

# Images of the crowd: carnival and media<sup>1</sup>

Beatriz Jaguaribe

## Abstract

Through selective readings of literary chronicles, artistic and media representations, this essay explores how a particular kind of crowd – the carnival crowd – has been interpreted and represented in key periods of Rio de Janeiro’s history. More than any other public celebration, carnival was and still is the festive ritual that mirrors most clearly the cultural negotiations of the city. I argue that different media not only express the social contradictions and the distinct cultural negotiations of this profane celebration but they also shape the experiences of the crowd.

### Keywords

Carnival. Crowds. Media. City.

## 1 The return of the crowd

Under the blazing summer sun of Rio de Janeiro, carnival is an assault on the senses. Smells of garbage, sweat, urine and alcohol impregnate the city. Sounds of percussion, shouting, loud music and singing crush the silence. As a jubilant celebration of the flesh carnival is also the consecration of bodies on display. Bodies of silicon, masked, embellished, glorious and grotesque, dancing, singing, drinking, kissing and urinating in the streets, squares, ballrooms, stages, and in the Sambódromo. Carnival is a popular celebration whose delirious images are broadcasted by the media highlighting anonymous people, as well as celebrities. Every year there is repetition and innovation of diverse imaginaries expressed through choreography, costumes, lyrics and technical details. There are several elements that identify carnival, yet there is an outstanding one that has had great impact on the city and considerable repercussion in the media; we refer to the festive crowd occupying city streets. During recent years Rio de Janeiro became the Brazilian city with the largest number of revelers.<sup>2</sup>

The re-emergence of street carnival in Rio de Janeiro has been linked to the enthusiasm of carnival groups called *blocos*.<sup>3</sup> According to Teresa Guilhon research the 12 founding *blocos*, which are part of SEBASTIANA association, were motivated by an agenda focused on regaining public space, and had the specific goal of occupying the streets taking advantage of carnival's traditions. Nevertheless, political and cultural claims of some carnival *bloco* founders do not necessarily encompass the design of thousands of people who choose to participate in street carnival. The country's redemocratization, the appreciation of popular culture, as well as carnival's profitable results boosted parades both in the Sambódromo as in city streets. During the military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s street carnival dwindled. Rio de Janeiro's street carnival not only emptied itself due to the repressive environment of military rule, but also because of massive implementation of televised media, lead by Rede Globo network, which offered complete coverage of Samba School parades. When the Sambódromo was built in 1984, it took away street parades from the downtown area to a specific arena restricted to those who can afford very expensive tickets. Nevertheless, I argue that the excess of

televised media coverage of Rio de Janeiro's carnival generated also discontent with the carnival "show". Street carnival is a demonstration that the crowd wants to return to the streets.

In this essay I explore a specific kind of crowd – the carnival crowd– that has been appraised at different times of Rio de Janeiro's history. Although people might have different reasons for meddling in the crowd, the presence of a carnival crowd in a contemporary metropolis shows the celebration of a sense of collective belonging, and expresses the performing jocosity of urban revelers. A carnival crowd in the streets highlights the physical presence of bodies and shows in this sense, the spectral dimension of mass media audiences. Thus, I do not endorse the disjunction between the crowd in the public space and the media. In the same way as different kinds of human multitudes behave in the public space, carnival crowds gathered in carnival groups also use the media as a source of exchange and information. In fact, many groups started as isolated spots in the digital network and later gained concreteness in the streets. However, the call of the streets increases body contact. This carnival call evokes energies that can be

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<sup>2</sup> According to information on the site [www.rankbrasil.com.br](http://www.rankbrasil.com.br), Rio de Janeiro is the city with the largest street carnival in the country. In 2013 carnival attracted 5.3 million revelers, gathered 492 blocos (carnival groups) and generated a profit of 848 million dollars for the city. Take a look at the news "Carnaval de rua do Rio de Janeiro deve quebrar recorde de público"(Rio de Janeiro street carnival will break a record of attendance), by Fátima Pires, 17/01/2013.

<sup>3</sup> See Master degree thesis by Teresa Guilhon (2013), Fundação Getulio Vargas, CPDOC, Rio de Janeiro. "**Os blocos no carnaval de rua do Rio de Janeiro: suportes para a memória.**"

domesticated or freed as ecstatic manifestations; as an apparition of what is wonderful breaking apart from everyday life, and as an expression of transforming passion. In its negative form the experience of being in the midst of the crowd can cause panic, nausea, impatience or fear. Either in its celebrating or dystrophic version, the feeling of being enveloped by the crowd has an impact because the crowd tears the borders between me and the other.

The presence of the contemporary urban citizen in the heart of the festive crowd becomes a counterpoint to the fragmented sphere of consumerism, competitive market individualism, and media audience isolation. I am suggesting that the experience of being part of the carnival crowd opposes the School of Frankfurt's theory on mass isolation created by the cultural industry. Diving into the carnival crowd is also a different experience from the notion formulated by Hardt and Negri (2004). The carnival crowd experience differs from Hardt and Negri's crowd experience, because political agendas are not necessarily abandoned during the celebration. Moreover, the singularity of each participant in the crowd is strengthened by dancing and dressing up in costumes, but it vanishes when people come together to intermingle in the crowd as an ultimate celebratory occupation of the streets. In spite of blatant social differences, racial and gender discrimination as well as social inequalities, Rio de Janeiro transformed itself – through the impact of its numerous slums, marches for citizenship,

and the rise of new political agendas – *into a more democratic and culturally populist city.* Carnival's appeal as a time of truce, inverted hierarchy and cathartic discharge lives on; however, the structures of everyday life against which the celebration used to transgress have changed.

Although Brazilian carnival origins were marked by the catholic religious calendar, carnival takes place seven Sundays before Easter Sunday, the carnival of Samba Schools, ballrooms, and the streets does not evoke religious or transcendental beliefs. On the contrary, carnival arouses carnal delight and ecstasies in the kingdom of this world. As it is characterized for endorsing antipuritanism and sensorial involvement with this world, carnival's vigor is the opposite of an ascetic, meditative attitude. Carnival is a feast of the flesh. Although many commercial reasons might be ascribed to the maintenance of this practice, crowds taking part in the celebration are not motivated by monetary gain. Unlike the crowd that gathers to listen to music concerts or those people cheering at sports events, a carnival crowd is involved with itself. Live music is a crucial element, but dancing, costumes, drinks and the very act of being part of the crowd represent the core of street carnival. While street carnival disappeared from the main European cities and nowadays only exists in a limited and choreographed way in Venice, Nice and New Orleans, in the United States, in Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, the second largest city of the country, hosts it and is the central stage of the festivity

(MORAES, 1958). The bombastic return of street carnival and the overwhelming presence of the crowd pose crucial questions about the feasibility of the celebration, the limits of coexistence, the crowd impetus and the role of different artistic, political and mass media agents in this orchestration. The presence of the crowd in a metropolis also highlights specific cultural modes that lead to alternative forms of modernity.

## 2 Crowds and masses in the metropolis

Either in a packed subway train, on the busy sidewalks or in the shops full of avid consumers, the city is the place where the crowd converges.

It is evident that urban design modifies the possibility of human contact and has an influence on the crowd's formation. Decentralized cities ruled by motor vehicles such as Los Angeles have fewer public spaces to foster crowd gatherings. On the contrary, cities with symbolic downtown areas, public transportation, urban density and a street network for pedestrians make it possible for multitudes to converge. Masses gather in metropolitan arenas for a variety of purposes, such as political rallies, moral campaigns, religious festivities, civil right marches or simply to participate in random events. As Sennett (1977) and many other researchers have argued, a crucial aspect of the downfall of public spaces lies on the changes of social practices that used to guide people who occupied city streets. In the large western metropolises of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new codes

of silence and public modesty were adopted to ensure privacy of strangers in a public environment. In his renowned book, *Crowds and Power* – Canetti (1973, p.15) explains that the repugnance of being touched by strangers is part of the metropolitan experience, but he also states that: “It is only in the crowd that a man loses his fear of being touched (...) Canetti (1973, pg18) points out:

It is only when men are together that they can free themselves from the weight of being apart; and that, precisely, is what happens in the crowd. Distinctions are dropped and everybody feels equal...It is thanks to this blessed moment, when nobody is better or worse than anyone else, that people are transformed into a crowd.

In spite of the fact that Canetti's book offers a broad cultural typology and an encompassing analysis on the formation of the crowd, his work was written under the impact of the formation of fascist crowds headed by charismatic leaders in the 1940s. I bring up his arguments because the return of the crowd, in the context of democratic societies in late modernity, suggests another kind of collective assembly. This return signs the specific need of social and bodily exchange as an answer to the media spectral environment. The presence of the crowd in the streets and squares also shows ways of occupying urban spaces that have been privatized or transformed in areas of consumerism. Each crowd will have its repositories of feelings, nuances of affection and political, cultural, and historical motivations. It becomes an impossible task to catalogue which is the crowd's

general “feeling” without incurring in reductionist typologies. In truth, Canetti highlights that the crowd crucial impulses – overthrowing hierarchies and the desire of collective belonging – have been the subject of debate and theorizing (SCHNAPPS; TIEWS, 2006). Meanwhile, a question about the need to be physically present in the public space in times when the mass media enables the existence of spectral crowds that do not have any physical contact remains.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the terms masses and crowds were used ambivalently. As schooling disseminated and democratic representative systems strengthened, crowds started being seen as irrational, but also as sovereign individuals and as working classes (JONSSON, 2006). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century new forms of communication, such as cinema and radio became popular giving a new meaning to the word “masses” – *the masses also became a synonym of media audiences*. The mobilized masses during the 1930s and 1940s were perceived as people, the working classes and the consumers and media spectators. While the word “crowd” in English means a group of people gathered together physically in a material space, the notion of mass can encompass amorphous audiences consuming messages, images, stories and information through the media: newspapers, cinema, radio, television and digital media (MARTIN-BARBERO, 1997)

In research papers about the media, the conception of mass has been intransigently

discussed since that term gained diverse connotations; from Adorno’s caustic criticism about mass audiences’ passivity before the culture industry, to the celebratory hymn of mass participation in the global village exalted by McLuhan. In the well-known Marxist version, the masses are seen either as the oppressed proletariat domesticated by dominant classes or as history’s driving force to throw down the *status quo in support of a future utopia* (BUCK-MORSS, 2000). In the first edition of the book *The revolt of the masses* (1930) published in 1930, Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) defines the masses as the incarnation of democratic mediocrity. According to Ortega, the “mass-man” exists independently from class affiliation, because he symbolizes what Nietzsche deplored as a conformist, imprisoned mind that replicates the herd and lacks creativity. Contemporary criticism on the use of the word “mass” has been a reaction against encompassing generalizations, since individuals shaped by class, ways of belonging, subjective affection and diverse identity are uniformly categorized by a heading that obliterates variations between them (CAREY, 1992).

Changes in the occupation of contemporary public spaces led many to question the importance of the crowd as the protagonist of social transformation. From this same perspective, Schnapps (2006, pg xi) defends that the “era of crowds” is already over, because in our post industrial societies we have “[...] a proliferation and growing dominance

of virtual or media modes of “assembly” instead of physical assemblies”

Schnapps (2006, pg xi) identifies the trend as follows:

[...] less rupture and one more process of specialization whose final result is a progressive reduction of the physical role of the crowds. They are reduced to the statute of an icon that circulates in a political economy characterized by the coexistence of media aggregation and body disaggregation.

Besides the communication and socioeconomic factors mentioned by Schnapps, another element with symbolic relevance contributed to the weakening of the crowds in western societies. This symbolic element is related to the fragmentation of trying to imagine the future. The impact of the crowd and the theories about the masses reached their climax in the 1930-40s, when ideological disputes between fascism, communism, and liberal capitalism were fought to win minds and hearts. It was pictured in posters, called upon in assemblies, and aesthetized in documentaries and public photographs. The emptying of secular utopian imagination about the future and the disappearance of the worlds dreamt for the masses weakened the crowds’ active presence in western societies (BUCK-MORSS, 2000)

### 3 Rio de Janeiro’s crowds

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the retraction of Rio’s crowd was a result of European social thinking trends, and

the artistic imagination held by literate city also played a role. But a crucial difference featured the composition of Rio’s metropolitan crowds, since the city was one of the largest slave ports of the Americas (KARASCH, 1987). During the Empire (1822-1889) and until the Old Republic was overthrown in 1930, Rio de Janeiro’s society was highly hierarchical. Lower classes’ civil rights, democratic participation and political power were vetoed. Freed slaves, poor immigrants and a weak petty bourgeoisie were the low and medium levels of society. The advent of the republic in 1889 did little to change the circumstances of poor workers or to mitigate hierarchic divisions involving social classes, race and gender. Until the 1930s, the city had a reduced public sphere in which the “literate city” formed by senior officers, politicians, managers, lawyers, physicians, engineers and members of the clergy held the networks of power. As it has been often mentioned in city history, the abolition of slavery caused jubilation among the poor; yet the same cannot be said about the proclamation of the republic. In his well-known book **Os bestializados**, José Murilo de Carvalho (1987) examines the way in which the press described popular reaction to the proclamation of the republic. According to his words it was passive, inexpressive and animalized. Nevertheless, Carvalho highlights that the disoriented popular reaction was not only the result of passivity, but the outcome of popular mistrust regarding political maneuvering of the ruling classes. But if popular classes were excluded from political and economic power, the same could not be said about their cultural influence.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century the carnival crowd featured the strength of collective celebrations. Although protest, sport and religious crowds were present at various moments in city history, it was the carnival crowd the one highlighting the most singular aspects of Rio's cultural negotiations.

The influential study of Roberto DaMatta published at the end of the 1970s demonstrates that in a highly hierarchical society, yet contaminated by ambiguous social relationships anchored in patronage and exchange of favors, carnival represented a collective, cathartic celebration of liberation (DAMATTA, 1997). During carnival's revelry social signs are inverted. Men dress as women, impoverished Negroes become aristocrats of the French baroque court, and housewives become seductive mermaids. DaMatta examined the rituals and festivities of Brazilian carnival in its modern dimension. His analysis spells out not only the hierarchical element of Brazilian society, but also the ambiguous negotiations of cultural standards. Carnival would not only represent a transgression of social hierarchies, but also a ritual of liberation based on individual anarchism that fabricates forms of subversion and spaces of pleasure. DaMatta does not deny that carnival mirrors society's rules, but instead of trying to unmask power or denounce class exploitation, it tries to highlight the more socially creative aspects of the celebration. It draws attention to the dialectic aspect of carnival's mirroring, which allows fractures and transformations to occur:

Other carnival researches (CUNHA, 2001; FERREIRA, 2004; QUEIROZ, 1992; SOIHET, 1998) disagree regarding carnival crowd characteristics. Pereira de Queiroz differs from DaMatta's interpretation since he denies carnival's ritual as a possibility of social truce. He believes the celebrations are pervaded by class differences. According to the author, one of the mythologies of carnival *ethos* is the popular belief that celebrations and a crowd destroy hierarchic order (QUEIROZ, 1992). He proposes that carnival should be understood as a form of group entertainment in which lower classes play a specific role and occupy a well-defined space in the celebration (QUEIROZ, 1992). On the other hand, Rachel Soihet emphasizes her disagreement with Pereira de Queiroz. She says that, as it occurred with the Pereira Passos new venues at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a carnival crowd was always formed by mixed social classes (SOIHET, 1998). Eventually, Pereira Cunha sets forth that carnival celebrations oscillated between hierarchization and mixed classes; between Portuguese style Zé Pereira roles and the mask balls inspired by the carnivals of Venetia and Nice; between the carnival of elegant ballrooms and street carnival full of Afro-Brazilian musicality (CUNHA, 2001). As Pereira de Queiroz, Pereira Cunha also draws attention to the fact that carnival gave birth to the myth of social union and the cessation of class, race and gender differences. In spite of it, she reiterates that carnival was an inventive way of dispute and juxtaposition between classes and cultural traditions:

Before becoming a tourist attraction and the official symbol of nationality, carnival was the main mean of expression of a society dilacerated by wounds that proved difficult to heal. It seems comforting that in those years it expressed its pain through laugh and mockery.

Nowadays I doubt that could be possible (CUNHA, 2001, p. 314-315).

#### 4 Under the sign of Carnival: carnival of masks and lyrics

From its colonial beginnings with the Portuguese Shrovetide that consisted of a variety of tricks played during carnival – among others the “smell ball battle” or throwing less agreeable substances to the faces and bodies of unaware pedestrians – *to the highly sophisticated preparations for the Sambódromo parades. Carnival*, the largest popular celebration in the world, became almost a synonym of Rio de Janeiro. As a reflection of class, race and gender negotiations, Rio de Janeiro’s carnival revealed tensions, inventions and cultural negotiations of successive historical times. It also revealed the anxiety related to the drunken partying crowd in the streets and a variety of reactions to that “threat” put into practice by municipal authorities and the police.

In the colonial Shrovetide, aristocratic families stayed safely inside their homes. They used to play carnival tricks such as throwing “smell balls” at family members or friends of the same social class (CUNHA, 2001). The slaves obviously could not target their masters, and even among

themselves there were some who had a higher status and were allowed to play tricks on those who were hierarchically lower. Ferreira (2004) recounts that during Shrovetide foreign visitors were the laughing stock of Brazilian families they were visiting, who targeted them with those smell balls. Shrovetide was a familiar event and also a form of popular entertainment. In colonial Rio de Janeiro narrow, rough stone streets, badly lit and with a foul stench, Shrovetide was fervently practiced by slaves and poor citizens. In 1822 after independence, Shrovetide continued being popular but it was increasingly despised by local elites that wanted more elegant forms of entertainment such as refined mask balls emulating French bourgeoisie (CUNHA, 2001; FERREIRA, 2004; GALVÃO, 2009; MORAES, 1958; QUEIROZ, 1992)

In 1851, the first carnival associations were founded. Around 1855, not only had mask balls become an essential part of carnival, but also the floats and sophisticated adornments had become part of the entourage of carnival associations that paraded along Ouvidor Street (CUNHA, 2001; FERREIRA, 2004). The parade of carnival Eminences attracted crowds and at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Great Associations, such as the notorious *Tenentes do Diabo*, *Os Democráticos* and *Os Fenianos* organized huge float parades. Those carnival associations competed among themselves and also endorsed political agendas as the abolition of slavery and the republican ideals. Since the beginning, this carnival of associations was directly linked

to the media in other words, to newspapers promoting disputes, disseminating satiric texts and organizing timetables (COUTINHO, 2006; FERREIRA, 2004; GALVÃO, 2009).

Lower classes participated of “*cucumbis*”, groups of poor revelers playing musical instruments of African origin and wearing homemade costumes. They also paraded in the so called “*ranchos*”, which were the first modest versions of samba schools. Cunha (2001, p. 94) states:

The fear of the carnival crowd in the streets, of the exciting and excited gathering of people coming in trams from city suburbs to the downtown area during the festival, was addressed in daily articles in the press during the 1880s and 1890s, and it became even more notorious during the first years of the Republic.

The anxiety of the elite over the risks involving carnival crowds is patent in 19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers, as well as in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Soihet mentions a report from 1912:

[...] nowhere in the world has been seen a sophisticated family that offers receptions and is thought to be aristocratic to forget all conventions and go to the square and mingle with the mob (SOIHET, 1998, p. 56).

Olavo Bilac (1865-1918), the celebrated bohemian poet and journalist, comments in a 1901 chronicle that carnival stirred up all transgressing desires: “And there are certain places a cautious bourgeois should not go without running the risk of scandal [...] But once carnival arrives the sober man puts his

seriousness aside, places a mask over his austere face – and bids goodbye to his fears!” (BILAC, 1997, p. 774). Meanwhile, the poet proclaimed that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, carnival had already lost its hot verve because moral lassitude weakened its transgressing forces.

The mask has lost its primordial charm. There is no need to cover your face with a mask to be able to bite the pulp of the forbidden fruit. The tasteful fruit is there at hand offering itself, giving itself, and imposing itself with an impudence that no longer offends Moral’s harsh eyes. A new, busy society with no time for scruples has replaced the old patriarchal society and, as a consequence, the mask lost its value because it is no longer useful. In spite of it, thanks God people still have fun and enjoy themselves during those three boisterous days. It has been said that becoming a man who is wrinkled, wet, trodden, and filthy, with a cold, ecchymosed and rheumatic be anything but fun. Why so? Amusement means everything that is new and different from the monotonous daily life which imposes eating at the right times (BILAC, 1997, p. 775).

In the book **A alma encantadora das ruas** (1908), João do Rio (1881-1921), famous writer, journalist, decadent dandy and Oscar Wilde’s fan, describes carnival’s *cordão*. João do Rio writings are a vivid amalgamation of decadent estheticism, in which elitist ambivalences regarding sexuality and mixed social classes and races are featured by an avid desire of going beyond repression generated by this very ambivalence. The “other’s” exoticism opens dangerous and fascinating possibilities of getting infected, feeling repulsion as well as experiencing a sensorial and cathartic discharge:

It was in Rua do Ouvidor Street. It was impossible to walk. The crowd thronged, suffocated. There were congested men forcing their passage with their elbows, women ablaze, screaming children, guys shouting jokes. The abundance of happiness put a touch of madness in all faces. [...] The alarm spread through the compact mob. The “cordão” is coming. It was scary. Right in the front an unbridled group of four or five *caboclo* teenagers in shattered shoes and large pointed arches ran opening their mouths with deafening shouts. Following them there was a big black guy covered with feathers, sweating, with a face shining as tar, who stretched his naked muscular arm carrying an iron club. Right behind came a group wearing red and yellow costumes covered with golden sequins glittering on the back of their coats, and wearing large wigs of curly hair disgustingly pasted on their skin. On the sides, men wearing clogs or barefooted walked stumbling, lifting torches, carrying live snakes without their teeth, adorned lizards, hideous box turtles in the midst of blasting yells (RIO, 2010, p. 244, 246, 248).

As usual in João do Rio chronicles, the observation of street life is narrated in the first person singular and the observer, as bourgeois flâneur is both attracted and repelled by the frenetic manifestations of carnival. Meanwhile, to explain in a pedagogic way the impact of the *cordão*, João do Rio uses the “Socratic” dialogue and the narrator of the chronicle listens to his friend’s preaching, exalting the *cordão* vs. the devitalized choreographies of carnival groups and mask balls. Enraptured by the crowd’s excitement our narrator finally agrees and exclaims:

Oh! Yes! He was right! *Cordão* is carnival, it is the last link of pagan religions. It is the keeper of debauchery’s sacred day. *Cordão* is our ardent,

luxurious, sad, half slave, rebellious soul, drooling lasciviousness and trying to marvel, boastful, meek, barbarian, pathetic (RIO, 2010, p. 264).

For the upper classes that had placed so many expectations on the beautification of the city by renovating the Passos, the Africanized *cordões*, the musical rhythm, and the totemic animals not only evoked the threat of chaotic libertinism but projected fantastic and atavic spectrums on the cosmopolitan city façade. The incompatibility between bourgeois standards with the ideas of modernity and progress, and the appearance of “archetypical” deities, forces, and emotions not only created an atmosphere of weird re-enchantment for the bourgeois observer, but also revealed the fascination with the crowd. In spite of using caricature and classist satyr, João do Rio writings convey a powerful acknowledgment of the city’s heterogeneous experiences. The *cordão* fascinates reveals and threatens not only because it does not match bourgeois standards of modernization, but also because it brings up forms of collective ecstasies, cultural contagion and celebration to the very heart of the modernized metropolis.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century carnival celebrations were not only the subject of newspapers, but also depended on them to promote parades and festivities (GALVÃO, 2009, p. 28-29). From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1940s, journalists who wrote about it were part of a specific niche called “carnival chroniclers” (COUTINHO, 2006). Since 1928 until the 1970s,

O **Cruzeiro** newspaper had a crucial role showing the carnival images, focusing on the grandiose samba schools parades, the mask balls or the celebrations by anonymous revelers. The advent of television in the 1960s made it possible for carnival to gain a global dimension, and television broadcasting changed the very structure of the celebration. During the military rule, street carnival in Rio de Janeiro was greatly reduced. From the 70s until the mid 80s carnival activities were under surveillance. TV coverage and illustrated magazines as **Fatos & Fotos** and **Manchete** sold thousands of copies with the images of a glorified parade, the clichés of dancing mulattas, and the pictures of revelers half naked covered with sweat posing indecently in carnival balls. Yet, the presence of the carnival crowd in the streets was scarce. There were just two groups that kept their verve, *Banda de Ipanema created in the 1960s* by some irreverent intellectuals and artists, and the *Cordão do Bola Preta* founded in 1918. In those days city streets were not occupied by a profusion of new groups or revelers.

The return of the carnival crowd to the streets now in unusual and very high numbers, lead to the appearance of hundreds of new groups that express in a variety of ways different modalities of celebrating carnival. Groups in costumes or playing instruments of percussion as the *Cordão do Boi Tatá* co-exist with ephemeral groups supported by sponsors or even celebrity groups whose aim is being broadcasted.

## 5 Conclusion

In cultural terms the appeal of carnival on culture and the media has been consecrated. Carnival's culture expressed by lower classes has been transformed and legitimated. Increasingly so, carnival has become a source of income and profit benefiting mainly businessmen and intermediaries. But as it was mentioned before, it involves more than just mass media and business.

Carnival, according to Agamben (2007), is a profane time because what had been kept in the realms of the gods is given back to men and becomes part of the flesh of this world. Carnival's profanation, its bombastic, excessive, allegoric, destructive and creative impulses launch the sacred into the world's impure soil.

In the suffocating embrace of the packed carnival crowd it is almost impossible to take a picture or to rehearse the prototypical contemporaneous gesture, the gesture to see oneself living through images. In spite of this, images of inflamed revelers appear in the media and social networks. Even at the very heart of the crowd revelers are aware of their media self-representing image. Carnival is not a rupture it is not revolutionary and does not imply the inauguration of new worlds. Carnival can also be the experience of a body in costumes dreaming about losing itself in the embrace of the ephemeral collectivity.

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## Imagens da multidão: carnaval e mídia

### Resumo

Por meio da leitura seletiva de representações artísticas e midiáticas, este ensaio explora como um tipo específico de multidão – a multidão carnavalesca – foi interpretada em distintos períodos da história do Rio de Janeiro. Mais do que qualquer outra celebração pública, o carnaval foi e ainda é o ritual festivo que melhor espelha as negociações culturais da cidade. Argumento que as diferentes mídias não somente expressam as contradições sociais e as diversas negociações culturais desta celebração profana como também moldam as próprias manifestações da multidão.

### Palavras-chave

Carnaval. Multidão. Mídia. Cidade.

## Imágenes de la muchedumbre: carnaval y media

### Resumen

Por medio de la lectura selectiva de representaciones artísticas y mediáticas, este ensayo explora como un tipo específico de muchedumbre – la muchedumbre del carnaval – fue interpretada en diferentes períodos de la historia de Rio de Janeiro. Más que cualquier otra celebración pública, el carnaval fue y todavía es el ritual festivo que mejor espeja las negociaciones culturales de la ciudad. Argumento que los media diversos no solamente expresan las contradicciones sociales y las diferentes negociaciones culturales de esa celebración profana como también moldan las propias manifestaciones de la muchedumbre.

### Palabras-Clave

Carnaval. Muchedumbre. Media. Ciudad.

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[eduardomoretin@usp.br](mailto:eduardomoretin@usp.br)

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