

A Arte e a Rua – audiovisual ethnography on the outskirts of São Paulo

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This essay discusses the artistic production linked to hip hop in Cidade Tiradentes, the largest social housing development in Latin America, situated on the East Zone of São Paulo, Brazil. The authors discuss art as a means of mobilization and political struggle, the transformations undergone by street art and the relation between art and public space, based on the experience of shared visual anthropology, which resulted in the production of the Cidade Tiradentes Arts Map web site (2009), two ethnographic films, Lá do Leste (From over on the East Side) (2010) and A Arte e a Rua (Art and the Street) (2011), the book Lá do Leste (From over on the East Side) (2013) and the web documentary ladoleste.org.¹

Introduction

This article presents a series of questions and reflections, in textual and audiovisual form, that emerged from the ethnographic research conducted with artists linked to hip hop in Cidade Tiradentes, a district on the periphery of São Paulo, Brazil, between 2009 and 2011. Rappers, graffiti artists and street dancers are some of the actors whose works and reflections provide us with an original view of life on the outskirts of the city, their dilemmas, transformations, projects and dreams. Among the questions that pervade the reflections of these artists—and our own—we highlight: what are the conditions for making forms of art integrated with public space and the local reality? How do spatial, socioeconomic and cultural transformations affect artistic manifestations in Cidade Tiradentes?

The research was undertaken during the development of a number of different

ethnographic projects: the *Cidade Tiradentes Arts Map* web site (2009), the films *Lá do Leste* (2010) and *A Art e a Rua* (2011), the book *Lá do Leste* (2013) and the web documentary www.ladoleste.org. The authors of this essay formed part of the team for the “Sociocultural Cartovideography of Cidade Tiradentes” project, which resulted in the *Arts Map*, and were also the directors of the two ethnographic films and authors of both the book and the webdoc.

A mapping of artistic practices in Cidade Tiradentes

In 2009, the Instituto Pólis, a São Paulo-based NGO, supported by the Cultural Centre of Spain in São Paulo, proposed the development of a project mapping the artistic activities linked to young people in the Cidade Tiradentes district. The project’s objective was “to help strengthen the cultural citizenship of residents from Cidade Tiradentes, to reveal and empower the knowledge, practices and cultural poetics of the district by emphasizing the views of local actors themselves concerning their practices.”²

The Cartovideography mobilized a group of resident artists from the region with the aim of promoting an exchange of knowledge concerning the territory’s cultural practices through the methodology of *audiovisual listening*.³ The result of the recordings, made by the researcher-residents, was posted in the interactive virtual map (www.cidadetiradentes.org.br), which enabled each group or artist mapped, each with their own password, to manage, combine and alter the content posted on line. The project’s aim was to help make the district’s cultural productions and spaces known and valued by its own inhabitants and thereby strengthen the political mobilization and communication of this social group.

The wider mapping process, coordinated by the Instituto Pólis, led to the creation of the Cidade Tiradentes Artists Network (Rede de Artistas de Cidade Tiradentes), a group of artists and activists from the periphery who united to present collective demands to the local public authorities, as well as think of improvements to the district’s cultural production and consumption, and reflect on creative solutions to the challenges they faced (such as collaborative production in networks and a solidarity economy focused around culture).

One of the specific features of this project is the production of knowledge and content

in a participatory form with the region's resident artists. The rapper Bob Jay, the cultural activist Daniel Hylario, the writer Cláudia Canto, and Cláudio TioPac, who works with audiovisual productions, were all researcher-residents central to the Cartovideography.

The life history of each of the researchers involved in the project was the starting point for producing the map, whose list of criteria for recognizing the region's artistic practices included the subjectivity of the researchers themselves.

Most of the artist researchers were born in the 1980s and have strong connections to hip hop. This movement—which today is no longer the dominant force in the district following the funk “invasion”—is strongly represented on the *Arts Map*. The significant presence of the more politicized artists groups linked to hip hop is a direct result of the relation between the researcher-residents and the district's history and transformations, especially in terms of street art, the organization of cultural practices and sociability in public spaces.

Once the mapping work was completed, we realized that we needed to broaden the discussions initiated in the conversations, interviews and encounters with Cidade Tiradentes's artists. For the production of the ethnographic film, therefore, we selected four of the mapped groups who we thought would best be able to tell us about the transformations experienced by street art in Cidade Tiradentes.

The four groups selected as the protagonists of the films *Lá do Leste* and *A Arte e a Rua* do not have just one uniform reading of everyday life in the territory or the transformations experienced by the district. Even among the members of a single group, we can encounter divergences that enrich the interpretive and reflexive processes of their artistic practices.

Before presenting these views, we introduce a brief account of the question of social housing in São Paulo, the world's sixth most populous city, in order to contextualize the setting in which our protagonists are active.

Social housing in São Paulo

The provision of social housing in São Paulo is not a recent problem. The spatial segregation of São Paulo is not just a “consequence” of the city's growth, but the outcome of public policies and private interests. The first favelas appeared in São Paulo in the 1940s and

represented the resistance of workers to being pushed out of the more central areas and accepting confinement in the urban peripheries. The response of public authorities to this issue was repression and forced removal, almost always destroying the favelas situated in “well located areas” and relocating their residents in the city outskirts.

The pattern of urbanization seen in São Paulo’s development, which has only intensified from the 1940s to the present, expresses the model rooted in the centre-periphery opposition. Teresa Caldeira (2000), in *Cidade de Muros*, lists four main characteristics of this model: it is dispersed instead of concentrated; it reduces population density; the social classes live far away from each other in the space of the city; the acquisition of one’s own home becomes a goal for the majority of the city’s residents; and the transport system is based on the use of buses by the working class and cars by the middle and upper classes.

An architectural feature of the projects for social housing in São Paulo is the construction of large-scale housing developments, which result in what became known as a “dormitory town”: clusters of uniform low-quality apartment blocks without adequate connection to the urban fabric or respect for the physical environment (Bonduki 1994).



Housing developments in Cidade Tiradentes. Frame from the film *A Arte e a Rua*. Photography: Rafael Nobre.

Cidade Tiradentes in (re)construction

Cidade Tiradentes is considered to be the largest complex of housing developments in Latin America, located in the extreme east of the capital of São Paulo state, 35 kilometres from the city's central point, Praça da Sé. The district was earmarked by the State in the 1970s exclusively for housing developments, explaining why it is commonly identified as a “dormitory town,” intended for the relocation of populations affected by public works. The initial project launched the centre-periphery opposition without ensuring that its new residents received the basic conditions needed to sustain this model, including access to mass public transport (which would take the huge number of workers to the centre) and to the labour market in the region.

In 2002 and 2003, 160 public areas were chosen to form part of the land regularization program of São Paulo Municipality, called the Bairro Legal Program, coordinated by the Municipal Office of Housing and Urban Development. In accordance with physical and land tenure criteria, Cidade Tiradentes was selected to receive the second large-scale state intervention in the territory (after the first constructions in Cidade Tiradentes, mostly undertaken in the 1980s).

How does *development* affect and transform the quality of public life and street art in Cidade Tiradentes? What model of the city is projected by this idea of development? How do art and street artists participate in this transitory movement? These are just some of the questions presented by artists from Cidade Tiradentes linked to the hip hop movement.

The audiovisual ethnographic works presented below focus on this “second wave” of major state intervention in the territory, the clearest expression of which was the inauguration of the local subprefecture. Produced in a participatory form with local actors, the works seek to capture the transformations from the perspective of artists linked to the hip hop movement, and therefore linked to the street, public space and all the political, social and cultural issues relating to the community. This is the moment of Cidade Tiradentes's history on which the protagonists of *A Arte e a Rua* reflect, questioning the problems arising from both the absence and the presence of the State in the region.

A Arte e a Rua

Although reurbanization of the district has provided infrastructure, schools, supermarket and hospital, “putting up walls” also implies losses and transformations not always seen as positive by some of the film’s artists. For the members of the rap groups, these walls—“built ever higher”—correspond to the breakdown of sociability; acquiring the space of the CEUs (Integrated Education Centres) for dance classes and competitions risks bureaucratizing street dance; the roads without paving or sanitation are no longer the theme of hip hop’s collective demands; the need to earn a living and expand art has taken graffiti to new spaces beyond the streets. And while for some of the artists depicted in the film, the walls are the strongest symbol of the fragmentation of hip hop’s language, in other discourses the unequal support from the subprefecture for the region’s artistic manifestations, organized crime and generational differences emerge as responses to the “loss of language.”

Daniel Hylario, a cultural activist from the region and the principal driving force behind the *Arts Map*, is the main protagonist of the ethnographic film *A Arte e a Rua*, interweaving the audiovisual ethnography with the film’s narratives on locality (full version on Vimeo: vimeo.com/57370633):

Daniel Hylario: “When the district was built, where I live in Barro Branco, the houses were built by work rallies. Nobody had walls and people needed somewhere to live. Everyone went to work together in the work party and people lived more compactly, closer to one another. It’s good that there’s a hospital, but it has become a rule: every time a public utility is built, a football pitch is destroyed. By destroying a football pitch, you destroy a little bit of the sociability that people have at the weekend.” (“Buraco Branco” (White Hole). Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*, <http://youtu.be/9xjORZ-L2Qc>)

Bob Jay, representative of RDM (Rapaziada do Morro), a rap group depicted in the film, met his partners some 11 years ago during the work rallies when “they put up rows of concrete blocks” while building their houses. The lyrics sung by the RDM group tell of the history of the uniting of young residents from a sector of the district called Barro Branco. The shows are organized by the group’s families and friends, the *RDM banca* which would assemble between 70 and 80 people in a coach to attend a show. The *banca* or *posse* (“crew”) implies social and cultural commitment.

Bob Jay: “What happened, brother? The district here didn’t have walls, you would leave one house here and ended up there on the other street corner, ‘hey neighbour, see you around,’ everyone lived close together. Later, for financial reasons, each one started to do their own thing. Now everyone just looks after themselves...” (*A Arte e a Rua*)

Modinha [Funk as seen by Rap]

In the production of the ethnographic film *A Arte e a Rua* we explored participatory and experimental filming methodologies. One of the narrative layers is composed by what we call “ethnography of groups”: a description of their movements around the territory, the facilities and spaces they use for presentations and rehearsals, their artistic practices, their sociability, and their reflections. To capture this narrative adequately, we experimented with techniques from observational and participatory cinema, filming everyday activities, performances, statements and informal conversations.

During one of these moments, we accompanied members of RDM in the streets of Cidade Tiradentes. Annoyed by the growth of funk—the contemporary musical fashion—in the community, once the home to hip hop, the RDM rappers take to the dark streets, heading for Barro Branco, the sector of Cidade Tiradentes where the group lives. There, supported by family and friends, a rap show is taking place organized by the Família RDM. The stage is the street itself (there is no platform) and the audience numbers no more than fifty people. (“Modinha” (Fashion). Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtsfL9DBKEQ>)

*Malandragem,
 é você mesmo que eu estou chamando
 que analisa o som de mano para mano
 que se identifica com a levada
 atitude é com nós,
 muitos sabem da jogada
 não, não!
 não interessa o estilo que você anda
 aí, modinha, vai colar com a sua banca
 eu já disse, só pra resumir
 se liga aí, o som taí
 é bom ouvir, pra conferir.
 Jamais eu vou sair rebolando
 aqui é favela e não me desengano
 eu tô ligado que vários manos pensa assim
 não tem tempo ruim
 chega aí, chega aí.*

*Bad boy,
 it's you I'm calling to
 you who analyzes the sound, bro to bro
 you who's with the beat
 we're the ones with attitude
 many know the game
 no, no!
 it doesn't matter what style you use
 your crew are gonna like it
 like I've said already, just to summarize
 pay attention, the sound is there
 it's good to hear, it's good to check out.
 You'll never catch me shimmying
 here it's favela and I don't delude myself
 I know lots of bros think like this
 anytime is good
 come on over, come on over.*

(RDM, excerpt from the song “Personalidade”)

In the view of this traditional and pioneering group from Cidade Tiradentes, rap is losing ground to funk, the new “fever” among the district’s young people. For Bob Jay and members of Família RDM, a number of factors are responsible: the support received by funk from the “parallel power” (organized crime), the “ageing” of the rapper generation, which today has “calmed down,” and the weakening and loss of support for rap’s anti-system discourse.

Permitidão

To receive support from the subprefecture, the funk groups, as applied to rap groups before them, cannot use swear words or condone crime. Sponsored by local government authorities, this style became known as *permitidão*, “permitted”—a word play on the

traditional funk style *proibidão* (“totally banned,” the lyrics of which exalt crime, sex, drugs and so on). The Youth Cultural Centre was also built in the district, encouraging funk groups to “become qualified” (in the sub-mayor’s words), using keyboards, guitars and high-quality recording equipment in the studio run by the district authority. (“Permitidão” (Permitted). Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwgsAMscVV0>).

All City

Members of the 5 Zonas graffiti collective possess different views of the transformations and fate of Cidade Tiradentes. On one hand the amplification of the activities of graffiti artists ensures greater visibility and makes this artistic language one of the few to generate enough income for some of the group’s members to “live off” their art. On the other hand, the graffiti artists diverge in terms of the opinions concerning the *place* of art and its relation to public space. The concept of *all city* is one of the foundations of graffiti art, the idea of spreading through the different zones of the city, occupying the entire urban space. In contrast to other groups portrayed in the film, like Família RDM, who act with, through and for “the ghetto,” graffiti draws its strength from the potential to disseminate its traces beyond the walls of the community itself.

Everaldo: “Today I think it’s impossible to define what graffiti is, it’s going through all these mutations, these experiences, it will feel various things, it will pass through various... now it’s starting to enter the museums, the art galleries...”

Credo: “What I think is most interesting within graffiti is that it is going through all this in a natural way, it doesn’t push too hard to be inside MASP [São Paulo Museum of Art], it doesn’t push too hard to be inside the house of... of the president of Itaú Cultural, you got it?”

Sow: “Ah, for me man, speaking honestly here, graffiti is what’s in the street, man, the stuff in the street is graffiti. That’s my personal view...” (*A Arte e a Rua*)

The third audiovisual narrative produced we call *artistic or experimental*: the materiality of graffiti, dance and music acquire form in creations like video clips and stop motion animations, made collectively by the film crew and filmed artists. (“Muros invisíveis” (stop motion 5 Zonas)

(Invisible Walls). Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcAk36rs-Vg>

Battles [from the streets to the schools]

Ivan Santos Silva is *B-boy*. He gives free (and unpaid) lessons at the CEU Inácio Monteiro, and organizes large “battles,” events that bring together hundreds of practitioners from various dance modalities, such as *Locking*, *Popping*, *Power Movie* and *Salto Mortal*, which originate from various corners of the city.

Ivan learnt about street dance in São Bento, the birthplace of the São Paulo hip hop movement in the 1980s. In our conversations, Ivan constantly recalled the street dance scene in Cidade Tiradentes, which once united dozens of people in the district’s streets.

Ivan: “In the past everyone was united. In the street itself, dancing on a sheet of cardboard. The guy sang, the guy danced, the other guy painted. It was a natural process: everyone developed their own space. People have this idea that everything that’s in the street is bad. I don’t care if it’s in the street or a closed space, in a club, on a court, wherever it is, for me it’s all the same, it’s a popular manifestation.” (*A Arte e a Rua*) (“All City”. Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*, <http://youtu.be/aZSpoLd680s>)

Bread

Working “to earn some bread” is a reality for the rappers that “get old” and have a family to support. Bob Jay, the MC from RDM, is one of thousands in the city of São Paulo who spend on average six hours a day commuting from home to their place of work in order to “earn their daily bread.”

The scene that follows was produced using the *câmera bastão* (baton camera) method, one of the strategies experimented in the production of our participatory audiovisual ethnography. Over a two-week period, the film’s protagonists were given a small HD handycam and brief instructions on how to use it. The idea was to capture elements of their everyday lives and art, whatever they deemed interesting. The recordings made by the film’s protagonists do not possess (and did not aim to produce) the aesthetic qualities found in professional cinema or

advert. Formally their results are much closer to home movies with all their imperfections, gaps and noise. The *camera bastão* forms a core part of our wider project of experimenting with Jean Rouch's idea of a *shared anthropology*⁴: cinema as a means for the collaborative production of knowledge. ("O pão" (Bread). Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDyTUdCrvSE>)

Utopia

One surprise in the research on street art in the periphery of São Paulo was the emergence of a new actor on the rap scene: the gospel groups. The growth of Evangelical churches in the peripheral districts is also evident in artistic production, and the language of rap, like other musical styles (from samba to rock), is therefore appropriated to praise Christ and evangelize. The city dreamt by Denilson, a rapper from the group Relato Final, is consistent with the prosperity theology preached by his church.

Denilson: "Ten years from now, you asked. Well, if we are alive here still, you can say: 'Shit, man, I don't believe it, Tiradentes became a wealthy district, Tiradentes became Morumbi, Tiradentes became Jardins.' I don't know, ten years from now, yes? If I am alive here, bro, ten years, I can think this thought: Tiradentes evolved, bro." (*A Arte e a Rua*)

Denilson projects images of São Paulo's wealthy districts as the future of Cidade Tiradentes. For the evangelical rapper, "evolution" is associated with a model of the city in which the "elegance" of the "richest" districts comprises the reference point for development.

The "artist" Daniel Hylario, on the other hand, more attached to the Marxist principles acquired in the social movements and projects in which he has participated since he was young, prefers to imagine the possibility of another kind of city:

Daniel Hylario: "Ten years from now? I don't know, it will depend a lot on the engagement of each resident here, what kind of life they want to have. If we are guided by the rich class, we will build more walls and have more large dogs to protect our children instead of playing with them. Now if we want to create an intermediary concept, a house with an average-sized gate and a dog that still plays with our children,

maybe that's better, right? I don't know, culture can contribute to this too." (*A Arte e a Rua*) ("Colorir a dor" (Colour the Pain). Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20mKE-H-dq0>)

Conclusion - Art and territory in transformation

The transformation of cities is inevitable. But we can still question the quality of urban changes and their impact on the lives of residents. Our intention in the ethnographic works developed during the different phases of this research (mapping, ethnographic film, book and web documentary) was to capture local thought concerning the city, especially concerning the peripheral region where the artists we knew lived.

What we were able to observe in Cidade Tiradentes, along with its artists and cultural activists, were transformations that result from diverse factors: from economic development, public policies and the actions of civil society organizations (NGOs, resident associations) to the activities of criminal organizations, the growth of neo-Pentecostal religions, new forms of consuming goods and culture, and generational conflicts.

We believe that the changes experienced by hip hop in Cidade Tiradentes provide an insight into the wider process of social transformation. The metamorphoses of this artistic and cultural language are clues to understanding some of the hegemonic forces that guide sociopolitical and cultural actions in Cidade Tiradentes and contribute to defining the future of São Paulo city.

Considering the transformation of hip hop as a social thermometer implies understanding changes within this movement, which is growing stronger as a politicized cultural practice, connected to the interests of the common good and public space, but also something that was appropriated, at diverse moments, by other interests, like those linked to crime, religion, consumerism and so on.

We have observed an association between economic development and the privatization of public spaces, public art and the common good in various Brazilian cities, particularly in São Paulo, which is today experiencing a critical absence of public spaces and collective life.

As anthropologists who actively listen to social conflicts, we hope that our audiovisual ethnographies help strengthen a public form of art, connected to the construction of collective ideals in the locality, but also to the formation of a critical and resistant public that, like Daniel Hylario, our *artist*, problematize ready-made ideas of *development*, consumption and culture. (“Humanidade” (Humanity). Section from the film *A Arte e a Rua*, <http://youtu.be/9Y9RfepyoVA>)

Translation by David Rodgers

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Notes

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² Presentation of the project “Sociocultural Cartovideography of Cidade Tiradentes” at www.cidadetiradentes.org.br. An audiovisual presentation of the project can be seen at <http://youtu.be/B77LpJQIWE0>.

³ The project defines the objective of *audiovisual listenings* as: “Provoking, in the sense of stimulating, the narratives of local actors themselves, so as to substitute the traditional interviews with questionnaires. They will contribute to revealing the different identities and local subjectivities, their affectivities and conflicts.”

⁴ Here we use terminology from documentary cinema made famous by authors like Bill Nichols (2005). Since the 1950s, the ethnographic cinema of anthropologist-filmmaker Jean Rouch focused on the experience of producing knowledge *with* the Africans with whom he conducted his research. Unlike academic theses, Rouch would stress, these films could be seen and discussed by his interlocutors. Moreover, Rouch experimented radically with coauthorship of the films with his African friends. For more on Rouch and his shared anthropology project, see Rouch (1995) and Piault (2000), among others.