

THE CARNIVALIZED METROPOLIS: THE STREET CARNIVAL GROUPS AS SURREALISTS AND SITUACIONISTS PERFORMANCES IN RIO DE JANEIRO

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ABSTRACT

The street carnival in Rio de Janeiro, cultural manifestation in rapid growth in the last three decades, has been the target of recent investments by the government and commercial interests. One of the consequences of this intervention was the distinction of *blocos de rua* (street carnival groups) between official and unofficial. This article will deal with this second type of groups, characterized by spontaneity and horizontality, taking as an exemplary case the group named Cordão do Boi Tolo. Such manifestations substantiate city experiences that impose themselves, from the aesthetic and cultural point of view, as creative experiences of performatization of bodies. From a political perspective, they are libertarian forms of occupation of public space and of redefining the uses of the city. Combining literary analysis, sociological reflection and ethnographic observation, the article intends to discuss this street carnival as an unexpected extension of the surrealist and situationist proposals for the re-enchantment of the world and the manifestation of the wonderful. It concludes that the magic that literature works in surrealism continues to be updated in the streets and crossroads of Rio de Janeiro by the *blocos de rua*, in their opposition to institutional powers and market control. It is in the enjoyment of the city by the revelers that the *flânerie* becomes creative writing of reality. It is in the streets of the carnivalized metropolis that the *dérive* is rooted in the oldest traditions of the square as a free space of popular creation.

KEYWORDS

city, street carnival, street carnival groups, situationism, surrealism

A METRÓPOLE CARNAVALIZADA: OS BLOCOS DE RUA COMO PERFORMANCES SURREALISTAS E SITUACIONISTAS NA CIDADE DO RIO DE JANEIRO

RESUMO

O carnaval de rua do Rio de Janeiro, manifestação cultural em franco crescimento nas últimas três décadas, foi alvo de recentes investimentos ordenadores pelo poder público e pelos interesses mercantis. Uma das consequências desta intervenção foi a distinção dos blocos de rua entre oficiais e não-oficiais. É acerca deste segundo tipo de blocos, caracterizados pela espontaneidade e pela horizontalidade, que este artigo tratará, tomando como caso exemplar o Cordão do Boi Tolo. Tais manifestações consubstanciam vivências da cidade que se impõem, do ponto de vista estético e cultural, como experiências criativas de performatização dos corpos. Numa perspectiva política, estas manifestações constituem formas libertárias de ocupação do espaço público e de ressignificação dos usos da cidade. Unindo análise literária, reflexão sociológica e

observação etnográfica, o artigo pretende discutir este carnaval de rua como um prolongamento inesperado das propostas surrealista e situacionista de reencantamento do mundo e de manifestação do maravilhoso. Conclui-se que a magia que a literatura opera no surrealismo continua sendo atualizada nas ruas e encruzilhadas do Rio de Janeiro pelos blocos carnavalescos, em sua oposição aos poderes institucionais e ao controle do mercado. É no gozo da cidade pelos foliões que a *flânerie* se converte em escrita criativa da realidade. É nas ruas da metrópole carnalizada que a deriva se encontra enraizada nas mais antigas tradições da praça como espaço livre e gratuito de criação popular.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

blocos de rua, carnaval de rua, cidade, situacionismo, surrealismo

They're still going to kill me on a street. When they discover, mainly, that I am part of these people who think that the street is the main part of the city.
—Paulo Leminski, *Quarenta Clics em Curitiba* (Forty Clicks in Curitiba)

INTRODUCTION

Street carnival¹ can be defined as a set of popular, spontaneous and playful events that are distinguished, in Rio de Janeiro, from the so-called “avenue carnival”, from the parades of the great samba schools. In contrast to this carnival, founded on a rigid and closed division between performers and spectators, and orbiting around the competition between associations, street carnival presupposes the active and free participation of the reveler, who “plays” the party without any goal other than fun itself. Its most common organizational form is the *blocos de rua* (street carnival groups), understood as popular, semi-organized, non-competitive and non-commercial (or free, at least) carnival groups, which typically go on a procession through the city streets (although there may also be groups that does not move). The experience of the *blocos de rua* implies the redefinition of city spaces, removed from their everyday use and transformed in subjects of affective investments. Such experiences of symbolic appropriation of the urban space constitute forms of political resistance (deliberate or not) and affirmation of the being in the street as a right, but also of cultural resistance, by claiming particular ways of performing this presence. If such carnivalesque manifestations are typically opposed to institutional powers and constituted authority, they also address ways of controlling behavior that are manifested in a diffuse way at the level of culture, on the ways of living everyday life. It is, therefore, about affirming city experiences that impose themselves both from the

¹ There is no consensus in the bibliography on the use of the initial capital or small letters in the spelling of the term “Carnival”. Following Ferreira (2004), I chose to use the initial capital letter to refer to the party dated in the three days prior to Lent (Carnival), choosing to spell with lower initials the term “street carnival”, because I understand it as referring to a possible manifestation of that greater festivity.

aesthetic and cultural point of view, as creative experiences of performing bodies, and from the political point of view, as libertarian forms of occupation of public space.

Such an approach, of free and spontaneous transit through the city as a form of resistance to systemic controls of power and money, finds its best genealogy in the intersections between social thought and literature. This takes place from the Baudelairean conception of the *flâneur* (and the way it was reappropriated by surrealist poetics and situationist praxis) to the way this character finds his other in the reveler, a modality free and improvisational of enjoyment of the street (Simas, 2020). It is in this theoretical (and practical) path that we will find the poetic and political antecedents of the current forms of occupation and meaning of the city of Rio de Janeiro by carnival revelry. Street carnival, in its maximum libertarian potential, is a being in the city by extrapolation of playing and performatization of bodies from the search for the fulfillment of desires. It can be thought, in this sense, as an unexpected extension of surrealist and situationist programs for the city of Rio de Janeiro.

This presupposition demands the establishing of the connections between literature and everyday life as ways of producing of meanings about the city. The literary analysis will be followed, therefore, by the attempt to understand ways the street carnival of Rio de Janeiro was configured in the last decades from improvisation and the refusal of standardization attempts. The Cordão do Boi Tolo, street carnival group created in 2006, will be taken not only as an ideal type of this Carnival model, but as its extrapolation, surpassing the condition of *bloco de rua* and becoming an immersive ambience. From the intersections between the *flânerie* and the literary *dérive* and the concrete experiences of street carnival, especially my own², I will seek to perceive this festival as an objective manifestation of the surrealist reenchantment of the world and the city, in harmony with the search for those poets for the encounter between art and vital praxis.

Here, fieldwork establishes intersections with literary writing, as in a set of mirrors. For surrealists, the wanderings of the poet-*flâneur* through the city constitute another form of perception of the wonderful, complementary to the practice of literary writing. Together, *flânerie* and writing constitute for Walter Benjamin (1929/1987) the supreme form of surrealist profane enlightenment. Ethnography, in turn, can be thought not only as a transposition of the surrealist method of collage, which constructs images by superposition of distinct and decontextualized realities (Clifford, 1981/2000), but as an experiment of objective chance, in which meanings emerge by the projection of desiring subjectivity on objects (Farias, 2003). In this process, similar methodological challenges are imposed on the *flâneur* and the ethnographer as researchers of their own everyday life. In his attempt to become the “peasant of Paris”, Louis Aragon (1928/1996) takes an attitude that anticipates that of anthropology, by the strangeness of the familiar, which I will seek when analyzing my own experience of Carnival. For situationists, the individual

² I have been going to Rio de Janeiro's street carnival since 2000. From 2016, I got involved in the network of amateur musicians linked to the movement of neofanfarrism and street carnival. I have participated since then in the organization of bands and street carnival group.

subjectivity of the experimenter, since in tune with other voices of his time, can put “this time in harmony with our desires” (Vaneigem, 1967/2002, p. 12).

Thus, my own look will be complemented by interviews of other participants of unofficial street carnival, in order to put this experience into perspective. For this paper, organizers and musicians from different street carnival groups were interviewed. Among those cited, Tomás Ramos is creator and organizer of BlocAto Nada Deve Parecer Impossível de Mudar and Ocupa Carnaval movement, which articulates unofficial street carnival groups in political occupations of the streets; Clemente Momberao is founder of Technobloco and Bloco do Bagunço. Both interviewees, however, participate in several other blocos in Rio de Janeiro. In addition, a founder and organizer of Cordão do Boi Tolo was interviewed, whose identity will be kept confidential, considering the unofficial character of the bloco and the possibility of applying municipal government sanctions on its organizers. All interviews were granted to the author in December 2020.

THE WRITING OF THE CITY: THE *FLÂNEUR*, THE DRIFTER AND THE REVELER

No character embodied so well the modern subject of big cities as the *flâneur*. From Balzac to Edgar Allan Poe, from Victor Hugo to Karl Marx, 19th-century European thought recognized in this wanderer the central character of modern life, whose great scenery is the street. No one sang the *flâneur*, however, so enthusiastically as Charles Baudelaire (1863/1995), who defined him as a resident of the street, of which he is a chronicler and philosopher, a passionate observer of the crowd. João do Rio (1995) defined the *flâneur* by a double condition: “be a vagabond and reflect (...) be a gaper and comment, have the observation virus linked to that of loitering”, in short, “roam with intelligence” (p. 5). The development of *flânerie*, a lifestyle that is also a form of thought, corresponds to the conformation of a certain type of city, that of the large boulevards and commercial galleries, a sea of unknown and potentially dangerous faces (Benjamin, 1938/2000). In it, the *flâneur* is mixed with another urban type, the bohemian, composed of the rebels and conspirators who, in turn, are confused with the scum of ragmen and prostitutes. Together, they share the condition of dangerous classes and form a kind of living protest against the established order and the rationalizing attacks of reforms on the urban tissue of the French capital.

If Benjamin (1938/2000) notices the protestor potential of *flânerie*, his limitations in the process of reinvention of the city do not escape him, on the other hand. For him, the *flâneur* is both a potent urban researcher and a critic of the objective life of cities as a decadent type surrendered to the commodity fetishism. It will be the surrealists, literary heirs of the *flânerie* in the 20th century, those who will rescue both their demiurgic capacity and its critical and iconoclastic potential. In 1924, surrealism declared war on capitalism, bourgeois society and Western rationality, especially regarding the effects of such phenomena on the human spirit: the death of the wonderful, the disenchantment of the world and the reduction of life to the instrumental and technical dimension (Breton, 1924/2001). However, one of the great mysteries that inhabit surrealist thought, one of

its most accurate dialectical blows, is perhaps the elegant balance between the complete denial of modernity and the assumption of the city, the scene of modern life, as its rightful habitat. There is no doubt about human demotion by the advent of modern life, its science, its technique and its machines. From journalistic presses to psychiatric machinery, the whole bourgeois world is an offense to humanity. The spiritual life of this world of technical ingenuity is poor, needy and nostalgic for the magic of country life and the enchantment of the oneiric (Breton, 1924/2001). But it is the cities that surrealism turns to. It is in its streets that the fantastic encounters will take place, the objects will reveal the wonderful and the objective chance will produce the surrealist images by the fire that arises from the shock of different realities.

When wandering “down and up” through the boulevards, with no determined goal and at random, the surrealist *flâneur* becomes a vector of the production of deep meanings from the unplanned and the contingent. As in the experience of automatic writing, *flânerie* becomes a research method and a new meanings production technology (Löwy, 2000/2018). Walking freely operates as a vector of truly important encounters, whether with friends, lovers or intellectual partnerships (Breton, 1928/2007). In addition to a study laboratory, the streets are also the battlefield of the surrealist revolt. It is at night that the knights–poets plan their assault on the cities, to implode them from inside and from below, dragging to the deep of the waters, where everything is slow and rusty, the bourgeoisie and capital machines (Breton, 1924/2001). The surrealist *flâneur* walks through the shops condemned by urban reforms, run over by the boulevard that bears the name of the reformist baron of the previous century, as who revisits the barricades of the Commune of Paris. It reveals not only the transitory character of cities, but the conflicts surrounding such changes. He perceives, in the posters in the windows and on the pages of the local newspapers, the echoes of a civil war, a reaction to the sound of the picks that destroy old Paris in the name of progress (Aragon, 1928/1996).

Result of the double journey of literature and *flânerie*, the city is, according to Benjamin (1929/1987), the supreme work of surrealists and the synthesis of their spirit of revolt. The experience of objective chance surpasses the drunkenness of the 19th-century *flâneur* by the intoxicating nature of the commodity, replacing the pleasure of the consumption desire with the enjoyment of the desire consummation. This rupture with the reified character of *flânerie* would be consummated, decades later, in the situationist practice of *dérive*, a form of urban ambience experimentation guided by give away to the requests of the ground and encounters (Debord, 1958/2003c). *Dérive* reveals the situs passion for the research of new ways of life in cities, more free and autonomous, in radical denial of the spectacular character of a world divided between performatizers and the public (Debord, 1957/2003b, 1967/1997). Its practice allows the construction of situations that call on the subjects to act as experiencers, creating a favorable field for the creation and fulfillment of their desires and becoming, in the best sense of surrealists, “an enchanted walk in the realm of Liberty” (Lövy, 2000/2018, p. 14). Against the existence reduction to the rationalist functionalism, the dictates of order and the seductions of capitalist promise (Internacional Situacionista, 1959/2003), the streets are experienced

by the drifters as the ground for a passionate game (Debord 1955/2003a), necessarily collective, participatory and collaborative, focused on the construction of new meanings for the city, for relationships and for everyday life itself (Jorn, 1958/2003).

Flânerie and *dérive* will find unexpected developments in Rio de Janeiro, a city that João do Rio (1995) describes through the daily experiences of subversion of order and mixtures. The *flâneur's* eye discovers a plot created by those dangerous classes that formed their cultural broth and against which the city itself, planned, became an instrument of containment (Simas 2020). This Rio *flânerie* reveals a city of inventions and inversions, mixtures and interpenetrations, displacements and gaps. Here, São Jorge bridges the gap between Ogum and the Nordic warrior Sigurd, Carlos Gardel is received in a spiritist center while a tupinambá spirit plays the bandoneon and *choro* players mix European music with African rhythms. It is in its streets that Zé Pelintra, a rural spirit, urbanizes and becomes the *malandro*, a carioca mix of *flâneur* and bohemian (Simas, 2020). It is this exusiac energy that defines Rio de Janeiro, the enchanting soul and enchanted body of its streets. According to Simas (2020), “the streets belong to Exu” (p. 9), a god converted into political and epistemic principle, culturally manifest in various ways: from Legba, the god of the streets and markets of the Dahomey people, to *pombagiras*, owners of gates and crossroads and archetypes of women’s freedom over their bodies. In opposition to the oxalufanic³, defined as relating to order and method, the exusiac concerns invention and improvisation, unpredictability and gaps, subversion and inversion of the order (Simas, 2020, p. 105). The exusiac principle of Rio’s streets is manifested, according to the author, as a principle of creation in discomfort, a way of circumventing normativity and modern rationality and resistance to a civilizational project of European matrix.

It is during Carnival that the streets of Rio de Janeiro are “exemplarily exusiac” (Simas, 2020, p. 105), that relations are (dis)organized by the inversion and dilution of identities, the loss of directions and forgetfulness. It is in Carnival that the city is taken by a sense of adventure and “unforeseen distress” (Rio, 2002, p. 27). The subject of the Carnival experience is the reveler, a type that can be thought of in a double relationship of continuity and rupture with the forms of resignification of urban space by *flânerie* and *dérive*. The reveler’s presence in the city is always performed collectively. His enjoyment in occupying the public space only makes sense when immersed in an indistinct mass that sometimes challenges the idea of individuality at the level of the body itself. Involved in the collective catharsis of Carnival, the revelers get carried away by the human wave, often physically. Some street carnival experiences are characterized by the extreme concentration of people, and the physical contact is naturalized in an unusual way, sometimes as an inevitable inconvenience, often as a defining element of the event itself. The reveler shares this appreciation for the crowd with the *flâneur*, but with a central distinction: if the *flâneur* is the “man of the crowd”, his enjoyment of the street is often lonely. On the other hand, no one is a reveler alone. In addition, there is an element of subversion of the

³ Oxalufã, old and wise, is the god whose positivity lies in the exercise of patience and in the fulfilling of tasks (Simas, 2020, p. 107).

order in the collective enjoyment of the reveler that defines it as a dangerous category. His collective wandering is anarchic and noisy, expansive and erratic, fueled by drugs and alcohol. It is true that the experience of the *flâneur*, even in its surrealist version, is of jouissance, but it is an internal delight, civilized, bourgeois. The character Nadja for whom André Breton (1928/2007) is enchanted in the streets is, in this sense, an anticipation of the reveler spirit: his behavior is erratic, anarchic and essentially delusional. But Nadja, lonely in Paris in the first half of the 20th century, is displaced in time and space. Breton (1928/2007), after all, cannot stand her. Admits not being ready for her.

What happens when the *flâneur* meets the reveler? João do Rio (1995), the Rio *flâneur* par excellence, is taken by absolute dread when he finds the *cordão carnavalesco*, street carnival group, coming towards him by the Ouvidor street, in the Rio downtown of the first decade of the 20th century. Overrun by a convulsed crowd, the street seems about to “burst with lust and noise” (Rio, 1995, p. 89). “Laughter, screaming, howling and squealing” join the “confused” and “epileptic” “drumming”, complemented by the nauseating smell of cheap perfume, dust, rancid and alcohol (Rio, 1995, pp. 89, 95). Hiding from door to door of what he considers a “pandemonium”, the chronicler exclaims, “oh, these *cordões*! I hate the *cordão*!” (Rio, 1995, pp. 90, 93). This immediate aversion to the Carnival anarchy of the *cordão* is followed, however, by the *flâneur* comprehension about the importance of Carnival not only as a creative power of the streets and the soul of Rio de Janeiro, but as a maximum expression of all human feelings. But this meeting between the Rio *flânerie* and the revelry is not, for João do Rio (1995, 2002), just an intellectual game. The *flâneur* and the reveler correspond to different positions that, not being mutually exclusive, manifest themselves in distinct temporalities of the city: the former in their daily life, the latter in the exceptionality of the Carnival period. In these “four paranoid days”, in which everyone gives in to excess, extravagance and transport of the flesh, the Rio *flâneur* is transfigured into a reveler, launching itself into the “rogue wave of voluptuousness and pleasure” that takes over the whole city (Rio, 2002, p. 28).

The experience of situational *dérive* is close to that of the reveler by its collective and playful character. It is distinguished, however, by its reflexive and even intellectual quality. Conversely, street carnival can be described by the terms of *dérive*: the free enjoyment of the city in response to immediate affective states and requests for meetings. But Carnival requests have a unique quality, making the city a licentiousness place in which honor and common sense become burdens and where “everything is possible, the greatest absurdities, the greatest crimes” (Rio, 2002, p. 32). The reveler is the purest expression of the energies of drunkenness that Walter Benjamin (1929/1987) finds in surrealists, although mediated by literature and revolutionary discipline. From the wild and popular *entrudo*, through the mass witnessed by João do Rio before the *cordões*, to the street carnival groups that made his play a form of resistance to authoritarianism, Carnival reached the end of the 20th century without losing its power of order subversion. The emergence of *blocos de rua* that, in the first decades of the 21st century, make their presence on the street a challenge to officiality is another virtuous chapter in the history of Carnival *dérive*.

AN INSTRUMENT IN YOUR HANDS, AN IDEA IN YOUR MIND

After a long period of shrinking, in the context of authoritarian modernization under the military regime, Rio de Janeiro's street carnival experienced, in the second half of the 1980s, a revitalization moment. This "Carnival resumption" (Sapia & Estevão, 2012) took place mainly around south side neighborhoods, led by the intellectualized middle class youth who perceived, in the political panorama of the end of the century, the possibility of taking to the streets to express themselves (Frydberg, 2017). A festive dimension of the political redemocratization, this resumption was guided by the feeling of citizenship that Brazilian society was taken by (Pimentel, 2002). Taking as its motto a verse of the song "Plataforma" (Platform), by Aldir Blanc and João Bosco, "não põe corda no meu bloco" (don't surround my bloco with a rope), the movement was guided by the affirmation of the street as a free place for enjoyment and the party as the main use of the city. The *blocos de rua* proposed a Carnival style characterized by political criticism and democratization of the revelers participation, as opposed to the previous emphasis in the model of samba school parades as tourist shows (Sapia & Estevão, 2012).

Extending until the first years of the 21st century, this rebirth of the street carnival took place in parallel to the revitalization of the so-called "*samba de raiz*" as a form of cultural occupation of the Lapa neighborhood, which quickly went from the condition of a slum to an entertainment hub to Rio de Janeiro's youth. Following the logic of carnival resumption, the street carnival groups of the 21st early century were still organized around the *samba* parties and bars of the city, but now its preferred place was downtown. Its musicality also evoked a revitalization spirit, with a traditional repertoire, composed by *sambas*, *ranchos* and *marchinhas*. The small number of participants, in a period in which Bahia's Carnival was still the preferred destination of the bourgeois youth of the city, expanded this memorialist appeal, with processions that bucolically crossed the alleys of old town.

Street carnival resurgence would gain monumental dimensions, however, from the second half of 2000, in a second resumption movement. Herschmann and Cabanzo (2016) refer to this moment as "boom of Rio street Carnival" (p. 7), in close connection with the arrival in the city of the so-called neofanfarism movement. Despite the novelties presented by these new groups, among which stand out Songoro Cossongo, created in 2005, and Orquestra Voadora, created in 2009, some central elements of street carnival's expansion were already manifested in *blocos de rua* of the late 1990s. One of the interviewees, founder and organizer of several street carnival groups, points out that

our street carnival, parade carnival, without sound-equipped cars, which does not have a defined script, which has the ability to create alternatives, that uses acoustic instruments... this carnival type that has the ability to organize quickly, at a moment's notice, spontaneously, it is born in 1996, with *Cordão do Boitatá*. (Tomás Ramos)

The emergence of new *blocos*, identified as “fanfares” or linked to this musical group format, brought, as an innovation, the inclusion of new themes, rhythms and musicalities, but also new conceptions of the relations with the public space. Fanfares can be defined as a form of musical occupation of the streets of nomadic and slow character, in the face of their use as a place of passage and guided by everyday life’s imperatives (Herschmann & Cabanzo, 2016). Materially, they are characterized by the use of wind and percussion instruments, chosen both because of their greater mobility and the possibility of being “acoustically consumed by the public in the noisy environment of the city” (Herschmann & Cabanzo, 2016, p. 3). The Brazilian neofanfarist movement gained momentum, starting in Rio de Janeiro, where it was distinguished by a carnivalized performance, networked with the street carnival groups. It is guided by the idea of democratizing the access to culture and brings together groups of professional and non-professional musicians who meet in the Carnival of several cities. Although this music format has traditionally a martial character, new fanfares stand out for eclectic repertoires, composed of acoustic versions of various song styles. This aesthetic trait, transposed to the street carnival, was a central element for its growth, attracting an audience that traditionally was not interested in hearing *marchinhas* and *sambas*.

Another central feature of fanfare *blocos* was the organization of musical workshops, lending a new dynamic to the Carnival movement. The workshops produced an explosion of street musicians, encouraging, in those who once performed as revelers, the taste for this form of participation in the party (Frydberg, 2017). Such workshops consist, in general, of classes organized by instrument, covering all the suits of wind and percussion instruments that make up a *bloco*. Their fundamental goal is to train the components in repertoire execution to be presented at Carnival. This model was created from the experience of Orquestra Voadora, although other groups of carnival resumption already offered workshops only for percussion instruments (Frydberg, 2017, p. 5). The fanfare model of workshop, however, by teaching instruments of all suits found in a band, allowed the formation of autonomous musical units, leading to the emergence of new bands and *blocos*⁴.

Carnival’s workshops created sociability networks among revelers and a movement of musical occupation of the city that extends throughout the year, including the unorganized, spontaneous and purely festive incidence of improvised encounters, nicknamed by participants of this network the *cracks*. The term was coined, at first, to name formal musical meetings of students of Orquestra Voadora workshop, on Tuesdays, after classes. It is, as can be assumed, a controversial allusion to the narcotics derived from cocaine, related by the participants themselves to uninterrupted desire to play, resulting from the new learning⁵. Over time, the term began to be used by fanfare carnival revelers

⁴ The Orquestra Voadora’s workshop had, in its annual program, an activity known as “mini-fanfare module”, which had the result of encouraging the creation of new bands and *blocos*, such as Ataque Brasil, Damas de Ferro and Os Biquinis de Ogodô Convidam as Sungas Odara.

⁵ As we can see in the documentary film *Aprendendo a Voar* (Learning to Fly), produced in 2015 by Orquestra Voadora workshop students (Orquestra Voadora, 2015).

as a reference to any amateur musicians meeting for carnival improvisations, during Carnival period or in other times of the year. More comprehensive interpretations of the term define as crack any *bloco* that does not rehearse, or any procession that is spontaneously formed, often from fortuitous encounters of amateur musicians. The crack practice — from which the categories *cracudagem* and *cracudos* derive, the former referring to a collective, the latter used to nominate their individual officiants — implied a spatial and temporal expansion of Rio's street carnival. Expanded temporality manifests itself in the current use of the statement that *cracudagem* plays Carnival all year round. In fact, carnival processions are common throughout the year, without any special reason but the pure desire to play in the street. Spatial expansion occurs during the carnival period itself, due to the explosion of improvised musical units, revealing crack as an organizing principle of unofficial street carnival:

blocos that I watched being invented appeared spontaneously, in the way people call crack: that moment after a specific *bloco*, in which a few musicians join to go out playing, to have fun. And a phenomenon happens, that is: as Carnival grows, having more and more *blocos*, more and more musicians, you will have a musicians network who play in several *blocos* together. When a certain *bloco* ends, this crowd has the repertoire of all *blocos* at their fingertips, then they can play the songs played by other *blocos*. (Tomás Ramos)

The resumption of street carnival was accompanied by another resurgence, that of attempts to co-opt and discipline these demonstrations. After decades without any intervention by the government, the street carnival groups began to be targeted, from 2009, of a municipal administration's regulatory initiative, named as "Official Carnival"⁶. A municipal decree from 2010 (Municipal Decree No. 32.664/2010) began to regulate the procedures for holding street carnival parades, conditioning public space occupation to groups registration and prior authorization of carnival processions by Municipal Department of Tourism. As a whole, such regulatory initiatives mischaracterized Carnival as an exercise of rights to culture and to the city, converting it into a tourist product and business opportunity, while disrespecting cultural manifestations. Despite its conjunctural causes, street carnival regulation by the city of Rio de Janeiro, just when it was experiencing a resurgence moment, reveals the structural character of government's attempts to control popular manifestations of festive life. A control by repression or co-optation, whenever these forces erupt as remeanings of Brazilian society and the city, and as producers of collective identities in a spontaneous, open and playful way.

On the other hand, Rio de Janeiro's street carnival maintained its vitality, affirming, year after year, its free and anarchic character. The officialization of Carnival by a

⁶ This carnival regulation model was described and analyzed in detail, in its formulation and operation, by the annual reports of the Special Carnival Commission of the City Council of Rio de Janeiro, in order to analyze the relationship and responsibilities linking the municipal government to Carnival, in the years 2017 to 2020 (Câmara Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020).

mercantile model of municipal administration found its counterpoint in an affirmation of *blocos* presence and identity that came to be classified as “unofficial”. This category (and its recurring variants: “pirates”, “clandestine” or “secret”) focused on groups that, in the process of Carnival resumption, represented their freest and most spontaneous expression. *Blocos* that resulted from fanfare musicality and acoustic bands, often organized in crack form or in close relation to them. They are those who play Carnival without city government authorization, most often because they understand it as averse to the party itself. Part of these collectives were organized around Desliga dos Blocos, an articulation whose name rightly evokes the opposition to the model of carnival leagues, organized to mediate the contact between carnival groups, public authorities and private companies. In September 2009, when the first decree that created Official Carnival was enacted, Desliga dos Blocos organized a “*bloqueata*” as a form of protest — the neologism *bloqueata* suggests a march (*passada*) of blocos. The manifesto that accompanied the act affirmed street carnival understanding as a way to “create our own scripts to chance and participants will” and “stimulate free dancing” (Henrique, 2010, para. 1), words worthy of a situationist document. The following year, the same collective organized the first “Unofficial Carnival Opening”, as a way of stating their opposition to the attempts to formalize street carnival groups. Since then, this event annually anticipates Momo’s reign over the city, independently to party management official initiatives.

Unofficial street carnival is a powerful affirmation of ways to enjoy the city that rise up against festive life mercantilization, restoring its magical and unique character of sets of relationships that signify the city. In this process, the material resources and street technologies elaborated by fanfare carnival offered themselves as resistance elements. Acoustic *blocos*, like the fanfares, stimulates the formation of collectives characterized by a higher degree of spontaneity and less organization investment. This improvised mode of collective wandering through the city, whose path is often decided in the heat of the party, is allowed much less to convert into an official and saleable spectacle. The characteristic amateurism of this revelers carnival, resulting from workshops expansion and a non-professional network organization, is a central element in its definition as non-mercantile par excellence.

WHERE IS BOI TOLO?

Some unofficial demonstrations of street carnival exceeded the condition of *blocos*, understood as street carnival associations and organizations, and gained the broader condition of situations, strongly involving the revelers and breaking barriers between executors and public. In the best sense of surrealist and situationist thinking, such events can be understood as promoters of momentary life ambiances capable of producing strong subjective impacts on their participants. The free play experience of carnival revelers, undertaken without mediation, operates, therefore, as an enlarger of the desires fulfillment ability. They are resistance forms to a functionalist, spectacular and instrumental

conception of everyday life and an attemptive to build libertarian relationships, connected to the wonderful.

This seems to be the case with Cordão do Boi Tolo. Created in 2006, this street carnival group is a historic landmark in Rio Carnival resumption. Its founding myth shows the spontaneity, horizontality and ludicity signs that define street carnival. As one of its organizers says, the *bloco* was created on a Carnival Sunday in which a revelers group waited, in XV de Novembro square, by Cordão do Boitátá, one of the most frequented downtown street carnival groups at that time. Despite the long wait, Cordão do Boitátá did not appear. The absence of the street carnival group is ascribed by the interviewee to a commitment of the band in another locality, but another current version speaks of the strategy then used by Cordão do Boitátá to change its locations and parade times to avoid large agglomerations. Anyway, several tellers of this story describe how revelers, some of them amateur musicians, put together a few instruments and went out in an impromptu procession. They took as a banner a piece of cardboard on which could be read, on one side, “Os Boicotados” (The Boycotted) and, on the other, “Cordão do Boi Tolo” (Foolish Ox *Cordão*), in clear and jupine reference to the supposed strategy of dispersion undertaken by the expected *bloco*.

What at first had been just a mockery, a Carnival transmutation of a frustrated meeting into an improvised party, became, throughout the year, an articulation for a second procession⁷. In the dispute between the two original names, the second was imposed, pointing to the carnival sense of foolishness, charged with positivity, as opposed to the negative character of the idea of boycott. All *boitolinos*, as the *bloco* followers are called, are joyfully foolish and celebrate, year by year, the folly of original mismatch, in incessant search for their own disencounter. It is common among revelers, on Carnival Sunday, a joke in which he asks “where is *Boi Tolo*?”, reference to unplanned character of his journey through downtown. Its wandering mass becomes a point of revelers encounters and mismatches on Carnival Sundays. The choice to appoint a *cordão* stems, of course, from the reference to the *bloco* that originated the primordial encounter, Cordão do Boitátá. In any case, it also evokes the old carnival *cordões* that, in the 19th century, were identified as more anarchic forms of revelry (Ferreira, 2004).

Cordão do Boi Tolo does not have a band or a defined formation of those who undertake the party, does not rehearse his repertoire and does not have participation criteria. It has an organizing group formed by original formation components, but also by people who have approached the *bloco* over the years. The existence of a collegiate instance does not imply the formalization of the group, and its activity, in general, is restricted to logistical decisions around parades. Boi Tolo is not registered and has no regulation, only a general understanding around its principles, which were summarized by the organizer interviewed in three “standing rules”: “we do not pay and do not receive”, reference to non-mercantile character of carnival parades, in addition to open and reflected resistance to carnival bands professionalization; “we defend public space

⁷ At least two revelers organized communities on the Orkut social network, from which the second procession was articulated.

occupation”, revealing *Collectivo*’s political character; “if you can play and you want to play, you can go in [the *bloco*] and play”. Thus, one of the characteristics that distinguishes *Boi Tolo* from other *blocos* is its absolutely open character: anyone can play or perform on the *bloco*. The “human rope” that separates officiants from revelers serves only to guarantee safe and comfortable space for the performance, and can be crossed by anyone who wants to manifest themselves artistically. According to one of its organizers, it is precisely this participatory openness that makes inevitable the formation of an organizing group: “if *Boi Tolo* is a *bloco* in which everyone can enter and play, we should do a Rio de Janeiro plebiscite to make decisions”. With this orientation, musical quality is deliberately deprecated in the name of exclusively playful character of musicality and open, free and anarchic nature of play.

Boi Tolo traditionally parades on Carnival Sundays, around 8 o’clock in the morning, time of its first (no)meeting, in 2006. For years it kept its carnival procession concentration in XV de Novembro square, in the vicinity of Mercado street, where its first parade departed and which is currently called by the revelers “Largo do *Boi Tolo*”⁸. As the *bloco* grew in size (and considering that *Cordão do Boitató* kept this place as its concentration point), *Cordão do Boi Tolo* began to concentrate in the vicinity of Candelária church⁹. In its original parade, the group replicated *Cordão do Boitató* path, from Mercado street to Rio de Janeiro State University Philosophy and Human Sciences Institute (in what one of its organizers called “the shortest parade of *Boi Tolo*”). Over the years, however, it has become a habit and an expectation that the parade, starting in the morning, will extend throughout the Sunday. As an interviewed organizer reports, in the first years the path was defined spontaneously, “walking” to the taste of the revelers themselves. With the increase in revelers numbers, the carnival processions began to be planned, in preference for wider avenues. Still there was “improvising on the spot”, largely due to the movements of revelers themselves.

Typically, carnival processions are marked by a beginning, called by revelers and organizers “concentration”¹⁰, and by an end, where the *bloco* finishes its parade with a symbolic act of collection of its flag. It became an unofficial street carnival custom that this final moment was also that of the beginning of crack. It is the moment when any amateur musician can join the band of the *bloco*, whether to play again its repertoire, or to play songs that are part of other groups repertoires, in addition to *marchinhas* and *sambas*. Thus begins an extension of the party that, contrary to formal parade prediction, has no ending time. The absence of a fixed band and previously chosen and rehearsed repertoire does not allow, in the case of *Boi Tolo*, the identification of this moment. Its parade is, in fact, an immense crack, “the first spontaneous crack in [Carnival] history”, in the opinion of one of its organizers. One of interviewees considered *Boi Tolo* as a *bloco* that responds to an “anarchic logic, without beginning and ending” (Tomás Ramos).

⁸ *Bloco*’s first flag, replicated for the second parade in 2007, is exhibited in Kamikaze Bar, located in that square.

⁹ From where it came from in following years, except for 2017, when the *bloco* was divided and concentrated in different parts of the city center.

¹⁰ The term is also used to name the place in which its beginning is planned.

Another interviewee recalled how carnival musicians planned their participation in other *blocos* and bands in expectation that Boi Tolo would last “all day” (Clemente Momberao). Cordão do Boi Tolo, in this sense, came to be understood, felt and lived by its revelers as an immersive experience, to challenge its participant’s physical limits. In 2017, a revelers and amateur musicians group recorded, joyfully, the *bloco* dispersion on arpoador beach on Monday, at 8:30 a.m., when the Boi Tolo’s flag was collected after more than 24 hours of parade.

The time extension of Boi Tolo carnival experience makes its Sunday parade an act of city occupation, both from a material and a symbolic point of view. Revelers and amateur musicians cross their flow throughout Sunday, coming in, going out and coming back in, not before finding someone to answer the question of the day: “where is Boi Tolo?”. It is not uncommon for this anarchic and festive occupation of the city to take to symbolically formal places like the steps of Parliament, the facilities of Gustavo Capanema Palace and the lobby of Santos Dumont Airport, subverting its use and transforming them into party scenery. After passing through Rio downtown, the carnival procession route often culminates with the abandonment of street layout towards Flamengo Park. The revelers stay between trees and lawns, as the night falls in a garden converted into an absolute Carnival territory, magically transformed into a world of their own, without the physical and social constraints of urban space. Since 2017, this occupation of the Flamengo Park is followed by the advance of Boi Tolo troops towards the south side, adding to Carnival Sunday another experience that would be repeated in all subsequent years: the crossing of two tunnels that connect the neighborhoods of Botafogo and Copacabana. A frenzy noise moment that has become a revelers obsession and in which, under the tunnel lights, thousands of people jump to the percussion instruments amplified sound.

In 2016, the *bloco* growth became a problem for its organizers. It is estimated that Boi Tolo had, that year, 50 to 100,000 revelers and a band of 400 to 600 musicians. The carnival procession was divided for the first time, organized on several fronts that came out simultaneously from different points of Rio downtown. These factions were called by organizers as “trunks”, term that describes the city’s bus lines, but soon gained another nickname by revelers: “herds”. The term referred to the multitude sense that, over time, came to define Boi Tolo. The division into trunks had an effect of recovering another carnival meaning that seemed to have been lost with Boi Tolo and street carnival growth: the one related to affection exchanged between the revelers. “Herds” were organized around fanfares that play in the city, by affinity between amateur musicians, stilt walkers and performers and certain bands, their components, audience and repertoire. The strategy was completed, however, in the middle of the day, with meeting of all “herds” in Arcos da Lapa square. This gigantic concentration turned Boi Tolo into a single *bloco* again, reaffirming its monumental character and announcing the crowd as its defining trait. The next year, Boi Tolo also paraded in the “herds” format, but they did not meet like in the previous year, but left all the same place, in front of Candelaria church, again as a way of affirming their unity. In 2019, the carnival parade was organized in form of a sequence of several *blocos*, parading in the same direction, at regular intervals. The original

organizational form, in a single large group, was restored in 2020, as an affirmation of its strength in the face of new repression attempts of street carnival by the municipal administration.

When street carnival repression was initiated by the privatist logic of municipal administration, in 2009, Boi Tolo came to be seen by its organizers and revelers as a carnival protest form of “hitting head-on with many political decisions”, as stated by one of its organisers, by affirmation of street occupation as a right and against party commodification. A form of resistance that is manifested fundamentally by freely “walking through downtown streets, where you want, walking without destination, occupy the street, make a spontaneous carnival procession, without corrals, without strings, without ropes”, in the words of the interviewed organizer. The condition of “anarchic block”, unregistered, unauthorized, without fixed band, participatory and open, made the actors of the street carnival, especially the musicians, perceive Cordão do Boi Tolo as a space to say what could not be said by official street carnival groups. Boi Tolo is currently elevated “to the level of political debate” (Tomás Ramos), constituting a possibility of popular expression of city and public space demands. It is Rio’s way to unite party and struggle in the streets, making Carnival, according to the interviewed organizer, “a moment to join, celebrate the city, the life and our space”.

CONCLUSION

The 21st century carnival resumption, of neofanfarism musicality, explosive multiplicity of small bands and reveler’s improvised and (dis)organized play, reaffirms the street carnival subversive vocation. In the broadest sense of the term, it is a reveler carnival, extracting unexpected potentialities from the proposals of surrealist *flânerie* and situationist *dérive*. First, due to a resistance to culture spectacularization, from “*não põe corda no meu bloco*” (don’t surround my bloco with a rope) motto to so-called “crack culture”, resulting from carnival workshops popularization and creating spontaneous, collective and transitory musical situations across the city streets. Secondly, the opposition to Carnival formalization and commodification, against which unofficial groups, of which Cordão do Boi Tolo is an exemplary case, are affirmed. Finally, this deliberately unofficial Carnival, an anti-officiality militant, asserts itself as an anarchic and horizontal form of streets occupation, as a political act and crowd takeover of the city, although circumscribed to a virtuous moment. More than mere denial, this presence is an affirmation of playing and affection, of organization by play and of a play that disorganizes and defies order, in the spirit of situationist and surrealist revolt. In this process, revelers are collective subjects of new ambiances construction, from the most anonymous to those involved with the musical and organizational practices of *blocos*, becoming city thinkers in act. My own carnival experience, embodied in this paper, is added to interviewees contributions in the form of an ethnographic *flânerie*. All this movement enhances street carnival as an experience of reenchantment of the world and collective resignification of urban space. A demiurgic moment that leaves its traces of dreamed city in the awake city.

With enough curiosity and imagination, the everyday walker can follow reveler clues, and discover another possible city.

Translation: André Videira de Figueiredo and Darlan Ferreira Montenegro

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