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Memory, Monuments and Resistance: São Paulo—Paris—São Paulo

Abstract

In colonized countries such as Brazil history begins when colonizers arrive and impose themselves on a territory, which for them is “new,” with history brought from afar. For those who already inhabit this territory, the past no longer exists. The *Bandeirantes-pioneers* contributed in the construction of this history, which was based on violence against the natives and the usurpation of their territory. In the modern city of São Paulo, the local bourgeoisie established an ideological identification linking the inhabitants of the city, seen as entrepreneurs and tireless workers, with the pioneers of the sixteenth century. Some concepts of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin enable us to understand this process.

Keywords

history, memory, monuments, resistance, Walter Benjamin

Paris—São Paulo and the image of the *Bandeirantes-pioneers*

In previously colonized countries, a story is told starting from the arrival of settlers. Despite general statements made about images, they are very important for impressing a certain conception of identity and history, which stamps itself on the mind and conveys an unquestionable version of the history of such a place. Walter Benjamin’s *Thesis VI* points to a characteristic of a method of historicist empathy: the establishment of an “eternal image of the past” seeking to describe it “as it really was,”¹ and thus establish an iden-

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¹ Both quotations W. Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I-2, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frank-

tivity of a common past as if this past was unique and as if it could be reconstructed by a detailed and meticulous study. Memory, however, is neither “neutral” nor is it “disinterested,” but rather “an organ attached to life.”² Images of the past reach the present, which is burdened with demands. In several of his works on art in modernity, notably in the famous essay *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility* (1935) and in the essay on the Surrealist Vanguard Movement (1929), Benjamin emphasizes the importance of image, not as merely illustrative or referring to perfection of form, but as a “space” that allows for the synchronization between the past and present, between thought and sensation, something that the author evokes as a possibility of liberation:

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film [...] extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.³

Benjamin suggests that through the techniques of image production, whether they are enabled by techniques such as cinema or by the surrealist experience in the city, we can free ourselves from the physical and intellectual constraints that limit freedom.

Gagnebin recalls that the interruption of the official narrative questions the interpretation of the dominant history and its temporality. “It inspires the desire and the possibility of another time and another form of remembrance.”⁴ She also recalls that in the *Theses*, Benjamin cites the gesture of the Parisian revolutionaries in July of 1830, which fired at the faces of the city’s monumental clocks, thus marking the beginning of another chronology. Michel Löwy has also commented, comparing⁵ the same episode with the protest of Brazilian natives, who during the 500th anniversary of the “discovery”⁶ of their land in 2000, aimed their bows and arrows at the “count-

furt am Main 1980, pp. 695–696; idem, *Illuminations. Essays and Reflections*, trans. H. Zohn, Schocken Books, New York 2007, p. 255.

² J.-M. Gagnebin, “O que é imagem dialética”, [in:] M. B. R. Flores, P. Peterle, *História e Arte. Imagem e Memória*, Mercado das Letras, Campinas 2012, p. 29.

³ W. Benjamin “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Reproduzierbarkeit”, [in] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I-2, op. cit., p. 461; idem, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 236.

⁴ J.-M. Gagnebin, “O que é imagem dialética”, op. cit., p. 33.

⁵ M. Löwy, *Walter Benjamin: aviso de incêndio. Uma leitura das teses “Sobre o conceito de história”*, Boitempo, São Paulo 2005, pp. 126–127.

⁶ The idea of discovery is controversial, that is why it is in quotation marks.

down” clocks that Globo Television⁷ had placed in different capitals to count down time to the anniversary of the “discovery” date: the 22nd of April.

This protest by the indigenous people allows us to remember that they were from the beginning victims of a genocide that symbolizes the history of the continent. “These events have rarely been recorded”⁸ and have remained a blot on our history. As Aguillera et al note:

From the point of view of the indigenous, there was no end to colonization anywhere in the Americas. Post-colonization is a European phenomenon—yes, in those countries that lost their colonies as a result of the struggle of the native peoples of said colonies. In the Americas, the indigenous population continues to be colonized by the descendants of the Europeans who have retained economic and political power.⁹

This exercise still continues in the form of distortion and annihilation of the past.

São Paulo—Paris—São Paulo

If Paris in the nineteenth-century had its Arcades, a “recent invention of industrial luxury [...] covered with glass and marbled walls,”¹⁰ then São Paulo of the twenty-first century has countless shopping malls that have arisen with great speed over the last thirty years. They do not cross from one street to another through passageways, as those of Paris, but destroy the topography of the city and displace houses, landscapes, and old buildings.

As in the case of the Parisian arcades, shopping malls are elegant or otherwise dependent on the neighborhood in which they are located, as one of the characteristics of shopping malls is that they spread to various parts of the city, representing a kind of democratic inclusion of the masses in consumption.¹¹

⁷ From 1997 to 1999 the Rede Globo sponsored copies of a countdown clock in 28 cities of Brazil. Two of them were destroyed during protests, one was badly damaged.

⁸ *Imagem, Memória, Resistência*, org. Y. Aguillera, M. C. Santos, Discurso Editorial, São Paulo 2016, p. 10.

⁹ *Ibidem*, op. cit., p. 11.

¹⁰ W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 83; *idem*, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland, K. McLaughlin. Belknap Press of Harvard Press University, Harvard 2002, p. 31.

¹¹ P. P. Pelbart, in *Vida Capital: Ensaios de Biopolítica*, Iluminuras, São Paulo 2003, notes that in this new phase of capitalist system “free time has become enslaved time” and that consumption is more a playful activity than a boring one.

The arcades provide an interruption to the intense traffic of the streets. Inside, the wanderer can linger without purpose and have their desires awakened by the offers of the luxury trade. In most cases people drive to shopping malls in São Paulo, and everything is commercial within their precincts. If already in the nineteenth-century Parisian consumers were beginning to feel like one great mass,¹² then now in the 21st century we are born with this mark stamped on our foreheads. Benjamin in the work quoted refers to François-Charles Fourier for whom this transformation of the city makes life pleasant, sheltered from weather, and compares the arcades to the phalansteries.¹³ It is as if these constructions, whether in Paris or in Sao Paulo, were enough to make the lives of its inhabitants comfortable and uneventful.

This is a world in which “what sets the tone is without doubt the newest, but only where it emerges from the middle of the oldest.”¹⁴ Fashion forms the new from what has already passed. This gives fashion, and everything that looks like new, the impression of being old-fashioned. For the new is made from the old-fashioned just as malls are from galleries and arcades. These are the beginnings of modern architecture, which still say a lot to today’s inhabitants of the city.¹⁵ Embedded in the buildings of big business and commerce are old dreams waiting to flourish. It is not in vain that Benjamin considers that Loos and Corbusier, modernist architects, make a clean slate (*tabula rasa*) of the architectural language before them: it is better to start again rather than to refer to a dream of the past that has failed to emerge.

The decay, or demolition, and the ruins of the city mark the moment in which the old city disappears to give rise to new constructions. These set the tone for how the inhabitants live and relate. It is in this environment that Surrealism is born. “The father of Surrealism was Dada, the mother was a passage,” says Benjamin.¹⁶ Aragon wrote about the Passage de l’Opera. This work constitutes for Benjamin a reference in which the relation between the old-fashioned and the fallen, the Arcades of Paris, may be considered in the present. There was also a demolition program in Paris (from 1852 to 1870)¹⁷ that removed the places where the participants in the 1848 journeys met from the urban landscape.

¹² W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 93; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 43.

¹³ Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 94; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁴ Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 112; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁵ Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 118; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 67.

¹⁶ Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 133; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 82.

¹⁷ The refashioning of Paris by Baron Haussmann.

In ancient Greece, Benjamin tells us, there were places from which one could descend into hell. "Our awakened existence likewise is a land which, at certain hidden points, leads down to the underworld"¹⁸ that opens to dreams, the dreams that are stored, kept in places that retain something of a desire for happiness nurtured in former times.

The still virgin plateau on which the city of São Paulo was born, underwent its first construction in the sixteenth century, when in 1554 a Jesuit college was built.¹⁹ From this initiation, little remains, probably far less than in the beginnings of Paris. But traces of this history can still be found, just as monuments that seek to mark certain moments remain.²⁰

The study of memory are mostly based on traumatic events that have recently become a concern of academics, especially of those from the United States and Europe. Most of these traumatic events are related to World War One and World War Two. Authors such as Dominick Lacapra and James Young²¹ refer mainly to the traumatic events of World War II, the

¹⁸ W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 135; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁹ See Fig. 1. The Jesuit priests José de Anchieta and Manoel da Nóbrega went up to the Serra do Mar, in 1553, in order to find a safe place to settle and catechise the Indians. Upon reaching the plateau of Piratininga, they found the ideal spot. It had 'cold and temperate air like those of Spain' and 'very good land with fresh water'. The religious community built a college on a small hill, near the rivers Tamanduateí and Anhangabau, where they celebrated mass. It was on January 25th, 1554, the date that marks the anniversary of São Paulo. Almost five centuries later, the town of Piratininga had grown into a city of 11 million inhabitants. Of those times, only the foundations of the construction made by the priests and Indians remain in the Pateo do Colegio. Piratininga took 157 years to become a city called São Paulo, a decision ratified by the king of Portugal. At that time, Sao Paulo was still the starting point of the *Bandeiras* expeditions that cut through the interior of Brazil. They had the goal of searching for precious minerals, and the imprisonment of Indians to work as slaves in the mines and plantations. In 1815, the city became the capital of the Province of São Paulo. But not until twelve years later would it establish its first law school in Largo São Francisco. From then on, São Paulo became the intellectual and political nucleus of the country. But it would only become an important economic centre with the expansion of coffee cultivation in the late nineteenth century. This official website of the government of São Paulo briefly describes the history of the city, [online] <http://www.saopaulo.sp.gov.br/conhecasp/monumentos/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].

²⁰ From a history of colonisation whose main characteristic is to impose a culture foreign to the local inhabitants.

²¹ D. Lacapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Cornell University Press, New York 1998; J. Young, "Memory and Counter-memory", *Harvard Design Magazine*, Fall 1999, 4, 13.

genocide of the European Jews, or to devastated places (or cities) as in the works of Karen Till.²²

The reflection presented here marks a difference between these traumatic events and the wounds caused by colonization in the American continent. At the same time, it is possible to identify some similarity in them: namely the use of violence. Lacapra refers to the pleasure German soldiers felt when they killed Jews and to the feeling of having fulfilled an important task as they contemplated a hundred or more corpses lying side by side. The author quotes a speech of Himmler for whom those soldiers faced with the difficult task to be accomplished still maintained their integrity.²³ This same “negative sublime”²⁴ may be identified in the enslavement and killing of the indigenous people of Brazil. However, no trace remains of the history of the ancient tribes living in the territory that is now Brazil. In his book *A Guerra guaraníca (The Guarani War)* Luis Carlos Tau Golin²⁵ affirms the attempt to completely erase the traces of an indigenous presence.

As in Paris, the changes in the city's landscape are designed to accommodate the transformations arising from the capitalist system of production and technological development; the enlargement of streets and pavements, demolition of old buildings to make way for new, more modern ones, more in line with the new way of life.

Some of the first elements of the city to disappear were fountains. They were demolished or covered over to make way for the concrete of skyscrapers and viaducts. However, the many chaotic transformations (the growth of Sao Paulo was very fast and disorderly from the 1950s) ended up leaving vestiges in their wake, vestiges of destruction. Benjamin notes: “Because it is only today, when the pickaxe threatens them, that they become effectively sanctuaries of a cult of the ephemeral, which become the phantom landscape of a cult of pleasures and professions cursed, incomprehensible yesterday, and that the future will never know.”²⁶

²² K. Till, “Reply, Trauma, Citizenship and Ethnographic Responsibility”, *Political Geography*, 2012, 31, pp. 22–23.

²³ D. Lacapra, op. cit., p. 28.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 28 ff.

²⁵ He narrates in his book how indigenous troops from the region of Sete Povos das Missões (in the south of Brazil), supported by Jesuit priests, blocked the advance of Portuguese and Spanish missions that had the function of redesigning the borders between the two countries after the signing of the Treaty of Madrid. The rebellious natives resisted from 1754 to 1756, when they were defeated by the troops of Portugal and Spain.

²⁶ W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 140; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 87.



Fig. 1. Pateo do Collegio today.

Source: "Pateo do Collegio", [online]

<https://www.pateodocollegio.com.br/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 2. Borba Gato statue in the 1960s.

Source: "Monumento de Borba Gato", [online]

<http://www.saopauloantiga.com.br/borba-gato/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 3. "Borba Gato" statue today.

Source: "Monumento de Borba Gato", [online]
<http://www.saopauloantiga.com.br/borba-gato/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 4. Monument of *Bandeiras*, dubbed "Push-Push" by Paulistanos.

Photo by Lucas Salles, 2008. Source: "Monumento às Bandeiras",
[online] <http://parqueibirapuera.org/areas-externas-do-parque-ibirapuera/monumento-as-bandeiras/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 5. Cantino's Planisphere (circa 1502), showing the meridian of Tordesillas and the result of the voyages of Vasco da Gama to India and those of Colombo to Central America, and of Gaspar Corte Real to Terra Nova and Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil.

Source: Estense Library, Modena.



Fig. 6. The Tordesilhas Treaty's line on the current map of Brazil.

Source: "Mapas do Tratado de Tordesilhas", [online] <http://estudosavancadosinterdisciplinares.blogspot.com.br/2015/02/mapas-do-tratado-de-tordesilhas.html> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 7. The Borba Gato statue sprayed on 30.09.2017.

Source: “SP: monumento às Bandeiras, Borba Gato e Secretaria da Educação são pichados”, [online] <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2016/09/30/monumento-as-bandeiras-borba-gato-e-secretaria-de-educacao-sao-vandalizados.htm> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 8. Monument of *Bandeiras* sprayed with paint on 30.09.2017.

Photo by Marcelo Gonçalves, Estádio Conteúdo.

Source: “Monumentos amanhecem pichados com tinta colorida em SP”, [online] <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2016/09/monumentos-amanhecem-pichados-com-tinta-colorida-em-sp.html> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 9. Tagging of Bandeiras monument in 2013 in protest against the Proposed Constitutional Amendment 215 concerning the demarcation of indigenous lands. The inscription at the base of the monument reads "Bandeirantes murderers".

Photo by Felipe Rau, Estadão Conteúdo.

Source: "Monumento às Bandeiras é pichado com frase contra PEC 215", [online] <http://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/2013/10/monumento-bandeiras-e-pichado-com-frase-contra-pec-215.html> [accessed: 28.06.2017].



Fig. 10. "A work of art cannot be worth more than a single drop of blood". In this affirmation lies the key to understand the high degree of inventiveness and aesthetic-political value of the Guarani intervention.

Source: "Empurra-empurra! Sobre a morte das estátuas", [online] <http://www.revistaforum.com.br/2013/10/07/empurra-empurra-sobre-a-morte-das-estatuas/> [accessed: 28.06.2017].

This is a quote of Aragon used by Benjamin, which emphasizes the old-fashioned aspect and decadence of the arcade along with the dream that cradled the nineteenth century: that of the happy life provided by technical development applied to the production of goods.

But if Paris during the nineteenth century was the city that cradled the dream,²⁷ São Paulo still lived at that moment with the problems of a newly independent colony in a country that still dreamed of becoming the epitome of imperial culture. Traces of this history remain in the city, but not necessarily in the buildings and pavements, nor in catacombs as in Paris, but at the level of concealment and effort to worship the forgetfulness of the violence with which Brazilian history was created, along with another history that seeks to permeate the gaps and possible spaces.

The monuments were built in São Paulo in order to remind us of a certain past, we are going to speak here of the monument to the Bandeirante-pioneer Borba Gato²⁸ in the neighborhood of Santo Amaro and the *Bandeiras*²⁹ Monument in Ibirapuera Park, and to make it credible that this past transmitted to the “Paulistas”³⁰ the legacy of being a pioneer and entrepreneur. But they make us forget that the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* were brutal and violent men who left the township for the interior of the country, enslaving indigenous people and devastating regions in search of gold and precious stones. The statue of Borba Gato first came under construction in 1957, and was completed six years later in 1963. The work’s architect was the sculptor Júlio Guerra, a São Paulo plastic artist whose work is widespread, notably in the neighborhood of Santo Amaro. At the time of the artist’s birth in 1912, Santo Amaro was still an independent municipality, neighboring the City of São Paulo. The Monument to the *Bandeiras*, located in Armando Salles de Oliveira Square, in front of Ibirapuera Park and the Legislative Assembly, is a work of the sculptor Victor Brecheret in homage to the Bandeirantes-pioneers of São Paulo. It was installed in 1954, facing the park, in commemoration of the 400 year jubilee of São Paulo. The work made of blocks of granite is 50 meters long and 16 meters high.

In the Paris of the nineteenth century the arcades are like thresholds, portals that give entrance, and by passing through them one can perceive the difference in attitude of the people, as though if they were about to make

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ See Fig. 2 and 3.

²⁹ See Fig. 4.

³⁰ The people who are born in the province of São Paulo are known as Paulistas, and those born in the city of São Paulo are “paulistanos”.

a decision.³¹ What protected the thresholds of the arcades were machines: “weighing machines, slot machines, the mechanical fortune teller,”³² the modern version of “know thyself” as if these places corresponded to the Greek oracles. This might suggest that even when arriving at the city with an imperious force, the transformations were imposed on a past that remained, even though it was veiled by new forms.

But in confrontation with the monuments and constructions of São Paulo, nothing gives us such an experience. Everything is hard and rigid as concrete just like the monuments, which glorify a past of expropriation, plunder, and violence. On the other hand, a past covered by streets and monuments is a past that loses its voice and form: the voices of indigenous people, silenced by religious preaching, and its past, transmitted orally from generation to generation, is almost lost in the middle of the concrete forest.

In a quotation from the Conferences of the Library of Warburg on arches and triumphal arches, Benjamin comments on the location of the Arch of Scipio in Rome, by saying that its character is “purely monumental,”³³ implying it is of mere cult significance. This statement for Benjamin has a double meaning, since the monumental character has both the function of glorifying and remembering the honored, as well as of serving as a passage or threshold. When crossing the arch, the traveler has the impression of crossing a border. In the monuments of São Paulo, we do not have that aspect. The monumental character here is solely to honor the Bandeirantes-pioneers as heroes.

If Paris is a modern myth for the existence of basements and undergrounds, São Paulo seems to have no mysteries: the discrepancy between the poor and the wealthy, regions reserved for mansions, large office buildings and service companies, shopping malls and the periphery is evident. It suffers all manner of deficiencies: paving, sewerage, health services, public transport, schools.

³¹ W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 142; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 89.

³² Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 141; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 88.

³³ Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., p. 52; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 97.

Memory, history and monuments

Few people know that the Greeks, who invented many arts, invented an art of memory, which like their other arts, was passed on to Rome whence it descended into the European tradition. This art seeks to memorize through a technique of impressing 'places' and 'images' on memory. It has usually been classed as 'mnemotechnics,' which in modern times seems a rather unimportant branch of human activity. [...] Mnemosyne, said the Greeks, is the mother of the Muses; the history and training of this most fundamental and elusive of human powers will plunge us into deep waters.³⁴

Thus, Frances Yates, researcher of the Warburg Institute at the University of London, begins her extensive work on memory. In this context we are able to glimpse where this study leads us; both for the choice of places and images elected to make the connection between past and present, as well as the origin of choices and refusals. According to the author, also mentioned by Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin³⁵ (2012), the art of memory was invented by the poet Simonides de Ceos.³⁶ It is Cicero in *De oratore* who tells the story of the banquet in which Simonides participated. In brief, we reproduce here the account: at the banquet given by the host Scopas, Simonides chanted a poem in honor of both the host and the twins Castor and Pollux. Scopas tells Simonides that he will pay only half of the arranged fee and that the poet should charge the rest to the twins. Later, Simonides receives a message saying that two young men are outside the house wishing to talk to him. During his absence, the house collapses killing all the guests, rendering them unrecognizable. Simonides recalled the exact places they had occupied, so that their relatives were able to identify and bury them. This is how the poet "invented" the art of memory, thus relating the training of this capacity with places and images.

This art held sway for a considerable time but has lost its significance in the modern age. Thinkers like Descartes and Bacon consider the methods of memorizing in the Renaissance, the magical and occult memory of Ramon Llull, as illegitimate, because for them there is no connection "between the emergence of modern science and that mediaeval art, so frantically revived and occultised in the Renaissance."³⁷

Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin, citing the Simonides narrative and referring to Wordsworth's sonnet, which mentions the story of the invention of memory, adds that what stands out in the poem is no longer the technique of recollec-

³⁴ F. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, Routledge, London 1999, p. XI.

³⁵ J.-M. Gagnebin, "O que é imagem dialética", op. cit., pp. 21-34.

³⁶ F. Yates, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 375.

tion, “but something more fundamentally human, namely piety towards the dead, an essential feeling in human and historical memory.”³⁸ This feeling would be linked to the need to give the dead an adequate funeral. The author also notes that the decline of this language-based tradition on memory, as indicated by Frances Yates, springs from the “birth and development of another form of knowledge that substitutes the poetic emphasis by the epistemological and asks about the degree of fidelity that guarantees the memory and the imagination.”³⁹

The important aspect of the concept of memory for Frances Yates is that it expresses the need for remembering to do justice to the dead, but we can also mention that remembering is resistance to forgetfulness. And that a trauma needs to be remembered so that it can be forgotten.⁴⁰

In his *Theses on the Concept of History*, his extensive work on the Arcades of Paris, and yet again in the essays on Baudelaire and Proust, Benjamin discusses another possible relation with the past and with memory. In the theses, history has the privilege of being the discipline that studies and researches the past, but as Benjamin points out, it not only narrates the past as it was, but remembers and interprets it. This is how Benjamin understands the substitution of the historical gaze for the political, an assertion present both in the *Theses* and in his text on “Surrealism.” As Benjamin notes: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.”⁴¹

Here Benjamin emphasizes that remembering and writing history are not spontaneous activities, but contain within them the intention of the writer: the one who writes is the one who articulates the past with the present. In the essay on Surrealism Benjamin recognizes that this avant-garde movement “was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the ‘outmoded.’” They did not see in these objects’ elements for a nostalgic memory, but converted this nostalgia by “blowing up the powerful atmospheric forces” hidden in them. The trick for this to be possible consists in “the substitution of a political for the historical view of the past.”⁴² It is also

³⁸ J.-M. Gagnebin, “O que é imagem dialética”, op. cit., p. 23.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ J.-M. Gagnebin emphasises this relation in her book *Lembrar, escrever, esquecer*, São Paulo, ed. 34 letras, São Paulo 2006.

⁴¹ W. Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, op. cit., p. 695; idem, *Iluminations...*, op. cit., p. 255.

⁴² Both quotations in idem, “Der Surrealismus”, [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. II-1, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 299; idem, *One-*

worth appealing to the *Theses* on three important aspects that will guide our reflection: empathy with the victors, the appropriation of spoils by the victors, and an awakening.

In order to address the concept of appropriation of the spoils and transmitted memory the Simonides narrative outlined above raises one aspect of memory, which is to give the dead a proper funeral, to do justice to the dead and to not let them be forgotten. In the same *Thesis VI* Benjamin affirms that only the materialist historian “will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.”⁴³

In this context it is important to refer to the history of Brazil, more precisely that of São Paulo, a colonial province of Portugal, where the Portuguese arrived in 1500. In *Thesis VIII* Benjamin refers to the historicist method of empathy, which he defines as: “a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, acedia, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly.”⁴⁴

The nature of the feeling of sadness arising from this method is more easily understood when one answers the question: who does the historicist historian empathize with? It is with the victor. It means telling the story as it occurred as if this course was necessary and natural, and that the winner earns the right to win and take everything they can. And they appropriate not only material and riches, but culture and memory too. The story they tell is the only one possible. The theme of awakening is in the *Arcades Project*:

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on the past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill (zero hour). For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.—Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language. 'Awakening.'⁴⁵

way street and other writings, trans. E. Jephcott, K. Shorter, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, London 1978, pp. 229–230.

⁴³ Idem, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, op. cit., p. 695; idem, *Iluminations...*, op. cit., p. 255.

⁴⁴ Idem, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”, op. cit., p. 697; idem, *Iluminations...*, op. cit., p. 257.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Das Passagen-Werk*, op. cit., pp. 576–577; idem, *The Arcades Project*, op. cit., p. 462.

The awakening alluded to here is that produced by the relation between the past and the present through images that flash in the collective imagination.

As mentioned above, the field of memory studies has expanded recently. This means that our age has become conscious that certain aspects of obtained history require revision, just as the monuments that pay homage to the past must be redefined.

Some reflections on history and monuments: to whom do they pay homage?

In a text entitled "Literary History and the Study of Literature"⁴⁶ (1931) Benjamin presents his conception of history emphasizing, as he would again in the *Theses on the concept of history*, the linear aspect of the histories of the sciences, as if each of them had an autonomous development, contained therein:

Scholars attempt again and again to present the history of individual disciplines in terms of one self-contained development. They like to speak of "autonomous disciplines." And even though this formulation initially refers only to the conceptual system of individual disciplines, the idea of autonomy easily spills over into the historical domain. It then leads to the attempt to portray the history of scholarship as an independent, separate process set apart from overall political and intellectual developments. If, as is maintained in what follows, literary history is in the depths of a crisis, this crisis must be seen as part of a much broader one. Literary history is not only a discipline in its own right; in its development, it is also a moment of history in general.⁴⁷

The text deals with the history of literature, but can be applied to every narrative that is intended to be taken separately from history in general. But, as we have seen before, this story typically is the story created and told by men in the same manner as the culture of the past and the past itself is appropriated by the present. To proceed to this appropriation the "victors" use the images of the past in their favor, and with them write a history most favorable to themselves.

⁴⁶ Idem, "Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft", [in:] *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. III-1, Hrsg. R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 283; idem, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, Part 2: 1931–1934, eds. M. W. Jennings, G. Smith, H. Eiland, Belknap Press, 2005.

⁴⁷ Idem, "Literaturgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft", op. cit., p. 459.

The monuments referred to above (Fig. 2, 3 and 4) were as we have said, erected in homage to the *Bandeirantes-pioneers*. They participated in expeditions called *Entradas* and *Bandeiras*, which were organized to explore the interior of the territory of the Portuguese colony in the 16th century in search for mineral wealth such as gold, silver, and precious stones as well as for hunting animals, and indigenous peoples for slavery.

They began in 1504, shortly after the “discovery” of the South American continent. The *Entradas* expeditions declined in the early seventeenth century with the emergence of the first *Bandeiras* expeditions from the townships of São Vicente and São Paulo. The first *Bandeiras* expeditions took the form of pursuing and capturing Indians in order to sell them as slaves to sugar producers in the Northeast. Their main target were Jesuit missions, where a large number of the indigenous population lived. This was also the cause of conflicts between the Jesuits and *Bandeirantes-pioneers*. In the 1640s the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* expelled the Jesuits from São Paulo. The decline of the *Bandeiras* came with the replacement of the Indians by African slaves. The *Bandeirantes-pioneers* also encroached beyond the frontier of the treaty of Tordesillas⁴⁸ that divided the land of the continent between Portugal and Spain (Fig. 5 and 6), which resulted in an expansion of the territory of what would later be Brazil. The stories of the expeditions of the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* to unknown territories gave rise to epic narratives, and these men were praised as heroes and regarded as valiant men, who forged the character of the inhabitants of São Paulo, a tireless and hard-working people. Carlos Berriel, in an interview for the newspaper of the University of Campinas⁴⁹ states that what “installs the *Bandeirantes-pioneers* as builders of Brazil is part of a speech presiding over the year 1922.”⁵⁰ It is a later construc-

⁴⁸ The Treaty of Tordesillas was an agreement signed on June 4th 1494 between Portugal and Spain. It earned this name because it was signed in the Spanish city of Tordesillas. It aimed to resolve the territorial conflicts related to the lands discovered in the end of the fifteenth century. According to the Treaty of Tordesillas, an imaginary line running 370 leagues north from Cape Verde would serve as a reference for the division of land between Portugal and Spain. The lands west of this line were ceded to Spain, while the lands to the east belonged to Portugal. This treaty ceased to exist only in 1750, with the signing of the Treaty of Madrid, where the Portuguese and Spanish crowns established new territorial divisional boundaries for their colonies in South America. This agreement was intended to put an end to the disputes between the two countries, since the Treaty of Tordesillas had been respected by neither party.

⁴⁹ A public University in a city of the province of São Paulo.

⁵⁰ C. Berriel, “A origem da ‘superioridade racial’ dos Paulistas”, [online] <http://www.geledes.org.br/carlos-berriel-a-origem-da-superioridade-racial-dos-paulistas/#axzz2bHaiTYMT> [accessed 24.06.2017].

tion made by the São Paulo coffee producing bourgeoisie that aims to glorify the Paulista culture and justify a given ideology.⁵¹ Thus the people of São Paulo become heir to those men considered heroes. While reality is different, these monuments may tell another version of history.

On the morning of the 30th of September 2016, the two aforementioned monuments emerged daubed (Fig. 7 and 8) with pink, green and yellow ink. The news in the media was announced briefly and with some amazement, followed by comments such as “the reason for such an attitude is unknown.” In social media, blogs and web pages, it was attributed to leftists, or vandals (words that are synonymous for some), disdaining the story itself. Shortly later the action was effected by a debate between the candidates for São Paulo city hall, broadcast by a television network, which mentioned the problem of graffiti, tagging and vandalism. The *Bandeiras* Monument had been tagged previously (Fig. 9 and 10) in 2013 when the National Congress proposed the Amendment to the Constitution (PEC), 215, the theme of which was the demarcation of indigenous lands.

Many of the complaints against these political actions and those who considered them vandalism forget that such monuments were erected to remind us of only one aspect of history. As Carla Damião wrote:

Thinking of the colonial past of any country, for instance, and some art movements against the memory of the oppressive-colonizer, whose identity is displayed in many national monuments as a result of the union of art and politics, it is possible to see an explicit counter action on the verge of raging vandalism. There are those who adopt anti-monumental strategies which can run contrary to the principles of traditional monuments, or those who interfere with a specific existing monument and the values it represents.⁵²

The events on the 30th of September 2016, those of 2013, and the attack on the clocks in 2000 are not just “coincidences.” On the contrary, when we consider the events of 2000 and 2013, it becomes clear that the motifs of the interventions are not vandalism or inconsistent left-wing attitudes. The reason for the interventions in the monuments, mainly in Victor Brecheret’s work, a landmark of the city, was not only to express the claim of freedom for graffiti and tagging, but was also a political manifestation against the homage paid to the pioneers of the colonization. This monument, as we have said, represents the *Bandeirantes*-pioneers, and is associated with the pro-

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² C. M. Damião, “Memory, Truth and Monuments”, Oral presentation at the London Forum of Aesthetics, supported by the British Society of Aesthetics in 07/11/2016.

gress of the country and the expansion of Brazilian territory. Those who defend the monument do so because they associate it with progress and the modernist homage accorded to the city of São Paulo. Marcos Tupã, coordinator of the Guarani Iyurupá commission, says that for the indigenous people, the monuments are offensive. The Bandeirantes are not heroes, he says. The intervention made by the Indians in the monument aimed to draw attention to the continuance of maltreatment undergone at the hands of the large landowners. Renato Cymbalista considers that the subject is complex and that it is necessary to discuss the meaning of the monument with society as a whole. Luis Carlos Tau Golin, as referred to before, denounces the systematic destruction of documents, maps, and ceramic pieces that prove the existence of the indigenous people in south Brazil.⁵³

The artist Guto Lacaz says that if we were to take down all the monuments that bear witness to the cruelty of history there would be none left standing. This statement leads to the question of counter-monuments,⁵⁴ which would be works made to remember death and destruction, and therefore have nothing monumental and cultic; they indicate the absence of what has been destroyed. It would be necessary to dig⁵⁵ deep to find the past of those peoples who had their history interrupted and were prevented from transmitting it.

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⁵⁴ J. Young, *op. cit.*

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