If we want to search the everyday for the non-signifiers which may be active within it we must catch them in the rough, in their unconscious or misunderstood situation, and not like water-creatures wrenched from the deep and left to die in the light of day.

—Henri Lefebvre

The history of peoples without history is the history of their struggle against the State.

—Pierre Clastres

Maurice Blanchot tells us the everyday is what escapes by definition. It is what we (but who is this “we”?) cannot perceive. When it manifests itself—thus losing its essential trait of being unperceived—it takes the form of boredom or of the astonishing. To ask about this “we” and then to ask questions about subalternity as I want to do here is alien to the way Blanchot understands the everyday. Such questions would be impertertinent, illegitimate even, since for Blanchot the everyday is what escapes “because it is without a subject.”¹ The subject has not yet happened, since nothing happens in the everyday. “When I live the everyday, it is anyone, anyone whatsoever, who does so, and this any-one is, properly speaking, neither me, nor . . . the other.”² Thus
the difference between the subject and nonsubject (which is at the heart of the problem of subalternity) cannot exist in the everyday for Blanchot. If the everyday is the domain of an “anyone whatsoever,” the subaltern is always marked as a nonsubject. It can never be an anonymous anyone, cannot be an integer in a series, each like the one before, since it is precisely the interruption of this logic. The other consequence of an everyday understood as a realm in which nothing happens is that the historical, the “something is happening” of history, likewise does not exist there. At the same time, Blanchot’s examples link the anonymous any-one to newspapers, the radio, the city street, the vacuum cleaner, the concept of leisure. These are not arbitrary examples. Blanchot’s everyday is invisible because it is all too familiar to a modern “we.” Subalternity, however, forces us to think about what has remained outside that province we call modernity.

The everyday is fundamentally liminal. Blanchot already knows this, of course, but he understands this liminality as fundamentally corrosive to structures of order, the place where they dissolve, much like statues crumbling suddenly into salt. But Henri Lefebvre (to whom all contemporary theorizations of everydayness, including Blanchot’s, are very much indebted) conceives of the everyday as the level at which structures of order are also constructed. He describes it as a point of mediation between the controlled and uncontrolled:¹ “Its apparent solidity bursts asunder to reveal it as the point where nature and culture come together.”⁴ Not only do subjects vanish at the threshold of the everyday; they are constituted there as well. The everyday may escape, may act indeed as a black hole too, pulling structures apart or condensing them into invisibility, but it is also the site of emergence, the “condition stipulated for the legibility of forms,” in Lefebvre’s words.⁵ The subaltern lies beyond this threshold. If the everyday constructs the coordinates of a legibility, the subaltern is always a “misreading,” an illegible stain in the archive.

The modes of intelligibility produced around two moments of insurgency in the late nineteenth century in Brazil are one example of the incommensurability between everydayness and subalternity that I have begun to trace here. While the Quebra-Quilos riots were processed and represented as touching on the everyday, the community of Canudos has been etched into the historical archive under the sign of the subaltern. One of the by-products of such an inscription is the disappearance of everydayness as a meaningful category. This difference suggests that everydayness may be invisible not only because it is so familiar as to be unperceived, as Blanchot
would have it, but because it has become too unfamiliar to be perceived in
the case of the subaltern. This everyday cannot be seen because the “forms”
of a society are no longer legible there.

**Everydayness and Hegemony**

Blanchot’s examples are indicative of the way the concept of everydayness
is indissolubly bound up with the structures of modernity. The everyday,
we could say, is the level at which hegemony seeks to reproduce itself. It
is the threshold at which hegemony seeks to become invisible as such, its
violence buried deep, so that it is lived as consent rather than domination.

Despite innumerable problems, the concept of consent (often used as a
shorthand for hegemony) accomplishes at least two functions that I want
to isolate here. First it describes a rule that takes place through ideology
and culture. This does not mean that one should equate hegemony with
mystification or false consciousness. It is not simply a question of beliefs;
rather, it concerns the way in which everyday material practices become
naturalized, so that standing in line for a passport, going to school, acquir-
ing a marriage certificate, affixing a number to one’s house, or measuring
a pound of wheat become as ordinary or banal as sweeping the floor or
eating bread. When these practices are repeated unthinkingly, day by day,
by one person after another, they produce the deep homogeneity required
of a citizenry of the modern nation-state, the commensurability required
for market exchanges. The tendency toward uniformity, iterability, and
sameness with which daily life is now lived is, according to Lefebvre, a
product of modernity. Before, housing, modes of dress, eating, and drinking
presented “a prodigious diversity. Not subordinate to any one system, living
varied according to region and country, levels and classes of population,
available natural resources, season, climate, profession, age and sex.” The
modern everyday, on the other hand, designates “a denominator common
to existing systems including judicial, contractual, pedagogical, fiscal and
police systems.” It is “the platform upon which the bureaucratic society
of controlled consumerism is erected.” For it to work in this fashion, the
part must imply the whole in way not unlike the relationship described
by Lenin and cited on the first page of Lefebvre’s *Critique of Everyday Life*,
volume 1: “In his *Capital*, Marx first analyses the simplest, most ordinary
and fundamental, most common and *everyday relation* of bourgeois (com-
modity) society, a relation encountered billions of times, viz the exchange
of commodities. In this very simple phenomenon . . . analysis reveals all the contradictions (or the germs of all the contradictions) of modern society.”

Just as the exchange of commodities becomes the lowest common denominator of capitalist society, other common and everyday practices become the platform upon which particular societies, particular regimes of rule, are erected.

The second function accomplished by the term consent is to indicate the participation of subordinate groups, whether active or passive. This should not be understood simply as a freely given acquiescence of an autonomous, rational subject—as a choice in which coercion or force plays no part. Antonio Gramsci’s elaboration of the notion of hegemony suggest a range of possibilities for participation that I think is useful to maintain. While Gramsci sometimes describes consent as given spontaneously, it can also be educated or “forcibly extracted” from the subordinate groups. Gramsci describes the ethical state—where “ethical” indicates not a religious function but rather the autonomous, educative, and moral activity of a secular state which works therefore precisely by hegemony rather than outright coercion—as both requesting consent but also educating consent. In other words, the ethical state exerts “educative pressure” in order to produce the “new type of humanity,” which will “freely” consent to its rule. The fully functioning ethical state—where the coercive element has withered away as it becomes ever more irrelevant and unnecessary—is the utopia of a perfect and seamless hegemony. Under such rule, using the formulation of David Lloyd and Paul Thomas, “certain paradigms become so self-evident as to relegate alternatives to the spaces of the nonsensical and the unthinkable. It is not so much that hegemony represses as that the dominance of its ‘forms’ of conceptualization renders other forms, other imaginaries, unreadable, inaudible and incomprehensible.” This is the end point toward which hegemony tends. More often than not, however, it is more useful to follow Gramsci’s elaboration of hegemony as designating a project of leadership rather than a seamless achievement. Despite hegemony’s desire to be complete, to garner the unqualified commitment of the masses, it can for Gramsci be superficial, incomplete, or unstable. Consent is thus a more useful term when used negatively. In other words, it would designate not so much a free rational choice on the part of the subordinate populations but the fragility or instability of hegemony, the possibility for struggle or contention. It would designate the possibility of an outside that we need not understand in terms of beliefs or ideas but as a residual, emergent, or merely alternative order.
This understanding of consent thus marks everydayness as the level on which hegemony not only functions but also fails to function, to return to Blanchot’s point. Like Blanchot, Michel de Certeau underscores the everyday as a place of evasion. De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* is an exploration of the small, minuscule, quotidian ways people manipulate the mechanisms of order and discipline, seeming to conform and thus evading precisely by the smallness of their tactics, which are exactly small enough to escape notice. His everydayness is the domain of numbers, rather than names—the space of anonymity and therefore democracy. Escape of this type is understood not as an inherent quality of the category of the everyday so much as a result of a multiplicity of orders that overlap at the level of the everyday. In other words, the everyday still evokes larger orders, but each individual and each day represent the locus of the interactions of an incoherent and contradictory plurality of determinations. There is no single totality implied by each unit, but the very opposite. If it is a whole, it is “made up of pieces that are not contemporary and still linked to totalities that have fallen into ruins.”\(^\text{13}\) De Certeau’s everyday is crammed with cellars and garrets, layered spaces, hollow places in which a past sleeps, accumulated times that can be unfolded but are silent and blank on the surface. Each place “like a deteriorating page of a book, refers to a different mode of territorial unity, of socioeconomic distribution, of political conflicts and of identifying symbolism.”\(^\text{14}\) The legible order that overlies such stratification “is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order.”\(^\text{15}\)

**The Quebra-Quilos**

In 1874–75, in northeastern Brazil, a series of riots broke out: the Quebra-Quilos (Smash the Kilos!) riots. As the name suggests, the riots often involved the destruction of the scales used to weigh goods in the marketplaces—a resistance to the imperial government’s introduction of the metric system in Brazil more than ten years earlier, in 1862. The act of smashing scales both identifies changes and defies them on the level of the everyday. If the structures of society do not change without a change at the level of the everyday, as Lefebvre said and as the Brazilian government surely believed as well, the Quebra-Quilos riots showed everyday life as the slowest thing to change. It “drags itself along in the wake of change. More than that: it resists change.”\(^\text{16}\)

The name of the riots in fact masks a variety of unrelated demands.
Evidence suggests that the protests were spurred by a series of factors that generally included new taxes and army conscription as well as the introduction of the metric system and consequent changes in weights. Many authorities attempted to blame the riots on religious, especially Jesuit, leadership, but there is no historical register of unified leadership. It is not that priests and clerics were not involved in some cases, but according to the author of the only book-length study of the riots, historian Armando Souto Maior, the riots are not recognizable as a systematic, organized political movement; rather, they comprise a series of disarticulated but metonymically related incidents that began in the state of Paraíba and then spread to Pernambuco, Alagoas, and Rio Grande do Norte and presented a variety of manifestations. In Goiana, for example, the riots were marked by the reaction of small producers and merchants against the monopoly of foreign merchants, especially Portuguese, so that they often took on a xenophobic or even anticolonial tint. In two cities, the Quebra-Quilos riots included the pointed destruction of numbers on houses; in some cities where slaves participated, the revolts included a demand for emancipation; and in other cities, masonry was denounced and local leadership was in fact religious. According to Souto Maior, the revolts seem to have subsided largely on their own despite the fact that troops and policemen were often sent to put some of them down.

If the riots were not exclusively organized by a resistance to changes in the metric system, how do we explain the fact that they became intelligible as such? Ernesto Laclau’s model of the creation of the hegemonic relation is, in this respect, very useful. If, for Gramsci, a class or group is hegemonic when it succeeds in presenting itself as realizing the broader aims of either emancipating or ensuring order for wider masses of the population, for Laclau this is a process that results from the production of an empty signifier. The example he gives is a hypothetical situation of opposition to a regime by a number of different particular struggles; these struggles differ among themselves even as they all share opposition to system. For a hegemonic relation to be constructed among these various points of opposition, a relation of equivalence needs to prevail over the differentials. A chain of equivalence is created between them so that a is like b is like c. The longer the chain of equivalences, and the more abstract, the less those separate struggles will share “something equally present.” At the limit, their common denominator will be a pure communitarian being independent of any concrete manifestation—a community, moreover, that is absent because of the regime. Laclau argues that this community cannot
have a representation (signifier) of its own, since such a representation would be simply one more difference in the series of differentials. The imaginary common denominator therefore borrows a signifier from somewhere in the chain and empties it of its particular, differential signified. The result is the emergence of an ‘empty’ signifier as the signifier of a lack, of an absent totality.\textsuperscript{18} Using Laclau’s model we can say that, in the case of the Quebra-Quilos riots, the opposition to the metric system becomes the empty signifier or the surface of inscription which articulates all other demands (desire for freedom for slaves, religious beliefs, opposition to new taxes). What I want to underscore—a point that may be clearer further on, when I compare these riots to the Canudos war—is that this surface of inscription is marked by the temporality and level of the everyday. This is precisely what makes for the slightly incongruous nature of the riots, as evident in the words of a commentator who said, “One expects that people will calm down and that the peace won’t be disturbed in this municipality for such a frivolous reason.”\textsuperscript{19} Such an uproar should not happen, he seems to be saying, for something so ordinary and frivolous as a system of weights.

This was not an arbitrary surface of inscription despite the variety of demands articulated by these riots. What was at stake in the riots was precisely a struggle over which and whose everyday. They manifested a resistance to the homogenization and unification of the everyday decreed by the Brazilian state in its attempt to increase its extractive and regulative power. Souto Maior misses this point when, in good subalternizing fashion, he reads the variety and disarticulation of the riots as evidence that we should understand the riots as prepolitical and the rioters as provocateurs rather than agents, properly speaking, since (he says) they did not really grasp the causes or consequences of their actions. While the Quebra-Quilos were spawned by processes of modernization driven by the Brazilian imperial state, the workings of the state were all but unfathomable to the protestors, according to Souto Maior: “The riots were the result of the historical evolution of the economy of the Empire and its most visible agents did not always have a more or less precise notion of what the State was, along with its machinery of soldiers and policemen, tax collectors, class differences, concentration of land, commerce etc.”\textsuperscript{20} The historian Robert Levine disputes such an ascription of naïvete to the rioters with an analysis of tax trends that seems to confirm their foresight: “Backland participants in these riots, of course, were portrayed as primitives terrified of modern scientific innovations; yet one could also praise them for figuring out that
uniform scales and measures would inevitably lead to a higher tax burden. Examination of the tax records in the affected municípios, in fact, reveals that between 1870 and 1875 new taxes were created or raised in two out of every three municípios after standardized weights were introduced.” Still, even if the rioters had been wrong about the increasing tax burden, and even if the logic behind the rebellions could not be identified as political actions under certain modern definitions of the term political, we could still say with Ranajit Guha that “peasants don’t launch into rebellions in fits of absent mindedness.”

On the other hand, Souto Maior’s interpretation, however blinkered, denotes a gap I would like to keep open between these populations and the state in formation. His analysis raises the question of how the Brazilian state existed (or did not exist) as an ideological referent for the rioters. In a chapter-long study much indebted to Souto Maior’s work, Magnus Mörner argues that the riots are in fact evidence of the weaknesses behind the imperial façade as it launched its premature attempt to impose a new modernizing system, to move from patrimonial to bureaucratic domination. They revealed that in northeastern Brazil the provincial presidents and elites exercised no effective control over the backlands and had to depend on dominance rather than ideological hegemony: “The military intervention and the ensuing repression came too late to be considered ‘rational.’ It was rather, through its arbitrary brutality, a display of traditional, despotic power.” If Mörner is right, then we can read the riots as the attempt to remain outside the purview of a new encroaching state.

The fact that a series of demands was articulated around a resistance to the metric system suggests, therefore, that we should understand the riots as reactions to changes in structures of governmentality that were perceived in terms of an illegitimate expansion into areas that a centralized apparatus of government had previously ignored or been unable to affect, into as-yet-uncolonized spheres of an everyday or private life. The jokes and songs that circulated alongside the Quebra-Quilos riots suggests as much. One judge narrates the beginning of one riot by mentioning the spread of a rumor of a tax of five thousand reis paid by any woman who combed her hair and by alluding to other rumors of taxes on sexual activities which he, out of decency, refrains from verbalizing. The apparent absurdity of such government intromission in arenas of everyday life such as personal hygiene and sex signals both how inconceivable it was, as well as the fact that the new system of measures and weights was associated metonymically with this order of threat.
On the other hand, we should not ignore the fact that the target of the protests (the surface of inscription) was precisely the ground upon which the state was attempting to encroach (systems of weight and measurement) in its attempt to modernize Brazilian society. We should not ignore, in other words, the existence of some kind of common ground. We therefore need to introduce a caveat to Mörner’s analysis of the riots, since the need to resort to “dominance” in the case of the riots need not necessarily mean, as he suggests, that there was no ideological hegemony at all in the backlands—merely that the new modernizing aims of the Brazilian state were not part of this older or prior hegemony that operated to the extent that it could determine the very grounds of the struggle. William Roseberry suggests a definition of hegemony with which I disagree in general but which may help to clarify the point I am trying to make here:

I propose that we use the concept [of hegemony] not to understand consent but to understand struggle; the ways in which the words, images, symbols, forms, organizations, and movements used by subordinate populations to talk about, understand, confront, accommodate themselves to, or resist their domination are shaped by the process of domination itself. What hegemony constructs, then, is not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination.25

While I believe Roseberry wants hegemony to name struggle rather than consent in order to emphasize its fragility, his definition has in fact that opposite effect. A hegemony that can determine the very grounds on which it is contested is almost seamless, and as I hope my prior discussion of hegemony makes clear, we should not reserve the term hegemony to describe this totalizing end point toward which every particular hegemony aspires. Nonetheless, what is useful about his argument is the suggestion that if a struggle takes place within a common framework of contestation, this may denote the existence of a hegemony rather than merely the rupture of consensus. To the extent that the Quebra-Quilos riots are represented as a struggle over the shape of the everyday, they also take place on the level of the everyday. The riots manifest an everydayness that participated albeit unevenly in the life of the empire, an everydayness dragging itself along in the wake of change.
The subaltern also escapes. But unlike the everyday, it is what is produced as escaping. The subaltern I am referring to is not simply the dispossessed, the downtrodden, the rebellious. It is not simply the people, the bodies out there, but the way they are represented as unrepresentable (as escaping). Naming, says de Certeau, is not “the ‘painting’ of a reality any more than it is elsewhere; it is a performative act organizing what it enunciates. It does what it says and constitutes the savagery it declares. Just as one excommunicates by naming, the name ‘wild’ both creates and defines what the scriptural economy situates outside of itself.”

To understand subalternity thus is to side with the argument that it is a discursive effect. This, at least, seems to me the most theoretically interesting use of the term, although the word subaltern can be, and indeed has been, used to think through other sorts of problems as well. In his *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Ranajit Guha calls our attention to the way insurgent peasants in India were, much like the Quebra-Quilos rioters, deemed nonpolitical by the functionaries of the colonial state. They were “excommunicated” from the category of the political as well as the categories of reason and agency (so fundamental to a post-Enlightenment notion of the human) and assimilated to other, nonhuman categories. The “natural” rhetoric that organizes so many representations of peasant insurgency noted by Guha (peasant rebellions “heaved like earthquakes” and “spread like wildfire”) flags the way the subaltern becomes unrecognizable in human terms. In other words, since the act of insurgency shows that these peasants have *not been fully subjected*, their actions cannot therefore be understood through the category of the subject. In saying this I am relying on Althusser’s formulation of the subject as fundamentally subjected through ideology, a formulation which makes visible the articulations between the grounds upon which the modern (human) subject is constructed and those upon which modern political systems are built or at least imagined. When I claim the subaltern is the nonsubject, therefore, what I mean is that this is how they are represented. This use of a notion of subalternity refers thus not to an autonomous or external domain but to the rebellions as they were committed to paper, to the rebellions as they were rendered unintelligible, turned into the equivalent of nonsense or noise. Gayatri Spivak’s famous and controversial statement that the subaltern could not speak proposed that such “excommunication” (to continue with de Certeau’s term) could not be undone retroactively. Denied a subject-
position from which to speak in the first place, they could not be granted such a position in hindsight. This line of thought on subalternity addresses therefore the problem of limits—the limits of representation and the limits of knowledge. Not just any limits, however, but limits that are specifically a consequence of problems of dominance and power. On the one hand, the nonsense of the subaltern confirms the (colonial) order because it is an effect of the discursive practices and the grid of intelligibility of that order. It also confirms the colonial order as what is, by definition, not nonsense. But this is not the whole story told by subalternity: the production of the rebellions as sheer noise also betrays the existence of a pressure on that same order, which is, after all, responding to an insurgency. Subalternity spells out an internal limit to a system of dominance, since the subaltern should be subjugated but is instead insurgent. As Gyan Prakash puts it,

We should understand subalternity as an abstraction used to identity the intractability that surfaces inside the dominant system—it signifies that which the dominant discourse cannot appropriate completely, an otherness that resists containment. But precisely because dominance fails to appropriate the radical incommensurability of the subaltern, it registers only the recalcitrant presence of subalternity . . . its externality to dominant systems of knowledge and power surfaces inside the system of dominance, but only as an intimation, as a trace of that which eludes the dominant discourse. 27

The concept of subalternity forces us to keep in view this tension between an inside and an outside. To the extent that the subaltern surfaces within a discourse, it is that which the discourse excommunicates; to the extent that such a manifestation is only a discursive trace of a more radical outside, the subaltern escapes.

The representation of the war of Canudos, which took place some twenty years after the Quebra-Quilos riots, bears all the markers of subalternization understood in these terms. The war itself took its name from the city settled in 1893 by a man known as Antonio Conselheiro who had wandered the northeast for some twenty-odd years, building churches and preaching sermons. “One day,” writes Laclau, “Conselheiro arrived in a village where people were rioting against the tax collectors, and pronounced the words which were to become the key equivalence of his prophetic discourse ‘The Republic is the Antichrist.’ From that point onwards his dis-
course provided a surface of inscription for all forms of rural discontent, and became the starting point of a mass rebellion.”\(^{28}\) The word rebellion may be too strong, however, given that by many accounts the Conselheiro and his followers simply wanted to be left alone by the republic. If the Quebra-Quilos riots took the form of a fight for the here and now, Canudos took the form of a flight away, a move toward an elsewhere still outside the purview of the state. This was an exercise in negativity not unlike the “no” of so many runaway slave communities or the Tupí-Guaraní tribes who followed their prophets in “mad migrations questing for the homeland of the gods” so as to prevent the consolidation of power in the hands of the chieftains, according to Pierre Clastres.\(^{29}\) If this desire to simply leave was interpreted by the elites and governments as setting up a “state within a state,” it was because they understood an unincorporated everyday as the manifestation of an alternative and rival order (another “state”). Therefore Canudos needed to be eliminated. After three failed government expeditions, the war finally ended with the destruction of Canudos and the death of the majority of the estimated 25,000 inhabitants who had settled there following Conselheiro.

On July 15, 1897, two senators had a dialogue concerning the nature of the Conselheiristas; their conversation, registered in the annals of the Chamber of Deputies, represents a particularly rich condensation of the problematic of subalternity. The first senator (Sr. Seabra) comments rather ironically that “it seems that the conselheiros are ghosts frightening [or haunting] the Republic.” The second senator (Sr. Barbosa Lima) does not refute the claim that they are phantoms but disagrees that they are scaring the new republic: “They do not frighten, but they do not mix with the nature of the new regime.”\(^{30}\) They are, to use other words, incommensurable with the new republic. Despite Barbosa Lima’s nonchalance, newspapers of the time register (or fabricate) a public hysteria in which rumors circulated that the Conselheiristas were merely the tip of a vast conspiracy to restore the monarchy. Monarchist newspapers were burned, one editor was killed, and it was even claimed that the people of Canudos were receiving aid and sophisticated arms from abroad and were being secretly led by foreign agents. The necessity to ascribe the source of agency to monarchists or foreigners betrays the sheer impossibility of understanding the actions of a ragtag group of religious fanatics in terms of agency. In official government rhetoric the war took on the semblance of a clash between the new republic, declared in 1889, and those who sought to throw the country
back into the dark ages of monarchism, between progress and retrograde forces. Antonio Conselheiro was deemed a religious fanatic, and those who followed him were perceived as the condensation of all the backward, misguided, criminal elements of the country. The city of Canudos itself was portrayed as a city founded out of nothing, a Troy arising out of thin air in the middle of nowhere, the very materialization of rupture. Defined only in terms of lacks, it was a city that was not really a city, with roads that were not roads and public plazas that were not really plazas but their obscene inversion. The journalist Euclides da Cunha, who had accompanied the army to the war front on the last expedition, described it as an anti-city built without rhyme or reason, a place in which “the houses proliferate in absolute disorder . . . as if all of it were built rapidly, feverishly, in a single night, by a multitude of crazy people.” Canudos was represented—and with time, could only be represented—in terms of the extraordinary. When the senator said that Canudos did not mix with the new regime, he was erasing the possibility of a common denominator. They may as well, therefore, have been ghosts, an image which aptly evokes the erasure of their presence in the space and time of the republic. Both here and not here. Deemed incommensurable with the new state, Canudos becomes unintelligible under the categories of the ordinary and everyday. This process suggests that one of the by-products of subalternization is precisely the erasure of everydayness.

While the Quebra-Quilos riots have been virtually forgotten, Canudos is an indelible referent in Brazilian historical memory—the subject not only of Euclides da Cunha’s famous account of it in Os Sertões, but of innumerable songs, poems, novels, and even a movie or two. The seeming differences in the form and fate of both events makes it all the more surprising when Souto Maior expresses his conviction in their deep similarities:

The Quebra-Quilos tragedy was relegated to the obscurity of those events that have been largely ignored and the complexity of its social mechanisms deterred definitive studies. The social types of those who participated were often very similar to that of the followers of Antonio Conselheiro and their motivations were almost identical. The optics with which the rebels of 1874 and the fighters of Canudos viewed institutions share the same etiology. This is why it has often been said . . . that the principal cause of the Quebra-Quilos revolt was the ignorance of the sertanejo populations regarding army conscription, which
Adriana Johnson

seemed unjust to them, taxes and the introduction of the system of weights and measures, based on the French decimal metric system, instituted in Brazil by law no. 1.157 on June 26, 1862.32

Souto Maior offers up the possibility of processing Canudos through the category of everydayness, the possibility of imagining battle lines that were not being drawn up for an apocalyptic war of the end of the world (as Mario Vargas Llosa conceives it in his novel of the same name). Souto Maior might have us foreground, for example, the incident that led to the first clash between Conselheiro and a local police force, namely an occasion in which he publicly defended an old woman who was being charged high taxes for a space from which to sell her goods at a market, marking the frustration with taxation as a continuous source of friction in Brazil that could surface at different moments and within different articulations. We could also emphasize, perhaps, the way the republican government attempted a secularization of daily life and the fact that oral poetry as well as a manuscript of sermons and Bible extracts attributed to Antônio Conselheiro identify one area of life particularly threatened by such secularization: the institution of marriage. The institution of civil marriage was, according to such accounts, experienced like the change in the system of measurement: as the illegal invasion of the new government in a terrain of everyday life where it did not belong. On the other hand, such speculation remains prey to the war’s surface of inscription as a religious crusade against the new republic and, as in the case of the Quebra-Quilos, there is evidence of a variety of otherwise unrelated reasons pulling people to Canudos. The chain of equivalences produced by Conselheiro’s opposition to the new republic included new taxes and changes in the Church (such as a renewed persecution of nonorthodox practices) and its relationship with the state, the ever-present menace of the coronelista system, ties of kinship, a belief in Conselheiro as a miracle worker and a search for cures from particular diseases, or an escape from the pressures of economic hardship at a time of unceasing droughts given that rivers and plentiful water underground made Canudos fertile.33

Perhaps one document that could be offered up as evidence of an ordinary Canudos is one of the only testimonies of an inhabitant of Canudos: the account of Honório Villanova, interviewed in 1962 by the journalist Nerton Macedo. This text is striking precisely for the way it evades the dominant surface of inscription of Canudos. God and republic are afterthoughts or footnotes in Villanova’s account, perhaps deliberately so.
Honório and his brother Antônio were both merchants in charge of Canudos's commercial life and the distribution of goods. In his interview Honório Villanova (who was then ninety-seven years old) depicts Canudos not as a millenarian, messianic site but as a town characterized above all by peace, order, and some measure of prosperity by the standards of the Brazilian backlands: “I like the order there so much that I decided to stay. Canudos was a lucky place. It didn’t even need rain. It had everything. Even cane sugar from Caririri.” While he demanded order and peace, according to Villanova’s testimony, Conselheiro did not insist that the dwellers of Canudos publicly and constantly demonstrate their faith. Villanova himself rarely went to church, he says, and many other men did not either; church was more a “woman’s” thing: “The men, I repeat, didn’t go to the religious services. The women, yes, almost all of them went to the sanctuary, where they prayed and listened to sermons.” According to Villanova, Conselheiro did not ban private property, commerce, or money in Canudos despite the fact that he himself did not touch either republican or monarchist money, and, later in the war, demanded that all money stolen from soldiers be burned. In fact, Villanova and his brother made good profit as merchants in Canudos. The existence of such people as the Villanova brothers in Canudos puts into question the vision of Canudos as a radically egalitarian society, with no differences in wealth, suggesting that there was certainly some stratification even if it was perhaps not as severe as in other parts of Brazil. Honório Villanova’s account belies the tendency in later, particularly Marxist, historiography to rewrite the community in utopian terms as an egalitarian, communist community rather than a monstrous urb. Villanova’s Canudos shows us an image of a community that may have had nothing in common with the religious longings of the women who might have gone to church or those seeking cures from disease. Nonetheless, Villanova’s own account also reveals how difficult—perhaps impossible—it is to withdraw Canudos from the sphere of the extraordinary to the extent that his narrative delineates the ordinary peace and prosperity that is precisely the utopia of a merchant. His is not just an ordinary Canudos but an extraordinary ordinary. It shares the same structure as the fantasy of abundance that drew many of the local indigenous groups to Canudos, according to oral history: “My mom . . . wanted to go and catch a glimpse of the beauty in Canudos . . . She thought it was pretty since they said that there in Canudos there was a river of milk and embankments made of cous cous.” In Villanova too the (Canudos) everyday escapes.

Sentenced to spectrality, the erasure of the everyday of Canudos cannot
so easily be undone. Not only can the subaltern not speak; it cannot now have an everyday. All that can be done is to mark this incommensurability. This is the virtue of a few short newspaper pieces published in *A Semana* by the famous realist writer Machado de Assis, a writer whom Roberto Schwarz characterizes as the only writer to have captured the twisted labyrinthine turns of the way ideology worked (and did not work) in nineteenth-century Brazil. Although a generalized hysteria presided over the lettered vision of the events of Canudos, Machado de Assis stands out, in contrast, for his expressions of sympathy toward the people of Canudos. One of these pieces, entitled “Canção de Piratas” from July 22, 1894, is particularly striking for the way he confronts the erasure of the everydayness in Canudos:

Newspapers and telegrams tells us that the followers of Conselheiro are criminal; this is the only word that could emerge from brains that toe the line, that are registered, qualified, voting, contributing brains. For us artists it is a renaissance. . . . They are the pirates of the poets of 1830. . . . Believe me, this Conselheiro in Canudos with his 2000 men is not what the telegrams and public papers tell us. Imagine a legion of gallant, audacious adventurers, without profession or reward, who detest the calendar, the clocks, taxes, social graces, everything that regiments life, forcing it in line. They are men who are sick of this dull social life, the same days, the same faces, the same events, the same crimes, the same virtues. They cannot believe that a world is a secretary of the State, with his appointment book, the fixed start and end of his work day, his pay docked for days missed. Even love is regulated by law; marriages are celebrated by law in the house of blacks, and by a ritual in the house of God, all with etiquette of carriages and coats, symbolic words, conventional gestures. Not even death escapes regulation. The deceased has to have candles and prayers, a closed coffin and a carriage that takes him to a numbered grave like the house in which he lived. . . . No, by Satan! The followers of Conselheiro remembered the romantic pirates, shook their sandals at the gates of civilization and left in search of free life.37

In this little scene Machado de Assis sets up Canudos as the contrary of a society that is minutely regimented and regulated, a society marked by a homogeneity (the same faces, virtues, rituals of death) which is presumably artificial. In this setting Canudos becomes the name for a life that cannot
be measured by calendars, watches, taxes. Like Lefebvre, Machado de Assis ties a homogeneous everydayness to modernity and articulates a critique using Canudos as a figure of all that lies outside this modern everyday. In this sense, of course, his scene preserves the association between Canudos and rupture and the extraordinary: for example, the information on daily life in Canudos that has survived in accounts like Villanova’s does not in fact paint the picture of a society free of regulation and regularity. Nonetheless, Assis voices a perspective from which the regulation of Canudos is illegible as such, a Canudos that is perceived as a line of flight because his pirates, finally, are characterized not so much by their predations and attacks on regimented society (as one might imagine pirates to be) as by the attempt to elude an encroaching form of governmentality, shaking the dust of civilization off their sandals. Their extraordinary becomes a flight from the ordinary. The erasure of an articulation between everydayness and Canudos thus takes the form of Canudos’s escape from the everyday. It is symptomatic that on another level this little vignette performs or confirms the very dilemma it confronts as it assimilates Canudos to a romantic vision of pirates, and to a history, therefore, very far from its own. It is yet another way Canudos’s everyday is rendered invisible, its nonsignifying elements wrenched like water-creatures from the deep and left to die in the light of day.

Notes

2 Ibid., 19.
4 Ibid., 357.
5 Ibid., 9.
7 Ibid., 9.
8 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 232.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 107.
16 Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, 2:34.
19 Souto Maior, *Quebra-Quilos*, 84.
20 Ibid., 2.
24 Souto Maior, *Quebra-Quilos*, 166.
30 The Universidade Estadual da Bahia (UNEB) has a valuable microfiche collection on the history of the Brazilian northeast in the Nucleo Sertão, which includes the annals of the Chamber of Deputies cited here.
32 Souto Maior, *Quebra-Quilos*, 56; translation mine.
35 Ibid., 68.