

# Deviation gestures: an aesthetic discussion on inhabiting the city

*Gestos do desvio: uma discussão estética sobre o habitar a cidade*

*Gestos de desvío: una discusión estética sobre habitar la ciudad*

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## Abstract

Taking the present moment as a period of transformation in social, existential compositions and, consequently, transformations in the desires to constitute cities, this article proposes to make a theoretical construction of what are the gestures of deviation and how they can announce new city conformations through the body of the people who inhabit these spaces. Thus, it is intended to stabilize an understanding of what the gestures worked here would be, using contributions from philosopher Giorgio Agamben and philosopher Barbara Formis, especially when she deals with the issue of ordinary gesture. In addition, it will also seek a stabilization of what is understood by deviation, still in the philosophical field, taking authors such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and their reflections on how a society can conform. These concepts are approximated from the field of urban through an attempt to composition of nebulae, according to Margareth da Silva Pereira, because it is understood possibilities of interlacing, but always admitting a certain instability and movement. Thus, by understanding the gestures of deviation present in the city as an enunciation of the desire for ways to live, we arrive at the identification of two possible regimes of deviation in social real related to the understanding of macropolitics and micropolitics.

**Keywords:** Gestures; Deviation; Affection; City; Desire.

## Resumo

Ao tomar o momento atual como um período de transformação nas composições sociais, existenciais e, conseqüentemente, transformações nos desejos para se constituir cidades, este artigo se propõe a fazer uma construção teórica do que são os gestos do desvio e como eles podem anunciar novas conformações de cidade através do corpo das pessoas que habitam esses espaços. Dessa forma, pretende-se estabilizar um entendimento do que seriam os gestos aqui trabalhados, ao utilizar contribuições do filósofo Giorgio Agamben e da filósofa Barbara Formis, principalmente quando ela trata sobre a questão do gesto ordinário. Além disso, também se buscará uma estabilização do que se entende por desvio, ainda no campo filosófico, ao tomar autores como Gilles Deleuze e Félix Guattari e suas reflexões sobre como uma sociedade pode se conformar. Esses conceitos são aproximados do campo do urbano através de uma tentativa de composição de nebulosas, nos termos de Margareth da Silva Pereira, pois compreendem-se possibilidades de entrelaçamentos, porém sempre admitindo uma certa instabilidade e movimento. Assim, ao entender os gestos do desvio presentes na cidade como uma enunciação do desejo dos modos de habitar, chega-se à identificação de dois regimes possíveis de desvio no real social relacionados ao entendimento de macropolítica e micropolítica.

**Palavras-Chave:** Gesto; Desvio; Afeto; Cidade; Desejo.

## Resumen

Al tomar el momento actual como un período de transformación en las composiciones sociales, existenciales y, consecuentemente, transformaciones en los deseos para constituirse ciudades, este artículo se propone hacer una construcción teórica de lo que son los gestos del desvío y cómo pueden anunciar nuevas conformaciones de ciudad a través del cuerpo de las personas que habitan estos espacios. De esta manera, pretendemos estabilizar una comprensión de cuáles serían los gestos aquí trabajados, utilizando aportes del filósofo Giorgio Agamben y de la filósofa Barbara Formis, principalmente cuando trata la cuestión del gesto ordinario. Además, también buscaremos estabilizar lo que se entiende como desviación, todavía en el ámbito filosófico, tomando autores como Gilles Deleuze y Félix Guattari y sus reflexiones sobre cómo una sociedad puede conformarse. Estos conceptos se acercan al campo urbano a través de un intento de componer nebulosas, en los términos de Margareth da Silva Pereira, pues se entienden posibilidades de entrelazamiento, pero siempre admitiendo cierta inestabilidad y movimiento. Así, al entender los gestos de desviación presentes en la ciudad como enunciación del deseo de modos de vida, llegamos a la identificación de dos posibles regímenes de desviación en el ámbito social relacionados con la comprensión de la macropolítica y la micropolítica.

**Palabras clave:** Gestos; Desviación; Afecto; Ciudad; Deseo.

## 1 A becoming issue: gestures as enunciation

a cidade está no homem  
quase como a árvore voa  
no pássaro que a deixa

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the city's in the man  
the way a tree flies  
in the bird that leaves it

Ferreira Gullar, *Poema sujo*, 2016; 2015 [1976].

The reflection on the relationship between the city and the bodies that inhabit it is a theme of curiosity and interest for various authors, fields of knowledge, and approaches. Such a complex and broad relationship deserves this diversity of perspectives, which are never exhaustive of all its nuances. The way in which the city inhabits the subject and constitutes them in their various forms of existence is a process of constant construction and transformation. Therefore, this article seeks to think about and – more importantly – intertwine some questions and musings to begin to unveil yet another way of looking at this intimate and intrinsic relationship, which speaks so much about the ontological constitution of the subject.

Several authors have explored the aspects and effects of the relationship between the body and the city from different points of view. Among them is sociologist Richard Sennett, who, in his book *Carne e Pedra [Flesh and Stone]* (2008), explores the public space of cities and its relationship with the body. For example, he shows how in the 1970s in Greenwich Village, New York, Greek, Jewish, and Italian families, drug users, dealers, musicians, and homeless people coexisted. In a city built from a blank slate with uniform blocks, distinct bodies intersected in the same spaces. However, for Sennett (2008, p. 289), this “agora only exists in appearance,”<sup>1</sup> because modern individualism silenced the streets, does not welcome differences, and simply does not see the other.

The universalist perspective in Sennett’s approach causes him to overlook the subtleties of everyday life, which reveal streets and bodies that do not remain silent; on the contrary, they demand, performatively, recognition of their existence and their diversity. Being in the city and expressing all of one’s power to exist puts in motion and displaces many consolidated structures. For example, women performing acts of power within the job market and political decisions, LGBTQIA+ people who, through their bodies, provoke changes in social formations, and Black people occupying spaces that were once inaccessible to them. The streets are not silent; alterities are in constant conflict due to a struggle for visibility and the recognition of desires.

Another author who discusses the intrinsic relationship between the body and the city is architect and urban planner Lúcia Leitão (2014). Leitão examines why the logic behind the production of Brazilian cities fosters a city focused on private space. Drawing from Gilberto Freyre’s work, the architect shows the origins of this problem, which can be navigated through questions about the corporeality of the city’s inhabitants. According to Leitão, the beginning of the development of Brazilian cities represented a loss of power and control for the sugarcane plantation owners because anonymity and collectivity are characteristic

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<sup>1</sup> The author has translated this and all subsequent non-English citations.

of urban life, “in many ways incompatible with the interests of the patriarchal masters of colonial Brazil” (Leitão, 2014, p. 78). In other words, being in the city would signify, in some way, greater freedom for bodies, particularly women, free workers, and former slaves, as they would be outside the visual control of the plantation master. However, the customs and power still concentrated in the hands of the plantation owners were enough to construct an idea of the street as something disreputable and frightening for women and children, meant only for men. Even today, some aspects of these ideas still inhabit the imaginations of many city dwellers in Brazil, especially those from wealthier classes, which leads to architectural projects focused on private space that ignore the street.

In *Dysphoria Mundi*, philosopher Paul B. Preciado (2022) discusses the issue of subject formation by questioning the present world and pointing to the process of deep – and necessary – change it is undergoing. After all, even a pandemic recently stopped the world. Therefore, according to the philosopher, the moment “is no longer about knowing who we are, but what we are going to become” (Preciado, 2022, p. 38). In this article, this uncertainty about becoming is viewed through the body and, more precisely, through the deviant gestures performed by it. For through the movements executed by the gestures of deviation, it may be possible to trace the desire for construction and the formation of a new way of inhabiting, of making the city. Although this issue is still in a theoretical reflection phase, some conceptual threads are already signaling the tone of this emerging perspective, especially by beginning, stabilizing, and articulating the transversal concepts for this discussion: gesture, deviation, and city.

When reflecting on what a gesture is, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1991) begins with a reflection on the relationship of indiscernibility, meaning elements present in its constitution that may risk becoming indistinguishable, and also relates the gesture to art. Thus, for Agamben, the gesture is simultaneously “power and action, naturalness and artificiality, contingency and necessity” (Agamben, 1991, p. 33). Agamben closely ties all this to theater and dance. Philosopher Barbara Formis (2010), when discussing ordinary gestures – those present in daily life but without extraordinary conditions – continues Agamben’s reflection on indiscernibility to think about an aesthetics of ordinary life, contrasting – or even intertwining – ordinary gestures with artistic gestures. One inhabits the other, and in this way, they can be considered aesthetic phenomena that affect the subject or that result from this affectation within a certain regime, which composes this indiscernibility.

To think about an aesthetic process of affectation in this text is to adopt the same understanding brought by Preciado (2022), who says he is inspired by two other scholars: Félix Guattari and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. In this way, Preciado understands aesthetics as

[...] a technology of consciousness production culturally constructed by both human and non-human communities. Aesthetics is, therefore, a shared sensory mode, but also a subjective consciousness capable of decoding and understanding it. (Preciado, 2022, p. 43).

When thinking about the aesthetic constitution of cities and the bodies that inhabit them and relating this reflection to the initial question posed by Preciado – what will we become? – this article seeks to theoretically understand the theoretical interconnections that help build an understanding of how the deviant gestures found in cities indicate what we will become, but more importantly, how they can indicate what the desired cities for these bodies are and the new world compositions that begin to be sketched by these gestures.

As a way to look at these deviant gestures present in the city, the article initially draws on an understanding of some ways to compose a society according to philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1996). When the philosophers work on the understanding of micropolitics and macropolitics as compositions of politics that coexist and are part of everyday life, they sketch the possibility of perceiving how some forms of existence – or appearance – happen in a collective, material, and visible field, while others occur in the subjective and affective realm. This perspective on politics from Deleuze and Guattari provided an initial understanding of how deviation can also manifest in society and consequently in gestures present in cities. Thus, two forms of deviation were identified. One, constructed collectively – through alliances – and that establishes identity groups opposed to a certain norm, a more macropolitical understanding. The other type of deviation operates in the micropolitical field and involves desires and flows. These are the everyday – ordinary – gestures, which act in the social real in a more subtle way but are no less intense.

To connect these notions of gestures and deviation and, more precisely, the deviant gestures in the city, another notion was used that functions as a way of thinking, in which deviation, what normally escapes, and instability are considered in the process of constructing a thought: nebulas. Architect and urban planner Margareth da Silva Pereira (2018) uses the notion of the nebula as a form of thinking that embraces twilight, but not as something obscure, rather as full of possibilities for connection and movement, something in constant transformation. Therefore, to think about this theoretical investigation into what the deviant gestures in the city might be, adopting a deviant way of thinking seems to be the path to follow.

Thus, this article is structured in three main parts. The first tries to establish what gestures are for this discussion, the second part does the same with the concept of deviation, seeking to understand what deviation is and how it functions. Additionally, two possible forms of appearance for deviant gestures in daily life will be pointed out as an initial stage of identifying and visualizing these gestures. Then – in a final gesture in the moment – it seeks to stabilize some understandings and notions to comprehend how the deviant gestures unfolding in cities can help reveal what the desired city formations of the subjects inhabiting them might be. This is a way to begin perceiving how these deviant gestures can play a role in unveiling the urban spaces desired by their inhabitants.

## **2 The urban gestures: a seam between body and city**

In an attempt to reflect on what constitutes a gesture – or at least stabilize some understanding – we begin with a philosophical reflection primarily based in the field of aesthetics, that is, in the field of the sharing of sensitive experiences (Rancière, 2009) in the world and, more precisely, the experiences and affections shared in cities. Thus, some connections about what can be considered a gesture will be made: the artistic gesture and the ordinary gesture; the understanding of gesture as action; and its intimate relationship with the city as a fundamental trait for its constitution, always considering gestures as something indiscernible, located in the in-between.

As a first step towards understanding what a gesture is, it is already possible to establish it as an action performed by the body through bodily movements. From there, it is necessary to start adding layers to this notion, which will be responsible for complicating and unveiling its true potential as an element to think about the city. The philosopher Barbara

Formis (2010) addresses the issue of gesture by investigating an aesthetics of ordinary life and does so by thinking about the relationship between the artistic gesture and what she calls the ordinary gesture. For her, these two regimes of gesture are composed of a technical component and a creative component: “the artifice of the gesture resides in the paradox of complicity between freedom and learning” (Formis, 2010, p. 20).

The city becomes, in this context, a field of possibilities for movements. Through its curves, straight lines, shadows, and obstacles, the body needs to learn to develop its possible and necessary gestures to inhabit – to read – this place, using its creative component, but also the techniques already incorporated from everyday life. Each city, or even each neighborhood, has its specific text available for reading by its inhabitants. For example, “In Rome, Roman phrases will form; in Paris, Parisian phrases, with agility or clumsiness, always, however, within the fabric, like an uncertain and secret seam” (Bailly, 2021, p. 47). Furthermore, in this relationship between body and city, one must be attentive, because “our ordinary gestures are usually easy: they allow us to manipulate the world as long as we forget that the world, in turn, modifies our bodies” (Formis, 2010, p. 19), that is, a dichotomous relationship, where one acts upon the other.

However, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that inhabiting the same place, having common gestures, does not imply the existence of a social cohesion constituted by spatial imposition. Otherness will always be present and must be; the issue is more about finding a way to inhabit spaces where affection can unfold in such a way that the freedom and learning inherent in the gesture do not erase or control the existence of the other. The urban planner Margareth da Silva Pereira relates Erwin Panofsky’s thinking with Filippo Brunelleschi’s studies to highlight a speaking urbanism, that is, a rhetoric of the city that creates possibilities of affection for the body, by making it clear that everything is possibilities and choices, not impositions:

Panofsky reminds us that the first Renaissance, with Pico della Mirandola, for example, discovered that “being situated at the center of the universe as a man is to be increasingly confronted with the necessity amidst the countless possible orientations.” The human conditions and the “configurations” social and historical that their gestures engender could not, therefore, “be natural:” they were decisions, choices, judgments. The most evident manifestation of this new power that man claims for himself seems to have been given by a Florentine, a scholar precisely of the ruins of Rome, Brunelleschi. With him, the language of visible things and the rhetoric of objects and sites would begin to gain clarity. (Pereira, 2000, p. 101).

Thus, by taking the city as this space of reading possibilities that sediment gestures in the body, its creative and technical components have in this space a kind of book, which can be read and interacted with. For example, the avant-garde artists of the late last century, such as Allan Kaprow (1927-2006), Paulo Bruscky (1949), and the Judson Dance Group (1962-1964), made this reading of the city to develop their works based on a reflection of ordinary gestures. An appropriation and manipulation of gesture between the ordinary and the artistic to create possibilities for the de-automatization of life. This reading is also done by the ordinary population, which produces its gestures to enable its way of existing in the world.

Artistic and ordinary gestures coexist and have many similarities between them, but the important thing is to insist on their difference, especially to stabilize the gesture that is of more interest here: the ordinary gesture. The two are often treated together in theoretical

and artistic reflections, perhaps even due to the avant-garde artists' attempt to transcend the boundary between art and life, or because it serves as a facilitating mechanism in the process of creating bridges to give an aesthetic look to these actions. However, they are distinct and need to be understood as such. From this perspective, Formis (2010) addresses these gestures from an idea of indiscernibility, just as Agamben (1991) does, in which the existence of a tension of otherness is admitted even in the apparent similarity.

The question of indiscernibility is crucial for this reflection, not only for the construction of a notion of what a gesture is, but primarily for the relationship built with the field of aesthetics and its affects. Biting an apple while walking down the street is not the same as biting an apple during a performance. Despite the similar bodily movements, the regime in which they are performed is distinct, and thinking about an aesthetics of ordinary life is building a bridge capable of granting to the ordinary the qualities already recognized in the work of art. From this analogy between the two, it is possible to identify their differences and connections in order to think about an aesthetics of ordinary life.

Aesthetics ultimately establishes a relationship of indiscernibility between the world of art and the world of life. Schematically: the ordinary gesture is artificial even though it seems natural, while the artistic gesture is artificial and asserts itself as such. (Formis, 2010, p. 44).

Giorgio Agamben (1991) also brings up the issue of indiscernibility in the gesture when reflecting on its constitution and sometimes relates it to the artistic gesture. Even though Agamben does not directly use the dichotomy between artistic gesture and ordinary gesture, he points to some elements that are indiscernible in the constitution of a gesture and that risk becoming indistinguishable.

The use of the word “ordinary” here, inspired by Formis’ reading, comes from the need to use a term that expresses what happens in the street in the most common way possible. The philosopher Michel de Certeau, in his book *A Invenção do Cotidiano [The Practice of Everyday Life]* (2014), constructs what would be an everyday life and admits in its spectrum the existence of the extraordinary. However, just as used by Formis (2010), thinking here about the ordinary gesture and an aesthetics of ordinary life is to observe life in cities from a perspective focused on the experience of collectivity, with all its multiplicity and individuality, a common.

Another dimension of gesture is the idea of indivisibility, after all, the movement performed by the body is indivisible, and the search for its division is a search for unity and, consequently, a product that can be quantified. Even if one tries to divide the gesture, the only place one will arrive at is microgestures, which are also indivisible. This issue has already been debated in the field of art, especially in the difficulty of transforming performative works into artifacts. Thus, one arrives at the difficulty of fixing the gesture in an image, since it is a continuous and indivisible movement. Agamben (1991) points to a possible path through the image-movement thought by philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1998). Thinking about the gesture from the understanding of the image-movement is trying to cast a look at its totality, even if they are only fragments.

Deleuze (1998), when thinking about his image-movements, is also thinking about the indivisible:

The space traveled is divisible, and even infinitely divisible, while the movement is indivisible, or does not divide without changing nature with each division. This already presupposes a more complex idea: the spaces traveled all belong to

the same homogeneous space, while movements are heterogeneous, irreducible to each other. (Deleuze, 1998, p. 9).

According to Agamben (1991), Deleuze shifted rigidity and intensified the status of the image in modernity, for now, it is not necessary to say that the image itself is the issue, but rather the gestures expressed by it. Furthermore, according to Agamben, cinema becomes the primary medium responsible for redirecting images into gestures. An example is the play *Nacht und Träume* (Figure 1), written by the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett in 1982, in which this redirection from image to gesture is implicitly given: “It is a dream of a gesture. Introducing the element of awakening into this dream is the task of the filmmaker” (Agamben, 1991, p. 34).

**Figure 1:** Frame from *Nacht und Träume*, written and directed by Samuel Beckett.



Source: Nacht [...] (1983).

Thus, one can objectively arrive – or at least approximately, even if simplistically – at an understanding of the gesture as an action performed through the body’s movements, which is located between acting and doing, and which is indivisible. But as Agamben defines it, it is a form of language: “The essential ‘mutism’ of cinema (which has nothing to do with the presence or absence of a soundtrack), just like the silence of philosophy, is an exposition of being-in-language of man: pure gesturality” (Agamben, 1991, p. 36), it is showing what can be said. The gesture taken here is movement, an action that shows what is desired and – perhaps because of that – transforms everyday life, even though in its composition and shaping it inhabits a place of the indiscernible. Perhaps it is possible to say that this indiscernible that is inhabited are the nebulous, unstable, ever-changing elements, but at the same time dense with information.

In this way, the text moves towards a reflection on what the deviation being discussed here is, and how these gestures of deviation may present themselves. Thinking about the gestures of deviation is to believe that through them, clues are left in the city about the

desires existing within these bodies, the desire for new configurations of cities, desiring cities. Looking at the gestures of deviation in the city is also understanding what changes are necessary, but also what permanencies are necessary. All of this through the body and by the body.

### 3 Questions about the detour: to dwell in it and move through it

Thinking about what the detour is – and more precisely about the gestures of the detour – can be understood as a tactical way of thinking about the future: imagining what we want to become. And beginning this reflection by looking at the clouds seems auspicious for this trajectory that takes shape, with all its “configurations, movement, ephemerality, instability, clashes, frictions, and sharing” (Pereira, 2018, p. 250). This thinking-through-nebulas takes the detour as something inescapable, perhaps even the true core of the matter – both for its ability to unsettle fixed truths and for its potential to transform contexts through new ways of seeing. The gestures of the detour addressed here are not a mere figure of speech for a mode of constructing thought. The gaze is, first and foremost, directed at the bodies present in the everyday life of the city – bodies that cross paths, bump into each other, and take detours. Nevertheless, there are homologous relations to be drawn between ways of thinking and the movements of bodies through the city, and it is from this encounter that nebulas are appropriated. After all, the body is a social and cultural construction, and consequently, its gestures are also traversed by the possibilities of constructing the thought that inhabits the subject.

When Paul B. Preciado approaches the power of the body as a pathway to transformations in contemporary society in *Dysphoria Mundi*, he is precisely referring to the capacity to detour – and, consequently, to create new possibilities:

The political body is not merely a site of insertion or of violent inscription by petro – sex – racial power, but now reveals itself as the place through which a collective mutation may provoke displacements capable, perhaps, of introducing ruptures in the repetitive and deadly system of global capitalist history. (Preciado, 2022, p. 51).

This possibility of creating ruptures and mutations through a shift in the sedimented and repetitive gesture can be related to nebulas, as they precisely allow for this ongoing process of instability – one that is triggered by the addition or re-signification of an element. In this context, that element is understood as a gesture. A deviant gesture, insofar as it is displaced from what is expected and normalized.

Another dimension offered by the way of thinking through nebulas – one that contributes to opening up the question of the detour as a potential for transformation and for shifting situations, as brought forth by Preciado – is the following passage:

Benjamin, just like Hegel, a century before him, criticized a mode of thinking knowledge that insisted on refuting crepuscular, shadowy, twilight zones and detours. In other words, both rejected a form of knowing excessively guided by direct and immediate applicability – which began to impose itself from the late eighteenth century onward – avoiding or veiling the wanderings and hesitations of reflections in the back-and-forth of their questioning, and ultimately denying inconclusive, provisional, and contingent results. (Pereira, 2018, p. 246).

The detour, just like thinking through nebulas, in order to provoke transformation, initially – or perhaps even through several stages and moments of the process – needs to admit this

state of restlessness. A restlessness that arises from the lack of absolute certainty, so dear to the positivist traces that still inhabit contemporary society. However, it is this state of being unsettled, which can also be a misfit, a discomfort, or even nothingness, that drives action through the detour. To move by detouring away from certainties and fall into a world of doubts, which is also a world of possibilities.

Revisiting the idea of the city as a text to be read and unraveled by its inhabitants, through their gestures, the philosopher Michel de Certeau offers an interesting contribution, especially for thinking about the detour. De Certeau adds the dimension of delinquency – perhaps a fragment of this urban text or a way of reading it through its transversalities. In this mode of reading, once again, the detour is highlighted as the enunciation of the new. This also revisits the idea brought forth by Preciado regarding the necessary ruptures and displacements:

What effective changes does this delinquent narrativity produce in a society? In any case, it can be said beforehand that, in terms of space, this delinquency begins with the inscription of the body in the text of order. The opacity of the body in movement – gesturing, walking, enjoying – is what indefinitely organizes a “here” in relation to an “elsewhere,” a “familiarity” in confrontation with a “strangeness.” The spatial narrative is, at its minimal level, a spoken language; that is, a distributive linguistic system of places simultaneously articulated by an “enunciative focalization,” by an act that performs it. (Certeau, 2014, p. 217).

This passage shows how the detour only exists because there is a pattern, a norm, before it. Going further, the gesture of the detour in everyday life – this intimate and personal, yet at the same time collective game between the subject and the city – only occurs after the incorporation of the structures that shape a space. To detour is to have the privilege of an intimate and intrinsic relationship with the inhabited space, to know how to disarticulate it and propose new configurations.

Another dimension in understanding the detour concerns its types of intensity and configuration. The philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1996) discuss the various configurations that can compose a society and how these configurations can stabilize in certain ways. One way these philosophers present the modes in which society conforms is through the understanding of micropolitics and macropolitics. For them, politics can be divided into these two distinct regimes. Macropolitics refers to the visible dimension of politics in social life – for example, major institutions, laws, and governments – while micropolitics is the invisible dimension, the desires that circulate among people; it is a flow, a rhizome.

It is worth drawing attention to some common misconceptions surrounding these notions, largely due to their names, which at first suggest a direct link to scale – as if macropolitics were something larger and independent from micropolitics. However, the two coexist. One would not exist without the other, and both are quite extensive. To demonstrate this intrinsic relationship and how they operate in the social reality, Deleuze and Guattari use the rise of Nazism in Germany as an example. For Hitler to come to power with the support of the majority of the population and act within the realm of consolidated and visible political structures (macropolitics), he needed to act on the subjective – on the desires – of the people, who had to believe and feel represented (a micropolitical process). This same reflection can be applied to contemporary times when considering the rise of totalitarian and fascist regimes, which always seem shocking when discovering their social adherence, fueled with such passion and involvement by their supporters.

Thinking about politics as the coexistence between macropolitics and micropolitics helps reflect on what a detour is and its forms of appearance. To detour can be something done in alliance by a group with common interests that come together, which can provoke a more visible political organization and force (Butler, 2019), or to detour in a solitary or collectively unorganized way – that is, without awareness that this detour is done by many, or without recognizing the power of a detour made by many. These two regimes of the detour can be associated with the macropolitical and micropolitical issues, both regarding their visibility and in the ways they constitute themselves. In this way, we have a first dimension of this inquiry into the detour. It can be performed in an organized and conscious manner or be present in a solitary yet simultaneously collective way in the everyday life of cities.

Using groups that are already widely known to reflect on this issue can be a simpler path to visualize the congruences and divergences with what is being discussed. Among these groups is the Homeless Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto*, MTST), which inhabits a detour and can be initially or probably related to macropolitics (see Figure 2). They act collectively and do not comply with a standard institutionalized law; in fact, they live in a state of conflict, all as an instrument of struggle for the right to housing for workers. However, they have a strong internal organizational structure capable of managing a social movement with national reach in a country as large as Brazil. Possibly, in a few years – ideally – this group will be absorbed by the government, since their political practice involves occupying vacant buildings that have public debt, to house homeless families. Perhaps the government will adopt measures to work together with MTST in public housing policies. In this case, there would be a change in the situation of detour, as happened, for example, with LGBTQIA+ people, who have ceased to be in a situation of illegality in various countries in recent years. Thus, the detour provoked the expected displacement and, for that reason, ceased to exist as such.

**Figure 2:** MTST Land Occupation in Recife, Brasil (2021).



Source: MTST/Publicity.

On the other hand, even within this consolidated group of social movement in a constant state of detour, there are particularities that drive them to make other types of detours in their daily lives. For example, simple and often barely thought-out gestures, such as lying

down on a bench, crossing outside the crosswalk, sitting on the curb (see Figure 3). Exercising and making the effort to coexist with these deviant dimensions ultimately unveils a daily detour that no one escapes in the game of survival. Some people may have more or less willingness – and predisposition – to be deviant; others are forced to be so due to specific living conditions, but all are to some extent, if not nothing moves, shifts, leaves its place, provokes changes, and opens spaces for the new to emerge. The most ordinary – most everyday – gesture, which leaves traces of desires and changes as it passes through cities. This gesture of detour is more fleeting, more subtle, yet as powerful as any other.

**Figure 3:** Documentary series *Homo Urbanos*, by Bêka et Lemoine (2017-2022).



Source: [http://www.bekalemoine.com/homo\\_urbanus.php](http://www.bekalemoine.com/homo_urbanus.php).

To further complexify this reflective inquiry into the detour, it is important to add a new dimension to the discussion: transversality. The Urban Studies Laboratory (leU – PROURB/ UFRJ) produced a collective text on narrating through transversalities (leU *et al.*, 2020a, 2020b). When the leU begins to discuss what it means to narrate through transversality, the first striking fact is the instability of the process. “Narrating through transversality is an act that recognizes translation, transition, the transitory, and transgression as implicit conditions of knowledge” (leU *et al.*, 2020b, p. 461). This text refers to the gestures of the bodies that inhabit the city and, by making a direct reference to Jean-Christophe Bailly (2021), these bodies read the urban phrase and, from this reading, begin – or do simultaneously – to tell their own stories, and the way of narrating them is through transversality. This admits transformation caused by the crossings with detours and allows instability in the existential condition, a necessary condition for the creation and imagination of new ways of existing.

It is the detours, their surrender to doubts, hypotheses, and trials that constitute them step by step as singularity and culture in their transit, between difference and repetition, and in their transgressions, between what is known and unknown, what is remembered and forgotten, between what brushes against them and what enters through their eyes, their pores, shaping them as body, as flesh, as anger, as will, as desire, as limit. (leU *et al.*, 2020b, p. 471).

Narrating through transversality, based on a reading of the urban phrases existing in each city, in each neighborhood, through a gesture, is both the need to practice gestures of detour for a necessary renewal and to resist the everyday, often full of traps.

Another perspective on transversality is brought by the anthropologist Teresa Caldeira (2016), who explores detour and its necessary alliances for enabling diverse forms of

existence from a different viewpoint. Caldeira's research extensively addresses the periphery and social inequality in Brazil. Thus, when reflecting on the notion of transversality, she offers a complex analysis of the relationship between the State and favela residents – people living in irregular conditions, outside the normative, who in some way inhabit a state of detour. When speaking of inhabiting detour, the reference is not only to their houses, often self-built and on occupied land, but also to the way they are employed – many in the informal market – and various other aspects of daily life, such as types of transportation used, access to certain services, and so forth.

For Caldeira (2016), these lives are surrounded by transversalities – that is, a coexistence achieved through a political game between what lies outside the normative and what falls within established standards. One can go further in this reflection, as the author points out how, in this game, the State somewhat flexibilizes itself not only to admit these other existences but also to seek mechanisms to formalize these detours. For example, the City Statute (2001), through the instrument of Special Social Interest Zones (*Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social*, ZEIS), provides mechanisms to regulate these settlements and protect the real estate market.

Figure 4 shows a frame from a film set in Recife, *Amor, Plástico e Barulho* [Love, Plastic, and Noise] by Renata Pinheiro (2015). In the scene, it is possible to observe a group of friends on the beach in Brasília Teimosa, a popular neighborhood in Recife responsible for inspiring the ZEIS instrument. In the middle ground of the image, one can see simpler and irregular constructions; in the background, the presence of the real estate market as a form of corporate threat. A coexistence through transversality – that is, once again, we have an example of a deviant gesture that, when performed with a certain density, imposes a desire. However, it is worth emphasizing once more that the ordinary gestures of detour hold the same power, even if they do not operate within this macropolitical sphere of visibility.

**Figure 4:** Frame from the film *Amor, Plástico e Barulho* (2015), directed by Renata Pinheiro.



Source: Queiroz (2017, p. 88).

Within the context of what has been presented about the gesture, the detour of greatest interest here is the one found in everyday life – micropolitics, flow, the rhizome. Casual detours filled with intensity and desire, enough to move and shift structures that no longer make sense and to reveal new paths for imagining a desiring city – a city where the body

finds pleasure and genuinely wants to inhabit. Reflecting on the different dimensions of detour and its transversality, both in the way stories are told and in the way relationships are formed in order to exist, is essential for deepening the understanding of this gesture, seen here as a path for thinking about the city. The gesture of detouring carries powerful signals, and this brief theoretical inquiry is only the beginning of unveiling that potential – so that, when we turn our gaze to such actions in urban space, they are no longer seen as mere whims or insignificant acts.

#### **4 Conclusion: stabilizing some notions on the gestures of detour**

By taking the gesture as this indistinct yet clearly expressive construction, and the gestures of detour as movements that shift established structures – a displacement of norms – what emerges are new ways of inhabiting and possibly reimagining urban form. In this sense, it may be possible to stabilize an idea, for now, of what the gestures of detour in the city are: a language in which nothing is said but everything is shown – a language of displacement and rupture of consolidated and imposed everyday structures. And through this enunciative action of the detour, new paths, epistemologies, and urban configurations begin to be unveiled.

It has been shown how these gestures of detour can take on distinct regimes of conformation. One of them is their macropolitical composition, which involves well-established and visible social and organizational structures within a society. The other is the regime of micropolitics: a more fluid conformation, a flow, a rhizome, driven by the desires that inhabit the subject. It is worth emphasizing once again that micropolitics is just as intense and transformative as any other kind of detour – or desire.

Understanding these two distinct regimes of detour within a research framework guided by the notion of nebulas offers an opportunity to construct knowledge through the very act of deviating. The transversality that is built and perceived in the interweaving of concepts extends both to the way of thinking and to the examples presented as illustrations of the identified regimes. After all, the ordinary gesture – perhaps not yet captured or still in the process of becoming so – seems to inhabit the detour. This could be observed both in consolidated movements such as the MTST, and in the everyday gestures portrayed in the documentary series *Homo Urbanos* (2017–2022), or in the displacements captured in the film *Amor, Plástico e Barulho* (2015).

Although they do not directly address the theme of detour, these films reveal gestures of detour in everyday life through ordinary scenes. For example, a body that inhabits the periphery of Recife, lives off *brega* music, but does not see itself as peripheral – and therefore complains about being on a beach surrounded by poor people, as in *Amor, Plástico e Barulho*. Or the gestures presented in the documentary series *Homo Urbanos*, which captures humans inhabiting various cities around the world: a man in Naples walking shirtless down the street, a South Korean washing dishes on the sidewalk, a Shanghainese man getting a haircut in the middle of the street. Gestures that provoke estrangement, either due to their genuine oddness within the context from which they are viewed, or due to the bias and prejudice embedded in the gaze cast upon the scene. These films offer representations and records of gestures of detour in their micropolitical form – subtle, yet intense in their unfolding within the everyday life of cities.

Thus, a possible next step in this inquiry into the gestures of detour – and how they reveal paths for reimagining ways of inhabiting – is to visualize and also locate, within these

regimes, their unfolding in specific urban spaces. It is a way to try to perceive how gestures of detour – these ordinary ones – operate in situated ways, since the subject, in their formation and constitution, is shaped by the city they inhabit, with all the intensity of its cultural, social, historical, and spatial dimensions.

Even though everything may still seem somewhat abstract, as it involves a tangle of ideas woven together to compose and stabilize a reflective path, this process – based on stitching bibliographic references – helped to solidify the continuity plans of the research, as well as to connect ideas that previously appeared disconnected or not yet arranged within their nebulas. This theoretical construction effort reveals the power of studying the gestures of detour in the city as elements that unveil an aspiration for the city, since “it is not desire that relies on needs; on the contrary, needs derive from desire: they are counter-produced in the real that desire produces” (Deleuze; Guattari, 2022, p. 44). Thus, the gestures of detour unveil the desires of subjects for the spaces they inhabit – desires that are, in fact, a necessity in social reality.

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