"We are Warriors": The Micropolitics of Play in Natal, Brazil

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 2021

Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the
ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

This thesis is dedicated to the participants and instructors of *Atitude Cooperação*.

Your stories animate the pages of this thesis and I hope that I have done them justice.

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ABSTRACT

Play, in its various manifestations, has become a bedrock of child and youth centered development NGOs. Organizations have utilized activities like sport, theatre, music, and art as vehicles for pursuing specific development agendas in the Global South. Their goals are varied and often address large scale social issues such as sexual and gender-based violence, hygiene, food security and sustainability, and peacebuilding.

My research is based on the belief that play is a valuable pursuit in and of itself. My thesis aims to provide a conceptual framework for assessing how vulnerable children and youth experience play-centered programs as they navigate adversity and risky environments. This thesis is informed by the theoretical work of Deleuze and Guattari and specifically their concepts of micropolitics and becoming. I argue that this perspective offers a more embedded understanding of how players experience play-centered programs and the effects they have on their day to day lives.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
EAC	*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*
IPEA	*Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada*
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SfD	Sport for Development
TCPS	Tri-Council Policy Statement
TfD	Theatre for Development
UFRN	*Universidad do Rio Grande do Norte*
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

Play is a basic, but vital, tenet of the human experience. It is a phenomenon that permeates all stages of life, stretches across cultures, and sometimes even transcends species (Brown & Vaughan, 2009; Massumi, 2014). Yet, it often fades into the background of our everyday ordinary lives and is set aside in favor of more mundane and routine responsibilities. In this thesis, I want to bring play to the forefront of our thinking and show how a study of play invites us into the emotional and creative expressions and desires of young people's life-worlds.

Play has always been an interesting topic for me, though I did not always know it was play specifically that I was interested in. When I first began my graduate studies, I knew these two things: I wanted to focus on children and youth, and I wanted to do my fieldwork in South America. I had spent the previous year teaching English at an elementary school in Chile with *Ingles Abre Puertas* (English Opens Doors), a social initiative supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Working with children was a new experience for me, and although it was challenging, I loved every minute of it. After I returned home to Canada, I wanted to build on my experiences and continue to learn about the contemporary social issues that shape the region, and where its young people fit into the larger picture.

While teaching English in Chile, I would often incorporate play into my lessons. It became a tool I used to bridge the language barrier and a way of making my classes more engaging and relevant for my students. Guided by these interests, I started researching a field of development that focused on sport as a way of engaging young

people in community projects. Sport for Development (SfD), as the field has come to be known, has been largely institutionalized in development practice, with even the United Nations creating a separate body dedicated to realizing SfD projects around the world.

It was with this background that my supervisor Lindsay DuBois introduced me to Marlos Alves Bezerra, a professor visiting from Brazil and doing research at the Dalhousie Centre on Resilience. Marlos is a professor of psychology at the Universidad do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) in Natal where his work focuses on conducting art-based interventions with vulnerable youth. Our similar interests led us to collaborate on my thesis research.

While Marlos was still in Halifax, he introduced me to a non-governmental organization (NGO) named Atitude Cooperação located in his home city of Natal. He told me that the organization provided young people living in the peripheral parts of the city, with an opportunity to take part in free music, theatre, and sports classes. It sounded like an ideal location for me to conduct my fieldwork. It also inspired me to expand my research topic as I felt that if I limited my focus to sport, I would miss an opportunity to study the other classes they offered there. And so, I decided to broaden my focus to the concept of play.

1.1 What is play?

A focus on play risks ambiguity. Scholars have written countless works in attempts to define play only to have the conceptual rug pulled out from under them. Books, articles, charts, lists, and diagrams have been dedicated to dissecting the many ways play manifests itself in everyday life: Progress, fate, power, identity, imaginary, self, and

frivolity (Sutton-Smith, 1997); competition, chance, mimicry, and vertigo (Caillois, 1961); play as behaviour or activity, play as motive, attitude, or state of mind, play as form or structure, play as meaningful experience, and play as an ontologically distinctive phenomenon (Feezell, 2010). Theorists have studied its role in cultural production (Huizinga 1955; Turner 1982; Hamayon 2016), cognitive development (Parten 1933; Piaget 1962; Vygotsky 1967), evolution (Brown & Vaughan 2009; Massumi 2014; Pelligrini et al. 2007), communication (Pellis & Pellis 2009), creativity (Bateson, 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 2009; Goffman, 1959), etc. These studies account for the ways play may be boisterous and quiet, contemplative and impulsive, light-hearted and serious, innocent and sinister, social and individual, physical and intellectual, and cultural and emotional. The list is exhaustive. It is almost as if the more we try to define it, the less like play it becomes.

The difficulty of defining play is summed up best by Sturrock when he states that "trying to define play is like trying to define love. You can't do it. It's too big for that" (quoted in Wilson, 2009, 269). Like love, playing is something that comes to us naturally, just as any instinct or urge, and is therefore an integral part of our life experience. It is something we know when we see it and when we feel it. Maclean et al. wisely note (2016) that "accepting play as the subject of analysis does not mean making play a subject and crucially does not grant it subjectivity" (5). On a similar note, the focus of this thesis is not on play alone, per se, but on the players, my participants, and their experiences at Atitude Cooperação.

Play is something we all have experience with firsthand. It is as "well-known and common fact of the social world" (Fink, 2016, 15). We see it at the skatepark with kids practicing their kickflips; it takes place in legion halls where senior citizens play games of bridge and bingo; we experience it when our dogs nudge a ball towards us, a well-known invitation to play that seems to transcend species. Play is an instinctive and expressive act; the emotional, cognitive, and physical embodiment of feelings like joy, curiosity, and humour. These acts are moments in which we build friendships, learn new skills, exercise the capacities of imagination, and explore the intricacies of our emotional repertoires. Seen in this way, it is easy to understand why Fink (2016) believes that by playing we celebrate our existence.

The shapeshifting nature of play makes it hard to pin down and define. In my research, I view play as an intervention into reality that seeks to explore and rework how we relate to the world. I argue that how and why we play changes based on the circumstances and the needs and desires of the individual. Play, in this sense, is not mimicry or repetition, but moments in which we take charge and re-imagine the world in distinct ways.

1.2 Purpose of my research

Play, as a topic in itself, is a relatively underexplored focus in development studies. My research aims to provide a conceptual framework for assessing how vulnerable children and youth experience play-centered programs as they navigate adversity and risky environments. In my analysis, I found it helpful to draw on concepts from Deleuze and Guattari's theoretical repertoire. Their concepts help me situate my research participants experience with play in a larger environment and to understand their personal transformations.

Reading the works of Deleuze and Guattari can be a daunting and intimidating task. On the surface, their work appears to be anything but practical and accessible, covering a vast landscape that touches on everything from psychoanalysis (1983) to literature (1987), cinema (1983), evolution (1987), and even thermodynamics (1993) and differential calculus (Deleuze, 1993). If the sheer scale of their philosophy is not enough to intimidate even the most well-rounded of readers, then the unconventional nature of their writing provides yet another challenge. Their work often reads as frantic prose, rife with implicit references to late philosophers and avant-garde literature, topographic images, and peculiar neologisms. In order to engage with the world of Deleuzoguattarian theory, the reader must be willing to jump in feet first.

In my thesis, I take a theoretical leap into Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of micropolitics and the related ideas of cramped space and becoming and discuss how they relate to play. Deleuze (2007) encouraged his readers to use his concepts in piecemeal fashion, hoping that they would find "some use, however small… in their own work, in their life and in their projects" (180). Part of the reason their work is so difficult to interpret and pin down is because they wanted their ideas to remain plastic and pliable, adaptable to new situations and problems. This allowed them to follow through with the rhizomatic nature of their work through diverse interpretations and applications. When thinking about how to apply their concepts Hickey-Moody and Malins state that "the question is not whether a particular concept is 'true', but whether it works, and whether it opens up the range of possibilities in a given situation" (Hickey-

Moody & Malins, 2007, 2). Deleuzoguattarian thought is, in this sense, a practical philosophy.

Deleuzoguattarian ideas can inform our understandings of development by highlighting the importance of the interplay between structure and movement. The concepts of micropolitics and cramped space allow me to situate my research participants' experiences within a larger context of poverty and oppression, taking into account the underlying forces that impinge on the collective bodies of young people. Thinking micropolitically about play shows us that social change can begin at the small-scale level of the individuals in their everyday environments. It means that my research participants actively intervene in the world in order to improve their lives, though be it with the modest means and tools available to a young person living in the marginalized neighbourhoods of Natal.

In my analysis, I reflect on the micropolitics of play. I want to look at young people as political actors who engage in small scale reworkings of their environments. These micro-acts enable diverse transformations, or becomings, which in turn help them navigate hardship and barriers to their well-being. I explore two themes of play that emerged from my research and discuss how they each represent a subtle intervention into the lived realities of youth in the West Zone: play as a safe space and humor and fellowship.

1.3 My research location

The famous Brazilian song writer Antônio Carlos Jobim once said that "Brazil is not for beginners" (quoted in Woodyard & Vincent, 2003, xvi). This thesis is a written account

of an outsider looking in, a reflection on Brazil from the perspective of a self-proclaimed beginner. Having only been offered a short glimpse of the country, this thesis is marked by a sense of unfinishedness, and an understanding that the things left to learn will always outnumber the words, pages, and time available to me. Brazil may not be for beginners, but I must begin somewhere.

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world and has the fifth largest population. In 2018, it had a population of 208 million people, including 68.8 million children and adolescents between the ages of 0 and 19 (Fundação Abrinq, 2019, 17). As the largest country in South America, it stretches from the interior Amazonian jungle, to the gorgeous Copacabana and Ipanema beaches of Rio de Janeiro. But while these descriptions help paint a broad picture of Brazil, they say nothing of the diversity of lived experiences within the country itself.

The Northeastern region of Brazil, where I did my research, has a unique history. In the year 1500, a Portuguese naval fleet led by Pedro Alvaz Cabal was on its way to India and instead landed in what is now known as the Northeastern state of Bahia. This marked the beginning of the Portuguese invasion of Brazil and what was to be 322 years of colonial domination. Brazil's experience with colonialism has cast a long shadow over the country and the nation still suffers from the lasting effects of exploitation, slavery, and coercion, all of which have influenced the physical and social fabric of Brazilian society (Schwarcz & Starlin, 2018; Telles, 2004).

Brazil consistently ranks as one of the most unequal countries in the world where extreme wealth exists alongside extreme poverty. The richest 10% of Brazilians earn approximately 42.7% of the nation's wealth. This is contrasted with the poorest 34% who earn less than 1.2% of the wealth (O'Doherty, 2020, 28). These figures are exacerbated regionally with residents in the Northeastern states, where I did my research, experiencing a disproportionate amount of poverty. Josué de Castro compares the Northeast to a mini Third World within Brazil. He describes the region as still having a feudal agrarian structure inherited from Portuguese colonialism (De Castro, 1952). While the Southern region, which includes megacities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, has become the modernized industrial engine of the nation's economy, the Northeastern region has stayed primarily rural, with an industry based on cotton, soybeans, and sugarcane (Telles, 2004).

Approximately 63.5 million people live in poverty in Brazil and 26.9 million people of this total live in extreme poverty. In the Northeast region, 14.5 million people live in poverty and 14.3 million people live in extreme poverty. In Brazilian census data, poverty (*pobre*) is defined as having a per capita monthly household income of less than or equal to half the minimum wage, equivalent to $468.50 Brazilian Real in 2017 values, or $14.75 Canadian dollars. Extreme poverty (*extramamente pobre*) is defined as living with a per capita monthly household income of less than or equal to a quarter of the minimum wage, the equivalent of R $234.25 Brazilian or $52.40 Canadian dollars (Fundação Abrinq, 2019, 20-21). These statistics stretch into realities of children and youth. A 2019 study by Fundação Abrinq found that in the Northeast, the approximate

number of children and adolescents aged zero to 14 living in poverty or extreme poverty

was a staggering 8.8 million (22).

População em situação domiciliar de baixa renda segundo Grandes Regiões – 2017
(em milhões)

● Extremamente pobres   ○ Pobres

| Brasil | 26,9 | 36,6 |

Região Norte: 4,0 / 4,5
Região Nordeste: 14,3 / 14,5
Região Sudeste: 6,1 / 12,2
Região Sul: 1,5 / 3,1
Região Centro-Oeste: 1,1 / 2,3
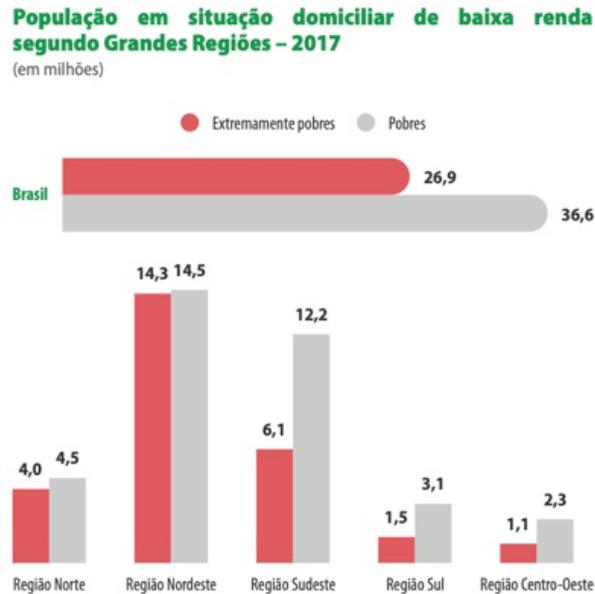
Figure 1   Population living in low-income households according to major regions (in millions) – 2017 (Fundação Abrinq, 2019, 20).

In 20I8, I travelled to Natal, the capital city of the Northeastern state of Rio Grande do

Norte, to conduct the fieldwork for this thesis. Natal is the 19th largest city in all of

Brazil with a population of approximately 890,480 people (Instituto Brasileiro de

Geografia e Estatística, 2020). I spent three months in the city, from July through

September, getting to know Brazilian life and culture as much as possible.

I conducted research with a small grassroots NGO named Atitude Cooperação (Attitude

Cooperation). The organization has its origins in the Brazilian medical cooperative

known as Unimed. Unimed is one of Brazil's largest and most recognizable companies,

offering medical services to approximately 17 million beneficiaries nationwide

(Unimed, 2021). They state that their overall social ethos is aligned with the United

Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goals

(SDG), both of which advocate for the preservation and conservation of the environment, social inclusion, and the appreciation of local culture (Unimed, 2021). The cooperative seeks to realize these goals by using their resources and connections to give back to communities in which they operate through the creation of programs that directly address important social issues across the country (Unimed, 2021). In 2006, Atitude Cooperação was launched as one of these small-scale social initiatives in partnership with three of the local public schools. Over the past 14 years, Atitude Cooperação has grown exponentially, from only 60 participants to well over 1,500 and is now considered an independent NGO.

Atitude Cooperação is located in the neighborhood of Felipe Camarão in the West Zone (Zona Oeste) of the city of Natal (shown in blue on the map below). It is surrounded by four other localities: to the north, Bom Pastor; to the south to *Guarapes*; to the east *Cidade da Esperança*, and to the west to the municipality of *São Gonçalo do Amarante*. The West Zone was often described to me as a "peripheral" and "insecure" part of the city. These two words are used a lot in Brazil and tend to refer to areas where the residents are economically and socially vulnerable and where poverty is prevalent. As indicated on the map by the yellow dots, the West Zone is home to 24 *favelas,* more than any other zone in the city.
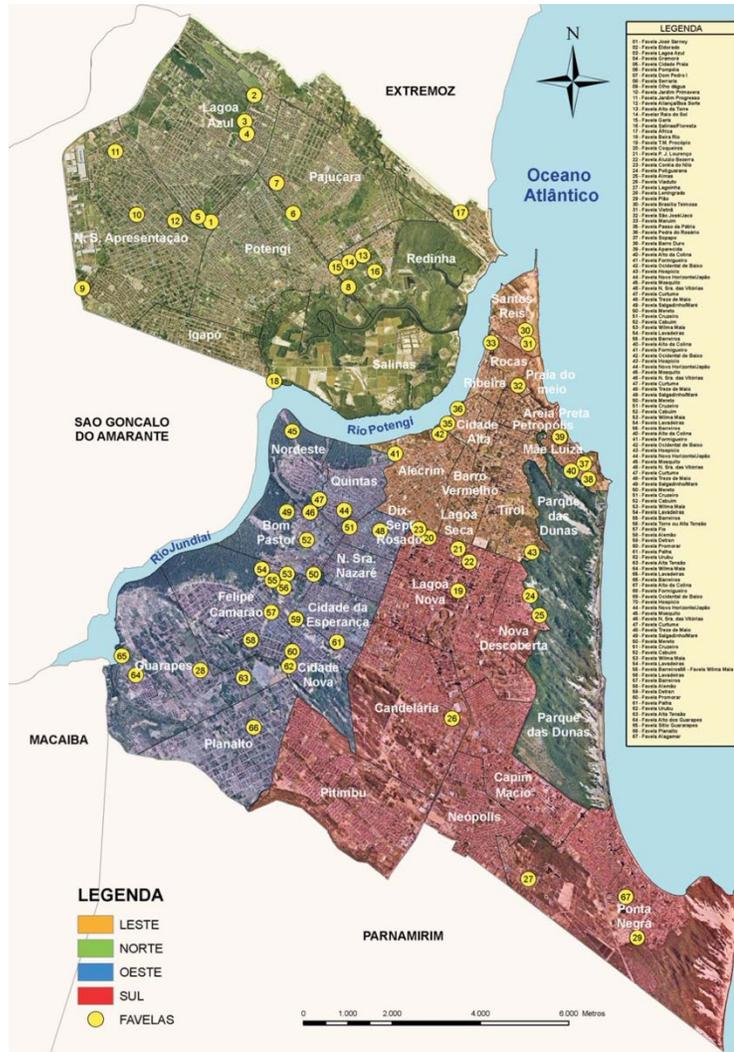
Figure 2   Map of the administrative zones of Natal with favelas (Prefeitura do Natal, n.d).

One of the main motivations for starting the organization was the lack of social projects and afterschool programs in the West Zone which would grant young people access to opportunities for art and recreation and expose them to different cultural activities. The lack of resources and spaces for play-related activities are evident across poor communities in the Northeast of Brazil. In 2016, only 4.2% of municipalities in the Northeast region had access to sports equipment and safe recreation areas (Fundação Abrinq, 2019, 44). In a study conducted in Felipe Camarão, Fernandes et al. (2004)

describe the lack of spaces for community gathering, such as public squares or leisure areas, noting only two public sport courts in existence. Both of these were described as lacking public maintenance and as overgrown with weeds and littered with garbage. They deemed the space neither safe nor sanitary for public use (Fernandes et al., 2004). There is also a shortage of cultural centres across Brazil, where young people may be exposed to arts and culture (Fundação Abrinq, 2019, 70).

Atitude Cooperação offers children and youth opportunities to take part in different forms of play in order to mitigate the effects of social exclusion and inequality in the West Zone. They focus on three main projects: *Celeiro* (sport), *Encena* (theater), and *Tocando a Vida com D'Amore* (music). Each project (which I will describe in greater detail below) seeks to contribute to the wellbeing and quality of life of its participants and their families.

The activities at the organization fall into the category of adult-led play or semi-structured play. The organization provides the tools, resources, and opportunities young people need to sustain and develop their curiosity and learning by offering a variety of play-related programs and modules based on increasing difficulty. The instructors lead, supervise, and observe each class, actively guiding and supporting the participants throughout to ensure that everyone feels included and is given a chance to play. All instruments, sporting goods, and other materials are provided on-site as needed.

Originally, the organization's efforts were focused solely on sports. In 2007, they began offering free volleyball and judo classes through their *Celeiro* (barn) project. The

objective was to use health, fitness, and competitive sports to inspire social inclusion and civic participation among children and adolescents in the Natal public-school system. All sports classes were held on the premises of three local schools, where instructors were able to access small courts and playing fields. Over the years, the organization has expanded the kinds of classes it offers, which now includes both outdoor and indoor soccer. Participants of the various classes regularly take part in competitions throughout the city and the state.

In 2011, the organization started the music project known as *Tocando a Vida com D'Amore* (playing life with love). The program was launched by the renowned Argentinian conductor and violinist Oswaldo D'Amore, a professor at the UFRN, who served as the artistic director of the university's string quartet, and later as the principal conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of Rio Grande do Norte. After retiring, D'Amore started a partnership with the Atitude Cooperação and focused on creating opportunities for young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds to study classical music. The project began with only 15 students but quickly grew due to the growing demand and interest from young people in the local neighborhoods. They have classes in cello, violin, viola, guitar, flute, and singing.

The theatre project, known as *Encena* (stage), started in 2014, in partnership with the UFRN. The course seeks to encourage social change by empowering youth in the community and fostering creative expression in order to address personal challenges. They regularly perform in front of large audiences and often work on a single play for months before performing it in public. The students create their own costumes and sets.

In addition to these core initiatives, the NGO also promotes a variety of other side projects. One of their most recent additions is the *Coletivo Jovem* (youth cooperative), a project run in partnership with the Coca-Cola Institute. The project contributes to the development of low-income communities by preparing high school graduates for the job market. In the past, other programs have included *Projeto Retratos da Vida* (photography classes), *Projeto Lixo na Lixeira* (sustainability education), and *Projeto Livro sem Fronteiras* (book exchange). More recently, they introduced a program focused on teaching mothers how to make artisanal crafts which they can sell at the market to support their families. Recognizing that many of these mothers cannot leave their small children home alone, they provide a small space for daycare onsite. They also use the space during public health crises. In 2015, The Northeast was one of the hardest hit regions during the Zika virus outbreak and the space was used to educate children and their families on how to stay safe during the epidemic.

1.4 Young people in research

Over the course of my three months in Brazil, I conducted interviews with participants and observations at the theatre, music, and sports programs. The organization regularly welcomes academics and artists from all over the world in order to give their students as much exposure as possible to different forms of culture, knowledge, and art and give participants the opportunity to learn, reflect, and have their voices heard.

The voices of young people, especially children, have historically been marginalized in research. The introduction to Chapter 4 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement describes how women, children, the elderly, and those who lack capacity to consent, have often

been excluded from participation in research. It also states that these exclusions were sometimes due to an over-protective attitude on the part of researchers and research ethics boards, and/or to the assumption that results from one group (males over the age of 18) could be adapted to other groups (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014, 49). They are seen as the innocent and passive recipients of programs and policies, and as lacking the resources, capacities, and knowledge to contribute to concrete change themselves.

The attitudes towards including children and youth more actively in research are, however, steadily changing. In Brazil, the social imagery surrounding children and youth has evolved from one of stigma to one of agency. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the conversation around children and youth focused on the plight of street children. These were stigmatized and marginalized youth who were seen as a source of crime and violence in cities across Brazil (Hecht, 1998; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). In the 1990s, the focus shifted to the so-called "project kids", the participants of various NGO programs. More recently, research has focused on what are called the "young peripherals", groups of politically and civically engaged young people who play key roles in social movements (Bezerra, 2009). This latest shift has acknowledged that children and youth are active agents in their own lives and can therefore be intelligent and valuable research partners.

The conversation around including children and youth has changed from a focus on conducting research on children and youth to conducting research in partnership with

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them. As Boyden and Mann (2005) importantly note, this is not to imply that young

people should be treated the same as adults or have the same responsibilities but simply

that that they should have more opportunities to participate in policymaking and action

(20). If we are to value the idea that children and youth can make meaningful

contributions to social policy, then we must attune ourselves to the very ways in which

they engage with and make meaning in the world, and we must pay attention to the

things that they value. These insights can help strengthen the policies and programs that

seek to help them cope with challenges and hardships.

1.5 Methodology

In order to learn about young people's experiences with play-centred programs, I

travelled to Natal in the summer of 2018 to spend time at Atitude Cooperação and to talk

to the young people there. My research took an ethnographic approach because, as

explained by Atkinson and Hammersley (2019), the ultimate goal of ethnography is to

study social phenomena from an insider, or emic, perspective, in an attempt to get as

close as possible to the lived-in and embodied experiences of individuals in their social

worlds. Ethnography involves embedding oneself in a research site for an extended

period of time in order to collect data first-hand. Over the duration of three months, I

went to the organization almost every day of the week, attending classes on weekdays

and performances and competitions on weekends. Ethnography allowed me to put

myself in the midst of things, and to try and understand, to the best of my ability, the life

experiences of my participants. Angrosino (2007), identifies three popular modes of data

collection in ethnographic research, which I also utilized in my own research:

observation, interviewing, and the consultation of existing literature.

In the first stage of my research, I conducted participant observation. During this time, I interacted freely with the students, instructors, and other individuals present at the organization both during and in-between classes in order to gain a deeper understanding of the overall function and feeling of the organization. Over time, observation led into a more active emphasis on participation in everyday activities at the NGO. Instructors would invite me to partake in classes, allowing me to experience the types of play at the organization first-hand.

Interviews took place over the course of approximately two weeks near the end of my time in Natal. In total, I conducted 16 interviews with participants and 3 interviews with instructors, both in individual and group settings. Music, theatre, and sport classes were equally represented among interviewees with a total of 8 participants in each category, with some participants taking part in more than one class. There was a total of 8 males and 8 female interviewees, a symmetry realized through chance rather than intent. Instructors from both sport and music classes were interviewed, and although I had intended to interview one of the theatre instructors as well, I ran out of time near at the end of my stay in Natal. Each interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide and recorded with permission.

I utilized the semi-structured interview method as a way of giving participants room to veer off script and to bring in their own ideas and topics for discussion. The questions focused on their experiences at the organization and the activities they offered, as well their lives outside of the organization in a broad sense. Each question was carefully crafted so as to not explicitly trigger any sensitive or uncomfortable subject matter, and

any sensitive issues that were brought up in interviews were done so by the participants at their own discretion.

1.6 Organization of the thesis

My thesis consists of the following five chapters, each of which touch on different important aspects of my research. In chapter 2, I analyze the evolution of youth rights discourse in Brazil, including the right to play. I discuss how play has often been adopted in the public agenda as a tool to address the needs of youth living in vulnerable contexts. The underlying aim of this chapter is to highlight the importance of civil society, with a particular focus on NGOs, in securing and enforcing children and youth rights and wellbeing in Brazil.

In chapter 3, I explore the efficacy of Deleuzoguatatrian philosophy as a theoretical guide for research in the social sciences, including my own project. Specifically, I explain the theoretical concepts employed in my data analysis: cramped space, micropolitics, and becoming. These concepts provide a grounding from which to understand the life experiences of my participants and how their experiences with various forms of play impacted their lives.

In chapters 4 and 5, I draw on the data I collected while in Brazil to explore the idea of play as a form of micropolitics. I use two conceptual tools provided by Deleuze and Guattari: the little refrain and the assemblage. Each section includes an observation of a play scene from the organization. These offer brief glimpses into how play unfolds in each of the classes and serve to compliment participants' own descriptions in the interviews. In the sections titled "cramped space", I discuss some of the important social

issues that were brought up in my interviews. I then move on to discuss two facets of play that reoccurred throughout my research and discuss their importance as micropolitical factors in the West Zone: play as a safe space and humor and fellowship. While these facets often occur together in individual acts of play, addressing them individually allows me to consider how they each have relevance and meaning in the lived realities of my research participants. These are modest interventions that support and enhance well-being and improve overall happiness.

1.7 Conclusion

As an early career researcher, I recognize that conducting a research project comes with a responsibility of educating myself in a way that I have never done before in my academic career. This thesis has been an evolving project. Over the course of the past few years, I have tried to wrap my head around the historical and cultural complexities of Brazil, delved into two of the most complex philosophers of the 20th century, and struggled with how to best capture and convey the heavy nature of my research participants lived realities. I hope that in doing so, I have done my research participant's words and stories justice.

CHAPTER 2   Literature Review

My aim in this chapter is to situate my research site, Atitude Cooperação, within a broader history of youth policy in Brazil. In the first section I briefly describe the evolution of young people's rights in the country, focusing attention on the forces that led to the adoption of the Child and Adolescent Statute (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*, EAC) in 1990. This legislation was once characterized by the former UNICEF director, James Grant, as "the best child protection legislation in the world" (quoted in Dewees & Klees, 1995, 77). It guaranteed every Brazilian child access to fundamental rights that were considered crucial to their survival, development, protection, and participation in society. Yet, Brazil is still far from meeting the objective set out by the statute, and many young people, especially in poor areas, struggle to access even basic services, resources, and opportunities.

In the absence of adequate state-sponsored services and programs, NGOs have attempted to provide support to young people living in some of the most vulnerable contexts. Increasingly the areas of leisure and recreation have come to be recognized as an important focus for child and adolescent well-being and development. I discuss some of the ways play has been incorporated into the development agenda as a tool to instigate social change both in Brazil and around the world. I then move on to consider how my research can contribute to the literature.

2.1 Youth rights in Brazil

Throughout the military dictatorship (1964-1985), national policies on children and youth were laid out under the legal codes known as the *Serviço de Assistência a*

Menores (Assistance Service to Minors) and the *Código de Menores* (Minor's Code).

The laws were directed primarily at poor youth, such as the street children, who were

described in the legislation as "vagrants" and "delinquents" and as living in "irregular

circumstances" without "proper moral supervision" (Rizinni et al.,, 1999, 7). These laws

implied that these young people were some of the very threats to public order and safety

that the constitution sought to protect its citizens from (Rizinni et al., 1999, 7). The legal

codes enabled an interventionist and correctional approach towards poor youth and

afforded them few rights themselves.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the street child became the principal image of youth

poverty in Brazil (Rizinni, Barker & Cassaniga, 1999). These young people were far

from a homogenous group, yet they often came from impoverished backgrounds which

forced them to seek an alternative means of survival on the street, often through

informal economic activities such as street vending and shoe-shining, and the illicit

dealings of prostitution and drug sales. They were regarded by the public as a scandal, a

shame, and a nuisance (Hecht, 1998; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). Considerable

attention, both national and international, was focused on documenting the abuse,

hardships, and constraints facing these young urban dwellers. Of particular concern was

the violence perpetrated by gangs known as *grupos de extermínio*, or death squads.

These groups were made up primarily of off-duty civil police and military police

officers who sought to "cleanse the streets" by murdering street children, often doing so

with complete legal impunity (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998, 393). According to one

of the figures cited by the head of the Street Child Movement, Rodrigues dos Santos,

between 1984 and 1989 as many as 1,397 street children were killed throughout Brazil

(Scheper-Hughes, 1993, 240). Another figure cites that between January 1987 and July 1988, as many as 306 children were killed by death squads in some of the poorest suburbs of Rio de Janeiro alone (Amnesty International, 1992). The tragedy brought both national and international attention to the situation in Brazil and resulted in an emergent children's rights discourse.

The Street Child Movement was eventually instrumental in proposing policies directly to the executive branch in Brasilia and pressuring the National Congress for the approval of a new statute on youth. The drafting of the EAC was the result, in part, of the same impetus that led to the adoption of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC was a global human rights treaty which stipulated that all children should be considered full citizens and the subjects of rights; it laid out the specific civil, political, economic, social, educational, health and cultural needs of children worldwide. It was considered a landmark achievement in global children's welfare, eventually becoming the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history with the largest ever amount of signatory countries, including Brazil. Having recently emerged from authoritarian rule, Brazilian lawmakers sought to enshrine these rights within their own new national constitution, framing children and youth as central to the building of their newly democratic society (Dell'Aglio & Koller, 2017; Rizinni et al., 1999). The Statute of the Child and Adolescent was passed into law by the National Congress of Brazil on July 13, 1990. The document acknowledges that young people, especially children, are in a distinct stage of their development and require certain rights that would enable their healthy and full participation in society, and their eventual development into adulthood (Dell'Aglio & Koller, 2017).

2.2 The right to play

The addition of play to the EAC closely mirrors the CRC directive. Play, as a right, has been enshrined in both international rights legislation and national policy in Brazil, through agreements such as the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Youth Statute. In both documents play is upheld as a universal right that is crucial to the holistic development of a child and is presented alongside other related rights such as access to leisure and culture (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, art.31; Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente, 1990, art. 16).

Regina and Pinto (2006) reminds us that the enactment of rights has two distinct steps: the first is summarized in Hannah Arendt's maxim of "the right to have rights"; the second, and most important, refers to the de facto exercise of these rights (Regina & Pinto, 2006, 654). In spite of the important advances in individual rights, government enforcement of the Child and Adolescent Statute remains weak and there has been little fiscal or political will for its full application; "laws have changed, but practice is very slow to do so" (Klees et al., 2000, 93).

Play has often been described as the "forgotten right" and there are several possible reasons for this (Hughes, 1990). The social history of play has evolved alongside the complex and contested history of childhood. The adult/child dichotomy, and the distinction and values made therein, are mirrored in the well-known dualism of work/play. Work and play are often understood as opposites. The 18th century philosopher, Adam Smith, described play as "menial" and non-productive. Smith is considered the father of modern capitalism and it easy to see how play might be seen as

a worthless diversion from labour within the capitalist framework (Buchanan, 2008b, 26). Work becomes the serious and fruitful realm of adulthood, while play is the fun and frivolous pastime of children.

Rather than seeing play as an important right on its own, it has often been addressed in relation to the right to education. Lester and Russell (2010) suggest the need to play is inadvertently taken care of in the classroom or in the schoolyard. The field of play related research has been vast and diverse, yet the majority has focused on the role of play in cognitive development, specifically its contribution to the development of fine and gross motor skills in young children (Parten 1933; Piaget 1962; Vygotsky 1978). These ideas mean play is not valued as an activity in-and-of itself, but rather, as a means to an end, towards a defined curriculum or skill set.

2.3 Play for development?

NGOs often pursue a progressive policy agenda which address under or un-represented issues. They provide support to individuals or groups whose needs are not adequately met by existing public policies, effectively stepping in where governments are unwilling to act, have withdrawn, or have failed (Lang, 2013, 2). NGOs develop what have often been described as empowerment projects that work to promote resilience in children and youth by providing resources and opportunities available outside the public school and public health systems (Rizzini, 2014, 14).

Within contexts of vulnerability, violence, and poverty, scholars of development have, understandably, opted to pursue problems seen as serious and consequential, qualities which few would ascribe to play. Compared to some of the most pressing current social

issues, play seems like a modest, even trivial, topic. However, increasingly, aid agencies, NGOs, and development practitioners have turned their gaze towards adopting play into their initiatives.

In development, as with the social sciences as a whole, play has largely been studied in instrumentalist terms (MacLean & Russell, 2013). Scholars and practitioners have focused on play not as a subject in-and-of itself, but rather as a way of luring individuals into participating in development initiatives and as an educational tool. They have taken manifestations of play, such as music, sport, and theatre, among others, and turned them into specialized fields. Two of the most prevalent are Sport for Development (SfD) and Theatre for Development (TfD).

The popularity of sports and theatre among young people means that SfD and TfD programs are considered uniquely suited to address issues related to youth populations. These projects address a wide variety of topics, such as HIV/AIDS (Jeanes, 2011) (Maleka, 2017), childhood obesity (Cohen & Ballouli, 2018), Ebola (Frishkopf, 2015), and sustainability (Heras & Tàbara, 2014), peacebuilding (Estrada-Fuentes, 2018; Thomas, 2019), and reproductive health (Nwadigwe, 2012) among many others. Each of these projects looks at the way young people can become instruments for social change. Take, for example, Hayhurst et al.'s (2014) description of an SfD program in Uganda. Her article describes how martial arts were used to promote gender equality and feminist values in order to address the plight of young girls aged 10-18. Martial arts techniques were seen an effective way of teaching girls about sexual relations, domestic violence, and conflict management. In another article by Hayhurst (2012), she describes a second

program in Uganda using martial arts. This time they were used as a way of preparing girls with a skill set seen as necessary to survive in a competitive economic climate. The initiative sought to teach girls entrepreneurial skills by training them to become martial arts instructors in combination with more traditional activities such as cultivating nuts. In both case studies, play is used as an educational tool and adapted to fit different extrinsically imposed Western goals. Critics argue that this kind of mentality is symptomatic of a neoliberal agenda that focuses on structural change and social mobility and neglects the complexity and distinctiveness that make up environments and the individuals within them.

De Castro (2020) connects macropolitical processes of globalization, with its inherent myths of progress and modernity, to the elevation of the western model of childhood as a hegemonic ideal. These ideas have extended into the social imagery of childhood, in which the "the ideal child, the model student and the future citizen" is described implicitly in terms of "his whiteness, his masculinity, his status as middle-class, as well as his 'inherent' childishness… and his immanent adulthood" (Hopkind & Sriprakash, 2016, 3). Globalization puts forth the Western model of childhood as a hegemonic ideal or universal norm. This means that any child who does not meet this standard is conceived of as lacking or deficient, and as falling short in important ways.

TfD and SfD each have their own unique histories and pursuits and are much too diverse to be captured under a single critique. Yet it is important to bring attention to a tendency within these programs to use play as a means of achieving large-scale, and exogenously produced, development goals. I argue that these programs view young people as not

only the future of society, but also as blank slates, which can be molded to fit a pre-determined outcome. According to Lester et al. (2019) These "normative measurements for children's wellbeing" are turned into "standardized accounts" (89-90) which then become "colonising yardsticks to make normalising judgements about childhoods across the globe" (107). I argue that this approach neglects the complexity and distinctiveness that make up environments and the individuals within them.

It is interesting to reflect on the way SfD and TfD scholarship and practice conceptualize the agency of children and youth within the sphere of development. In more traditional development approaches, children and youth are generally seen as the innocent targets and passive recipients of various programs and policies and as lacking the power to actively change their environment (Lester & Russel, 2010; Lester et al., 2019). The development practices listed above conceptualize children and youth's agency differently by looking at the way young people can become instruments to achieve a specific agenda. Critics of these fields have brought attention to how hidden behind these alluring ideas of play, are programs where the participants become sites where concepts, ideas, and values are negotiated, contested, and realized (Ahmed & Hughes, 2015; Coakley, 2011; Darnell, 2012; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2012; Prentiki, 2007; Spaaij et al., 2016). The onus is placed on the participants to change their behaviours and attitudes in order to successfully meet the goals set out by the programs. Children and youth play no role in oppressive conditions they may be born into, yet a focus on agency seems to partially place the onus and burden on children and youth to instigate broader structural social change. Many modern development issues arose as a consequence of colonialism

and neocolonialism. This raises the question should the ball for meaningful structural change fall in the court of the youngest members of society?

2.4 Conclusion

It is in this landscape that I carve out a place for my own research. Reading about these kinds of case studies made me wonder if their narrowly focused and externally defined objectives allow for children and youth's own goals and aspirations to be heard? Or are these initiatives simply new avenues to realize paternalistic attitudes, or even neoliberal exploitation, towards young people living in development contexts? I do not mean to imply that issues related to things like health, gender, and sustainability are not important. Clearly, they are, and it is not the focus of this thesis to comment on the success and failures of these initiatives. Rather, I want to think about the meaningful ways in which children and youth can participate in development in order to explore their own unique potentials and aspirations.

My research revolves around the belief that children and youth can have profound insights into their current situations and futures. One of the things I found interesting about Atitude Cooperação is that, unlike the programs listed above, they lacked a single specific overarching goal. They were not trying to instill young girls with feminist values or educate boys on sexual health. Rather, they provided the same opportunities for creativity and exploration that are often afforded to youth living in more affluent environments. Although the organization can be described as a development-oriented NGO, their mandate is predicated simply on transforming the lives of hundreds of children and their families through a diverse array of classes (Atitude Cooperação, n.d). Drawing on my fieldwork from Atitude Cooperação, I hope to show how play, in-and-of

itself, can provide empowering experiences which young people use in order to forge a

unique path.

CHAPTER 3   Theoretical Framework

I met Isabela, a young girl aged 15 or 16, near the end of my fieldwork, when a researcher from Canada named David came to conduct the initial stages of what was to be a longitudinal project with youth in Brazil. David staged a workshop with the theatre class, where Isabela was a participant, and I was invited to sit on the sidelines and observe his research process. The entire group sat in a circle as David asked them questions about their lives and experiences as young Brazilians living in the West Zone of Natal.

A turning point in my research was when David asked the participants if there was anything we should know about their lives in Natal before we returned home to Canada. Isabela raised her hand and replied: "I want you to know that we are warriors!" The other participants nodded their heads in agreement as Isabela went on to tell us about how she and her family used to live in one of the nearby favelas. Life, she told us, was difficult. Simple things, like having enough money to buy food and pay rent were a daily struggle, but her mother always did the best she could to give her and her siblings a good life. Isabela's family had experienced extreme hardship and poverty, but they were survivors and fighters, and she wanted us to know it. This warrior spirit, she told us, existed in herself and in all her fellow classmates at Atitude Cooperação.

While I never had the chance to interview Isabela her words stayed with me long after I left Brazil and are still with me now as I grapple with how to best capture and portray the stories that my research participants relayed to me over the course of my fieldwork. They were all, in their own unique ways, warriors.

For my theoretical framework I wanted ideas that could capture this spirit. I have chosen to use Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of micropolitics and becoming because they touch on the relation between movement and structure. In A Thousand Plateaus (1987) Deleuze and Guattari write that: "everything is political, but every politics is simultaneously a macropolitics and a micropolitics" (213). Throughout their work they paint a portrait of life as a political category; as an interplay between the macropolitical structures that serve to organize and describe our worlds and the micropolitical struggles to carve out a space for the plurality of being (May, 1991; 2010). Rather than see these concepts as opposing binaries, in terms of size or scale, they should be understood in tandem via their interactions and relation to one another, and as inextricably linked facets of reality.

Deleuze and Guattari put forth a description of reality that is dynamic and unstable, and as defined by the forces of desire that push and pull and subtly shift our ways of connecting to the world. They bring our attention to the ways in which people navigate environments of oppression and engage in small interventions to both explore and change their conditions. In this chapter, I introduce these concepts in detail and discuss how they relate to my research environment, the broader theme of play, and to the methodological approach I took in this project.

3.1 Vegetal image of thought

The foundation of Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative project lies in Deleuze's early solo work, *Difference and Repetition* (1993). Deleuze argued that philosophy had spent too much time trying to conceptualize life in terms of fixed universalisms and enduring

truths and had therefore failed to articulate in theoretical terms how difference, or change, occurs. He calls this mode of thinking a dogmatic image of thought.

The dogmatic image of thought is best illustrated by one of the topographic images that Deleuze and Guattari use throughout their work: the tree. They argue that traditional Western thought has been arboreal in its structure: fixed in its position and growing in a predictable vertical fashion. The purpose of thinking arboreally is to describe the seemingly stable ways in which the world functions, in terms of sameness, so that we can judge, compare, and define other aspects of life (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Examples of this arborescent way of thinking include Aristotle's genus, Plato's essences, and Kant's categories of the understanding (Kellner & Best, 1991, 99). This mode of thinking forecloses the possibility of change and movement in favour of a fixed and prescribed narrative (Colebrook, 2002; May, 2005).

For Deleuze, movement, not structure, is the primary state of all life. Massumi (2002) states that "positionality is an emergent quality of movement" and that therefore, "the problem is to explain the wonder that there can be stasis given the primacy of process" (8). Deleuze's own work, and his later collaborations with Guattari, put forth an ontology that emphasized the nature of life as permanently in flux; as material, processual, and defined by ongoing connectivity. Colebrook (2002) writes: "at the heart of all Deleuze's thought is his insistence that our relation to the world is dynamic, not just because our ideas about the world change, nor because the world is a thing that goes through change. Life itself is constant change and creation" (51). For Deleuze, "living

consists in difference and its actualization… it unfolds … it is alive" (May, 2005, 24).
These ideas are summed up in Deleuze and Guattari's vegetal image of thought.

To illustrate the vegetal image of thought, the image of arborescence is contrasted by
another analogy rooted in topography: the rhizome. A rhizome is a type of root that
grows underground. It lacks structure or form, having no clear pattern of growth, instead
rupturing off into new shoots or connecting to other nodes and nodules as it makes its
way through the soil and stretches into new territories. The rhizome is, for Deleuze and
Guattari, the ultimate rendering of a multiplicity; it is non-hierarchical and never ceases
to make new connections, always existing "in the middle, between things, interbeing,
intermezzo" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 25). Rhizomes are not posited as the antithesis
of arborescence but rather as the struggle beneath the surface to find new ways through
or around structural constraints.

3.2 Cramped space

The dogmatic image of thought has influenced how we organize and understand our
world. Patton (2000) associates the notion of arborescence with "the principles of
organisation found in modern bureaucracies, factories, armies and school, in other
words, in all the central social mechanisms of power" (43). They have also stretched into
the broad identity categories that have shaped our ways of organizing the world,
including gender, race, religion, sexuality, capitalism, democracy, patriarchy, and so
forth (Buchanan, 2008a; Merriman, 2019; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As Thoburn
(2016) describes, within these modes of being, certain individuals (for example white
males) have advantageous standing in that their identities are bolstered and legitimized
by the social structures themselves, enabling them to make their way through the world
in a relatively unhindered fashion. In contrast, individuals who are "positioned

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unfavourably in relation to privileged poles of class, gender, race, and so on" are

excluded from the legitimate realm of social and political being (Thoburn, 2016, 369).

The dogmatic image of thought becomes a form of macropolitics, the large overarching

structures which impose themselves on lived experience. While these structures help us

understand and organize our worlds, they can also be fascistic, in that they do not

account for difference, change, and the essentially pluralistic nature of being (Massumi,

1992).

We can think of colonialism and its aftermath as an example of macropolitical thinking.

Wolfe (2006) reminds us that colonialism was not simply an event, bounded in time and

left in the past, but a structure that has been firmly rooted in society. Brazil spent more

than 300 years as a Portuguese colony. During this time, colonial regimes coerced the

population into unequal relationships and Western European ideas supplanted other

ways of being. To this day, Brazil still struggles with these legacies which have now

become entrenched in the physical and mental landscape through systemic issues related

to race, class, gender, economic and social exclusion, etc. The inequalities of

colonialism were never meaningfully addressed nor resolved and still linger in the

collective consciousness.

Macropolitics remind us that neglecting the structural roots of poverty and inequality

can inadvertently place stigma and blame on the most vulnerable populations by leading

us to believe that poverty is the result of poor choices, lack of willpower, and so forth.

These beliefs naturalize poverty by "erasing their social and political origins so that they

are taken for granted and no one is held accountable except the poor themselves"

(Scheper-Hughes, 2004, 13). In my research, macropolitics serve as an implicit foundation which highlights the underlying forces that impinge on the lives and bodies of those living in impoverished environments. These issues are important to acknowledge, but as I do not have the space to meaningfully address the complex macropolitical origins of poverty and inequality in my research environment, they are touched on only lightly in my data section. Instead, I have chosen to focus on how this oppression is manifested and experienced in day-to-day life in Deleuze and Guattari's related concept of cramped space.

The insecurities and inequalities spurred by macropolitics are extensive, trickling down into the lived experiences of everyday life and leading to the creation of what Deleuze and Guattari call cramped space. Macropolitics are oppressive because they shape our capacity for movement, not just in the physical sense, but also in terms of expectations and habits they prescribe to spaces and modes of being. They essentially "affect not only how the body is understood but its potentiality; its future capacity to affect and be affected" (Hickey-Moody and Malins, 2007, 5).

As the name suggests, in cramped space a person's movement and expression have been impeded or blocked, leading to a feeling of immobility or being trapped. Walters and Lüthi (2016) describe this idea clearly: "We find ourselves in cramped space when the way ahead is traversed in all directions by blockages, boundaries and limits, be they social or material" (362). While oppression may be structural, or macropolitical, in origin, its effects "generate concrete dimensions for those who are made subject to (or objects of) it" (Albequerque, 2014, 2) and are "encountered and made sensible in

everyday life" (Katz, 2017, 598). For Fraser (1998) "far from occupying some wispy, ethereal realm, they are material in their existence and effects" (144). Being cramped is not simply a physical or spatial condition, but one that infiltrates and transverses all aspects of being, making a social experience in the round (Thoburn, 2016, 370).

During my fieldwork, the idea of cramped space was exemplified most starkly during a visit to a small community known as Coque in the northeastern city of Recife. The community is considered a *favela*, a term used to designate the informal shanty towns that are found across all major cities in Brazil. Favelas are defined by Luiz Souza (2003) as a form of compulsory segregation in that the isolation the residents experience goes against the will of the people living within that community. Places like Coque were often described to me as the kinds of places you hear about on the radio or on the news but never dare to enter. As an example, on one occasion during my research, an Uber driver refused to enter Coque and made us run to the outskirts of the community where he was waiting to pick us up. Favelas have a reputation of being dangerous; as being run by gangs, as having high homicide rates and shootings, and as being hot beds for drug trades.

On Recife's human development scale, which measures standard of living in municipalities across the city, Coque is ranked last. The residents live without access to basic necessities such as garbage disposal, clean water, and healthcare. Within these constraints, the well-being of the community hinges on a kind of collective survival, where residents take care of one another, breaking open alternative paths to make sure that their needs are met often through their own ingenuity and modest means.

The lives of Coque's residents were in a very literal sense cramped. The community is located near Boa Viagem, one of Recife's most modern neighbourhoods, which boasts tourist hot spots, luxury high rises, and access to the white sand beaches that stretch along the city's coastline. Yet, despite living in such close proximity to wealth, it is as if an imaginary line has been drawn between Coque and the surrounding neighbourhoods. The recent decades of urban expansion in the Recife area mean that much of the once undesirable land is now considered prime real estate for new commercial projects. Coque's residents live in constant fear of being evicted and pushed out by land developers. The reality of this prospect became clear on our way back to Natal, when we stopped at the nearby RioMar mall for lunch. The mall was filled with high-end foreign boutiques such as Dolce & Gabbana, Prada, Coach, and Hugo Boss. After lunch, we stepped onto the terrace to get a better view of the city. In the near distance, just across the river, I could see Coque, its modest homes barely peeking through the mangroves. The encroachment was plain to see, and I wondered how long the residents would be able to resist the expanding city that seemed to close in and tower over them. The experience painted a stark distinction between two very different Brazilian realities. These kinds of cramped spaces exist all over Brazil.

In each of the interviews I conducted, participants would comment on the various factors or social issues in the West Zone that lead to the creation of cramped space and place young people at greater vulnerability. The barriers that my participants mentioned include the prevalence of violence, inequality in the education system, lack of economic opportunity, and varying levels of social support. While there are many more issues that

I could have focused on, these are the topics that were raised by my research participants in their interviews as important in their everyday lives. These issues should be seen as intersecting and as contributing to the creation of complex cramped environments.

3.3 Micropolitics

Young people's lives are substantially shaped by oppressive social, political, and economic forces which are largely out of their control (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). Structural constraints permeate their lives from birth and continue into adulthood, restricting the forms and possibilities of young people's subjectivity and agency, and impacting their lives and livelihoods, social relations, and mental well-being in uneven ways. Cramped spaces affect how they move through life, the opportunities that are afforded to them, and how they feel about themselves, their futures, and their place in the community.

How do young people navigate these cramped spaces and what kind of tools do they have to contend with them? Throughout their work, Deleuze and Guattari present us with ideas that help us "describe [the] transformative, creative forces, and movements" of people embedded in their material worlds (Patton, 2000, 9). The condition of being cramped compels individuals to seek innovative ways of changing their conditions by "tracing a path between impossibilities" (Deleuze, 1995, 133). Biehl and Locke (2010) describe these acts as "those individual and collective struggles to come to terms with events and intolerable conditions and to shake loose, to whatever degree possible, from determinants and definitions" (317). These acts are what Deleuze and Guattari call micropolitics.

Micropolitics is defined by Deleuze and Guattari as the politics of desire (Goodchild,

1996). Deleuze and Guattari took Nietzsche's concept of the will to power as an

inspiration for their underlying ontology which frames how we understand existence,

human beings, and the world itself (Roberts, 2007, 116). The will to power is understood

as the instinct of all living things to pursue "growth and expansion" in order "to become

something more" (Nietzsche, 1968, 367). In a similar vein, desire is not simply a

response to a perceived lack in the body or mind (á la Freud), but a force which flows

through life as the productive and creative capacity to explore the abilities of the body

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Rose (1999) describes micropolitics as follows:

> They are cautious, modest, pragmatic, experimental, stuttering, tentative. They
> are concerned with the here and now, not with some fantasized future, with
> small concerns, petty details, the everyday and not the transcendental. They
> frequently arise in 'cramped spaces' – within a set of relations that are
> intolerable, where movement is impossible, where change is blocked and voice
> is strangulated (279-280).

Rose's description gives micropolitics a visceral dimension. If the individual

experiences cramped spaces as barriers or walls that close in on them, inhibiting their

movement, expression, and potentiality, then micropolitics becomes the means, or

desires, by which they contend with the various forms of oppression that surround them.

Throughout their work, Deleuze and Guattari take inspiration from the 18th century

philosopher Benedict Spinoza and his statement that nobody knows what the body can

do (Deleuze, 1990; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). According to Spinoza our relations to the

world are perpetually in flux and we are constantly moving toward that which would

open up new capacities in the body (Deleuze, 1990). Throughout their work, life is

posited as a struggle to become (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Becoming is essentially an

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act of de-territorializing ourselves, by exploring and pushing the limits of our affective capacities within the specific confines of our environments.

Deleuze and Guattari's writings on Spinoza help us understand how play could be considered a form of micropolitics. Deleuze and Guattari describe (1988) children as true "Spinozists." Children are "not pre-occupied with organisation or function but perceive and sense materials whose elements and possibilities are continually open to the future" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 282). As Hickey-Moody (2013) states, "the body of the child presents us with a model of 'power from below', puissance, a power, might or force that is expressive and generative rather than controlling" (279). Children represent a particular approach to life; one which is filled with curiosity and an openness that leads us to push boundaries and explore to the fullest extent what the body can do, an approach embodied by the act of play: "In the case of the child, gestural, mimetic, ludic and other semiotic systems regain their freedom and extricate themselves from the 'tracing,' that is, from the dominant competence of the teacher's language— a microscopic event upsets the balance of power" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, 15). It is this subtle subversive quality that makes play a micropolitical act.

Play, as an act underpinned by a desire to explore what the body can do, think and become, represents a small-scale intervention or micropolitical act. Each act of play is not meant to function as a quick fix to oppression but as a small reworking of cramped space, through things like the creation of a safe space and humor and fellowship. These experiences, though small, are profound.

These individual becomings may be difficult to measure, but that does not mean that they are unimportant or insignificant, or that they somehow evade the evaluative mechanisms needed in order to influence evidence-driven policy. Determining the effects of these micropolitical acts requires meaningful engagement with individual research participants, and a qualitative approach to research that takes their voices and stories seriously. This is what Deleuze and Guattari call cartography.

3.4 Cartography

In *Difference and Repetition* (1993), Deleuze states that "Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter" (176). Like the other students in my graduate cohort, I left to conduct my fieldwork with a finished research proposal in hand that outlined the specific theoretical and methodological framework I was to use throughout my research. I am sure I am not the only one to say that conducting fieldwork, especially for the first time, is a chaotic and overwhelming experience. I felt myself struggling to take in every minute of my time in Natal, wondering what would be relevant, what I should leave out, and what would be the turning points that would change and ultimately shape my research project.

My experience in the workshop was an encounter, an event, that forced me think about my research in a different way. Isabela's words were strong, eloquent and to the point, almost like a warrior call in itself. When I left Brazil and went home to Canada, her words lingered in the back of my mind. I spent about a year waiting for my interviews to be translated from Brazilian Portuguese into English, and while I had vague remembrances and notes of what was said, I was missing vital pieces of my research. When the translations started to trickle in, I discovered that my research participants

were telling me that they were also warriors, struggling to carve out unique paths in amongst the barriers and walls that face them in almost all areas of their life.

Cartography, like the rhizome, is an open-ended project (Biehl & Locke, 2010). It does not seek to conform experience into a single narrative or line of thinking, a singular tracing, but instead opens us up to vast potentiality: "the map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions, it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modifications (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, 13). Any research project using a Deleuzoguattarian lens should take into account how individual becomings are brought into existence, documenting their transformative stories, no matter how small the scale (Lester et al., 2019, 69).

Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of cramped space and micropolitics allow me to capture the dynamic becomings of these young people as they move through the world. I address how participants' experiences with play at the organization had relevance in their everyday lives and led to transformative becomings. Charting becomings requires a commitment to individual stories without losing sight of the larger social milieu, or cramped space, in which those experiences are embedded.

3.5 Conclusion

Micropolitics is the politics of the everyday. It deals with the micro-movements or becomings that arise within cramped space. Becoming should not be understood as change directed towards a particular pre-determined endpoint, or a teleological unfolding toward some ultimate destiny, but as the transformative potential of lived experience. That is, becoming should always be understood as "a creative process of

making, remaking and unmaking oneself in relation to others" (Cristancho & Fenwick, 2015, 128). Situating Deleuze and Guattari's theories of becoming within the field of cramped space attunes us to the tensions that arise within lived experience. Far from abstract reasoning or theorizing, these concepts become very real and tangible ways in which to think about how people progress through and engage with the world. They allow us to see how these young people remake their worlds with the very limited tools and resources available to them in the cramped conditions in which they live out their everyday lives. In terms of locating the micropolitical, Massumi (2015) states that "there is no better place to start than the local context in which you live and work every day" (70). Where better to look than at the act of play?

CHAPTER 4   Data Analysis Part 1

4.1 Conceptual Tool: The Little Refrain

While studying the various forms of play at Atitude Cooperação, I found Deleuze and

Guattari's description of the refrain (sometimes called the "little refrain" or ritornello)

helpful for its ability to illuminate some of the potential functions of playful activities

and playful spaces. A refrain refers to the rhythmic repetition in a piece of music; a kind

of acoustic anchor which holds together a song by continually returning to a reoccurring

passage or chorus: "tra-la-la-la, tra-la-la-la" (Boutang et al., 1996). Deleuze takes these

features of the refrain to heart but supplements them with the additional material

characteristics typical of his theory of immanence. The refrain, for Deleuze, is

essentially a way of constructing a territory, though this particular type of territory

serves a distinct function.

The little refrain represents the subtle reworking of space. Unlike the macro-territories

that seek to over-code, subordinate, or oppress, a refrain is assembled from below

(Holland et al., 2009, 12). Take, for example, Deleuze's description of a little boy

walking alone at night:

> A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his
> breath. He walks and halts [in step with] his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or
> orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is a like a rough
> sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of chaos
> (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 311).

From the example above, we can see that the refrain creates a sense of order in an

otherwise chaotic and cramped environment. The boy is afraid of the dark and the

uncertainty that it represents and is unable to move forward. The structure and repetition

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of his song provides him with comfort, the beginnings of a so-called territory, which enables him to work past his fear and forge forward through the darkness.

While the refrain in this example harks back to its original meaning as a tune or melody, Deleuze and Guattari's concept can extend beyond its musical roots to include the coming together of a variety of material or immaterial components or heterogeneous elements. They state that: "in general, a refrain refers to any aggregate of matters of expression that draws a territory and develops into territorial motifs and landscapes" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 323). Deleuze and Guattari describe this as the creation of a 'home', referring to the idea that a home is more than simply a structure, but rather the binding together of a territory through more organized rhythms and habits of daily life which ground us and give us stability. Like the refrain itself, these habits are expressive and must be reinforced again and again so that their meaning is retained. The little refrain is a micro, or molecular intervention, so much so that is easy to disregard or miss. These rhymes make up the backdrop of lives, the micro-territories that shape our surroundings. In this section, I want to look at how spaces of play can produce little refrains. These are micro-acts, or micromovements, which change the way we structure and relate to the world around us.

For my research participants, play is instrumental in creating a safe space reminiscent of the little boy's song. They describe the organization as a mother's heart, a home-like space where they feel safe and welcomed, and where they return day after day and year after year. Play as a safe space is an important idea in and of itself, but in spaces marked by violence, this idea takes on a whole new level of profundity and necessity.

Play becomes a molecular intervention into everyday life. To understand how this happens, we first need to understand how violence, in its various forms, contributes to the creation of a cramped space and chaos in the West Zone of Natal. Exploring play within this framework allows me to chart how the concept of the little refrain works within the larger social milieu of violence.

4.2 Cramped Space: Violence

Violence was a theme that was brought up continually in my interviews as one of the primary contributors to the creation of cramped space in the West Zone. As we shall see in the later interviews, participants and instructors would often comment on how issues like homicide, gang warfare, and other violent crimes, impacted their lives and the lives of their families.

Ivanildo has been the judo instructor at Atitude Cooperação for the past 4 years. He has taught professional classes in private schools and at various other social projects around Natal, but Atitude Cooperação, he tells me, holds a special place in his heart. Ivanildo grew up in the Felipe Camarão and knows from personal experience the hardships and struggles that children and youth in this area can face. He offers a stark description of the surrounding neighborhoods:

> **Ivanildo:** In our community we are surrounded by people that want to do bad things, drugs, drug dealers influencing kids, so we know that they see things that other kids don't see. Our community lives inside evil, evil surrounds us, everywhere we look there are bad things and they [the students] get very vulnerable to it… It's really shocking to see dead people, and our kids see dead people and it's really common to know that someone got shot, or stabbed, so they are used to bad things.

Ivanildo's comments made me think of a recent IPEA report that likened the current situation in Brazil to a state of war (Cerqueira et al., 2017). The country has one of the

highest rates of homicide in the world. In 2017, just a year before I did my fieldwork, a staggering 63,880 people were murdered across the country, with an average of 175 deaths per day. Of these 63,880 deaths, 11,700 of the victims fell under the age of 19 (Fundação Abrinq, 2019, 72). The victims are steadily becoming younger and younger (Cerqueira et al., 2017). While these statistics are troubling in themselves, they only hint at the full scale of violence as a large number of deaths and non-lethal assaults often go un- or under-reported in the data (Murray et al., 2013).

Gang related activity is considered the driving force behind the proliferation of violence. In the 1970s through the 1990s, two major gangs emerged out of Brazil's overcrowded prison system: *Comando Vermelho* and the *Primeiro Comando da Capital*. Over the last few decades, these rival gangs have fought to increase their influence and reach all over the country. They are highly sophisticated and organized, garnering funding through their control over the extremely lucrative cocaine, crack, marijuana, and weapons market. These gangs have managed to gain a foothold in peripheral communities all over the country, including cities like Natal. In the vacuum created by state neglect, they act as a kind of de facto government in their communities by imposing parallel control (Murray et al., 2013; Kassab & Rosen, 2018).

One of the starkest descriptions of violence was presented to me by Mariana, one of the teachers in the music department at Atitude Cooperação. In the previous year, Mariana, worked with a social project in a favela in the West Zone known as *Comunidade do Japão*. She describes the neighborhood as follows:

> **Mariana:** Like Rio de Janeiro, you've seen those favelas in Rio, and you don't think that exists here in Natal. Where you see stories… we lost an audio

recording of a child there, they started to talk, and we recorded it and later we would cry listening to it. Because we would say "this is here in Natal?" Kids seeing drug dealers playing with a human head as if it were a ball. It's very heavy, seeing relatives being taken with a gun, a rifle pointed to their head and never come back home, relatives bringing money home from drug trafficking.

When we think of violence in Brazil, many of us immediately think of cities like Rio de Janeiro. Violence in the southeastern regions of the country has been well documented over the years, with famous scholars such as Janice Perlman, spending well over 40 years in Rio de Janeiro's favelas documenting the evolution of violence in the city and its effect on the lives of the city's poorest populations (Perlman, 1976; 2010). More recently, movies like City of God (Lund & Meirelles, 2002; Soarez, 2007) have been influential in depicting Brazilian poverty on the screen and bringing the grim realities of Rio's favelas to a global audience. While the southeast is by no means cured of the violence epidemic, the locus of violence has shifted north in recent years (Nsoesie et al., 2020).

Residents of the northeast region are now exposed to some of the highest rates of violence in the country. In 2017, there were more than 27,138 homicides in the northeast region alone (Fundação Abrinq, 2019, 73). The rise of violence is also reflected in the homicide rates in the city of Natal. As Waiselfisz (2016) documents, in 2004 the city had the 26th highest rate of homicide and firearm related death out of all of the state capitals, but by 2014, the city jumped to fifth place (32). As levels of violence rise throughout the country, cities have implemented tough-on-crime policies and these policies are often carried out in poor peripheral neighbourhoods where violence has been the most pronounced. The consequence has been a spike in prison populations leading to the fourth largest prison population in the world (Murray et al., 2013, 471). These

prisons have become the recruiting grounds for gangs and other criminal syndicates (Rosen & Kassab, 2018). In early 2017, just a few months prior to my arrival in Natal, a brutal riot broke out between two gangs in one of the prisons, resulting in the death of 17 inmates (Phillips, 2017). As violence becomes cyclical, these outbreaks are becoming more and more common, signaling that their reach has become widespread throughout the country.

Violence shapes and affects the lives and life trajectories of my research participants in crucial ways. In the peripheral zones of urban centres, young people "get to know hunger, injustice, violence, death, and extreme fear, and deal with it the best they can" (Clements & Fiorentino, 2004, 55). The examples of violence mentioned by my participants (seeing dead bodies in the streets, knowing someone who has been murdered, and witnessing your neighbours taken by gunpoint) are at their core traumatic experiences that are not far removed from war zones. These experiences can incite longstanding psychological stress. Some of the effects of exposure to such violent acts can include depression, suicide, anxiety, antisocial behaviors, and PTSD, all of which severely undermine well-being (Aisenberg & Mennen, 2000; Sieger et al., 2004). In many ways, exposure to violence cuts childhood short.

Violence is not always physical. Sometimes the very social structures that make up the foundation of our society can impinge upon a young person's well-being. Violence affects not only their physical existence, but also how young people understand themselves and their place in society, as well as how others view them (De Castro, 2006). Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) state that "violence can never be

understood solely in terms of its physicality - force, assault, or the infliction of pain - alone. Violence also includes assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim" and go on to emphasize that "the social and cultural dimensions of violence are what gives violence its power and meaning" (1). Structural violence brings our attention to the ways in which harm can exist even in the absence of direct violence.

The concept of structural violence has similarities to macropolitics and cramped space. Structural violence refers to the belief systems and patterns of action, the so-called "invisible social machinery", embedded in our social norms and institutional practices that normalize, even valorize, oppression (Scheper-Hughes, 2004, 13). The concept helps us understand how the social constructs around things like race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, contribute to inequality, poverty, and oppression by limiting or inhibiting individuals from meeting their basic needs (Farmer, 2003; 2004; Galtung, 1990; 2018; Scheper-Hughes, 2004; Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). Throughout my research, my participants would touch on the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality, are ossified in the collective imagination. Macropolitics and structural violence are complimentary concepts. They both illuminate how certain structures effectively reproduce traditional power configurations and systems of inequality by promoting static ways of understanding the world, thereby inhibiting change and movement for certain segments of society.

Violence produces a cramped but not static environment. Cramped spaces force us to be creative; to form movement and agency with the limited tools we have at our disposal (Walters & Lüthi, 2016, 365). This section focuses on the refrain. The little refrain

represents a tool for understanding how agency, even on the small scale, exists even within cramped conditions, and operates across a wide scale of experiences. I explore how the refrain emerges in a singular event (theatre class), through the reoccurring rhythms of the day to day at the organization ("like a mother's heart"), and as an individual tool to help cope with difficult experiences ("the fuck it button").

4.3 Refrain #1: Theatre Class

It is my first day in the theatre class and I am terrified. As a shy and introverted person, the idea of speaking and performing in front of a room full of people seems more like torment than play, but today Paulo has unseated me from my comfort zone and invited me to take part in the class. Paulo's teaching methodology is influenced by the renowned Brazilian playwright and activist, Augusto Boal (2000). Boal's work explores the intersections between art and social justice, focusing on the use of theatre as preparation for social action against all forms of oppression and injustice. Boal removed members of the audience from their role as spectators by inviting them to take part in the play and turning them into spect-actors. Each act portrays a situation where the actors are experiencing some form of oppression and the audience members are invited to step up and contribute to how they think the actor should overcome the situation. This engages the audience and helps them sympathize and think critically about oppression, making theatre a potentially powerful tool to transform society.

In today's theatre class, I am a spect-actor as well. This is my first-time taking part in one of the activities at Atitude Cooperação and the experience allows me to reflect, from an insider's point of view, what it feels like to be a part of the class. After some

introductory warm-up exercises, Paulo asks us to jump into today's main activity. He

describes to us the following scene:

FADE IN

A family at home. The son and daughter sit on a couch watching television while the mother tidies up around them. The front door swings open. The father is home from work.

THE FATHER
"Honey I'm home!"

The father throws his hat to the side as the mother walks up to him, giving him a kiss on the cheek.

THE MOTHER
"How was your day *meu amor*?"

The two children run up to the father and vie for his attention.

THE DAUGHTER
"*Pai*, *Pai*, look at my new dress! Do you like it? Did you bring me home any presents?"

THE SON
"*Pai*, I scored three goals in soccer today!"

As the commotion settles, we hear someone knocking on the door. The father opens the door, and three men appear. They all have guns.

THE MEN
"We have come to rob you!"

The family cat and dog appear to greet the intruders.

THE PETS
"*Hiss, hiss*"
"WOOF, WOOF, WOOF!"

The men point the guns at the family. The family screams.

THE FAMILY
"Oh no!"

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Everyone in the family, including the cat and dog, are dead. The thieves escape.

A few moments pass. The housekeeper appears, unlocks the front door and steps into the house. He looks at the bodies on the floor.

Paulo has cast me as the cat. We rehearse the scene again and again. First in its original and most realistic form; violent, serious, and sombre. I come to realize that acting is like a delicate assemblage, in which we play a kind of theatrical tag, each actor doing their part to maintain the suspension of the scene, through timing, body language, and tone. Even my small hiss has its place in keeping the play going. As soon as we get the hang of the script, Paulo asks us to infuse the scene with a different tone: I want you to move and speak every word in slow motion. It is harder than it sounds. The excitement of the scene seems to get the better of us and we steadily begin to speak faster and faster. From the sidelines, where he stands observing us, Paulo shouts: Slow it down more! We try our best. The script which usually takes us 5 minutes to complete, now takes 8 or 10 minutes. As soon as we begin to tire of slow motion, Paulo gives us new directions: Speak as fast as possible! We speak so fast we are tripping over our own words, and before we can blink, the scene has ended. We rehearse the scene again and again, and each time Paulo gives us a new challenge: Do it in a Nordestino accent! Like you are acting in a Mexican telenovela! Speak every word as if you were laughing! This last rendition is my favourite. The imaginary bullets fly past us and through us, and yet, we are behaving as if we are in the midst of a deep belly-laugh.

At the end of the class, we are exhausted. We sit in a circle and Paulo asks each of his students why theatre is important to them. One by one, students reflect on their experiences. One statement, by a young man named Francisco, stood out to me. He said

that "theatre is for everyone. It does not matter who you are, if you are poor or rich, young or old, black or white, theatre welcomes you." I felt it welcomed me too.

When Paulo first described the scene described above, my inner reaction was a mix of shock and discomfort. As a young researcher from Canada, with little familiarity with Brazil, I could not help but wonder if Paulo had come up with this scene to shock me and turn me into a spect-actor of a different sort. The play centres around a stereo-typical nuclear family: the young boy and girl, the stay-at-home mother, and the bread winning father. When the father comes home and tosses his hat aside it is reminiscent of Lucille Ball and Ricky Ricardo and the idyllic family scenes of 1950s American sitcoms. Yet, it is not long before the scene turns into a tragic and almost satirical portrait of Brazil.

The scene evoked the same heavy nature of the stories people had told me about their personal experiences with crime and violence in Brazil. Just a few days prior, one of the graduate students at the UFRN told me about how her ex-boyfriend's family home was broken into by a group of young men bearing guns who had come to steal their valuables. Thankfully, unlike the characters in the play, the family survived, but these thoughts were still fresh in my mind as Paulo relayed to us his script. The play initially struck me as anything but playful, but later, upon further reflection, it became a way of interrogating what play could be and do.

Acts of play temporarily disorder the structured spaces of our worlds and contain within them the same territorial motifs and rhythmic forces and relations as what Deleuze and

Guattari call the little refrain. The act of play is an intervention into everyday life, a little refrain, that creates ways of being in control during times of uncertainty, anxiety, and stress.

Charlie Chaplin once said that "in order to truly laugh you need to be able to take your pain and play with it." We often view play as moments of reprieve from real life necessities and stress. While this may be true in some instances, there can be moments when we reckon with the very nature of our lived realities and play with very real emotions and experiences. In these instances, humour can be used as a way of turning a serious topic, like crime and violence, into something fun or funny. Humour, like this, can make play a micropolitical act, in which the powerless suddenly become powerful and in which scary things becomes less scary (Lester & Russell, 2014). Lester et al. (2019) describe this as the "as-if" quality of play that lets us experience things without the serious consequence of having to live it in real life and which seeks to turn the world upside down and to think about the world, not as it is, but as it could be: "The 'what if…' of playing instigates an 'as if…' emotional repertoire" (99). Like the little refrain, these are transformative acts in which the player or players take control of their environment, temporarily disordering the structured spaces of their world in order to rearrange experiences to their liking (Henricks, 2006; 2014; 2015). Yet, humour does not have to be painful or subversive to be considered micropolitical.

Humor can also be healing. The word humor derives from the Ancient Greek and refers to the "humoral" medicine they believed contributed to the balance of health and emotional well-being. We have all heard the phrase "laughter is the best medicine" at

one point in our life. To address humour in relation to cramped space may come across to my readers as making light of heavy situations, but as my research participants tell me in the following sections, there is still some credence to the old adage.

4.4 Refrain #2: "Like a Mother's Heart"

The above example of a theatre class looks at play as a distinct event or occurrence bounded in time. The class eventually comes to an end, the assemblage falls apart, and the actors return to being normal teenage boy and girls. Yet, the ripple effects produced by play and through play have significance and power long after play comes to an end. In this section, I look at how the rhythms and relations of play radiate outwards, through the relations we produce.

Ivanildo's use of the word "evil" in the interview above may seem strong to those unfamiliar with the prevalence of violence and crime in peripheral areas of Brazil. This was, however, not the only time the notion of evil was brought up in my interviews. I met Kahyla, a young girl aged 8, hanging out at Atitude Cooperação's library. The space sometimes functioned as a classroom for Portuguese, chess, math, and music theory but these were relatively unpopular and under-attended classes meaning that the space was usually unoccupied and quiet. My research assistants and I would often conduct the interviews here because we knew we would be uninterrupted. However, I remember on one particular occasion, we had entered the library expecting it to be empty, only to have been startled by a small girl sitting on the floor in between the stacks, with a book open on her lap. It was not unusual to find Kahyla hiding in some small corner of the library. I had the chance to ask Kahyla about her experiences at the organization:

> **Margaux:** How do you feel in the judo or theater class?
> **Kahyla:** Hmmm… I feel like I'm protected.

> **Margaux:** Protected? Protected from what?
> **Kahyla:** From evil, a bunch of stuff.
> **Margaux:** Is there any other places where you also feel like that?
> **Kahyla:** No.

Kahyla did not mention what kind of evils she was referring to, nor did I press her on her thoughts. Her message is, however, clear: she feels protected and safe at the organization from whatever evils she may experience elsewhere in her life.

Kahyla's comments on feeling safe were repeated throughout my interviews, in one way or another, though not always in such stark ways. I asked the participants to tell me how they would describe the organization to a friend and how it differed from other places they spent a majority of their time such as home or school. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and what they thought the organization could offer other young people who were presumably coming from a similar background.

Kevin and Francisco, whom I will introduce in greater detail in later sections, are both 18 years old and have been participants at Atitude Cooperação for the past 5 or 6 years. Throughout their time at the NGO, they have seen the impact the organization has had on other participants lives as well as their own. I asked Kevin how he would describe the organization:

> **Margaux:** So, the people are different?
> **Kevin:** They treat you in a different way
> **Margaux:** How?
> **Kevin:** Like you can feel well being there. As the saying goes, the NGO is like a mother's heart, always room for one more, or plenty. It's a very cool place to be at in a moment when you really need it… because there are people who give advice, sit you down to have a conversation. Everybody is very welcoming. It's a very different place.

The comparison to a mother's heart is echoed by another participant, Francisco:

Margaux: Do you think the NGO is different from other places?
Francisco: I think the NGO is *the* place.
Margaux: The place? Why?
Francisco: A place where you can be somebody different. A place where you are not afraid of being different. A place of acceptance. In this big world that closes a lot of doors here they give you a warm welcome. It doesn't matter your sexuality, color, it doesn't matter anything. Here they welcome you. Like a mother's heart.
Margaux: There is always room for one more.
Francisco: There is always room for one more, even when there is no more space.

A mother's heart is perhaps the closest we can get to a natural home. The analogy to a mother's heart suggests that the organization is a source of security, protection, support, and well-being for a child, a safe and welcoming space where a participant can go for guidance, encouragement, and affirmation. These same ideas came up with another participant, Margarida:

Margaux: Do you think this place is different from other places?
Margarida: Ah, I think so, to me. I have a very big love for this space. I feel very good here.
Margaux: It's different how? What does it have that makes it different?
Margarida: I don't know, it gives me this calm feeling, gives me a feeling of safety, ok? It, actually sometimes when I arrive here, it makes me want to pray, you know. Because it's a place that transmits so much, in certain moments of the day, of course. Not all day long, nor every day. But there are days that it's so peaceful, so calm that it just makes you want to sit down and start thinking, right? As well as grabbing your instrument to study. So, it's a place that gives me a lot of tranquility and safety. That's why I think it's a different place. It's not in every place that I feel like this.

The creation of a safe space, a "refrain", is a form of micropolitics because it represents a subtle reworking of space that seeks to carve out new ways of being and relating to the world. At Atitude Cooperação, the play refrain is held together by the rhythms of play and the relationships that they help form, and by the small gestures of sociability, feelings which are offered so steadily that they become almost akin to a mother's love. It implies a place that is safe, nourishing, unconditionally loving, and that these qualities are offered reliably and as steadily as a heartbeat. This is done through the rhythms of

the organization: through positive and affirming relationships with both peers and instructors as well as through consistently engaging and playful activities.

4.5 Refrain #3: "The Fuck it Button"

In an interview with two boys named Raezaum and Arthur the notion of the little refrain was brought up in a more immediate and tangible sense, similar to way the little boy uses his song in the example I described at the beginning of the section, as an individual tool. Raezaum is 17 and Arthur is 12. I met both boys sitting in the courtyard having lunch together. They live in the same building complex in the neighborhood of Planalto, on the outskirts of Natal. Arthur has been a participant in the theatre class for the last 2 years. He was the little boy in the play described at the beginning of the chapter. I sat next to him on the imaginary couch, playing the imaginary cat, and he would pet my head as an imaginary pet owner. Earlier in the year, he introduced Raezaum to the organization and he now takes cello lessons.

In Arthur and Raezaum's interview, the issue of violence presented itself as a discussion on gender and sexuality, another macropolitical undercurrent that shapes society. I began the interview by asking Raezaum and Arthur the same question as Kahyla, Kevin, and Kelvin: "How does the organization differ from other places you spend most of your time, like school, home, or church?":

> **Raezaum:** I think they are nicer because, like, I study in a private school and those people are
> **Arthur:** Spoiled.
> **Raezaum:** They are a pain in the ass, right. And here they are very simple. And it's very nice when you arrive somewhere and people aren't looking at which brand of clothing you wear. And in my school people look at that.
> **Arthur:** In my school it's normal because… But I like the people here better. Because in my school people don't have respect, you understand. Like, if a person is gay, in my school that person suffers, how do say it? Suffers bullying. Not here. The person feels more welcomed, understand?

> **Raezaum:** They, like, have a small head. Like, closed minded. Thinking that the world spins around people who are heterosexual, and these things.
> **Arthur:** Yeah, but it's not everybody…
> **Raezaum:** Yeah, it's not everybody. But…
> **Arthur:** 15%.

Raezaum tells us about his first days at the organization and how Arthur was bullied by boys who thought he was gay:

> **Raezaum:** Like, there were some boys that did these things here to Arthur, like saying stuff, but after you talk with them and try to explain something to them, I think it's also lack of conversations at home. Because, usually they hear from their parents, it comes from home, your behavior is what you bring from home. So, you bring it out to the street, but when there are people who talk with them, maybe it can open their minds. So much that it happened with several guys here. After the first time I came here there were boys saying things and today its a lot less. And I talk with everyone, normal. And I think it's more explaining, explain that there isn't only one kind, like, of what is said as right for couples, and these things. So much that I have a friend, he is a trans boy, I think it's like that, right?
> **Margaux:** Yeah.
> **Raezaum:** There was this little boy, who I will not name right? He asked us if we were dating. Me and Roberto. And we were like, no, no… And Roberto said, but we could think about it. And the little boy said, so you are not going to be… then he stopped to think for a minute because we all stopped and looked at him like, don't say what you don't need to say.
> **Arthur:** Because, she is a girl, and he is a boy, you know. But just that she is not…
> **Raezaum:** So he changed it. Because it was going to be like, straight couple, but it's not…
> **Margaux:** But it's not.
> **Raezaum:** He considers himself a boy, so it would be a gay couple not a straight couple. So, he wanted to say that, you understand? But then he fixed it saying, no, so you're not going to be… He was going to say wouldn't be a boy anymore, you would be a girl. Then he fixed it saying `you are not going to be straight, you're going to be gay'. Like, to brush off, but we know he was going to say that. So there. Talking, after a while I think it gets a lot… it gets inside people's heads. Because there are people who don't have conversations at home.

Gender ideologies are one of the biggest contributors to oppression in Brazil. Research on gay and transgender people's lived experiences of violence and crime show us that they are particularly vulnerable to hate crimes and discrimination in different areas of life, including employment, education, healthcare, housing and other services (Chacham

et al., 2016). Yet, in the lives of young people, the discrimination and stigma associated

with forms of gender and sexuality often manifest themselves in bullying (Serra-Negra

et al., 2014).

Theatre class helped Arthur develop his own little refrain to deal with bullying. He used

a strategy the theatre instructor told him to use when dealing with critics:

> **Margaux:** Do you think theater helped you in any way to deal with these
> situations?
> **Arthur:** Yes. Because the teacher says, I won't tell you, "turn on the fuck it
> button" haha. Because in theater we deal a lot with the public and everyone has
> their personality, you know. One person can like the presentation and another
> not. So, you will also receive… how is it I forgot the name…
> **Margaux:** Criticism?
> **Arthur:** Criticism and you know, constructive criticism and there's criticism,
> understand? You understand. And…
> **All:** Hahaha.
> **Arthur:** And the teacher says if you stop to think about the criticism, you will
> never win.

Situations like these call upon particular reserves of strength. The fuck it button marks

the creation of a temporary assemblage, an incantation similar to the little refrain. Like

the little boy's song, it is a tool Arthur uses to negotiate and navigate the challenges of

criticism and bullying. The refrain is not constructed as means of achieving absolute

liberty or escape, or as an ultimate solution to a problem, but rather with the intention of

finding a way out or a way through, "a means of movement, a way of transforming the

situation" (Bogue, 2008, 110). The fuck it button is a strategy, a small intervention, that

Arthur uses to reframe how he feels about himself and to cope with critique. Put simply,

it gives him the strength, confidence, and courage to continue being himself.

When I ask Arthur and Raezaum if these people still attend the organization, they say

that:

Raezaum: Some people who used to do these things left. I think they weren't here to do anything. Just to make fun of people.
Arthur: people see that this here [the organization] is not for them, you understand. And then suddenly they leave the NGO, you know. That's it.

The bullies represent a challenge to the safe space that the organization tries to build. Deleuze and Guattari state that refrain is always fragile: "a mistake in speed, rhythm, or harmony would… back the forces of chaos, destroying both creator and creation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 311). In a similar vein, if the bullies were to succeed in making Arthur, and other participants, feel unsafe or unsure of themselves, the refrain would fall to pieces and it would cease to function as a safe space, or a mother's heart. Yet, these bullies could not find their place, their rhythm, and purpose at the organization and so decided to leave.

4.6 Conclusion

Play may not be a quick fix or a perfect antidote to complicated issues like violence, but it can represent a small, micropolitical reworking of space that seeks to make it safer and more welcoming. In places like the West Zone, where everyday life is marked by experiences of complex violence, these playful assemblages can be a modest, yet powerful, resource for young people.

When we feel safe, we can put ourselves in positions of vulnerability, creating new assemblages with the world around us and open ourselves up to new experiences and knowledge. Lester and Russell (2014) touch on these same ideas, but in specific relation to play:

> When playful urges are actualised in a supportive environment, children will develop a friendship with the place. The place affirms a child's value, and child–environment interactions are mutually supportive and caring and can provide a place that is a buffer from stresses and pressures in their lives. This stimulates the desire to further explore the possibilities of this relationship (55).

Put another way, it is not enough to simply provide the time and tools for play; participants need to feel physically and emotionally safe.

While the purpose of the refrain is to create or demarcate a territory, it also contains within it the potential to open up from the inside and to connect with the outside world, to de-territorialize and create movement and flows elsewhere:

> Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself… One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it. One ventures from home on the thread of a tune (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 344).

The refrain remains a fragile assemblage in that we can overcome its territorial boundaries, through a metaphorical opening of the circle. This is done not where "the forces of chaos press against it" but from a safe side, created by the circle itself. As we shall see in the next sections, a safe space gives us the foundation for other play-related facets such as humour and fellowship.

CHAPTER 5   Data Analysis Part 2

5.1 Conceptual Tool: The Assemblage

An assemblage is a conceptual tool that helps us think about movement in terms of connectivity. It is described as the coming together of various heterogenous elements, which combine in novel ways, to create new functions and potentialities. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), every assemblage "is simultaneously and inseparably a machinic assemblage and an assemblage of enunciation" (504), that is, they have both a "material" side and an "expressive" side (De Landa 2016; 2019). The machinic assemblage refers to the physical and tangible elements of the assemblage: the "states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodges" (Deleuze, 2007, 177). The assemblage of enunciation expresses an internal dynamic at work within the assemblage, and includes things like "utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs" (Deleuze 2007, 177). Put in another way, assemblages are not simply material, but always contain a much larger arrangement of feelings, signs, affects, rhetoric, imaginings and re-imaginings which are situated within a larger history or social milieu.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) provide us with the example of the horse, man, and weapon assemblage (399). When each of these elements come together, we see that the man has new capacities to move across land with new precision and power. Yet, the combination of these elements is not enough to create a warrior. It is only once we include the enunciative, or expressive, components that the man transforms himself, through things like intent or confrontation.

Deleuze and Guattari sometimes describe assemblages as machines, or desiring machines. The addition of desire here is an important one. Desire is not perceived of in terms of lack or absence but as the productive force to explore the capacities of the body. As Colebrook writes:

> Life is desire. When a plant takes in light and moisture it becomes a plant through its relation to these other forces; this is one flow of desire. When a human body connects with another body it becomes a child in relation to a parent, or it becomes a mother in relation to a child; this is another flow of desire. When bodies connect and become tribes, societies or nations, they also produce new relations and flows of desire (Colebrook, 2002, xvi)

In the Deleuzoguattarian world, desire underpins every aspect of life and attends to movement, even on the smallest scale. It is what "inspires every action, from getting up in the morning to studying, cooking, going to war or humming a tune" (Fox, 2013, 499). These connections provide "the engine for all social production – of bodies, subjectivities, thoughts, feelings, social forms and institutions, and political and economic orders" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7). This focus on desire means that all human beings are fundamentally active agents.

In this section, I look at play as a form of an assemblage. In the play assemblage, the player becomes connected to a diverse set of novel encounters and elements. My participants become desiring machines who seek out new ways of being, or becoming, and stretch their creative capacities within the limits of their environments. From this perspective, play is a powerful and micropolitical force that facilitates transformations across various lived experiences.

5.2 Assemblage #1: Judo Class

At the centre of the organization is a small outdoor pavilion that functions as the pulsating heart of the physical space. It is a simple structure, surrounded on all four sides

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by a three-foot wall, just high enough to sit on comfortably and escape the unforgiving Brazilian sun and torrential rains. This is where students gather before and after class, friends come to hang-out, and where you will often find mothers waiting for their children. On any given day, something entertaining is happening at the pavilion to draw the attention of onlookers. Today, it is a judo class.

Ivanildo, the judo instructor, has gotten down on all fours and is pretending to be a bear. The students scream and run in all directions, trying to escape, but Ivanildo is too fast. He catches a girl by the ankle and now she too turns into a bear. One by one students fall to the ground, slowed down and weakened by laughter. There are now bears everywhere.

Ivanildo calls for a timeout to allow students to catch their breath and the commotion briefly comes to a pause. The remaining 'humans' huddle in a corner. They are serious and focused; it is clear they are hatching a plan. When the game continues, their strategy begins to materialize. A small boy jumps onto Ivanildo's back and another boy clings to his chest, hanging upside down with his legs wrapped around Ivanildo's waist and arms locked around his neck. Their plan works; Ivanildo comes to a halt and the remaining humans are able to escape. The sight of the boys' antics draws laughter and applause from the spectators who have gathered along the edge of the pavilion. The game comes to an end.

The game described above is a clear and simple depiction of play. Most of us have played games like these ourselves and know from personal experience how it feels to be

within this play world. Something about the ludic gesture pulls us in, asking us to suspend the normal functions of routine in order to feel, think, and become something new, like a bear. The scene registers as a paradox: something that should instill fear, becomes also fun, as evidenced by the players squeals which sound like a mix of terror and delight. While it may be difficult to pin down the exact essence of what makes scenes like this playful, we all know and recognize its subtle nuances when we see it and when we feel it.

The judo class is an example of an assemblage. The ludic moment is a territory bounded by the pavilion, and things like the blue floor mats and the judo uniforms, but still flexible enough to allow for improvisation, as demonstrated by the two boys. In order to understand how the enunciative or expressive elements work within this assemblage, I want to return to Ivanildo's interview, and his discussion on humor and fellowship.

I had the chance to interview Ivanildo and ask him about his teaching methodology and what he thinks playful activities, like the one described above, can contribute to a young person's life in the West Zone. Ivanildo is always warm and welcoming and eager to talk about judo and the organization, so when I asked him if he wanted to take part in my research, he immediately said yes. Ivanildo began practicing judo when he was only eight years old and now, at the age of 26, holds a black belt and the esteemed title of Sensei.

Living in cramped conditions mean that teaching at the organization is not easy; students will often come and go and finding a way to connect with them, and make them stay, is

the most difficult part of the job. Living in the West Zone has shaped Ivanildo's teaching

methodology:

> **Ivanildo:** We can see that they miss seeing good things, so we make judo this good thing.

To be effective, young people need to view the opportunities offered by the NGO as

important and relevant to their lives and be willing to participate in them. Ivanildo

believes that part of the reason the organization has been successful among youth in the

area is because of how the instructors approach their classes:

> **Ivanildo:** I realized our class is different precisely because of the creativity, the way we lead the student, the way we talk, speak, making the class, let's say, well humored, to use humor, to know how to conquer the student because if you use only the judo itself, I believe that few would stay… The technical part is important but thank God I'm in a place where this isn't so important.

Ivanildo goes on to tell me that judo is a very repetitive sport and that young people,

especially children, get bored easily. The rigid structures or rules of skill-oriented

classes can lead to frustration and disengagement among participants. While learning

technique is an important component of the class, it comes secondary to humour and

fellowship:

> **Ivanildo:** I think our methodology revolves around good humor, knowing what they live through every day, their problems, it's a more humanized judo. 40% is judo and the other 60% is fellowship.

Sports alone is not enough to keep the participants' interest. This sentiment is

highlighted in another study by Rothschadl and Nunes (2004), who discuss the

important difference between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards:

> The most often-cited reason children give for dropping out of sports is that it stopped being fun. Too much emphasis on competition and winning are specific reasons they give for their attrition… winning is primarily an extrinsic reward, and extrinsic rewards do not sustain motivation to participate over a long of time. Intrinsic rewards do. Utilizing a different approach in teaching recreational sports to children can reduce the extrinsic emphasis and increase

intrinsic rewards, such as positive, enjoyable experiences that will sustain long-term involvement (138)

These are sentiments I witnessed in my observations as well. The young people at the organization seemed to be drawn towards the playful and creative activities. The enthusiasm for music, theatre, and sports, stood in contrast to the more academic classes such as music theory, math, Portuguese, which were rarely, if ever, attended during the three months I spent doing fieldwork at the centre.

When thinking about assemblages in terms of becoming and micropolitics, it is helpful to chart how they function and what they do, i.e., what becomings they open up within us or around us.

5.3 Cramped Space: social support systems

Cramped spaces are complex environments where young people face multiple barriers to their well-being. In this chapter, I want to emphasize the social dynamics of cramped space, specifically how challenges arise within the personal realm, within the family, and in the greater community.

Ivanildo states that familial absence is one of the greatest challenges he encounters at the organization:

> **Ivanildo:** In peripheral students we see a lot of the family absence, lack of affection, lack of maternal and paternal presence, and we see that when they are in class, they can make friendship bonds that make up for the lack of the dad's presence and affection. And we get to teach them values that maybe they don't learn at home or at school because nowadays people don't do things for love, they do things for money, so they end up letting go of simple things like a hug, a smile, asking how the weekend was.

Ivanildo continues:

Ivanildo: Our job is like good vs evil, unfortunately, as I told you, and sometimes the family is part of this evil thing and there's no use being on one side of the rope where 5 people pull and you are pulling alone, the 5 people on the other side are going to win. So, I lived that with some students, I wanted to pull them to the good side, but there was a whole family on the bad side, you know. and sometimes the student wants to be in the good side, but the influences, things that he lives at home distorts the good we try to do him here. So, we had students that left, some that had a bright future if they hadn't given up, or by family influence, the family not managing to work, not working together with the NGO.

Not all of my participants come from troubled or broken homes. The lack of social support can manifest itself in other ways as well, as highlighted by Teatro.

Teatro is 18 years old and a participant in the theatre class. Teatro spoke openly about how she used to battle low self-esteem and depression. She describes her past self as rebellious, as having few friends, and little motivation or interest in daily life:

Margaux: Do you think you've changed with theatre?
Teatro: In the beginning I was a really rebellious person, so I was working on that, I realized theater was helping me in this way. Sometimes people get here, many that wanted to kill themselves, with no pleasure in doing anything. Like me, I didn't like to do anything, but not with theater.

Later in her interview, she reiterates these ideas:

Teatro: I was a very rebellious person, like, I couldn't stand anyone's advice, I didn't care about life, whatever.

Teatro's emotional well-being and outlook on life can be understood as cramped. She talks about suicide several times in the interview. These feelings can limit what the body can do, affecting how we feel, think, and act by making us feel despondent, frustrated, and socially withdrawn. In other words, depression can make us feel like there is no room for change. Ivanildo and Teatro's interviews made me think about the importance of social support systems in a young person's life and how play might help these relationships come into existence.

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5.4 Assemblage #2: "It's like you are someone important"

I introduced Teatro above, but I want to continue with her interview because she has more to say. The pseudonym Teatro chose for herself reveals a great deal about her identity. In her interview she described how her experience at the organization was one of tremendous personal change. Over the course of 6 years, she has taken violin, dance, photography, and the entrepreneurship class, but it was not until she joined theatre that Teatro found her passion:

> **Margaux:** How did you become interested in theatre?
> **Teatro:** I always liked to be there in the projects, that kind of stuff, because I did nothing at home, only study. Then when I found out about theater, as soon as it started, I wanted to go. I found it very cool, a bunch of young people, then I joined theater. I liked it very, very, very much, it was something I identified with. Because violin I didn't like, sometimes to study was really bad, you had to like it to learn the song. I mean, I liked it but not that much, but not in theater. I threw myself into theatre.

Teatro tell us that she experimented with other forms of play before ultimately turning to theatre class. While she enjoys theatre and even dreams of becoming an actress, it is the friendships that she has made at the organization that Teatro chooses to emphasize in her interview:

> **Teatro:** Nowadays I try my best to please people, I like to make friends. Back in the day I wouldn't talk to anyone, if someone was staring at me, I was like "what are you looking at?" But not today, I like to talk, have friends, go out, and in theater you get a lot of friends… In the first year of theater, I built a lot of strong friendships, really strong, like best friends.

Friendships help sustain us through challenging circumstances. They can mitigate the negative effects of adversity, contribute to a young person's self-esteem, and foster a sense of belonging (Amati et al., 2018). Boyden and Mann (2005) illustrate this with an example from Malawi where a group of girls affected by HIV/AIDS described how being with friends made them feel "strong" and "less alone" (3-4). These supportive

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relationships are critical to developing a sense of purpose and sense of self and determining how we relate to the world and move through life.

Teatro attributes much of her change in outlook to her participation in theatre. At one point in her interview, Teatro states ideas in a way that was repeated, almost word for word, by other participants as well. She said:

> **Teatro:** Theater excites, makes you feel like doing many things, it's like you are someone important, you feel important.

In the theatre-assemblage, every actor, gesture, and line, is vital to the continuation of the play. Feeling important is a powerful emotion. It implies that our choices, opinions, and actions matter. Statements like these make it difficult for me to describe Teatro's experiences as producing only soft outcomes. She is adamant that her experiences with theatre have changed her life and that theatre can change other people's lives as well.

The feeling of importance was emphasized by another participant, Gustavo (age 10). Like Teatro, Gustavo is a participant in the theatre class. Gustavo went to the organization almost every single day. His school was on strike and rather than spend that time at home he chose to come to organization. He was even given an extra role in a play:

> **Margaux:** What is your routine like?
> **Gustavo:** I wake up, then get lazy to get up, brush my teeth, have breakfast, then leave with my mom and come here
> **Margaux:** So, despite not having any class in the afternoon, you come here. Why don't you stay home? Don't you like it?
> **Gustavo:** I hate staying at home. Now I have to come anyway because I got a role in the afternoon. The teacher gave me the role of the mathematician.
> **Margaux:** And how did you feel on stage?
> **Gustavo:** Important.
> **Margaux:** Important? Where else do you feel important?
> **Gustavo:** At home and here

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> **Margaux:** What about in school?
> **Gustavo:** No, school is boring
> **Margaux:** Do you like it here, (NGO), Gustavo?
> **Gustavo:** Yes (humming), more than home
> **Margaux:** More than your home? Why?
> **Gustavo:** Because at home there's one thing to do: eat, play and sleep
> **Margaux:** What about here? What is there here?
> **Gustavo:** Playing, only playing. I wish I could spend all day long playing
> **Margaux:** You said that you liked here more than home. What is different here?
> **Gustavo:** Friendships

Gustavo says, in clear and simple terms, that the reason he comes to organization every single day is because he wants to play and be with his friends, and that these relations make him feel important.

Humour and fellowship are what bind the play-assemblage together and make it powerful. They are the enunciative and expressive elements that give play meaning. When placed within a larger framework of depression, familial absence, and low self-esteem, this play assemblage becomes an important site for reworking how we relate to the world.

5.5 Assemblage #3: "Better than winning"

Today, I am attending a volleyball class at one of the local public schools in Bom Pastor. The school is only few minutes away from the NGO but trying to organize an observation session there has been a struggle. The area is considered dangerous, and my research assistants are trying to figure out the logistics of how to get there safely: "If we drive, what are we going to do with your mother's car? It's a big car. We can't park it on the street." Lucas is driving his mother's brand-new Honda Fit and they are worried that we may bring unwanted attention to ourselves. Bea insists that we have someone who knows the area tag along with us. After communicating with a few of the instructors, we

have settled for meeting the volleyball instructor, Renno, at the NGO and then joining him at the school for his volleyball class.

The volleyball court consists of a small patch of sand and a net in the back of the schoolyard. Adjacent to the court is an abandoned lot overgrown with wild plants. Renno describes the conditions "the worst possible" for sports telling us that animals will often defecate in the sand, and that broken glass and trash are littered through the schoolyard where students play barefoot.

The small court was designed for beach volleyball in which each team consists of only four players. In today's class there about 20 students and Renno has adapted the rules so that more students can play at time: "Today, we are playing beach volleyball with three extra players." Some of the students sit on the sidelines waiting for their turn to play. The participants are crammed into the tight space and jostle for a position in the sand. Every now and then the ball gets knocked out of bounds and goes flying onto the roof of the school. Without skipping a beat, one of the players climbs up the railing and onto the tin roof to fetch the ball. With each step the roof makes a clanging noise until he finally finds the ball and kicks it back into the court. The boys on the sidelines cheer them on and the game continues. Renno tells me that the participants are very motivated and dedicated players. Despite the tough conditions, "nothing stops them from playing."

The volleyball instructor, Renno, has a different idea about why play-centred program are successful in helping youth foster alternative paths. He states that when they attend class at the organization their focus is pulled away from delinquency:

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Renno: They live in a periphery neighborhood. You know how it is. We pull them towards good things and some people out there pulling them towards bad things… Their focus is different, because there's a competition, a trip. So, it directs their focus to, for example, they are in soccer and going to play this tournament, then that other competition that's almost here. So, that helps distract them from those sorts of things. They have, for example here in volleyball, they have training before class. So, they already have something to do in the morning. The volleyball class is 9;00 to 10:15, but 8:30 they are having breakfast, getting ready, get home at 10:40 to 11 and have to get ready for school. So, it fills up the day, Monday and Wednesday. And the other days there is always something to do. It directs the focus away from drugs, idleness.

Reducing idle time is often adopted as a delinquency prevention strategy (Jacob & Lefgren, 2003). The idea is to redirect their energy and focus on more healthy pastimes and guide them away from destructive lifestyles and habits.

Kevin and Kelvin are participants in the volleyball game described above as well as in soccer. Kevin is 19 and Kelvin is 16 and they are both in grade 9. I asked both what their family and friends think of the NGO:

Kelvin: We're not in the streets doing stupid things, we prefer to be here rather than at home, doing nothing, only on our phones
Margaux: Now tell me what good you believe, in this case soccer or volleyball, could bring to someone's life?
Kelvin: Making a better person, not getting into the world of crime
Kevin: Besides helping in the physical development of your body, it makes your head busy and doesn't allow you to rebel, to turn into a marginal later in life.
Margaux: So, what do you think leads a person into the world of crime?
Kevin: Lack of opportunities, discredited family. Yeah, that's it.

Kevin and Kelvin touch on the same ideas as Renno; that "keeping your head busy" keeps you out of trouble. Yet, their narratives miss an important reason why activities like soccer and volleyball are powerful tools for young people. Play is not simply a means of re-directing their focus; it is much more profound than that. The play assemblage fosters the social connections that provide them with a source of strength

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and happiness to help them face life's challenges. Kevin touches on this idea himself at the end of the interview:

> **Margaux:** Tell a little about the feeling of being on the field playing
> **Kevin:** It is good and at the same time it is bad, because you are trained to do that and it's stressful because of this part, you get really stressed over a teammate that didn't do that thing you asked for or if a rival comes hard on you and you want to payback, but you can't. Yeah, but being together with your teammates and the teacher is enough, better than winning, right? being together with the guys.

For Kevin, the most important part of soccer class is not winning in competitions, but the feeling of camaraderie he experiences when he is on the field with his friends and the instructor.

5.6 Assemblage #4: "But he is darker"

Lorrany and Julia's interview is one that initially stumped me. I tried putting it in the section titled "like a mother's heart" but I knew they were saying something more nuanced. Their interview deals with one of the most important social issues in Brazil: race.

I met Lorrany and Julia on my first day of doing interviews. I had just finished talking to their friend Rebecca when the two girls came running up to the classroom, knocked on the door, and shouted "We want to be interviewed too!" Lorrany is 11 and Julia is 12 years old. They both take part in the singing and theatre courses. The two girls initially bonded over their Christian upbringing. They both say that while church is still their favorite place to be, the organization is a close second. I asked Lorrany and Julia to describe how the people at the organization differed from other places they spent a lot of time, like school or church:

> **Margaux:** And you, Lorrany? Do you think people here [at the organization] are different?

> **Lorrany:** I think that there are a lot of darker boys. Like, from what I've seen, most boys that are on drugs are darker. But I saw one boy who has a darker skin color who shows interest.

Julia tries to interject:

> **Julia:** No there is also dark skin colored…
> **Lorrany:** No but he is darker.
> **Margaux:** And that [turning towards drugs] happened to your brothers?
> **Julia:** That also happened to my dad.
> **Margaux:** It's been a long time you've seen your brothers? Or they always show up in your house?
> **Lorrany:** No, there is one that comes by sometimes and there is another who lives with us. My mom always tells him but, that's it.
> **Margaux:** They are older, right?
> **Lorrany:** Yeah, he was 15 Tuesday.
> **Margaux:** The one who lives with you.
> (Lorrany nods her head)
> **Margaux:** Have you ever asked him to come to the NGO, if he had any interest?
> **Lorrany:** No. Sometimes I try to, but I know him. He was in church. But slowly stopped going. He didn't want to go anymore.
> **Margaux:** And you, Julia, was that what happened to your dad?
> **Julia:** It happened. It still happens.

Lorrany and Julia's conversation highlights the ways in which ideas about race are engrained in the minds of Brazilians, even from a young age. In theatre class, Lorrany was confronted with something that unsettled her ways of understanding the world: a darker boy who "shows interest." Her opinions and beliefs about race do not come from an outside source but from within her own family. Her two half-brothers both have darker skin and are struggling with drugs and these experiences have reinforced the correlation between dark skin and addiction. Lorrany's comment that the boy in her class is "darker" shows us that race exists along a sliding spectrum of "whiteness." "Measures of whiteness" are determined by a what Pinho (2009) calls a wide economy of signs, which include not only things like hair texture and skin tone, but also gender and class (40).

Brazil was once famously described as a racial democracy, but its history and current

social landscape paint a much more complex portrait (Freyre, 1986). At the time of the

abolition of slavery (May 13th, 1888), Brazil's population was mostly black or mixed

race. In the early 20th century, Brazilian state actors began to encourage the arrival of

European immigrants to work on the newly formed gold mines in the Southern regions

(Telles, 2004). Dâavil (2003) describes how at the heart of these policies was a belief

that whiteness was correlated with virtue, health, and strength. These beliefs were

shaped in opposition to "blackness" which was still associated with being primitive,

lazy, and childlike. The European immigrants were expected to mix with the primarily

Afro-Brazilian population in an attempt to make "a white man of the tropics." Brazil

was using race, and specifically whiteness, as a tool to secure its trajectory into the

modern world, believing that whitening the population would eventually lead to a more

productive and modern social class (Flynn et al., 2013). While the belief that Brazil is a

racial democracy has since been refuted, complex feelings about race seem to linger in

the social consciousness (Telles, 2004).

Lorrany's mother has tried to explain to her why her brothers are on drugs in a way that

captures the more complex dynamic that are play:

> **Interviewer:** And what do you think leads people to do drugs?
> **Lorrany:** I think that, like my mom says, if they were your friend, they
> wouldn't have offered. So, then they are not a friend… Let's say "Oh let me
> smoke" then say "no, no, this is not good for me." If they say, "Do you want to
> join too?" and say, "Take it, take it" That's not a friend. My mom says she
> thinks they're not a friend. Me too.

Lorrany's mother gives an alternative narrative of how and why her brother became

addicted to drugs, one that that does not fall in line with the simply racial correlation

between addiction and skin color. One of the other participants, a darker boy, reminded

her of her brother, and it led her to reflect on why her brother was not in theatre as well:

> **Lorrany:** Sometimes it makes me want to cry, because my brother is not here. I have two brothers that are out there, on drugs, and I get very sad because they [the boys in the theatre class] are a little darker like my brother. And I imagine if he was here, doing theater and things like that, I think it's beautiful.

Play is an intervention into everyday life. It allows us to explore and open up feelings of

empathy towards things that do not conform to our beliefs or understandings. The

encounter showed her that her brother could also be a participant at the organization

"learning" and "improving" himself; that skin color was not determinant of a specific

trajectory through life.

Thomas Henricks describes play as a social laboratory. It helps facilitate creative and

exploratory connections: "When we play with others, we create and administer a

publicly acknowledged reality. When people agree on the terms of their engagement

with one another and collectively bring those little worlds into being, they effectively

create models for living" (Henricks, 2015, 2). These ideas are reiterated by Hannah

Arendt (1958) when she says that playful engagements force participants to disclose

themselves through their actions as well as engage with other's disclosures (194-195).

Play, as a social laboratory, becomes a way of facilitating exchange, a framework and

incentive for creating ongoing rhizomatic connections and becomings.

In *The Ambiguity of Play*, Sutton-Smith (1997) focuses on play's potential to contribute

to improved understandings of social relations and personal development. He suggests

that play is one way in which individuals define and negotiate social norms and

identities. He notes that play functions as a "form of bonding, including the exhibition

and validation or parody of membership and traditions in a community" (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 91). It is therefore essential to sociocultural formation. Through play, children form tight-knit communities, develop group identities, and create a sense of belonging among members (Flanagan, 2009, p. 9). Because play has such an important place in our social lives, it functions as a tool for critical engagement in order to understand social and cultural norms. Therefore, play is both productive and integrated into our everyday reality. Sutton-Smith shows us how spaces and opportunities to play can help children and youth explore ideas related to the self as well as understand the social and cultural norms and values of a given society.

If it difficult to say for sure whether or not theatre class, or any of the classes at Atitude Cooperação, would have helped Lorrany's brother stay away from drugs, but a conversation with another participant named Silva, offers us some more guidance. Silva mentioned in his interview that the organization helps young people stay out the world of drugs:

> **Margaux:** Do you think the NGO is capable of that? Because you talked about getting people out of the world of drugs, do you think it works?
> **Silva:** I do. I see that it works because I have a friend that he was involved with these drug things, he used a lot of drugs. He was always in the bus station, on the street. He would spend nights getting drugged. Until when I came to him and said: "come get to know the sport, judo. In the NGO, you will identify a lot with it." And today he did identify with it a lot and left here because of work, and now he has a good life, working. And I feel very happy with that.
> **Margaux:** Being able to…
> **Silva:** Being able to help a person.

It is unclear what made Silva's friend identify with judo, and it is likely more than one thing, but it is clear that his friendship with Silva helped change his life. Silva introduced him into a new social assemblage, one filled with new people, new activities,

and new ways of looking at the world. His story is testament as to why forms of play, like judo, help foster new becomings.

5.7 Conclusion

Play may seem frivolous and unimportant in relation to the complex challenges young people face in peripheral neighbourhoods, yet Ivanildo is adamant that things like sport, music, and theatre are "good things." The barriers that my participants face are not only economic in nature but also social and emotional. They affect how they move through life, how they feel about themselves, their futures, and their place in the community.

For my participants, life is not simply defined by experiences of oppression, hardship, or the lack of material resources and opportunities. Their lives are also guided by the importance of fostering friendships and finding opportunities for enjoyment. Throughout my fieldwork, participants would make it clear that the initial appeal, and the reason why they stay at the organization, often for years of their young lives, is because the organization offers them opportunities to find a supportive group of friends with whom they can laugh and have fun as well as develop deep connections that can support them throughout their lives. One of the most profound ways we engage in this desire to be well is by connecting with others through play.

CHAPTER 6   Conclusion

While in Brazil, I was rarely introduced as a student of international development studies. Instead, others were told that I was pursuing a degree in international relations, sociology, or political science, anything but a focus on development. I remember asking a professor at the UFRN about their views on development, only to receive a curt and direct reply: "Arturo Escobar is an important theorist in South America." While this experience was new to me, it did not come as a shock. Throughout my years as an undergraduate and graduate student, I learned that the idea of development has a complicated history and comes with a certain amount of baggage.

The problem with development, according to Escobar, is that it is simply a reinvention of old colonial structures. He describes the development apparatus as ideological export, a form of cultural imperialism, and a neoliberal project based ethnocentric, reductionist, universalising ideals of modernity and progress (1992; 2000, 2004). This critique of development is echoed by other theorists of the time, such as Homi Bhabha (1994) who contends that neo-colonial relations of oppression persist even within the so called "new" world order, describing globalization as "quasi-colonial, a condition at once old and new" (xxi, 9) and Gustavo Esteva (1985) who states that "the "three development decades" were a huge, irresponsible experiment that, in the experience of a world-majority, failed miserably" (78). Escobar advocated for a post-development world based on an "articulation of anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, anti-productivist, anti-market struggles" (1992, 431). While development has not disappeared from the intellectual landscape, the ideas around it have changed and evolved.

My experiences in Brazil made me reflect on my own ideas of development and where my research project falls within this larger picture. Currie-Alder (2016) wisely notes that "[c]oncern over development has been with us for as long as people have existed for it is fundamentally about the improvement of the human condition" (6). Development, understood in this way, is not something that emerged out of the postwar World War II period but rather something much closer to the human experience. It focuses on some of the most complex environments and engages with some of the most vulnerable populations, studying how intertwined cultural, economic, and political factors and histories contribute to conditions like poverty, inequality, and oppression. It encompasses both the local and global level by including everything from grassroots peasant movements to globalization and climate change. As a dynamic field of inquiry, development studies is constantly evolving to reflect and keep up with the ever-changing world we live in.

Over the years development theory and practice has steadily moved away from understanding development simply in terms of economic growth, nor as dependent solely on state direction or on the free play of markets. Development "expertise" and "wisdom" no longer emanates from the developed countries in the Global North, nor is development something that only happens in the Global South. Influenced by scholars such as Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, development has taken on a more humanistic approach. Both Sen and Nussbaum posit poverty, not simply in economic terms, but as the condition of being unable to explore and pursue our capabilities in their various manifestations and as the lack of freedom to do certain valuable things

(Nussbaum 2000; 2001; 2011; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Sen, 1992; 2001; 2004; 2009).

These changes in development discourse have created spaces to explore what development means from alternative perspectives, redefining the nature and goals of development in order to consider things such as agency, movement, wellbeing, and quality of life.

Capability deprivation has similarities to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming in that it views individuals as active agents and posits our relations to the world, and our well-being, as the primarily relational and connective. What Deleuze and Guattari can add to this conversation is a more nuanced and dynamic look into how poverty, or cramped spaces, impinges on the bodies and minds of people as they carve out new potentials for themselves. It shows us how, despite the cramped conditions they find themselves in, people look for ways of transforming themselves and their conditions, even if only on the small scale.

For my participants, growing up in the West Zone of Natal is not easy. The neighbourhoods are some of the most marginalized in the city, and for residents, problems related to violence, crime, and poverty, as well as a number of other social and emotional challenges, arise even within simple daily life. These conditions mean that being a warrior is often not a choice but a necessity.

Policies and programs that seek to invest in the healthy development and well-being of these youngest members of society are critical to the future development of Brazil. It is vital for these organizations to assess the outcomes and impacts of their programs in

order to determine whether their activities are contributing to any tangible change within the community or area of interest. If their activities are successful, they can serve to assist policy makers in designing effective programs and policies for children and youth elsewhere in the world. Structural issues like poverty and inequality are complex, traversing multiple social and economic sectors, making it unlikely that the efforts of any single NGO can overcome these barriers on their own. Small grassroots social projects like Atitude Cooperação lack the resources, connections, and funds to sufficiently address the magnitude of problems faced by young people and their families in their entirety, but they can help in small ways.

In this thesis, I have offered an alternative framework for studying the effects of play-centred programs within challenging environments, what Deleuze and Guattari call cramped spaces. I have focused on what is produced by the act of play itself, and the potentialities, desires, and becomings, that it enables. My research looks at young people as intelligent agents who try to understand their environments and potentials in order to make their lives better. If we understand oppression as the structures and barriers that impeded movement and expression, and create what Deleuze and Guattari call cramped spaces, then micropolitics becomes a dynamic force in which people actively contend with and navigate through these forms of oppression. Seen through a Deleuzoguattarian lens, play becomes a micropolitical act that seeks to rework space and reality and our relations to them from within.

Using the concepts of the little refrain and the assemblage, I charted how simple acts like Arthur's "fuck it button" and Lorrany's encounter with "a darker boy" represent

minor acts, or micropolitics. These stories are what Deleuze and Guattari describe as "soft subversions and imperceptible revolutions" (Guattari & Rolnik, 2007, 306) that ultimately change how we view and relate to the world. The nuances of these stories would often go un-noticed in larger theoretical frameworks that seek to conform experience to a singular narrative or outcome.

Atitude Cooperação's reach within Natal is becoming steadily larger. Participants tell their friends and their neighbours about the organization which results in a growing number of new participants. Some participants, like Arthur, are protective of the space, wanting only a select few people to know about his well-kept secret. More often than not, however, participants want others to join in. This can be through expanding these kinds of NGOs into other neighbourhoods:

> **Kevin:** There at the NGO, it used to be a daycare center, so the space is too little. I mean, when they have events there, it gets to crowded. It could expand. Have it in places, like, more peripheral.

> **Teatro:** that theater changes people's lives, like it changed mine I want it to change other people's life, for other people to have opportunity of what I had, I hope that when I have a child as old as me, that he has the same opportunity as me, because I see that my mom didn't have the same opportunity as I had, you know? I want this NGO to grow, that many people, kids from the neighbourhoods come to meet this project that is so cool, it's important. I think there should be more NGOs, not only here, because I guess there are other neighbors that don't have one and I think people should invest more in NGOs, in things that make the human being grow.

Or through the activities they offer:

> **Silva:** Not just for me, but for the other students, someone who would stay at the library. I know the situation is not very good now, but I think there could be a volunteer, someone who could help and be at the library to help the people who like to read. Even if they don't like to read but have some free time and came and read a book. Or asked to take it home to read when they have free time.
> **Arthur:** Yeah, they could have ballet.
> **Raezaum:** So, there isn't ballet and all.

Margaux: Would you do ballet if they had it?
Raezaum: I would.
Arthur: I would.

The overall sentiment is that their experiences at Atitude Cooperação helped change their lives and they want other young people to have similar opportunities and experiences. Deleuze and Guattari can help us understand how this cascading effects can produce change on a broader scale.

Micropolitics are described as the way society produces Lines of Flight (*linges de fuite*). Lines of Flight is one of Deleuze and Guattari's most cited concepts, but it is often mistranslated and misinterpreted as denoting some kind of revolutionary act or paradigm shift. In actuality, this is a much more modest rendering of change, and this is evident by Deleuze and Guattari's usage of the word *fuite*. In his introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Brian Massumi writes that the English translation to the word "flight" does not fully capture the original meaning behind the French word which "covers not only the act of fleeing or eluding but also flowing, leaking, and disappearing into the distance" (xvi). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) affirm this when they state that:

> Lines of flight, for their part, never consist in running away from the world but rather in causing runoffs, as when you drill a hole in a pipe; there is no social system that does not leak from all directions, even if it makes its segments increasingly rigid in order to seal the lines of flight. There is nothing imaginary, nothing symbolic about lines of flight. There is nothing more active than a line of flight (225)

With their concept of Lines of Flight, Deleuze and Guattari remove the stark dualistic divisions associated with overt acts of resistance and replace them with something more subtle. They "seek to detach resistance from its dependence on the formative procedures of power-structures" (Buchanan, 2008a, 241) and focus instead on minor acts, what they describe as "soft subversions and imperceptible revolutions" (Guattari & Rolnik, 2007,

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306). It is the nature of lines of flight to leak and overflow, to seep through and disrupt the structures which seek to restrict and contain them in order to find new paths forward (May, 2007, 135).

For Deleuze and Guattari, political thought should focus on how these lines of flight come into existence (May, 2007, 139). Looking at lines of flight as a form of leaking is an interesting way of looking at social change. It suggests that broad structural change happens not via large scale paradigm shifts but by small scale acts which undermine and slowly change the collective ways of being and thinking through attitudes, self-perceptions, levels of confidence, the building of skills sets, and creative re-imaginings of the status quo. When applied to my research, and the data I collected, the concept of leaking shows us that young people are fighting to transform their conditions and environments, and slowly reworking how they see themselves and their communities. This idea shows us that change and movement are possible even within cramped space.

This leaking may be difficult to measure, but that does not mean that it is unimportant or insignificant, or that it somehow eludes the assessments needed to influence evidence-driven policy. Determining the effects of these soft outcomes requires a commitment to the voices and stories of research participants.

I want to end with another comment from my interview with Teatro. She ended her interview with the following statement:

> **Teatro:** Sometimes it's not a need of medicine, but of words, of seeing how people care for each other, I guess that's it.

Teatro's words are an important reminder for everyone looking to help young people in adverse contexts that respect, compassion, and self-worth are just as much facets of wellbeing as education, healthcare, and job opportunities. These are the foundations and support systems that help individuals develop the internal resources needed to face life's daily challenges. Teatro's story, and the stories of other participants', are testament to the fact that a young person who is provided with forms of play will have a much higher chance at a happy, healthy, and satisfying life.

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