

Selections from *Os tais
caquinhos* (2021) by
Natércia Pontes

Selections from *Máquina
de pinball* (2002) by
Clarah Averbuck

Translated by Júlia Irion Martins

Translator's Preface

I have a memory that I may have made up: I'm at my grandmother's house in Fortaleza, Ceará. It's nighttime—late enough that I might be the only person awake, but not late enough to be interesting. I get up from my station at the desktop computer in the living room, where I post on forums or play on Style Dollz until it is late enough to be interesting, and go to the kitchen for a popsicle. I open the freezer, reaching for one of those rectangular fruit bar style popsicles—lime—and when I pull my hand out of the box, a roach scuttles up my hand. I don't think roaches can survive in a freezer, but the fear of seeing a roach consumed me so entirely when visiting my family in Ceará that when I read Natércia Pontes' *Os tais caquinhos* (Those little shreds, Companhia das Letras, 2021), I began to believe my memory once more.

Os tais is a slim novel, composed not of chapters but of mounting vignettes that tell the story of apartment 402 where hoarder and father Lúcio lives with his two teenage daughters: Abigail and Berta. These vignettes, written as diary entries from Abigail's perspective, stack on top of each other less like diary entries signaling the passing of time and more like the precariously stacked cardboard boxes in 402.

For this issue of *Absinthe*, I've selected three vignettes: "402, Alcove of Loose Tiles," "Hunger Feels So Good," and "Mother." In the first of these vignettes, and one of the novel's opening vignettes, Abigail details the ownership the roaches have over every last centimeter of 402. They're in mugs, they're in shoes, they leave their traces and amputated bug legs in the drawers. But Abigail describes these disgusting creatures with such tenderness that you begin to accept them as sharing space, as beings that have been here long before us and will be long after us. This softness of prose to describe abject, harsh, or sad conditions is characteristic of Pontes' writing. In the same way that the vignettes stack, Pontes' syntax stacks too. The other two vignettes I've translated, "Hunger Feels So Good" and "Mother," both take the form of lists. "Hunger" enumerates an accumulation of lessons Abigail learns from Lúcio. But "Mother" is a list of lack—a claustrophobic and precarious stacking of what Abigail *doesn't* have cluttering her mind.

On an episode of the Brazilian literature podcast *Rumor*, Pontes comments that it's actually quite rare for novels to be set in Fortaleza and that she wanted to explore her memories of being in "the [music] scene" 1990s Fortaleza.¹ Despite this explicit aim, Pontes never actually reveals that the novel takes place in Fortaleza. One of the podcast hosts, Pedro, comments that for him and his co-host Lucas—both Fortalezenses and in "the scene"—it's quite obvious that *Os tais* takes place in Fortaleza. Yet for those unfamiliar with its particular 1990s terrain, it's the book jacket copy that does us the favor of stating that the story takes place in a "likely Fortaleza of the 1990s." As such, Pontes presents an ambivalent relationship to location and regionalism, inviting non-Fortalezense readers to consider for whom regional representation is meant.

This next memory I'm sure is true: A cousin of mine had a burned CD playing in her car, on it hits from the likes of Green Day, Blink-182, Evanescence, Eminem, and—most memorably—the Russian pop duo t.A.T.u. That summer, I dragged my mom from mall to mall in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, until I found a copy of *200 km/h in the Wrong Lane*. I didn't know this at the time, but my relentless hunt for a foreign CD (and this one, in particular) is probably the most Brazilian thing about me.

Clarah Averbuck's *Máquina de pinball* (Pinball machine, 2002) expands on and captures this aforementioned Brazilian lust for foreign music. Narrated in the first person, *Máquina* chronicles the life of rock music-obsessed Camila Chirivino, a 22-year-old gaúcha who has just dropped out of her degree in journalism, gotten dumped, relocated to São Paulo to become a writer, and frequently laments how difficult it once was to get ahold of new American musical releases.

Máquina is filled with references to American and British rock music. Each chapter begins with an epigraph from American and British musicians (save for one from *Fight Club*) such as Lou Reed, Rivers Cuomo, and PJ Harvey, among others. And, what's more,

¹ "Familiares estranhos e estranhos familiares: o selvagem e doméstico mundo de Natércia Pontes," *Rumor*, podcast, April 26, 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/4yhOpaoYuI3szLRksD3z6g>.

Averbuck dedicates the entire novel to the Strokes (Camila's cat is named Julian, after frontman Julian Casablancas). Beyond the epigraphs, Camila frequently cites from her favorite artists. The English lyrics are kept in English, with no italics demarcating this text as "different" from Portuguese. In a disclaimer located at the end of the novel, Averbuck explains that her work contains several untranslated expressions in English and that readers must simply deal with it—"sem chororô nem discurso" (without whining or lecturing) about the Portuguese language and Americanization and "yadda yadda."² Her flippant attitude about Brazilian preciousness about language and culture brings into question what we lose—and gain—by not translating. This remark, she clarifies, is especially pertinent to translating lyrics—a practice that is a "bummer." And Averbuck isn't wrong: You can explain Chico Buarque's "Cálice" but you can't translate it.

Though widely regarded as inspired or even directly lifted from her popular blog *brazileira!preta*, Averbuck denies *Máquina's* connections to the blog through form.³ That is to say, the book contains no formal elements of a blog: It is organized as a traditional novel with chapters, characters, and a plot. To make the case for *Máquina* as autofictional, the reader must be familiar with Averbuck's biography. Like Camila, Averbuck is a gaúcha who dropped out of her journalism degree at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (PUCRS) to move to São Paulo and pursue writing. Averbuck delights in this space of autobiographical catch and release, leaking hints that she might be Camila but also. . . that she really might not be, or might be, but just a little bit. In a disclaimer printed on the last page of the first edition of *Máquina*, Averbuck writes the following regarding her text: "É mentira, mas é tudo verdade. Qualquer semelhança com a realidade não terá sido mera coincidência. Dúvidas, consulte um advogado." (It's all lies, but it's all true. Any similarities to reality are not merely coincidental. Any questions, consult a

² Clarah Averbuck, *Máquina de pinball* (Conrad Livros, 2002), 77.

³ Some scholars consider *Máquina* to be the result of a "bricolagem de textos escritos originalmente na internet" (A bricolage of texts originally written on the internet). Bruno Lima Oliveira, "Estratégias de Inserção na Literatura 2.0," *Cadernos de Letras da UFF* 25, no. 50 (2015): 204.

lawyer.)⁴ This disclaimer parodies the typical disclaimer included on the copyright page of many fictional works, which are meant to protect an author from libel by confirming the fictionality of the work.⁵ However, in writing that any similarity to reality is *not* coincidental, Averbuck still confirms (or at the very least strongly suggests) that *Máquina* is, in fact, fictional. It is fiction with pointed *similarities* to reality. But at the same time, this statement reminds readers that she has, in fact, pulled from her real life (or “reality”) to write her fictions.

These anxieties surrounding fact or fiction in Averbuck’s work, particularly given its online nature, seem to me incredibly prescient of the ways in which we often read contemporary women’s fiction. As I argue in my dissertation, contemporary readers fixate on fact-checking and cross-referencing author biographies with their output—a practice I speculate as derived from Web 2.0 verification culture (e.g., linking phone numbers and email accounts). Pontes, too, suffers accusations of autofiction—yes, her father was a hoarder and the Fortaleza she writes is inspired by the one she lived in. But, as she says, she likes writing that “flirts with the real” but that departs from the real, allowing it to “bloom” and become weird—an ambivalence towards “the real” that echoes her approach to location. But I digress—rockers and taunters of autofiction alike, enjoy these translations.

⁴ Averbuck, *Máquina de pinball*, 79.

⁵ “This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events are products of the author’s imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.”

Selections from *Os tais caquinhos*

by Natércia Pontes

402, Alcove of Loose Tiles

My apartment wasn't ventilated or clean like Neca's. It wasn't aseptic and lavender scented like the bathroom stalls at school. In their lair the roaches weren't under siege. Even if, on a bad day, one or another was crushed by the existential wrath of the tenants (my family), one could very well consider our home a safe space for these docile insects with serrated legs. The insects loved to slumber in the mugs, explore the recesses of our sneakers, dive into the remaining water of the giant jug, tickle our toothbrushes. There was a sweet roach smell that incensed our lives. There, too, was an intimate agreement. I turned a blind eye to the insects' infestation and, in turn, expected that there be a modicum of respect from them. Not climbing across my face while I slept, for example. For the most part, the roaches complied with our tacit agreement, allowing life to be more bearable. I often forgot about them and slept wrapped in a thin sheet that smelled like sebum. Sooner or later, I'd encounter a lost leg in the cutlery drawer, silverware greasy from the kitchen, and life would once again return to an indecipherable state, not unlike our dark apartment, where light didn't reach the living room—especially because there was no such room. There was, instead, a deposit of cardboard boxes filled with books that crumbled with time. Some boxes had to occupy the veranda for lack of space. Then it would rain, and the boxes would get soaked and then dry out with the sun and the wind. As years passed, they became a dunghill of mold and termite nests. The thought of opening the glass door with its rusted frame was so terrifying that we decided to never open it ever again.

Hunger Feels So Good

Perhaps the greatest of Lúcio's lessons. The second being that we cultivate free thinking, without many certainties. Although I

understood in an intuitive and intangible way what Lúcio meant to tell us with this, I got used to exercising doubt about everything. For example: (a) closed doors don't always signify intransigence or contempt for your family. They could very well point to a healthy need to be alone or of keeping your belongings safe from minor domestic accidents and theft. And if these belongings were juice boxes or creme-filled cookies, there was nothing more understandable; (b) boxes and more boxes of corrugated cardboard piled atop one another, bulging from an excess of content and humidity, full of moths and their grey cocoons glued to their exterior like miniature sconces eaten away by time did not denote sloppiness, lack of hygiene or absence of cleanliness in the home, on the contrary the debris of that thick brown paper gave the environment an intellectual charm, particularly when colorful tomes of the most diverse titles emerged from the worn corners; (c) the sweet odor of roaches was not diluted exclusively with the habit of cleaning the house, the alternative always at hand was to squirt the juice from an orange peel into the eyes of an unsuspecting Berta; (d) the lack of a blender in our kitchen contrasting with the embarrassing presence of a grimy hand mixer which only reached two speeds was in no way, shape, or form a reason for public shame but, much the opposite, for joy since its lack could be easily remedied with the cruel drowning of Ken-doll in the toilet; (e) not having a Hello Kitty lunchbox, but in its place an acidic, hollow stomach during the 20 minutes of recess (and during the interminable minutes after class) also meant long, wet kisses with eight classmates of both sexes hidden by nervous giggles in the bathroom stall; (f) going deeper and deeper into the sea until losing your footing did not essentially express a loose and sad desire to vanish from the face of the Earth, but rather the romantic desire to be a solitary mermaid gliding from wave to wave in search of a human prince with a shiny forelock; (g) maintaining the desk with obsessive order as the only place in the house where one can actually exert control and authority is not a symptom that the owner of the desk does not feel respected in the rest of the house, but rather that the owner is a clean and admirable girl; (h) suffering from a phobia of cats does not suggest a phobia of something besides cats, but that yes, these agile little demons are indeed scary; (i) cups

that remain dirty after washing do not attest to the filth of the inhabitants of a specific home, they merely represent a silly lack of care on the part of its residents; (j) static from an old television isn't always a torment, it can very well work as a fun reading light in the middle of the night assuming you mute it; (k) spending entire afternoons immersed in a book that will appear on the literature exam tomorrow and getting stuck on the same sentence because no amount of concentration can beat the Ping-Pong ball bouncing on your upstairs neighbor's floor does not mean you are going to get a laughable grade, but that you will find a sneaky way of swindling the teacher with difficult words such as Pantagruelian, vicissitude, and gnu; (l) doormats emblazoned with warm welcomes express order, cleanliness, and candor, though they are not mandatory items in all house entrances; (m) garlic cloves sprouting in the fridge are not as disgusting as they seem, they can very well be interpreted as the manifestation of the exciting mystery of the continuity of life in adverse circumstances; (n) eating a whole jar of sweet potato jam in 12 hours (replacing breakfast, lunch, snack, and dinner) should not in any way be criticized as an inadequate eating habit for a growing teen, but rather as an exotic practice given to those spirits free from the rules imposed by sociocultural dictates; (o) hiding the first menstruation from everything and everyone using thick layers of toilet paper as a pad, rather than being a symptom that trust in others is confused and shaken, points to a precocious maturity and independence, in other words, it is a cause for unquestionable pride of the young lady in question and for everybody involved; (p) comforters aren't always obligatory and cozy items for a dwelling, as they are more appropriate for cold climates you can do without them. Similar logic can be applied to bedding sets that are not moth eaten and with all pieces intact (top sheet, fitted sheet, and pillowcases) and delicately matched with each other, because, hot or cold, all sleep with closed eyes—except for Lúcio, who always sleeps with one eye open and the other closed, crocodile-like at his post, in case anyone wants to trick him or even attack him; (q) waxing isn't always a cosmetic recourse, however it is considered a dumb and painful practice that my friends' mothers invented for their daughters; (r) vaccination cards don't need to be safeguarded in an accordion folder

(with each slot labeled with the name of a specific daughter, arranged in order of birth) because nobody contracts old diseases long eradicated in the country (aside from tetanus, Hepatitis B, and whooping cough); (s) microwaves are beautiful, fun, and practical but above all unnecessary—particularly when they explode out of nowhere in the comfort of one’s home, resulting in giant, abrasive cuts on the face of feisty eight-year-old kids; (t) dogs are also deadly and should never be petted. When one of these beasts is present, the first precaution to take is to immediately climb atop the nearest table and yell at its owner, calling him a criminal and a lunatic, after all, how can one, with impunity, bandy about with a monster capable of biting the face of a defenseless and introspective eight-year-old child whose father died of a massive stroke?; (u) if someone obsessively draws mazes in the eyes of looney-goosey little girls—as if they were missing their skeletons or made up entirely of rubber—and accommodate themselves between the narrow spaces pressed between the spirals of a notebook, in separate notepads, in medicine boxes, in multicolored brochures for the pizzeria on the corner, in the space between one number and another of emergency dispatches (the police, poison control, the suicide hotline, etc.) listed in the phonebook, or even fragmented in the fat and yellowed tomes that are phonebooks and TV guides, it doesn’t mean that they’re crazy; (v) your house isn’t that kooky, even though it can be faithfully described as scrap metal from a cable box descrambler; (x) using plastic bags from the supermarket to store everything—and I mean absolutely everything (food, watches without batteries, birth certificates, flip-flops, plates, porcelain tchotchkes, lighters, remnants of used deodorants, glasses cases, loose lids, empty pill packs, frames, cups, toothbrushes, overdue electric bills, silverware, erasers, forgotten fruits, dry-erase markers, unpaid water bills, combs, report cards, travel cards from a distant relative, etc.)—isn’t as horrible as it seems. On the contrary, it’s ecological, hygienic (it protects things from contact with roaches), and very practical (if the bag disintegrates over time, just switch it for a new one); (w) the noise that plastic bags make when handled isn’t necessarily unpleasant, but relaxing, as it emulates the sound of the sea; (y) disobeying all the rules (do not enter, do not touch, do not read), leaving

footprints and fingerprints in the dust that covers the floor and all the precarious objects and furniture in the apartment, courageously ceding to curiosity and boredom which were once again more powerful than fear, is far from being the greatest affront to a paternal figure already assigned to a daughter; (z) continuously hearing, in the face of any type of frustration or deviation from expectations, your father roaring *I want death!* and asking God insistently and furiously *Why won't death come for me?*, hearing this sequence of sentences repeated time and time again until you memorize the interval of time between one sentence and the next such that you can repeat it with your dad and declaim in unison each syllable of the refrain, *I wa-nt dea-th!*, silencing your voice and pretending to be an insolent ventriloquist, *Why won't dea-th co-me for me?*, is nothing more than a banal scene that happens in the best of families and does not provoke any type of hurt or pain.

Mother

Dear diary, I haven't had a mother for a long time. I don't have a hand. I don't have anyone to suck the snot out of my nose. I don't have a breast. I don't have anyone to fix the doorknobs. I don't have a mouth. I don't have anyone to defend me in a long letter. I don't have feet. I don't have anyone to pluck the wax out of my ear with tweezers. I don't have eyes. I don't have anyone to drive me to ballet. I don't have ears. I don't have anyone to delicately trace the contours of my eyebrows. I don't have eyebrows. I don't have anyone to hang my doodles on the fridge. I don't have nails. I don't have anyone to comb my hair with conditioner. I don't have legs. I don't have anyone to solve my banking problems in another country. I don't have elbows. I don't have anyone to wake me up early in the morning with a hoarse voice. I don't have kidneys. I don't have anyone to hold my hand to cross the street. I don't have eyelashes. I don't have anyone to make me noodles. I don't have knees. I don't have anyone to send me a fish in the mail. I don't have a belly button. I don't have anyone to tell me whether or not I was breastfed. I don't have ribs. I don't have anyone to pack my bags. I don't have a butt.

I don't have anyone to keep track of my medical records. I don't have heels. I don't have anyone to teach me to darn. I don't have a tibia. I don't have anyone to look at me sweetly. I don't have cheeks. I don't have anyone to rub ointment on my back. I don't have a back. I don't have anyone to send me a colorful postcard with marker drawings. I don't have a chin. I don't have anyone to save my first lost milk-tooth. I don't have a pharynx. I don't have anyone to cover my book covers. I don't have a flank. I don't have anyone to sew me curtains. I don't have a tongue. I don't have anyone to hold me while I blow out my birthday candles. I don't have hair. I don't have anyone to sing me a lullaby. I don't have eyelids. I don't have anyone to explain traffic signs to me. I don't have gums. I don't have anyone to teach me how to fold shirts. I don't have shoulder blades. I don't have anyone to put a coat on me. I don't have a body. I don't have anyone who knows all of me. I don't have a pulse. I haven't had a mother for a long time. I don't have a mother.



Selections from *Máquina de pinball*

by Clarah Averbuck

Chapter 1

Let the truth be known / I've got to walk around in my own tennis shoes / Let the truth be known / I have to learn to live in this world on my own / Let the truth be known / Nobody showed me how it's supposed to go.
Bob Forrest – *The Bicycle Thief*

Planet: Earth. City: São Paulo. Like all metropolises, São Paulo finds itself today at a disadvantage in its fight against man's greatest enemy: pollution. Fuck, what a dirty city.

My skin is disgusting. I didn't have any acne as a teen, save for one zit or another during that wretched time of month, always at the extremities of my face. Now I have three right in the middle of my cheek. But don't get it twisted—I didn't discover them in a mirror because here there simply isn't enough light for that. My hair is also horrendous because of this ridiculous water. Remember that fluorescent fish with three eyes from that episode of *The Simpsons*? Well, he'd be way more fluorescent and would have, like, five or six eyes spread across his body if he depended on this stupid water. Yeah, I'm a girly-girl. I wear makeup, stilettos, a belly button ring, and glittery nail polish. I'm happy this way. Girly. But with balls.

Balls. "Camila, you've lost weight!" Bless Dr. Boleta, who gives me slips and slips of receita azul. She who has blue has everything. But I don't want everything—just amphetamines. Hydrochloride amfepramone, alias Inibex or Hipofagin, a gift in the lives of those who don't like sleeping, the neurotic depressives without money to eat. All of the alternatives are correct.

One month ago I had cable TV, a fridge, a microwave, a contour pillow, a blender, a VCR, a dishwasher, a cable modem, a balcony, and a boyfriend. Now I live in a room that doesn't fit an adult man lying on the floor. Believe me—I tried. I sleep on a little mattress on the living room floor with Julian, the cat I found on my third city day. I love cats. The other two stayed in my ex-house. Three, to tell

the truth, but in the division of goods the boyfriend kept one of them and with the Beatles figurines—the only reason we’d fought up to this point besides the cheating that led us to our tragic end. Mine, to be clear. Because I need to fall in love all the time, or I can’t produce for shit. That’s why my ex-boyfriend, who I truly liked, didn’t want anything to do with me anymore: I’m incapable of being with just one person. I can love just one person, and he was this person, but I need constant novelty. After two years he didn’t want to deal with it anymore and kicked me out. What was I supposed to do? Try to explain? It’s useless—nobody would understand, not even me. Now the love of my life for this week only refers to me as “The Jester” and collects the fortune I owe him. Yearning. *Love is suicide.*

I have two options: I suffer like an abandoned dog, crying, crying, crying, and hoping for it to pass or I get out there having as much fun as possible and eating. No cannibalism here: I’m talking about sex—feeling something that isn’t pain is good during these times.

I constantly have “I want to go home” panics, but they are completely useless and what I can do is get wasted and embody Vicente Celestino or Lupicínio Rodrigues or both—which could be even more depressing when you consider that they suffered better—and return, stumbling to my little maid’s room without a window. Me and Julian slept peacefully. Once again, that little cat saved my life. In moments of extreme depression—when I’d think about flying out of the 11th floor window, turning into a slimy pancake on the asphalt—Julian would walk over to me and stare. I’m sure he knew what I was thinking about and asked me to stay. Who would take care of this poor little cat if I turned into lasagna? The freaks who lived with me? Never. So I would give up and keep staring at my feet.

With time, I got used to spending the mornings with the damned sun in my face. The living room windows didn’t have curtains. But truthfully it wouldn’t have made the slightest difference.

To hell with all of that. It’s behind me, and in front of me there’s an entire city with its legs open. The fact that I don’t have a fucking cent to my name doesn’t worry me. I always find a way to get money. I make do with my pills, my CDs, my computer, and any telephone line. Yep, because not getting emails is inconceivable. I can’t even

begin to imagine how somebody could stand to wait for a letter that came by carriage or ship or motorcycle or a mailman's bag. The possibilities of failure were enormous. I think I'd rather spend my whole life traveling than waiting for letters from loved ones far away. I'd probably fall head over heels for some guy who I caught a glimpse of at a Scandi pier and spend the rest of my life trying to find him. Easy things aren't any fun. And difficulty doesn't mean slow—slowness corrodes me. I want everything immediately. That's what you get for being the only child of rocker parents. Or hippies. Or zen, depending on the era. Now they do meditation and send me books about the movement of Pluto and the Age of Aquarius.

I might be fucked and broke, but rock is free. Lately I only listen to the Strokes, a band that some non-believers with no vision doubted would blow up. To me, it was obvious. I became a fan as soon as I heard the first single, "The Modern Age"—which was simply brilliant—months before anyone here had any idea that they would be the Thing. Now they're hype. That's alright—they deserve it. So anyway, for the fucked, rock is ramen. But ramen lite. I don't want to become pear-shaped. It's enough to be poor—fat and poor would be too fucked. A tip: Never cook with glasses on. I don't know about you, but I have this habit of sticking my head in the pot to see how things are going in there and my glasses get all foggy. This also happens with steaming dishes and cups of tea. Humiliating.

Camila Chirivino; 22 years old; dropped out of a half-finished degree in Journalism and Letters; likes cats, chocolate, vodka, skinny hairless men, dark eyes, jazz, and rock. For now, that's all you need to know.



Chapter 11

*Leaving just in time / Stayed there for a while / Rolling in the ocean /
Trying to catch her eye / Work hard and say it's easy / Do it just to please me
/ Tomorrow will be different / So this is why I'm leaving.
Julian Casablancas – The Strokes*

Routines are always shit, unless you find a way to lose track of time. I'm not talking about days, but rather hours. Losing track of days is simple: You just have to be completely normal. Normal people get on my nerves. "Normal" is the strangest thing I can imagine. Is it weird to do drugs to have fun? Is it weird to sleep until you're not sleepy? Is it weird to not want to lock yourself into norms invented by half a dozen idiots at the top of the food chain? I don't think so. What's weird is a guy leaving with a briefcase at 6:47 a.m. every day, taking the bus to the train and the train to a small insurance company, working until six on the dot and the going back home to eat beef and rice in front of the TV without speaking to the wife (who made the beef and rice) and avoiding eye contact with the kids (who hardly know who this bearded dude they call "dad" is) and sleeping (in blue pajamas) shortly after the evening news because he's tired, too tired, and tomorrow he'll have to do it all over again and again and later he'll retire and look back and find that his life was dignified, honest, and just and that he lived a stupid routine in which he was unable to differentiate one day from the other. These people are insane.

I did it differently: I'd go two, three days without sleeping due to my happy pills which I'd finally acquired, and then I'd go to the store in a state of disarray in that stage where you heard non-existent cell phones ringing and you capture radio signals with your earrings and see figures. I love that. After the languor of the first day always comes hyperactivity. Something had to compensate for the fact that I had to leave the house every day at nine in the morning, walk to the train, buy the ticket with change to spare the ticket girl from a sour mood, take the train, get off the train, take the train again, get off again, get on again, arrive at the station and walk to the store, being forced to put up with those people who think they have the right

to speak to you—an innocent passerby—who is simply trying to go to work and has to now put up with these dirty, ugly hippies. Then I had to open the store and the rolling security grille had problems. That's fine, we all have problems, but *honestly*, the security grille didn't have to fall on my feet every day. Damn iron door. So I'd turn on the lights and the alarm and the computer and pick a CD and sit at the counter and order a Diet Coke from the conjoined store and eat a pão de queijo and someone would come in and look and ask about a sale and leave. Then a thousand people would come and go and some were afraid of talking to girls and others weren't afraid and talked too much and others were interesting and others weren't interesting and others were obviously posers trying to fit into something. Tsk. Regardless, it was cool. When it was time to leave, I'd leave. I walked to the metro and confronted the same NPCs. I'd go through the turnstile, down the stairs, and wait. These people are all insane. At the end of the day, they were all desperate to get on that stupid train. They were thousands and they were ugly and sweaty and dirty and poor just like me and they all wanted to pass in front of one another. Every day. And every day I muttered "fuck this" and let all those tired workers pass in front of me. They behaved as though it was the last train to escape the devil. The subway cars left packed with people, who looked more like maggots coming out the eyes of a decomposing skull, all squished up under the ground. Man. In five minutes, another train would arrive, empty and with oxygen. The hurried always stay losing.

It was a Friday night and I didn't have work on Saturday. Thank God, because I had an unprecedented hangover and I'd had a night of mediocre sex with an old hookup who I'd met up with at a bar. For some reason, I decided not to take the train. It was too hot, too humid, too polluted, too everything. The bus would take longer, but it had windows and I needed to feel a breeze on my face. When I was a child, I thought those ads for soundproof windows with a chic girl with an up-do and gloves shushing were weird. Now I get them. I felt at home for a few seconds. It was the city with Parque da Mônica with the Jotalhão bouncy house and Avenida Paulista and the Municipal Theatre and the Italian-filled Bixiga. It was my home. At least now it was. I decided to get off at Paulista, one of the places

that made me want to live in São Paulo. If you walk on Paulista at night and you feel a little chill on your belly, then you know that you need to live in São Paulo for a little while.

I walked. I walked along Paulista, observing the people who were worried about getting somewhere quickly, noticing nothing around them. I walked slowly, smoking my last cig and thinking and listening to my new discovery, Black Rebel Motorcycle Club—the Jesus and Mary Chain of the '90s. Big cities can be very sad. But not for me, obviously. For the people who desperately needed to get home and make beans and rice and beef and watch the novela. How do you even miss the novela? Brrr. Drink, drink. To walk home is to stop at that friendly bodega. Vodka with guaraná, to mix things up a bit. I don't know how it's listed on the menu, but I'm going to call it "Paulista." I lean on the counter and when I come to the sad conclusion that my first paycheck is already gone, I hear a comment behind my back.

"They say they're going to be the next big thing."

I was wearing my Strokes shirt and there was all this discourse about the salvation of rock put on them. Rock doesn't need to be saved, rock is a lost soul, a drunk, a druggie with a poorly kept beard and an unbuttoned shirt. He who tries to save rock transforms it into something else. The Strokes? The Strokes are rock. And rock doesn't need to be saved from anything.