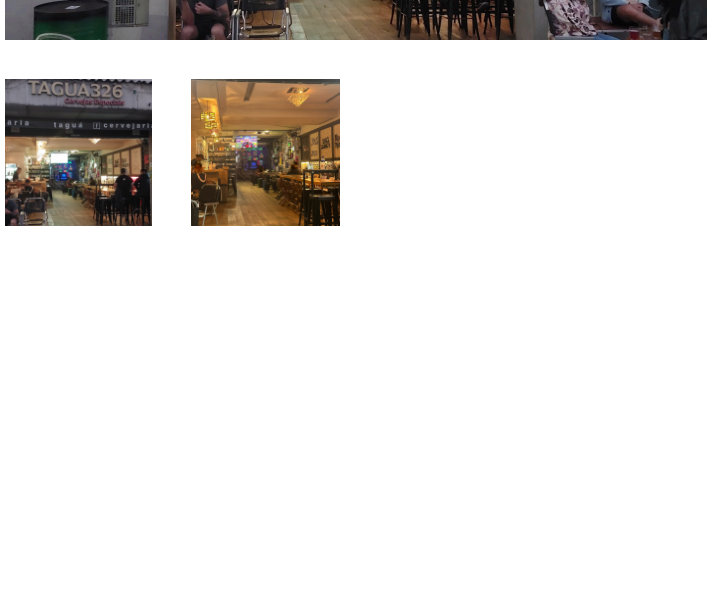




THE LAST ONE: 4 FRIENDS AND 4 SHOTS IN AN (ALLEGEDLY) (UN)ORDINARY FRIDAY

“Would this be my final role^[1] for Real in Brazil?

In the unreal Brazil, in surreal Real?

The fact is that, today, the chef's friend got shot for real

At the corner of bar Taguá

That, by the way, serves you some water

They call it Sabesp's Big Gulp^[2]

and it's free whenever you want it

At first, I must say that I saw nothing

And, at first, I also heard 'nothing'

Because I (still) knew nothing

But, what I heard, was a sequence of shots

Filled with rhythm and that came out of nothing”

[Field note: July 5th, 2024 – The day after “freedom” / The day besides *Liberdade* (freedom)]

It was July 5th and I had arranged to tell my friends the latest news, because I had finally managed to complete the process of contracting my scholarship, after six arduous months of coming-and-going and waiting for life's deadlines (or cycles). Therefore, I was preparing for my departure and in a mixture of anxiety, happiness and nostalgia.

We decided to meet at 7 p.m. and I arrived around 7:15 p.m., as I got late watching the Portuguese team's unfortunate loss at Euro 2024. When I arrived, I bumped into my friend T, who had also been a little late watching the last penalty and he immediately commented “*how unfortunate of João Infelix (João the Unfortunate)*” – in his usually sour and sarcastic tone. T was already drinking and, as a (bitter) *connoisseur* and bohemian fan of craft beers, he had chosen an IPA, while I opted for a Lager, to start off lighter.

T is a history teacher in the municipal school system in the city of São Paulo. He was on recess, celebrating the fact that he could take a short break from school and telling me about some of his recent experiences in the classroom, such as the growing increase in disobedience, disrespect and disinterest on the part of today's students. For those who have teacher friends in Brazil's public (or even private) education system, it's almost inevitable not to discuss this subject, after all, there are more and more constant discussions in society about the recent behavior of young people (or the younger generations) – from apathy and professional (dis)interest to the impacts of constant exposure to social networks and post-pandemic (dis)socialization, among others.

Around 7:40 p.m., our colleague Z arrives and we finally start to catch up on each other's last weeks – like many Brazilians do every Friday (although some may even do it from Monday to Friday or Sunday to Sunday). The act of getting together in a bar and drinking beer for hours while catching up on your colleagues' week(s) is a fairly typical (Porto, 2023; Silva, 1969/2011) and cultural Brazilian socialization, in which you often set a time of arrival and an expectation of departure, but always as something open-ended and not very objective or precise. In fact, the goal is to be imprecise, in which one seeks to have the company of the other for a long time and, taking advantage of this time, have a beer to “wet one's words”.

At the end of our first beers, we decided to get a peach draft beer, on my recommendation, having tasted it a few weeks earlier. This peach draft beer is very similar to a Lipton peach-flavored ice tea, but with a slightly alcoholic taste, where you can barely feel the alcohol even though it has more than 4.5% alcohol content – which led my friends to comment that “*this is criminal*”, using this expression as a slang term, in the sense that it was extremely dangerous and “*should be banned*”, because it goes down too soft and you could get very drunk without realizing it. It was in this trip to the beer taps that I began to get a better sense of the space and atmosphere of Taguá 326 brewery, which is located next to the *São Joaquim* subway station, just after the *Liberdade* station, in the center of *São Paulo*.

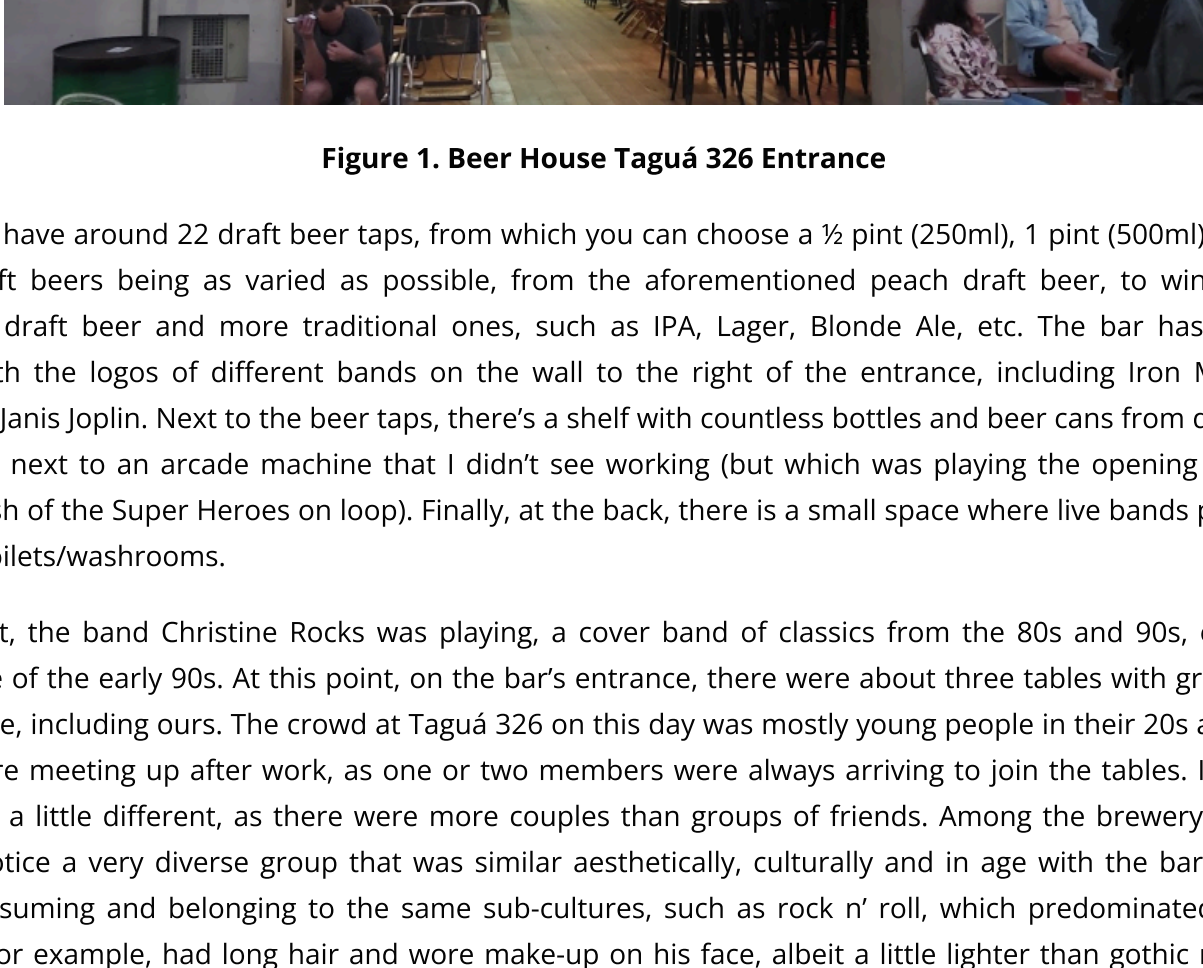


Figure 1. Beer House Taguá 326 Entrance

At Taguá, we have around 22 draft beer taps, from which you can choose a ½ pint (250ml), 1 pint (500ml) or 1 liter jug, with the draft beers being as varied as possible, from the aforementioned peach draft beer, to wine draft beer, Smirnoff ice draft beer and more traditional ones, such as IPA, Lager, Blonde Ale, etc. The bar has a “rock bar” aesthetic, with the logos of different bands on the wall to the right of the entrance, including Iron Maiden, Black Sabbath and Janis Joplin. Next to the beer taps, there's a shelf with countless bottles and beer cans from different parts of the world, next to an arcade machine that I didn't see working (but which was playing the opening of Marvel vs. Capcom: Clash of the Super Heroes on loop). Finally, at the back, there is a small space where live bands perform, right next to the toilets/washrooms.

On that night, the band Christine Rocks was playing, a cover band of classics from the 80s and 90s, especially the grunge scene of the early 90s. At this point, on the bar's entrance, there were about three tables with groups of three or four people, including ours. The crowd at Taguá 326 on this day was mostly young people in their 20s and 30s, most of whom were meeting up after work, as one or two members were always arriving to join the tables. Internally, the dynamic was a little different, as there were more couples than groups of friends. Among the brewery's employees, one could notice a very diverse group that was similar aesthetically, culturally and in age with the bar's public, in a sense of consuming and belonging to the same sub-cultures, such as rock n' roll, which predominated. One of the employees, for example, had long hair and wore make-up on his face, albeit a little lighter than gothic rock make-up itself, a “soft goth” so to speak, despite being dressed in shoes and a vest typical of “social” clothing, which we call “*esporte fino*” (like a “fancy casual” in Brazil, showing elegance but at the same time denoting his musical taste and way of being).

While we were waiting for our friend J to arrive, Z was updating us on his latest encounters with a colleague from work, who works with advertising and with whom he had recently gone on a date. Although they didn't have many interests in common, Z saw this as a positive thing, as it meant that much of what he introduced to her would be new. The two started dating after a few months of flirting and teasing, which culminated in a “direct hint” before a work party. Z, who works as a designer at an advertising agency, commented in a WhatsApp group before the party that “anything goes, except kissing designers”, receiving a sad face emoji 😞 from his intended, who replied with “you can't even kiss advertising people as well”, receiving the same sad face 😞 from my friend Z. As the youngsters would say, it was a match, even if it wasn't on Tinder. Everything was heading for another ordinary day, or in other words, it was just another Friday of “having a drink with friends”. Around 8pm, our friend J arrived and parked across the street. J is also a history teacher and, curiously enough, he's our only friend who owns a car, even though our social circle is made up of people in their 30s. Just like T, the first thing J does when he arrives is comment that he's sad about the end of the school break because soon he is “back to hell”, in reference to the return to school.

As J and T were venting about their daily lives as teachers and the challenges of teaching, I noticed a scene of people running around the corner in front of me, right down Pirapitingui Street and turning onto the other side of Taguá Street, towards Dr. Siqueira Campos Street. It was around 8:30 p.m. and, within two minutes, the rush that I saw coming down the street had reverted and I saw one or two people running back towards Pirapitingui Street, at which point we all heard four dry sounds, very similar to the exhaustion of a motorcycle, although at a lower volume than motorcycles usually make. We looked at each other in plain confusion and even thought it was a motorcycle, as a delivery courier was passing by. However, this same delivery man stopped and started looking around the corner of Pirapitingui Street. The three people in the bar next door also began to stare at the corner, motionless, while asking each other “*did something happen?*”. Everyone outside Taguá tried to keep calm and carry on with their conversations, but they constantly turned their heads to look at the corner of Pirapitingui Street, which was becoming more and more crowded by the minute.

In the space of five minutes of pure confusion, the scene was set: a street corner filling up with people; a small bar almost closing so that they could go to the corner to find out what had happened; our Taguá bar with the outside tables looking confused and not knowing what to do; the staff of the Taguá bar divided between serving customers and finding out what was generating the movement outside; the inside of the bar completely oblivious to any external events; the band playing a cover of “Plush” by Stone Temple Pilots and some neighbors leaving their houses to walk their dogs, oblivious to what was going on in the street.

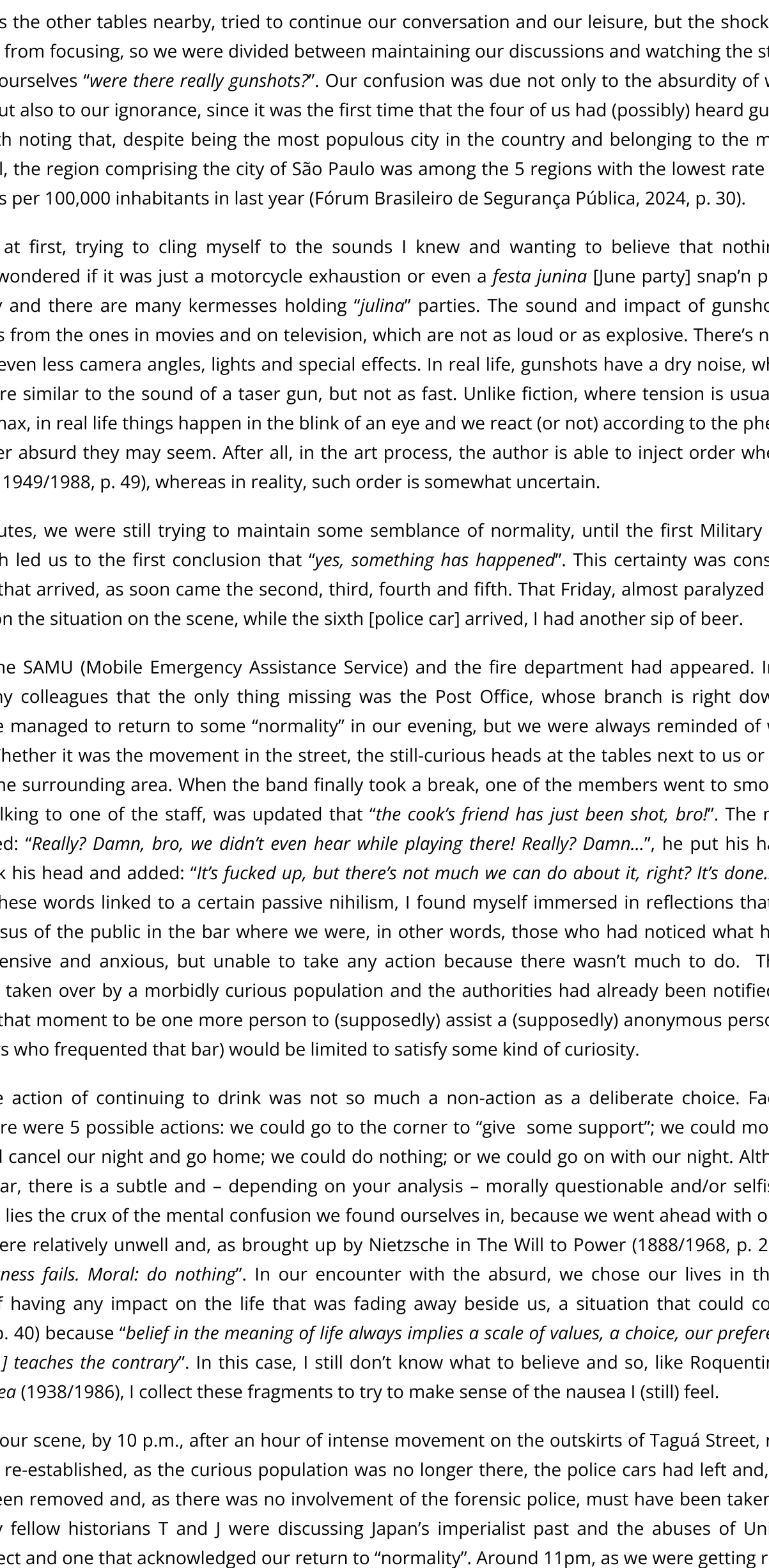


Figure 2. Beer House Taguá 326 Interior

We, as well as the other tables nearby, tried to continue our conversation and our leisure, but the shock and curiosity prevented us from focusing, so we were divided between maintaining our discussions and watching the street's corner, while asking ourselves “*were there really gunshots?*”. Our confusion was due not only to the absurdity of what we were witnessing, but also to our ignorance, since it was the first time that the four of us had (possibly) heard gunshots in real life. It is worth noting that, despite being the most populous city in the country and belonging to the most populous state in Brazil, the region comprising the city of São Paulo was among the 5 regions with the lowest rate of intentional violent deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in last year (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024, p. 30).

In any case, at first, trying to cling myself to the sounds I knew and wanting to believe that nothing tragic had happened, I wondered if it was just a motorcycle exhaustion or even a *feira junina* (June party) snap'n pops, as it was still early July and there are many kermesses holding “*junina*” parties. The sound and impact of gunshots in real life greatly differs from the ones in movies and on television, which are not as loud or as explosive. There's no close-up on the gun and even less camera angles, lights and special effects. In real life, gunshots have a dry noise, which seems to me to be more similar to the sound of a taser gun, but not as fast. Unlike fiction, where tension is usually built up to reach the climax, in real life things happen in the blink of an eye and we react (or not) according to the phenomena that arise, however absurd they may seem. After all, in the art process, the author is able to inject order where there was none (Sartre, 1949/1988, p. 49), whereas in reality, such order is somewhat uncertain.

After 10 minutes, we were still trying to maintain some semblance of normality, until the first Military Police vehicle arrived, which led us to the first conclusion that “*yes, something has happened*”. This certainty was consolidated with each vehicle that arrived, as soon came the second, third, fourth and fifth. That Friday, almost paralyzed by the lack of action I had on the situation on the scene, while the sixth (police car) arrived, I had another sip of beer.

The police, the SAMU (Mobile Emergency Assistance Service) and the fire department had appeared. In my shock, I joked with my colleagues that the only thing missing was the Post Office, whose branch is right down the street. Gradually, we managed to return to some “normality” in our evening, but we were always reminded of what had just happened. Whether it was the movement in the street, the still-curious heads at the tables next to us or the small talk going on in the surrounding area. When the band finally took a break, one of the members went to smoke a cigarette and, while talking to one of the staff, was updated that “*the cook's friend has just been shot, bro!*”. The musician then asked, startled: “*Really? Damn, bro, we didn't even hear while playing there! Really? Damn.*”, he put his hand up to his mouth, shook his head and added: “*It's fucked up, but there's not much we can do about it, right? It's done.*”. Somewhat shocked by these words linked to a certain passive nihilism, I found myself immersed in reflections that this was the exact consensus of the public in the bar where we were, in other words, those who had noticed what had happened were apprehensive and anxious, but unable to take any action because there wasn't much to do. The scene had already been taken over by a morbidly curious population and the authorities had already been notified, so going to the scene at that moment to be one more person to (supposedly) assist a (supposedly) anonymous person (that is, for the customers who frequented that bar) would be limited to satisfy some kind of curiosity.

However, the action of continuing to drink was not so much a non-action as a deliberate choice. Faced with that situation, there were 5 possible actions: we could go to the corner to “give some support”; we could move to another bar; we could cancel our night and go home; we could do nothing; or we could go on with our night. Although the last two are similar, there is a subtle and – depending on your analysis – morally questionable and/or selfish difference. Possibly here lies the crux of the mental confusion we found ourselves in, because we went ahead with our event even though we were relatively unwell and, as brought up by Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* (1888/1968, p. 28): “*everything done in weakness fails. Moral: do nothing*”. In our encounter with the absurd, we chose our lives in the face of the impotence of having any impact on the life that was fading away beside us, a situation that could confuse Camus (1955/1991, p. 40) because “*belief in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, a choice, our preferences. Belief in the absurd [...] teaches the contrary*”. In this case, I still don't know what to believe and so, like Roquentin in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (1938/1986), I collect these fragments to try to make sense of the nausea I (still) feel.

Returning to our scene, by 10 p.m., after an hour of intense movement on the outskirts of Taguá Street, normality had already been re-established, as the curious population was no longer there, the police cars had left and, it seems, the victim had been removed and, as there was no involvement of the forensic police, must have been taken alive. Across from me, my fellow historians T and J were discussing Japan's imperialist past and the abuses of Unit 731, a very unusual subject and one that acknowledged our return to “normality”. Around 11pm, as we were getting ready to leave, the band of the night started playing “*Um minuto para o fim do mundo*” (One minute to the end of the world) by CPM 22, at the same time that we saw a typical “solidarity surveillance” guard riding past on his motorcycle and sounding his characteristic alarm, which brought a sincere but nervous laughter, as we kept discussing “*what could this guard have done in the face of the shooting situation we've just witnessed? Either he would have been another victim or he would have had the same power to act as we did. I doubt he could have prevented it*”.

After paying our bills, we joined J's car, as he had offered to give us a lift to each other's homes. So, in the midst of various paving works by Ricardo Nunes' city hall and some logistical discussion about where to go to light, we finally stopped at a traffic light on Barão de Iguape Street, on top of an X sign. While we were waiting for the light to open, my friend Z noticed the bar next to us and reflected: “*Man, the people drinking at those tables can't even imagine what we've been through today drinking like them, can they?*”. A certain silence overtakes us, along with murmurs of “*sure thing, you're right*”, which is cut short by J getting very nervous because a bus wanted to turn into our street, but was prevented from doing so by J's car. I explain to J that the X we're standing on is a bus turn symbol, indicating that you shouldn't stop on top, and that he hasn't given me time to explain this before. This symbol prompted a further discussion from J about the traffic signs and accessibility of buses in Germany, a country he has already visited, culminating in a “*in Germany you wouldn't have any of that*”. Well, J, I also think it's very unlikely that, in Germany, we would experience anything close to what we experienced on this night of July 5, 2024 in our beloved – and chaotically absurd – São Paulo.

Text: Lucas Novais

Images: Lucas Novais e Caroline Guerino^[3]

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At the time of publication, Lucas Novais is a PhD student in Cultural Studies at the University of Minho and Passeio's scholarship holder.

Notes

^[1] *Role* is a Brazilian slang term that refers to a “casual hangout”

^[2] Sabesp's Big Gulp [*Sucão da Sabesp* in the original] is a play with the word *sucão* [a large juice] and São Paulo's water company [*Sabesp*].

^[3] As a result of the shock of the events described here, as well as out of respect for the victim, the photos illustrating this text were not taken on the date in question, but on a new visit about two weeks after the event.

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