing the network. In particular, while this history is culled from the personal accounts of numerous interviewees (most of whom repeated the same narrative), it largely draws from the longer interviews with Lenissa Lenza, Pablo Capilé, and Felipe Altenfelder, three prominent figures in the organization whom I introduced in the Introduction. These three individuals were gracious enough to grant multiple interviews over the months that I spent with them and at public events where we met.

I. The Beginning

Calango & the Search for Raison d'être

The story of Card predates Fora do Eixo by a few years. Card was a foray in economic experimentation that came out of a cultural collective called Espaço Cubo (Cubo Space)³⁶, which was comprised of a group of university-aged youth in the city of Cuiabá improvising ways to develop a local music scene. Cuiabá is the capital city of the

³⁶ When I speak of Espaço Cubo, I'm referring to the cultural collective that would later, in 2005, become part of Circuito Fora do Eixo. I will explain below the events that lead to this transition, but briefly here, Espaço Cubo is but one cultural collective, whereas Circuito Fora do Eixo is a *network of cultural collectives*, of which Espaço Cubo is one. In the text I alternate between both terms in the interest of historical accuracy. When I use Fora do Eixo, it is to denote events that happen post-2005, or as a general set of ideals that began with Espaço Cubo and that carried over to Fora do Eixo.

state of Mato Grosso, located in the Mid-West region of Brazil³⁷; it is a medium-size city for Brazil with approximately 570,000 inhabitants. Contrasting with the image of Brazil usually exported to the world—that of lush vegetation and tropical beaches—the flat and dry Mid-West is often considered the “ugly duckling” of Brazilian regions. It is also very much in the periphery of cultural production centers, with poor infrastructure for cultural events and little incentive for companies to invest in the region through the cultural incentive laws.

Two of the initial founders of Espaço Cubo, Pablo Capilé and Lenissa Lenza, met in 2000 while attending the Federal University of Cuiabá. Capilé and Lenza figure centrally to the history of Fora do Eixo, and although I suspect they would disagree with the use of the terms ‘leader’ and ‘power’, today they are undeniably the members with the most “*lastro*”, a term Fora do Eixo coined that describes something along the lines of “institutional clout”. At the time they met, both were enrolled in Communication programs and were active in the political side of student life, having been involved with the student and labor movements. Around 2002, Capilé, Lenza and eight others decided to broaden the scope of their political agenda beyond the university with the hope of making an impact in society. Although they had not quite figured out what their principal intervention would be, like many university-aged youth they possessed a vague notion of wanting to effect local social change. What they did know, as Lenza explains, was that the conventional post-university life of finding a job and working for a paycheck in the

³⁷ Brazil has twenty-seven states (including the Federal District) that are divided into five regions: North, North-East, South, South-East, and Mid-West. The Mid-west consists of the states of Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, and the Federal District.

pursuit of material goods did not appeal to them. To this end they decided to live collectively in a house and work towards their social goals, wherever that might lead.

At this time in Brazil an independent music scene was slowly beginning to emerge in the interior of the country and music festivals were the primary venue for independent bands to circulate and build an audience. Mato Grosso, however, was not on the map of independent festivals. Nevertheless, in 2001 acquaintances of Capilé and Lenza organized a festival in Cuiabá called *Calango*. Although Capilé and Lenza were not part of the production of the festival that first year, they soon played a larger role before eventually taking over its production. The *Calango* festival is an important chapter in the history of Espaço Cubo and Fora do Eixo as it is the event that put them on the map as serious cultural producers, while also serving as the laboratory for experiments with the Cubo Card. Today FDE produces, by some estimates, hundreds of festivals per year and Capilé claims that over thirty thousand musicians have played at FDE events.³⁸ *Calango* became Espaço Cubo's (and later Fora do Eixo's) biggest event of the year, until its final edition in 2010, and until another festival called *Grito Rock* (Scream Rock) took its place.

Despite the relative success and good reviews of *Calango* that first year, Tadiu Valerio, a prominent music journalist working for the Brazilian record label Paradoxx Music, wrote that it made little sense to host the festival on a yearly basis given the

³⁸ Just a few examples of the many festivals produced by Fora do Eixo in cities across Brazil in 2013 are: *Festival Goma* (Uberlândia); *Festival Rokería* (São Paulo); *Vaca Amarela* (Goiana); *Miralone* (São João del Rio); *Festival BeradeRO* (Porto Velho); *Alambique do Som* (Barbacena); *Festival Vós* (Santa Maria); *Goyazes Festival* (Porangutu); *Festival Quebarmar* (Macapá); *Drops Festival Mundo* (João Pessoa); *Canja* (Bauru); *Mogifonia* (Porto Ferreira), and many more. See: <http://foradoeixo.org.br/?s=FESTIVAL&submit=Pesquisar> (accessed August 14, 2014).

absence of a local music scene to cultivate and sustain audiences in Cuiabá. According to Lenza, this was the ‘aha!-moment’ when the young collective finally realized the shape that their intervention would take: they would dedicate themselves entirely to setting in motion a local music scene, while also working towards inserting culture more centrally into public debate. This public debate began and continues at the local level; however, it has now expanded to include a national debate.

My Vector for your Sound System

Espaço Cubo is the name the group of ten youth gave to the house they inhabited collectively. The year was 2002 and while they had not developed the idea of an alternative currency at this time, nor had they articulated the term “collective bank” (and would not identify as a solidarity economy until seven years later), together they agreed that any money henceforth generated would be deposited into a general house fund. In order to pay their bills during this initial period they relied on an assortment of channels including parental contributions—take for example Lenza’s parents, who sent a monthly stipend of R\$400 (\$200 U.S.). This practice carries on among some of the newer and younger members today, often with a degree of controversy. The controversy involves two common critiques of FDE. The first is that despite a desire to connect to underserved communities, that the majority of the FDE members, especially in the beginning, hailed from middle class parents who could support their children in such a way, which cast an aura of privilege on them. A case could very well be made that FDE would not have achieved all that it has if it had not been for their relatively privileged social position. The second critique is that in more than one instance idealistic youth, many of who

dropped out of university to join the network, have allowed the network to charge their parents' credit cards for expensive items such as new laptops, or in some instances have handed over to the network cars that parents have bought for their children.

Other founding members during that initial moment quit their jobs to delve full-time into the cause and contributed their final salaries to the general fund. At least two others who had experience working in recording studios were hired for free-lance jobs, the fees of which would be shared with the collective. Freelance assignments continue to be an important revenue source for the Fora do Eixo Economy, and it is one point where the network engages at times with the capitalist market. The jobs are usually related to media and cultural production; but also included workshops and lectures offered on an assortment of topics, such as solidarity economies, organizing festivals, mobilizing protests and more.

As a first step towards generating a music scene in Cuiabá, the young collective set up a practice space in the main room of the house for which they received a small fee from bands. On Sundays they opened their garage to host a free event where bands could play for an audience. These "Sundays at Cubo" remain as today a staple in Fora do Eixo's weekly cultural offerings in the eight houses they currently occupy across Brazil, with only a name change to "Sundays at Home". The event remains open to the general public and serves as a venue for lesser-known bands (including today international ones) to play for an audience.

The few bands that were playing in Cuiabá in 2002, according to Capilé, were primarily cover bands; which is to say they performed the music of other, more famous

bands. As bands increasingly spent time in Espaço Cubo's practice studio, however, they started developing original material and were soon requesting a place to record their own music. At this point Capilé, who grew up with well-to-do parents, traded his "Vector", a luxury car, for a recording system. In the many versions I have heard told about the organization's history, this moment always indexes the first instance of barter and trade. It is doubly compelling as a point of departure in that the barter is clearly not what one would normally deem a "fair" trade, if equivalence were quantified solely in monetary terms. But as part of an institutional origin story, this narrative represents Capilé shedding the materialism of his upper-middle class background and the beginning of a more qualitative register of value, one associated with principles of solidarity and non-individual gain rather than value quantified in relation to an abstract "universal equivalent", such as money.

As the months went by, the collective continued to barter for different services when confronted with new obstacles to their daily operations. Lenza recounts one particular episode when Espaço Cubo's electricity was shut off due to months of unpaid bills. A musician who regularly used the practice space approached them with a proposition: Allow his band to record two albums for free, and he would (illegally) reconnect the electricity to the hodgepodge of pirated cables in the street, a common practice in Brazil. In another instance, a band member who owned a graphic design shop traded flyers and posters for time in the studio. Trading services without the exchange of money—official or otherwise—is a vital practice to the FDE economy today, albeit on a much larger scale as FDE's roster of services multiplied with the increased talent and skill made available when more people joined the network.

At this very first stage, then, we see with Espaço Cubo a gesture towards what becomes the baseline of Fora do Eixo's orientation towards social action in an environment of limited economic resources: to find alternative and practical solutions that maximize the little resources that are indeed available. These solutions may or may not involve normative capitalist relations. As Felipe Altenfelder—a highly esteemed³⁹ member of the network today—explains FDE's mantra: act and carry on whether or not you have money. Economist and specialist in complementary currencies, Heloisa Primavera (2010), has collaborated with FDE and lends theoretical support to their orientation towards social action, making the point that when non-monetary exchange is seriously considered as an important element of an economy, *scarcity* quickly transforms to an *abundance* of resources.

The Zine Project & the Beginning of a Cycle of Grants

If in the beginning Espaço Cubo made a decision to focus on music over other forms of artistic expression, it was due to the close relationships they had with local musicians. Furthermore, practice space and a recording studio were what they had to offer. Yet from the initial stages the collective has always been open to other forms of social intervention. It is true that music production remains the cultural form most associated with Fora do Eixo, since the circuit of music festivals they organize across Brazil and abroad is, some would argue, vindication of their unconventional methods in

³⁹ I resisted here the urge to employ the term “high-ranking”, as FDE insists that it eschews hierarchies and notions of rank. Instead, they argue that their notion of “lastro” is more democratic way of organizing. I will interrogate the problems with claiming that “lastro” is void of hierarchies or relations of power in a subsequent chapter, but for now suffice it to say that Altenfelder has enough “lastro” to easily be considered the number three in charge, following Capilé and Lenza. Anecdotally, Altenfelder is indeed highly esteemed (one cannot achieve lastro without being so), and of all the interviews conducted, he was the only one to admit to me the existence of hierarchies in the organization.

sustaining a cultural economy. Yet music constitutes but one among a multitude of cultural and social activities in which they engage. The Zine Project is an example this, and although it no longer figures into the current activities of Fora do Eixo, it was often referenced in the retelling of the network's history since, I suppose, it demonstrates solidarity with local communities. I include it here as important mark in the economic trajectory of the collective as the first instance it won a large grant for a project.

The Zine project was a program that Lenza and Capilé (with backgrounds in Communication) developed on behalf of Espaço Cubo in 2003 for the public and private schools of Cuiabá. Zines are a common form of amateur news production; they are not specific to Brazil and usually involve a small circulation of self-published articles by nonprofessional writers that deal with a specific subject. They are modeled after magazines, but are smaller and usually reproduced on a photocopier. The Zine project offered workshops that trained high school youth to be journalists and to write about issues important to their lives and to their schools. As the project gained in popularity among the schools, the collective integrated their different projects by bringing musicians who played at Espaço Cubo to the schools, which helped the bands develop a fan base. Students began frequenting the weekly Sundays at Cubo and often conducted interviews with the musicians that would be included in the Zines.

According to Lenza, many of the students who participated in the Zine project went on to pursue university degrees in Communication. The project was recognized by the local Secretary of Culture and was selected for a private grant in the amount of

R\$10,000 (\$5,000 U.S.).⁴⁰ Since the Zine project was already set well in motion prior to the reward, the collective decided to invest this money in a small van.

The centrality of grants, both public and privately funded, to the Fora do Eixo Economy cannot be overemphasized. Over the course of the last decade, the network has received hundreds of thousands, if not millions of Reais through this channel of funding. It should be noted that the network's interaction with private funding entities puts FDE very much inside the capitalist economy.

Grito Rock (Scream Rock)

By 2003 Espaço Cubo had become a hub of cultural activity in Cuiabá. Their work in the schools with the Zine project further connected the collective to the community and made Espaço Cubo a meeting place for Cuiabá youth. In addition to the “Sundays at Cubo”, the collective initiated a series of monthly themed events that showcased hip-hop artists, rappers, and rock bands. They also organized cultural activities outside of the Espaço Cubo, often times in venues arranged through the local Department of Culture. By now the collective had also established important contacts with the independent music festival circuit in the neighboring state of Goiânia. The collective had truly made inroads towards achieving their goal of consolidating a cultural scene in the city.

At this point Espaço Cubo decided it was ready to host its very own festival. In February 2003, during the week of Carnaval, the members of Espaço Cubo launched the

⁴⁰ The grant was given by UniMed, a cooperative of medical professionals. The grant was awarded based on projects with social impact. See UniMed's website (in Portuguese): www.unimed.coop.br

first edition of *Grito Rock*. *Grito Rock* was envisioned as a substitute for Carnaval, especially for youth who preferred Rock music and its scene to the Samba or Bossa Nova music identified with Brazil's largest national festival. In this way, the festival was meant to empower the local bands. This fits in well with their intention to create a more inclusive cultural scene, given that Carnaval is less associated with the interior regions of Brazil than it is with the population of Rio de Janeiro, Salvador de Bahia, and other coastal towns. Furthermore, cultural forms such as Samba and Bossa Nova often take the mantle for what is considered "Brazilian" over other non-mainstream forms such as Tecnobrega, Rio Funk, or even Rock.⁴¹

The first *Grito Rock* festival featured regional local bands and earned the collective a small profit of R\$1000 (\$500 U.S.), money which they invested in equipment for the practice space. While *Grito Rock* started rather modestly, it eventually replaced *Calango* as Fora do Eixo's largest yearly music festival. The network is currently boasting that *Grito Rock* 2014 is being hosted in 400 cities across 40 countries, including those as unexpected and varied as Greece and Nepal.⁴²

Artist Fees and the Rise of Cubo Card

Despite having won the UniMed grant for the Zine Project, 2003 and 2004 were particularly tough financial years for Espaço Cubo. Forced to relocate to a smaller house out of the center of the city and unable to fill their new van with gas, they were often

⁴¹ Ethnomusicologist Hermano Vianna has made that point that cultural forms such as Samba or Bossa Nova export an image Brazil as unified, obscuring the deeply entrenched social inequality that still exists in the country.

⁴² That *Grito Rock* occurs in countries and cities with such distant and different contexts than Brazil has been a point of critique, and it is something that I will touch upon later. It should be noted, as well, that 2014's numbers are exactly ten countries and one hundred cities more than 2013's numbers, suggesting a somewhat flexible relationship to accuracy in reporting.

stranded. By accounts told by Lenza and Capilé, they went hungry during much of this period.

While actually living hand-to-mouth, however, Espaço Cubo's reputation as successful cultural producers gave the appearance that the collective was in a stable financial situation. After all, they had produced the two largest music festivals ever hosted in Cuiabá, not to mention that Espaço Cubo charged entrance fees at many of its events, and almost always controlled the bar. All clues suggested that the collective was making profit for itself. This is important to the discussion at hand because it gave rise to what became an ongoing and divisive criticism levied against Fora do Eixo; and it throws into question their very claim to solidarity: that is, the issue of artist fees. Up until this point, Espaço Cubo had not been remunerating musicians or bands that played these events. Yet if the events were profitable, argued the musicians, to not redistribute resources would fly in the face of principles of that solidarity. In the collective's view, they were delivering these bands an audience that would be unavailable to them otherwise. Money could be earned in other ways; such as through the sale of CD's, merchandise, or future shows especially as a band's fan base grew.

Importantly, however, Capilé makes the case that during that period they simply could not afford to pay the bands because, despite appearances, these events were usually not profitable as their expenses far outweighed the revenue. As Capilé explains:

To get 200 people to a show, you had to call 8 bands...to get their friends and family to fill the place. Of those 200 people, only 80 paid the entrance fee. 120 were friends of the band. So 80 times R\$5 (\$2.50 U.S.), which is what it cost to get in, gave us R\$400 (\$200 U.S.). From the bar, we got another R\$400 (\$200 U.S.). So that was R\$800 (\$400 U.S.). The sound system alone cost us R\$1000 (\$500 U.S.)!

So we were in a situation in which we were owing money. [...] We were living with the electricity and the water cut off, attached to the [illegal] system. It was difficult to be able to pay the bands at that time. And we didn't have enough evident victories ... that our discourse of a solidarity network that would run through all of Brazil, was solid enough for them to believe in. The people didn't believe in that discourse, ... well a part of them believed, but the majority of bands found it hard to believe.

The musicians nevertheless continued to push back against Espaço Cubo's explanation, and disparaging rumors were spread around town, jeopardizing the collective's reputation. Bands accused them of not wanting to pay artist fees despite the collective's apparent growth and economic power.

It was in response to the demands of the musicians to receive a performance fee that Espaço Cubo conceived of an alternative currency. While they could not pay the bands in Reais they could offer them services: such as labor and time in the studio, or alternatively the bands could redeem the currency for beer and food at the shows. Therefore, the Cubo Card was originally envisioned as a system of credit that would allow bands to invest in their careers. Although it would not become a physical currency until 2008 this arrangement initially satisfied the bands according to Lenza because it offered them a way to pay for services that would be out of reach at normal market price. At minimum, it would have taken band members much longer to save up the official money needed to pay for them.

Cubo Card, and the barter and trade system more generally, was never meant to fully replace the Real, but rather it was a way to optimize resources needed to operationalize and sustain a cultural scene in Cuiabá. Though they had not connected this to any theoretical paradigm at the time, this sentiment echoes Belgian economist Bernard Lietaer's conceptualization of "complementary currencies", a term he coined.

Such currencies for Lietaer, “complement official currencies because they enable useful socioeconomic flows that would otherwise run dry if the official currencies were the only options available,” (as summarized by Hirota 2009, 75). The use of the Cubo Card lent a degree of stability to the collective since the money saved could be allocated to paying other expenses such as transportation fees, or spent on food and rent for the members of Espaço Cubo. While they still experienced levels of economic hardship (Fora do Eixo continues to experience financial ups and downs), adopting this alternative form of exchange allowed the collective to advance in the production of events at an accelerated pace, and in the face of obstacles that would have otherwise obstructed their ability to act.

Although the Cubo Card became the central representation of this alternative cultural economy, equally important to the viability of the economy was shifting conceptions about the role of the artist/musician and labor relations at the festivals. Contrary to the conventional practice of artists simply showing up for a gig and playing a set in front of an audience, Espaço Cubo asked band members to integrate into the production side of the event and contribute labor or whatever in-kind services they could offer behind the scenes. Band members might also act in the role of security at the festivals, as stagehands, as sound engineers, as drivers. They may trade in-kind services such as printing flyers, and so forth. And they would accept payment in Cubo Cards. Therefore, in addition to offering a complementary currency, it was also about implementing an ideological approach that diverged from the notion of artist as a privileged citizen.

Bankruptcy & Expansion

Given that the members of Espaço Cubo lacked any sort of training in economics, it should come as little surprise that there was a steep learning curve to this new economic arrangement; it was a new experience for everyone involved. If for the bands the added value of the Cubo Card was an investment in advancing their careers through practicing and recording tracks, according to Lenza this lesson was initially lost on them. Many of them spent their Cubo Cards almost entirely on beer at the festivals. When the members of Espaço Cubo encouraged the bands to dedicate more time to their music and less on beer, the collective soon realized that they had parceled out far too many credits, more than they would be able to make good on. Suddenly they were completely overbooked as bands vied for practice space and recording sessions. The collective could not keep up with demand and in effect went “bankrupt”. In hindsight, Lenza and Capilé joke today that they received a quick lesson in hyperinflation.

This lesson was not lost on the collective and forced them to be extra meticulous in accounting and to take their alternative economy more seriously. They also realized that sustaining an economy based on trading of services would require broadening the scale of participants by enlisting the involvement of people around the city and establishing partnerships beyond the bands and their immediate circle of friends. It was at this time that they devised the first version of the “Cubo Bank”, as a registry of credits that included a list of available services.

As a result of better systematization interest in the Cubo Card grew. And as a larger pool of people integrated into the system of trade a wider variety of services was

offered for exchange, including to people outside of the collective. According to Lenza, people wanted to participate in the exchange because they realized it was useful. Event photographers, for example, agreed to receive Cubo Cards as payment, while a taxi service agreed to partial payment. With outside businesses, rarely were transactions paid *fully* in Cubo Card, but rather they were paid a percentage of what was owed in Card, helping to maximize and redistribute the scarce resources available. This was important because while a greater number of people were participating in the system, by no means was the complementary currency accepted as payment for the entirety of the collective's operational expenses. This is why the capture of Reais has always been part of, and indeed imperative to the future of the collective.

Eventually several shops agreed to trade in Cubo Cards, including a hip-hop and skateboard clothing store owned by local Paolo Ávila. Ávila paid R\$500 (\$250 U.S.) to Espaço Cubo to be the exclusive ticket vendor for special events and festivals, and his store would appear on posters as an official sponsor. This further benefited the business by bringing in concertgoers, many of whom would browse and purchase merchandise. As part of the arrangement the shop would accept a portion of the cost for merchandise in Cubo Card. Ávila, in turn, could exchange Cubo Cards at another location, such as for example a DVD store that also took part in the alternative market, or trade Cubo Cards as payment for other services like the taxi company and at participating restaurants.

The relationship that was established between Ávila and Espaço Cubo at that time in Cuiabá has endured, albeit in another capacity that warrants an additional comment here. Ávila is a rap artist who goes by the moniker *Linha Dura* ("Hard Line").

I met and interviewed him in São Paulo where he currently lives with Fora do Eixo. Ávila is an Afro-Brazilian from a favela in Cuiabá who has collaborated for many years with CUFA (Centro Única das Favelas), an organization that works with disadvantaged and poor youth in favelas and other marginalized communities in at least fifty cities across Brazil. Active since the 1990s, CUFA is relatively famous in Brazil and has developed youth programs in music, art, theatre, sports, video, Internet and other activities. Ávila is highly respected in FDE as he created an important alliance between the network, CUFA and the Afro-Brazilian youth from the favelas, who have historically been among the most disaffected and disadvantaged youth group in Brazil. He is currently trying to bring the “social technologies” of FDE, including its complementary currency, to the favelas of São Paulo. Ávila gives “street credit” and broadens the image to FDE, which has long been accused of being predominantly middle class. And while today the network is made up of a fairly diverse social composition, and black and mixed-race individuals hold positions of influence, at that time FDE was also predominantly white. As such, they have always been eager to promote cultural forms representative of Afro-Brazilian youth culture, such as Baile Funk, tecnobrega, and rap, and to make connections with favela communities because if it is claiming to make social and cultural interventions, race and class are prominent issues in Brazilian society. For FDE to be taken seriously in its objective to push for social justice and change necessitates engagement with Brazil’s long entrenched structures of racism and prejudice. Favelas, as diverse a population as they are in terms of racial mixtures and local iterations of class, are arguably where these structures are rendered most visible.

As the Cubo Card began to create a buzz, it even caught the attention of the local

public officials. Lenza recounts that the Secretary of Culture of Cuiabá joined the experiment and negotiated an exchange: for every R\$100 (\$50 U.S.) the Secretary of Culture invested, it received 300 Cubo Cards to trade for in services. Perhaps the most interesting part of this transaction between the collective and the Secretary is not the seeming arbitrariness with which they arrived at an equivalence of exchange (Espaço Cubo, we should remember, was still in the experimental phase of its new currency) but rather that it reflects the highly isolated and contextualized nature of the alternative economy. Like all of the trading partnerships offered as examples here, the negotiation of exchange relies on local relationships and is made on a case-by-case basis. In these highly localized scenarios Cubo Card's value is trade itself, especially trade based on solidarity. It is instrumental, attached to use-value more so than an abstract exchange value.

There is a further interesting element to note in this economic arrangement with the local officials, which is that the participation of the local Secretary of Culture contributed an added value of social capital in the Bourdieuan sense, in that it conferred a level of state legitimacy to the currency. For Bourdieu, capital refers to more than economic capital; it also includes the value of social networks that enable individuals, or in FDE's case, organizations, to mobilize cultural authority. Bourdieu writes, "social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition," (1992, 119). While it might be exaggerated to suggest that Espaço Cubo's relationship to the local political establishment of Cuiabá was durable and institutionalized at this point in time, it is

nevertheless true that the collective, and later the Fora do Eixo network, has over the years put concerted effort into securing such long standing relationships. And they have reaped many social and economic benefits from relationships with the state at both local and national levels, such as in the form of grants, which I later address. The point here is that establishing an economic relationship with the local Secretary of Culture put into motion a process by which, in a relatively short time, Card's value would extend beyond its immediate and local use-value in trade to also include social and cultural capital that, as I show in Chapter 4, FDE parlays into economic capital.

Today the Cubo Card does not exist as such, but is rather the Fora do Eixo Card or just Card. It is a complicated monetary system to understand, especially from the outside. There are many reasons for this. When speaking of Card people generally assume that it is one currency that extends across the network. Yet, Capilé explains that the network has resisted a centralization of Card since the point is to stimulate local circulation and production of culture. Rather, he explains, they have taught the collectives how to devise their own version of Card. There are Capilé estimates, around thirty different local versions of Card. This can make tracking all of the Cards in circulation—whether earned or traded, in its material or in its symbolic form—an extremely challenging task, and likely accounts for one of the reasons FDE has resisted disclosing how much money flows through the network on a yearly basis. They simply do not know. I further believe that the complexity of navigating between local and network wide economic arrangements has at times created situations in which local agreements have not been fulfilled. This explains why the network's credibility has suffered in recent years, something that will be discussed in a section below.

Consolidation of Circuito Fora do Eixo

By 2005 Espaço Cubo's experiment in stimulating local culture through alternative means had far exceeded their initial goals. The music scene in Cuiabá was "*bombando*" (a colloquial word Fora do Eixo frequently uses to describe its events, which translates to something along the lines of "off-the-hook"). Bands from the area were making a name for themselves and increasingly more were popping up. According to Capilé the number of bands in Cuiabá grew from five in 2002 to about fifty in 2005, and despite its over half a million inhabitants, it was difficult to keep up with the bands' demand to play in front of a live audience. The scene was beginning to outgrow the limits of this medium-size Brazilian city.

The third edition of Calango occurred in 2005 and, according to Lenza, it had truly become a festival of professional quality. Its activities, moreover, involved much more than three days of music; Calango involved a week of cultural events that extended to various parts of the city, such as communication and production workshops offered at local schools (*Calango Escola*). Lenza jokingly claims that the whole of Cuiabá was "taken over" by Calango and, she further asserts, the local community by and large looked forward to and benefitted from the event. Importantly, included in the roster of activities that year was what ultimately became an essential and recurring feature of Fora do Eixo festivals: the incorporation of serious political debates, panels and roundtable discussions about cultural policy, social change, and the future of independent music in Brazil. Musicians and producers came from all over Brazil to participate. With a daily attendance of over ten thousand spectators, Calango (and Cuiabá) officially secured itself a place on the national map of independent music festivals in Brazil.

Espaço Cubo was also starting to earn a modest profit from its events. At festivals such as Calango, the collective was both experimenting with their alternative economy while also participating in what can be considered a traditional capitalist music market. That is to say, they were paying artists with Cubo Cards, seeking out sponsorships in the form of products and services (food, drink, transportation, security and so forth) rather than money, while at the same time charging entrance fees and generating money from the sale of ancillary goods. All of these methods were necessary for profit to be made. In kind donations such as food and beer allowed the collective to offer meals to artists who could use Cubo Cards at food stands, but also secured the network a bit of money when the same food and beer was sold to the general public. It is perhaps important to underscore here that profit in this context does not refer to surplus accumulation of capital, but rather to the ability to reinvest in the sustainability of the not-for-profit collective.

Inspired by the success of Calango, Espaço Cubo decided to venture out of Mato Grosso in search of partners who shared the same vision of fortifying local cultural scenes and who would be interested in participating in their alternative economy. Collaborating with cultural producers beyond the state borders would provide musicians from Cuiabá a potential circuit of new venues and audiences for which to perform. Likewise, bands from other states could also play in Cuiabá. The members of Espaço Cubo embarked on a tour of independent festivals hosted by collectives across Brazil, often traversing thousands of miles on buses to arrive at places as distant as Rio Branco in the western most state of Acre (next to Amazonas), Belém in the state of Pará, or Fortelza in the state of Ceará (1400 miles from Cuiabá). While each collective had its

own mission they converged in the desire to stimulate local bands and work outside of mainstream channels. However, none had developed the idea of an alternative cultural economy bolstered by a complementary currency. According to Capilé and Lenza, this was what made Espaço Cubo so compelling to the other collectives. The members of Espaço Cubo offered their labor and knowhow in the production of the events such as *Jambalada* in Minas Gerais, *Festival Veradoro* in Rio Branco, *Purando Rock* in Brasilia, *Festival Demosul* in Paraná, among others. At every stop along the way the collectives exchanged ideas and explored options on how to best pool intellectual, technical and financial resources such that they could produce and sustain a circuit of music festivals outside the São Paulo—Rio de Janeiro axis.

By December 2005 a group of collectives from the cities of Cuiabá (Mato Grosso), Londrina (Paraná), and Uberlândia (Minas Gerais) formed the network called Circuito Fora do Eixo (Circuit Outside the Axis, or simply Fora do Eixo). They would focus on three areas: 1) The production of content; 2) the distribution of content and; 3) the circulation of bands.

II. The Fora do Eixo Economy

The consolidation of the Fora do Eixo network meant an expansion of services available for the diverse economy that Espaço Cubo had been experimenting with for about three years. With it also came an increase in cultural activities associated with the network and, subsequently, a wider fan base. In Cuiabá even more youth were drawn to Espaço Cubo, charmed by the idea of the alternative social and economic arrangements that the collective promoted. Membership in the collective (now part of the Fora do Eixo

network) grew⁴³, and with it the willingness of local businesses to take part in their form of exchange. Beyond festival sponsorship businesses began donating outright to Espaço Cubo in the form of office supplies, desks, chairs, computers, printers and more, while hotels and restaurants found it beneficial to offer discounts and accept partial payment in Card.

Why, we might ask, would businesses be willing to partake in this alternative economy? The connection between the increase in youth working with Espaço Cubo and increased interest in businesses willing to collaborate is not random. While it is likely that some businesses found the idea of a complementary currency and trade compelling in and of itself, joining this form of economic exchange also gave businesses access to a larger membership of young consumers who would likely rather support businesses collaborating with their cause.

An equally relevant factor that should not escape our consideration is the communal ties in a small city like Cuiabá; it speaks to the social and cultural spheres that Polanyi argued are intertwined with economic relationships. Many of the business owners were parents of the same youth working with Espaço Cubo. In at least one instance the collective organized dental and health insurance for its members, thanks to the involvement of children of dentists and doctors. Furthermore, the close ties that it held with the Secretary of Culture, as mentioned above, gave them distinction. Yet the highly local nature of this form of exchange has its limits as well, especially given the

⁴³ By membership I am referring to those who are living in the house and/or working with the collective. Many members began working part-time while attending university or holding other jobs. Dropping out of university in order to join the network, however, is not un-common and it is even promoted within Fora do Eixo (to the chagrin of many parents) as in their view the network offers a more practical education. This is, in part, what is meant by the University Fora do Eixo. More on that below.

geographic reach of the network today. The case-by-case agreements required for the economy to flourish, as mentioned previously, are hard to establish on a broader scale. It was a lack of relationships with local business owners, and a notable lack of clout, that eventually caused problems for Fora do Eixo upon their arrival in São Paulo. In the meantime, however, the FDE economy continued to establish trading partnerships locally, offering increasingly more services as the network grew, and equally as important, they carried on trading knowledge, technical assistance and labor internally among themselves.

Calango “upgrades”

By the 4th edition of Calango in 2006, the network’s economy and alternative system of exchange began to bear fruit. During this festival organized exclusively now by Fora do Eixo, the bartering exchanges with hotels and restaurants had become easier thanks to the credibility of the FDE economy at that time. Lenza explains what a hypothetical arrangement with a hotel or a restaurant might look like: If a hotel bill for the entire festival amounted to R\$30,000 (\$15,000 U.S.), the hotel would agree to accept 10% of the fee in Card. Of this amount, 30% would be traded for media services, while the other percentage would be redeemed from the list of services offered by the network. The remaining 90% would be paid for in official money, but the 10% saved could be allocated elsewhere. Similarly, a restaurant might agree to accept Cards in the following way: The restaurant would be included on the flyers as official sponsor of the festival and Fora do Eixo would deliver the musicians and production crew to the restaurant for every meal during the week of the festival. The restaurant would accept payment in

Cubo Cards. At the end of the festival, a percentage of Cards would be paid for in services according to the needs of the restaurant owner, which might include graphic design projects like creating new menus or advertisements. FDE could also provide a film and editing crew to produce a commercial. While social media was still an emerging technological platform at this point, today a highly popular service is the management of a business's Twitter and Facebook accounts to maintain better communication with their customer base. The rest of the Cards would be exchanged for Reais.

While the alternative system of exchange began to broaden its scope and the bartered exchanges became more common, it must be said that such exchanges did not always work out to the satisfaction of all who participated. This is not uncommon in systems of barter and exchange, despite a tendency to idealize local economic relationships that operate outside of capitalism. Writing about a very different historical period, David Murray (2000) discusses power relations in economies of exchange between colonial settlers and North American Indians and attempts to dispel the commonly held assumption that trading outside of the capitalist system, in his case the pre-capitalist system, necessarily produces harmonious exchange. He calls these assumptions "fictions of accord", meaning that not every exchange always left both parties feeling completely satisfied with the equality of the transaction. This has sometimes been the case with Fora do Eixo's alternative economy. For example, one dissatisfied restaurant owner was interviewed on national television last August during the weeks when the swell of criticisms against FDE following the appearance on the television program *Roda Viva* reached its peak. The restaurant owner's grievance was certainly justified: He showed the camera the pile of over C\$10,000 (Card) that he had

accepted as part of an agreement during a music festival. A year later, he had not heard back from the network despite various attempts to contact them. If we take Fora do Eixo's formula, R\$1 equals C\$1, C\$10,000 therefore amounts to R\$10,000 (\$5,000 U.S.), a significant sum of money for any small business owner.

This particular situation also points to some of the problems that arise when currency is not a universal equivalent, expressed in an abstract exchange value, but is rather tied to the specific use-value. In his seminal book *The Philosophy of Money*, George Simmel (2004) argues that money, as an institution, works because of faith in its redeemability at some point in the future. An instance like that of the restaurant owner cast doubt on Fora do Eixo's ability to come through on its promise to fulfill its part of the exchange, and in so doing de-values Card (and also the Fora do Eixo "social movement"). In contrast to Marx for whom money alienated individuals as it broke down communal ties, for Simmel money in the form of a universal equivalent was liberating precisely because it freed individuals from certain bonds that require future transactions and that limit mobility. The point to make here is that the tension between fostering economic relationships based on community bonds and always coming through on agreements has not been fully resolved within the Fora do Eixo Economy.

However, at this point in 2006 the idea of an experimental alternative economy based on solidarity held allure. The solidarity economy discourse was particularly appealing to local and national government funding institutions, a point that was not lost on Fora do Eixo as the network became quite adept at foregrounding the discourse to secure greater social and economic capital. This edition of Calango received a huge

boost in state sponsorship. While Calango had always received funding and in-kind donations of some sort, in 2006 it received an “upgrade”, as Lenza puts it, in the amount of R\$100,000 (\$50,000 U.S.) from the Cultural Incentive Laws. “Upgrade” is a term that Fora do Eixo has adopted and uses frequently (in English) to connote an improvement of some sort in their social technologies.⁴⁴ In Chapter 2, I explained that Fora do Eixo’s use of social technology refers to a systematized collection of techniques, methods and practices that are geared toward solving certain social and institutional problems. “Upgrade” is another good example of how the network appropriates terminology connected to digital technology within its own discourse. For Internet applications or software programs to ‘upgrade’ suggests improvements made to the system, which usually includes additional features, speed and efficiency. In this case, Lenza refers the extra influx of state money as an improvement to Calango, which it views as social technology.

From that moment forward every festival produced by Fora do Eixo would receive at least some portion of funding through grants. By 2008 Petrobras, Brazil’s largest semi-private oil company, joined as a contributor of Calango with R\$160,000 (\$80,000 U.S.), while the local Secretary of Culture and the national Ministry of Culture contributed between them R\$100,000 (\$50,000 U.S.) The festival also received more modest, though by no means irrelevant, local grants totaling another R\$7,500 (\$3,750 U.S.). Additionally, Brazil’s largest beer company *Ambev* donated 10,000 beers to the 2008 event.

⁴⁴ In Chapter 2, I explained Fora do Eixo’s use of social technology as referring to a systematized collection of techniques, methods and practices that are geared toward solving certain social and institutional problems.

While its complementary currency is arguably the most novel aspect of Fora do Eixo's diverse economy, especially when examined in relation to other alternative and solidarity economies, it would nevertheless be hard to exaggerate the centrality of grants to the network's economic viability. The capture of these funds is so important to the sustainability of the network that today dozens of Fora do Eixo members dedicate themselves full time to monitoring for grant announcements and submitting project proposals. Grants, including those sponsored through the Cultural Incentive Laws, constitute a portion of virtually every project that Fora do Eixo is involved with: whether festivals, conferences, online television programs, or simply the daily operations of the Fora do Eixo houses. The chart below, pulled from FDE's website, represents the total yearly influx of money into the network vis-à-vis grants over a three year period. While specific institutions and projects are not identified, the numbers nevertheless offer an idea of the relatively large sum of money that comes in through grants alone.⁴⁵

Table 1: Influx of Grant Money 2010-2012

	Grants Applied For	Amount Solicited	Amount Captured
2010	127	Not provided	R\$ 2,242,436 (\$1,121,218 U.S.)
2011	112	Not provided	R\$ 3,027,397 (\$1,513,698 U.S.)
2012	122	R\$ 24,919,012 (\$12,495,506 U.S.)	R\$ 5,064,404 (\$2,532,202 U.S.)

Fora do Eixo has developed a degree of expertise at this type of resource capture,

⁴⁵ <http://foradoeixo.org.br/> (accessed Sept 2, 2014).

a skill that has often produced resentment from other organizations competing for the same pool of money. This resentment has given rise to further accusations that FDE uses its privileged position and relationship with local Secretaries and the national Ministry of Culture to design the very grants that it then applies for, obviously leaving the other applicants with an unfair disadvantage due to, as Garland (2013) points out, overlapping ideology. While Fora do Eixo denies doing this, it exercises mastery in this form of funding. And it has undeniably benefitted in many ways, including financially, from its close relationships with state officials.

State Relations

Fora do Eixo has always displayed a particular savvy at establishing partnerships with the local Secretaries and national Ministry of Culture (MinC), and leveraging these relationships for the economic and political goals of the organization. Such proximity to government officials has raised criticisms about how much influence one has over the other, and it has been argued that FDE benefits with unfair advantage when capturing state funds. Moreover, as FDE rose in prominence, groups have often tied these close relationships to political ambitions of the organization, and in particular of Pablo Capilé. And while FDE has always claimed a distance from any one political party, its stated principles align closely with the Labor Party (PT). It is the PT with which FDE has sustained the most consistent relationship, although the network also maintains close working ties with the Green Party (PV). Espaço Cubo and Fora do Eixo came of age during a period when the MinC, headed by Gilberto Gil and Juca Ferreira (both of the PV), was dedicated to a wider distribution of state resources to local and grass roots

initiatives across Brazil. This redistribution was implemented through the cultural policy programs such as Cultura Viva and the Cultural Points program that I discussed in the Introduction. FDE would go on to form a very close relationship with Ferreira, campaigning for his bid to be the Secretary of Culture of São Paulo, a position he sought and won following his tenure in the national Ministry. FDE meets regularly with Ferreira at his office in São Paulo.⁴⁶

Back in Cuiabá, Espaço Cubo actively sought out partnerships and sponsorships from the local Secretary of Culture since the very beginning. The local Secretary of Culture began contributing in a variety of ways to Espaço Cubo, and as previously mentioned, the Secretary himself partook in the circulation of Cubo Cards. While it did not fund the first editions of Grito Rock, the Secretary of Culture provided venue space and sound equipment. When in 2006 Lenza was hired to direct a music video for a nationally renowned band called Vanguard, it was the Secretary of Culture that provided the camera equipment.⁴⁷ The local government agency also contributed significant funds to the FDE annual conferences, which began in 2008.

Espaço Cubo's close ties to and support of political candidates once landed Lenza a state salaried position. In 2006, when a member of the Worker's Party, Mario Limpo, was appointed as the new municipal Secretary of Culture following local elections carried by the PT, he appointed Lenza to the directorship of a recently inaugurated local museum—the Museum of Sound and Image (MISC).⁴⁸ The directorship came with a

⁴⁶ Fora do Eixo's relationships with local Secretaries and national Ministries of Culture have not always been so cushy, a point that will be explained in another chapter.

⁴⁷ The video can be found on youtube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeQL6VCxFos>.

⁴⁸ http://www.camaracba.mt.gov.br/index.php?pag=tur_item&id=19 (accessed January 10, 2014).

monthly salary of around R\$1,800 (\$900 U.S.), which went to the general fund thereby endowing the collective with a modicum of economic security. While it may seem like nepotism, Limpo was acting in accordance with the directive coming from the Gil's Ministry of Culture in Brasilia; Espaço Cubo and Fora do Eixo were precisely the type of local cultural initiatives that it sought to bolster in mission to redistribute public funds. The collective, in turn, invited multiple other cultural collectives to occupy the building with them and to share in the office and exhibition space.

The work at the MISC gave Lenza and Espaço Cubo/FDE greater exposure to a broader network of collectives, resulting in a huge boom of new collaborators. If in 2005 FDE was founded by three collectives in three cities (Cuiabá, Londrina, Uberlândia), by 2007 more than forty collectives had joined Fora do Eixo. This exposure also increased their opportunities not only to cash in on the Cultural Incentive Laws, but also to get hired as consultants. Cultural producers and academics throughout Brazil, such as ethnomusicologist Hermano Vianna, or Kuru Lima (producer of the Vivo Connection festival, sponsored by one of Brazil's largest telecommunications company, Vivo) began to contract Lenza, Capilé and others involved in the network to give lectures and workshops. This lecture circuit continues to provide a consistent stream of money for the network, and the number of individuals capable of speaking on behalf of FDE has increased considerably. Around this time, Capilé became an Ashoka Fellow for his role in "social entrepreneurship" and problem solving abilities and was awarded R\$8,100 (\$4,050 U.S.) every three months for two years.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ From their website: "Ashoka is the largest network of social entrepreneurs worldwide, with nearly 3,000 Ashoka Fellows in 70 countries putting their system changing ideas into practice on a global scale."

The work at MISC in Cuiabá also allowed Espaço Cubo, now billed as Fora do Eixo, to take on another cultural venue in Cuiabá called the *Casa de Shows* (House of Shows); wherein a steady stream of musicians played weekly from Thursday to Sunday evenings. The *Casa de Shows* became Fora do Eixo's third largest production, following *Calango* and *Grito Rock*. By 2009 the roster also included international bands from across South America.

Today the network continues to secure working ties with the Labor Party. In 2013, Lóris "Alpha" Canhetti, a Fora do Eixo member living in the house in Brasilia, was approached and offered an internship as part of the communication team for the Cultural Commission of Brazil's Chamber of Deputies (similar to the House of Representatives in the U.S.). She resides in the FDE house and commutes to work daily. Her salary of R\$1,800 (\$900 U.S.) is deposited in the general fund. Neither FDE nor Canhetti sought out this job opportunity; the fact that she was approached suggests a confidence in FDE to represent a sector of the population that deals with alternative and youth culture, and further elucidates the level of social capital they had achieved at that time. At the very least, it points to the growing relevance of the network in debating cultural and communication policies in Brazil.

Fora do Eixo Conference

The annual Fora do Eixo Conferences began in 2008 as a forum within which to

Founded by Bill Drayton in 1980, Ashoka has provided start-up financing, professional support services, and connections to a global network across the business and social sectors, and a platform for people dedicated to changing the world. Ashoka launched the field of social entrepreneurship and has activated multi-sector partners across the world who increasingly look to entrepreneurial talent and new ideas to solve social problems." <https://www.ashoka.org/about> (accessed November 9, 2013).

collectively work out the kinks and systematize their social technologies and “applications”, and to subsequently trade this knowledge amongst themselves and with outside collectives as part of the ideal of solidarity. According to Marielle Ramirez, one of the initial members of Espaço Cubo, “applications” are considered another form of management tool, which is to say, “they are social technologies that streamline the relationship between the network and the other Fora do Eixo nodes.” More so than at the political debates that accompany their music festivals, the FDE Conference is the yearly event in which the network self-reflects, forges new relationships, discusses its ideologies, considers new directions and sets an agenda and for the upcoming year. FDE is an intensely dynamic network that goes through mutations in response to the cultural and social challenges that arise in Brazil. In this light, the annual Conference has proven to be a platform for both institutional fine-tuning as well as for reinvention. For example, as a result of discussions held at the first Conference in 2008, the network agreed to increase the amount of energy aimed at stimulating other forms of cultural production and media exchange beyond music that had become equally important to them. Thus was launched SEDA (Audio-Visual Week), an initiative that sought to circulate films throughout remote communities in Brazil, many of which did not have theaters.

During that same conference Card was finally launched as a physical currency for the first time, something that Lenza claims gave it a deeper degree of legitimacy. It is not fully clear why exactly Card in physical form imparted more legitimacy on a currency that was never envisioned to be attached to a universal equivalent, and Lenza did not elaborate. However we can acknowledge that the materiality of bills somehow approximates or even mirrors the way that Reais circulate. That is to say that perhaps it

is more familiar and at times easier to deal with cash than with having to register and keep track of credits. Today, however, Card seldom circulates in material form except within music festivals. Regardless, it was a celebrated moment within the context of the conference. And it was at the 2009 Conference that FDE began to identify itself as part of a national movement of solidarity economies. They brought in two prominent academics who were writing about solidarity economies in Brazil, Ioshiaqui Shimbo and Paul Singer. Shimbo and Singer helped FDE develop its Statement of Principles at the FDE Conference, and Singer went on to become the Director of the National Secretary of Solidarity Economies (SENAES), housed within the Ministry of Labor and Employment in Brazil's capitol.

The annual FDE Conferences are worthy of note for several reasons. First, they clearly illuminate the rapid, even exponential, growth of the network. According to Capilé and Lenza, thirty people participated in the first FDE Conference in Cuiabá. The second FDE Conference, held in 2009 in the distant state of Acre (bordering Peru, next to the Amazon rainforest), attracted approximately ninety people. This nearly quadrupled to over 350 attendees at the 2010 Conference, which took place at the Federal University of Uberlândia (in the state of Minas Gerais). And by 2011, over 1,500 people participated in the Conference, hosted at the recently inaugurated Fora do Eixo house in São Paulo. While it is important not to overemphasize this as a national phenomenon that encompasses every sector of society, or that it has become mainstream among the general Brazilian public; it nevertheless demonstrates a growing interest among a certain section of the population in reimagining economic relationships to culture and in the very possibility of social transformation founded on the principles of solidarity that Fora do

Eixo was promoting.

Secondly, the Fora do Eixo Conference offers yet another glimpse at the complex economy of the network, while also touching upon the sensitive issue of how much control funding entities have in constraining the network's agenda—or perhaps less obviously, how much the funding entities reflect the values embodied in FDE's activism. The first three FDE Conferences were not funded, so Fora do Eixo included them within the program of activities of specific music festivals that had received funding, thereby allowing them to host two events in one. For example, the third FDE Conference coincided with the Jambalada festival, which had received an R\$90,000 (\$45,000 U.S.) grant from *Cultura y Pensamento*, a national program organized by the MinC. By 2011 in São Paulo, however, the Conference stood alone, receiving R\$160,000 (\$80,000 U.S.) from the foundation wing of Vale do Rio Doce Corporation, a mining company voted the worst company in the world for two consecutive years by environmental organizations. A further R\$140,000 (\$70,000 U.S.) was received from SABESP, the largest waste-management company in the world.⁵⁰ The financial support of these two companies, both with a history of ethically dubious business practices, casts light on an instance of seeming contradiction in Fora do Eixo which its critics have been quick to point out. There is an unresolved tension in accepting funding from corporations whose practices run contrary to an organization's stated ideals. Fora do Eixo also once earned disapproval when receiving sponsorship from Coca-Cola for an event, due to the company's poor human rights record in the global south: for example, its role in causing

⁵⁰ <http://www.vale.com/EN/Pages/Landing.aspx>; <http://site.sabesp.com.br/site/>. These are both controversial companies.

extreme water shortages in countries like India where supplies are scarce or its collusion with paramilitary “death squads” in Colombia that target union leaders at its bottling plant. It could be argued that there is a level of approval and even complicity in these acts when benefitting financially from the very corporations committing those same acts. After receiving criticism, FDE once stopped short of naming a popular music festival after its major sponsor, Oi, a telecommunications company in Brazil.

Shift in Institutional Identity

At the 2010 annual Conference in Uberlândia discussion further centered upon the question of institutional identity. Fora do Eixo had been working closely with local politicians since at least 2007; and by 2010 the organization had clearly transitioned from a cultural network into a cultural *movement* that took up issues relating to culture and society. At this time they began to connect their technologies and applications with the idea of “simulacra”, based loosely on Beaudrillard’s use of the term. For Beaudrillard simulacrum is not merely a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right: the hyperreal. As Lenza recalls the debate:

We started to think of simulacra in the Conference ... of the idea that we are a movement. We are disputing society. We stopped being simply a cultural circuit that does culture production, but understood ourselves as a social movement that produces public policy and disputes social change [...] And we are simulating a bank, a university, a [political] party, and now the media. [...] These are not the ‘official’ media, the ‘official’ bank or an ‘official’ party, but they are prototypes for our structure. But today we think of this differently, we realize that this is not simulacra, but rather real structures.

Therefore, FDE understood its four main technologies, the FDE Bank, University, Party, and Free Media, as simulations that have come to resignify authentic possibilities

for social change.

The network then identified its goals as twofold: Fora do Eixo is simultaneously a cultural circuit and a social/cultural movement. In order to avoid a split in the organization they agreed that collectives wishing to continue working towards the circulation of cultural programs were encouraged to do so under the name Circuito Fora do Eixo. The rest would continue to develop their capacity as a social/cultural movement and go by simply Fora do Eixo. Lenza explains that adopting a narrative of itself as a “movement” drew even more collectives into the network therefore amplifying its ability for social action.

Importantly at this 2010 Conference the group shared the opinion that Fora do Eixo had reached a ceiling on what they could possibly achieve from “outside the axis”. They had organized themselves well and devised structures and technologies that proved successful in creating an independent cultural circuit and in making claims on local governments. If their social experiment were to truly create a paradigm shift in how, by and for whom culture was produced and circulated in Brazil and to further parlay this shift into social transformation, FDE had to now prove that its experiment was transferable to an environment with the greatest concentration of capital, and at the heart of the traditional culture and media industries. That is to say, after nearly a decade of positioning themselves critically against the São Paulo—Rio de Janeiro “axis”, they now had to move the very axis itself. The network also thought that by positioning themselves in the São Paulo, the group would serve as a liaison between independent cultural movements “outside the axis” and the axis itself.

This realization was followed by the more practical realization of just how widespread and dispersed the network had become. If Fora do Eixo were to engage with the axis it needed an upgrade in terms of internal organization and strategy. Upgrade in this sense meant finding more efficient structures of living and working, on the one hand, and a new positioning of the FDE agenda in relation to the political and cultural establishment on the other hand. In relation to the latter, FDE understood that it would not work to their benefit to frame the network's arrival in the center of the axis as a direct challenge or threat to the gatekeepers of mainstream culture and information, but rather would require at times a degree of collaboration with the powerful culture and media industry giants, such as Globo. In terms of structures of living and working, FDE decided that instead of remaining scattered across distant cities, members would consolidate into core hubs, perhaps regionally, which would lend efficiency to daily operations and facilitate internal communication with the FDE hubs across Brazil. The network agreed to establish Fora do Eixo houses where members could live and work full time for the network, as Espaço Cubo had done before. The first house would be in São Paulo.

III. Move to the Axis: Casa Fora do Eixo, São Paulo

The move to São Paulo was complete by January of 2011. Twenty-two full time residents initially occupied the house, including the most veteran members of the participating collectives from around the country. The layout of the property seems more like a compound than a house, an ideal spot for the network's temporary

“headquarters”.⁵¹ In addition to the main two-story structure (a luxurious house by any standards, especially given the space), there is a cemented courtyard in the back with a basketball hoop. A “shelter-like” structure, exposed to the outside and with a corrugated metal roof, sits opposite the hoop, and is adjacent to a brick barbeque area (an extremely common feature in many Brazilian homes). Another two-story building at the back of the courtyard faces the main house. The rooms of the house have been divided according to the network’s thematic areas: Bank, Media, Music, University, and Party. The building in the back serves as a meeting space and is used for conferences, PósvTV programming, audio-visual presentations and concerts. In the main house, the upper-floor is reserved for sleeping quarters where residents use bunk beds in communal fashion, although the rooms are separated by gender, and share everything from toothpaste to underwear. Visitors when spending the night usually sleep in the dorm-like quarters on the second floor of the building in the back. The residents of these houses earn no official salaries but have all of their material needs met by the collective “Fora do Eixo Bank”, which is funded through the various channels discussed so far. In place of traditional wages, the residents’ labor hours are logged into an accounting ledger as Card. How this translates into an ability to capture Brazilian Reais, I will argue in the next chapter, makes visible the discursive dimensions of Card while simultaneously pointing to the arbitrariness of official currency.

Fora do Eixo entered São Paulo with momentum. No sooner had they settled into their new home than they instated the free weekly concerts, “Sundays at Home”, a

⁵¹ I place headquarters in quotations because FDE resists centralization and, as I will explain below, soon expanded to other houses across Brazil to avoid that. But for the time being, the Casa São Paulo was undeniably the network’s central hub.

carryover from Espaço Cubo. FDE also reached out to famous graffiti artists living in São Paulo, such as the internationally recognized *Cranio*⁵², and hosted an inaugural day celebration during which the artists covered every wall of the property, inside and out, with street art.⁵³ Local musicians, producers and the press were invited to the event. Within a month they had secured a weekly Tuesday night spot to host music shows in a well-known venue in the Augusta neighborhood, a former red-light district converted into one of the prime night-life centers of São Paulo. Soon after, mainstream media outlets such as *Folha* and *Globo* showed up at the *Fora do Eixo* house to see what the buzz around this new group of long haired youth who produced cultural events and used alternative money was all about.

While the house might bestow a chaotic first impression, *Fora do Eixo* by this time was well organized and took seriously the task of consolidating their social technologies. When they arrived in São Paulo the network sought out closer contact with academics, journalists and social critics, the most notable being Ivana Bentes, Chairwoman of the School of Communication (ECO) at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ); Bruno Torturra, an independent journalist who had worked for mainstream media channels; and Claudio Prado, who had worked in the Gil and Ferreira administrations at the MinC. These individuals would prove to be FDE's most ardent supporters, and collaborate closely and continuously with them. Bentes is the "resident intellectual" of FDE although she does not live with them, but rather in Rio. In their view, Bentes gives the members of FDE theoretical legitimacy. She uses her position at

⁵² <http://cranioartes.com/>

⁵³ To view the Facebook page of the FDE House in São Paulo, see: <https://www.facebook.com/casaforadoeixo> (accessed August 20, 2014).

ECO as a platform for collaborations with FDE such as the Free University of Culture (explained below). Torturra founded Mídia NINJA together with FDE, and has written extensively about the network. Prado has a permanent program on FDE's Internet streaming channel, PósTV, where he debates cultural policies. All of these individuals have received both acclaim and criticism for their involvement with FDE.

The number of *residentes* (permanent residents) in the São Paulo house remains in a state of perpetual fluctuation. During my two stays at the house, the first from mid-November to mid-December 2012, and the second from February to March 2013, it was home to sixteen of them. This number, however, rarely reflects the number of people in the house on any given day as a constant influx of visitors passes through the doors daily including artists, musicians, journalists, politicians, researchers such as me, a host of other collaborators and activists, volunteers or even the general public. In December 2012, they held a conference at the FDE House during which fifty-six people occupied the space for at least a week. There are also *viventes*, or interns, who work with FDE and many of who remain for extended periods of days, weeks and months. During my second stay at the house, FDE was hosting a group of cultural activists from Cape Verde wishing to learn FDE's technologies in order to apply them back in their country. Like all of the residents, these internships are unpaid, but the interns incur zero costs; all of their immediate needs are met including transportation, in this case, from Cape Verde, and even a laptop if needed.

To say that Fora do Eixo entered São Paulo with force is not to suggest, however, that they were received without skepticism. There was indeed tension. As newcomers

from the periphery who had spent a decade in what could be interpreted as an open and antagonistic contradistinction to the “axis”, they encountered resistance from cultural producers, though perhaps not as much as they would later receive in Rio de Janeiro where FDE has yet to gain a foothold and some factions of the political left, as I will make clear in chapter 4. Among the main issues they faced upon arrival in São Paulo in terms of their internal economy was that businesses had no incentive to trade with them. As Altenfelder explained to me in a personal communication, FDE had no local credibility and, moreover, business owners in São Paulo viewed the group of tousled youth as “country-folk”. Why would they engage in a solidarity economy with them? While the lack of personal relations might partly explain why businesses would not trade with them it was also likely tied to something structural about the nature of large anonymous markets. At any rate, while Card circulated in material form in the context of music festivals and smaller cities, in São Paulo the weight of the complementary currency shifted back to its symbolic dimension. That is to say, its value was linked more to a *discursive representation* of solidarity; in its use for trade across the network, as a quantifiable index of “solidarity” labor, and so forth; and less to its use as a material currency that one might carry and redeem in a number of locations, as had been the case in the more intimate settings, like Cuiabá. I discuss the discursive qualities of FDE’s alternative economy at greater length in chapter 4.

Expansion of the Fora do Eixo Houses

Following the success of the flagship Fora do Eixo house in São Paulo the network sought to avoid its own centralization inside of what they considered the axis of

cultural production. If FDE's goal was to connect the axis to areas in the periphery of the axis, it needed to establish FDE houses in other regions of Brazil. The centralization in São Paulo was initially important, claims Lenza, to hone in their social technologies, but this would only be made meaningful if these technologies could be replicated. They therefore launched four more houses, one in each of Brazil's remaining regions. Including the São Paulo house, today there are: Casa do Nordeste (Fortaleza); Casa Amazonas/Norte (Belém); Casa Sul (Porto Alegre); Casa Minas (Belo Horizonte); Casa Sudeste (São Paulo). Members reside for long periods in one or another house, but they also circulate widely between them, often switching their house of residence depending on the needs of the network.

The houses communicate daily through various online platforms such as Skype, Facebook, G-chat, and Facetime to name a few. The Internet is arguably the most utilized daily tool for Fora do Eixo allowing members to keep abreast of what is happening across the immense network in real time. At least once per week, on Tuesdays at 2pm, there is a network wide meeting on Skype held by the *Núcleo Duro* (Hard Nucleus) or the *Cúpula* (Dome), names given to the "elite" group of members with the most *lastro*. At these meetings the latest news, issues, events and strategies are reviewed, which facilitates the rapid spreading of information. Every member, even those in the more remote houses, knew of the presence of a "gringo" researcher asking questions about the network. Due to the high volume of online activity, each house is wired with an intense Internet infrastructure including multiple routers and different networks. In São Paulo, for example, there were at minimum five separate routers ensuring that every area of the house was covered and that networks avoided clogging and connections ran

quickly. Despite the precautions, there were still moments in most days when one or another router would have to be rebooted due to overactivity.

Today there is also a Casa Fora do Eixo in Brasilia launched in 2013, which the network calls the *Casa das Redes* (House of the Networks), emphasizing a transition in their thinking beyond simply the Fora do Eixo network to rather a “network of networks” collaborating together.⁵⁴ Due to its location in the national’s capital, most of FDE’s activities in the *Casa das Redes* revolve around the FDE Party, which is their technology that focuses specifically on debating public policy. *Casa das Redes* opens up its doors and offers space for members of networks who also need to engage with Brasilia’s political scene. It is here where Alfa, the resident doing the internship in the Chamber of Deputies mentioned previously, resides.

Casa das Redes is further unique among the FDE Houses in that it is the first to receive a grant for the sole purpose of setting up a house. Banco do Brasil, Brazil’s largest bank, allocated a one-time grant of R\$350,000 (\$150,000 U.S.) to get the house up and running, which included equipping it with the essentials: furniture, appliances (refrigerator, dish washer, blender, washing machine, etc.), television, and a car for transportation. After visiting several of the FDE houses, *Casa das Redes* stood out to me as the only one in which everything is “new” (the pillows were still soft!) since it had not been furnished through donations of used goods.

Many of the individual collectives participating in Fora do Eixo do not live in the

⁵⁴ Capilé, when explaining his vision for the future of FDE, often explains it similar to this: In the beginning in Cuiabá, individuals wanted to create a cultural scene so they joined into a collective of individuals. Soon collectives wanted to establish a circuit of independent music festivals, so they joined into a network of collectives. Next will be a network of networks, disputing and working for social change around the world.

FDE Houses but rather sustain their own houses or offices in smaller cities, such as in São Carlos, Itaipava, Ouro Preto to name a few. However, the six regional houses are the principle hubs of Fora do Eixo across Brazil. Every house is federally registered as its own non-profit entity, for tax purposes among other reasons, and is individually responsible for its own expenses. The FDE Bank is a network wide technology, but there is no single or centralized FDE Bank, per se, from which all houses can withdraw funds. Instead, every house manages its own Bank, and must also secure resources to fill its coffers.

It is perhaps important to underscore the fact that, with the notable one-time exception of the *Casa das Redes*, Fora do Eixo does not receive grants to fund the FDE houses specifically. Rather they receive grants that are earmarked for specific projects. It is therefore no small challenge to keep the network's extensive infrastructure viable; and for each house to cover its monthly expenses, which can amount to sizeable sums given the number of people living in each house. In São Paulo alone, the average monthly expenditure is between R\$15,000-20,000 (\$7,500-10,000 U.S.). While the Casa São Paulo is certainly the largest and most expensive of the FDE Houses, each one is confronted with significant bills to pay.

In order to allay at least part of its large financial burden, FDE has managed to find innovative ways to maximize grant funds by strategically cross-utilizing elements of projects that correspond to both the specific initiative and thereby keeping it within the legal parameters, but also to the network overhead. An example of this can be found in a small project called the Fora do Eixo Observatory (Proyecto Observatorio Fora do Eixo).

Launched in 2010, the FDE Observatory's goal was to offer online workshops on how to produce Internet programming content, such as that which FDE does for its online streaming channel PósTV, and also to host debates around topics such as solidarity economies, complementary currencies, the "creative industries", cultural policy and more. In 2012 the FDE Observatory received funding from Petrobras, which would cover the costs associated with the workshops, such as Internet bills, "speaker fees" which go to the Collective Bank, and the rather expensive PósTV equipment. These funds help to minimize some of FDE's overhead.

While there may not be a central FDE Bank, should one house be unable to meet its expenses during a given month, another house, perhaps in a better financial situation that month, will lend money. This loan can be repaid (with minimal interest) in Reais the following month, or in Card through the trading of services or labor in, say, the setup of a festival or the production of a poster. Often members will travel to another house in order to pay off this debt.

Lending money from house to house (or project to project), however, is the subject of controversy. If Fora do Eixo receives no money specifically for the FDE Houses, much less does it receive grants for the purpose of sustaining the network itself. This conjures up a tension that FDE is perpetually responding to, because to channel money to a house in Belém that is designated to a festival in São Paulo is illegal. This became particularly contentious when, on the television program Roda Viva in August of 2013 it was made evident that NINJA Media was in fact a FDE initiative that was sponsoring journalists like Bruno Torturra. NINJA Media had purportedly emerged

organically from the June 2013 protests and had not at that point received any funding of note. Capilé explains this away by reminding that the network earns money through other ways than just grants and it is this pool of money that the network flows between houses and projects, not the grant money. He offers further justification by pointing out that multiple houses can contribute to the production of an event. If, for example, the Casa Belém has one particularly talented graphic designer, it is within legal boundaries to use her labor at various other sites. In this way, there is nothing unethical or illegal, Capilé asserts, in transferring money to that house for services rendered (it goes to the house because nobody earns individually).

The Fora do Eixo University & the Free University of Culture

An additional way that Fora do Eixo cross-utilizes expenses is in their strategic use of space and of labor. The Fora do Eixo University and the Free University of Culture offer good examples of this.

The FDE University is a social technology (as well as a simulacrum) based on the idea that the technical skills that members of FDE receive while living and working there should be considered a legitimate education based on experiential learning. Such skills include: graphic design, media production and distribution of various kinds (audio visual, music, radio, Internet T.V.); the production and management of small and large cultural events and conferences; sound engineering; public relations (marketing); accounting; journalism; public speaking; leadership skills; network organizing; social mobilization and more. These practical skills, it is argued, easily open up opportunities for employment in the traditional marketplace should a member wish to leave the

network.

Similarly, the *Free University of Culture* is an initiative born from a collaboration between Fora do Eixo and Ivana Bentes at the ECO. The objective of the Free University of Culture is to broaden the scope of the FDE University by involving other networks, collectives, NGOs and individual collaborators that cross-pollinate knowledge and contribute their own social technologies to the pool of available courses/skills that make up the curriculum.⁵⁵ As its name suggests, the University will be entirely free and Bentes is optimistic that the Free University of Culture's curriculum will eventually achieve accreditation.

Underlying both of these initiatives is a critique of the traditional Brazilian Federal University system, which despite being a public institution, continues to reflect the social inequalities of the country. For example, required books for classes are prohibitively expensive for the majority of the Brazilian population. While students bypass this by photocopying school material in reprographic shops surrounding the universities (a practice that has often caused legal battles between the universities and the Brazilian publishing industry and that enters in national debates over fair use versus "piracy") the idea of the Free University of Culture is that all of this conflict will be avoided by appealing to collaborators who will offer knowledge for free.

Courses offered by the Fora do Eixo University and the Free University of Culture are not relegated to a particular institutional home, as say a traditional college campus, although the UFRJ frequently provides space on its urban campus. Instead,

⁵⁵ I am registered, for example, as an English and Communication teacher, though have never been called upon for my services.

there are multiple “campuses” and “campus locations”, which when compared appear rather socially disparate. For example, one campus might be a cultural center in a favela in Rio de Janeiro, while another might be a public square in São Paulo. Yet others could be the headquarters of a small NGO in Porto Alegre, a state foundation (for e.g. FUNARTE ⁵⁶), behind the scenes at a music festival, or the multiple FDE houses. Part of Fora do Eixo’s intention with blending spaces of such social disparity is to shed light on the unequal relations between race, class, and access to mainstream education. By providing alternatives to the state sanctioned and private built environments, such as traditional (public and private) college campuses, the hope is to overcome the normal gatekeeper and right of entry function on education and access to knowledge. The two projects have captured grants in the amount of hundreds of thousands of Reais, which can be parceled out to the “campus-sites” and as fees and honoraria of the “professors” and “speakers”. FDE can pay part of its rent with this. Many of the internships that FDE offers are written into the grants in this way. Such internships, when publicly announced, tend to receive thousands of solicitations from applicants across Brazil interested in working for the FDE University, living in the houses and learning the ins-and-outs of the network more broadly.

IV. Conclusion

In this chapter I have had to considerably abridge the otherwise profound and rich cultural history of Fora do Eixo in order to direct focus to the rise and diversification of

⁵⁶ The National Foundation of the Arts, which has headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. <http://www.funarte.gov.br>. FUNARTE has a public library, conference spaces and auditoriums available for organizations and groups to use.

its alternative economy and to highlight its claim to solidarity principles. This has meant excluding mention of countless other FDE cultural initiatives. Perhaps more important, I have bypassed momentous and transformative instances of social activism that catapulted FDE to the center of public attention in São Paulo, such as the March for Marijuana, the March for Liberty, and the campaign to oust the unpopular Culture Minister, Ana de Hollanda, who ultimately ceded her post in 2012. I address these three events—which have little to do with FDE’s alternative cultural economy—in Chapter 5 because they are central to the Fora do Eixo story as the network intensifies its identity as a social movement, ultimately culminating in the formation of Mídia NINJA in 2013. For now, the network continues to expand membership while firming up its ability to operate as a multi-dimensional cultural economy, and now social movement, in an environment of limited resources by making use of the capitalist and non-capitalist channels that I have acquainted the reader with here.

Since 2002, this alternative economic arrangement has served the members of Espaço Cubo and, later, For a do Eixo well. It can well be argued that the network has indeed made in-roads in destabilizing the hegemony of the international and national mainstream culture industries at the local level, while overcoming long entrenched entrance barriers to the production and management of culture. Organizing cultural production according to solidarity principles has stimulated independent cultural scenes in peripheral cities throughout the interior of Brazil; solidifying a steady circuit of festivals, exhibitions, film clubs and other venues within which artists can continually perform, present, debate and develop a broader audience. As a social experiment Fora do Eixo demonstrates that local cultural networks can experiment with extra-institutional

ways to manage economic relations as a means of group empowerment, and “expand the social field in which alternative values and organizational forms prevail,” (De Sousa Santos, 2006).

Yet despite all of its commendable achievements, there remains the burning question: If *Fora do Eixo* claims attachment to solidarity principles in the field of cultural production and social activism, why then are whole groups of artists, musicians and people on the left so angry with them? How can we account for the fact that other cultural activists who are likewise trying to set up an independent music industry, and who also position themselves in solidarity against the mainstream culture industries and capitalist markets, think that *Fora do Eixo* is a monopolizing hegemon? What is it about FDE’s interactions with social movements that some sectors of the left take issue with? Does it have something to do with Capilé’s expansive vision for the future of FDE—that it will soon become a “network of networks”, disputing and working for social change around the world? Most importantly, what do such intense reactions to *Fora do Eixo* reveal about the stakes involved in conflating culture and social change in Brazil?

In the next chapter I take up the role of discourse in *Fora do Eixo*. I consider how its deployment by the network gives rise to particular types of economic subjectivities, but also how it involves and instates relations of power that circulate both internally and externally to the network. Addressing the relations of discursive power in *Fora do Eixo*, I argue, will help us begin to unravel many of the questions posed above.

Chapter Four:

Discourse and Power in Fora do Eixo

In the previous chapter I discussed Fora do Eixo and its development through the framework of a solidarity economy. As I tried to emphasize, that history reflects the network's own institutional narrative, FDE's "public persona" that it endeavors to fix firmly vis-à-vis the diffuse circulation of that narrative and accompanying images. In this chapter I wish to problematize this narrative and address power and discourse in Fora do Eixo. This is important because FDE has attempted to create an alternative language for economic relations and for social intervention, and has succeeded in many ways. However, I argue in this chapter that Fora do Eixo's alternative economy is largely made up of discursive formations such as Card and the Collective Bank that produce and sustain relations of power in the economic relationships that it maintains with actors across different registers—whether internally among its members, or in its dealings with artists, small local business that partake in their barter system, with the state through government grants, and with private or semi-private corporations that invest in culture. By focusing on the discursive dimensions of Fora do Eixo, I hope to explain how the network has developed such a degree of cultural, political and economic capital, while simultaneously becoming part of the very power structure involved in Brazilian cultural production, cultural policy and social change. I argue that their discursive practices are largely responsible for the network's success thus far, but that such practices have also created problems for them and fostered resentment.

I further examine Card in both its material and symbolic dimensions—that is to say, how it organizes and enables certain forms of cultural practices that have an impact in the material and socially lived histories of participants in the economy, especially those members who reside in the FDE Houses. In addition to existing in material form as a currency that circulates in music festivals and allows for the purchase of a few food and drink items, I consider Card's multiple iterations as a discursive tool that serves both in the capture of the official currency, Reais, from the state and other funding entities, as well as a social technology that produces new economic subjectivities. What form of subjectivity is produced and how this particular subjectivity has played into the successes and failures of the network will be examined.

Two main questions drive this chapter. First, how has Fora do Eixo parlayed its alternative economy into political, economic and social capital? Second, if Fora do Eixo claims that it operates according to principles of solidarity, given the immense disagreement with many of its practices we must ask: Solidarity for whom? This is an important question because while its practices may be rooted in ethical considerations of solidarity, the ways in which FDE shifts assignment of value to Card, allowing the complementary currency to move in and out of a capitalist economy, often times produces discord among people who have had interactions with them, and has led its detractors to accuse them of a huge discrepancy between their discourse and their action. This chapter will discuss this tension.

Comment on Data Sources

This chapter draws from personal interviews and observations while living with Fora do Eixo for three months and coinciding with them frequently at conferences, forums, festivals and other events between October 2012-June 2013. When I have not been able to interview an individual or individuals who are important to the chapter's narrative, I have relied on online resources such as Facebook posts, blogs, news forums, and other Internet platforms. In one section, *The Collective Bank*, I draw heavily from a FDE manuscript that documents a conversation between Felipe Altenfelder and Michel Bauwens (2014), founder of the Peer-to-Peer (P2P) foundation. The P2P foundation had received some negative critiques of FDE that it placed on its website, and determined that it was not after all a P2P network.⁵⁷ The conversation between Altenfelder and Bauwens, which FDE asked me to translate from Portuguese to English for them, reflects the network's attempt to respond to these criticisms and explain its goals, objectives, practices and understanding of its institutional itself. FDE sees this manuscript as its most updated manifesto; it reflects the way FDE wants to be interpreted by the online world. For this reason I have drawn from it, and for this very same reason I look critically at it.⁵⁸

I now begin speaking about discourse as it relates to the labor relations in Fora do Eixo because labor ties together nicely the material and symbolic dimensions of their alternative economy. That is to say, FDE's relationship to labor allows them both to act

⁵⁷To read the critique, which determined FDE is not a P2P network, see: http://p2pfoundation.net/Fora_do_Eixo (accessed September 2, 2014).

⁵⁸To read the interview in English, see: <http://www.shareable.net/blog/interviewed-felipe-altenfelder-of-fora-do-eixo-on-mutualizing-music> (accessed September 2, 2014).

socially and to organize their daily lives a certain way while, together with Card, it also produces an identity and particular form of economic life.

I. Labor as Discourse

Marcos's Tour: Work is life

Walking into the FDE house in São Paulo for the first time provokes a feeling of awe, as if you have stepped into a uniquely unconventional setting. The hustle and bustle of young people walking from room to room with a sense of urgency or diligently working away at their computers and laptops—whether on makeshift desks, on old moldy sofas, or sprawled on the floor—coupled with the ubiquitous artistic flavor and graffiti on every surface of the building and its surroundings gives the sense that you have entered a hybrid space, somewhere between an Internet café, an art studio, and an undergraduate dorm residence. It is a gated house, like so many in Brazil. When the bell rings announcing a visitor a designated attendee greets them and gives a detailed tour of the premises. For the uninitiated, this is their first exposure to the organization and as they are guided from room to room they receive explanations of the layout and logistics of the house/compound, how they live collectively, what the paper diagrams on the walls mean, how the Collective Bank operates, as well as a sense of the mission of the organization as a whole. It is also when one might first get a taste of the very particular FDE vernacular.

Incoming residents of the Fora do Eixo houses, those coming to live and work there, are assigned to one of the network's thematic areas: Media, Music, the Bank, and the University. Every thematic area has its own leader to whom residents working in those respective areas report. While residents do not punch in and out with a time clock,

they are expected to work relentlessly on projects. A sixteen-hour workday is common practice in the house and at 4am the house is usually alive with activity. Though never explicitly spoken of in these terms, I often sensed an undercurrent of competition among the residents not to be the first person heading off to bed.

When I was first given the tour of the house, Marcos, one of the original residents, explained the organization's philosophy with regard to the hefty work schedule. Most people, he claimed, work eight hours a day and spend the next eight hours trying to unwind and forget about the previous eight hours before finally sleeping for eight hours, only to repeat the cycle the following day. Those eight hours of work are not part of the pleasurable lives of most people. At the Fora do Eixo houses, he asserted in contrast, there is no distinction between working and living. His assumption, therefore, was that the Fora do Eixo members have no problem working sixteen hours, seven days per week, as it is intimately intertwined with pleasure for them and gives meaning to their lives. In this narrative, work is life.

The "work is life" narrative was reiterated in multiple interviews, leaving little doubt about its centrality to Fora do Eixo's institutional identity as well as to the identity of the individual residents. The narrative breaks down the traditional work life/private life divide; FDE members work for the network as much as they *are* the network (Garland 2012). Given the central importance that it has in organizing the material and symbolic lives of residents in the FDE Houses, we might ask: What sort of ideological work is at play in the "work is life" narrative? What subjectivities does it produce or pre-suppose? And what is the relation of its labor practices to the symbolic, political and

economic capital of the network?

To answer these questions I want to first suggest that by entering the Fora do Eixo houses as a resident, one is entering into a form of social contract in the collectivist tradition of Rousseau. Rousseau theorized how best to establish a (political) community in the face of an increasingly commercialized society, which I believe parallels to some degree the institutional aspirations of FDE. While Rousseau was speaking about a larger political community in relation to a state, here I use the social contract as a more informal and localized construct that nevertheless sets up moral and ethical codes of conduct between members of the FDE network that organize, regulate, manage and discipline practice, and that coheres a community, which could be argued is also political. Upon entering the FDE Houses individuals accept certain conditions that subordinate oneself to the general will. These codes serve as social laws that, while not codified as in a formal system, they are systematized through social practice and occupy the same function within a community as, say, state codified law. One does not escape the concept of rules, but these are rules that each member of the community agrees to. And although social contracts do not have to be codified, they do have to be legitimized, which in the end raises the important question: From where does Fora do Eixo derive its sources of authority that validate these codes?

From what I observed at the Fora do Eixo houses, “work is life” is one part of the solidarity discourse that serves this function. When taken together with the other discourses involved in Fora do Eixo’s economic practices, such as those surrounding the Collective Bank and Card, “work is life” speaks to the type of self-cultivation of new

economic subjectivities that Gibson-Graham suggested was necessary to develop a new economic politics that challenges “capitalocentrism”. But in addition to self-cultivation of new subjectivities, I also see an additional quality to FDE’s labor practice in that it motivates certain forms of re-enacting solidarity, and in doing so (re-enacting solidarity through labor) the residents self-reflexively enact the network. I connect this idea to Taylor (2002) and Lee and LiPuma’s (2002) thoughts on the social contract’s role in modernity. For Taylor, if the social contract has been so pervasive as a foundational ideology in Western modernity it is due to its ability to construct “collective agency,” which Lee and LiPuma claim to be a crucial aspect of modern social imaginaries (193). Additionally, the social contract creates, “through reciprocal ... acts of ‘promising and agreeing’,” an imagination of a cohered social community that governs people’s actions (ibid).

It seems to me that “work is life”, as a discourse, plays a role in constructing a sense of a cohered community with shared affinities, agreements, values and benefits, and it directs action. FDE is keenly aware that it owes a lot of its success to its labor practices, which largely explain how the network has accomplished so much so fast. Days are long in the FDE Houses, packed with planned and unplanned activities. Few organizations can boast such a sizeable and dedicated fleet of young, talented individuals working around the clock at an unrelenting pace, and for this reason a lot transpires in 24 hours. In large part, the “work is life” narrative is what has inspired and mobilized a workforce capable of producing and maintaining a vibrant cultural scene, as well as taking on larger social issues and organizing protests and marches. These feats, in addition to its obsessive use of social media, have garnered FDE a lot of visibility.

“Work is life” encodes culturally and historically specific modes of sociality, including forms of labor in which solidarity is esteemed and enacted. In enacting the network, the members of Fora do Eixo constitute a collective agency, a self-reflective grouping that imagines its particular form of solidarity as a cohered social and economic community.

Fora do Eixo’s collectivism has limits, however. Understanding “work is life” as part of a community based informal social contract peculiar to FDE also implies that there are boundaries of participation within the network; there are parameters on entitlements, rights, responsibilities, and it guides behavior, confers status and subjecthood. Many of FDE’s critics deride its claim to be democratic and rooted in solidarity principles when, in fact, it engages in practices of inclusion and exclusion, especially when competing for the capture of Reais in the form of grants. A fair criticism of Fora do Eixo would be that the discourses that inform its alternative social and economic organization become seemingly naturalized to its members through constant internal reaffirmations. Their way of life then becomes the ultimate register of solidarity to the extent that other cultural activists with similar goals but who live differently are somehow less “authentic” in their pursuit of solidarity and/or social change. They build consensus around, and develop emotional attachments to the solidarity discourse and reinforce the discourse through the self-reflexive social media enactments of the network. Establishing a sense of institutional-self fortified by such affective discourses—by which I mean discourses that rely on emotion or desire to influence behavior and action—and collective enactments has at times resulted in a rigid dichotomy wherein if you disagree with FDE you are labeled as “analog”, a derogatory term they use internally to suggest something or someone to be outdated and out of touch with the current trends in political

and cultural activism. In this way, it could be said that FDE sets up an axis of its own. This “*you are either with us or without us*” mentality has provoked tension from groups with similar aims to FDE, but that take umbrage with the network’s seeming desire to absorb everything and everyone under the Fora do Eixo umbrella. I address this in more detail further below.

Next, I discuss the type of alternative subjectivities involved with Fora do Eixo. I begin with a reflection on the residents’ relation to material culture and how these relations are rearranged in the FDE Houses through their use of the Collective Bank, which structures their material and symbolic lives.

The Collective Bank

Upon entering into the collective living environment, what the majority of residents found most challenging, according to my interviews, was getting used to the Collective Bank. Residents felt especially uncomfortable taking money out at first, and sensed that perhaps they did not have the right. They often stated that it took some time to shed the years of consumerism and individualism inculcated in them their entire lives, of thinking “what is mine is mine”. But with time, they usually repeated, this feeling began to wane. When asked if they felt they could withdraw money to go to the movies or to enjoy a dinner or night out with a friend, most dismissed this idea. Sure they could, they all said, but they are all very conscious of the fact that the collective is constantly walking a thin line with regard to finances, so they would most likely refrain from spending money for individual purposes like that. However, most made a point to assure me that if they did decide to spend an evening out in this manner, there would be no

problem with it.

Paradoxically, one way to interpret the discourse around the Collective Bank is as a local instantiation of neoliberal governmentality: that is, a self-governing rationality that serves the purpose of producing subjects best suited to fulfill the objectives of the institution. Fora do Eixo's adherence to communal principles compels an element of self-regulation and self-economization, behavior usually associated with neoliberal strains of thought. The comparison does not map on perfectly, of course, because the self-governing tactic is ultimately deployed for opposing goals: neoliberalism is commonly understood as giving central importance to the individual pursuit of economic self-interest, while Fora do Eixo gives weight to the pursuit of economic solidarity. Nevertheless, there is slight overlap in the tactic itself and also in the sense that both the neoliberal subject and the FDE subject are economically calculating, individually responsible and self-managing. This is one of the ways that FDE, as an institution, governs its members.

At any rate, the Collective Bank produces a sense of collective identity within the organization that unifies them as a group, and they use the bank as a counter-distinction between themselves and other organizations. In a correspondence with Michel Bauwens (2014), founder of the Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Foundation, Altenfelder explains:

A key point to understand these relationships is also understanding the way we deal with resources and survival. We work with a Collective Bank, so that all individuals have access to the minimum necessary for their survival, and in this way they can dedicate themselves to the activities of the movement. This option, while it enables us to have a group of militants with plenty of availability, is different from the choice made by the other organizations that follow an organization based on the capital/labor relation, using salary as a device that reproduces the dichotomy between owners of the means of production and owners of the workforce.

The Collective Bank figures predominantly into the “work is life” ideological frame. By allowing residents of the Fora do Eixo houses to bypass the traditional relation between labor and capital, the boundaries between the private and work lives of the members are blurred. In rejecting the materialism inherent in a normative wage/money/consumption system, labor, itself a highly material practice, becomes a symbolic articulation of solidarity and pleasure. In the same conversation with Bauwens, Altenfelder addresses the Collective Bank’s role in the work lives of FDE residents and writes, “It is what enables the autonomy and emancipation from the logic of wages, where you want to earn money to consume free-time.” This notion of “earning money to consume free time” echoes Marcos’s earlier comments regarding what FDE considers to be a normative work schedule in mainstream capitalist society. Driving home the point, Altenfelder continues:

[The Collective Bank] is a platform of sustainability that allows many people to abandon their precarious or ‘slave jobs’ in traditional media, in commercial production companies, advertising agencies, or any Fordist-style employment. In this new reality, the individual has to invent her or his own profession. They have their life and time released, produced from another distinct and community logic.

Let us put aside for a moment the reductive interpretation of typical labor; the “slave jobs” to which Altenfelder refers are highly specialized and urban, and coming from middle-class youth reads as somewhat elitist. More pertinent to the discussion of how FDE’s use of labor as a discourse produces new economic subjectivities as well as secures it social, political and economic capital, he glosses over a simple fact here. If the residents’ time and life are “released” within this alternative economic arrangement, they are only released insofar as residents dedicate their time instead to Fora do Eixo. They are

therefore not as free as he suggests. Embedded in Altenfelder's enthusiasm is the technoutopian assumption shared by many peer network theorists (Bauwens 2008; Benkler 2006; Jenkins 2006; Lessig 2004, 2008), which posits that labor involved in peer networks is necessarily a better form of labor because the break down of the work/private life divide fosters a more democratic environment and reduces workers' feelings of alienation, allowing them greater autonomy and providing a more psychologically satisfying experience overall.

We see similar reasoning today in the labor relations of tech companies like Google that, that integrate as many elements of everyday home, private and pleasurable life into the work environment. Take for example the *Googleplex*, which includes free laundry facilities, two swimming pools, multiple volleyball courts, eighteen cafeterias with diverse menus, billiard rooms, outdoor open spaces with fountains, pathways and more. In return for these provisions, employees are encouraged to be there often and to work long hours. Although Google and Forá do Eixo hail from completely different institutional cultures (at the most basic level, one is highly profit-driven and the other a solidarity network) they nevertheless draw from similar representational politics that position cyberculture as counterculture (Turner 2006). That is to say, and as Fred Turner has argued, cyberculture today fulfills the utopian project of transforming social consciousness for democratic purposes and individual liberty that began with the countercultural movements of the 1960s. Moreover, both Google and Forá do Eixo represent their particular form of labor as non-alienating labor since each is driven by larger visions of social purpose and because in their view the separation between work and private life has been resolved. For FDE, all of its members' material needs are met and

they are participating in (and even driving) a unique moment in Brazilian history that expands the possibility of what is knowable and attainable in the fields of cultural production, media and social justice broadly construed. For Google this means positioning itself in contrast to the corporate and industrial culture of the twentieth century by structuring the work environment in such a way that hierarchies are less visible and employees have all the amenities necessary to instill a sense of comfort and a desire to socialize at work.⁵⁹

It should be noted that the blurred boundary between work and private life today does not only apply to people who labor in institutional settings, like companies or not for profit organizations. It also permeates the everyday life of multiple others who have access to and embrace digital networks. In an article addressing the limitations of peer production, Kreiss, Finn and Turner (2010) remind us that even activities once thought of as leisure, such as playing video games, are nowadays considered a form of un-paid labor for the benefit of the gaming companies. While Kreiss et al. assign positive value to peer networks in general, they caution against the unqualified celebration of P2P production and prompt us to recall the fervor surrounding the imagined (though largely unrealized) liberatory potential that has historically accompanied the advent of new forms of media and technology. Among their many precautions, the authors ask us to consider whether peer networks are actually contributing to the “quietly coercive expansion of the workplace into everyday life,” (255). With this in mind, I question to what extent the “work is life” narrative or the Collective Bank actually lead to more satisfaction for

⁵⁹ I find a comparison between these two institutional cultures that on the surface seem so different but that are rooted in a similar faith in the transformative potential of digital media a fascinating topic for future research.

everyone implicated in the alternative economy. What type of economic subject does it produce or pre-suppose? And what level of “sacrifice” is required of this subject?

II. A New Economic Subject

Further along in his communication with Bauwens (2014), Altenfelder acknowledges the limited freedom that the labor arrangement affords residents, though he does not see it as a trade-off but rather as something that allows the “uniqueness” of individuals to emerge. He writes:

We created a common environment where direct participants, once freed from the capital / labor ratio, gain a multitude of possibilities for involvement. [...] Since the emergence of collective houses, the math got easier because when entering a house as a resident, the person shall be guaranteed the basic conditions for survival, no longer needing to worry about that. From there, *all of their availability and capacity is at the service of the collective process*, responsible for the valuation and projection of her/his own uniqueness. The residents have no salary, and in the houses all activities are divided without the need for hierarchy or ranking of one activity over another, and at the same time, there are no more owners and non-owners. (emphasis added)

There is an assumption here that at first glance appears counter-intuitive, but upon closer look instigates and feeds off a dialectic between a project of assimilation and the production of individual forms of subjectivity. Altenfelder suggests that by acting or living collectively, and especially when giving yourself over to the Fora do Eixo, one begins to express her/his individual uniqueness. That is to say your individuality, your subjectivity, is released/produced once the Collective Bank meets your material needs and you meld with the group. An additional tension arises when taking into account the way FDE deals with individual authorship of any kind. FDE members never assign their individual names to creative productions. Whether a photograph, poster, article (such as an op-ed piece), video, commercial, and so forth, credit is always assigned to Fora do

Eixo. At best—and with the notable exception of the differentiated reputation of a few key members of the network such as Capilé—commentary made on personal Facebook and Twitter accounts are perhaps the closest that FDE comes to individuation. Yet as Garland (2012) noted, and as I confirm from my own observations, even the extensive use of personal social media accounts are in the service of FDE for the purpose of self-referencing the network and gaining visibility for FDE. It is rare that non-network related posts appear on personal accounts. Therefore, how do we reconcile the apparent incongruity in Altenfelder’s claim that individuality emerges when your identity blends, through labor and living by the Collective Bank, into the network? What sort of individual is Altenfelder envisioning?

Homo-solidaricus

To help make sense of this, I find it useful to think of this particular individual as relational. By relational I am mostly, though not exclusively, appealing to a post-structuralist lens in which identity is not comprised of discrete and unitary qualities, but rather is viewed as constituted in relation to others, such that you are what you are not. I include in this understanding Foucault’s thinking about the role of discourse in producing subjectivities. But relational identity can also be viewed, at least partly, through a material perspective, in some ways similar to Marx’s notion of the “species-being”.

For Marx, the “species-being” is an essential and relational self.⁶⁰ It is not a pre-social essential self, as in the traditional liberal model of say, John Locke, for whom we

⁶⁰ Marxists are not the other theorists to think of society as relational. For example, Alison Jagger (2004) shows how the relational ontology of radical feminism parallels that of traditional Marxism, though the two theoretical strains disagree on which social relations are most deserving of critical examination.

were born in the state of nature as conscious, rational and autonomous beings only to then enter into social contract. For Locke, we are first and foremost individuals. Yet for Marx, we are relational and social beings first and foremost, emergent from out mode of production. That is to say that the individual subject is produced through her/his labor and as such we can only be authentic to ourselves by engaging in an economic system that allows for us to remain relational. However, the relation of labor and production in capitalist system divides individuals from their essential selves because it pits individuals against each other through competition. Yet, in systems such as that of Fora do Eixo, there is no competition dividing our relational selves. Individuals, according to this logic, are thus produced authentically within this arrangement. Our mode of production does not just sustain us, it *is* us; it is the nature of the species. Marx writes:

This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existences of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their lives, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production. (1978, 150)

For residents of Fora do Eixo, their physical labor practices structure their everyday lives and express an identity tied to solidarity.

For Foucault, identity is also relational. In contrast to the Marxist model, however, identity is not tied to a relational *essential* self, since for Foucault there exists no essential self. But rather it is relational in that identity is not centralized but rather formed, in part, through disciplinary power that spreads across multiple and mobile fields of social relations, producing discourses and putting into circulation apparatuses of knowledge. That is to say that our identity is relational to power, which proceeds and

produces our sense of self through discourse and knowledge. Power installs itself at the level of the individual, and we are produced as individuals. In the case of Fora do Eixo residents, a self-conscious discourse about solidarity (e.g. “work is life”) is produced by and then enacted by the FDE subject while simultaneously producing that very same FDE subject.

If there were to be a character representative of this dual arrangement between Marx’s “species being” and Foucault’s discursively produced subject, it might be homo-solidaricus. I use homo-solidaricus as a parody of sorts, an economic straw man that in theory does not act in selfish interest, but rather in the pursuit of collective goals. Homo-solidaricus is a symbolic, though structuring, understanding of self, the product of the discursive artifacts that make up FDE’s alternative economy (“work is life”, Collective Bank, Card) that ultimately scripts the norms of proper comportment, labor practices, their relation to material culture (how they dress, where they sleep, what they purchase and so forth) and how they carry out their lives. Both labor as practice and labor as discourse put into motion the FDE economic subject.

But why is underscoring the difference between an essential self and a discursively produced self—like homo-solidaricus—important? In my view, this distinction holds relevance in the acknowledgment that if homo-solidaricus is not essential but rather produced, then it opens up the possibility for re-articulations of economic subjectivity based on solidarity that may not fit under the Fora do Eixo canopy. Homo-solidaricus is a tabula rasa of sorts, upon which to write alternative values and goals. This is an important point for those who are actively pursuing new ways of

managing alternative forms of cultural production based on solidarity, but that disagree with FDE's practices.

What has been described above as a solidarity economy and the subjectivity that comes from the "work is life" and other narratives that inform FDE's labor practices is part of the network's representational politics; it is what FDE *aspires* to be and to do. However, plenty of legitimate complaints circulate regarding what many perceive as a discrepancy between Fora do Eixo's solidarity discourse and its practice.

This last point bears upon important considerations of power with regard to Fora do Eixo's use of discourse. In addition to the power of discourse to produce subjectivities, there are also relations of power that produce and are produced by FDE's use of discourse between organizations and within the network itself. The question of power is important in light of the shift in public opinion about FDE since August 2013, which reveal the high stakes in cultural and media production in Brazil. This next section will attempt to make visible how power works discursively and materially within FDE's internal structure as well as in its relation with other groups.

III. Discourse and Power

Power plays out in diverse ways within the network. There are, for instance, social coercions in the form of pressure to conform and to reprioritize one's social relations with friends, family and partners. Fora do Eixo's use of discursive power internally arises from the very term its founding members invented for power itself: *lastro*, which among other things confers the power to speak (discourse par excellence). Though I introduced *lastro* in Chapter 3, here I explain it in more detail.

Lastro – discourse par excellence.

Upon asking many Brazilian colleagues what exactly “lastro” means, few had heard of it and those that had could not explain its meaning. At best, they understood it as somehow related to banking or boating.⁶¹ This is not, however, what it means to Forado Eixo. For FDE lastro is central to its organizational structure as it refers to “institutional clout” and establishes the social positioning within the network, legitimizing what for others seems to be a hierarchical structure, though FDE adamantly denies the existence of hierarchies. Lastro bestows the power to speak with authority within and for the network. Who has more lastro has more right to speak and to have one’s voice heard in meetings and debates. It grants the right to attend exclusive meetings, to set agendas and be more influential in the direction of the organization as a whole, to speak on behalf of the organization in public, to take on greater responsibilities, to steer an initiative, to manage new members of the network, and more.

One achieves lastro from the amount of dedication and quality of work that one gives to the network. It is not always associated with time spent in the organization; it is possible to rise quickly within the organization if you completely give yourself over to it. For example, Driade Aguiar can be considered among the individuals with most lastro, but she only joined the network in 2008. For the most part, though, those who have been in the organization longest tend to have more of it; certainly Pablo Capilé is undisputed leader of the organization and wields the largest reserve of lastro.

From an external perspective lastro equals power and establishes hierarchies.

⁶¹ <http://michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno/portugues/index.php?lingua=portugues-portugues&palavra=lastro> (accessed May 20, 2014).

Yet, as I have previously mentioned, FDE uniformly denies the existence of power and hierarchy. In over sixty hours of interviews, only once did one person admit that there were indeed hierarchies. Most residents prefer to see the network as horizontal, void of the power relations found in the traditional capitalist and bureaucratic organizational structures. FDE is more democratic, in their view, because everything in this peer-to-peer arrangement is debated. They think about *lastro* in terms of trust, respect and knowing what is best for the organization.

A host of obvious observations follow when recognizing *lastro* as power. While Fora do Eixo claims to be fully democratic in its structure, there exists an “elite” group within the network, called the *Núcleo Duro* (Hard Nucleus, of Hard Core) that holds exclusive meetings. Therefore, despite its insistence on continual debate about all issues, in practice the debates are pre-decided behind closed doors or in Skype meetings reserved for the *Núcleo Duro*. *Lastro* perpetually reifies the position of the *Núcleo Duro* and produces an environment wherein those who have been in the network longest are gatekeepers who will most certainly be those directing it. This has led some of FDE’s critics to jokingly refer to the group as the *Núcleo Durável*, the “durable” or “long-standing” nucleus. At the end of the day, it is unlikely that Pablo Capilé and Lenissa Lenza will ever be significantly challenged. However, this does not mean that a newcomer to the organization cannot speak up in meetings or debates. Talles Lopes, another member of the *Núcleo Duro*, claims that one can challenge an idea or perspective of someone with more *lastro*, but she/he had better be willing to debate it until the end. Yet this is no easy task when up against the charismatic authority of someone like Capilé. It is best, newcomers are told, to sit back and listen at first, to absorb the very specific

FDE vocabulary, to build *lastro* and in time (when you can speak like us) you will have the right to speak up.

One former resident who spent four years in the network before leaving on relatively bad terms corroborated this expectation of acquiescence to authority. In an interview after they had left, this individual admitted to me that initially, in the smaller collectives within the Fora do Eixo network, there was more horizontality and ability to express personal opinions, but after moving into the FDE House in São Paulo there was a shift. They admitted to me that at some point it just became easier not to question the Núcleo Duro, and that there was an increasing centralization of power.

The repercussions for *truly* challenging someone like Lenza or Capilé could easily result in added pressures to conform, for instance through different levels of discrediting like subtle (or outright) chiding and public humiliation. I experienced this firsthand when Capilé took my IRB and read it aloud in a courtyard full of other FDE members in seemingly playful manner; he poked fun at some of the questions that I was asking, such as bringing up concerns about controlling the relationships with people outside the network, a complaint that circulates widely about the FDE. Capilé was not being aggressive, but such a public display, even as a joke, clearly sets limits on what is and is not acceptable to ask. Many have been asked to leave, and many have left of their own accord due to such pressures.

Aside from conferring the power to speak and decide the direction of the network, *lastro* plays out in more banal ways with the FDE Houses. For example, Pablo Capilé and others with more *lastro* never wash a single plate, cook dinner, or do any of the

household chores that others are expected to do. In fact, Capilé rarely brings dishes back into the kitchen, and eventually they are picked up by any one of the other residents. Capilé and those like him have “already put in their time”, it is argued, and they have more important things to do for the network. Also, Capilé, Altenfelder, Lenza and others with more *lastro* have their own individual bedrooms in the houses where they reside, while the majority of other residents sleep in dorm like bunk beds.⁶² This is paltry as far as luxuries go; a quick glance into Altenfelder or Capilé’s room reveals an ascetic space where they sleep without even sheets on the bed. Nonetheless, these seemingly trite observations suggest hierarchies. Additionally, there are certain rooms in the house that act as meeting rooms for Capilé and a few others, and if said door is shut, one had better knock before entering.

Lastly, although I did not witness much extravagance in spending, there exists a notable stratification in access to the Collective Bank. A select few of the higher-ups have credit cards paid for by the network and use them at their discretion, presumably for appropriate expenses related to the network but with little to no accountability. By way of example, on one occasion I was traveling between events with Altenfelder, Capilé and Torturra when they decided to stop for dinner. This is not unreasonable and we discussed where we could eat that might be cheap. However, the restaurant we ended up dining in was not cheap, and although I offered to pay my share, they insisted that I was invited as their guest. What struck me was not the R\$200 (\$100 U.S.) dinner bill, which was not particularly excessive for four people in São Paulo, but rather the realization that this

⁶² Exceptions are made for couples that live in the house. In São Paulo there were two couples that had their own room.

manner of dining out was not available to the majority of the other residents at the FDE house. This type of differentiated ability to spend, with little to no challenge, speaks to the degree of power involved in *lastro* and throws into relief a potential aperture in their claim to solidarity.

Perhaps it is important to mention here that it is not intrinsically immoral to have hierarchies within an organization. Many activist organizations work with hierarchical structures. The Landless Peasants Movement, for example, has fought corporate powers on behalf of peasants for three decades and has helped thousands of them acquire land; yet it stands accused as operating in a heavily tiered manner and is considered by some as authoritarian (Santos 2006; Navarro 2006). The issue is that FDE has up until recently adamantly and stubbornly denied hierarchies. There is evidence, however, that they are changing their tune slightly with regard to this, likely due to the pressures involved in the social demonization of FDE following its appearance on the television program *Roda Viva* in August 2013; “*lastro*” was brought up time and again, especially by a group of disaffected individuals who had left the organization. In Altenfelder’s correspondence with Bauwens, FDE now concedes that there is “leadership” within the organization.

Lastro is part of *Fora do Eixo*’s self-invented narrative that has naturalized their alternative living conditions, relationships, and structures of “leadership”. Those that live in the house and remain there do so because they believe in the values and ideals encoded in FDE’s discourse. The promise of achieving more *lastro* is among the things that inspire residents to continue; though in no way should we downplay their belief that they

are working towards something greater, such as social transformation—although the form they envision that to take remains somewhat unclear.

Passa Palavra and Exploitation

Not everybody is convinced of the “work is life” narrative, nor view lastro as a form of benevolent democratic leadership. One group in particular, a Marxist collective called Passa Palavra, has developed a rigorous and impassioned ideological condemnation of what they perceive as Fora do Eixo’s “business-like character”, citing among countless other grievances the exploitative labor conditions of the young people who live and work long hours in the FDE Houses with no remuneration and no leisure time.⁶³ True to their Marxist principles, those involved with Passa Palavra believe that workers are generally exploited and that the economic base is what defines all other social relations. It is perhaps not surprising that a group of Marxists should be concerned with the tension between labor, wages and control over one’s material life. The participants of Passa Palavra avow goals to establish a society wherein the means of production are collectively owned and organized by the workers themselves.

But how does this differ from the collectivism of Fora do Eixo, which largely attempts to redefine economic relations in order to later transform the social and political? To be sure, part of FDE’s broader goals is to dispute the traditional modes of cultural production, and the Collective Bank is meant to resolve in many ways the tension in the capital/labor dichotomy. Rather than a concern for the lack of salaries, which is a

⁶³ Passa Palavra has consistently been FDE’s most outspoken detractor and has levied public indictments of the network like no other. For general information on Passa Palavra see (in Portuguese): <http://passapalavra.info/>.

For critical articles, see (in Portuguese): <http://passapalavra.info/2013/08/82709>

<http://passapalavra.info/2013/08/82548>; <http://passapalavra.info/2011/06/41221> (accessed March 24, 2014).

situation that incoming residents agree to in advance, a more valuable critique might be directed towards the relations with outgoing members: those who opt to leave the network.

While it may be true that individuals have all of their needs met while they remain inside the FDE Houses, many have found that upon leaving they are left to start from scratch. And if we are to believe the accounts of people who have done so, such as Laís Bellini, chances are they will also leave with debt. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, a new person entering into the Fora do Eixo house is expected to contribute something. While this usually means one's labor, skills, knowledge or perhaps a small personal savings, at times contributions are more economically significant, for instance allowing the network to use a credit card or donating a car for collective use. Bellini's personal account of her experiences with FDE suggests that she left the network with R\$5,000 (\$2,500 U.S.) in debt, which the collective only partly agreed to pay much later, and her credit was left in bad standing. In an article in the newspaper *CartaCapital*, the commentary of another former resident, Rafael Rolim, lends support to Bellini's story and reveals how the network used his credit card to buy Pablo Capilé a new laptop. He reports:

They requested my credit card, which I had jointly with my parents, in order to buy tickets. As there was total confidence, I was persuaded to share the password. In a month and a half they spent R\$21,000 [\$11,000 U.S.] on my card. They bought a new MacBook Pro for Capilé, which I only realized when the bill arrived.⁶⁴

In the same article, Alejandro Vargas, yet another former resident, confirms this practice claiming that:

⁶⁴ <http://www.cartacapital.com.br/sociedade/fora-do-eixo-6321.html> (accessed May 12, 2014).

The use of credit cards of people who live in the house is common practice. And as we had no salary [to pay the bill], soon the card's debt entered the SPC and Professionals [a collection agency], and even today I still have bad credit.

To the degree that Bellini, Vargas, Rolim and others offer accurate accounts, as I believe they do, this to me is a more striking example of exploitation than a lack of salaries while living collectively inside the FDE house. How does Fora do Eixo explain this?

For FDE it becomes a question of trying to balance all of the financial accounts that are owed across the network. By some accounts, outstanding debts always get paid eventually, though it may take a long time, even a year. Beatriz Seigner, the film director whose initial Facebook post about her experience with FDE sparked a torrent of similar disparaging stories, claimed that it took nine months of intense nudging before FDE finally reimbursed her what she was owed. When asked about this, FDE members argue that their intention is to pay everybody back, but like many non-profit organizations they must prioritize in order to stay afloat. It would seem that FDE's political project to develop "social technologies" that promote economic solidarity has many limits.

Lack of Leisure and Critical Reflection

Passa Palavra's grievances do not stop with salaries. In their view, the simple fact of sharing beds and clothes does not make Fora do Eixo "post-capitalist" as the network suggest; rather it is pre-capitalist, reminiscent of the same type of religious fervor of self-denial and un-reflective devotional work that characterized the monks and nuns in a previous era, and that greatly contributed to the accumulation of power and wealth of the church. While Passa Palavra does not mention Max Weber, we can draw parallels here to

the type of devout Protestant work ethic that Weber (2004) argues is at least partly responsible for setting the social conditions that influenced the development of capitalism. In other words, for Passa Palavra “work is life” is but a ruse that keeps its members working and, importantly, keeps them from thinking or reflecting critically. They write, “The devotion becomes a regime of exhaustion and submission, in which the physical and mental exhaustion prevent the practice of any self-organization and critical thinking.”⁶⁵ In this way, Passa Palavra argues against FDE’s claim that the “real” FDE comes from its base (the menial workers) because in fact the ideas come from above, from the Núcleo Duro, and quickly become naturalized.

While Passa Palavra’s metaphors might be slightly overstated, their assessment of Fora do Eixo’s lack of critical reflection due to heavy work routines warrants consideration, especially with regard to how it connects to the power dynamics involved in FDE’s internal discourses. Who gets to produce these statements that get dispersed publicly and that taken together constitute the institutional identity of the network? After spending time in many debates in the FDE Houses and in public, and hearing others in the house speak the same jargon as Capilé, one begins to notice that FDE has in many ways—with some notable exceptions—become overly insular and self-indexing in its discourse, an acknowledgment that gestures towards concerns about how democratic it really is. This issue brings to mind a comment made by Rafael Vilela, a resident in the FDE House in São Paulo. In response to my question of why he did not speak up more in public given the apparent *lastro* he wields, Rafael retorted, “Why would I? We’d all be

⁶⁵ <http://passapalavra.info/2013/08/82548/comment-page-1> (accessed March 26, 2014).

saying the same thing, so it doesn't make sense for everyone to speak. Meetings would be too long and boring.”

There is an element of truth Vilela's words. When Fora do Eixo members speak publicly they are representatives of the network. Is it unreasonable to expect rhetorical coherence from the group, without giving credence to cryptic accusations of brainwashing, as many of its harshest critics have charged them with? Institutional consistency was certainly at play in why, after collecting so many hours of interviews I resolved to fix on only a few key people due to large ideological and rhetorical overlap. Vilela did not seem to be burdened by the tension between assimilation and individuation, and was happy to “toe the party line”; though I must emphasize he did not do so as a dupe but rather as someone who fully buys into the FDE ideology. Vilela is arguably the network's most talented photographer and has no issue with assigning credit for his creative work to Fora do Eixo, allowing his “subjectivity” to be subsumed. If so many people remain in the houses, it is at least partly due to a belief in the discourses that makes up the FDE narrative, which is to say that they subscribe to the idea of collectivism and all that it implies in the FDE context, including *lastro* and labor. Again, we must not underestimate the degree to which the majority of these young activists view themselves as militants partaking in (if not guiding) an historic shift in Brazilian society.

What seems to me a more compelling critique concerning the questioning of power and participatory thinking in Fora do Eixo is that it places so much stock in the idea and appearance of collective debate, when in fact there is very little debate. The very terms of debate are circumscribed, previously decided by the Núcleo Duro. As I and

others (Garland 2012; Yúdice 2013; Passa Palavra) have observed, debates, public meetings and even cultural events are often attended predominantly by FDE members (preaching to the choir), while the images that circulate online suggest otherwise, as if these events were expressions of representative democracy. Public events end up as forums to publicly present the ideas and desires of Capilé and the Núcleo Duro, even if they are not the ones speaking or are not even present.

While I agree in part with Vilela's dismissal of the idea that everyone should speak up, in my view there is also substance to Passa Palavra's concerns about a lack of critical thought. I acknowledge this while also recognizing that many residents find pleasure and larger meaning in their work with Fora do Eixo. Leisure time is basically non-existent in the FDE Houses. For Beatriz Seigner (2013), saddest of all was the fact that residents do not have time to enjoy the very culture they produce: to see movies, go to the theater, to read, or even to develop some music skills. Why not, she asks by way of example, offer guitar lessons or something of the sort to the residents of the houses?⁶⁶ Even one of FDE's closest collaborators, Bruno Torturra, conceded that this was one issue in which he and Pablo Capilé disagrees.

That the lack of leisure time impacts critical thinking is corroborated by the public accounts of several former members, as well as in my own interviews. One ex-resident in particular, who wishes to remain anonymous, was quite enthusiastic about Fora do Eixo during our first interview. A week later, however, they had left the house and a

⁶⁶ To be fair, in my own experience in the FDE Houses in São Paulo and in Belo Horizonte, residents did partake in movie nights, and often enjoyed the Sundays at Home concerts. Though admittedly, during the Sunday concerts residents were likely to be working, either for the event or throughout the house, only to come to the show if a lack of public attendance left the performance space without an impressive enough audience.

couple of months after that joined in the outpouring of censure instigated by Seigner’s and Bellini’s Facebook posts in August 2013, and offered a description about their experience with FDE in unflattering detail.⁶⁷ When asked about the change of heart, the individual in question claimed that during our first interview they were a representative of FDE and therefore obviously (and unrepentantly) spoke about the network as the network speaks about itself. There was nothing remarkable about that, they believed. It was only upon achieving distance from the hectic work routine of the FDE house that they were able to truly reflect on the experiences, gain insight and develop a personal opinion about issues they found uncomfortable while in the network, not the least of which is the unspoken but very real pressure to obey the Núcleo Duro without question. The indoctrination of the FDE vocabulary and ideology happens rapidly when working close to the network. Newcomers often spend their mental energy trying to understand the institutional narratives and make connections with the FDE ideology. Add to this the pressure to keep up a high-paced production schedule; there is little else they can think about.

Discursive Re-appropriation

The lack of time to reflect critically is not only reserved for the new residents. The obsession with acting in “real-time” speed also has an impact on the Núcleo Duro. This is revealed in the way Fora do Eixo ascribes theoretical concepts to its practice. Aside from using techno-jargon, such as *hackear o estado* (*hacking the state, using state resources to challenge and criticize the state*); *F9* (*to reboot, start again*); *analog* (*out of*

⁶⁷ I use the plural pronouns “they” and “their” to further protect the identity of the individual.

touch, irrelevant, old-school), Fora do Eixo also has a tendency to appropriate academic terms and re-signify them in ways that do not always align with the term's original use. Take for example how Fora do Eixo often cross-references the term *solidarity economy* with *creative economy*. This can be confusing within academic circles and institutional circuits—such as UNESCO—for whom creative economy is usually associated with the group of theories (Howkins 2001; Florida 2002) that posits creativity, knowledge and information as a driving force of contemporary economies and give rise to what Richard Florida has called “creative cities” and a “creative class”. Central to creative industries are strong intellectual property laws that reward and incentivize human creativity. Fora do Eixo, however, adopts an openly antagonistic stance against intellectual property laws that attribute individual authorship (although, as I will argue, they push for institutional authorship) and considers itself a proponent of the *Copyleft* and *Free Culture* movements, which are alternatives and direct challenges to copyright.

Such contradictions in the use of terms are common to FDE; they care little about this, however, and use these words publicly and unapologetically with utmost confidence. Speaking about their application of theory, Talles Lopes admitted:

If Ivana [Bentes] comes to us and says, ‘you are all doing exactly what Deleuze and Guattari were writing about’, I then say ‘great’. And I do not have to read that then, because if someone like Ivana tells us, it’s because it’s so. She knows more about it.

One could argue that such a way of dealing with discourse and theory resists full engagement. For them, however, the preoccupation with accuracy of use is an intellectually elitist concern emanating from the academy. Why should FDE not have license to re-appropriate symbolic meaning? This is a valid point within the network's

institutional logic, since among their stated goals is precisely to dispute the symbolic reinvention of society. However, I would also point out that Fora do Eixo seeks ties with the academy—for example it relies on academics such as Ivana Bentes to give them legitimacy. The fact that academics are concerned with conceptual integrity does not make them elitist. Furthermore, FDE places high value on academic treatises written about them; they were very interested in working with me, for example. I suspect that if pushed further on the point they would reply that their re-appropriation of academic terms is FDE's attempt at "hacking the academy".

FDE's foray into creating a new language of economy has often backfired and made them the subject of ridicule. One notable example is the notion of *pós-rancor* (*post-rancor*). Coined by social critic and close FDE collaborator, Claudio Prado, this somewhat underdeveloped theory speculates that the antagonism between labor and capital has largely been resolved in our contemporary digital age, and now the tension resides between those who have information and those who do not have it. Despite its lack of supporting arguments FDE has captured the term, likely because in some pseudo way it encapsulates their own relation to labor/capital with the Collective Bank, as well as their expertise with navigating and managing digital environments. I suspect there is also something further at play, which is a realization that Prado's tenure at the MinC under the Gil and Ferreira administrations confers symbolic power to the network, and connects by association FDE to the highly popular ministers and their cultural policies. Indeed, a relationship with Prado positions FDE in the thick of the national movement towards progressive and inclusive cultural policies, a hot topic in Brazilian civil society. FDE began the practice of attaching the prefix "post-" to many other signifiers, including

the self-referential *pós-mercado* (*post-market*), *pós-capitalismo* (*post-capitalism*), *pós-amor* (*post-love, alluding to open relationships*), and to its Internet channel *PósTV*.

Fora do Eixo has often met criticism about its internal language with ambivalence, proclaiming instead an emphasis on action above discourse. Such a supposition implies that they are extra-discursive, that is to say, beyond discourse (*post-discourse?*). Some might say, however, that the network is *excessively* discursive. Yet perhaps there is another equally valid way to look at this. Although their loose use of academic terminology could be seen as resisting full engagement with the theories—whether due to lack of time or lack of desire—it could by the same token be viewed as more marketing-oriented and instrumental than deliberative or reflective. They appropriate and re-encode certain words for the benefit of the organization. Viewed in this way, FDE's discourse operates tactically to establish a relation of power in which they, with a greater degree of fluency in their institutional terminology, have the upper hand. In a personal communication, Sylvie Durán, a cultural producer from Costa Rica who is involved in numerous cultural networks and initiatives across Central America, expressed frustration and dismay at being put in a situation in which collaborating with FDE on projects worth millions of Reais meant having to adapt quickly to their terminology or risk exclusion. As an outsider with the added disadvantage of not speaking Portuguese fluently, she questioned if such practices actually uphold principals of solidarity. It is perhaps worthy to note here that Durán was an early enthusiast of FDE and endeavored to work with them to build connections and networks between cultural producers in Central America and Brazil. However, while they invited each other to several conferences and sponsored joint events, Durán was among the first to object to

FDE's practice of placing the Grito Rock "brand" on music festivals that she had been organizing in Costa Rica long before FDE came along, and promoting the festivals as FDE events. She paid dearly for her dissent and was, like many others, vilified by the network through social media platforms and shut out from certain funding opportunities they had been working on together.

Control, Court and Co-opt

Laís Bellini, a former resident in the Fora do Eixo house in São Paulo, offers perhaps the most revealing indictment of the internal politics of the network. Her story also proffers a challenge to those who champion the work/private life lack of divide, which she shows does not always equate with liberation, especially in the context of the FDE Houses. In her long and impassioned Facebook post of August 8, 2013, Bellini recounts the intense social pressure to work all day. Leaders of the thematic areas apply pressure to perform in sometimes less than subtle ways. The following excerpt from Bellini's Facebook post is long yet worth including as it displays not only the expectation to work, but also reveals psychological pressures that residents have faced. It alludes, moreover, to the hierarchical structure within the house and the control over the interpersonal relations of the inhabitants.

You live in the Fora do Eixo house in Sao Paulo and that is your life. If you want to visit your parents in the interior [of the State] ... honestly look, you better have a good reason ... and do not come around "asking" two months in a row. Yes, because there, that's the way it was. "Can I go visit my mom this week?" Stuff like that. You feel like meeting up with someone that isn't part of the network?! You're going to have to invent the biggest lie to get out of there for one night, and the next day, if you take a while to come back, there is has no happy face telling you it's ok. In there, it's control and work 24 hours a day. Now, you ask why Pablo [Capilé] is going out. Or why Lenissa [Lenza] is going to spend 3 days out of the house. You shouldn't ask. She's going to go out, she's going to

use the money from the Collective Bank, and nobody is going to ask how much she's going to spend. But of course, you see, she has "more *lastro* than you". Pablo [Capilé] decided to sleep late and missed his flight. No matter, he did not even bother to cancel the flight. "Laís, you're going to call [the airline], you're going to find a way to change the ticket." "But it's already past check-in time," ... "It does not matter, exchange it, or purchase another, you have to buy another ticket quick Laís. Have you already resolved it? (gtalk is exploding!) Go do it Laís, go do it soon girl, you're sluggish today, you are really sluggish, eh? You seem retarded." Yes, it's your job to buy 70 plane tickets and you do not stop for 4 days getting all the possible and impossible options and price quotes. God forbid you should book a ticket that is the wrong schedule. "Call her, ask her what time she is arriving. You have to have a flight for her. Laís, you are retarded, ARE YOU NOT LISTENING TO WHAT I'M SAYING?" (Bellini 2013).

As the above post indicates, there are social pressures beyond labor that bear upon and regulate residents. For example there is pressure to avoid relationships with people outside the network. I asked several members about this who openly confirmed that while dating outside the network is not forbidden, it was frowned upon because the demands of a relationship often interfere with the responsibilities one has within the network. Outsiders would likely object to the devotion, the long hours and the constant travel required for the network to succeed. On the other hand, dating within the network is viewed with approval since partners in that case understand the level of engagement required, although there are accounts of controlling these internal relationships as well (Bocchini and Locatelli 2013). In my time with FDE, I met several couples involved in the network and who lived together in the houses. One couple, Marcos and Isis, had a baby named Benjamin while living in the FDE house in São Paulo. Benjamin, affectionately referred to as the "network baby" and "baby 2.0", is being raised in the FDE house as part of the collective. His parents have ultimate authority over his life, but everyone is involved in some way in his upbringing, and the Collective Bank covers all of his material needs. Many interviewees also stated with little remorse that it was hard

to maintain friendships with people outside the network, even those from childhood, because they are in another mental place. And seeing one's family can be challenging as well, though several times while I was there family members came to see how their children lived. Most people I interviewed claimed that after an initial period of doubt, their parents were ultimately supportive.

Yet Bellini claims to have been discouraged from speaking even to her friends in the other thematic areas within the FDE house. She writes, "They said: 'Laís, Gabriel was your friend there in Bauru. Here you do not have to converse with him. In here you are not friends,'" (2013). Moreover, her personal account suggests that Fora do Eixo extended its control to relations of intimacy. She alleges that the network commonly uses seduction as a tool to attract and draw in people deemed of interest to the network, a practice Bellini and others maintain is internally referred to as "Catar e Co-optar" (to court and co-opt). She writes:

... a collective network, shared, with much love in [São Paulo] and worldwide... Just to point out, when I was still there, I participated in a conversation in which they proposed that I had to prove that I was more in, I was more devoted to the network, so they could trust me and that I could go out to do strategic actions such as to court and co-opt some guys they consider interesting to be inside [the network]. A week after that conversation I was out. And make no mistake my dears, love is there to be one more tool ... whether you are a university student, an intellectual, an interesting artist for them, a politically well-positioned professor. It does not matter, if you are the target, 'love', or rather 'post-love' is a tool, (ibid).

It is important to remember that Bellini is a disaffected member, and has an axe to grind against Fora do Eixo. This is not to say that she did not live those experiences, only that we must be measured in how much centrality we give to her posts. That said, Bellini became a referent for many others who came out critically against FDE. Moreover, this

was not the first time that such an accusation of using seduction as bait was made against Fora do Eixo, though perhaps it was the first time it was publicly exposed.⁶⁸ Bellini's charge was substantiated by the stories of many others who chimed in with their own accounts. Rafael Rolim, who lived for years in the FDE collective (and then the FDE House) in Fortaleza and was apparently close to Capilé comments:

'Court and Co-opt' is the term used by Pablo...constantly. I myself was forbidden by him to approach a person who I had an affinity for because, 'in the movement', I should be single, I was a good 'bait'. Spontaneous relations between two members, for love, are also not welcomed. Couples are pressured to break it off, and are forbidden to have relationships with people outside the network, except for higher order, (quoted in Bocchini and Locatelli 2013).⁶⁹

While "court and co-opt" is a practice that purportedly involves both men and women, it raises questions about gender relations in Fora do Eixo. Gender is an issue that the network maintains a heightened awareness of and attempts to navigate, albeit sometimes rather awkwardly. FDE takes pride in fostering an environment that supports women's advancement within and beyond the network. Women are encouraged, for example, to speak in public. In an interview, FDE member Driade Aguiar, who is of Afro-Brazilian descent, credits FDE's insistence that she speak on behalf of the network in conferences and other public events with giving her confidence. Aguiar entered the network in 2008 when she was eighteen years old and quickly became part of the Núcleo Duro. She views FDE's commitment to gender equality as, to use her words, "empowering". The organization also organizes conferences specifically dedicated to feminist issues. For example, in May 2014 they held a conference on women in Latin

⁶⁸ Long before Laís Bellini's revealing account on Facebook, I had heard from more than one source about Fora do Eixo's use of intimate relationships for the interests of the network. These sources have chosen to remain anonymous.

⁶⁹ I repeat my observation from footnote 6: In my time with FDE, I met several couples involved in the network and who lived together in the houses.

America called “*Ellas*”, which took place in the city of Belo Horizonte and where they discussed topics such as normative notions of beauty, human rights, domestic violence, education and more.⁷⁰ Also, if I were to attempt to identify the most influential people in organization, those with the most *lastro*, based on my observations I would say that five of the top ten are women (Lenissa Lenza, Marielle Ramirez, Carol Tokuyama, Driade Aguiar and Isis Maria). While this list is highly debatable, especially since FDE denies the existence of hierarchies in the network, I suspect that they would be pleased with the ratio. The point however is that there are many women with influence in the organization.

Despite their good intentions, however, there exists a clear division in the network in the roles that women and men take on that reflects essentialist views of male and female “nature”. By way of example, men are perceived as “naturally” political and more assertive with rhetoric. With a couple of notable exceptions, men are usually the ones deciding the strategic direction of the network, and they travel more extensively. Women are “naturally” better organizers, and as such they are in charge of the Collective Bank and the internal operations. This manifests in what seem to be ‘his’ and ‘her’ clubs (Garland 2012), where men and women in the Núcleo Duro occupy different physical spaces without much interaction except in meetings, which largely happen via Skype. This is not to say that men and women do not interact; those who are not in the Núcleo Duro work together all day long. However, at the level of upper management these divisions are made more visible.

⁷⁰ <http://www.ellas.cc/> (accessed August 21, 2014). In Portuguese and Spanish, *ellas* is the feminine personal pronoun for ‘they’ or ‘them’.

At one point, the FDE house in Brasilia was occupied almost entirely by women. This was done intentionally. When in an interview I inquired why, Carol Tokuyo pressed the issue that this was necessary for the women to grow and participate on their own terms. Tokuyo's perspective invokes a position in feminism that rejects linear and patriarchal concept of time and space. For example, feminist scholar Mary Daly wrote:

...women's *own* time ...*is* whenever we are living out of our own sense of reality, refusing to be possessed, conquered, and alienated by the linear, measured-out, quantitative time of the patriarchal time. Women, in becoming who we are, are living in a qualitative, organic time that escapes the measurements of the system, (quoted in Jaggar 2004, 367).

While it is commendable that the network tries to give the women the space to act in their own terms, it also suggests that power relations between the genders are likely expressed in contexts where they coincide in a physical space, even if subconsciously.

“Court and co-opt” is a practice that problematizes Fora do Eixo's claim of gender equality. One group of sixteen disaffected members who had lived at one or more of the FDE Houses (including Bellini and Rolim) wrote and released a manifesto online about what they perceived as the gender bias within the organization. “Court and co-opt” is mentioned in this manifesto and, to stress the point, even though it involved both men and women its specific deployment described below in a particularly misogynist way, offers a glimpse of what can easily be perceived as sexism. The fourth of seven points addressed in the manifesto states:

Within the scope of co-optation of the network, is that of having relations with an “ugly” woman. He who maintains loving or sexual relationships with women considered ugly, with the purpose of co-opting her, is more respected by others (they have more “lastro”). It is common to hear the jargon among those who are closest to the summit [Núcleo Duro] that “whoever hooks up with an ‘ugly’

woman gets more lastro.⁷¹

Capilé, for his part, denies the practice of “court and co-opt”, assuring that, “emotional relationships are not determined by rules of the movement, but rather based on the desires of each individual.” When I pushed Altenfelder on this point, he also denied the existence of such a practice, at least in the manner that Bellini suggested. Sure, he admitted, when someone new shows up they (presumably the men of the organization) speak among themselves as boys would in a bar, joking about who has the best chances to seduce that person. But he rejected the notion that it held any deeper meaning, and adamantly denied its systematization as a strategy to lure newcomers in.

To be fair, in the midst of all of this criticism, several females interjected with accounts claiming they had maintained relations with people outside the network while living and working in the FDE Houses.⁷² However, it is hard to ignore the overwhelming amount of overlapping stories involving “courting and co-opting”. A quick Google search with the tag “*catar e cooptar*” + “*fora do eixo*” yields at least 3,900 links.⁷³ The sheer numbers speak for themselves and make it difficult to discount their honesty. The network’s attempt to discredit these individuals, or explain this away as a misinterpretation falls flat. Fora do Eixo often states that it is not afraid to make mistakes. This is a healthy attitude, and is perhaps among the reasons they have overcome countless barriers while generating an alternative market for culture and making a name for itself as a social movement. But for as much as they may not be

⁷¹ <http://feministaspelacultura.noblogs.org/post/2013/08/26/manifesto-fora-do-eixo-machismo/> (accessed September 2, 2014).

⁷² <https://www.facebook.com/luz.anna.rocha/posts/706083982740061>

⁷³ Retrieved August 22, 2014.

afraid to make mistakes, they certainly seem more reticent about admitting to those mistakes, beyond of course giving lip service to the vague claim, “we have made mistakes.”

In conclusion to this section on discourse and power relations internal to *Fora do Eixo*, I wish to stress that my decision to include here the critical stories of Bellini et al. does not presume or privilege a certain type of sexual normativity. The issue at hand, I hope I have made clear, is to what degree those parties involved had the autonomy to decide their intimate and interpersonal relations for themselves. “Court and co-opt”, along with the other social pressures presented here, reveals how the ideal of *homo-solidaricus* does not always play out at the level of the individual. Taking on the form of economic subjectivity required of membership within the collective and receiving the benefits of its solidarity arrangement comes with a cost. The individual freedom that Altenfelder alludes to requires a degree of engagement with the network that necessitates various forms of self-denial and regulation, the re-arranging of social, intimate and familial relationships, and the acceptance of a tiered power structure. All of these realizations underscore, in my opinion, the importance to continually reflect upon the question: Solidarity for and with whom?

Thus far, I have discussed the internal power dynamics of *Fora do Eixo*. While I briefly touched on the power relations between organizations that often arise from FDE’s use of discourse, especially of its very particular FDE vocabulary (when speaking about Sylvie Durán), in the second part of this chapter I delve deeper into this topic. Understanding FDE’s power relations in the fields of cultural production and social

activism requires, I argue, considering Card as a discursive formation that reproduces social and ideological systems, and entails unraveling its shifting system of valuation.

IV: Card as Discourse

Perhaps the biggest self-indexing enactment of the Fora do Eixo network that also does its ideological work is Card. Today Card, arguably the most important component of Fora do Eixo's alternative economy, is a currency around which people have developed an identity and an economic form of life. Yet aside from producing economic subjectivities and encoding culturally and historically specific modes of sociality in which solidarity is esteemed, Card is deployed as a discourse also in the capture of Reais. Understanding Card as discourse in this way requires review of how Fora do Eixo assigns value to its complementary currency and how the network negotiates equivalence between Card and Brazil's official currency.

While economists have long dealt with the question of money and value, here I choose to bypass them because rather than dealing with economics per se, I am putting forward a more sociological and cultural treatment of Card. Card is largely a discursive formation in the tradition of Foucault and its value arises in part through the micro-politics involved in the dispersal and circulation of the various solidarity discourses that feed into Fora do Eixo's alternative economy. I will argue further below that the way FDE parlays discourse into economic, cultural and political capital has to do with the emotive, or affective, associations that people attach to the concept of solidarity and also in consensus building. Yet, while my focus is largely on Foucault and discourse, there are parallels to Marx and George Simmel in how FDE assigns value to Card that are

instructive here. This is particularly curious given that Marx and Simmel usually evoke contradistinction in the debate over money and value. Notwithstanding, they both help to explain specific moments or facets in Card's shifting valuation.

For Marx value emerges from the labor time necessary to produce a commodity. Simmel, in contrast, challenged Marx's idea of an absolute value of money measured in labor, and was more interested in the symbolic nature of money and how it reflected human values, psychology, and culture (Frisby 1990). Applied to the context of *Fora do Eixo*, we might say that the symbolic nature of Card is an expression of relationships of solidarity. Simmel's approach to money as something more philosophical and even, as Frisby notes, *aesthetical*, contrasts with the materialistic approach of Marx. For Simmel, value is relative and only transpires at the actual point of exchange. An analysis of money in exchange, for Simmel, would reveal something fundamental about human nature because there is nothing intrinsic about money itself; rather it emerges only in relation to human valuations (Parry & Block 1989). In this way, Simmel's perspective seemingly speaks to the type of substantive, subjective or qualitative values that inform the solidarity exchanges of *Fora do Eixo*'s alternative market.

Simmel's view of money does not always map onto Card, however. For instance, there is divergence when considering the type of relationships established at the moment of exchange when money is used as a universal equivalent. If for Marx, a universal equivalent alienated a working class by breaking down communal ties, for Simmel this is precisely what made a universal equivalent so liberating. That is to say, for him money frees humans from the affective relations involved in economic exchange that previous

societies dealt with because in a money economy a relationship between two people was done at the moment of exchange, freeing individuals from certain bonds that require future transactions and that limit mobility. Simmel writes:

There is, therefore, the right to buy oneself out of a personal obligation by means of money. The lord of the manor who can demand a quantity of beer or poultry or honey from a serf thereby determines the activity of the latter in a certain direction (1990, 286).

Likewise, if you were in need of a new pair of shoes you would not be bound to trade with someone you dislike just because they were the only one in need of, and thus willing to trade the loaves of bread that you had to offer; instead you are free to trade money with anyone anywhere. Though there is logic in that perspective, it does not explain how Card is used, especially given that the complementary currency is not a universal equivalent in the traditional sense but rather operates according to shifting registers of value. Moreover, a further relationship is required/expected/promised in Card's exchange. Card is in many ways a form of credit redeemable for services associated only with Fora do Eixo and its partners. One cannot purchase a new car with Card, and choices of where to eat are circumscribed within a limited economic network. Furthermore, I would suggest that FDE's strategy for attaining cultural, political and greater economic capital clutches on its ability to foster the type of affective economic relationships that Simmel suggests run contrary to individual freedom. This is a different form of liberation than that which George Simmel thought virtuous about money in the form of a single universal equivalent.

That money arises out of social interaction rather than immutable laws is something we forget in our daily use of it. When looked at as a discourse, Card is a site

that reminds us that money is a social construction, a cultural artifact that is not external to us but is part of our cultural history. It has no intrinsic quality or value; it is rather an agreement, a social contract of sorts. To be sure, FDE sees its use of Card as an agreed upon social contract, a tool deployed for the purpose of social and cultural change. In FDE's view, Card is a currency that does not break down—for better (Simmel) or worse (Marx)—communal ties in favor of the promotion of individualization, but is rather used as a way to build community. It is a largely abstract currency that does not alienate, but rather promotes equality. Critics might adamantly, and perhaps rightfully, challenge this but nevertheless it is key to understanding how FDE equates the substantive and cultural value of “solidarity” with economic value in the capitalist market and the political and cultural capital that follows.

Assigning Equivalence

In relation to Reais, Fora do Eixo simply claims that one Card is equivalent to one Real, an unremarkable equation based more on pragmatism than mathematical calculation. The equation makes sense in its simplicity because Card is not competing with the Real, and so it is easier to deal with in this way and obviates more difficult translations of equivalence that occur when converting, say, state-based currencies between countries. Card is not calculated from an outside set of macro-economic structures, but rather it is decided internally, a reflection of the currency's rootedness in FDE's specific cultural history. Perhaps the most interesting part, discursively speaking, of the “one Card equals one Real because we say so” claim is that funding entities have accepted this as a legitimate equivalence. Why they have done so is revealing of what

North (2007) has called the micro-politics of alternative forms of money, especially in the context of cultural funding. Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) remind us that politics is a struggle to fix meaning, which in the context of Card I extend to include the politics involved in fixing value.⁷⁴ That the funding entities accept Card speaks to a particular political moment in Brazilian society, which places high value on new experiments that attempt to overcome histories of subjugation. What is certain is that Fora do Eixo has managed to parlay the symbolic capital of Card—bolstered by the attachment of affect, or emotive associations to the solidarity economy discourse—into economic capital in the form of grants that amount to hundreds of thousands of Reais.

A fair challenge could be made here: that I am assuming economic capital means the accumulation of official money, when one of Fora do Eixo's central goals is to develop a plurality of conceptions of economic capital. To paraphrase Primavera (2010, 55) again, once money is removed from economic exchange scarcity shifts to abundance. An abundance of economic capital must not necessarily entail an abundance of official currency, or currency at all. Notwithstanding, official money is something that FDE spends a good deal of time trying to obtain, which underscores the fact that the network does not act externally to the capitalist economy but rather finds avenues that broaden the possibilities of acting economically within it. This line of reasoning gives weight to FDE's insistence that Card be seen as a *complementary* currency rather than an *alternative* one, since it complements the network's interaction with the Real and the capitalist economy.

⁷⁴ Of course value implies a preferred system of meanings with which we imbue the social world with symbolic weight and that informs our practice, identity, forms of exchange, and so on.

Labor value

The second part of the story of how Fora do Eixo uses Card in the capture of Reais involves how the network assigns value to Card specifically for this purpose. As I have alluded to, there is no absolute way that FDE assigns value to Card. To be sure, part of FDE's success in the accumulation of political and economic capital is very much the result of the slipperiness with which the network discursively sets terms of value for its currency. Card's exchange value has continuously shifted over the years in response to specific contexts and needs that arise. Card's history, as I presented in the previous chapter, has unfolded on a case-by-case basis and its value has often depended on the stakes, gesturing again to the micro-politics involved in money as discourse. At first, Card's value was largely qualitative, attached to substantive use-values that resolved particular and immediate issues involved in cultivating a music scene in Cuiabá. For example, Card was used to trade time in the studio for a band's performance at a festival. Despite Card not existing as a currency at that initial trade between Capilé's Vector car and a recording track (see Chapter 3) the exchange nevertheless reveals the alternative economy's conceptual foundation wherein a universal equivalent is measured in representations of solidarity rather than a fixed unit price. Additionally, there is added value to this type of exchange in the sense that partaking in this arrangement inscribes the economic act and the economic subject within a larger movement and set of ideals.

Later on, particularly when dealing with grant funding entities, Fora do Eixo quickly realized the expediency of fixing labor value to Card. Today labor remains the central valuation that the network employs for its currency in the capture of Reais. An example of how this works in practice should make this clear.

I return to a conversation with Lenissa Lenza about Fora do Eixo's 2011 Annual conference, the one in which over 1,500 participated at the newly inaugurated FDE house in São Paulo. When asked what it cost to produce such an event, Lenza claimed it amounted to over R\$1,000,000 (\$500,000 U.S.). This seemed like a lot of money for a conference. When pushed further on the point, she said that "in Real, it cost R\$350,000 [\$125,000 U.S.]. Including Card, it cost over R\$1,000,000." Lenza reveals a "rhetorical-mathematics" characteristic of Fora do Eixo. That is, Card here references the intellectual and manual labor of the members that spent weeks and months organizing the conference. Her calculation confirms two things: First, to say that the residents in the FDE Houses do not earn salaries, as many of their critics do, is not entirely true; they do in fact earn a quantifiable salary, at least symbolically, as their hours are logged in and registered as Card in the Collective Bank. Second, despite Card being, as I have suggested, a qualitative measure of value rooted in discursive representations of solidarity, FDE also assigns a more quantifiable value to it, at least partly, through these wages, which is to say through labor. The logical question to follow becomes: How much is that salary, and how is it determined? The answer to these questions reveals another rhetorical maneuver.

Isis, the woman in charge of the Collective Bank in São Paulo (and Benjamin's Mom), explained to me the network's system for determining wages and how it came about. She recounted that a few years ago in a meeting, the Núcleo Duro determined that each member of the house would earn a salary of 50 Cards per hour based on the average salary of their type of work (communications, cultural production) in the market place. If a graphic designer earns R\$50/hour (\$25 U.S.) in the market, then a graphic designer in

the FDE Houses should earn no less in Card. Therefore, they looked to the capitalist market for equivalence and their alternative economy becomes a re-presentation of that marketplace.

Yet if the marketplace serves as a referent, this calculation is largely inflated because their ideological principles demand that in the FDE house no one earns more than anyone else. On average, then, it is said that every resident—whether the person in charge of the kitchen, the person who greets and drives people around, or members of the Núcleo Duro—earns R\$50/hour. While the number of people who live there permanently varies we can nevertheless calculate an estimate of what Fora do Eixo salaries amount to. Let us say, as Capilé did on the television program *Roda Viva*, that twenty people live full-time in the house in São Paulo. They work, according to their calculations and in-line with their “work is life” ideology, an average of sixteen hours per day. Therefore, one person’s daily salary equals 800 Cards, or, given the supposed commensurability with the Real, it is R\$800 (\$400 U.S.). Multiplied by twenty residents earning the same, the amount quickly spirals to R\$16,000 (\$8,000 U.S.) per day. This is the average value of labor generated in one day at only one of the seven FDE Houses. Monthly this amounts to an average of R\$24,000 (\$12,000 U.S.) per resident, or R\$480,000 (\$240,000 U.S.) for the house. By way of comparison, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics the average wage in Brazil is R\$2,100 (\$1,050 U.S.) per month and the minimum wage is around R\$724 (\$362 U.S.).⁷⁵

⁷⁵http://www.ibge.gov.br/english/estatistica/indicadores/trabalhoerendimento/pme_nova/pme_201402rj_02.shtm; <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/brazil/wages> (accessed March 31, 2014).

Therefore, a resident of the FDE Houses is making in theory ten times the average Brazilian salary, elevating them to the top 1% of the population.

The labor-based calculation with which Fora do Eixo assigns value to Card serves FDE in at least two ways. First, it satisfies requirements of some, though not all, funding entities that stipulate that solicitors of grants must match at least 10% of their request. Not all funding entities require this, but for those that do, Fora do Eixo can easily match—and exponentially surpass—any amount of funds allocated to them in the form of a grant. If FDE solicits R\$100,000 (\$50,000 U.S.) for a music festival or a conference that takes a month to produce, it can easily claim to be contributing R\$480,000 (\$240,000 U.S.). Lenza's calculation of the 2011 Annual Conference above expresses this: R\$350,000 (\$125,000 U.S.) came from various external channels of funding, and FDE contributed 650,000 (\$325,000 U.S.) in Card. This is an obvious advantage over other cultural organizations vying for the same public and private resources but that, despite the many hours of labor (some of which is likely unremunerated), may not index their time in relation to a collective bank.

Additionally, when asked about the amount of money that flows through the network annually, one is met with different answers depending on the day and who is asked. In one example Lenza cited that of the approximately 88 million (\$44 million U.S.) flowing through the network in 2011, 15% (approximately 13 million) was in Real and 85% (approximately 75 million) in Card. Of the 15% in official money, 8% came from public money while the other 7% was money the network generated through its own services. I suspect these numbers are loose inflations that FDE cites for many reasons,

not the least of which is the fact that the de-centralization of the network makes it difficult to track the flow of money, as discussed in Chapter 3. But there is another reason that the network benefits from such exaggerations: It is self-indexical and gives the illusion that it is bigger than it is.

Another reason why funding entities might accept these overblown numbers connects to the second way that attaching labor value to Card favors Fora do Eixo when competing for grants and reveals yet another rhetorical maneuver, the “multiplier effect” (1+1=3).⁷⁶ According to Capilé, living collectively and working around the clock without official salaries as FDE does means that they can stretch out funds longer and further. On the television program *Roda Viva*, Capilé spoke with conviction when claiming that for every Real that FDE receives from outside sources the network’s alternative labor arrangement allows them to multiply it by a factor of fifteen in terms of productivity.⁷⁷ That is to say, if we were to compare what organization “Y” manages to achieve with R\$100,000 (\$50,000 U.S.) versus what FDE manages to achieve with the same amount, Capilé’s argument leads to the conclusion that an investment in FDE clearly gets better value for money spent. This is an important claim when dealing with the spending of public funds.

For Passa Palavra this is yet another exposition of Fora do Eixo’s capitalist and exploitative practices. In Passa Palavra’s view, value in relation to FDE’s labor practices is best described as surplus value, for it is the unpaid work (manual, cognitive, symbolic) of its members that affords FDE rhetorical license to claim that they turn R\$1 into R\$15.

⁷⁶ I thank Shannon Garland for helping me find the word to describe this practice.

⁷⁷ At other times, Capilé has claimed a factor of six, suggesting a pattern of arbitrariness in their calculations.

It is this that creates such surplus value in FDE. To be fair, this type of flexible and arbitrary assignment of value has allowed *Fora do Eixo* to achieve many things. However, some have argued that it skews the relation between economic value and cultural value in independent cultural circuits (Garland 2012) while also tipping the scales in their favor when it comes to capturing grants.

While *Fora do Eixo* attaches value to Card through labor, it is not quite the same as Marx's labor theory of value. It is true that the FDE sets the price of their services (i.e. their commodities) in terms of the labor necessary to produce those services, such as Marx believes is the way to arrive at the price of commodities in a capitalist economy. However, FDE's price for an hour's worth of labor represents a rather loose interpretation of labor value in the capitalist market. Furthermore, while the labor of the residents in the FDE Houses—the physical mode of production—is certainly material, it is the solidarity discourse encoded within the labor that confers the most value to the complementary currency in the eyes of the funding entities. Therefore, while Card's value is based partly in material production, it is predominantly discursive.

Having established the discursive qualities of Card, and shown how its shifting valuation slips back and forth between representations of solidarity and an attachment to labor value, we must delve deeper still and consider further mechanisms that elucidate the process by which *Fora do Eixo* jockeys discourse into political and economic capital. Here I borrow heavily from ethnomusicologist Shannon Garland (2012) and cultural critic George Yúdice (2013), both of whom have had close interactions with FDE. Following Garland's observations on how FDE's ubiquitous online visibility imbues the

network with more value, I contend that although Card is a discursive formation, its value does not arise solely from the discourse itself, but in the *widespread circulation of that discourse through social media platforms*. Additionally, Yúdice's initial reflections on the Núcleo Duro's use of consensus building as a currency itself dovetail with my own personal observations and reveals the true micro-politics and power relations involved in its alternative economic arrangement. I will now briefly explain how this works in practice.

“A Chuva de Like” (The downpour of ‘Like’)

Among the reasons to consider the discursive dimensions and self-reflexive enactments of Fora do Eixo is its obsessive use of social media in order to troll for and mediate criticism in “real time”, to gain visibility and to ultimately reaffirm and legitimize the network. Arguably more than any other group, Fora do Eixo has embraced the Internet and understood the potential of social media platforms to expand the network and to grow and diversify the Fora do Eixo “brand”. The quick and often times vehement response to criticisms about itself that pop up on forums such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter is a well-known characteristic of the network, something that I and others, for instance Garland, Yúdice and Sylvie Durán, have witnessed first hand.

Garland spent time with Fora do Eixo, like myself, and included the network within her doctoral investigations that map out Indy Rock circuits across South America.

In a 2012 article⁷⁸ she offers a brilliant summary of FDE's embrace of Internet and how it

⁷⁸ Garland's article considers how alternative economic arrangements, such as Fora do Eixo's use of Card, might actually skew the traditional relation between cultural and economic value that has long given cultural legitimacy to the Indie rock scene.

engages in “network-wide media diffusion tactics”, which involve specific Twitter hashtags, sharing and commenting on FDE-related action on Facebook (515). These, she writes, are “sometimes coordinated and carried out during specific time frames to keep the stories prominent in social media news feeds” (ibid), a practice that I witnessed during my time with FDE and from following them online. In February 2012, FDE even managed to elevate the hashtag #GritoRock to the top trending position on Twitter due to its coordinated efforts to include the hashtag in thousands of tweets during the day (523).

A deeper degree of symbolic capital, of course, corresponds to the amount of likes or hashtags one receives. Such Internet functions perform as discursive tools that confer legitimacy to what is being said in the way that, say, a popular vote would. During her time living in the FDE house, Laís Bellini (2013) recounts another practice whereby after writing a post (and especially if it directly responded to a criticism), Capilé would habitually go from room to room ordering people to “like” his comment and to offer their own declarations about how “awesome” FDE was, and how happy and inspired they were to be living there and partaking in the movement. Thus would begin the “downpour of likes”, according to Bellini. Indeed, the facility of FDE to receive hundreds if not thousands of “likes” in the matter of an hour gives the appearance that the organization is larger and more relevant than it perhaps truly is.

The amount of Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and other social media platforms related to Fora do Eixo ensures the enormous cross-referencing of the network. In addition to self-reflexively en-acting the network and lending coherence to it as an entity, all of these media actions are tactics that help generate what FDE members call,

“‘meme’ force, in terms of mediated recognition, a reference to the concept of ‘memes’, images or words that quickly become popular through their reproduction of the Internet,” (Garland, 515). FDE portrays itself as a juggernaut force.

Fora do Eixo has a communication army at its disposal, and in many ways its use of technology sets the stage for alternative forms of civic and cultural engagement in the contemporary moment. Its media visibility team makes sure that FDE gets more coverage than anything or anyone else, and PósTV is a powerful tool in which to display these events to an online audience in real-time. However, many feel that they overstep. Social movements that collaborate with FDE object to the way it takes over the media operations at protests and marches, making it seem as if it were solely a Fora do Eixo event. This happened on a larger scale during the March for Marijuana and the March for Liberty protests in São Paulo in 2011, which was for many groups (Passa Palavra among them) a first exposure and interaction with Fora do Eixo. I will discuss these two political marches in Chapter 5 in the context of Mídia NINJA. What is important here is that following these and subsequent events, many groups now refuse to partner with the FDE and take critical aim at the network’s self-promotion. The circulation of the FDE brand, it is argued, becomes more important for the network than the events themselves, a view that I accept to be at least partly accurate.

This criticism applies as much to the production of cultural events as it does to the social movement wing of the network. For culture, the perpetual expansion of *Grito Rock* is perhaps the best example of this. A deeper reflection of FDE’s emphasis on self-marketing and their incredible savvy in that regard undercuts their self-referencing “post-

market” and “post-capitalist” labels because many of their practices, including the tiered pay scale of musicians who perform at their festivals, are modeled on the capitalist market. What is more, FDE’s unique capacity to diversify the scope of issues and causes that it takes up and that become associated with the “FDE movement” is evidence, for groups like Passa Palavra, of its desire to expand into new niche markets. In my view, it exhibits a pronounced anxiety about remaining relevant, of assuring that the network never becomes *analog*. Perhaps a symptom of their hyper-mediated environment and accelerated modes of living/working includes a latent fear of obsolescence due to the rapidity with which trends nowadays pass into obscurity. This might also explain their constant reference to “upgrading” its social technologies and its objectives.

Moreover, detractors take issue with the fact that Fora do Eixo notoriously distributes positive value to all of those working with FDE and negative value to those that challenge it. Its army of communication makes it difficult to criticize or make declarations about the network without being outright disqualified, something that Sylvie Durán knows all too well. In the conclusion to her article Garland echoes what others have suggested: that despite FDE’s ideology of democratic participation, the tactics that the network employs to gain visibility in the competitive online environment, “generates a type of self-contained institutionalism that runs counter to ... its own goals for democratic access and production within the culture industries,” (521).

Trade in Solidarity and Delivery of Consensus

Mídia NINJA, on the other hand, is an interesting example of how the visibility afforded by the Internet can be a double-edged sword. This acknowledgement is at the

heart of why FDE initially tried to decouple Mídia NINJA from itself: the network realized that its negative reputation for trying to make everything “Fora do Eixo” (“We are all Fora do Eixo” they regularly declare) and for its insistence on control would cloud people’s desire to partake in Mídia NINJA. This came to a head during Fora do Eixo’s appearance on the highly esteemed national television program *Roda Viva* on August 5, 2013 in the midst of the 2013 protests in Brazil, which I explained in the Chapter 1. As a reminder, Capilé and journalist Bruno Torturra were invited to the program as Mídia NINJA, but it quickly became obvious that NINJA was in fact Fora do Eixo. The following day, Beatriz Seigner’s (2013) Facebook post sparked a storm of negative publicity for FDE that lasted for months as critics and former collaborators attacked the network’s economic and social practices in blogs, on Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and other online forums. They were often accused of “cult-like” behavior. Even mainstream media outlets dedicated segments to FDE on national news programs and in newspapers (Globo News, Folha São Paulo). It is somehow ironic that when Fora do Eixo finally became *most* visible, following its appearance on national television, the notoriety that the network so desperately craved actually came in the form of social demonization. For many people who had never heard of Fora do Eixo prior to *Roda Viva*, the prevailing representations of the network were predominantly discrediting. Lenza admitted to me that the network is in a more precarious financial position than ever because some funding entities are weary to allocate grants to FDE due to the influence of negative publicity.

While subsequent personal communications with Altenfelder and Lenza lead me to believe that they have become humbled by the experience and have made adjustments

in their internal structures, the network still views the whole episode as a conspiracy emanating from the “old media” and the “rancorous Brazilian right”.⁷⁹ The conspiracy theory is supported, in FDE’s view, by the fact that Mídia NINJA, as a form of amateur or citizen journalism, offers direct challenges to mainstream news media and questions its motives for the editing of certain content. The unabashed cherry picking of content was particularly salient in the mainstream media’s coverage of the 2013 protests and the subsequent protests around the abuse of power and corruption in the handling of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, which I will discuss this in greater detail in the next chapter.

While I believe there may be a little substance to Fora do Eixo’s concern for the motives behind the mainstream media’s negative reporting on them, I also think that FDE does some cherry picking of its own. FDE’s emphasis on right wing and industry conspiracy glosses over the very content of those dissenting voices and fails to account for why many on the left no longer associate with them. In setting up this dichotomy of the old media and rancorous right versus “us”, FDE establishes its own axis. A criticism of FDE equates to support of the right. This was Yúdice’s point in his Facebook post from August 11, 2013,⁸⁰ which reflected upon a specific reaction he received from a FDE collaborator, Alexandre Santini, in response to a post Yúdice had written the previous

⁷⁹ While the network subscribes above all to the conspiracy theory of the old media and rancorous right, the multiple accusations have not fallen completely on deaf ears. For instance, in addressing some of Laís Bellini’s concerns, the Núcleo Duro has indirectly acknowledged that the first year in the FDE house in São Paulo—the year that Bellini was residing there—was extremely tense for a host of reasons, not the least of which includes trying to establish a presence in the heart of the axis after a decade of positioning oneself in critical contradistinction to it. While sidestepping admission of guilt by avoiding specific accusations, Capilé has stated that those living in the house were still figuring out a routine of living and working collectively, and that perhaps some people had succumb to the demands and intensity of the period.

⁸⁰ <http://lagringasudaca.com/post/57970953462/depoimento-do-academico-george-yudice-sobre-sua>

day. On August 10, Yúdice detailed his wife Sylvie Durán's and his largely unfavorable personal interactions with FDE. In the comment section below his post, Santini suggested that Yúdice consider the fact that FDE is under attack from the “big media and reactionary right”. This type of response is important for understanding how FDE converts its solidarity discourse into political and economic capital.

To clarify, by political capital I am not referring to politics in the traditional way, such as would be the case of someone from the Núcleo Duro were to run for political office. Rather, I take it to mean what Yúdice suspected were, in his view, the political aspirations of Capilé. That is to say, as achieving a level of control over managing alternative cultural and social processes in Brazil and, I would add, beyond its national borders. Part of this positioning, Yúdice writes, consists in offering politicians and funding entities a wide base, what they claim to be the largest cultural network in the world. While Yúdice provocatively questions how *Fora do Eixo* can reasonably profess to speak on behalf of movements that involve such a multitude of stakeholders and diverse claims—for instance the “Latin American Cultural Movement” or the “Social Movements of Culture”⁸¹—he recognizes FDE's aptitude for the appearance of consensus building and for converting the multitude into social (or economic) currency that helps in the positioning of power.

With this in mind, I would suggest that we might also consider *Fora do Eixo*'s solidarity economy as including both micro and macro scales of operation. At the micro-level—which I take to mean those individuals, business, groups, networks and so forth

⁸¹ Passa Palavra shared this concern. Following the March for Liberty, which was in fact largely organized by FDE, Passa Palavra wrote its first public condemnation of FDE, insisting that the network could not stand in to represent the Brazilian left.

that collaborate in its solidarity economy—we might infer that they are trading in futures, or rather *alternative futures* and the promise of social transformation inscribed within solidarity discourses. At the micro-level, FDE’s discourse circulates and gains value and symbolic capital with the increase in participants. At the macro-level, which involves relations between Fora do Eixo, funding entities and politicians, the Núcleo Duro capitalizes on the symbolic capital of its large numbers of members to secure official currency from funders, and to gain leveraging clout in dealings with politicians. This latter point includes degrees of clientelism, since at times it awards FDE the possibility to write the very government grants that it then applies for, which always “favor FDE projects owing to the high overlap between ideologies,” (Garland, 521). At this macro-level, the network trades in consensus with “the multitude” standing in as the surplus value that allows FDE to render the affective (emotive) attachments that people associate with solidarity—including identification, empathy, sympathy, antipathy (against the ‘old media’ and the ‘rancorous Brazilian right’) and other connected emotional states—into political and economic capital.

V. Conclusion

Fora do Eixo is an extremely complex entity that defies typical classification. If in the last chapter I emphasized the solidarity aspects of FDE, in this chapter I have tried to provoke a more nuanced perspective that, at times, throws into question the network’s very claim to solidarity. I opened the current chapter with focus on the discursive and material practices involved in the production of a new economic subjectivity based on solidarity principles, and closed the chapter having sketched an image of an intensely

competitive network, unafraid to throw its weight around, and which at times is ostensibly more engrossed in its self image and in the expansion of the FDE brand than it is in the cultural content that it produces or in the social issues that it takes on. I believe it a fair assessment to suggest that behind the curtain of solidarity (which I firmly accept to be its genuine goal) Fora do Eixo's agenda includes—*in part, and by no means entirely*—an intense and self-conscious desire to remain relevant, while securing a position of power in directing alternative social and cultural processes.

Internally speaking, the testimonies of Bellini (2013), Seigner (2013) and so many others, describe a rigid and vertical internal structure reinforced through the ideological work of institutional discourses and various levels of psychological control. In their aforementioned article, Kreiss et al. (2010) remind us that Weber, though largely critical of bureaucracies, also pointed out their positive qualities, for instance safeguarding against arbitrary rule and charismatic authority. In Fora do Eixo, lastro makes it difficult to hold the whims of Capilé's charismatic authority or the authority of the Núcleo Duro in check. Fora do Eixo's internal power structure involves forms of regulation—upon the body, in one's relation to material culture, in inter-subjective relations and social comportment—that are perhaps less transparent than say, corporations or bureaucratic forms. This acknowledgement should not diminish the fact that there are others, indeed many others, who genuinely find purpose and meaning in the network. Nor can we assume that those who remain in the Fora do Eixo houses are dupes. That said, however, the multiple accounts of disaffected members certainly tarnish the image of a group that alleges to be living the very transformation they wish to produce in society. While FDE has done impressive things within Brazilian culture and society, their “ends justify the

means” attitude frequently runs contrary to the their claim of solidarity, and is perhaps where the network needs the most adjustment.

In the previous chapter I described FDE’s economy, and the network as an entity, as always in the process of becoming. That holds true as much in light of its shortcomings as in its greatest virtues. Despite over ten years of growth, FDE is still a young organization and it should not forever be defined exclusively by its missteps during this period, lest we ourselves gloss over the positive contributions it has made to Brazilian cultural production and social activism—for example Mídia NINJA, the subject of the Chapter 5. Those practices that have been most targeted for censure—capture and co-opt, prickly responses and ostracism of dissenters, rhetorical gymnastics, and collusion in capturing grants—emerged from of a group of young individuals (many of who are no longer so young) with little experience and trying new ways to carry out unconventional experiments with cultural production and social intervention. It is important to recognize that these are not long-entrenched institutional procedures, but rather are practices that the network can certainly respond to and modify. I suspect that following the shift in public opinion, the Núcleo Duro has ceased many of its more controversial practices and has made adjustments to members’ lifestyle, as evidenced by the self-conscious spike in Facebook photos depicting residents enjoying themselves at beaches, with partners and engaging in other leisurely activities. In a conversation with Lenza, she admitted that FDE now realizes they must work harder to sustain better relations with people who leave the network. And I would venture to say that “court and co-opt” is by now, given the scrutiny, a practice of the past.

Indeed, the story I have presented here serves in many ways as a cautionary tale about what happens when those fighting power become a node of power themselves. The case of *Fora do Eixo* demonstrates that placing such high value on speed, action, expansion and visibility at the expense of critical self-reflection may actually work contrary to the purpose(s) that one serves, and sometimes result in irreparable collateral damage. FDE is navigating, with varying degrees of success, a current tension experienced by social movements in a network society. This tension registers on at least two levels. First, the recognition that there is “power in numbers”—there are undeniable political and economic advantages in the consensus provided by expansive networks. To paraphrase Yúdice (2013), in the contemporary cultural economy, the name of the game is managing and delivering the multitudes to politicians and funding entities, with great benefits for those who know how to do so. But we must ask, at what cost to plurality or even solidarity? What gets lost and who is overshadowed or trampled in the process? These questions connect to the second part of the tension, which is appreciating the fact that multi-stakeholderism requires careful and sometimes painstaking negotiation and authentic debate. The case of FDE points to both the power and the limits of consensus building.

Chapter Five:

Mídia NINJA and the 2013 Brazilian Protests

“Look, Ulysses, I can fight with the Pope, with the Catholic Church, with PMDB, with anyone, but I will not fight with Doctor [sic] Roberto [Marinho].”
(Porto, 1)

The above epigraph is an anecdote that supposedly took place in 1985 during the first moments of Brazil’s transition back to democracy after twenty years of military rule. It is drawn from the official biography of Roberto Marinho, founder and CEO of TV Globo, Brazil’s largest media company.⁸² The moment captures a heated response between president-elect Tancredo Neves (the first to usher in the new era of democracy) and Ulysses Guimarães, leader of Neves’s centrist party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB). Against his party’s wishes, Neves appointed the conservative Antônio Carlos Magalhães to his cabinet as the Minister of Communication. Magalhães was a former collaborator of the dictatorship party, but more importantly he was a close friend of the media mogul Marinho. As the story goes, Neves even asked Roberto Marinho to call Magalhães and share the news of his appointment. Mauro Porto shared this anecdote in his recent book, *Media Power and Democratization in Brazil* (2012), in order to elucidate the degree of power and influence that one media mogul and his conglomerate had at that time in shaping the political destiny of Brazil.

⁸²The official biography was written by journalist Pedro Bial. See, Bial, P. (2005) *Roberto Marinho*. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar. I drew the quote from Porto (2012).

Fast forward nearly thirty years, I share an anecdote about Fora do Eixo that although it takes place within a very different media and political landscape speaks to a new type of media influence in Brazilian politics today. The focus of this story, however, is not media conglomerates constraining democracy and wielding influence in the public sphere by controlling television markets, as was the case during the transition to democracy in Brazil (Porto 2). Although those relationships of power and authority continue to persist today, the story that follows makes visible shifts in the sources of influence in the political process, which nowadays also originate from grass roots media activist networks who take advantage of the affordances of digital media to reformat journalism. These are not seismic shifts, to be sure, but they do provide forums for greater democratic participation in media.

Haddad's Phone Call

In 2013, I was with Fora do Eixo when Pablo Capilé received a phone call from the Mayor of São Paulo, Fernando Haddad. Haddad was calling in response to an open letter that Capilé posted on Facebook the day before that was critical of the Mayor's support for the military police's actions during the first day of the 2013 protests.⁸³ In 2012, FDE had supported Haddad's political campaign in the municipal elections of São Paulo. Haddad, of the Workers Party, was Brazil's Minister of Education when he decided to run for mayor of São Paulo. He was endorsed by the former and wildly

⁸³ The letter was written and signed by the group *Existe Amor in São Paulo* (Love Exists in São Paulo), a collective formed by Fora do Eixo (also as Mídia NINJA) and other social movements and civic groups in SP. Among other things, the collective pressures City Hall for the right to occupy public space. To read the open letter to Haddad (in Portuguese), see: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=150578975126209&story_fbid=156043291246444 (accessed June 22, 2014).

popular President Lula and ran on a progressive platform. Haddad was popular among younger people as he promised the right to occupy the street, which had been criminalized under the prior administrations of José Serra (2005-06) from the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) and Gilberto Kassab (2006-13) from the Social Democratic Party (PSD), both center-right parties that often join in forming government coalitions. His political opponent in this election was none other than Serra himself who, after abandoning the mayorship in 2006 on a successful bid for the Governorship of the state of São Paulo (2007-2010), decided to run again for Mayor of Brazil's largest city. Serra won the first round of votes against Haddad and was expected to triumph, however in the second round of voting Haddad made a surprising come back to win with 55% of the vote. While it would certainly be an overstatement to attribute Haddad's success to FDE's efforts at promoting his candidacy through social media channels, what follows, suggests that at the very least Haddad *perceived* FDE to hold some form of influence.

On June 6, 2013, the first day of the social protests in Brazil, protesters were met almost immediately with police repression. That night the Governor of the state of São Paulo, Geraldo Alckmin (also of the PSDB party), lauded the military police's actions in restoring order and promised to send in more troops that would act with even greater force should the protests continue. Haddad, who had been in office only six months and who was in Paris at the time, sent a message echoing the words and position of Alckmin and he levied a critique at the protesters accusing them of immaturity, mostly because they were unorganized and lacked leadership.

The following day, Fora do Eixo and the locally-based collective *Existe Amor em São Paulo* (Love Exists in São Paulo) published an open letter to Haddad on Facebook, taking him to task for what they saw as falling back on the same clichés and reactive political rhetoric of the conservative parties, and for supporting the repressive police state that his political platform had run against during the election. In FDE's view, Haddad should have openly distanced himself from the police violence. Among other things, the letter stated: "Governor Geraldo Alckmin had already clearly said that he would tighten repression. This was widely covered and endorsed by the editors of the two large newspapers in the city. Here is our point, Haddad. From Alckmin, *Folha*, and the state of São Paulo we expected no less. But from you, we expected more."

According to Talles Lopes, a member of Fora do Eixo's *Núcleo Duro*, the conversation between Capilé and Haddad involved an apology from the Mayor. Apparently he had read the letter and taken its message to heart. He emphasized that he was a "quick learn" and would try to do better. While I cannot confirm what really what was discussed in the phone call, across the network everyone began speaking about it as if was a victory for the protesters, for FDE, and by extension Mídia NINJA. What can be said with certainty is that over the next few days Haddad changed his initial stance and spoke out publicly against the "lamentable" police violence and called for restraint. On June 14, 2013 he appeared on the morning television program *Bom Dia SP* (Good Morning São Paulo), a TV Globo production, and expressed that while the city can live with the manifestations and protests, "it cannot live with, and indeed repudiates, all forms

of violence.”⁸⁴ Unfortunately, this was not enough to stop the police violence. However, the takeaway from this short account is twofold: First, Haddad recognized and acknowledged FDE’s relative level of influence on public opinion, at least in terms of the constituencies he was interested in representing. This gives support to the discussion in Chapter 4 regarding FDE’s perceived ability to use its widespread Internet presence to mobilize and then deliver constituencies to politicians and funding agencies. Of course, it would be misguided to assume that Capilé and his associates exert the same degree of influence that Roberto Marinho exercised back in his day. However, we cannot disregard the broader, and second point, which is that digital media and activist networks are producing disruptions in established power relations between the state, civil society, and the media.

Chapter Layout

This chapter will look at these disruptions by focusing on Fora do Eixo’s latest initiative, Mídia NINJA, a contemporary case study of *citizen journalism 2.0* in Brazil. As discussed in Chapter 2, I use citizen journalism 2.0 to denote journalist practices wherein public citizens rely on hand held mobile devices, 4G technology and social media platforms to gather, produce, comment on and circulate news content normally considered outside the purview of corporate media for a host of reasons. Indeed NINJA⁸⁵, an acronym in Portuguese for *Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action*, was born out of a perceived need for independent journalism free from commercial

⁸⁴ See: <http://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/cidadania/2013/06/haddad-diz-que-violencia-policia-nos-protestos-contra-aumento-e-lamentavel-6645.html> (accessed August 7, 2013).

⁸⁵ I use Mídia NINJA and NINJA interchangeably for brevity, but also because its members also interchange the name frequently.

interests and the constraints that sometimes happen with editorial boards. Mídia NINJA connects to a view shared by many that journalism has not fulfilled its social purpose to inform a public without bias. This is not new, as a long tradition of scholars (C. Wright Mills 1956/1999; Chomsky 2002; Gitlin 1980; Gournelos 2012; McChesney 2004, 2008; Schiller 1969/1992) have pointed out that the relation between media, money and power insinuates that mainstream journalism on its own does not maintain a progressive and democratic society. This point of view is partly behind the emergence of alternatives to mainstream media (MSM), such as The Nation newspaper, more recent online media like Slate and the Huffington Post, and WikiLeaks.

Mídia NINJA's goals extend beyond journalism however: more generally they wish to deepen democracy and political representation in the country. In the pages that follow I analyze NINJA as a case that makes visible how activist groups are currently deploying the affordances of digital technology to push forward progressive political and social agendas. Mídia NINJA is part of shift in the focus of media communication "from a situation where 'content is king' to one where community and connection have become increasingly important," (Gournelos and Gunkle 2012, 17). On its webpage, NINJA offers the following self-explanation:

The Internet changed journalism and we are part of this transformation. We live in a peer-to-peer (P2P) culture that allows people to share information without traditional mediators. New technologies and new forms of using technology have opened the way for new sharing spaces, in which people do not only passively absorb information, people produce and exchange information. In this new context, of networks connected to streets, multimedia citizens emerge with the capacity of make its [sic] own opinions and share it [sic] in the virtual world. ... Our work is where the fight for social justice, cultural, political, economic and environmental change takes place.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ <https://ninja.oximity.com/partner/ninja/about> (accessed August 11, 2014).

Many questions arise from this narrative: Has Mídia NINJA actually transformed mainstream journalism? If so, how much, and in what ways? Does Mídia NINJA make mainstream media more responsive to civic interests and demands? Does it help democracy? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

To begin to make sense of these questions, I consider Mídia NINJA through at least three distinct, though interrelated frameworks: 1. As a “media movement” (Porto 2012; Waisbord 2009, 2010) that, borrowing from Waisbord, is defined as “a broad set of civic initiatives to transform media structures, practices and content” (2010, 133) that opens possibilities for a plurality of voices to participate in the symbolic re-representation of social issues and the production of news; 2. As citizen journalism 2.0, which focuses on the affordances of new media—in this case hand held devices, 4G technology, and social media platforms—in pushing beyond the limits of mainstream journalism canon; 3. As an alternative public sphere and counter-public that reflect a Gramscian (counter-hegemonic) pushback from civil society.

In Part I of this chapter, I discuss Mídia NINJA in relation to Fora do Eixo’s own media activism. This will require a *brief* re-encounter with FDE’s institutional history, and its internal narratives. I focus on some events that were left out of the “solidarity economy history” presented in Chapter 3, such as political marches that figure prominently in the conceptualization of Mídia NINJA. Part II discusses NINJA’s role in the 2013 protests in Brazil, and I ask what has it actually accomplished? Are there lasting implications to MSM and journalism in Brazil? I first provide background on the social issues and grievances that shed light on the stakes involved in the protests, and then

discuss as mainstream media's negative portrayal of the manifestations as well as NINJA's role in reversing this negative framing. Part III discusses some of the challenges that lie ahead for the initiative, including finding legitimacy within a trade that has for a half-century set strict guidelines on the profession. Lastly, I consider how we might account for the role of digital media in the protests without losing sight of the fact that, as architecture and media scholar Thérèse Tierney (2013, 6) reminds us, while technology is instrumental, the core issues are social and not technical? This last question carries some importance because, as will become clear throughout this chapter, Mídia NINJA tends to adopt and reify technological determinist voices that place media, and itself, at the center of the social world.

In summary, this chapter is about, on the one hand, the democratization of media in Brazil and how Mídia NINJA and citizen journalism 2.0 works towards that end. This includes engaging in non-normative journalistic practices and providing forums that give space for alternative counter-publics to participate in local and national dialogue. On the other hand, and without trivializing human agency and interpersonal relations, it is a reflection on how digital media and social networks are influencing and shaping, even if in small degrees, political processes in Brazil.

Comment on Data Sources

As addressed in the Introduction, my research trip to Brazil extended through the end of June 2013. And while I attended many protests during the initial month, including the largest single protest in Rio with 100,000 demonstrators, and many of my observations are drawn from that period, this chapter nevertheless required that I gather

additional data. I therefore drew analysis from blogs, social media websites, live streaming news websites like YOUTREAM and PósTV, newspaper articles, YouTube footage and mainstream news clips. Over the course of the year I had multiple Skype conversations with members of Fora do Eixo, most notably Lenissa Lenza, Talles Lopes and Felipe Altenfelder, which contributed to my enquiry.

I. Fora do Eixo Revisited: A ‘mediated’ history

The history of Fora do Eixo can be told many ways. In Chapter 3, I offered an “economic history” of the network that foregrounded a “solidarity economy” narrative. This was an important version of its history to tell because, as I argued, so much of the network and its members’ identity is based on how their alternative economic and social relations have helped them overcome obstacles, such as economic entrance barriers to the production of culture in Brazil. It has also allowed them to amass an impressive alliance of members and collaborators across all of Brazil, despite the fact that the number of participants is probably less than the network claims publicly. Yet the rise of Fora do Eixo, and subsequently Mídia NINJA, can also be cast as a “media history” as media and communication technologies have been central to their core daily operations from the very beginning. It is important to acknowledge that these different historical readings are, of course, artificial distinctions imposed for analytical focus only. One history cannot be separated from the other, and the solidarity principals that guide Fora do Eixo also bear upon Mídia NINJA. In fact, NINJA is just FDE’s most recent articulation of a solidarity economy in that it attempts to bypass traditional media industry markets through decentralized networks and collaborative online sharing of information. In this

case it is directed toward media and journalism rather than the production of music festivals. As explained on its website, NINJA views itself as part of a Free Media Movement and “aims to highlight, in communications, what FDE have (sic) already demonstrated in the cultural field.”⁸⁷ And while it is not my intention to provide here a complete re-reading of the network’s history, I will nevertheless briefly summarize important signposts of its history as they relate to the advent of Mídia NINJA.

Indeed, Fora do Eixo’s trajectory can be construed as a long, drawn-out and multi-faceted media laboratory, as its success is intricately imbricated with the experimentation of new communication technologies and with the production and distribution of alternative content. Eventually the members of FDE achieved high levels of professionalization and expertise in this regard. From the earliest stages of Espaço Cubo’s *Zine Project* in the schools of Cuiabá (see Chapter 3) to Mídia NINJA’s live-streaming of the 2013 protests on its Internet channel PósTV, FDE has always practiced with diverse media forms and worked towards building its own internal media system.

Returning for a moment to Fora do Eixo’s internal narrative, which I discussed at length in Chapter 4, the network realized that mainstream media would take time to understand and give visibility to what FDE understood as one of its primary social interventions: disputing the means of producing and distributing information. Using the social media platforms available at each stage of the journey—blogs, Orkut, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, G-chat and recently PósTV—FDE spent years developing and mastering its elevated media presence and establishing distribution channels for content produced

⁸⁷ <https://ninja.oximity.com/partner/ninja/history> (accessed July 29, 2014).

by the network itself. Producing independent content has always been part of Fora do Eixo's 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) experience. To recap what was discussed in Chapter 3, when in 2005 the group of cultural collectives joined forces to form the network that became *Circuito* Fora do Eixo, its stated goals were three-fold:

1. Circulation: Establishing a cultural circuit through which musicians and other artists could continuously circulate and play for live audiences throughout Brazil.
2. Production of (independent) content: This was initially taken to mean producing alternative discourses about access to culture and trying to place culture centrally in local and national public debate and policy. It was a counter-hegemonic logic against the corporate values of the traditional culture industries. If by culture industries FDE was at first referencing the recording labels, this has since broadened in scope to include the entire "media-industrial complex".
3. Distribution: Distributing content across an enormous network, especially into traditionally excluded areas of Brazil.

PósTV, launched in 2011, is perhaps Fora do Eixo's most relevant media laboratory in terms of a progression towards what would ultimately become the communication arm of Mídia NINJA. And while PósTV is not exclusively a Mídia NINJA portal since it continues to stream 'non-NINJA' related activities such as concerts, debates, and conferences in addition to Mídia NINJA footage, it is nevertheless safe to say that PósTV is the main reference where interested audiences can view NINJA coverage, often in real time. It should also be noted that the Mídia NINJA logo is on the PósTV page as well.

The March for Marijuana and The March for Liberty

When Fora do Eixo arrived in São Paulo, several events and factors occurred that have relevance for the development of Mídia NINJA. First, FDE began to forge relationships with traditional social movements that had long been active in São Paulo. They did this for strategic reasons: They were the new kids on the block that had spent

the last decade deriding São Paulo as an axis of economic, cultural and political control and FDE was looking to make inroads and partnerships in the city. Yet as Capilé recounts, in the course of dialogues with these groups the network became increasingly politicized, ultimately resulting in the branching of FDE into two separate parts: a cultural movement and a social movement. The network was looking for ways to collaborate and realized that, in addition to delivering large number of members across the network, its value-added contribution was the strength of its communication team that could provide visibility to the movements. The first important demonstration FDE participated in was the March for Marijuana in 2011, the agenda of which was to compel politicians to decriminalize marijuana use. Although the police responded with slightly less violence than during the 2013 protests, the demonstrators were nevertheless met by a repressive police force.

In response to the police retaliation against the peaceful demonstration, Fora do Eixo proposed to organize the March for Liberty that same year, the idea of which was that no one social movement or political party would be foregrounded; rather it would be a joining of forces in a march that demanded the very right to assemble on the streets for democratic expression. It was to represent a collective and forceful expression of social discontent with São Paulo's state and city government, which had consistently denied social movements the right to occupy public space for peaceful demonstrations, a requisite part of freedom of expression in a democratic society. In terms of sheer numbers, the March for Liberty was a resounding success and FDE made a name for

itself—for better or for worse⁸⁸—among social movements in São Paulo. Two weeks following the São Paulo event, Marches for Liberty occurred in at least forty cities across Brazil.⁸⁹

Since then, Fora do Eixo has continued to develop a politically active presence in São Paulo and across Brazil, and as discussed in Chapter 4, its distinguishing feature is its ability to communicate in real-time, organize across distance, mobilize marches and deliver a large constituency to funding agencies and politicians. Fora do Eixo works closely with local and national politicians, such as former Minister of Culture Juca Ferreira who is currently Secretary of Culture of São Paulo. The social, cultural and political issues that it takes on continue to spiral: from instances of institutional racism such as Indigenous communities being kicked off their land and police violence toward Afro-Brazilian populations, to free media and CopyLeft issues, to gay and lesbian rights, women's issues, free education, the right to occupy public space, and so on.

Out Ana de Hollanda!

Fora do Eixo also achieved renown as an important mobilizing force in the campaign to oust the unpopular Minister of Culture, Ana de Hollanda, who due to intense public pressure was asked to resign in September 2012, only twenty months into a four year post. De Hollanda's position on a Copyright Reform Bill and on the *mídiaivrisimo* (Free Media) movement more generally was seen as bolstering the interests of industry

⁸⁸ In Chapter 4 I discussed the antagonistic relationship that exists between Fora do Eixo and several other social movements and activist groups in São Paulo that feel FDE has attempted to unilaterally speak on behalf of the left. This antagonism surfaced after the March for Liberty. However, as I discuss here, the March for Liberty also drew the attention of other individuals and social activist groups that continue to support and collaborate with FDE.

⁸⁹ <http://noticias.r7.com/cidades/noticias/marcha-da-liberdade-ocorre-hoje-em-mais-de-40-cidades-20110618.html> (accessed August 26, 2014).

titans like Globo, Sony, Universal, EMI and other, and she broke with the national politics of free access to digital culture established by her predecessors, Gilberto Gil and Juca Ferreira. Suspicious of how the Internet and open access initiatives would infringe on the economic and moral rights of artists, she wrote in a 2008 blog that the “democratization of access to information is ironic talk meant to neutralize creativity.”⁹⁰ FDE was very active in the online campaign blog *Fora Ana de Hollanda!* (Out Ana de Hollanda!).⁹¹ When asked by the Brazilian press to comment on her resignation, de Hollanda did not mention *Fora do Eixo* by name, but lamented that an online crusade organized from a radical left group was able to steer popular opinion against her.

An example that particularly demonstrates FDE’s influence in building ties between civil society and the state can be found in the gesture of de Hollanda’s replacement, Marta Suplicy, to reach out to Pablo Capilé on her first day as the new Minister of Culture and invite him to a public forum. The forum represented the state’s acknowledgment that the previous administration had in part undone the state/civil society partnership that de Hollanda’s predecessors, Gil and Ferreira, had worked hard to establish through cultural policy programs such as *Cultura Viva* (Live Culture) and the *Pontos de Cultura* (Cultural Points). More importantly in terms of the progression towards *Mídia NINJA*, as Pablo Capilé and Felipe Altenfelder have explained it to me, sometime between the March for Liberty in 2011 and Ana de Hollanda’s resignation in 2012, FDE became fully aware of itself as a “media movement”, that is to say a social

⁹⁰ <http://bloglog.globo.com/blog/blog.do?act=loadSite&id=240&postId=4332&permalink=true> (accessed August 10, 2014).

⁹¹ <http://foraanadehollanda.blogspot.com> (accessed August 10, 2014).

movement whose relevance hinged in large part on its incredible savvy and creativity in navigating and managing the affordances of new media and P2P culture.

Casa Fora do Eixo Hype

The third pre-Mídia NINJA related occurrence following the opening of the Fora do Eixo House in São Paulo and the various Marches of 2011 was the hype surrounding the network's alternative living and economic system. Journalists, many of who worked for mainstream media outlets came in droves to interview them. Some of these journalists, excited by the types of social and cultural interventions that FDE was attempting to foster, continued to partner and dialogue with the network. Bruno Torturra best personifies this. Torturra is a journalist who spent ten years working as a reporter for mainstream media outlets such as Globo, and TRIP, an online arts and culture magazine owned by UOL, Latin America's largest Internet provider and online portal.⁹² While partaking in the March for Marijuana, Torturra was beaten by the military police. He subsequently created a blog on Facebook that documented the incident and offered his reflections. As Torturra recounts the story, that blog was met with a bigger reception than anything he had written in all his years at TRIP.⁹³

The March for Liberty coincided with a period in Brazil when massive layoffs of journalists left many individuals confronting an uncertain future. With so many journalists being laid off in Brazil and forced to work free-lance, Torturra decided to

⁹² Universo Online (UOL) was formed in 1996 as an internet provider. UOL merged with media conglomerate Grupo Folha in 1996, and produces Brazil's two most widely read publications: *Veja* and *Folha São Paulo*. UOL, is Globo's direct competitor for an online audience, and even has an online TV station, TV UOL where people can upload and share videos.

⁹³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/26/brazil-midia-NINJA-journalist-bruno-torturra>.

gather a group of fellow journalists and brainstorm ideas about how journalists might make a living independent of the mainstream media. Working closely with Fora do Eixo, Torturra is one of the key visionaries of Mídia NINJA and he wrote the manifesto that founded the initiative. Through his multiple appearances on mainstream and independent media on behalf of Mídia NINJA, Torturra has undoubtedly become the initiative's "poster-child" and its main spokesperson.

In summary, while Mídia NINJA's coverage of the 2013 protests catapulted Fora do Eixo into a more mainstream spotlight the network had for years been honing in its ability to create independent and non-commercial content and to establish a communication/media system that shares and distributes that content. It also invested a lot of effort in branding its image as a new and alternative "movement" with a multiplicity of (not always well-defined) goals and initiatives, but one that pushes for case-by-case social change. In this sense Mídia NINJA is a very organic progression from PósTV, and the social activism of Fora do Eixo.

II. Mídia NINJA

Tunis and the Launch of NINJA

On March 24, 2013 Fora do Eixo officially launched Mídia NINJA during the 3rd World Forum on Free Media held in Tunis. FDE had sent over one of its members, Rafael Vilela, to attend and cover the Forum and also the social protests that were happening in the streets as part of the so-called "Arab Spring".⁹⁴ For FDE this was the

⁹⁴ Unless referring to one specific country, such as Tunisia, I use the term "Arab Spring" as shorthand to refer generally to the civic uprisings that began to take place in 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan and others. I use the term because that is

perfect occasion to inaugurate NINJA as it juxtaposed the ideals of free media espoused initially in 2001 during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, and it also gave them an opportunity to build connections with activists on the ground in Tunisia. Lenissa Lenza and Felipe Altenfelder both admitted to me in separate conversations that Fora do Eixo had been watching the events of the “Arab Spring” with heightened interest and wanted to participate. It was also clear that Fora do Eixo absorbed and integrated into Mídia NINJA’s organizational narratives the techno-utopian discourses that were circulating on mainstream media outlets, especially in the U.S. and Europe, that glorified the liberatory role of digital technology in, to use Lenza and Altenfelder’s overgeneralizing words: “opening the region to democracy”. FDE likes to draw parallels between itself and the street protesters in cities like Bahrain, Cairo, Tripoli, Tunis and others, and has actively sought encounters and collaborations with journalists and activist groups in that region. And while the social demonstrations that were happening in that region were grounded in localized social and political lived histories profoundly different than those of Brazil, FDE nevertheless understands itself as part of a worldwide social and cultural movement that uses digital media for social change.

Following Vilela’s trip to Tunisia, Fora do Eixo dedicated its entire membership to work on and manage the new initiative. That is not to say that they were no longer organizing cultural events, but rather that in the first few months Mídia NINJA was given priority and every resident of the Fora do Eixo Houses were working on NINJA in some capacity. Between March 2013 and when the social unrest began in Brazil in June 2013,

often how it is spoken about, and it is especially how FDE refers to those historic events. However, I understand full well that the term does not describe an historical event that includes all, indeed most Arabs.

Mídia NINJA covered many protests and events just as Fora do Eixo would have done in the past, only now under the name NINJA. These include: The second March for Marijuana in March 2013; a protest against Marcos Feliciano, and angelical minister who, despite his openly anti-gay stance, was appointed by Dilma as the director of Brazil's Commission on Human Rights; a street protest/festival called *Anhangabú da FelizCidade* (a play on word that can mean either "Plaza of Happiness", or "Plaza of the Happy City")⁹⁵ which gathered artists and activists in a city plaza in São Paulo; the National Day of Youth Struggles (*Jornada Nacional de Lutas da Juventude*) organized by collectives involved in Brazil's youth movement, and more.

Therefore, true to the ideological position and history of Fora do Eixo, NINJA was producing news content dedicated primarily to activism around multiple social and cultural issues. In addition to streaming live and uncut footage, NINJA also provided interviews with activists and social movement leaders, with academics and also with local state officials, such as Juca Ferreira. While these interviews were often conducted in the street, NINJA also organized meetings and small forums where people could debate what was happening on the street as it had done before under the FDE label. These interviews occurred in multiple locations including the FDE Houses, government offices, small partnering business and cultural centers such as art galleries that sometimes lent FDE/NINJA space. The initial media platforms where an interested public could

⁹⁵ Anhangabú was the name of a river that once flowed through São Paulo. It derives from the indigenous Tupi language. Today it is the name of a neighborhood in São Paulo, close to downtown. *Vale Anhangabú* (literally Anhangabú Valley) is a very busy city plaza in the Anhangabú neighborhood. It is in this place where the festival Anhangabú FelizCidade took place.

view NINJA images and videos included Facebook, Twitter's TV Casting Channel, YouTube, and PósTV.

The NINJA Economy

If journalism produced with cellphones and other 4G devices is cheap, the *transmission* of this footage is even cheaper. The first night of the Brazilian protests, Mídia NINJA took a leap in terms of its audience reach when one NINJA journalist, Felipe Peçanha, placed R\$40 (\$20 U.S.) worth of credit on his cell phone and streamed the events to over 180,000 viewers.⁹⁶ This does not approximate the millions of viewers that channels like Record News⁹⁷, Folha and Globo News reach nightly, but it is significant nevertheless, and especially considering the low cost. Peçanha's broadcast that night represents an important milestone for Mídia NINJA, as it was the first instance they succeeded in reaching a wider public than it had ever reached before. In their view, it proved once again Fora do Eixo's ability to bypass the economic entrance barriers of a media industry dominated by titans.

During this time, Mídia NINJA had no direct funding and therefore operated under the same alternative economic model of the Fora do Eixo Houses that I explained in Chapter 3. With the exception of Bruno Torturra, who despite several years of

⁹⁶ According to Altenfelder, this audience number was determined by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE), which measures televised audience. He explained it to me this way: IBOPE uses a point-metric, with one point equaling an audience of approximately 90,000 people. That night, according to him, Peçanha's transmission reached a level of 2, and thus 180,000. This pales in comparison to Globo, which easily reaches a 45-point level on any given night, which is to say millions of people.

⁹⁷ Record News is a 24-hour free-to-air news channel launched in 2007. It is owned by Record Network (*Rede Record*), the second most popular television network in Brazil following Globo. Since the Tupi Network dissolved in 1980, Record Network is now the oldest broadcast network in Brazil—founded in 1953 it pre-dates Globo by four years.

collaboration with FDE never lived in the FDE Houses and prefers to call himself a partner rather than a member of FDE, NINJA content was primarily produced and distributed by the residents of the FDE Houses, and the Collective Bank met their expenses (including much of Torturra's). NINJA also falls under rubric of FDE's social technologies, in that it is trying to solve a social problem of opening media to more diverse voices and publics.

However, Mídia NINJA would like to grow and expand to members outside of Fora do Eixo. This will require further considerations of how to navigate the economics of news and information production and management. Circumventing transmission costs, while important, does not resolve the very real issue of providing salaries or, at minimum, coverage of the base material needs of 'Ninjas', a name they use to refer to people acting in the role of journalists or information gatherers/producers for the initiative. Not every 'Ninja' receives the benefits (or has the desire) of living in the FDE Houses with a collective bank that cares for their needs. Thus, the question has become how to set up a funding structure for both the initiative, and for collaborating, though separate individual writers/journalists.

Altenfelder identifies two sources of funding that will, in his view, provide sustainability for the initiative and its associates. First, NINJA has been awarded international grants from entities such as Frontline, Global Justice and Hivos International due to the collective's continued work on social issues such as human rights and the democratization of media. I suspect that NINJA will also benefit from FDE's experience and expertise in winning grants from national funding organizations, and

possible state entities as well. This money will be directed, as is usual, to FDE's Collective Bank in the same ways as previously explained.

The second source of funding, which addresses the question of remuneration, is still in an experimental phase but will connect to the idea of *crowdfunding*, a form of raising money for a project or cause by soliciting contributions from a large number of people, typically on the Internet. This has been made possible through a “solidarity partnership” between FDE/NINJA and the Germany-based independent and participatory news portal Oximity, which developed Mídia NINJA's webpage, released in June 2014.⁹⁸ The NINA webpage invites anyone to become a ‘Ninja’ journalist for free by simply registering on the website. The Mídia NINJA webpage is now the primary platform to view NINJA footage, although it still uses streaming channels like USTREAM, YouTube, PósvTV and it retains social media accounts. FDE plans to devise a system wherein NINJA journalists create a profile and an audience can “sponsor” them with a donation made through a PayPal account, whether earmarked for projects-in-the-making or a general fund for the journalist in question. The general fund could cover material expenses like rent, food and so forth. FDE member and NINJA journalist, Rafael Vilela, benefitted from this type of sponsorship when a donor paid for his flight to Tunis in March 2013. At this point in time, however, there is only the possibility to donate directly to NINJA.

Fora do Eixo's partnership with Oximity also offers an interesting glimpse into another way that the concept of solidarity economy establishes working relationships in

⁹⁸ <https://ninja.oximity.com> (accessed July 29, 2014).

the networked production of media. Oximity was founded by Indian national Sanjay Goel, who made money with a start-up in Palo Alto during the dot-com bubble, and Christian Hapke, a German computer engineer. Goel and Hapke started Oximity based on the belief that news consumers today are craving more in-depth knowledge, better quality and more personalized news than mainstream outlets provide. They sought to connect citizen journalists from around the world. Its mission, therefore, is “to re-engineer the news industry entirely by providing a substantive and significantly improved alternative to traditional news media as a mainstream news provider.” It does so by “collecting news directly from the source, facilitating curation by readers, and distributing the news content across the Internet.”⁹⁹

After reading about Mídia NINJA in the Guardian newspaper following the 2013 protests, Goel and Hapke reached out to Fora do Eixo. By the beginning of 2014, NINJA had traveled to Berlin to meet with them. As Altenfelder details it in an informal conversation, there were many similarities between the organizations and when he and Capilé witnessed a group of individuals in a small apartment in Berlin coding Mídia NINJA’s material, they realized FDE had achieved yet another one of its objectives: to connect to and expand an international network dedicated to promoting free media. As part of the collaboration Oximity provided Mídia NINJA with an exclusively customized and professional webpage, something that FDE would have had difficulty paying for otherwise. In return, Oximity benefits from the content that NINJA provides and from the exposure and visibility that a connection to FDE/NINJA can provide. The NINJA homepage has the capability to translate into eight languages, and while the articles

⁹⁹ <https://www.oximity.com/newsweb/userinfo/ourMission.xhtml>

themselves remain in the initial language (for now, mostly Portuguese), there is a function that allows anyone to contribute by translating the page. During the website's inaugural month in June 2014, it received visits from over 20,000 people from 160 countries (Mazotte 2013a).

Breaking Narratives

For Bruno Torturra a central goal of Mídia NINJA is what he and his *Fora do Eixo* colleagues call “breaking narratives” (*quebrar narrativas*): that is to produce narratives that break away the paradigms of journalism in which news is source-generated and relies heavily on official sources, such as those provided by the state or by a small group of “experts” (Schudson 2003). Instead, Torturra asserts, NINJA seeks to reclaim the main social functions of journalism and communications, by which he means, “...their activist role as the public’s eyes and to offer information that is increasingly qualified to defend democracy,” (quoted in Mazotte 2013a). To defend democracy implies a dispersal of MSM’s normative narratives that have been traditionally set from above and directed below to the audience (Torturra 2013).

In this last comment, Torturra seems to be referencing, at least in part, the concurrent shift from one-to-many to many-to-many communication, what is captured by the concept *citizen journalism 2.0*. As mentioned, citizen journalism 2.0 involves active participants, or citizen producers, who rather than consume information passively, instead play a constituting role in shaping the discourse through the use of current technologies

(Tierney 2013). According to Ivana Bentes¹⁰⁰, citizen journalism connects to the allure of social participation, especially at times of social unrest, and produces more interesting narratives than the highly centralized corporatist model (Mazotte 2013a). This is possible, Torturra contends, thanks to the technical possibilities of new media and a culture that embraces the Internet and peer-to-peer media practices.

Breaking the narrative also registers as an economic critique of the corporate model of journalism. Torturra rejects the idea of conspiracy among the big media, but rather understands media as embedded within well-established economic systems that privilege political institutions and the economic interests of shareholders and advertising agencies when formulating programming and editing news content (Pinheiros 2013). In this corporate model, as Torturra perceives it, the spectator is not considered a participant but rather as a consumer of news. Content becomes a commodity rather than information that provokes reflection (Torturra 2013). Instead, Mídia NINJA seeks to have autonomy in developing stories of social interest, free from constraints of editing rooms and market considerations. As mentioned previously, among its objectives for democratizing media includes increasing participation in the production of content, such that citizen consumers are encouraged to take up positions as citizen *producers*. Not only will this give more coverage to social issues habitually excluded from mainstream coverage, but the representations of these important issues will more closely reflect, while simultaneously shape, the popular imaginaries of important issues like poverty, race, gender, sexuality, drug trafficking, violence and so on.

¹⁰⁰ Dr. Bentes appears repeatedly throughout the other chapters. As a reminder, she serves as Chair of the School of Communication at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and is a close collaborator of Fora do Eixo and Mídia NINJA.

Gatekeeping and Editorial Functions

Torturra and his Mídia NINJA associates frequently take aim at what they perceive as mainstream news's systematic institutional bias and gatekeeping of information that favors market driven and statist content. Yet as many media scholars (Hallin 2000; McQuail 2005; Schudson 2003; and Waisbord 2009) have discussed, the issue of institutional bias and gatekeeping cannot be explained so simplistically as to suggest that news content is always swayed by capital and ideological leanings. In Brazil, this may have been the case when Globo's founder Roberto Marinho was still able to directly influence the appointment of Presidential cabinet members, but as Porto (2012) and Matos (2008) argue, this is no longer the case. Furthermore, there are many other influences that play into what makes news. That said, many of these same scholars agree that corporate news is often source-generated and rely on official sources because of institutional habit and accessibility. Therefore, Torturra's insistence on providing citizen-produced content is potentially a good strategy and connects to Waisbord's (2010) review of Civic Advocacy Movements, which take a pragmatic approach by providing media institutions with readymade material on social issues normally excluded for a host of reasons. It also speaks to Schudson's (2003) thoughts on "framing" news based on the empathy one has with specific social groups; individuals involved with Mídia NINJA will be much better positioned to accurately cover stories about traditionally marginalized communities.

Currently, content on Mídia NINJA's website largely foregrounds left-leaning social and cultural issues in Brazil, and some international issues. This content includes articles, commentaries and video footage that address police militarization and social

confrontation; environmental issues; AIDS; prostitution; gay rights; indigenous issues; labor rights; domestic violence; housing and land struggles; the legalization of marijuana; the 2016 Olympic games; corruption at all levels of society, and more. Internationally focused stories take up topics such as Edward Snowden, the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, WikiLeaks; the so-called “Arab-Spring”, immigration issues between Mexico and the U.S. and more.

While Torturra’s enthusiasm to democratize media by offering space for diverse and citizen-produced narratives is admirable, we must ask: To what degree is this actually happening? After all, Fora do Eixo has for years been accused by its critics of becoming a node of power itself, enacting the role of gatekeeper in terms of access to information, political contacts and funding streams. How does this play out in Mídia NINJA?

As of August 2014, Fora do Eixo still holds the key to what information is allowed on the Mídia NINJA website. If a registered ‘Ninja’ contributor wishes to contribute an article she or he must first send it to Fora do Eixo, which will then upload the information. And while this might not be the case in the future, currently all of the decision-making structures of Fora do Eixo, including the idea of *lastro*, are also involved in the Mídia NINJA editorial process. This is not to suggest that the decisions of what content to include on the website are made exclusively by the highest-ranking members of FDE, represented by the *Núcleo Duro*. The massive amount of content on the website would make this impossible; many people within Fora do Eixo work tirelessly to keep the site updated. It does mean, however, that groups, social

movements, politicians or journalists who collaborate more closely with Fora do Eixo, who have more *lastro* in this regard, are centrally placed. Therefore one could say that although it is challenging mainstream media and opening the practice of producing information to a broader public, a case could be made that NINJA's editorial process includes practices of selective bias of its own.

While the number of NINJA journalists and participants is growing, a cursory glance at the website reveal that approximately 85% of the articles are attributed to NINJA, while the other 15% are from a relatively small group of individuals.¹⁰¹ Assuming that content that is attributed to "NINJA" translates to members of Fora do Eixo, and an attribution such as "Elidia Vidal, NINJA" implies someone not living in the FDE Houses but that associates with the network, it is hard to reconcile these percentages with the claim that NINJA is truly representative a plurality of alternative publics. This observation, however, is not meant to discredit their achievements thus far; as I show further in the chapter, NINJA was successful in getting the attention of mainstream media outlets like Globo and Folha São Paulo, and reframed the protests in a more positive way. In this regard it can be said that NINJA is providing space for an alternative public to express itself, if by alternative public we take to mean mostly NINJA and its collaborators.

In the following sections, I discuss the 2013 protests in more detail, including an explanation of the social issues that ultimately drove hundreds of thousands of Brazilian citizens to the street. I examine Mídia NINJA's role in challenging the mainstream

¹⁰¹ This percentage was based the last one hundred and fifty articles that appear on NINJA's website as of August 9, 2014. Only nineteen were attributed to individuals. Ten of these nineteen articles were attributed to one woman, Elidia Vidal. The remaining nine were distributed among as many journalists.

media's representation of the protests as violent and unruly. By reaching a large audience through social media platforms and exposing police repression, NINJA managed to reframe the demonstrations and contributed to a shift in public opinion.

III. Background Issues of the 2013 Protests

On June 3, 2013 the Brazilian transportation commission announced a ten-cent (U.S. equivalent) increase in transportation fares from R\$3,00 - R\$3,20 (\$1.50 - \$1.60 U.S.). As far as fare-hikes go, the additional ten-cents per trip was relatively modest, a symbolic amount even for most working class Brazilians. Notwithstanding, it was enough to provoke the largest social protests in Brazil since the 1992 protests calling for the impeachment of then-President Fernando Collor de Mello.¹⁰² If the transportation commission had hoped that the “symbolic increase” would barely be noticeable to citizens while helping to offset the rising costs of infrastructure and maintenance due to inflation, the symbolism backfired. In fact, the fare-hike took on unanticipated dimensions of symbolism that elucidated structural problems far deeper than a fare increase. The increase cast light upon Brazil's deep-seated social inequalities and raised serious questions about the Brazilian state's priorities with public spending.

At the moment of the fare increase, widespread discontent was already simmering among the general population regarding the allocation of public monies in anticipation of

¹⁰² Fernando Collor was the first directly elected President of Brazil (1990-1992) following the transition to democracy. In 1992 he was accused by his brother, Pedro Collor, of running an “influence peddling” scheme. Massive protests led by university students swept the nation. Collor resigned in December of that year, but the impeachment proceedings continued. He was voted out of office and banned from holding political office for eight years (1992-2000). He was later acquitted of all criminal allegations by the Supreme Court due to lack of evidence. Mello ran for Mayor of São Paulo in 2000, but was disqualified. He twice ran for Governor of his state Alagoas (2002 and 2010) and lost both bids. He did, however, win a Senate seat for Alagoas and served from 2006-2010.

the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. While winning the bids to host these two world events was seen as signs of “progress” that would strengthen Brazil’s international reputation, many felt that the Brazilian government took on too much financial responsibility and had taken extreme measures in order to maintain a positive appearance for the world. This positive appearance of a “modern” Brazil was thinly veiled, however, and glossed over the impoverished reality and institutionalized racism experienced by the majority of its population. While the Brazilian government argued that the money spent on the games was part of an already approved plan to invest R\$49 Billion (\$24.5 Billion U.S.) in the nation’s infrastructure—airports, highways, bridges, paved roads, and so forth—and would therefore benefit each and every Brazilian citizen, barely any of this had been started by the Spring of 2013. At the time of the fare hike, however, R\$7 Billion (\$3.5 Billion U.S.) had already been spent building and renovating grandiose sports stadiums (H.J. 2013). Brand new stadiums were built in Brasilia, Natal and even the remote city of Manaus, none of which have teams in the top Brazilian soccer league and would have use for the stadium after the mega-events. Working conditions were rushed and several people died in work-related accidents while building those stadiums.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, more important public institutions, like public health clinics and schools, remained underfunded, understaffed, and in poor structural condition. For many people, this clearly reflected misguided priorities and a lack of redistribution towards public infrastructures that would benefit more popular classes and populations of

¹⁰³ <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2013/nov/27/crane-collapse-corinthians-brazil-three-killed> (accessed July 25, 2014). Also, a highway overpass that was under construction collapsed in Belo Horizonte during the World Cup, crushing the front of a bus and killing at least two people. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-28154828>; <http://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/vidaecidadania/conteudo.phtml?id=1481302> (accessed July 25, 2014).

black and mixed races. The public was tired of paying exorbitantly high taxes for appalling services in return from the state.¹⁰⁴

Transportation System

One need not look further than the public transportation system itself to witness institutionalized trends of cultural exclusion. Transportation systems in Brazil are often visible displays of the racial divide of cities. If, at minimum, the public had confidence that the ten-cent increase would somehow trickle down to improvements in transportation infrastructure, perhaps it would not have been the “tipping point”. However, buses and *combis* (informally owned vans that provide service from favelas to the center of the city) remain overcrowded, unreliable, slow and expensive. According to an article in *The Economist*, “a minimum-wage worker in São Paulo’s center whose employer does not cover transport costs ... will spend a fifth of gross pay to spend hours a day on hot, overcrowded buses that trundle in from the city’s periphery,” (H.J. 2013). They are also very dangerous—both in terms of instances of traffic accidents *and* high levels of assaults and robberies. For example, during my stay in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, combi service was suspended when two foreign tourists were abducted, beaten near death and raped; while the police captured the assailants the next day, the public expressed outrage that the same effort and resources to seek justice were not afforded to at least three Brazilian women who were raped by those same men weeks prior. In the public’s view, this underscored the fact that foreigners have at times more rights than Brazilian citizens; it reveals the degree to which inequality pervades all levels of the state and society.

¹⁰⁴ According to the *Economist*, Brazilian’s pay the highest taxes of any country outside the so-called “developing” world. See H.J. 2013.

While subway systems exist in larger cities like Rio and São Paulo, they predominantly serve the wealthy and white neighborhoods. By way of example, Rio de Janeiro's subway system has only three lines, which primarily circulate through the city's wealthier South Zone. In fact, Rio's system is so inefficiently planned that two of the three subway lines follow each other during ten consecutive stops.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, in the northern regions of the city where the largest concentration of Afro-Brazilians, mixed race and poor live in favelas, residents are forced to endure long and exhausting commutes through treacherous traffic conditions to reach their service industry jobs in the city center or the South Zone. When it was announced that the city's subway would receive an upgrade for the World Cup and Olympics, rather than extending lines out to the harder to reach North Zone, the city opted to add *three more stops* into Ipanema and its neighboring Leblon, two of Rio's most wealthy beachfront neighborhoods. The public viewed this as obviously done for the benefit of tourists during the mega-events, and from the perspective of the majority of Rio's population, was yet another indication that foreigners enjoy more economic and social rights than most Brazilians.

Urban Renewal or Removal?

The social issues involved in the handling of the World Cup and the Olympics also extended beyond the question of public spending. They connected to a century-old tension between modernization projects and the fight for housing rights, an on-going struggle in Brazil that disproportionately affects Afro-Brazilian and mixed race populations (Earl 2012; Holston 2008; Perry 2013). There was understandable

¹⁰⁵ For a map of Rio's subway system, see: <http://www.myriotravelguide.com/map-of-rio-de-janeiro-subway/> (accessed July 15, 2014).

grievances about what was generally considered as a blatant disregard for the rights of these marginalized communities in state-sponsored actions that at first glance seemed like social cleansing. At the time of the fare-hike, Amnesty International estimated that nearly twenty thousand families had been evicted and displaced due to the building of infrastructures for the games.¹⁰⁶ In Metrô, a favela in Rio de Janeiro that surrounds the famed and historic Maracanã soccer stadium, 400 of its 600 houses were razed in order to make way for a parking structure for the World Cup. In a bizarre move, residents of these poor and mostly black neighborhoods came home one day to find an ominous “X” painted on their door, signaling that their home was chosen to be demolished. Some families were given financial compensation for their homes, but it is unclear if the amount would allow them to purchase another one. Other families were relocated to different *bairros populares* (“popular neighborhoods”, referring to where poor people live) as part of a Federal Program called “My House My Life”.¹⁰⁷ Neither of these provisions made up for the fact that these families had built their lives in and around these neighborhoods, sometimes for generations. Moreover, they were displaced to neighborhoods far from the city center, effectively tripling or quadrupling daily commutes through Rio’s congested and ill-planned transportation system. In other poor communities, residents were forced from their homes in order to make way for an Olympic Park and Village. Such state-sponsored community re-location projects reflect the type of social construction ideology that Keisha-Khan Perry (2013, 36) has called

¹⁰⁶ See: <http://thinkprogress.org/sports/2014/02/28/3345031/brazil-relocates-15000-families-world-cup/> (accessed July 14, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ See: <http://noticias.terra.com.br/brasil/cidades/moradores-de-favela-perto-do-maracana-voltam-a-fechar-avenida-no-rio,0651775b23663410VgnCLD2000000ec6eb0aRCRD.html> (accessed July 14, 2014).

ocultação construída (constructed concealment) wherein the “visible and invisible city” exist simultaneously, but one is ignored.

Officials deny that these relocations are part of an organized plan of social cleansing for the purpose of giving the appearance of a more modern Brazil. Instead, they claim that it is part of the Brazilian government’s continued commitment to social policies that include intervening in neighborhoods in risk of, for example, mudslides, which have in fact afflicted some of these neighborhoods in the past.¹⁰⁸ However, recalling Henri Lefebvre’s (2002) important insights that “space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics, it has always been political and strategic,” (quoted in Perry, 40), it is easy to imagine that there is more to the picture than government enactments of good-will. Indeed, aside from “social cleansing”, there is speculation that these relocations have a lot to do with the rising value of real estate in Rio’s city center, and even in its favelas, some of which have the best city views (Garcia Navarro 2014). This lends support to Perry’s argument about similar urbanization projects and housing struggles in Salvador de Bahia—another highly racialized and segregated city—which is that these rapid transformations are “designed to enhance the interests of traditional elite groups and the nouveaux riches while the poor black majority of the population is forgotten,” (36).

It is true that with the rise to power of the Worker’s Party over the last decade the Brazilian government has channeled more resources towards social policies for marginalized populations than ever before in its history. It is maybe for this reason that

¹⁰⁸ See: <http://www.si.com/more-sports/2014/02/27/brazil-world-cup-2014> ; <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/05/world-cup-favelas-socially-cleansed-olympics> (accessed July 14, 2014).

these tactics seem so poorly considered and egregious: they hark back to a century of modernization projects and urban reform ideologies responsible for establishing the racially-segregated spatial divide between a wealthy core and an impoverished periphery in cities across Brazil. Rio's 20th century history of urban planning offers a great example of *ocultação contsruida* (constructed concealment): the city's urban reforms of 1902 reflected a broader national modernization project, and the building of Parisian-style boulevards pushed the black poor up the surrounding hills, producing some of the first favelas; Getúlio Vargas's industrialization drive of the 1940s included the construction of an enormous horse-race track that drove poor residents out of the wealthy neighborhood of Gávea to what is now one of the largest favelas in the world, Rocinha; and the military dictatorship's "favela eradication" policy of 1970s forced the displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents and set up black communities out of view of the "cosmopolitan center", for example the favela *Cidade de Deus* made (unjustly) infamous in the 2002 movie *City of God* (dir. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Kund) that portrayed the community as a hub of extreme violence. Today, there is a widely shared public perception that the Brazilian state is reinforcing the spatially segregated divide and will stop at nothing to portray itself as a "modern" nation capable of pulling off these mega sporting events.

What is more, winning the bid to host these events coincides with an interesting historical political juncture in Brazil, with a ruling government, the Worker's Party, that has been increasingly identified by its progressive social policies and its experiments with participatory democracy towards a more inclusive Brazil. For more than a decade it appeared as if the tides were changing at long last, with a surge in social, cultural and

economic rights. For the first time, even favela residents had proven that they could take up citizenship positions and successfully mobilize demands for rights and resources (Araujo and Salles 2009; Holston 2008; Lemos and Castro 2008; Mitzukami and Lemos 2010; Santos 2006; Santos and Avritzer 2005; Turino 2010; Yúdice 2003). Groups like *AfroReggae* and *Central Única das Favelas* (CUFA), which emerged from within Rio's favelas in the 1990s in response to racial tension and violence between residents and a militarized police force, became hallmarks in the 2000s for a mobilized black youth culture. AfroReggae and CUFA work closely with local and national politicians on programs that invest in favela youth. State support of civil society-originated media policies (e.g. Marco Civil) and cultural policies (e.g. Cultural Points program) devised with the public rather than private interest in mind, as mentioned above, is another example of inclusive democratic processes. In many ways Brazil seemed to be renegotiating a social contract with its citizens while constructing a national identity against dominant political economic narratives.

In the context of the World Cup and Olympics, however, Brazil has in many ways walked back, or at the very least wavered, on this stance. Despite the state's well-intentioned gestures in some directions, in others it was viewed as perpetuating a history of inequality when serving the interests of distinct social groups. This suggests that Brazil is not so independent of the influences and demands of international economic forces and institutions—such as FIFA—as many of the champions of the Worker's Party have claimed. Nationally speaking, it would appear that the agenda of the political and economic elite have once again trumped the interests of the majority.

The above examples represent but a handful of grievances brought out by the World Cup and Olympics that highlight the country's many unresolved social conflicts. It should be obvious, then, that the public reaction against the ten-cent fare increase had deeper roots than mere transportation; rather its origins connect to entrenched institutionalized inequality in Brazil. All of these issues contributed to the general feeling that those Brazilians who stood to benefit *the least* from the nation's rampant spending spree were populations with a long history of subjugation and exclusion. The ten-cent increase in transportation fares was interpreted as adding insult to injury: marginalized groups in Brazilians were once again forced to carry the heavy burden of "progress" while others reap the rewards.

In this next section, I examine the 2013 protests and Mídia NINJA's role in deconstructing the normative mainstream media portrayals, which cast the manifestations as unruly acts of chaos and depicted the protesters as violently intentioned actors.

IV. The Protests

The First Days

The protests began on June 6, 2013 in São Paulo. At first the group of protesters consisted mainly of university aged youth, organized civic associations, unions and social activist networks, such as Fora do Eixo. Although the fare-hike drew tens of thousands of protesters to the streets across the country, it was actually the military police's brutal repression toward the mostly peaceful demonstrators that first day that triggered the rage of a much broader public than had been willing to take to the streets initially.

The protests were peaceful for the most part, but as often happens a small segment of demonstrators broke with the rest and began to vandalize private and public property. This small group set fire to cars, defaced buildings with graffiti, shattered storefronts and bank windows, destroyed ATMs, occupied government buildings, threw office furniture out of windows, and so forth. Police responded with a high degree of force. Some of the police violence appeared premeditated, as evidenced by acts such as pepper spraying the eyes of professional cameramen covering the protests, or aiming and shooting rubber bullets at close range into at the eyes of journalists and young people, resulting in blindness.¹⁰⁹ Over the course of a month or so there were several deaths related to the protests, including innocent bystanders.¹¹⁰ In one instance a cameraman in Rio de Janeiro was left brain-dead after a plastic explosive fired from the military police struck him in the head.¹¹¹

The protests quickly made international news since they coincided with the Confederations Cup, the international soccer tournament hosted in Brazil as a test-run for the following year's World Cup.¹¹² The fact that protests were happening outside of

¹⁰⁹ <http://celebridades.uol.com.br/ooops/ultimas-noticias/2013/06/17/globo-tira-logotipo-de-microfones-de-seus-reporteres-veja.htm> (accessed July 27, 2014). Also, it is worth noting that even mainstream journalists did not escape police aggression—take for example Folha reporter, Giuliana Vallone, who was shot with a rubber bullet directly in the eye. See: <http://www.fabiocampana.com.br/2013/06/vi-o-policial-mirar-e-atirar-na-minha-cara-diz-reporter-ferida-em-sp/> (accessed August 8, 2014),

¹¹⁰ In one instance a woman in her mid 50s who had just finished her cleaning shift in an office building and was trying to get home accidentally inhaled tear gas upon leaving the building and died due to an adverse reaction to the toxins in the gas.

¹¹¹ <http://www.fabiocampana.com.br/2013/06/vi-o-policial-mirar-e-atirar-na-minha-cara-diz-reporter-ferida-em-sp/> (accessed June 22, 2014); <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2556211/Brazilian-cameraman-left-braindead-hit-explosive-device-covering-bus-fare-price-hike-riots.html> (accessed June 22, 2014).

¹¹² The Confederations Cup is a much smaller version of the World Cup held every four years by FIFA (the International Federation of Football Association). Since 2005 it has taken place a year in advance of the World Cup in the host country, acting as a rehearsal for the larger tournament. It is contended by the holders of each of the six FIFA confederation championships (UEFA, CONMEBOL, CONCACAF, CAF,

stadiums during big games meant that Brazil was under intense scrutiny from the international community as millions of eyes tuned in to see how the country handled its social unrest. Brazil's mainstream media outlets, like Globo and Folha, initially drew attention away from the protests. The little footage that was aired those first days avoided showing interactions with police but rather focused on the small percentage of people who were not there to march peacefully and displayed the few instances of vandalism that occurred. In addition to excluding imagery of police aggression, the news channels relied on official reports provided by the police for its coverage. In this way, the mainstream media frame the protests as rupture and chaos and the protesters as violent provocateurs.

Yet footage captured by some protesters found its way onto social media sites, most notably YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. Mídia NINJA contributed in this regard as it was the first to collect video footage of the military police's excessively violent interaction with the protesters and stream it online through PósTV. The footage was not Mídia NINJA's alone, but was gathered from diverse sources—anybody who was documenting the events as they unfolded at street level. The images of police repression caught on video through mobile devices created a snowball effect of anger towards such unwarranted police violence. By the middle of June, it is estimated that about 250,000 people were marching through the streets in cities across Brazil, and the largest single demonstration was 100,000 people in Rio de Janeiro, which I attended. By the end of

AFC, OFC), along with the FIFA World Cup holder and the host nation, to bring the number of teams up to eight.

June, protesters had taken over the outside of the federal government buildings in Brasilia.

March on Globo

Angered by the misrepresentation of the manifestations, protesters turned their focus directly on Globo, and suddenly the demonstrations took on an additional dimension against what many perceived as the collusion between the mainstream media and the government. Virulent public criticism directed at Globo, and open letters to politicians—such as Pablo Capilé’s letter to Haddad—made their way through blogs, social media, PósvTV and other alternative media channels. On July 17, 2013 thousands of protesters stormed Globo’s headquarters in Rio de Janeiro and overtook its studios in Leblon, demanding that the media corporation air footage of peaceful aspects of the demonstrations as well as the military police’s violent interactions with them.¹¹³ The anti-Globo sentiment reached such elevated levels during the manifestations (for example angry mobs turned over several Globo News vans) that Globo reporters began removing the company’s logo from microphones and cameras to avoid adversity (Feltrin 2013).

By the end of that first week, likely realizing that it was losing credibility, Globo finally began to broadcast short clips drawn from a hand held device, some of which revealed the tense and aggressive interactions between the police and the protesters.¹¹⁴ News anchors asked for the audience to begin sending them personal clips on a daily

¹¹³ Video footage can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqzbsZlxKPU> (accessed July 27, 2014).

¹¹⁴ <http://linkis.com/g1.globo.com/rio-de-/voOw> (accessed August 8, 2014).

basis. As the protests continued, mainstream media relied more and more on citizen-captured images.

This is not the first time that Globo had represented demonstrations with what was perceived as obvious bias. In 1984, at the end of the dictatorship, a campaign organized by civil society groups and political opposition parties called *Diretas Já* (Rights Now) yielded ten million protesters in streets nationwide, the largest in Brazilian history. TV Globo's coverage of the demonstrations was relegated to local television channels while its prime-time newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, largely ignored or misrepresented the rallying crowds (Matos 2008; Porto 2012; Straubhaar 1989). As Porto points out, the refusal to transmit the protests symbolized a pro-establishment bias. Of course, mainstream media representatives claim that the government constrained them because they had the power to grant them licenses or not. However, when it became clear that there was a growing support for the opposition, TV Globo switched its coverage in support of the opposition in order to retain legitimacy in the eyes of the public opinion (Porto 2012; Straubhaar 1989). The 2013 protests seem to be history repeating itself. *Diretas Já* and the 2013 protests are instances that illustrate how civil society groups can at times influence the media's coverage. They further suggest that the alliances between MSM in Brazil and the external forces that they interact with—the state (and its policing apparatus), the market, and civil society—are not always so easily defined or containable.

NINJA's immediate impact

Mainstream media were eventually forced to use Mídia NINJA's footage because

of its proximity to the action and also because it captured compelling evidence that the official police version of several incidents of violence clearly contradicted the video images captured by the protesters. In one notable instance, images suggesting that a police infiltrator might have thrown a Molotov cocktail that provoked a violent counter-reaction sparked public indignation, and served in the defense of a wrongly arrested and accused protestor (Atunes 2013; Mackey et al 2013; Watts 2013).¹¹⁵ Although the police deny the claim, the footage that implicated them was picked up by Globo News and Folha, demonstrating just how far up the news chain Mídia NINJA's footage made it, and is a clear indication of "the gulf between street-level journalism and big news organizations that often over-rely on police briefings for information" (Watts 2013). Evaluating the work of the citizen journalists, Folha's ombudsperson, Suzana Singer, admitted that, "Folha was left in the dust. [...] It's not enough to cover protests the old-fashioned way, counting only on what your own reporters see, the police version, and images on the big broadcasters ... It's necessary to take into account these new sources of information," (quoted in Watts 2013).

Citizen journalism is not new, of course, as there are ample examples of individuals and groups practicing journalism in this way. Among the reasons that make Mídia NINJA a unique instance of media activism, and in my opinion a notable case study, is the large audience that it has been able to reach. Many new and old media channels were covering the protests, but Mídia NINJA became a primary reference. In a short time it gained a surprising degree of influence over the framing of the June protests

¹¹⁵ To view the video, see: http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/07/24/video-of-clashes-in-brazil-appears-to-show-police-infiltrators-among-the-protesters/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0 (accessed August 8, 2014).

and it connected the streets to those at home more so than any other group of journalists. In an interview with Galileu Magazine, Torturra says, “When the National Newspaper used our material as a basis to question the Carioca¹¹⁶ Military Police’s official version of the repression of the protest that occurred on the first day of the Pope’s visit, we realized that an important barrier had been crossed.”¹¹⁷ In its first four months, Mídia NINJA received over 120,000 likes on its Facebook page and received far more responses and comments to its coverage from online users than other mainstream media outlets (Mazotte 2013a).

The concept of Mídia NINJA and its version of citizen journalism also captured the imagination of news organizations and media activists beyond Brazil. From 2013-14 they have traveled extensively on a lecture circuit through Europe and Latin America, and news outlets like Al Jazeera, CBS, ESPN, El Pais, The Guardian, the Economist and many others wrote articles about NINJA. In 2013, there were no less than 550 instances in which Mídia NINJA appeared in either newspaper or magazine articles, on television news or as invited guests on programs. And of the 526 where they appeared in the same outlets from January – August 2014, at least 86 of them were related specifically to the 2014 World Cup.¹¹⁸ Although the coverage was not always favorable for Fora do Eixo and NINJA, the larger point is that it connected to contemporary questions about media and information production in the digital age that are relevant to many (though certainly not all) societies.

¹¹⁶ People from Rio de Janeiro are called Cariocas. Torturra is referring to the military police of Rio de Janeiro.

¹¹⁷ <http://revistagalileu.globo.com/Revista/noticia/2013/12/bruno-torturra.html> (accessed July 25, 2014). Pope Francis’s first visit to Brazil coincided with the protests.

¹¹⁸ <https://docs.google.com/a/foradoeixo.org.br/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AmoWhBF2evKydDNid2RSbjBSdEwxazlQZGRna2M5SEE&usp=sharing#gid=4> (accessed August 26, 2014).

Singer's insider quote mentioned above, where she gives credit to the efforts of groups like Mídia NINJA, indicates that mainstream outlets are willing to respond to the pressures of civil society groups, especially when faced with shifting public opinion. Viewed in this light, we can say that the type of citizen journalism that Mídia NINJA embodies is, to some degree, opening Brazil's media system even further than what Porto (2012) has suggested it has already opened since 1985. This claim should be qualified, however. Recalling Waisbord's (2009, 2010) insights, we cannot assume that just because civil society has a greater voice in media coverage at one particular juncture that it automatically has the ability to influence news. State and the market forces will likely continue to have the upper hand in shaping Brazil's media system.

V. Challenges Ahead

As Mídia NINJA continues to collaborate as a network and redefine itself beyond the 2013 protests, it is confronted with several challenges, among them dealing with adversity in the face of an entrenched culture of journalism that appears to be fighting for its own legitimacy and that strongly opposes what it sees as an "amateurish" foray into the profession. Also, there exists the possibility of being absorbed within the mainstream media system. My intention here is not to stipulate solutions to these challenges, but to indicate areas that are still in dispute.

Contending with Professionalism

Journalism was already changing in Brazil before Mídia NINJA showed up. In fact, NINJA was formed from within the social and media landscape that saw journalism begin to transition from a profession that had set legal limits on participation towards a

profession that is more inclusive of diverse demographics. However, as I discussed in Chapter 2, even though the Brazilian Supreme Court overruled Decree-Law 972, which legally required a university degree in journalism in order to practice it as a profession, there are continued efforts to regulate the trade.

Mídia NINJA associates are frequently presented with questions about what the initiative means to the future journalism. During an appearance on Record News, renowned journalist and television presenter Heródoto Barbeiro, asked Torturra if anyone could be considered journalist, to which he responded:

Every citizen can feel like, or think of himself or herself as a citizen. But being a journalist involves a certain ethical position beyond just transmitting information. It involves a certain process. ... Not everyone can call himself or herself a journalist. But everyone can be a communicator. Those are the borders that are in dispute right now. What is journalism? Or what is communications? Or what is media activism? What's more important for me is not whether to define it as journalism or not, but rather to have people no longer be just passive spectators of reality, but also participants (Torturra 2013).

Torturra, a trained journalist himself, is acknowledging but bypassing the tension that currently exists in public debate about his trade. There are some groups in Brazil who, while champions of freedom of expression and press, are not supporters of citizen journalism initiatives like Mídia NINJA. For its part, the National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ)—the professional syndicate that lobbies on behalf of journalists that I mentioned in Chapter 2—has a stake in keeping the established professional parameters of journalism in place. The syndicate has long been criticized for lending its full support of the Decree-Law 972 and for not being more openly critical of the military dictatorship. FENAJ lobbied quite aggressively to keep the decree in tact, as it feared that deregulating an employment structure built over more than forty years would worsen conditions, lower

pay, create less stable employment and poor quality journalists in newsrooms. Perhaps FENAJ's concerns about stable employment for journalists are not so unwarranted; after all, Torturra formed NINJA in response to the restructuring of the newsrooms and massive layoffs of journalists.

On the other hand, those who agree with the Supreme Court's ruling to overturn the Decree-Law 972 advance a counter-argument. Commercial media, they point out, is not actually producing quality programming, but rather content geared toward as wide a base as possible, and that usually entails entertainment, scandal and sensationalism.¹¹⁹ To be fair, this is not always true. Take for example the TV Globo program *Meninas do Jô* (Jô's Girls), which is the most critical of all political talk shows currently on air in Brazil (Atunes 2003). It is hosted by four female journalists—Lilian Witte Fibe, Cristina Serra, Ana Maria Tahan and Cristiane Lôbo—and TV legend Jô Soares. Particularly popular among young adult audiences, the show's often-harsh reproaches directed at Globo and the government provide a valid example that suggests Globo is not above producing and airing programs that are hyper critical of itself, if it attracts audiences (ibid).

At any rate, while FENAJ throws critical darts at citizen journalism initiatives for what it deems to be a threat to the professional standards of "quality" journalism, such as objectivity and fact-checking, it often seems that they are motivated more by maintaining favorable labor relations between journalists and media organizations. There are others who share FENAJ's concerns about professionalism, but for different motivations.

¹¹⁹ See: <http://freespeechdebate.com/en/case/should-journalists-need-a-diploma/>; and <http://www.coha.org/press-freedom-in-brazil-sound-the-alarm/> (accessed July 20, 2014).

Brazilian media scholar Sylvia Moretzsohn is an outspoken critic of opening the journalist trade to unqualified (in her view) everyday citizens. In a 2006 article “‘Citizen Journalism’ and the Myth of Redemptive Technology,” she argues that the commonly held belief that increased access to communication technologies automatically makes everyone a journalist bypasses important criteria of credibility. However, Moretzsohn makes clear that her goal is not to shore up a false ‘us’ versus ‘them’ confrontation between citizens anxious to exercise freedom of expression and journalists trying hard to preserve their ‘privileged’ role as informants (29). Rather, her concern is that in “naturalizing” journalism, it ceases to be taken seriously and thus “dissolves into daily errands,” (ibid). If this is important, it is not because of maintaining a privileged position of journalists, who often gain cultural authority by glorying their access to superior knowledge and proximity to events (Schudson 2003, 60). But rather because this is a particular moment of concentration of capital, and the idealized perception that new media technologies distribute power to “everyone” downplays the actual power mechanisms of the hegemonic group (Moretzsohn, 29).

One particular instance involving Mídia NINJA provides an example that speaks to Moretzsohn’s concern. NINJA’s perceived journalistic shortcomings were particularly laid bare in July 2013 when Eduardo Paes, Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, invited NINJA for an interview. The interview, which was screened on PósvTV and viewed by thousands of people, was seen as a PR disaster for NINJA. Critics derided the group’s lack of preparation and the “amateurish” way the interview was conducted, the agenda of which was ultimately driven by the far more experienced Paes’s, who spent two hours lauding

his own achievements (Mazotte 2013a).¹²⁰ NINJA, seemingly succumbing to the social pressure for standards of professionalism, conceded to these criticisms. In a Facebook post the next day—appropriately titled *Pós-Paes*, or “Post Paes”—they offered a tempered apology, claiming that they are in the process of learning, and that while they will make some right and wrong choices along the way, they are ultimately committed to producing a transparent journalism “worthy of the great trust and expectations that people have placed in Mídia NINJA”.¹²¹ Torturra, reflecting later on the episode, spoke of the need for NINJA to “bring experienced journalists into this conversation to understand where we failed,” (quoted in Mazotte 2013a). For Moretzsohn, this was a cop-out, and she offered yet another precautionary warning—that ignoring the standards of journalism taught in media training might actually end up serving the interests of the very people the group wishes to criticize (ibid).

Moretzsohn’s views on the journalistic professionalism are interesting because they seem to be rooted in an activism not unlike Mídia NINJA. Her cautionary assessment about the dangers in placing too high value on the liberatory potential of digital technology because it too reproduces societal relations of power is insightful, and something that Fora do Eixo and NINJA could take into consideration. However, there are at least two things she is not considering. The first is that the very fact that Eduardo Paes, the very busy and prestigious mayor of Rio de Janeiro, invited NINJA for an interview is not irrelevant. For Fora do Eixo, this is confirmation that the process they

¹²⁰ To view the interview (in Portuguese), see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdRx3kVQmTo> (accessed August 9, 2014).

¹²¹ To read the Facebook post (in Portuguese), see: <https://www.facebook.com/midiaNINJA/posts/205781782913308> (accessed August 9, 2014).

are putting in motion is indeed working. The supposedly poor performance that day can be remedied, but Paes and other politicians are recognizing the fact that citizen journalism in the digital age requires engagement with a different assortment of media producers.

Secondly, what is considered “quality coverage” is itself a concept imbued with relations of social power. One could ask, was NINJA’s coverage relevant? Perhaps not so much in the Paes interview (though getting the interview was relevant), but it could well be argued that Mídia NINJA’s coverage of the 2013 protests truly had meaningful social consequences in that, for example, it freed the young man wrongly accused of throwing a Molotov Cocktail. The images that NINJA presented in the youth’s defense were not intended to be framed objectively, since they were taken from the perspective of a participant in the protests and therefore with an explicit agenda. However, the images were presented *factually*, as in the young man was not, in fact, the individual who instigated the altercation with police. NINJA’s coverage was relevant enough to make it onto the mainstream outlets, shift public opinion about who, *actually*, were the violent aggressors in the protests, and receive praise from Folha’s spokesperson. To what degree, then, should NINJA really concern itself with such labels as journalist or so-called professionalism, when it is regardless making important social interventions?

Absorption within the Market System

One of the most interesting things about a media climate characterized by a large (though incomplete) diffusion of digital technology is that tech-savvy activist groups and individuals are able to catch the state, and at times telecommunication companies off

guard. This is what happened in the Brazilian protests. However, it does not take long for the state and market forces to catch on and adopt. It is a mistake to think that the increased connectivity, speed, and expansive reach of social media are domains exclusive for the left and that these affordances are always attached to campaigns to broaden democracy. As digital-skeptic Evgeny Morozov warns in his 2011 book, *Net Delusion*, “unbridled cyber-utopianism is an expensive ideology to maintain”, because just as the Internet can be used for good, so too can it be used as a “powerful tool of oppression”, (27-8). This happened, as media scholars Howard and Hussain (2013) remind us, in the “Arab Spring”, when “every single government that faced public protest, regardless of regime type, had some kind of digital-response strategy,” (14-15). These authors are speaking about the power of states, especially modern authoritarian states, in using the Internet for anti-democratic purposes such as cracking down on protesters, for spying, censoring, and spreading propaganda. In the context of NINJA, however, the precautions can also apply to corporate interests because mainstream media companies also “do not stand still” (Morozov, 27) and they quite possibly will try to adopt and absorb so as to control, co-opt and appropriate citizen journalism practices.

It is important to remember that social media and the production of alternative forms of space and journalism cannot be separated from the organizing forces of the market and state. For instance, the state provides infrastructure and licenses, and platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are privately owned. Concerns about absorption by the market system are not alarmist, but rather rooted in a simple awareness that capitalism tends to inscribe trends within its logic, and that there is an inevitable penetration of commercialism into media content (McChesney 2007). This is already

happening in some ways with Mídia NINJA's relationship to corporate media entities. NINJA registers its content under a Creative Commons *Attribution* license that allows free use, even for commercial purposes, as long as attribution is given.¹²² In a conversation with Altenfelder, he explained that for Mídia NINJA's goals, it is better to spread the narrative than charge for the content. In spite of this grounding in solidarity, Globo's use of NINJA footage free-of-charge in some ways strengthens a neoliberal logic of flexible labor and management, in that Globo is cutting labor costs by "contracting" NINJA journalists. However, due to NINJA's non-proprietary and solidarity principles, no one journalist is accredited and there is no contract to speak of. From Globo's perspective, the street journalists have outpaced MSM journalists and proven their efficiency in capturing better footage of events at the street level. In providing free footage to Globo, Folha, Record and other mainstream news networks, Mídia NINJA becomes complicit in evading the need for paid journalists and in bolstering the very practice they were reacting against. This combines both FENAJ and Moretzsohn's concerns.

There is another way to look at this, however. Having its footage absorbed within the system and shown on mainstream television is, in many ways, a victory for Mídia NINJA not unlike being invited by Eduardo Paes for an interview. Recalling Waisbord's reading of Civic Media Advocacy as a pragmatic approach for inserting socially oriented issues within mainstream news coverage, we can view Mídia NINJA as using Globo and others as a tactical ally, and simply providing them with ready-made footage to advance its cause. Understood as such, it is not only that NINJA gets absorbed within the system

¹²² For a list of licenses offered by Creative Commons, see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>.

but also that NINJA is *inserting itself* within the system. I see a parallel here to WikiLeaks wherein its founder, Julian Assange, handed over the critical content to media systems and organization (e.g. *The Guardian*) against which WikiLeaks was in large part reacting to. Addressing WikiLeaks, media scholar Ted Gornelios writes:

When liminal and central forces collide, they function simultaneously to break apart and reify each other. WikiLeaks provides a useful example in which alternative voices are foreclosed by the structures in which they appear and act even as they serve to broaden and question those structures, (2012, 174).

Mídia NINJA is undeniably pushing open some of the access gates to Brazil's mainstream media system while at the same time collaborating with the structures that it seeks to criticize. NINJA pushes the limits of what is known and accepted as normative news coverage and practices. Indeed, the relation between Globo and NINJA reveals a fascinating instance in which the sharing/P2P/collaborative/solidarity news economy sits in an awkward relation to the market economy, and where new media forms and practices converge with media industries in an uneasy coexistence (Chakravartty and Zhao 2008; Jenkins 2006).

Mediating Technological Determinism

As has been made evident, Mídia NINJA tends to engage in the hubris of technological determinism. Altfelder is perhaps most guilty of this. Take for example an explanation he once offered about digital technology's pivotal role in the history of contemporary social activism in Brazil. He asserted, "someone as deep in the interior of Brazil as, let's say, Amapá¹²³ could set up a profile on Facebook and suddenly they are relevant, finding it easier to dialogue with local politicians, with social movements, with

¹²³ Amapá is a coastal state in the far North of Brazil, bordering French Guyana.

artists and journalists across Brazil.” Altenfelder clearly validates discourses that conflate civic participation with “one’s ability to send, receive and relay messages,” (Nunes 2012, 158), and that equate a Facebook profile with imparting credibility and opening access.

Fora do Eixo is not alone in this thinking, however. Although Fora do Eixo might be considered counter-cultural, the mainstream political and media environment shares its views on the revolutionary potential of digital media. For example, among the first to realize the Internet’s potential impact on politics in the U.S. was Howard Dean’s 2004 campaign consultant, Joe Tripi, who after the campaign observed, “If information is power, then this new technology—which is the first to evenly distribute information—is really distributing power,” (Tripi, 4). Even Twitter’s ‘About’ page claims that that it “can give a voice to even the weakest signals” (Nunes, 158). Also, despite Mídia NINJA’s cyber-euphoria, there is a qualitative difference in its discourse than those deterministic voices that promise more individual empowerment and legitimate more privatized and flexible constellations of economic life, such as those media scholar Eran Fisher (2010) suggests reflect the ideological work of most contemporary discourses around digital media. In contrast, NINJA adopts discourses based on *collective*, as opposed to private, empowerment. While FDE’s economic life could certainly be described as a “flexible constellation”, given the cross-network sharing of resources, this flexibility is in the service of a community (although it must be said, this flexibility only goes so far, since FDE members rely on the Collective Bank, which has geographic and social restraints).

A reasonable critique of Mídia NINJA is that it has become part of, and perpetuates, an environment branded by what Nick Couldry has called “media rituals” (2003). Among these rituals, Couldry advances, is the “myth of the mediated center”—the belief or assumption that there is a center to the social world, and that, in some sense the media speaks ‘for’ that center (Couldry 2003, 2). Indeed, NINJA sees media, and certainly itself, as a center of social transformation and it feels that it is speaking on behalf of society, or at the very least on behalf of civil society. In São Paulo, for example, well established social movements have long taken issue with how FDE’s online activism and ubiquitous presence promotes its role in leading popular protest, often times obscuring traditional methods, relationships and structures of protest that were in place long before the Internet, and certainly before FDE. The network’s enthusiasm is seductive, to be sure, and it is important to expose police abuses and to challenge mainstream media coverage. However, in doing so we have to be careful not to downplay the role of human agency or understate the importance of both online and offline action and mobilization in the 2013 protests.

I think the best way to mediate the challenge in analyzing social media’s role in providing an alternative public sphere during the protests while still acknowledging the fact that it was not digital technology that motivated protesters to march but rather it was the will of hundreds of thousands of people incensed by both their government and its policing apparatus, is to return to Tierney’s insights about the entanglement and, indeed, circularity of digital and spatial publics. Tierney’s larger contribution is to see social media as a *mutual process* wherein the structuring forces of media interact with human action to co-produce each other (19, emphasis added). Theorizing social media’s role in

the “Arab Spring”, the author provides the following example that is equally applicable to the Brazilian context. She writes:

A Facebook page may emerge as a simple discussion forum, but as members begin to discuss events and their implications, as opinions are voiced and heard, a consensus of thought develops online. Plans and organizational efforts follow. People leave the confines of their screens, offices, schools, and homes and move into the streets to make their voices heard and presence known. The crucial point here is that once a demonstration has moved into the streets—to a physical public space—it is videotaped by individuals, as well as national and international news sources. An important circularity of imaging connects the active practices of a local networked public to the global media public, swaying world opinion, (19-20).

Tierney’s example satisfies both orientations towards social media’s role in the 2013 social protests, and in moments of social unrest more generally. For one, we do not have to endorse the idea that new media is inherently transformative, lest we fall for the latest and most fashionable version of the myth that “through media we access both our central realities and our future,” (Couldry, 53). On the other hand, what we can say with a greater degree of certainty is that social media’s role in social activism has changed the way that journalism and activism happens. It solves some problems of scale, expands the scope of communicative interaction (Bohman 2004) by providing alternative space for counter-voices, and bypasses some entrance barriers to the production of information. The biggest challenge ahead, of course, is sustaining online and offline interest beyond the hot initial “revolutionary” moment and maintaining it through the painstakingly slow process of actual social reform.

VI. Conclusion

In this chapter I presented a specific historical context, the 2013 protests in Brazil, within which activist groups and civil society members seized an opportunity to intervene

in the news-making process. It was an interesting moment in the history of Brazilian news when the normative channels of influence and gatekeeper function were disrupted. To their credit, after much nudging, Globo and its mainstream associates began to work with the citizen journalists. It is therefore fair to say that Mídia NINJA helped build a stronger link between civil society and MSM, and that during the 2013 protests Mídia NINJA's style of citizen journalism 2.0 provided forums that could be interpreted as broadening a public sphere. In this way they succeeded in their goal to democratize and open media, if only for a moment and only for a particular alternative public associated with Fora do Eixo.

Perhaps initiatives like Mídia NINJA call fill in the space for public media, which never took hold or received much support in Brazil (Porto 2012). Clark and Aufderheide (2011) believe that "Public Media 2.0" may have a chance, but that the bottom-line market logic of media will still prevail, an opinion shared by Couldry who writes, "New Media, whatever their differences from old media forms, are not disconnected from the material processes by which society's symbolic resources are centralized," (186). For Clark and Aufderheide, if public media 2.0 is to have a chance, it requires planning, experimentation, showing people that it matters and developing constituencies that invest in it. This may very well be Mídia NINJA's contribution.

Lastly, aside from an experiment in citizen journalism, I presented in this chapter indications that groups like FDE/NINJA are presenting alternative avenues for political participation. São Paulo Mayor Fernando Haddad's eager apology to Capilé in response to the open letter and public critique, Cultural Minister Marta Suplicy's meeting with

Fora do Eixo on her first day in office, and Rio de Janeiro's mayor Eduardo Paes's invitation to interview him make visible, if nothing else, FDE/NINJA's perceived influence in building links between civil society and the state. It further demonstrates that politicians take seriously mediated forms of political participation. Fora do Eixo, after all, throws its communication army behind candidates that it openly endorses. The broad audience that FDE/NINJA and other networks can deliver has not been lost on politicians, who understand that a politicized constituency nowadays uses digital platforms to participate in politics and remain informed. Citizen journalism has in many ways been reformatted, and activist and civil society groups now command a level of attention and seriousness from the political establishment.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

This dissertation opened with a particularly tense moment in Fora do Eixo's history, following Pablo Capilé and Bruno Torturra's appearance on the national talk show *Roda Viva*, when it became clear that Mídia NINJA was in fact a Fora do Eixo affiliate. More than de-legitimizing Fora do Eixo, the ensuing criticism and social demonization, I suggested, revealed the high stakes and contesting interests involved in the struggle to control alternative cultural and political processes in Brazil. It also underscored the fact that Fora do Eixo had become a compelling social force; whether it compelled disdain, fear or admiration, the network's tireless experiments in provoking shifts in the fields of cultural production and social activism garnered it a level of relevance within those fields. But what is produced by Fora do Eixo within these fields?

Despite its constant state of flux, Fora do Eixo has managed to produce alternative economic, social, and political models of organization and action. It has systematized parts of them, such as some of their "social technologies" like the Collective Bank, but for the most part they are still in experimental phases. As I discussed throughout the chapters, each of these models of organization and action carry with it certain benefits and limitations. FDE has also produced some interesting configurations of power. In what follows I offer a summary and brief reflection of these models of organization and action, and of its power configurations.

I. Summary and Reflections

Alternative Cultural Economy and Music Circuit

Fora do Eixo's alternative cultural economy, supported initially by Card but that today includes large sums of official money through grants, has allowed it to establish an extensive circuit of music festivals across Brazil. The primary benefit of this for musicians is to continuously play in front of live audiences. It has created a cultural infrastructure—the circuit/network—in areas where there was none, and has generated economic resources where none existed. This model has, by some estimates, circulated tens of thousands of national and international musicians through Brazil, and sometimes across Latin America. If we take into account Grito Rock, its largest festival, it could be argued that they circulate bands around the world, although this seems somewhat disingenuous; many festivals that are now called Grito Rock were in existence long before Fora do Eixo.

Fora do Eixo's circuit of music festivals has also launched and/or bolstered the careers of some musicians who have achieved national renown and even fame. The most notable examples of this are Gaby Amarantos, who is credited with inventing a genre of music called tecnobrega (literally: “cheesy techno”) from the Northern city of Belém, and Criolo, a rap and soul singer from a favela on the outskirts of São Paulo called Imbuías. Both attribute at least a portion of their success to circulating through Fora do Eixo's festival system. In Amarantos's case, this circuit brought her to audiences outside of Belém and she became famous, and while she has since signed with Globo's record label, *Som Livre* (Free Sound), and tours through Europe and North America, she still collaborates with Fora do Eixo and plays their festivals, such as Festival Goma in

Uberlândia where I met both her and Criolo. At times Fora do Eixo pays her an extremely large fee (commensurate with her status as a pop star) and other times she performs for free. Criolo was already fairly famous before he began collaborating with Fora do Eixo. He has chosen to remain an independent artist, although he mentioned to me that record labels are continuously offering him contracts and trying to sign him. However he prefers to do things his own way and makes a very lucrative living from the types of festivals and shows produced by Fora do Eixo and others. He too has toured through Europe.

As I discussed in the Introduction and Chapters 3 and 4, while Fora do Eixo's "solidarity economy" model has allowed it to create a network of music festivals outside of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the hegemonic centers of cultural production in Brazil, it has also been criticized at times by musicians who view the solidarity discourse as an excuse not to pay artist fees, or to get paid very little and sometimes in Card, which is redeemable within a very limited market. Despite Fora do Eixo's claim that its solidarity model is "post-market", the large sums of money that they pay to big acts like Amaranthos and Criolo versus what they pay to lesser known bands who draw smaller crowds reflects, without a doubt, a market-oriented strategy.

Therefore, while Fora do Eixo's music festival model has created an alternative music scene that benefits many artists, evidenced by the fact that bands continue to work with them, these benefits come only with an acceptance of Fora do Eixo's solidarity schema, which often means little or no artist fees. FDE's solidarity structure is not as

“post-market” as it claims, since it benefits some artists more than others—indeed, many critics believe that it benefits Fora do Eixo most of all.

Lastly, despite its sometimes-large claims, Fora do Eixo’s alternative model does not seem to be creating a paradigm shift in the political economy of the Brazilian music industry. FDE frequently espouses, as part of its institutional origin story, that it emerged within the context of “the total collapse of the record industry” following the introduction of file-sharing capacities. More than overstated, this is factually not true. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Brazilian Association of Record Producers claims that the Brazilian music industry reported sales (physical and digital) of R\$373 Million (\$186.5 Million U.S.) in 2011, a growth of 8.4% over the previous year.¹²⁴ While it does provide an alternative cultural economic model that gives opportunity to many and that opens the possibilities to share in the process of producing and distributing music, it is unlikely that it will ever be the dominant system in Brazil or even make a large impact on the current system.

Model for Social Activism

As I described throughout the chapters, the biggest assets of Fora do Eixo’s model for social activism are its command of a large and experienced communication team and its expertise in navigating social media. This gives it the ability to extensively promote its multiple agendas and endorse political campaigns. However, it has been criticized for using its media apparatus to self-promote and either bypass or absorb other social

¹²⁴ <http://www.abpd.org.br/downloads.asp> (accessed August 27, 2014).

movements. Critics argue that Fora do Eixo attempts to speak unilaterally on behalf of the political left.

I think the March for Liberty mentioned in Chapter 5 symbolizes Fora do Eixo quite well. The March for Liberty involved many social movements, each with their own institutional missions, yet the march itself did not have one specific agenda, other than to demand the very right to march and occupy the streets. Similarly, Fora do Eixo does not give primacy to one particular agenda, but is rather a network of agendas that implicitly includes the objective to perpetually grow the network. It is constantly in search of new instances of social upheaval and always positioned and ready to jump into battle, nationally and internationally. I explained in Chapter 4 how this led some groups, like the Marxist collective Passa Palavra, to throw critical darts at FDE for draping itself in anti-market discourse, when it seemingly engages in market-like practices, such as “consuming social issues”, and searching out new niche markets within which to promote itself. By standing for so much, this form of what we might call “social movement for hire, though free of charge” risks standing for nothing, other than the expansion of its brand.

Yet I suggested in Chapter 5 that Fora do Eixo’s pronounced anxiety about remaining relevant, of assuring that the network never becomes *analog* and in constantly needing to “upgrade” or “reboot” its objectives, might reflect a symptom of their hyper-mediated environment and accelerated modes of living/working. Integrated within its institutional unconscious seems to be a latent fear of obsolescence, perhaps due to the rapidity with which trends nowadays pass into obscurity.

A case in point that speaks to both its “social movement for hire” orientation and also to the degree of influence that politicians perceive Fora do Eixo to have is the politician José Dirceu, President Lula’s former Chief of Staff. Dirceu had his political rights revoked in 2005 following corruption charges, and in 2012 was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison. I was at the Fora do Eixo House in São Paulo in February 2013 when Dirceu, who was appealing his conviction and had not yet begun his sentence, arrived and in an open forum with all the residents made the case for his innocence and claimed he had been a political target. He requested Fora do Eixo to mobilize a campaign on behalf of his innocence, and to allow him to be photographed with Capilé. While Fora do Eixo did not, in fact, take up this campaign, they did allow Dirceu to be photographed with them at a future event (the photo graph is included in the beginning). This demonstrates the level to which Fora do Eixo has become a referent as an active member of civil society.

To be fair to Fora do Eixo’s model for social activism has made it a recognizable of civil society player at the national level in a very short time. To offer one final example, during the 2013 protests President Rousseff called for a series of emergency meetings with activists and social movement leaders to discuss how the government might address their demands, and to mitigate future upheaval. FDE was among the organizations invited to attend the second meeting; Pablo Capilé went on behalf of the network. As a result of these meetings, Rousseff promised a few immediate concessions including: importing foreign doctors to staff Brazil’s health clinics; meeting with governors and mayors to discuss how to improve transportation infrastructure and services; and pressuring the national Congress to dedicate all funds received from oil

royalties to education. It would be disingenuous and a disservice to all the diverse groups that participated in these sessions to overstate Fora do Eixo's role in these meetings. That said, we can objectively determine that FDE forms a very visible part of a dynamic civil society that the state recognizes as a relevant social force. Since June 2013, Rousseff has met regularly with social movement leaders and civil society groups, and in April 2014 she once again invited FDE to participate in a meeting about the demilitarization of the police.¹²⁵

Model for Citizen Journalism

In Chapter 5, I discussed Fora do Eixo's model of citizen journalism, Mídia NINJA, which aspires to produce news content independent of market concerns, that is produced by a more diverse group representative of a plurality of social perspectives, and that takes up issues normally not included in mainstream news, such as police violence. Borrowing from others, I suggested that NINJA be considered an instantiation of citizen journalism 2.0. The attachment of 2.0 acknowledges the fact that the new technological affordances of social media have changed the context of activism and reconfigured some practices, including journalistic practices (Tierney 2012, 9). Today, the potential exists for a more egalitarian method of information distribution (for those who have access). However, this term should be used cautiously so as to not fall back on deterministic assumptions about the liberatory potential of new media, and importantly, not to overcast the offline actions of the people on the ground and the interpersonal relations that are the real motivating factors in social protests.

¹²⁵ <http://www.folhapolitica.org/2014/04/organizadores-da-midia-ninja-se.html> (accessed August 6, 2014).

It is fair to say that, during the 2013 protests, Mídia NINJA's style of citizen journalism 2.0 provided forums that could be interpreted as broadening a public sphere. In this way they succeeded in their goal to democratize and open media, if only for a moment. It generated a space for counter-narratives to the mainstream news and played a role in shifting public opinion about the protests. Moreover, NINJA's efforts served to strengthen the connective between civil society and mainstream media by providing Globo, Folha, Record News and other mainstream outlets with its readymade and compelling footage.

The downside of the NINJA, so far, is that its editing process is still controlled by Fora do Eixo, and therefore, while it creates the potential for an alternative space for a plurality of voices and counter-publics to find expression, for now these alternative voices are mostly those of FDE members or collaborators. It has also been criticized for a perceived lack of journalistic professionalism, as understood by journalists and their professional associations who have a stake in maintaining certain criteria and standards of their trade established for over half a century. These critics overlook the fact that politicians are responding to and engaging with this type of journalism because of the shared perception that groups like NINJA speak to a broad constituency that is of interest to them. NINJA is therefore opening these doors for more grass roots participation in the political process.

Perhaps Mídia NINJA's greatest contribution is paving the way for others. This is already happening—take for example Estúdio FLUXO, formed in 2014 by Bruno Torturra. Although Torturra is involved, it is completely independent of FDE and

collaborates with groups outside of the FDE network. Torturra describes FLUXO as a “journalism laboratory in flux”; it is streamed on USTREAM but also has a YouTube channel, a Facebook page and a website.¹²⁶ Relevant to our discussion is the fact that high-level political candidates are making a point to appear on FLUXO for interviews. These include presidential candidates for the upcoming 2014 October elections such as Luciana Genro, *Socialism and Freedom Party* (PSOL); Zé Mario, *United Socialist Worker’s Party* (PSTU); and Eduardo Jorge, *Green Party* (PV). Gubernatorial candidates have also appeared, such as Vladimir Safatle (PSOL) and Gilberto Marigoni (also PSOL). São Paulo Mayor Fernando Haddad from the Worker’s Party (PT) was also interviewed on the program. These candidates, however, all represent different parties from the left—it is unclear what involvement FLUXO has with candidates on the right.

Model for a New Economic Sociability

Fora do Eixo has produced and systematized “social technologies” for living together, most notably the Fora do Eixo Houses and the Collective Bank. The FDE Houses help give coherence to the network as centralized hubs. The economic arrangement allows these youth to dedicate themselves entirely to a social movement they, for the most part, believe strongly in without having to worry about one’s basic material needs. It trains them with several media production skill sets that could be useful if they were to leave, including graphic design, sound engineering, photography, and video production. It also provides experience with the production of cultural events.

¹²⁶ FLUXO’s content can be found through all of these platforms: <http://www.fluxo.net>; <https://www.facebook.com/estudiofluxo>; <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/estudio-fluxo>; https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8tHT_yp3bpp87o8ckAr2VQ (accessed August 6, 2014).

For some, like Driade Aguiar, mentioned in Chapter 4, Fora do Eixo empowers individuals with public speaking and management skills.

This mode of living comes with a cost, however. Despite Fora do Eixo's claims that it gives individuals freedom to act socially because they do not have to worry about material concerns, being a resident within in the Fora do Eixo Houses actually necessitates giving up a great deal of personal freedom. One is expected to work long hours and at times it has exploited its members economic resources. There are also social and psychological pressures like self-regulating one's leisure time and economic activity, as well as constraints on interpersonal relations with people inside and outside the network. Interviews with former residents suggested to me that the hierarchies within the network can have the opposite effect of the empowerment that Aguiar refers to: while it may encourage the development of some public speaking skill, what is spoken publicly is largely demarcated. Through this perspective, Fora do Eixo's model for living communally can at times appear insular.

Production of Power

I also unveiled multifaceted power relations produced within Fora do Eixo; not only the more evident configurations of organizational power like *lastro*, which establishes hierarchies and structures the daily lives of its members, but also at least two subtler forms of power. The first is the production of a particular type of subjectivity necessary for Fora do Eixo to continue operating at such at high-paced level. The Fora do Eixo subject is produced through the circulation of "solidarity discourses" that encode with positive value and emotional attachments such rhetorical devices as "work is life",

which instill a sense of purpose and dedication that motivate and drive the material lives of these youth. Secondly, and connected to the first, are the relations of power involved in Fora do Eixo's ability to deliver such a wide base of constituents to politicians and funding agencies. They are able to gather their wide base through the deployment of these same rhetorical devices and their skillful capacity to self-promote vis-à-vis its elevated and disburse online presence. This in turn bestows a level of social capital upon Fora do Eixo, which it transforms into economic capital in the form of grants, and also political capital in the ability to set agendas and otherwise control alternative cultural and political processes. I suggested that Fora do Eixo risks becoming a node of power itself within the field of cultural production.

II. Future Research

As I emphasized in the Introduction, this dissertation represents a messy text as theorized by Marcus (1998), which is to say that it is an inherently incomplete presentation of knowledge about Fora do Eixo. This was compounded by the incredibly complex, highly dynamic and multi-dimensional nature of my object of analysis. The pages presented herein can only be understood as but an initial gesture towards making sense of the network and how it interacts with different social registers within Brazilian society. I have tried to describe the often times messy processes by which it coheres as an entity and produces models of social action while simultaneously defying attempts to circumscribe or classify it, due to continual re-inventions of institutional goals, discourses, practices and identities. Indeed, fluidity is its constant feature.

With this acknowledgment in mind, there seem to be infinite possibilities for continued research on Fora do Eixo and I will briefly discuss a few of the directions that this project might take in the short-term. I offer these with an important qualification: while dedicated almost entirely to Fora do Eixo, this dissertation is the beginning of a much broader project to understand alternative cultural and political processes in Brazil and beyond. I will address this in the final section.

Mapping Mainstream Culture and Media Industries

This project would benefit from a more detailed mapping of Fora do Eixo's relationship to the mainstream culture and media industries. FDE has positioned itself against the dominant corporations such as Globo, Folha, Sony, Universal and others. However the network has often collaborated with these corporations when it has suited their interests. For example, while I was in the FDE House in São Paulo, a film crew came to interview Pablo Capilé for a documentary that Globo was producing about them. Therefore I believe a deeper political economic analysis of the culture and media industries, as well as interviews with industry executives would provide a more thorough conceptual map of FDE's situated place and actual impact within the fields of culture and media production.

Mídia NINJA, a Return to the Field

In relation to the other chapters, I believe a lack of direct empirical observation in Chapter 5 precluded a more nuanced and textured analysis of Mídia NINJA. My attempt to rely on analysis from a distance did not provide a sufficient amount of data, or "situated knowledge" that I initially thought would be possible given that I had already

spent time with Fora do Eixo and understood how the FDE Houses and organizational structure works. Writing this chapter drove home the importance of participant observation and the benefits of the type of experiential knowledge that one can only attain from being in the field. This project will continue to keep a keen eye on Mídia NINJA, as I believe it to be a worthwhile project; however, this will require a return to Brazil for a more direct engagement with NINJA.

Race in Fora do Eixo

A more complete analysis of Fora do Eixo should engage deeper with issues of race than I have been able to do here. In Brazilian society, race is perhaps the most prominent marker of social and economic distinction. Yet it is within the cultural sphere that Black Brazil is often most visible and acceptable within the national landscape.¹²⁷ Take for example Gilberto Gil, only the second Afro-Brazilian Cabinet Member in the history of Brazil; his position was as Minister of Culture. Black Brazil seems much less acceptable around rights based claims on the state for concrete resources. Does this disjuncture somehow manifest in the institutional unconscious of Fora do Eixo? From early on, race played into Fora do Eixo's imagined intervention in the field of cultural production. For example, it promoted hip-hop and rap artists, like Ávila (a.k.a. *Linha Dura*), which in Brazil like in other societies are genres mostly associated with black culture. Since Fora do Eixo has branched out into two main institutional domains—culture and social movement—how race plays into FDE's imagined social interventions of these two areas is a question worth delving into. Also, as I mentioned in Chapter 3,

¹²⁷ I am indebted to Boatema Boateng for this insight.

working with Ávila conferred a degree of legitimacy on Fora do Eixo as it dispelled some of the criticisms about their predominantly middle class background at that time. This raises interesting questions about what in some social movements and other organizational structures might be considered reverse hierarchies—that is to say, that the further away your identity is from the social groups most dominant in society (white, male, heterosexual, middle or upper class, urban, educated and so forth), the more institutional clout and legitimacy you have. What are the different expectations of members who hail from middle class backgrounds versus those who come from favelas? How are these power differentials negotiated?

Comparisons beyond Brazil

Another direction this project might take is a comparative analysis between Mídia NINJA and the type of citizen journalism 2.0 that took place within the social demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria and other countries that are often called the “Arab Spring”. Such a comparison would have to emphasize outright that different political, economic, cultural, religious, social and media landscapes preclude direct parallels, or a reductive mapping-on of digital media’s role from one context to another. Even regionally, the countries that partook in the “Arab Spring” had variable outcomes with relation to the use of digital media, due to specific national contexts and diverse cultures of use (Tierney 2012). However, as I mentioned in the Chapter 5, Fora do Eixo declares itself in solidarity with what it perceives as its counterparts in North Africa and the Middle East, and is at the very least discursively bound to the “Arab Spring”. The comparison would also have to, once again, resist techno-utopian visions of media’s role

in social transformation, especially pertinent here because such comparisons between post-colonial societies risk reifying positivistic perceptions that conflate technology with progress.

Fora do Googleplex

A cross-institutional and cross-cultural comparison between the labor practices of Fora do Eixo and Google would provide fascinating insights into the breakdown of the work life/private life divide in institutions where digital technology figures centrally into identity. The comparison would be interesting precisely because at first glance these are two diametrically opposed phenomenon—Google is hyper-proprietary and Fora do Eixo is bound by solidarity principles and searching for alternatives to capitalism. But what is it behind their countercultural institutional imaginary, their techno-utopian belief in the socially transformative potential of digital technology, and their labor practices that bind them?

Pós-Fora do Eixo

In conclusion, Fora do Eixo's models for alternative living, stimulating cultural production and social activism are instructive: they provide imaginaries for different social, economic and political possibilities, for a new type of sociability and civic engagement. Yet, as I hope to have made clear, Brazilian civil society is overflowing with experiments in digital and media culture at the level of production and also at the level of intervening in policies that bear upon the very ability to access culture. There are innumerable actors, institutions and social movements involved in Brazil's alternative cultural and political processes that also work towards the democratization of media and

other areas of social justice and equality. As my career moves forward, it would be wise for me to broaden my scope and try to conceptually map out a larger terrain of these alternative movements and processes. This will require me to de-center Fora do Eixo as my object of analysis in order to account for other social forces and cultural phenomenon that stand to deepen my understanding about how all of these multi-dimensional and dynamic terrains are imbricated in Brazilian society. Fora do Eixo will always be a grounding referent for me as I navigate my way through the messy analytical endeavor of unraveling elaborate relationships across different fields, social registers and institutions. However, strengthening my knowledge about the bigger picture and how it all fits together will only enrich my understanding of what is particularly Brazilian about Fora do Eixo, and what meaningful and lasting contributions it has made or stands to make to Brazilian culture and society.

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