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Book Review

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Bruno Carvalho. 2013. *Porous City: A Cultural History of Rio de Janeiro*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Winner of the 2014 Brazilian Studies Association Roberto Reis Book Award, *Porous City: A Cultural History of Rio de Janeiro* offers fascinating interventions in a number of fields that Carvalho ultimately weaves together to form a nuanced reading of the former Brazilian capital as a "porous city"—a clever and convenient near homophone of the concept of porosity that the Harvard professor develops in the preface, introduction, six chapters, and conclusion that comprise the book.

In the Introduction, Carvalho details his concept of porosity after a treatment of the metaphor of urban spaces—particularly Rio de Janeiro—as palimpsests. While the palimpsest provides an appropriate textual analog for how such spaces are literally and figuratively "scraped off" the cityscape and replaced by new layers, porosity allows for intermingling between these layers and others. Throughout the book, such words as intermingling, layering, confluence, mobility, contact zone, intersections, and overlapping, among others, serve as descriptors or stand-ins, though not exact synonyms, for porosity.

Rather than the entirety of Rio de Janeiro, Carvalho wisely narrows his focus to a specific neighborhood in the sprawling metropolis: Cidade Nova, the New City. In this way, he prioritizes "the various forms through which writers, artists, and urban dwellers can perceive, remember, manipulate, and imagine a given city" (xii). Indeed, the extensive and diverse range of sources—from maps to post cards, travel journals, literary texts in multiple languages, popular culture, and beyond—bears witness to the lengths to which Carvalho has gone in his examination. Ultimately, he positions Cidade Nova as a space that, thanks to its unique circumstance, geography, and porosity, can provide understanding of certain hallmarks of Brazilian national identity.

Chapter One, more than the Introduction, offers a clear and believable rationale for Carvalho's assertion that a swamp that was backfilled to shorten the commute for the Portuguese royal family became (quite literally) a central part of Rio de Janeiro's history, even if it was ultimately all but erased

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off the map. He further contends that "in the socio-cultural and literary fabric of that early and much forgotten Cidade Nova lies the palimpsestic landscape out of which emerges so much of what came to be considered Brazilian" (40). The chapter paints a portrait of a city on the cusp of greatness, one that saw a spike in population as a result of immigrants from other parts of the nation and globe alike. Through a detailed documentation of the city in the mid-nineteenth century, in addition to a close reading of Manuel Antônio de Almeida's *Memórias de um Sargento de Milícias* (*Memoirs of a Militia Sergeant*), Carvalho teases out how Cidade Nova came to embody the contradiction of the intermingling of the center and the periphery, the dominant classes and the marginalized, a porous space that plays a vital role in setting up how said contradiction can be understood throughout the rest of the book.

Chapter Two features the touchstone of Brazilian literature, Machado de Assis, whose stories peel back the palimpsestic layers of time to speak to an elite readership by describing the ever-changing landscape that he was so familiar with as a person who himself inhabited porous spaces and embodied them via his own mulatto identity. Of particular interest is Carvalho's discussion of Machado's progression as a writer who initially seems "to participate in the flattened notion of a divided Rio de Janeiro" (55), yet eventually "developed a more reflective sense of belonging in a lettered city" (68), by writing that city through the lenses of those who existed at the margins, outside the center, and featuring characters from marginalized spaces who expose readers to those spaces through story.

Chapter Three marks a transition from describing a neighborhood in formation to fleshing out the perception of Cidade Nova as a fully formed stereotype in the wake of the Pereira Passos reforms between 1902 and 1906. While the South Zone of Botafogo (the backdrop of Aluísio Azevedos' *O Cortiço* [The Slum]) and other neighborhoods benefitted from major infrastructure improvements, Cidade Nova was the landing place for many of the poorest citizens displaced by these measures, which made it a target of negative racial and xenophobic stereotyping. For Carvalho, then, João do Rio's journalistic portrayals of Cidade Nova help round out and enrich our knowledge of Cidade Nova at the same time as they serve as a reminder that the area had, for many, become a space at the margins of Rio de Janeiro, or *carioca*, society, despite its geographic centrality. The chapter comes full circle when we see that Lima Barreto, author of *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* (*The Sad End of Policarpo Quaresma*), often "articulate[d] the perspective of those who paid a heavy price for modernization projects, but who reaped few of the benefits" (95). Nevertheless, it is to Carvalho's credit that the underlying tone of the chapter is not despair, for the very circumstances that served to stigmatize the neighborhood ultimately fostered a rich cultural diversity that in many ways has come to symbolize Brazilianness.

The groundwork for this symbolic Brazilian identity is laid in Chapter Four, where he describes how Cidade Nova, specifically the Praça Onza, "[d]uring the 1920s … became home to thousands of Jewish newcomers" (105), though Carvalho clarifies that Cidade Nova "did not have neighbourhoods associated with a single ethnic group" (107). The author is quick to note that Cidade Nova was not a paradise and that much of this *convivência* (106)—another near synonym of porosity—was facilitated by the rich music and dance culture, in addition to prostitution in the red-light district, all of which provided spaces for interactions to occur (131). Carvalho situates his reading of porosity between the

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Afro-Brazilian and Jewish communities in the 1920s within a broader reading of Brazilian literary trends domestically and abroad, most notably the Brazilian Modernist movement and its embracing of the "favela [as] a source of a purer, primitive, and more authentic Brazil" (114). The chapter is enlightening and well researched; however, since it does not focus as closely as previous sections on specific authors, a reader unacquainted with the time period might find the abundance of names and titles to be challenging to digest at once, even if many of them were mentioned multiple times previously.

Despite the stigmatization of Cidade Nova as the neighborhood of "marginalized social and ethnic groups" (137), Chapter Five describes how carnival and samba brought together people of all social strata in the Praça Onze and how this intermingling emanated out from the "cradle of samba" to the whole of Brazil through radio. Additionally, Graça Aranha's and Arthur Ramos' descriptions of the area further contributed to the perception of Brazil as a racial democracy. The perceived authenticity of Cidade Nova (as discussed in Chapter Four) and its centrality to carnival, then, saw the area take on a "prominent role in the cartographies of cultural and intellectual elites" (147). Carvalho's highlighting of the paradoxical centrality of Cidade Nova to the burgeoning sense of symbolic Brazilianness and the neighborhood's ultimate marginalization via urban policy is particularly poignant: "and in their name [of cars and progress] the Praça Onze itself was run over, in order to make way for the monumental President Vargas Avenue" (167).

Chapter Six drives home the point on which Chapter Five ended: that President Vargas Avenue constituted a type of "authoritarian modern urbanism" (173). It does this through the fascinating case of Orson Welles' visit to Rio de Janeiro while making a documentary. Welles comprehended the centrality of the Praça Onze and of similar porous spaces to *carioca* culture, even if the progress-minded Vargas government could not. Still, in attempting to portray this culture on screen, Welles' cameras, for critics, captured too much realism, which is to say, they disapproved of the many Afro-Brazilians featured in it. This chapter is a fitting end for the book, and it could stand alone in some ways, for it focuses extensively on Welles' project and numerous tangential areas yet to be researched. It is also, perhaps, the most accessible chapter for a wider audience.

Bruno Carvalho's *Porous City: A Cultural History of Rio de Janeiro* is a highly recommended read for those with a moderate-to-strong foundation in Brazilian history and culture, and its chapters could serve as useful supplemental material for the graduate classroom. The author does a fine job of moving at an appropriate pace, and his conclusions never seem hastily formulated or exaggerated. Most of all, the considerable research that has gone into the work is commendable and offers plenty of jumping-off points for those who would seek to build upon Carvalho's reading of porosity.

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