

BRAZIL UNDER CONSTRUCTION:
LITERATURE, PUBLIC WORKS, AND PROGRESS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Canudos, the site of Antônio Conselheiro's religious community of over 25,000 followers, was famously desiccated by the Brazilian military in 1897 because the government saw it as a threat to the young Republic. The War of Canudos (1896-97) is a defining event in Brazilian history marked by its racial, political, regional, and religious intricacies, which are documented in one of the most canonical texts in Brazilian letters: journalist Euclides da Cunha's 1902 *Os sertões (Rebellion in the Backlands)*.¹ Although the military burned down Canudos in the late nineteenth century, we might expect the ruined city—rich with significance as a place of religious fanaticism, popular uprising, military missteps, and massacre—to have been transformed into a historical site with museums and guided tours. However, Canudos is now underwater. In the late 1970s, the Brazilian military regime (1964-1985) built a reservoir there as part of the Cocorobó Dam project. In the name of utility—supplying water to a drought-stricken region—the government let visual evidence of an unflattering aspect of the country's military history disappear under a shimmering surface. Although not directly referencing the construction of the Cocorobó Dam, a one-sentence chapter in Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's experimental novel *Zero*, written from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, opposes this sort of governmental choice. The chapter's willful reversal of the history of

¹ Decades later, the Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa's 1981 historic novel *La guerra del fin del mundo [The War of the End of the World]* aided in expanding awareness of the event beyond Brazil.

illumination—connoting knowledge and technology—condemns the military regime for moving the country backward not forward: "Há tantos anos, foi descoberta a vela de cera, a maior invenção depois da lâmpada elétrica" [Years ago, the wax candle was discovered, the greatest invention since the electric lamp] (191).² Loyola Brandão wrote *Zero* while the military regime was building Itaipu, what would soon be the world's largest hydroelectric power plant. The regime celebrated superlative electricity production; however, Loyola Brandão saw *Zero* progress.

The reservoir at Canudos and the Itaipu dam reveal how governments can use public works to drown out or amp up specific national narratives. Yet, they also reveal how literature can resist governments' official narratives. Loyola Brandão wrote *Zero* in alienating, fragmented prose that leaps from genre to genre with little cohesive narrative to make its fragments adhere. The defamiliarization this creates pulls readers away from unreflective assumptions about narrative, not only *Zero*'s own narrative, but also national narratives beyond the novel. Moreover, *Zero*'s incoherence and open-endedness allowed it initially to pass through the regime's censors when it was published in 1975. However, months later, the novel was censored, and it would only be allowed to be published again in Brazil in 1979 when censorship had eased.

This dissertation, "Brazil under Construction: Literature, Public Works, and Progress," analyzes literary representations of Brazilian public works to explore questions about power and narrative. I begin with the examples of the reservoir over Canudos and the *Zero* chapter because they illustrate how opposing, sometimes mutually exclusive, national narratives coexist. Some understood the reservoir as a practical

² Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

solution, whereas others saw it as erasure. Some viewed the military regime's construction of public works as a symbol of progress, while others deemed it the deplorable action of an authoritarian dictatorship. This dissertation explores how, from the 1900s through the 1970s, the federal and municipal governments and companies operating in Brazil created not only public works, but narratives to demonstrate how specific public works would aid Brazil's national progress. In response to these narratives, fiction writers portrayed public works to complicate idealistic notions of national progress that deserved further reflection. By analyzing references to public works in literature, we can better understand conflicting conceptions of the nation that have coexisted at different moments in time. Thus, the contribution of this dissertation is to show the integral role that narratives about public works have played in Brazil's multifaceted self-representations.

A brief overview of the types of public works and narratives I refer to will make this argument clearer and sketch the arc of my dissertation. From the 1900s to the 1970s, Brazil frequently embarked on massive public works projects. Beyond their immediate function, these public works were central to the country's self-representation as they stood as large, tangible symbols of national progress. Mayor Pereira Passos's public works initiatives in Rio de Janeiro (1902-1906) aimed to imitate the public spaces of the world's most esteemed cities—primarily Paris. By the time the new capital, Brasília, was under construction in the late 1950s, imitation was no longer enough. At this point, public works symbolized Brazil's innovation. When the military dictatorship took power in 1964 and began its string of large-scale public works projects, an undercurrent of legitimization was always present. Having seized power unconstitutionally, the regime

used its public works of superlative size, such as Itaipu, as proof of its legitimacy. In the simplest terms, these three public works progress narratives reveal a transition from a focus on imitation, to innovation, and finally to superlative size to indicate national progress. The government, as well as certain companies and other institutions that could benefit from the promotion of public works projects, helped support these progress narratives. However, Brazilian writers frequently have questioned these public works progress narratives. Since the military regime, public works have been less crucial to the construction of dominant narratives of national progress perhaps because maintaining, as opposed to building, public works has been more crucial. Fiction from the mid-1980s to present frequently critiques the lack of functional public works available to the country's poor, and these critiques call attention to the need to maintain public works in order for citizens to thrive. I end with this reflection on the maintenance of public works to underscore a more recent trend that veers away from public works progress narratives.

The remainder of this introduction is divided into four parts. The first defines key terms. The second examines extant literary criticism about public works. The third analyzes the relationship between the production of culture and the production of public works, a key component of my argument. I end with a description of the chapters.

Definitions

Before exploring my argument about the critical role of public works narratives in Brazil, I must first define a series of key terms: *public works*, *public works progress narratives*, and *literature*. First, by public works, I mean material structures whose construction is organized by governments. I refer to electrical lines, waterways, gas lines,

sewer pipes, roads, streetcars, power plants, tunnels, and bridges. In other words, I refer to public works that constitute the physical scaffolding of the city, the parts we can touch. Although the term *public works*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to “the work of building such things as roads, schools, and hospitals, carried out by the state for the community,” I focus on a smaller subset of public works. Buildings, such as public libraries, post offices, fire departments, police stations, and public hospitals, are not considered in this dissertation. We often conflate such structures with the people who work within them and the services these people provide, whereas this dissertation concerns actual physical structures. Although critics of Brazilian literature have rarely reflected on the topic, Brazilian writers frequently have considered the symbolic richness of this physical scaffolding. It involves intricate networks of wires, pipes, and roads, capable of connecting or isolating people. For the purposes of this dissertation, I employ the adjective *infrastructural* to refer to public works when using *public works* as an adjective is unwieldy.

Second, what I refer to as *public works progress narratives* are narratives that use the construction of certain public works as proof of national progress. Governments and private companies construct progress narratives to bolster their endeavors, be it in the form of publicity, speeches, or written documents. Public works progress narratives, like all progress narratives, track improvement over time. They necessarily portray the present as superior to the past. They often are promoted by the media and other institutions. Many individuals espouse progress narratives, and in some cases these narratives are valid descriptions of reality. The point, however, is not whether optimistic clichés

correspond to reality, but how they are crafted by governments, companies, and other interested parties, and then reinforced or contested by writers.

Third, most of what I refer to as *literature* falls unambiguously under the category of fiction: novels, short stories, plays, poems, and songs. However, I also examine advertisements, autobiographies, an illustrated biography, newspaper articles, a published diary, and *crônicas*.³ Both literary and nonliterary texts, as we learn from Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, and others, relate to wider cultural and political contexts and can be read using the same analytical tools. My reason for grouping non-fiction and fiction follows Williams's claim that "all kinds of writing produce meaning and value" (*Politics* 326). Concerns with what surrounds a work of literature have been well articulated in the Latin American context by critic Néstor García Canclini who argues that, "To analyze art is no longer to analyze only works, but the textual and extratextual, aesthetic and social conditions in which the interaction between members of the field engenders and renews meaning" (101). Thus, by placing Brazilian literary representations of public works within a historical context, we can understand their relationship to notions of national progress as conceived in specific temporalities.

In addition to these definitions, a further distinction should be noted between three interrelated yet separate things: (1) actual public works, (2) public works progress narratives, and (3) literary representations of public works. For instance, a short story

³ Several of my chapters analyze *crônicas*, a genre without a direct equivalent in the Anglophone world. The *crônica* is a particularly popular genre in the literature of the Portuguese-speaking world that includes both very short stories with indefinite plots and short social or literary essays, often initially published in newspapers in the form of a journalist's column. Journalist Julie Salamon describes the *crônica* as "a newspaper column that allows poets and writers wide latitude. They can write a kind of diary one week, an essay the next, a story or simply a random thought. Think of them as literary blogs, but on newsprint." The *crônica* is frequently casual and humorous, often written in the first person and focused on contemporary, urban subject matter. Therefore, it is a logical venue for writing about infrastructural transformations, and it allows writers the leeway to insert invented characters and scenarios into their commentaries on public works.

about a bridge under construction can challenge the validity of a public works progress narrative scripted around that bridge while simultaneously acknowledging the utility of the actual bridge. The power dynamics manifested in these relationships are also of key importance to this dissertation.

The tensions between competing representations of national progress give life to this research. The texts analyzed throughout this dissertation concern Brazil's infrastructural progress, which is intimately connected to its economic and industrial progress. Some texts address tensions between aesthetic and practical conceptions of national progress, in other words, between artistic production and actual construction projects. Others call into question the morality of the steps taken to build public works in the name of national progress. Others stake a claim in whether Brazil should call on foreign companies to run its public works or look for national solutions to infrastructural challenges. Yet others identify dysfunctional public works as an example of complacency about improving the quality of life of poor Brazilians. These differences will help us nuance our understanding of Brazil's multifaceted ways of using public works to tell its national stories.

Extant work on this subject

In his short essay, "La Conquête de l'ubiquité" [The Conquest of Ubiquity], first published in 1928, poet and scholar Paul Valéry marvels about how radio and recording devices have rendered high-quality music easily obtainable.⁴ Inspired by recent television

⁴ "The Conquest of Ubiquity" is most famous as the point of departure for Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Valéry underscores how the work of art ceased to have importance once art reproduction became increasingly widespread and high quality. Drawing on this

and video recording innovations, he predicts that visual art is heading down the same felicitous path as music. Valéry likens art transmitted via radio and television to water, gas, and electricity transmitted by pipes and wires:

A work of art will cease to be anything more than a kind of source or point of origin whose benefits will be available—and quite fully so—wherever we wish. Just as water, gas, and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign. Just as we are accustomed, if not enslaved, to the various forms of energy that pour into our homes, we shall find it perfectly natural to receive the ultrarapid variations of oscillations that our sense organs gather in and integrate to form all we know. (226)

Valéry metaphorically connects art to public utilities in order to demonstrate how the former is beginning to be disseminated and expected much like the latter. High-quality reproduction makes art similar to public utilities because such reproduction shifts the focus away from the work of art itself and toward our access to its reproduction.

Similarly, we are less likely to wonder where our public utilities come from than we are to become concerned when they stop working. With both art and public utilities, our access to them is a crucial concern.

Valéry refers to those who, like himself and his intended readers, have access to public utilities. What might it mean for them to be enslaved by public utilities? Without public utilities, many people cannot work, cook, bathe, clean, or entertain themselves as they would like to, which generates a sort of dependence. However, other people, unmentioned in the essay, do not have access to public utilities, which, as will be

observation, Benjamin elaborates his notion of the aura of the work of art and highlights the positive political ramifications of the demise of this aura.

discussed, makes for a quite different relationship to such services. Despite Valéry's aside "if not enslaved" the overarching sentiment of the essay is joyful: greater access to beauty and art is good, just as access to public utilities is good. When phrased as such, the parallel begs the question of who controls access to beauty, art, public utilities, and by extension public works. I begin this section with Valéry's provocative passage because it brings up so many of the questions—about class, function, beauty, and access—that are central to this dissertation and to the scholarship that informs it.

As Valéry's essay attests, critics frequently consider technology's influence on art. This is especially true of criticism that considers literature's relationship to urban life, bourgeois consumerism, and the industrialization and expansion of many cities throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For instance, literary critic Andreas Huyssen argues that "no other single factor has influenced the emergence of the new avant-garde art as much as technology, which not only fueled the artists' imagination (dynamism, machine cult, beauty of technics, constructivist and productivist attitudes), but penetrated to the core of the work itself" (9). Literary critic Flora Süssekind makes a similar argument about the influence of technology (gramophones, phonographs, telephones, new printing presses, cameras, cinema, and so on) on Brazilian fiction in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While such scholarship centers on how technology has transformed literature, my focus is on analyzing what fictional representations of public works reveal about the ties among narrative, power, and competing notions of national progress.

However, the line between the study of public works and the study of technology or commodities is not always clear. Take for instance, the representations of electricity in

literature. While electric streetlights are public works, and electrically-powered phonographs are commodities, electric lamps in private homes are harder to classify. They are powered by a public utility; however, the lamp itself is a commodity. Moreover, although the intimate space of the home is private, it, as critic Wolfgang Schivelbusch observes, is dependent on and connected to public utilities (28). This connection means that the home—since the installation of public utilities—has forgone some of its private autonomy because it is reliant on the government for services, which is another possible meaning of Valéry’s “if not enslaved.” Most literary criticism concerned with electricity leans more toward a study of commodities than a study of public works, such as Linda Simon’s *Dark Light: Electricity and Anxiety from the Telegraph to the X-Ray* (2004). Although my dissertation recognizes the confluences among public works, commodities, and technology, it is resolutely focused on the first, about which there is still a dearth of literary criticism.

Studies of public works within literary criticism are growing, thanks primarily to the scholarship of Bruce Robbins and Michael Rubenstein. Robbins’s article “The Smell of Infrastructure: Notes toward an Archive” and Rubenstein’s article “Light Reading: Public Utility, Urban Fiction, and Human Rights”—the pioneering works on public infrastructure in literary studies—constitute the point of departure for my dissertation. The conception of infrastructure in these articles is analogous to my definition of public works. Robbins and Rubenstein write about the connections between public utilities and

fiction, and they provide examples from the fiction of Ralph Ellison, James Joyce, Jamaica Kincaid, Milan Kundera, Virginia Woolf, and others.⁵

Robbins examines the role of public utilities, primarily electricity and running water, as vehicles through which characters articulate their desires and loyalties, generally linked to the tenuous line between public and private domains. Robbins tracks the way that the modern study of literature in the West derived from an opposition between utility and culture, which, in his view, may partially explain literary critics' seeming lack of interest in the theme of public infrastructure.⁶ Robbins's article centers

⁵Although it may be tempting to compare this notion of infrastructure to Marx's notion of the infrastructure or base upon which a superstructure is created, Robbins and Rubenstein are writing about infrastructure that constitutes tangible objects. Marx, in contrast, refers to society's relations of production. It should be noted that literary critic Caroline Levine invented (at least within literary circles) the term *infrastructuralism* in her 2007 Modern Language Association talk, "Narrative Networks: *Bleak House* and *The Wire*." However, for her, infrastructuralism refers not to material structures, but to a method of interpreting literature. In an interview, she describes the term as follows:

I coined the term "infrastructuralism" specifically to think about bringing two traditions of thinking together. I've referred a number of times to Derrida and deconstructive reading here, but I've been just as deeply influenced by Foucault and his careful analysis of specific social institutions. These two thinkers have frequently been used against one another: Derridean readings are accused of being too transhistorical to take account of the operations of particular material institutions such as nineteenth-century prisons, while Foucauldian-style analyses have sometimes emphasized historical specificity at the expense of recognizing the iterable, transhistorical patterns—forms—at work even in the most particular historical experiences. The term "infrastructuralism" is a playful—but also serious—way to bring together poststructuralist readings and the analysis of social institutions. (95-6)

⁶ Robbins underscores the important historical relationship between public works/utility and literature/literary criticism. He writes:

Once upon a time, dazzling marvels of infrastructural engineering were of course publicly celebrated. But in the eyes of literature and of literary criticism, the narrative of progress based on bridges, tunnels, sewers, railways, gas lines, electrification, and so on almost immediately came to seem naïve and misguided. The modern study of literature, like much Romantic literature itself, was arguably born from nineteenth-century resistance to the criterion of utility. As the origin story is told by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society*, criticism emerges out of the concept of culture, and the concept of culture emerges in reaction against the proindustrial ideology of utilitarianism. (26)

He tracks two progressions of cultural and literary criticism that define themselves in opposition to Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism. The first runs from the relationship between the Romantic critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge's philosophy of culture and his contemporary Bentham's ethical theory of utilitarianism to John Stuart Mill's critique of both men's work. What Mill saw as missing from Bentham's greatest happiness principle (the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people) was the importance of non-material factors of happiness. Mill defined this happiness as spiritual, not material, and saw it as deriving from culture, thus drawing a link between the beliefs of Coleridge and Bentham (*Culture and Society* 59).

on a conviction that there is something fundamentally problematic about the privatization of public utilities because certain services used by all citizens should be protected from the whims of a competitive market. As I am not convinced that governments necessarily do a better job providing efficient and inexpensive public works than private companies, I disagree with Robbins on this point. However, tensions surrounding who should control public works are central to my dissertation. Some of the Marxist-leaning Brazilian authors I analyze share Robbins's view, which assumes that all such privatization goes unregulated and is irresponsible. In contrast, other authors analyzed in this dissertation laud the accomplishments of private utility companies, primarily the Canadian company Light, to which I dedicate an entire chapter.

Robbins's dual concern with both high and low profile public works (my terminology, not his) is helpful for understanding my argument about public works progress narratives. High profile public works, such as the Rio-Niterói Bridge in Brazil or the Hoover Dam in the United States, historically have been integral to national progress narratives. Often technologically savvy and grandiose, these projects demonstrate the

Raymond Williams makes this argument in his essay "Mill on Bentham and Coleridge" in *Culture and Society*. The other similar progression of cultural and literary criticism is comprised of Bentham's influence on the mid-Victorian literary critic Matthew Arnold. Like Mill, Arnold calls for the addition of the importance of culture (intelligence, schooling, artistic appreciation, intellectual opinions, and so on) to Bentham's utilitarianism, which in Arnold's view, is too focused on industrial innovation. Lionel Trilling makes this observation about Bentham and Arnold in his text *Matthew Arnold*.

In the Latin American context, this rift is most famously articulated by the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó in his book-length essay *Ariel* (1900). Although written in a different context and for a different audience, Rodó, like Mill and Arnold, underscores the problems with valuing utility to the exclusion of culture. Emphasizing the unity among Latin American nations, Rodó counterposes the refined humanistic and poetic Latin American spirit and the vulgar materialist and utilitarian Anglo-American one. Inspired by the characters in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Rodó likens the Latin American spirit to Ariel and the Anglo-American spirit to Caliban. This oppositional paradigm—however flawed—has been widely influential throughout Spanish America, generating various published responses, which have become famous of their own right. *Ariel* was not influential in Brazil, which is a point that literary critic Robert Newcomb argues in depth (48, 103, 113, 121-33). However, Brazilian intellectuals of the time shared the anti-imperialist convictions underlying the dichotomy the essay establishes. While *Ariel* bemoans mainly the United States's hegemony, complaints of imperialism in Brazil tended to attack a wider swath of dominant world powers.

priorities of a government, yet also reveal something more abstract about how a country chooses to display itself publicly.

Low profile public works, such as sewer pipes and electrical wires, however, are easily overlooked. Robbins refers to these types of low profile public works as the underbelly of capitalism and observes that they frequently are ignored:

Capitalism is often conceived as a shiny display of more or less desirable commodities. The inverse of this vision, infrastructure belongs to capitalism as well—it makes possible the production and distribution of these commodities—while it also sustains life functions like the provision of clean water and the elimination of waste that are categorized as “public utilities” and are as [of] yet incompletely commodified. Yet unlike commodities infrastructure is the object of no one’s desire. (25)

Infrastructure is the object of no one’s desire because people traditionally do not feel as compelled to protect and maintain what lies in the public domain as they do their personal possessions. This concept obviously has a long history. Aristotle, for instance, saw that what “is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Every one thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all of the common interest; and only when he is himself concerned as an individual” (25). Infrastructure is the “object of no one’s desire” in the sense that few want to take care of it. However, as I argue, for those who have limited access to public works—such as piped water, electricity, and paved roads—infrastructure is indeed an object of desire. Robbins argues that Jonathan Franzen’s 1992 novel *Strong Motion*, by drawing attention to the abandonment of public works, “sets going a rhetoric of seduction.” In other words, we are seduced into caring about public works or into wanting to protect them from ruin, an argument I draw on in my analyses of Brazilian low profile public works in need of maintenance.

Rubenstein's article, in turn, analyzes how the public utilities represented in postcolonial novels factor into perceptions of the city and into characters' relationship to language. His interest in public utilities stems from today's rapid, urban migrations, which result in an expanding percentage of the world's poor living in urban slums as opposed to rural areas. Rubenstein explores characters whose development is marked by both struggles to obtain public utilities and conflicts with the companies that control them. His research extends to film as well. Drawing on Jacques Rancière and Hannah Arendt's scholarship on rights, Rubenstein connects public works and positive rights, which are rights that permit or oblige action as opposed to inaction. In reference to protests about power outages in the country of Georgia (notably in the city of Kutaisi) as told in Paul Devlin's 2003 documentary *Power Trip*, Rubenstein posits: "Kutaisi's protesters announce the demand for positive rights, not 'the right not to be killed' or 'the right not to be tortured' but 'the right to light': the right to be seen, to be recognized, to be supplied. A right of consumption, modeled perhaps on the excesses of the west, but enacted in an entirely different context, an entirely different relationship to power" (43).

Rubenstein's correlation between positive rights and public works informs my argument that Brazilian writers challenge idealistic public works progress narratives. Lima Barreto's *Clara dos Anjos* (1923), a *folhetim*⁷ set in a poor community in Rio de Janeiro in the early 1900s, serves as an example. Lima Barreto gestures to citizens' positive rights throughout the *folhetim* by referring to how the Rio de Janeiro government should provide proper sewage, roads, public water spouts, and streetlights to all. The

⁷ *Folhetim* refers to literature that is originally published serially in a newspaper. Due to the format, chapters tend to be short, often ending with cliffhangers meant to whet the reader's appetite for the following installment. This genre tends to be plot-driven, and its authors often publish installments under rigid time constraints. It is standard in English to use the French equivalent *feuilleton*.

narrator complains, “Não há água, ou, onde há, é ainda nos lugarejos do Distrito Federal que o governo federal caridosamente supre em algumas bicas públicas; não há esgotos” [There is no water, or if there is, it’s in the small villages of the capital that the federal government charitably provides with some waterspouts; there are no sewers] (85). Moreover, his diatribe, with its ironic use of the word *caridosamente* [*charitably*], challenges the government’s narrative of charity, implying that access to public works should be ubiquitous in *subúrbios* (poor areas on the outskirts), not an infrequent and ceremonial government performance of good will.

Lima Barreto’s passage frames access to public works as a positive right, yet it also gestures to the author’s right to challenge governmental public works progress narratives. It serves as an example of how, in my dissertation, Rubenstein’s right to light fuses with literary critic Homi Bhabha’s conception of a right to narrate. Bhabha states, “When you fail to protect the right to narrate you are in danger of filling the silence with sirens, megaphones, hectoring voices carried by loudspeakers from podiums of great height over people who shrink into indistinguishable masses” (200). Many of the writers I analyze exercise their right to narrate as they disagree with dominant public works progress narratives.

Cultural conceptions of national progress change over time, and I argue that Brazilian literature tracks these changes. Therefore, my dissertation is aligned with New Historicism. New Historicism arose, in part, as a reaction to New Criticism, which purported that we should base our analyses of fiction on the text itself without allowing the context surrounding the text to influence our reading. In contrast, New Historicists, such as Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher, highlight the confluences among

art, economics, and society, which are influenced by specific cultural contexts and sites of power.

The creation of public works, of public works progress narratives, and of literary texts are three important sites of Brazil's self-representation. Many scholars connect either Brazilian public works and progress narratives or Brazilian progress narratives and literary texts.⁸ However, few studies analyze the connections among all three categories: how Brazilian fiction represents public works and, thus, responds to dominant public works progress narratives. Such research can help us understand the integral role of public works in shaping competing national narratives.

The scholarship that ties Brazilian literature to public works bears mentioning, especially because it makes gestures toward my particular concern with national progress narratives. As previously mentioned, Süssekind has critically considered the role of electricity in the modernization of Brazil and its ties to literature in *Cinematógrafo de letras: literatura, técnica e modernização no Brasil* [*Cinematograph of Words: Literature, Technique, and Modernization in Brazil*]. In the book, she tracks the impact of various electrically operated devices on the fiction that coincided with their invention. She analyzes fiction writers' strong reactions for or against new types of technology, such as the typewriter. Literary critic Luciano de A. Tosta's 2003 "Exchanging Glances: The

⁸ For examples of scholarship that connects Brazilian public works and progress narratives, see Teresa Caldeira's 2000 *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*, Henry A. Dietz and David J. Myers's 2002 *Capital City Politics in Latin America: Democratization and Empowerment*, Juan Lucena's 2009 "Imagining Nation, Envisioning Progress: Emperor, Agricultural Elites, and Imperial Ministers in Search of Engineers in 19th Century Brazil," and Dominichi Miranda de Sá, Magali Romero Sá, and Nisia Trindade Lima's 2008 "Telegraphs and an inventory of the territory of Brazil: the scientific work of the Rondon Commission (1907-1915)." For examples of scholarship that connects Brazilian progress narratives and literary texts, see Lucia Helena's 1993 "A narrativa de fundação: *Iracema*, *Macunaíma* e *Viva o povo brasileiro*," Doris Sommer's 1991 *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*, and Renata Ruth Mautner Wasserman's 1994 *Exotic Nations: Literature and Cultural Identity in the United States and Brazil, 1830-1930*.

Streetcar, Modernity, and the Metropolis in Brazilian Literature” considers fictional representations of Brazilian streetcars, paying particular attention to how streetcars symbolized modernity at their onset, and then nostalgia when they had become an outmoded means of transportation.

Marxist literary critic Roberto Schwarz’s 1987 essay “A carroça, o bonde e o poeta modernista” [The Cart, the Streetcar, and the Modernist Poet] analyzes how the poetry of Oswald de Andrade engages the quasi-colonial relationships of production of the Brazilian coffee industry. Schwarz provides a detailed reading of Oswald’s 1925 “Pobre alimária” [Poor Beast], a poem in which a horse-drawn cart becomes stuck on the tracks of a streetcar full of lawyers. Referring to the modernist process of overlaying dichotomous images (cart/streetcar), Schwarz writes:

O procedimento visa aproximar e articular dados que a ideologia colonialista, e sobretudo a sua interiorização pelo colonizado, separam em compartimentos estanques. Trata-se nada menos que de conquistar a reciprocidade entre a experiência local e a cultura dos países centrais, como indica a exigência de uma poesia capaz de ser exportada, contra a rotina unilateral da importação. (26-7)

[The procedure aims to bring together and articulate data that the colonialist ideology, and above all the colonized person’s interiorization of it, separate into watertight compartments. It involves nothing less than conquering the reciprocity between the local experience and the culture of central countries, as the demand for poetry capable of export indicates by going against the unilateral trend of importation.]

Oswald’s poem unites—albeit through an accident—the Brazilian experience and the culture and infrastructure of dominant countries, recognizing how they are part of the same whole. The so-called colonialist ideology would deem Brazil incapable of creating authentic and effective culture and infrastructure for itself, so such elements would need

to be imitated or purchased from abroad. In contrast, as Schwarz references, the Modernist movement vocally advocated for Brazil creating an export culture for other nations to emulate, as opposed to imitating foreign trends. As Schwarz argues, Oswald and his fellow *modernistas* managed to complicate watertight compartments of ours/theirs, foreign/national, authentic/imitated, and so on.

The Production of Culture and of Public Works

Schwarz's analysis of Oswald's "Pobre alimária" pinpoints a fundamental element of this dissertation: the relationship between the production of culture and the production of public works. Colonial and neo-colonial relationships have made and make Brazil self-conscious about the importation of foreign cultural and infrastructural trends due to the cultural and economic hegemony such trends reveal. The production of culture and of public works highlights Brazil's aversion and attraction to foreign influence. This is related, in part, to an aversion/attraction to modern life that literary critic Marshall Berman points out: "Our nineteenth-century thinkers were simultaneously enthusiasts and enemies of modern life, wrestling inexhaustibly with its ambiguities and contradictions; their self-ironies and inner tensions were a primary source of their creative power" (24). These technological and industrial advancements reached Brazil later than Europe and North America and were imported from Europe and North America. Therefore, the inner tensions to which Berman refers came to Brazil during the turn of the century and the early twentieth century, and they were specifically marked by the legacies of colonialism.

Euclides da Cunha, for example, lamented in 1902 that Brazil lived "parasitariamente à beira do Atlântico dos princípios civilizadores elaborados na Europa, e armados pela indústria alemã" [on the Atlantic coast like a parasite of the civilizing

principles elaborated in Europe and equipped with German industry] (14). Euclides da Cunha thus urges Brazilians to find national solutions to the country's practical problems. João do Rio, in his 1909 *crônica* "O último burro" [The Last Donkey] grapples with the same theme, emphasizing the exploitative nature of public works companies active in Brazil.⁹ The author maintains ambiguity as to whether the *crônica* is an earnest social critique or a farce. He writes: "Vieram os alemães, veiram os assaltantes americanos, e na nuvem de poeira de tantas ruas abertas e estirpadas¹⁰, carros elétricos zuniram matando gente aos magotes, matando a influência fundamental do burro" [The Germans came, the American thieves came, and in the cloud of dust of so many open, uprooted streets, electric trolleys buzzed by, killing lots of people, killing the fundamental influence of the donkey] (293). Whether we interpret the *crônica*'s "last ass" as a nostalgic luddite-narrator or as the Brazilian essence embodied in the capital's last animal-traction streetcars is somewhat of a mute point; elsewhere João do Rio has voiced both praise and disapproval for public works. Contradictory sentiments about new public works reveal ambivalence about infrastructural development in Brazil primarily related to Brazil's peripheral relationship to economically dominant countries.

Another ambiguity involved whether or not foreign public works projects in Brazil at the turn of the century were imported for their utility. On several occasions, Machado de Assis points out that *cariocas*' (people from Rio de Janeiro's) desire for foreign public works was often more superficial than practical because it was more

⁹ "O último burro" was published in the newspaper *A Notícia* on 5 November 1909. It is included in João do Rio's collection of *crônicas* entitled *Vida vertiginosa* [Vertiginous Life], first published in 1911.

¹⁰ I assume that *estirpadas* is a typo or antiquated spelling that means *extirpadas* [uprooted] or *estripadas* [gutted]. Although I am unsure which is correct, the sentiment of both words is essentially the same in this context. I consulted a Portuguese dictionary from 1900, which includes the noun *estirpe* [root], but not the adjective *estirpado*.

concerned with social status than utility. This is the subject of the start of my first chapter, yet it is also exemplified in one of Machado's 1892 *crônicas* about Rio de Janeiro's first electric streetcars.¹¹ In the *crônica*, an electric streetcar conductor drives with the smug "convicção de que inventara, não só o *bond* elétrico, mas a própria eletricidade" [conviction that he had invented not just the electric streetcar, but electricity itself] (*Crônicas de bond* 27).¹² By casting a character with the vanity and ignorance to think that he invented something that exists in nature, Machado de Assis questions the values of a society more concerned with the status gained from having fancy imported streetcars than the practical benefits of the fast, new vehicles.

Grounding my analysis in these turn-of-the-century tensions is important because they remain to this day. As cultural critic George Yúdice argues, Latin American cultures have long been "inscribed in a transcultural relation to Western modernity" (209).¹³ Machado de Assis's critiques of Brazil's relationship to public works are compelling because they ask the reader to reflect on this relationship to Western modernity, as opposed to ignoring or automatically accepting it. Dating back to pre-independence, the production of culture and of public works in Brazil has been deeply influenced by trends in dominant nations, primarily England, France, and the United States. As Roberto Schwarz states in his well-known essay "Nacional por subtração" [National by

¹¹ In 1892, the first electric streetcars began to run in Rio de Janeiro. This *crônica* was published on 16 October 1892 in Machado de Assis's column "A semana" [The Week] in the *carioca* periodical *Gazeta de Notícias* [News Gazette].

¹² Whenever I had access to early publications of texts or faithful reproductions of them, I maintained the original spelling and grammar even if it is now antiquated.

¹³ Elaborating on this point, Yúdice writes, "Latin America's transcultural Westernism, it must be emphasized, is radically different from the cultural matrices of countries like Nigeria, Iraq, India or China. To begin with, unlike these countries, Latin America was colonized by Europeans who *settled* there, transferring their religious, linguistic, political, juridical, literary and social systems. These, of course, were transculturated in contact with non-European peoples, whose own systems, however, were utterly destroyed, with the exception, of course, of everyday beliefs and practices which survived the destruction of indigenous imperial civilization" (210).

Subtraction], first published in 1986, “Brasileiros e latino-americanos fazemos constantemente a experiência do caráter *posticho*, *inautêntico*, *imitado* da vida cultural que levamos. Essa experiência tem sido um lado formador de nossa reflexão crítica desde os tempos da Independência.” [Brazilians and Latin Americans constantly experience the *fake*, *inauthentic*, *imitated* character of the cultural life we live. That experience has been a formative part of our critical reflection since the time of Independence]. As the examples from Euclides da Cunha, João do Rio, and Machado de Assis demonstrate, this experience of imitation was felt strongly in relationship to public works. However, as Schwarz’s reading of “Pobre alimária” demonstrates, literature has the power to transform such feelings of imitation into feelings of national authenticity or to complicate strict categories of imitation and authenticity.

Description of the Chapters

To understand how public works are involved in competing narratives of national progress in Brazil, I have chosen to focus on five key sites of public works that have been particularly meaningful in Brazil’s self-representation and that triggered fictional responses: 1) the electrification of streetlights in Rio de Janeiro, 2) the dominance of the utility and transport company Light and its involvement in the industrialization of southeastern Brazil, 3) the construction of Brasília and its highways, 4) the military regime’s major public works projects, and 5) the substandard public works in contemporary Brazilian slums. Each of these sites is integral to how Brazil has framed its self-assessment of its modernization. Though I analyze literature written about the Itaipu Dam and the Transamazon Highway, my dissertation focuses primarily on Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, and São Paulo. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, these cities

have been dominant political, economic, and cultural hubs in Brazil. Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have housed and Brasília constituted the country's most significant urban public works projects. Moreover, writers from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have written the vast majority of published literature about public works, and it is the cultural texts themselves that have shaped the trajectory of this research.

I have organized the chapters of my dissertation chronologically from the early twentieth century to present.¹⁴ The first chapter is entitled “The Generation of Electricity: Fiction, Light, and Progress in Rio de Janeiro in the Early Twentieth Century.” In 1905, Mayor Pereira Passos transformed downtown Rio de Janeiro. He gutted the cluttered city center and replaced it with a wide boulevard, earning himself the nickname “the Tropical Haussmann” (Outtes). His massive urban renewal project was meant to rid the capital of its reputation as a dark, dangerous colonial port where travelers ran the risk of catching yellow fever on the filthy streets. The renewal project showcased Rio de Janeiro's first electric streetlights. Light has long been an irresistible metaphor linked to knowledge, purity, and progress, and these new electric lights became an important symbol of how Pereira Passos's reforms marked Brazil's glowing entrance into the twentieth century. Periodicals and official documents of the time reinforced this stance. Rio de Janeiro's first electric streetlights—modeled after those of Paris—connoted safety, cleanliness, beauty, and glamour, key attributes of Pereira Passos's reforms.

¹⁴ I have chosen to organize my dissertation chronologically, yet it should be noted that thematic and formal commonalities, as well as temporal ones, link the texts. Lima Barreto, José Marquez da Silva, and Ferréz share a social concern with improving the public works available to the Brazilian poor. Oswald de Andrade, João Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector, and Luiz Ruffato employ representations of public works as a vehicle for aesthetic experimentation. Certain authors address public works progress narratives, yet neither take such a firm political stance nor employ such aesthetic experimentation as the authors previously mentioned. In this final category, I refer to Machado de Assis, João do Rio, José Vieira, and José Geraldo Vieira.

While this public works progress narrative emphasized the balance between practical concerns (cleaner light, brighter light, more streetlights, and safer streets) and aesthetic concerns (glamour, status, and beauty), a comparison of two fictional texts suggests that practical and aesthetic notions of national progress coexisted less harmoniously. Lima Barreto's 1905 *folhetim* entitled *O subterrâneo do Morro do Castelo* [The Cave of Castelo Hill] uses electric light to attack the social aspects of Pereira Passos's reforms. The implication is that by imitating elitist, foreign models of progress, the Rio de Janeiro government excluded the poor, thus making the same mistake as the foreign models it emulated. In contrast, João do Rio's 1908 *crônica* "Noturno policromo" [Polychrome Nocturne] employs the electric lights of Rio de Janeiro's 1908 National Exposition to praise the aesthetic achievements of his city's modernization, implying that aesthetic progress ultimately mattered more than social progress and suggesting that Brazil could use a foreign innovation (electric lamps) to create something entirely original.

For Brazilians, to have an opinion regarding national progress requires having an opinion about the role foreign companies and capital should have in that progress. As a provider of electricity, gas, telephone services, and public transport for most of the twentieth century—the Canadian company Light features prominently in this debate. In southeastern Brazil, home of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, citizens watched Light buy up smaller companies and expand to the point of becoming a household name that made its way into prose, poetry, popular songs, and expressions. Chapter two, "The Power of Light: Representations, from 1906-1962, of a Transport and Utility Company in Brazil," analyzes depictions of Light from 1900 through the 1960s. By analyzing these popular

and literary representations of Light over the decades, I demonstrate how Brazilians both understood and challenged the power Light held over their country's infrastructural and industrial progress. Using the example of Oswald de Andrade's representations of Light, I suggest a parallel between debates over foreign companies' appropriate involvement in Brazil's industrial development and debates over foreign influence on Brazilian arts, two issues that were contentious simultaneously.

Central to Light's development was the 1926 completion of the Cubatão Power Plant near the city of Santos, part of a massive power project that allowed Light to expand throughout the region, ward off competitors, and meet the growing demands for electricity in São Paulo, as the city became an expanding industrial center (McDowall 255). Chapter two shows that the power plant not only generated electricity but also inspired competing texts about the best method to achieve Brazilian economic independence. A 1961 anti-imperialist manifesto regards Cubatão as evidence of what was wrong with Brazil's economic trajectory, whereas a patriotic illustrated biography published in 1962 regards Cubatão as the catalyst of Brazil's extraordinary economic independence. An array of creative representations of Light demonstrates Brazilians' awareness of and resistance to the company's power over the country's infrastructural development.

The construction of Brasília in the late 1950s constituted a massive manifestation of Brazil's desire to find its own model for its national progress. This model involved linking the vast nation to its core with a fan of highways and constructing a modernist capital comprised of reinforced concrete buildings with clean lines and curves. The dominant public works progress narratives until the 1950s had drawn heavily on the

public works of more developed countries, a preference with which many writers took issue. In contrast, by the late 1950s, the government-sanctioned public works progress narrative scripted public works as evidence of a bold and original form of national progress. Despite this narrative, the construction of Brasília by no means marked a rupture with foreign countries. President Juscelino Kubitschek opened trade relationships and borrowed internationally extensively for the capital's construction.

The third chapter, "The Real and Promised Brasília: An Asymmetrical Symbol in 1960s Brazilian Literature," posits that to write about Brasília in the 1960s was to write about a dual city, part symbol and part reality. This dual city grew out of an impulse—both in official documentation and everyday speech—to oversimplify representations of the real city in order to preserve its mythic promise of national progress. The oversimplifications derived, in part, from a national desire to showcase how Brazil had found an authentic path toward its own progress, as opposed to copying pre-existing models in other nations. In this context, the debate about national progress centers on how people evaluated the real Brasília's achievement of a promise. This chapter analyzes four texts written in the 1960s that challenge utopian visions of Brasília. Guimarães Rosa's short story "As margens da alegria" [The Margins of Happiness] (1962) and Clarice Lispector's *crônica* "Brasília: cinco dias" [Brasília: Five Days] (1964) react to idealizations of Brasília that represent it as *the* symbol of national progress. The authors' formally experimental and remarkably apolitical texts focus instead on the malleability of the symbol of Brasília and the complex ways in which people respond to the modernist capital. In José Marques da Silva's *Diário de um candango* [Diary of a *Candango*] (1963) and José Geraldo Vieira's novel *Paralelo 16: Brasília* [Parallel 16: Brasília]

(1966), the asymmetry that is of greatest interest is the disconnect between how the new capital purported to be more egalitarian than other major Brazilian cities yet ended up being deeply segregated by class. For both authors, this phenomenon did not keep Brasília from being a symbol of national progress but called into question who had access to that progress. Vieira's novel also engages delusions about how Brasília's design could transform residents' behaviors and motivations for upholding an idealized opinion about Brasília.

Four years after the inauguration of Brasília, the military regime seized power, jerking the country in a new, more authoritarian direction. But, as I show in chapter four, "Progress Narratives and Monumental Public Works: Brazil under the Military Regime (1964-1985)," one constant throughout the decades was the use of public works as a strategy for narrating national progress. The military dictatorship focused on promoting high profile public works projects that would break national and world records for their size. The Rio-Niterói Bridge, for instance, was the longest bridge of its kind in the world when it was completed in 1974. By focusing on projects such as this, the military dictatorship generated a buzz around infrastructural progress in order to obfuscate its regressions in the area of social progress. It even instituted a national transportation week, organized an anthology of literature related to transportation, and held a competition for the best poem about the Transamazon Highway. To uncover the regime's strategy—simultaneously construct public works and narratives to accompany them—this chapter analyzes Domingos Pellegrini's 1977 short story "A maior ponte do mundo" [The Longest Bridge in the World], which takes place on the Rio-Niterói Bridge in 1974 while

it was under construction. Pellegrini's text employs a real public works project to address contradictions between material and social progress during the military regime.

While the Kubitschek administration and the military regime were invested in constructing both actual public works and public works progress narratives, subsequent administrations have not created either on such a grand scale. As Brazil's *favelas* continue to grow, many of the nation's most pressing infrastructural concerns exist within unauthorized living spaces outside of the legal public works grid. This liminal space presents complex questions about legal obligations, human rights, and safety hazards, all of which involve public works. Since 1985, literary representations of public works tend to address these contentious issues as opposed to critiquing public works progress narratives. This trend coincides with the growth of Brazil's *favelas*.¹⁵ My fifth chapter, "I Dreamed the City Stopped: Failed Public Works in Ferréz's *Capão Pecado* and Luiz

¹⁵ Geographers Greg O'Hare and Michael Barke describe the phenomenon of *favela* growth within a Latin American context:

During the late 1970s and early 1980s in Brazil, Mexico and some other Latin American countries, serious mishandling of the economy led to considerable economic recession, hyper-inflation and an external debt crisis (Gilbert, 1989; Bacha and Malan, 1989). Subsequent structural adjustment programmes by the World Bank and IMF caused declining living standards and a large increase in the numbers of the urban poor (Harris and Fabricius, 1996). The incomes of moderate and middle income groups were also reduced, a fact which had adverse repercussions on the poorer income housing market, through rising costs and inadequacies in the supply of building materials (Pugh, 1995). With no taxes to pay in the favelas, the pauperization of low middle class income groups in the 1980s, caused a significant number of them to move into the squatter settlements (Taschner, 1995). These processes caused one of the fastest periods of growth in favelas in the city's [Rio de Janeiro's] history. Between 1980 and 1991 there was an increase of 34% in the numbers of people living in squatter housing when the city's overall population growth was only 7.7%. (237)

Economist Peter Lloyd-Sherlock comments on the expansion of São Paulo's *favelas*, noting similar trends: Between 1970 and 1993 the growth of São Paulo as a whole was markedly slower [than from 1950 to 1970], yet its shanty town population increased dramatically. From 1987 to 1993 the number of shanty town residents is estimated to have more than doubled, reaching almost two million, compared to a total urban growth rate of only 1.1 per cent. As will be seen, much of the growth of shanty towns (known locally as *favelas*) was fuelled by the movement of population from the formal rental and owner-occupier housing markets, people who had been living in the city for many years. (289)

Ruffato's *Eles eram muitos cavalos*," analyzes how two contemporary Brazilian novels—Ferréz's *Capão Pecado* [*Capão Sin*] (2000) and Luiz Ruffato's *Eles eram muitos cavalos* [They Were Many Horses] (2001)—relate failing public works to displacement and disorder.

Both novels use public works to develop the themes of anarchy, apocalypse, instability, violence, inequality, and urban ruin. In the São Paulo depicted in these texts, public works are not being built or improved. Broken, vulnerable, or conspicuously absent, urban public works are failing, and their failure is wearing away some citizens' morale. Failed public works make their way into characters' metaphors and daydreams, as the physical city permeates their imaginations. The results of the authors' depictions of failed public works are twofold. On the one hand, the depictions aid in the literary objective of creating a dark setting in which dysfunction and vulnerability reign. Thus, problems with public works grate away at the interior, intimate spaces within the urban subjects. On the other hand, this failure shows how stark class lines delineate who has access to basic public works. The abandonment of public works and their uneven distribution across São Paulo in the novels trigger in the reader a desire to protect public works and make them more widely available.

The conclusion briefly examines commonalities among the chapters and offers a final representation of public works in the form of a Los Angeles museum exhibit about a Brazilian-Argentine footbridge. While the dissertation focuses on the central role that public works have had in Brazil's formulation and contestation of national progress narratives throughout the twentieth-century, this final example constitutes a foreign gaze

at Brazilian public works, and it engages the question of how we use narratives and public works to write history.

CHAPTER ONE
THE GENERATION OF ELECTRICITY: FICTION, LIGHT, AND PROGRESS IN
RIO DE JANEIRO IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Before electric light arrived in Rio de Janeiro, Machado de Assis foretold its impact on the capital. He anticipated how reactions to electric light would symbolize a view of technological progress that was more concerned with social status than function. In his 1894 *crônica* "Projeto de atêrro total da baía" [The Total Landfill of the Bay Project], he facetiously argues for the filling in of Rio de Janeiro's entire Guanabara Bay. He fancifully describes a future landmass bedecked with an aerial railway, Roman aqueducts, circuses, lyrical theaters, waterways for Venetian gondolas, and, most relevant to this study, electric illumination. In an era in which many people believed that science had limitless potential to make life more comfortable and efficient, Machado de Assis's satiric piece reveals that public works that were erected in the name of comfort and efficiency often had more to do with glamour. In his *crônica*, the desire for elegant imports merits the destruction of the one of Rio de Janeiro's most aesthetically pleasing features: the Guanabara Bay. Foreign technology and entertainment trump natural beauty, the *crônica* suggests, because Brazilian citizens are so focused on the cachet of what comes from abroad that they cease to value the unique attributes of their own country. Thus, Machado de Assis implies that the Brazilian desire for urban renewal regretfully meant importing the fashions and symbols of Europe and North America for frivolous enjoyment more than useful improvements. The author laments that Rio de Janeiro has a

surplus of beauty that goes unappreciated by locals and a dearth of practical, material forms of progress, which could indeed be useful to the nation's capital.

Machado de Assis anticipated reactions to Rio de Janeiro's first electric streetlights. Authors at the start of the twentieth century understood that electric streetlamps were a loaded symbol of the debate about the direction Brazilian progress should take. Rio de Janeiro's first electric streetlamps provoked competing beliefs about if Brazil's progress should lean more toward egalitarian and practical concerns (cleaner brighter light, more streetlights, and safer streets in all neighborhoods) or more toward selfish and aesthetic concerns (glamour, status, and beauty), such as those depicted in Machado de Assis's *crônica*. Representations of Rio de Janeiro's first electric lights engage thorny questions: What matters more, Brazil's social or aesthetic progress? What are the competing notions of both social and aesthetic progress? These questions dovetail tensions regarding literature's social versus its aesthetic contributions. Although I include an assortment of examples from different media and different authors, the two writers of central importance in this analysis are Afonso Henriques de Lima Barreto (1881-1922) and João Paulo Emilio Cristóvão dos Santos Coelho Barreto, better known as João do Rio (1881-1921). Lima Barreto's *O subterrâneo do Morro do Castelo* (1905) [The Cave of Castelo Hill] condemns the construction of the *Avenida Central* and its electric lighting for being elitist, and João do Rio's "Noturno policromo" [Polychrome Nocturne] (1908) celebrates the beauty of the electric lights of the National Exposition of 1908. Divided into two parts, this chapter first analyzes the social, and then the aesthetic concerns embodied in representations of electric light.

Social Lights

In 1905, Mayor Pereira Passos transformed downtown Rio de Janeiro. That November, he inaugurated the 108-foot wide *Avenida Central* that earned him the nickname “the Tropical Haussmann” (Outtes).¹⁶ The avenue was the crown jewel of the massive urban renewal project meant to rid the capital of its reputation as a dark, dangerous colonial port where travelers risked catching yellow fever on the filthy streets.¹⁷ As a journalist from *O Commentario* described it: “a Avenida que acaba de ser inaugurada representa o mais ingente esforço para arrancar a cidade tricentenaria aos moldes arcaicos de que parecia nunca mais querer libertar-se” [the Avenue that was just inaugurated represents the most enormous effort to rip the three hundred year old city from the archaic models from which it seemed to never want to free itself] (286).

This effort to modernize involved lining the *Avenida Central* and Botafogo Beach with the city’s first electric streetlights.¹⁸ A total of 174 arc lamps glowed along the

¹⁶ Referring to Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann’s renewal of Paris under Louis Napoleon in response to the cholera outbreaks of 1832 and 1846, the Brazilian diplomat Baron Rio Branco gave Mayor Pereira Passos the nickname “the Tropical Haussmann” (Outtes) and his countryman similarly referred to Pereira Passos as “the Brazilian Haussmann” (Needell “Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires” 523). Along the same note, Pereira Passos received the following praise from the French architect Le Corbusier who visited the Brazilian capital in 1929 and 1936 (Almandoz 36): “Of a colonial city, charming and hidden in the trees, this other Haussmann had made the most dazzling township in the world” (Evenson 38). In addition to the construction of the *Avenida Central* and the erection of electric streetlights, Pereira Passos orchestrated many other reforms. Pereira Passos’s initiatives included the construction of the Leme Tunnel, sidewalks, and avenues as well as the improvement of multiple roads and public spaces. The buildings his reforms produced are among the most striking in Rio de Janeiro and many still stand to this day because of efforts made to preserve them. A notable exception is the elegant Palácio Monroe, built for the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair and subsequently transported to the *Avenida Central*. The building was later demolished.

¹⁷ Historian Jeffery Needell points out Pereira Passos’s lesser transformations of the city geared specifically at making it seem more “civilized” and, in the case of certain restrictions, trying to rid it of its Afro-Brazilian traditions: “Pereira Passos also attacked certain Carioca traditions. He prohibited hawking foods on the streets, spitting on the streetcar floors, selling milk from cows trotted door to door, raising pigs within city limits, exposing meat on butchershop entrances, allowing stray dogs to run loose, leaving building façades unpainted, continuing with the *entrudo* (wild pranks) and unregulated *cordões* (boisterous popular processions) of *Carnaval*, and a host of other ‘barbaric,’ ‘uncivilized’ customs” (*A Tropical Belle Epoque* 35).

¹⁸ According to the December 1905 issue of the *carioca* magazine *O Commentario*, in October 1905, first lamp-posts and then electric bulbs were installed along the *Avenida Central*’s median. The lights started to

Avenida Central's median (Departamento de Relações Públicas 23). The government hoped the steady glow of the avenue's arc lamps would eradicate both the actual and the symbolic darkness of a city behind the times. The mayor treated the spiraled iron streetlights as public art, part of a strategic beautification of the city. The mayor commissioned the Brazilian sculptor Rodolpho Bernadelli to design not only sculptures, but also streetlamps, such as the ornate electric lamp-post in the Largo da Lapa that stands to this day (Cohen 45). These initial electric streetlamps exemplify how art, technology, and utility merged around public light as a symbol of modernization. In a laudatory description of the soon-to-be-finished *Avenida Central* from the social pages of the weekly *carioca* magazine *Rua do Ouvidor*, electric lights, along with luxury shops and café terraces like those of "grandes capitaes europeas" [Europe's great capitals], add to the avenue's charm (5). It was no coincidence that the elegant streetlamps looked as if they had been plucked from the streets of Paris, the city where Brazilian aviator Santos-Dumont flew his dirigible in 1901, proving that controlled flight was possible. Paris was then the epicenter of culture, innovation, and good taste, and Pereira Passos, like many mayors of the time, wanted Brazil's capital to resemble the City of Light. As Santos-Dumont had conquered the air, Pereira Passos sought to conquer the dark.

To celebrate his mayoral achievements, Pereira Passos commissioned a guidebook about Rio de Janeiro. Historian and journalist Francisco Ferreira da Rosa, editor of *O Commentario*, wrote the guidebook, which was published in 1905. Ferreira da Rosa updated the government-issued text in 1922 to celebrate one hundred years of

function on 12 November 2005 (291). A pamphlet produced by the Canadian company Light explains that temporary electric streetlights were installed on the *Avenida Central* and on Botafogo Beach in 1904 by the Société Anonyme du Gas. In September of 1905, Electric streetlights were installed in Botafogo Beach (Departamento de Relações Públicas 23).

Brazilian independence. By describing the city before and after the reforms, Ferreira da Rosa uses electric lighting to illustrate the total transformation Pereira Passos made possible during his four-year term (1902-1906). Ferreira da Rosa states that on 31 December 1902 Rio de Janeiro was a sleepy, dirty, boring city with gas lights, yet "em 31 de Dezembro de 1906 Rio de Janeiro estava toda iluminada a electricidade" [on the 31st of December of 1906 Rio de Janeiro was all lit by electricity] (29), implying that this light made the city lively and clean. However, the claim was false. Although the downtown streets were electrically lit, most of the poor neighborhoods to the north had no public lights at all, not even gas or whale-oil ones (Meade 87). Ferreira da Rosa's inaccurate description of a city entirely lit by electricity reveals how Pereira Passos sought to erase visual reminders of Brazil's colonial past by keeping the downtown *cortiços* (tenements) vestiges of the colonial era, and the *subúrbios* (poor neighborhoods on the outskirts) conveniently in the dark, while displaying the new avenues under bright lights. Some authors took issue with this government use of electric light as a symbol of progress because the new light source was only available to a small subsection of the city population. In their eyes, Pereira Passos's reforms were making the city more comfortable for the elite, but ignoring the needs of the poor.

Two popular taglines for Pereira Passos's reforms concisely sum up opposing opinions about the capital's urban remodeling: "o bota-abaixo" [the tear down] and "Rio civiliza-se"¹⁹ [Rio civilizes itself]. For some, the construction of the *Avenida Central* symbolized a continuation of the status quo of elitist government priorities, while for

¹⁹ Communications scholar Denise da Costa Oliveira Siqueira writes, "O projeto *Rio Civiliza-se*, tão divulgado por jornalistas como Figueiredo Pimentel, empolgava determinados setores da sociedade e exaltava a importação de costumes e produtos da América, e principalmente, da Europa" [The Rio Civilizes Itself project, so divulged by journalists such as Figueiredo Pimental, stimulated certain sectors of society and exalted the importation of American and primarily European customs and products"] (85)

others it represented Brazil's exciting modernization. A character in José Vieira's novel *O bota-abaixo: chronica de 1904* [The Tear-Down: Chronicle of 1904], referring to Pereira Passos's reforms, identifies with the nickname after which the novel is named, "Nós não precisamos de avenidas, Sr. Barão! Carecemos é de escolas, transportes, educação civica. Tratam disso as oligarchias?" [We do not need avenues, Baron! We need schools, transportation, civic education. Do oligarchies take care of that?] (110).²⁰ Expressing the sentiment of the second nickname, Olavo Bilac describes, in a 1904 edition of the magazine *Kosmos*, the demolition of hundreds of old buildings to construct the *Avenida Central*. He personifies the death of Rio de Janeiro's colonial past to welcome the city's entrance into modernity:

No aluir das paredes, no ruir das pedras, no esfarelar do barro havia um longo gemido. Era o gemido soturno e lamentoso do Passado, do Atraso, do Opróbrio. A cidade colonial, imunda, resoluçando no soluçar daqueles apodrecidos materiais que deabavam (qtd. in Ferrez 17)

[In the collapse of the walls, in the crash of the rocks, in the crumble of the clay there was a long moan. It was the sad and mournful moan of the Past, of Backwardness, of Opprobrium. The colonial city, filthy, echoing the whimper of those rotten materials that came undone]

Bilac backed the stance that the *Avenida Central* and the mayor's other projects were propelling the capital into a glorious future, yet not everyone agreed.

If the construction of the *Avenida Central* allows Bilac to envision progress dramatically annihilating the past, it allows Lima Barreto to call on the past to critique Pereira Passos's version of progress. Lima Barreto grew up in a *subúrbio*, and he dedicated himself to representing the discrimination against Rio de Janeiro's working

²⁰ Although this novel appears to have been published in 1905, I have been unable to verify this. The copy I read, which was quite old, had no date, and literary critics have been unable to confirm the exact publication year.

class, as his *folhetim* entitled *O subterrâneo do Morro do Castelo* demonstrates. It was published serially over a five-week period in the carioca newspaper *O Correio da Manhã* in 1905 while the *Avenida Central* was under construction.²¹ A small section of the tenement Castelo Hill, the founding site of the city, was leveled in 1905 for the construction of the *Avenida Central*. This leveling displaced some tenement residents and revealed manmade caves within the hill that were thought to have been built by the Jesuits who lived on the hill in the eighteenth century (Needell *A Tropical Belle Epoque* 38). Inspired by this current event, Lima Barreto published his satiric *folhetim* in which he employs representations of electric lighting to critique what he viewed as the elitism of Pereira Passos's reforms and model of progress. Although the publication of *O subterrâneo no Morro do Castelo* predates the installation of the first permanent electric streetlights on the *Avenida Central*, temporary arc lights illuminated the avenue at the time of its publication (*Commentario* 291).

Frequently in the literary depictions of public works, there arise examples of how physical borders become social borders, which Lima Barreto shows via a mapping of the lit and unlit portions of the city. He juxtaposes the bright electric lights of the new avenue with the darkness of less wealthy areas of the city. For instance, the narrator describes the unlit streets of a steep, muddy section of the neighborhood Gamboa in the early 1900s. When he and a friend walk along the streets of Gamboa in search of the home of a man who claims to be an expert of Castelo Hill's history, they have "dificuldade em encontrar a casa; a escuridão tenebrosa da noite e da iluminação não nos consente distinguir os números dos portais" [trouble finding the house; the gloomy darkness of the night and the

²¹ It appeared in the paper almost every day from 28 April to 3 June 1905. For decades, this *folhetim* was practically forgotten, until Barreto's biographer, Francisco de Assis Barbosa, brought its existence to the attention of the public, and literary critic Beatriz Resende organized a reprint of it in book form in 1997.

illumination don't allow us to distinguish the numbers on the doors] (19). The lack of public light complicates a simple task and casts a melancholy ambience over the neighborhood. The contrast is visible: one avenue has the most modern light source available, while a less well off neighborhood not far from it has almost no public light at all. Thus, Lima Barreto's *folhetim* employs a dominant visual symbol of the time—electric light—to make a case for more egalitarian urban reforms in Rio de Janeiro.

Although in other texts Lima Barreto argues that the very livelihood of Rio de Janeiro's poor is threatened by the lack of public works—such as clean, piped drinking water—in *O subterrâneo* he makes an argument about fairness, not about a service necessary to sustain life. He implies that the *carioca* poor deserve access to the same bright lights as the elite. This relates to the argument about positive rights made by literary critic Michael Rubenstein, which is discussed in my introduction. Rubenstein writes that when communities without access to electricity protest in favor of their right to light²², they “announce the demand for positive rights, not ‘the right not to be killed’ or ‘the right not to be tortured’ but ‘the right to light’: the right to be seen, to be recognized, to be supplied. A right of consumption, modeled perhaps on the excesses of the west, but enacted in an entirely different context, an entirely different relationship to power” (43). Likewise, Lima Barreto's *folhetim* implicitly calls for “the right to light,” as it contrasts the electric lights downtown to the lack of streetlights in less wealthy neighborhoods.

Embellishing upon this recent discovery and upon long-standing rumors of buried treasure, Lima Barreto introduces the actual engineers of the *Avenida Central* as

²² In establishing this concept of a right to light, Rubenstein draws on Rancière's article 2004 “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?,” which is inspired in part by Hannah Arendt's concept of the “right to have rights,” articulated in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951. Rubenstein refers specifically to protests about power failures in the country of Georgia as told in Paul Devlin's 2003 documentary *Power Trip*.

characters who quickly bring electricity to Castelo Hill's caves when they receive word that the area may be full of Jesuit gold.²³ The *folhetim* imagines that, following chief engineer Paulo de Frontin's instructions, electric lights were installed in the caves. Thus, Lima Barreto sardonically relocates the city's electric streetlights: he puts them underground. This imaginary reversal demonstrates what the author viewed as the backwardness of Pereira Passos's reforms. The paradox is evident: for decades the government has made no effort to light the streets of Castelo Hill; however with the chance of turning a profit, officials rapidly outfit the bowels of the neighborhood with modern electric light, which offers no shared profits for the residents of the hill's tenement. Although the officials claim that the excavation is necessary, since the treasure will solve the economic crisis, they find no gold. They keep the only two artifacts discovered, a cross and an iron gas lamp, for themselves. The narrator, incensed, demands that the president of Brazil and the chief engineer make the items publically available: "Vamos lá, Sr. Rodrigues Alvez e Dr. Frontin, entreguem ao Museu Nacional o que lhes não pertence" [Come on Mr. Rodrigues Alvez and Dr. Frontin, give to the National Museum what does not belong to you] (89). The *folhetim* cynically ends with the city officials having dug up a tenement for what ended up being no good reason. It is an obvious critique of a pattern in Brazil and elsewhere by which public works are built with resource extraction in mind, not the public good.

²³ Some characters believe that the Jesuits buried gold in 1711 during the French Invasion. Others believe that Jesuits dug caves to hide their legendary treasure under Castelo Hill before they were expelled by the Marquis de Pombal, the Prime Minister of the Portuguese Empire from 1750-1777. He believed that the Jesuits were decreasing the indigenous labor force by educating the native Brazilian population and that they, therefore, were a threat to Lisbon's economy (Skidmore 45). As a comic twist, one character insists that the chief engineer Paulo de Fontin "é o Marquês de Pombal; ou melhor, aquele encarna atualmente a alma do ministro de D. José!" [is the Marquis de Pombal; or better said, he presently incarnates the soul of the minister of Don José!] (27). Reincarnated or not, the officials proceed with their treasure hunt with little concern for the residents or for the preservation of the historic neighborhood.

Lima Barreto protests the urban reform that, in his view, destroyed historic monuments and privileged the whims of the elite over the needs of the poor. Emphasizing the violence of the act, the *folhetim* describes one of the *Avenida Central* engineers who

pronunciou o Sésamo, abre-te naquela fuma de Ali Babá; a sua picareta demolidora foi a varinha mágica que tirou o encanto do morro, despedaçando o modelo resistente, abatendo com fragor grandes moles de granito, levando a eletricidade irreverente ao soturno âmbito dos subterrâneos, onde a voz humana ecoa hoje, após três séculos de silêncio e paz, com o tom diabólico de profanação que teria a música de cake-walk nas catacumbas de Roma. (85)

[proclaimed open sesame in that Ali Baba cave; his destructive pickaxe was the magic wand that made the hill's charm vanish, shattering the resistant frame, forcing chunks of granite down with a crash and bringing irreverent electricity to the gloomy realm of the caves, where, after three centuries of silence and peace, the human voice echoes today, with the diabolic tone of sacrilege that cake-walk music would have in the catacombs of Rome.]

With an eclectic mixture of metaphors from *One Thousand and One Nights*, an African American dance made popular in the early 1900s (the cake-walk), and Catholic burial galleries in Italy, the narrator tells a tale of government violence inflicted on nature. Cake-walks would be obscene in the catacombs of Rome for their boisterous secularism. However, electric lights are obscene via contrast since the tenement above them remains dark while the uninhabited underworld glows below. The narrator imagines that the deceased Jesuits who excavated Castelo Hill would feel that it is now “profanada pelo progresso iconoclasta que deixa em sua passagem o cheiro acre do acetileno ou a claridade baça das lâmpadas elétricas. [profaned by the iconoclast progress that leaves in its passageway the acrid smell of gas or the dull clarity of electric lights] (86). Far from being a symbol of modernization, electric light is portrayed as a heartless invader and as

the face of an erred version of progress. Thus, the text accuses the current reforms of ignoring impoverished people's right to light.

In the last two quotations, Lima Barreto employs unlikely adjectives to describe electricity: irreverent and dull, which express his distaste for what he views as a discriminatory modernization that has tainted the nation. In the *folhetim*, electricity is irreverent for having disrespectfully trespassed on local traditions in the name of so-called progress and is dull in its global uniformity that illuminates the government's avarice. Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre offers a similar lament in *Casa grande e senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*), describing how electric lighting denotes the end of an era of stories about folkloric figures, a great Brazilian tradition he believes was sacrificed to modernity and to the powerful artificial light that warded off shadows and ghosts. He thus argues that electric light threatened part of the essence of Brazilian society. Freyre writes that “o século da luz elétrica . . . acabou com tanto mal-assombrado bom, para só deixar os banais, das sessões de espiritismo” (328) [the century of electric light . . . did away with many a worthy ghost, to leave us only the banal ones of the spiritualistic séance] (*The Masters and the Slaves* 340). For Freyre, electric light marked the end of a Northern Brazilian ritual of telling ghost stories that fed off the inevitable country darkness and was replaced by banal, less specifically local traditions. As Freyre sees the confluence of European, indigenous Brazilian, and African cultures in Northern Brazil as a source of national pride, it is fitting that he is skeptical of a technological innovation that was markedly impersonal, uniform, foreign-born, and symbolic of urban advancement.

Lima Barreto also tended to downplay the possible benefits of modern technology for the working class, although his argument is less nostalgic than Freyre's and more concerned with urban poverty. Lima Barreto had nothing against electric lights per se, but he took issue with a narrative of national progress by which the capital's first electric streetlights were seen as a symbol of modernization. For Lima Barreto, electric light concealed the extreme classism and racism inherited from the slave-run economy in a nation that had abolished slavery only seventeen years prior, making it the last country to do so in the Western Hemisphere. He saw any modernization that did not narrow that gap between the rich and the poor as a contradiction in terms.

Electric light marked a new era that entailed more adoption of North American and European culture as Brazil began shifting from a primarily agricultural to a primarily urban society.²⁴ In his *folhetim*, Lima Barreto makes the same observation as Freyre when describing the electric lights in the cave that give it “uma tênue mais com o século” [a quality that goes better with the century] (31) than gas light. It is an ironic reference given that, in the text, electric light reaches the empty caves before it reaches the neighborhood above. Fiction writers sensed the symbolic importance of electric light whose inauguration coincided with a new century, captured the imaginations of Rio de Janeiro's citizens, and triggered debates about what type of progress best suited the capital and, by extension, the country.

In contrast to Lima Barreto, who would have been thrilled if his texts had catalyzed a popular revolution, João do Rio's primary concern in his writing was to take the pulse of Rio de Janeiro's streets. He wanted to record what the streets had to offer, be

²⁴ The more rapid and significant shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy took place throughout the 1920s.

it frivolous, scandalous, glamorous, or serious. Literary critic Renato Cordeiro Gomes underscores how novel João do Rio's reporting style was: "Abandonou as reflexões de gabinete e revolucionou o jornalismo carioca, adotando a reportagem, o inquérito e a entrevista, quando ia atrás da notícia, estivesse ela nas ruas, nos morros, no meio político, nos espaços da boemia ou nos salões" [He abandoned reflections [written] from the office and revolutionized *carioca* journalism, adopting reporting, inquiry, and interviewing when he followed a story, be it in the street, in the *favelas*, in the political realm, in bohemian spaces, or in salons] (16). Moreover, while other journalists privileged foreign news, João do Rio valued local stories.

The *crônica* "Velhos Cocheiros" [Old Coachmen], from his 1908 collection *A alma encantadora das ruas* [The Enchanting Soul of the Streets], reveals João do Rio's interest in the street and its lights, particularly their ties to social inequality. The narrator finds the oldest coachman in Rio de Janeiro who has witnessed major transformations—including that from a monarchy to a republic and from gas to electric streetlights—both of which had remarkably little impact on his life. His physical deterioration, near blindness, low wages, and inability to retire despite his old age demonstrate that this new "luz azul" [blue light] (*A alma* 194) is only a cosmetic improvement. This reference refers to the electric arc lamps that emitted an intensely bright blue light, entirely different than the soft yellow glow of gas lamps to which people were accustomed (Simon 72). João do Rio juxtaposes electric illumination and moonlight in order to examine the ties between superficial modernization and enduring social inequality: "A praça vibrava numa estrepitosa animação, os combustores reverberavam em iluminações fantásticas, e, só, no céu calmo, como uma hóstia de tristeza, a velha lua esticava a triste

foice do seu crescente" [The square vibrated with boisterous excitement, the lamp-posts reflected fantastic illumination, and, alone, in the calm sky, like a Communion wafer of sadness, the old moon extended the sad scythe of its crescent] (196). Combining images of morality and manual labor, the narrator likens the old coachman to a moon that has been deplorably neglected by people entranced by the city's bright lights.

While the advent of electric light piqued interest in the ties between light and egalitarian concerns, such ties date further back. To conclude this first section, I offer a few examples of the social critiques present in fictional representations of gas light. In his *crônica* "Os humildes" [The Humble], included in his 1909 anthology *Cinematographo: chronicas cariocas* [Cinematographer: Carioca Chronicles], João do Rio criticizes the lack of compassion for the hardships of workers and critiques the tendency to only acknowledge the existence of workers when they go on strike, causing a disruption in services. In addition, the *crônica*'s complaint links light to civilization: "Quando pensou a cidade que havia, com efeito, por traz daquela sinistra fachada do Gaz, homens a suar, a sofrer, a morrer para lhe dar a luz que é civilização e conforto?" [When has the city ever imagined that, behind that sinister façade of the Gas Company, there were actually men sweating, suffering, and dying in order to provide the light that is civilization and comfort?] (193). João do Rio notes how we generally take public works for granted until they stop working. His *crônica* thus draws what is generally invisible or neglected to the fore, personalizing public works about which we rarely reflect.

Jorge de Lima's famous Spenserian sonnet "O acendedor de lampiões" [The Lamp Lighter], written in 1914, has the similar effect of lamenting social inequality with regard to gas lighting, but it simultaneously calls attention to the beauty of the worker's

feat. The poem begins with the energetic announcement of the worker, which raises his job to a grand spectacle: “Lá vem o acendor de lampiões da rua!” [Here comes the lighter of the streetlights!] (305). After establishing in the octet how he tirelessly provides light when the moon and sun do not, the sextet introduces the social theme and the paradox. It includes the lines:

Ele que doira a noite e ilumina a cidade,
Talvez não tenha luz na choupana em que habita. (305)

[He who gilds the night and illuminates the city,
May not have light in the hut he inhabits.]

The implication is that social inequality denies him the convenience, beauty, and safety of having gas light in his home.

Published serially in the *Revista Sousa Cruz* in 1923-24 and then published posthumously as a single volume in 1948 in its partially unedited form, Lima Barreto's *Clara dos Anjos* includes the lack of access to light in its scathing critique of the state's neglect of the poor in the early 1900s (Massaud 356). Just before one character is murdered, the narrator describes the insufficient public light in the Rio de Janeiro *subúrbio* where the crime occurs: “As luzernas de gás, tangidas pelo vento, mal iluminavam aquelas torvas ruas dos subúrbios, cheias de árvores aos lados e moitas intrincadas de arbustos” [The gas lights, touched by the wind, barely lit those dreadful streets of the outskirts, lined by trees and shrubs entangled with underbrush] (117). When citizens do not feel safe, especially in their own neighborhoods, they are keenly aware of their exclusion from public safety initiatives and the rights that ought to accompany citizenship. Health care specialist and scholar Raj Patel argues that “the degree to which

neighborhoods create comfortable environments to live in is a parameter of psycho-social health” (263), a concept well developed in *Clara dos Anjos*. In contrast, part of a Light advertisement from 1933 paints an opposing picture of the state of public safety, also drawing on how comfortable environments foster psycho-social health. It places drawings of a policeman and of a light bulb beside one another with the text: “dois aliados” [two allies], which raises electric light to a heroic status. Below this image is a drawing of a house at night with a bright electric light above the front door, accompanied by the text “a luz protege o lar” [light protects your home] (Light Archive). The implication is that Light and the police are making Brazil a safer place. However, as Lima Barreto highlights, such safety efforts were unevenly spread across class lines.

Aesthetic Lights

When electric lighting was a novelty in Rio de Janeiro, it quickly became associated with social status, as a symbol of wealth, European luxury, cleanliness, and beauty, both when it served to light streets and when it served to light private interiors. For instance, João do Rio’s story “Aventura de Hotel” [Hotel Adventure], written in 1908, demonstrates how posh a certain hotel was by mentioning that it had electricity in every room (*Melhores contos* 57), which was a rarity at the time. Similarly, in José Vieira’s 1905 novel *O bota-abaixo: chronica de 1904*, electricity symbolizes aesthetic innovation more than practical progress. A woman showing off her Rio de Janeiro mansion points out an old-fashioned chandelier with wax drippings on it and remarks regretfully that her husband has demanded that it be remodeled: “Se eu não consentisse em botar luz electrica no lustre, mandal-o-ia arrancar. Dize que quem olha p’ra o passado fica-se atraz” [If I hadn’t agreed to put electric lights in the chandelier, he would have

had it taken down. He says that he who looks to the past falls behind] (39). The image of the electrically-powered chandelier demonstrates the urgency to possess one fashionable commodity while still maintaining an older symbol of prestige, thus revealing how the desire for electric light in this case is about style more than utility. As opposed to purchasing a bright, single-bulb electric light, which would have been more efficient, this seemingly illogical hybrid solution maintains the artistic appeal of the chandelier (now removed from function) to adapt to the new light source. The focus is on looking fit to be part of modern, high society, as writers note electricity's importance as a status symbol, which mixes with older symbols of prestige.

Likewise, a piece in a 1911 issue of the popular magazine *Fon-Fon* notes not the functionality of electric light, but the status such light evokes in a satire of Rio de Janeiro's new obsession with proper British "five o'clock tea" (written in English). Electric lighting connotes luxury in a description of five o'clock tea, a ritual described as "o pretexto, a intenção benevolente para a elegância de reuniões de escol, da delícia da palestra sussurada, em *tête-à-tête*, numa sala aromada de hortênsia, iluminada à eletricidade, cheia de mulheres lindas" [a pretext, a benevolent excuse for elegant meetings of high society, the delight of whispered conversation, *tête-à-tête*, in a hydrangea scented room, electrically lit, full of beautiful ladies] (qtd. in Broca 56). The passage includes an expression in French and refers to both a British ritual and a light source developed in the United States. Part of what made electricity elegant in the eyes of Brazilians of the time was its status as an import. These examples show how interior electric lights, like electric streetlights, were symbolically charged.

Edison was enough of an inspiration that, according to Gilberto Freyre, it was common in the late nineteenth century to name Brazilian children “Edison” in honor of the inventor (Freyre *Ordem e progresso* 522, vol. 2, ch. 4), a name that would presumably increase one’s cultural capital.²⁵ At the turn of the century when the name became popular, some Brazilian authors disparaged an understanding of national progress measured by what Brazil imported as opposed to what it created itself, an argument that would be more forcefully vocalized by the Brazilian modernists of the 1920s, during and after their legendary *Semana da Arte Moderna* [Week of Modern Art] in São Paulo in 1922.

One of João do Rio’s *crônicas* about the 1908 National Exposition uses electric light to celebrate Brazil’s aesthetic progress. In the exposition, national and international pavilions spread along Rio de Janeiro’s Praia Vermelha [Red Beach] with the dramatic backdrop of steep mountains and ocean. This exposition—like many national fairs worldwide—was strategically placed on an important national date, which enhanced the event’s patriotic role of cultivating a sense of nationhood (Hardman 75). The exposition honored the centennial of the opening of Portuguese America to the ships of ally nations, which was an initial step toward Brazilian independence (Süssekind *Cinematógrafo* 25). Brazilian critic Francisco Foot Hardman lists lighting as one of the distinguishing characteristics of this 1908 exposition with which “a República novíssima suplantava os eventos similares do velho Império em fausto, neoclassicismo e luzes feéricas” [the very new republic outdid the comparable events of the old Empire in terms of pomp, neoclassicist splendor, and brilliant lighting] (113). João do Rio captures with gusto the

²⁵ Through the decades, the tradition continues. Edison is the first name of one of the most famous Brazilians of all time, soccer legend, Edison Arantes do Nascimento, known as Pelé (1940-), who prefers to be called “Edson” than “Edison,” the former being a common Brazilian transformation of the name.

pomp and splendor in his *crônica* “Noturno policromo,” first published in the newspaper *A Notícia* in 1908 while the fair was still underway and then republished in *Cinematographo: chronicas cariocas*.²⁶ In his hyperbolic celebration of the brilliant lighting, which he achieves both formally and thematically, João do Rio reveals how electric light was associated with national progress in both aesthetic and practical ways.

While Lima Barreto’s *O subterrâneo do Morro do Castelo* contests the progress symbolized by electric light, João do Rio’s *crônica* praises it wholeheartedly. João do Rio’s stylistic and thematic celebration of electric light serves as a celebration of national progress by which beauty and technology merge in electric light. At times, his praise of the exposition’s electric light becomes praise of the entire capital city, a veritable ode to Rio de Janeiro:

A luz vestia inteiramente os pavilhões de fulgores de sol, tauxeava d’oiro os palacios, punha vibrações de labareda no ambiente, espelhava no céu um opaco reflexo de chama enorme, mergulhava na agua baloiçante da enseada e como que repercutia além, para fóra, para o outro lado, por todo o caes, pela cidade a dentro, ardendo em outras mil lampadas ardentes. (*Cinematographo* 376-377)

[Light entirely cloaked the pavilions with the brilliance of the sun, gilded the palaces with gold, put the flicker of flames in the surroundings, spread the opaque reflection of the enormous flame over the sky, dove into the rippling water of the cove as if it were reverberating outward, beyond, to the other side, to the entire port, into the city, burning in another thousand burning lights.]

In João do Rio’s text, electric light caresses, kisses, and possesses “aureolas rutilantes” [glittering areolas] (380), an eroticization of Rio de Janeiro that imitates the tradition of depicting electricity as a beautiful, strong, muse-like female (Penna Bhering 16, 27, 30

²⁶ This *crônica* was originally published on page 3 of *A Notícia* on 30 August 1908 (Rodrigues 478).

and 84). A related tradition existed of *fin-de-siècle* writers who portrayed Paris as sexual and female in efforts to highlight its intoxicating appeal (Wilson 47). By stylistically depicting the fair as writers have treated Paris, João do Rio increases Rio de Janeiro's cultural status and highlights its seductive power, adding to the sensuous tone of the *crônica*:

Um animal misterioso surgira do solo e ía estendendo os tentáculos, acariciando as cupulas, rastejando no ar uma cauda de escamas ardentes. Dois minutos depois era cidade luminosa. . . . Ladeando as ruas, baloiçavam-se interminavelmente grinaldas e festões de lampadas electricas. Nos canteiros, em meio das plantas, nos balaustres dos jardins, beijando a relva ou pendendo do arvoredo, vivia a reticencia côr de sangue, côr de céu, côr de esmeralda, côr de leite de outras lampadas. (376)

[A mysterious animal emerged from the soil and began stretching its tentacles, caressing the cupolas, slithering in the air a tail of blazing scales. Two minutes later, it was a luminous city. . . . Lining the streets, unending garlands and bouquets of electric lights swayed. In the flowerbeds, in the middle of the plants, on the banisters in the garden, kissing the grass, or hanging from the trees, the reticent blood red, sky blue, emerald green, and milky white of other lamps flourished.]

What concerns this narrator is not how electricity works nor anything else literal about its production, but the quality of its light and the speed at which it turns on, illuminating the entire exhibition in a mere two minutes. For much of Brazil in the early twentieth century, access to technology was desirable primarily for its aesthetic appeal, which is emphasized by this sensual depiction of electricity. Progress, in the form of electric light, does not detract from nature, as it does in Lima Barreto's *folhetim*, but instead enhances it by highlighting the beauty of the garden.

In the *crônica*, electricity first takes the form of a tentacled sea creature swimming through the air and lighting the pavilions, which is reminiscent of another

tentacled metaphor. At the time of the 1908 exposition and long after, the Canadian company Light had the nickname “o polvo canadense” [the Canadian octopus] (McDowall 4), which drew on a popular metaphor for voracious forms of capitalism. The company Light, which provided the electricity for the National Exposition of 1908, earned its nickname from Brazilians’ resentment of how the foreign company had wedged its financial tentacles into most areas of national public works (“O Rio de Janeiro da Belle Époque”).²⁷ These divergent octopus metaphors and the *crônica*’s blissful depiction of electric light demonstrate a phenomenon that cultural critic Julio Ramos notes in Nicaraguan writer Rubén Darío’s chronicle of the Great Paris Exposition of 1900: “La estilización en la crónica transforma los signos amenazantes del ‘progreso’ y la modernidad en un espectáculo pintoresco, estilizado” (*Desencuentros de la modernidad* 151) [Stylization in the chronicle transforms the threatening signs of progress and modernity into a picturesque and aestheticized spectacle] (*Divergent Modernities* 114). Similarly, in João do Rio’s *crônica*, tentacles are not a threatening thief of resources, but a bearer of beauty. Shifting freely from a representation of electric light as a sea monster, then as bouquets, and finally as a creature that kisses color into grass, João do Rio chaotically celebrates the spectacle of light, which is in turn a celebration of the progress the exposition represents. Thus, the author captures the viewpoint of the cross section of *carioca* society who saw no threat in having public works controlled by foreign firms and saw in the exposition a purely positive symbol of Brazil’s modernization.²⁸

²⁷ See chapter two of this dissertation for an alternative theory of the nickname’s origin.

²⁸ This argument would be more forcefully vocalized by the Brazilian modernists of the 1920s, especially Oswald de Andrade in his poetic manifestos. His 1928 “Manifesto Antropofágico” [Cannibalist Manifesto] calls for the cannibalistic consumption of foreign ideas in order to regurgitate what is useful for Brazil’s own self-expression. It is encapsulated famously by his line “Tupi or not Tupi that is the question,” which rewords Shakespeare with the insertion of the name of one of the primary indigenous languages in Brazil.

One of the positive aspects of the exposition's electric lights was their supposed health benefits. Electric lights were considered more hygienic than gas lights because the latter emitted small amounts of carbon dioxide, sulfur, and ammonia when burned, which could stain walls and give people headaches in indoor settings (Schivelbusch 51). However, an initial exchange in João do Rio's *crônica* demonstrates a more abstract health benefit attributed to electricity around the turn of the century. A friend tries to convince the reluctant narrator to stay awhile longer at the National Exposition to see the pavilion lights turned on at dusk. The friend argues that it will improve the narrator's state of being: "tua tristeza passará, os nervos cansados se galvanizarão" [your sadness will disappear, your tired nerves will galvanize] (375). As literary critic Linda Simon informs, doctors of the time thought that electricity "provided nourishment for depleted nerves" (6), and critic Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains that electricity was viewed "as a sort of vitamin" that was "a means of restoring exhausted energies" (71).²⁹

Beyond health benefits, another perk of electric light was its brightness and efficiency. The narrator describes the exhibition's gas lights as "lampejos suaves" [soft lamps] that spread "mornos mistérios" [lukewarm mysteries], while he describes the electric lights as possessing the "fixidez d'aço" [rigidity of steel] that made the evening as bright as day (380, 376). Gas lights were lit by hand, which was slow in comparison to the mere flip of a switch that turned on an electric light, a swift act associated with speed, progress, and industry, all evoked in the image of electric light having the rigidity of steel.

²⁹ Although the language has changed, the concept still remains intact today: since the 1980s, doctors have treated patients who have seasonal affective disorder with special fluorescent lamps meant to mimic sunlight.

In the same decade, Rubén Darío was also enchanted by the electric lights of a fair, the Paris Exposition of 1900:

Por la noche es una impresión fantasmagórica la que da la blanca puerta con sus miles de luces eléctricas . . . Es la puerta de entrada de un país de misterio y de poesía habitado por magos. Ciertamente, en toda alma que contempla estas esplendorosas *féeries* se despierta una sensación de infancia . . . Aquí lo moderno de la conquista científica se junta a la antigua iconoplastia sagrada. (qtd. in Ramos *Desencuentros* 164)

[At night it is a phantasmagoric impression that offers us a white door with its thousands of electric lights . . . It is the entrance to a country of mystery and poetry inhabited by magic. Certainly, in every soul that contemplates these splendid fairies, there arises a sensation of infancy. . . . Here the modern of the scientific conquest is joined to the ancient sacred icon artistry.] (qtd. in Ramos *Divergent* 125)

João do Rio's *crônica* displays patriotic pride that the type of modern grandeur Darío depicts could now be celebrated in Latin America, not just in Europe and North America.

João do Rio takes interest in the aspect of modernity linked to increased velocity. The *crônica*'s shortness fit readers' supposedly shortening attention spans, which were seen as the result of the increasing stimulation of urban, everyday life. The ornate style of this *crônica*, with multiple metaphors to describe the visual effect of electric light, speaks to a growing interest in visual media, especially film. Despite the interest in the short medium, João do Rio does not strive to be concise. On the contrary, the liveliness of his *crônica* stems from the rococo busyness of his rendering of electric light:

Cada guirlanda de lampadas era uma escala de côres, cada grande lampada um gong de luz, cada pavilhão um tremendo acorde de scintillações. A Esposição inteira era a sinfonia do sol, a marcha gloriosa á estrella, com cavalgatas de walkyrias em fogo, trinos e murmurios de fadas de fogos-fatuos e de gnomos cambiantes, procissões e candelarias de anjos brancos, córos de arcanjos entrechocando gladios de ouro e de cristal. (377-8)

[Every garland of lamps was a succession of colors, every large lamp a gong of light, every pavilion a tremendous mixture of scintillations. The entire exposition was a sun symphony, a glorious march to the stars, with a procession of mounted valkyries aflame, the trills and murmurs of the fairies of friar's lantern and of gnomes of changing colors, processions and candelabras of white angels, choirs of archangels clashing against gladiators of gold and crystal.]

It is as if he believed that to adequately describe the extraordinary quality of the exposition's lights, he had to use equally dazzling and numerous metaphors, to match the form to the content. Writers of the time became increasingly interested in depicting visual images because of the diffusion of photography, graphic advertisements, and cinema. Yet, "Noturno policromo" does not attempt to recreate a scene that readers can visualize the same way they would visualize a photograph or film. Instead, as the passage previously cited shows, the *crônica* overlays various metaphors to build excitement in a way that is unique to written mediums. This method reproduces the sense of over-stimulation in the modern world that fascinates João do Rio.

The author even extends this interest in multimedia to sound by imagining the voices of electricity at the exposition: "as orquestras tocando, as bandas militares fazendo soar os metais, os gritos desencontrados da turba pareciam as vozes de todas aquelas luzes" [the orchestras playing, the military bands making the metals sound, the mismatched shouts of the crowd seemed like the voices of all those lights] (179-180). Thus, João do Rio appeals to the aural and visual appetites of readers who had recently been introduced to phonographs and film. As historian Flora Süssekind notes, "foi com encantamento semelhante que, via de regra, João do Rio tratou dos artefatos e técnicas modernos. Consciente, inclusive, da violenta transformação no próprio 'modo de olhar' que operavam então" (*Cinematógrafo* 45) [João do Rio tended to write glowingly of

modern inventions and techniques, and in such a way as to make it plain that he was aware of the dramatic change they caused in the very ‘way of looking’] (*Cinematograph* 27).

We can conceive of this change in the way of looking in terms of the argument famously set forth by Walter Benjamin in his 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” He notes that the mechanical reproduction of art—such as a photograph, radio broadcast, or film—reduces the authority and importance, but primarily the aura of art. Paintings, cathedrals, concerts, and so forth are grounded in a space and/or time that vests them with an aura related to their singularity. However, this aura diminishes when these art forms can be reproduced easily via photographs, sound recordings, or film. This loss of aura changes people’s perception of art by divesting it of its ties to ritual and the sacred (222). While João do Rio was witnessing the mechanical reproduction of art all around him, it is noteworthy that he hones in on the aura of electric light itself. Thus, the aura transfers from the art object to one of the means of making art easily reproducible: electricity and, more specifically, electric light. “Noturno Policromo” does not forego ritual, but changes what is idolized. The *crônica* fetishizes electricity in the Marxist sense that this commodity is animated while characters are dehumanized (163). The concept of electric light as a commodity fetish both fits with the capitalist and marketing intents of world fairs and with the *crônica*’s privileging of electric light over the narrator or his unnamed friend, who exist merely to frame the magnificence of the light.

The two characters in the *crônica* view the exposition as proof of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil's progress that is confirmed by light. The unnamed friend describes the success of the exposition in mythic and galactic terms for emphasis:

O mito de Prometheu descobrindo o fogo perpetua-se e hoje todos os progressos humanos grandiosos anunciam-se pela alegria da luz.

Nunca viste illuminar-se a Exposição? É o anuncio aos astros de que aqui ficou um pedaço do sol" (375)

[The myth of Prometheus discovering fire perpetuates itself, and today mankind's grandest progress announces itself by the joy of light.

Have you never seen the Exposition lit up? It's the stars announcing that here lies a piece of the sun.]

"Here lies a piece of the sun" is not a bad slogan for a city looking to imitate the City of Light. For the narrator, the exposition brings out the finest natural and technological traits of Brazil's capital: "Dessa apoteose de vitral magico como que nascia todo o esplendor da Cidade Maravilha" [It was as if all the splendor of the Marvelous City were born from that glorification of magic stained glass] (379). Although the National Exposition featured international pavilions that showcased cultural and technological achievements from abroad, its main pavilions, for obvious reasons, celebrated national achievements. By contrasting the exhibit's lights with the seemingly inferior lighting of specific foreign festivities, the narrator locates the exhibition's electric lighting in a national context. He celebrates Brazil's superiority via its lights:

Cada luz era por si só um conjunto de emoções, o conjunto das luzes dava áquelle amplexo da eletricidade nas trévas, não o tom chinez de uma corrida de balões dançarinantes, não o ar exquisito das festas luminosas dos ritos judaicos, não a sensualidade expressiva de uma illumination veneziana, mas o aspecto inédito de uma torrente de brilhantes que jorrasse do céu uma infinita variedade de brilhos, desde a porta

monumental, onde sarabandam todas as côres, até a montanha negra que aos milhões de reflexos parece um formidável topázio de fogo. E era positivamente um deboche de colorações, uma porneia de tons incandescentes, um vulcão de arco-íris. (378)

[Every light in itself was a mixture of emotions, a mixture of the lights that gave that embrace of electricity to the darkness, not the Chinese tone of a race of dancing hot air balloons, not the strange air of the luminous festivals of Jewish rituals, not the expressive sensuality of Venetian illumination, but a unique torrent of diamonds that poured from the sky with an infinite variety of light, from the monumental door, where they danced the Spanish saraband of all colors, to the black mountain that with its millions of reflections looks like a formidable, fire-colored topaz. It was positively a debauchery of colorations, a brothel of incandescent tones, a volcano of rainbows.]

Reading the vivid, foreign images is similar to moving one's eye from one country's pavilion to another in the National Exposition, as it brings together traditions from various cultures. The confluence of international images continues: "A luz fazia-me como um ambiente de pompa, em que scintillavam diluidos e confundidos todos os mineraes do mundo" [The light created a luxurious ambiance in which all of the minerals of the world, diluted and confused, scintillated] (377). As the narrator expresses, all the most spectacular elements of the world seem to have joined, condensed, beside a Brazilian beach. Like João do Rio's entire *crônica*, it is an example of radiant praise of Brazil's progress embodied in the National Exposition's lights.

Conclusion

Raymond Williams claims that the modern city is "the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness"³⁰ (*The Country* 239). *Carioca* writers of the early twentieth century often used representations of electricity to capture the collective

³⁰ The full reference reads: "Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning—features of the nineteenth-century social experience and of a common interpretation of the new scientific worldview—have found, in the City, a habitation and a name. For the City is not only, in this vision, a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness."

consciousness of citizens whose understanding of Brazil's progress was intimately tied to the rapidly changing material environment they inhabited. As I have argued, writers took advantage of the layered symbol of electric light to develop the conflict between social and aesthetic aspects of national progress. This debate is intimately linked to competing views about imitating Europe and North America, both in art and in public works, as well as debates concerning whether national progress should cater to the elite or the masses. Representations of Rio de Janeiro's initial electric light display and challenge ruling definitions (to borrow Raymond Williams's term) of national progress (*Marxism and Literature* 125). Although I posit that both Lima Barreto and João do Rio keenly perceived the symbolic power of electric light, their intent in representing it varies.

Lima Barreto used literature as a platform for voicing his sociopolitical beliefs, which remained quite constant. In contrast, João do Rio's literary concerns were less political; he cared far more about his texts' mood, emotion, shock value, formal details, and popular appeal. In his collection of *crônicas*, *Cinematographo: crônicas cariocas*, João do Rio includes both "Os humildes," a call for a more egalitarian Rio de Janeiro, and "Noturno policromo," a praise piece for the artistic lighting of an ornate national spectacle. These two *crônicas* approach city lighting from remarkably different angles but, seen together, they capture the pulse of the city and its inhabitants, with their varying viewpoints.

While the texts analyzed in this chapter capture competing notions of electricity's role in national progress, they share a common concern with government priorities regarding public space. In the simplest terms, Lima Barreto's critique of the construction of the *Avenida Central* employs electric lighting to call for more egalitarian progress. In

turn, João do Rio's *crônica* in praise of the National Exposition of 1908 uses electric lighting to privilege aesthetic innovations. Thus, Lima Barreto's *folhetim* highlights social inequality and elitist notions of progress within Brazil—a stance that contests the government's progress narrative. João do Rio's "Noturno Policromo" celebrates the beauty of electric light that accompanies a type of progress defined by the importation of foreign technology and concern with social status. Lima Barreto's *folhetim* is plot-driven, concerned more with content than style, whereas João do Rio's *crônica* generates its energy from its stylistic vibrato. Thus, the texts themselves take a stance about the importance of social versus aesthetic elements of literature, which relates to their stance on social versus aesthetic elements of their country's national progress.

By way of conclusion, I would like to point out a curious likeness between Machado de Assis's "Projeto de aterro total da baía" and Lima Barreto's *O subterrâneo do Morro do Castelo*. Machado de Assis's *crônica* foreshadows the various landfills that filled in 20% of the Guanabara Bay's water surface during the twentieth century (Sedrez 63). These landfills replaced natural space with manicured parks and residential and commercial units. Machado de Assis thus foretold one of many instances when Rio de Janeiro gave up the beauty and the original contours of its land to make more space for leisure, commercial, and residential use. Rio de Janeiro's steep hills and curvy coastline present more challenges for expansion than most cities do; therefore much of the physical restructuring of the space—landfills, the construction of tunnels, and the leveling of hills—has arisen as an effort to accommodate an expanding population and make the city more navigable.

The historical structures and the working class also have suffered from these physical transformations, since neither has been a main priority in the expansion of Brazilian cities, or most cities for that matter. Demonstrating this point, Lima Barreto's *folhetim* foretold a physical restructuring of Rio de Janeiro linked to class hierarchies. The historic Castelo Hill paradoxically was destroyed in 1921 for a historical commemoration: the 1922 Exposição Comemorativa do Centenário da Independência do Brasil [Commemorative Exposition for the Centennial of Brazilian Independence]. The ceremony—which incidentally occurred the same year as Lima Barreto's death—offered a pretext for destroying the unsightly tenement on Castelo Hill that stood in the middle of the capital's downtown. Like the 1908 National Exposition portrayed by João do Rio, the 1922 fair had spectacular electric lighting and served to showcase the city both at home and abroad. Looking beyond the historic moment of these texts allows us to connect them to ongoing and contentious histories of Brazil's relationship to public works and public space.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POWER OF LIGHT: REPRESENTATIONS, FROM 1906-1962, OF A TRANSPORT AND UTILITY COMPANY IN BRAZIL

The Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company was a Canadian-owned company that ran, and occasionally monopolized, electricity, streetcar, telephone, and gas services in Southeastern Brazil for the better part of a century. Moreover, the company played an instrumental role in the industrialization of Brazil's two largest cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. It changed its name on several occasions, but from its inception in 1899 to 1969, all these variations were abbreviated as "Light."³¹ Its one-syllable, easy to rhyme nickname frequently made its way into song lyrics, expressions, prose, and poetry that responded to the company's power with envy, anger, or humor. By analyzing these popular and literary representations of Light over the decades, I demonstrate how Brazilians both understood and challenged the power Light held over their country's infrastructural and industrial progress.

Literary critic Catherine Gallagher argues in reference to critical approaches for reading literature that "power cannot be equated with economic or state power, that its sites of activity, and hence of resistance, are also in the micro-politics of daily life"

³¹ The company changed its name to Brascan in 1969 (Hausman 249), and it remained Canadian-owned until 1979 when it was nationalized (Boone 363). Although the Canadians are no longer involved with Light in Brazil, the Rio de Janeiro branch of the electricity part of the company is still called "Light" to this day, and its official name is Rio Light. Although this Canadian company was active throughout Latin America, Great Britain first and then the United States have been much larger players in Latin American industry and public works.

(43).³² Gallagher's observation is relevant to this chapter for two reasons. First, popular and literary representations of Light often constitute a form of resistance—be it playful or acerbic—to the power economically dominant nations have in Brazil. Second, such references concern more symbolic power associated with Light and its electricity: the power of visibility, status, style, and recognition as well as the power of being connected. A humorous expression illustrates this dual interest in power. One version of the retort, which can be said if a person leaves a light on is, “Desliga essa luz! Você é sócio da Light?” [Turn off that light! Who are you, a business partner of Light?]. The facetious accusation pits Brazilians consumers against a foreigner company, victims against perpetrators, and citizens against the market to disparage Light's high prices. Its humor derives from a shift in status, since the speaker accuses the listener of being rich enough to waste electricity or greedy enough to exploit Brazilians. While on the one hand the expression criticizes Light, on the other it fantasizes about the status of those rich enough not to worry about the price of an electric bill.

This chapter is divided chronologically into four sections that examine representations of Light that engage its economic and symbolic power. The first explores representations of Light from the 1900s through the 1920s, and the second examines Rudyard Kipling's impressions of Brazil's light in 1927 in comparison to Light advertisements of the 1920s and 1930s. The third section analyzes textual and musical representations of Light from the 1930s through the 1950s, and the final section compares two representations of Light from the 1960s, which relate specifically to the company's Cubatão Power Plant.

³² Gallagher is differentiating the priorities of New Historicism from those of Marxism, emphasizing New Historicism's expanded definition of sites of power.

The Canadian Octopus and Light Posts, 1906-1928

In her essay “Government is Good,” literary critic Amanda Claybaugh notes a trend in recent literary criticism: a movement away from analyses of how literature is integral to forming a sense of nationhood (such as the essays collected by Homi Bhabha in *Nation and Narration*) and toward a concern with the relationship between literature and the state. She understands the *state* to be the government and its institutions.

Claybaugh writes, “Instead of asking how literature can make an imaginary entity (the nation) seem real, they are asking how literature can make a real entity (the state) more visible” (165). Part of the impetus for making the state more visible is the conviction among some literary scholars that a Foucaultian position of skepticism of large institutions—the default position in most U.S. humanities departments—undermines the importance of defending certain public and social services run by governments.³³

Representations of Light often highlight citizens and writers’ perception of Light’s exorbitant power and, therefore, lend themselves to the type of state-focused reading that Claybaugh suggests.

Light’s nickname “o polvo canadense” [the Canadian octopus], which dates back to at least 1906, underscores Brazilians’ resentment toward the foreign company for

³³ For instance, Bruce Robbins makes this argument as follows, using the term “cultural left” presumably to refer primarily to academics at universities in the United States: “The privatizing of water has at least as good a claim as the Panopticon to stand for what is most wrong with the world at the present time. Yet thanks to our anti-utilitarian, antigovernmental bias, we of the “cultural left” have little if anything to say about it. We may (and should) register our protest when infrastructure is a target for destruction, as in the U.S. bombing of Iraq and the U.S.-supported Israeli bombing of Lebanon, but we don’t usually think of infrastructure as something to be planned, funded, built, regulated, and sustained. Whatever our political beliefs as individuals, collectively we have trouble defending state or state-regulated institutions even when they absolutely have to be defended. This is a problem” (28).

wedging its financial tentacles into most areas of Brazilian public works.³⁴ By some accounts, this nickname arose not as a popular and playful jab, but as a smear campaign by the Brazilian Guinle company that wanted to penetrate the electricity and transport sectors, which Light monopolized in certain cities (Gómez-Ibáñez 127).³⁵ Brazilian citizens' notions of progress depended on whether they saw this many-armed international involvement as Brazil's ticket to progress or as a barrier to homegrown and/or state-run solutions to the nation's problems. Whether the nickname arose from angry customers or a strategic competitor, it drew on a popular metaphor for voracious forms of capitalism and was frequently employed to attack Light.³⁶

A satirical sonnet by Emílio de Menezes, published in 1912, pits Light directly against the government.³⁷ In so doing, the poem evokes empathy for the state, which is a rare allegiance in Brazilian satire. Thus, the poem suggests the importance of protecting certain services, such as electricity, from the whims of the market. Menezes uses the company's other nickname "Luz e Força" [Light and Power] as a running pun and refers to two Light employees who recently were caught embezzling.³⁸ He writes,

³⁴ The first reference I can find to this expression is from a 20 October 1906 issue of *Correio da Manhã* cited by geographer Christopher G. Boone in his article "Streetcars and Politics in Rio de Janeiro: Private Enterprise versus Municipal Government in the Provision of Mass Transit, 1903-1920."

³⁵ Several 1912 newspaper articles recount the battles between the Guinlé family company and Light over electricity and tram services in São Paulo. See *O Estado de São Paulo*, 9 June 1912: 8. *World Newspaper Archive*. Web. 31 Jan. 2010. For historical analyses of the conflicts between the two companies in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo see Boone and see Greenfield.

³⁶ To offer a North-American comparison, in Frank Norris's novel *The Octopus*, published in 1901, California wheat farmers struggle against the railroad company that controls and betrays them, which is presumably modeled after the Southern Pacific Railroad. As in the nickname given to Light, exploitative capitalism is likened to an octopus whose skulking arms sneak into all aspects of life. The company name is sometimes written with an accent: Guinlé.

³⁷ Poet and journalist Emílio de Menezes (also spelled Meneses) wrote this sonnet under the penname Zangão. It was published in the *carioca* newspaper *A Imprensa* [The Press] on 3 March 1912.

³⁸ Before the poem, Menezes includes a caption about the case: "Registramos a denúncia levada pelo dr. Filemon Torres, advogado da Light and Power, à polícia, contra dois empregados daquela empresa, acusados de terem dado ali vultosos desfalques" [We register the report brought by Dr. Filemon Torres, a

Quando deparo um desses casos fico,
 não direi *satisfeito*, mas contente;
 a *Light*, águia feliz e onipotente,
 faz de nosso Governo um tico-tico!

O povo, moço ou velho, pobre ou rico –
 cede, cede com c, benevolente:
 e a *Light* – até do *Lloyd*³⁹ é pretendente –
 todo o pinto que vê leva no bico!

Com direito ou sem ele, a *Luz e Força*,
 à luz do dia e à força da chicana,
 pilha tudo, por mais que a gente torça.

- Tudo, não! Desta vez a luz se empana,
 vai-se a força e, por mais que ela se estorça,
 dois *agries* dão nos *pintos* da águia ufana! (183-84)

[When I read of matters such as these
 I'm—well, not *happy*, but grateful, rather;
 for the *Light Company*, that soaring eagle,
 always reduces our Government to a sparrow!

The people—young or old, wealthy or poor—
 are ever willing to let *Light* have its way,
 and *Light*, rapacious—even *Lloyd* it covets!—
 catches with its beak every bird it sees.

The *Light and Power Company*
 in broad daylight wields its power
 and little cares for what we think of it.

Not always, though. *This* time, it seems,
 its light is dimmed, its power fails,
 and two sparrows bring the middle eagle down!]
 (Süssekind *Cinematograph* 67)

Menezes's poem makes the state more visible by demonstrating its inability to protect
 itself from the profit-driven exploits of a large company. The satire calls for more

lawyer of Light and Power, to the police against two employees of that company accused of considerable embezzling] (183).

³⁹ Lloyd was a shipping company.

governmental control in the form of regulation. These references to Light show citizens and writers' awareness of their rights to affordable basic services and their thought—sometimes justified, sometimes not—that these rights were being abused.

Although not mentioned in literary satires, sometimes the government had the upper hand over Light. Geographer Christopher G. Boone notes that, due to the Rio de Janeiro government's restrictive contracts, Light's *carioca* streetcars were not particularly profitable from their inception in 1906, and by 1945, Light operated its streetcars at a loss because their contract forbid them from increasing fares (362).

Although some representations of Light allude to the nationalization of public works as a solution, nationalization did not necessarily mean greater efficiency and cheaper prices. Historian Gerald Michael Greenfield touches on this point regarding Light and other foreign companies' control of utilities in São Paulo in the early twentieth century: “if private foreign companies constituted the primary obstacle to improved service, it follows logically that public control would have quickly resolved all problems. Yet, this did not prove the case with water, a service which from 1892 to 1913 rested completely under State control” (47). Sometimes Light was simply the easiest entity to blame.

While the previously mentioned expressions and sonnet challenge Light's economic power, Oswald de Andrade alludes to more ambiguous aspects of Light's power. His musings on Light gesture to tensions between Iberian and Brazilian Portuguese, which reveals how sociopolitical power dynamics influence language. For instance, instead of always referring generically to electrical poles and streetcars in his writing, he specifies “um poste da Light” [a Light post] and “um bond da Light” [a Light

streetcar] (*Um homem sem* 62, 70). He even names one of the sections of his 1925 poetry anthology *Pau Brasil* “Postes da Light” [Light Posts].

Oswald’s use of the word *Light* also follows the Brazilian modernists’ interest in stressing the infiltration of other languages into Brazilian Portuguese as a way to distinguish Brazilian Portuguese from the language of the colonizers. Italian migration to Brazil, Tupi and Bantu-based words, the role of French as the dominant language of culture, proximity to Spanish-speaking countries, and global capitalism slowly (at times over the course of centuries) had transformed Brazilian Portuguese. In the 1920s, the modernists sought to highlight these differences from Iberian Portuguese as part of their affirmation of cultural autonomy. Moreover, by using the common term *Postes da Light* in a literary context, Oswald indicates how, in everyday speech, the brand name seems to take precedent over function. He shows language’s border crossing, a point evocatively articulated by literary critic Stephen Greenblatt:

We need to understand colonization, exile, emigration, wandering, contamination, and unexpected consequences, along with the fierce compulsions of greed, longing, and restlessness, for it is these disruptive forces that principally shape the history and diffusion of languages, and not a rooted sense of cultural legitimacy. Language is the slipperiest of human creations; like its speakers, it does not respect borders, and, like the imagination, it cannot ultimately be predicted or controlled. (61)

Another founder of the Brazilian modernist movement, Mário de Andrade, also tweaked the names of streetlights in his writing, provoking a similar effect. In his 1928 modernist masterwork *Macunaíma*, the narrator refers to lighting in a São Paulo park as “a máquina luz elétrica” [the electric light machine] (115, 119). This term follows the narrator’s comical habit of referring to any device that is unfamiliar to the novel’s

protagonist, Macunaíma, as a machine (machine glasses, machine Smith Wesson, machine London Bank, machine automobile, machine telephone, and so forth). These manners of referring to streetlights elucidate literary historian Pascale Casanova's argument that, for Brazilian modernists, the "association of literature with the development of a changing and unfinished language, abandoning older, sclerotic models, made it possible to accumulate fresh literary resources" (62). Mário's *máquinas* willfully challenge the seriousness of Iberian Portuguese and cheekily reference primitivism, yet they also encourage the reader to see the familiar as unfamiliar.

The first examples in this section underscore Light's role in ongoing power negotiations related to how the state and private companies contended for power and how citizens articulate their feelings of powerlessness against companies. The modernist examples highlight how such power dynamics infiltrate language. The modernists made use of Brazil's unique spoken Portuguese and São Paulo's rapid industrialization in their writing. In so doing, they portrayed Brazil's dual adoption of foreign words and foreign goods related in part to industrialization in the 1920s. This was one method by which they positioned their writing in opposition to that of Portugal. All of these examples relate to the political ramifications of Light's economic power in Brazil. I turn now to Rudyard Kipling's letters about Brazil, which depoliticize electricity and Light.

Kipling and Light, 1920s and 30s

In his essay "O entre-lugar do discurso latino-americano" [The Between-Place of the Latin American Discourse], literary critic Silviano Santiago underscores Latin American literature's lack of innocence about the global power structures that have

influenced the region for centuries (16). While emphasizing the artfulness of Latin American authors' references to exploitations, he writes, "O escritor latino-americano nos ensina que é preciso liberar a imagem de uma América Latina sorridente e feliz, o carnaval e a *fiesta*, colônia de férias para turismo cultural" [The Latin American writer teaches us that it is necessary to liberate [ourselves from] the image of a smiling, happy Latin America, carnival and *fiesta*, vacation colony for cultural tourism] (26). Santiago contends that, "A maior contribuição da América Latina para a cultura ocidental vem da destruição sistemática dos conceitos de *unidade* e de *pureza*" [Latin America's greatest contribution to western culture comes from the systematic destruction of the concepts of *unity* and *purity*] (16). A particularly striking example of this disruption of romanticized views occurs in the textual representations of Light that challenge the company's role in Brazil.

However, I also bring up Silviano Santiago's argument to frame a reading of foreign texts, Rudyard Kipling's 1927 Brazil essays. On the one hand, Kipling's essays further the vision of a happy Brazil of *carnaval* and cultural tourism that Santiago disparages. On the other hand, Kipling's accounts deviate from stereotypes because of their emphasis on Brazil's industrial achievement. Yet, this praise of Brazilian industry is removed from a political context because Kipling's primary interest is how public works production in Brazil embodies man's age-old struggle to manipulate nature. He depicts Brazil as a country in which nature, depending on how well man controls it, may be either the ally or enemy of infrastructural, industrial, and economic progress. In so doing, he implies that by successfully implementing natural resources, Brazil can gain economic independence. This emphasis has a curious effect of downplaying the role of foreign

companies in Brazil's industrialization (and downplaying colonial legacy) by framing the challenge of national progress as simply a challenge of harnessing nature's power.

Some information about Kipling's essays will frame my reading of them. Kipling was ill in 1926, and his doctor recommended a long sea voyage. This prompted him and his wife to travel to Brazil, which had been a dream of his for years (Carrington 499 qtd. in Radcliffe). They traveled within Brazil from February to April 1927. Kipling wrote seven travel letters or essays about his trip, each accompanied by a poem. They were first published in November and December of 1927 in London's *Morning Post* and compiled posthumously in the travelogue *Brazilian Sketches* in 1940.

Kipling visited Light's Cubatão Power Plant near Santos and wrote an essay about it. The 1926 completion of Cubatão was central to the company's development because it was part of a massive power project that allowed Light to expand throughout the region, ward off competitors, and meet the growing demands for electricity in São Paulo as the city became an expanding industrial hub (McDowall 255). However, what interests Kipling is the apolitical struggle he observed at Cubatão between man and nature. For instance, he begins the essay with the following poem:

Song of the Dynamo

How do I know what Order brings
 Me into being?
 I only know, if you do certain things,
 I must become your Hearing and your Seeing;
 Also your Strength, to make great wheels go round,
 And save your sons from toil, while I am bound!

What do I care how you dispose
 The Powers that move me?
 I only know that I am one with those

True Powers which rend the firmament above me,
And, harrying earth, would save me at the last –
But that your coward foresight holds me fast! (33)

Humans have the capacity to harness nature's powers to improve industry, but nature can fight back. After describing the impressive electricity production of Cubatão's dynamo here and in the body of his essay, Kipling writes "Yet now and again the generous tropical thunderstorm shows what 'power production' really means" (41). By emphasizing the universal conflict between man and nature, Kipling ignores the local, political and historical implications of the Cubatão Power Plant. He never refers to Light by its name and only alludes to it being Canadian.

For Kipling, Brazil's waterfalls and ample land are the source of the country's dramatic appeal and industrial potential. He writes, "Land, like the Sun and the gay-painted houses, over-plays and over-acts its part in the immense, florid drama of this World-by-Itself" (290). Brazil's electricity generation is more impressive than Europe's due to the extensive waterways that power it: "The cities of Brazil have, like many an English town, jumped direct from oil and candles to electricity, but electricity in a climate already surcharged with all sorts of it, differs a little from the meek steam-generated stuff which works vacuum-cleaners and toast-racks elsewhere" (29). Similarly, Kipling describes a Cubatão engineer whose work had been "ridiculously easy" because all "he had had to do was to plug up the necks of certain valleys with concrete, and wait till the year's twelve-foot rainfall drowned them at leisure. . . . he has now a system of inland lakes and seas . . . capable of indefinite expansion if he plugs up more valleys" (44). Unlike many of his predecessors who praised Brazil solely for its natural beauty, Kipling

links natural forces to industrial progress, as if Brazil were blessed with physical attributes that could streamline it into the future faster than European nations.

Kipling states that Brazil's geography is so well built for hydroelectric generators that it could produce enough electricity to export the power source to many other nations, which could make Brazil economically independent. With reference to Cubatão and the increasing demand for electricity, he writes, "The requirements are always expanding, as São Paulo discovers that she can make more things for herself, or another railway or two goes in for electrification that they may be shut of English coal strikes" (44). His apparent vision of Brazil's ideal economic future involves ending the country's dependence on foreign natural resources.

Kipling predicts a fantastic future for electric power in which humans learn to transform ocean storms into useful electricity. As he foretells it, Brazil is the major world power in this predicted future: "At that epoch (which will be heralded by the *hara-kiri* of the Oil Barons) Brazil sitting with her back to illimitable electric power, will sell it between Twenty-five North and Sixty South on both sides of her continent—westerly to the 180th meridian, and easterly to somewhere on the far side of dry Africa" (45).

Nature was, in Kipling's view, not only the greatest contributor to Brazil's progress, but also, its greatest threat. Those who built Cubatão suffered "the treachery of the soil, which resembles Roquefort cheese" (38). Engineers waged a constant struggle against nature to keep Cubatão generating electricity: The engineers "had had, they told us, some bother with this hillside after deforesting it for the pipes, and were now planting millions of eucalyptus to hold the soil together. But the local ant liked that wood, too, and they thought of gassing him out. They said that when you once began interfering with

Nature you had to go on” (42). Likewise, Kipling personifies the “dense green of the mountain wall” in Rio de Janeiro to reveal a conflict whose scale was unfamiliar to Europe. The mountain warns, “*But* if you cease even for a month to fight my creepers and undergrowth, they will wipe out all of your fine works, and in a half year you will go out under *me!*” (28). While many Brazilian writers of the time saw foreign exploitation as the major potential threat to Brazilian progress, this European author viewed *nature* as more menacing.

Kipling observes both a struggle and harmony between man and nature in relationship to Light’s electricity. He delights in the harmony obtained when Rio de Janeiro’s electric lamps illuminate the city’s foliage, a spectacular marriage of modern technology and natural beauty. Kipling describes Rio de Janeiro’s powerful lights that meet his ship as it reaches the wharf: (5) “the whole city and the coasts alongside her chose that moment to light up in constellations and cloud-stars of unbridled electricity” (19). Kipling describes the trees, avenues, and harbor that were “fringed by electric lights that raced forward, it seemed for ever, and renewed themselves in strings of pearl flung round invisible corners; while above everything, one saw and felt the outlines of forested mountains” (20). Electric lights help make the capital a “tiaraed city,” a “world of light,” and a “dream-city” with “intensely lighted green foliage” (36, 19, 8, 21). The British author is moved by both the beauty of the lighting and the tropical scene it illuminates. When he visits Copacabana, which was at that point a suburb still being developed, he mentions how “rollers from the full South Atlantic aligned under the stars, and crumbl[ed] along ivory sands up to the electric footlights” (21). The capital has found the

perfect balance between maintaining its natural, old charm and modernizing according to the needs of an industrializing society.

While popular and literary representations of Light from Brazil tend to focus on Light's hegemonic power, Kipling underscores the same felicitous points as the company's own advertisements: triumph over nature, beauty, and industrial progress. For example, a 1936 Light advertisement displays a worker balanced on the outer poles of an electrical tower high above a road during a lightning storm.⁴⁰ One man, emblematic of all Light employees and Brazilians, fights against inclement weather to fix an electrical wire. Thus, Light triumphs over natural setbacks for the good of Brazil. A Light advertisement from 1932 pictures a modern home with a lamp and overhead light that claims electric light as "o motivo mais ornamental de um lar" [the most ornamental element of a home]. Moreover, Light understood that many Brazilians associated electricity with national progress. Another advertisement from 1932 elicits patriotic emotion by depicting a map of Latin America with a spotlight on Brazil—specifically on São Paulo and Rio—boasting that "a energia electrica é o maior factor do progresso industrial" [electric energy is the greatest factor for industrial progress]. Kipling's essays and these Light advertisements demonstrate confluences between a foreign view of Brazil and marketing campaigns, both of which focus on the extraordinary, practical, and aesthetic attributes of Light's light. While literary and popular representations of Light in Brazil make the same observations at times, they are more likely to historicize Light's role in Brazil within a context of dominant nation's hegemonic economic power.

⁴⁰ All of the Light advertisements mentioned in this chapter appeared in Light's magazine *Revista Light*, which was published in Rio de Janeiro. I accessed them at the Rio de Janeiro Arquivo Light [Light Archive].

“I Swapped the Light of Day for the Light of Light”: 1933-1955

While Light advertisements emphasize beauty, a contemporaneous song imagines how the company’s power disrupts beauty. The famous carnival composers Braginha and Lamartine Babo’s⁴¹ 1933 song with the proverb title, “Uma Andorinha Não Faz Verão” [One Swallow Does Not Make a Summer] has the following lyrics:

Dizem morena
Que teu olhar
Tem corrente de luz que faz cegar
O povo anda dizendo que essa luz do teu olhar
A Light vai mandar cortar. (Light website, “Light na MPB”)

[They say *morena*
That your gaze
Has a stream of light that blinds
People are saying that Light is going to have
the light of your eyes cut off.]

The song plays with various connotations of electricity and light, deriving its punch line from a literal interpretation of a metaphor. The light in a woman’s eyes and, by extension, the “electricity” of her attractiveness are imagined not as autonomous attributes, but as features provided by Light via electrical wires. The implication is that Light controls more than we imagine—not just prices, power distribution, and transport lines, but love, attraction, and personal autonomy. The object of the satire, capitalist greed, interferes with individual freedoms.

While many aforementioned examples have bemoaned foreign involvement in Brazilian public works, a song from 1955 features a narrator who longs to be connected

⁴¹ Braginha is also known as João de Barro and as Carlos Alberto Ferreira Braga. Lamartine Babo is also known as Lalá.

to Light and all it represents. The first verse of the famous carnival samba “Café Soçaite,”⁴² the number one song on the Brazilian pop charts that year, goes as follows:

Doutor de anedota e de champanhota,
estou acontecendo no café soçaite.
Só digo "a chanté",
muito merci all right,
troquei a luz do dia pela luz da light.⁴³ (Light website, “Light na MPB”)

[Doctor of jokes and champagne cream,
I’m happening in the Café Soçaite.

⁴² The following decade, Maria Bethânia created the medley “Pano Legal/Café Soçaite,” which is a well-known cover of this song in which she transforms the protagonist into a woman.

⁴³ The song was written by Miguel Gustavo and sung by Jorge Veiga. The subsequent verses go as follows:

Agora estou somente
com outra dama de preto,
nos dez mais elegantes eu estou também.
Adoro River Side, só pesco em Cabo Frio,
decididamente eu sou gente bem.

Enquanto a plebe rude na cidade dorme
eu janto com Jacintho
que é também de Thormes.
Teresa e Dolores falam bem de mim,
já fui até citado na coluna do Ibrahim.

E quando me perguntam como é que pode,
papai de black tie dançando com Didu,
eu peço mais uísque,
embora esteja pronto
como é que pode? Depois eu conto. (Light website, “Light na MPB”)

[Now I’m only
with another lady in black,
in the ten most elegant I am also.
I adore River Side, I only fish in Cabo Frio,
decidedly I am fine folk.

While the rude plebe in the city sleeps
I dine with Jacintho
who is also from Thormes.
Teresa and Dolores speak highly of me,
I’ve been mentioned in Ibrahim’s column.

And when they ask me how I can do it,
papa in black tie dancing with Didu,
I order another whiskey,
although I’m a *pronto*
how can you? Later I’ll tell you.]

I just say *enchanté*,
 very *merci*, *all right*,
 I swapped the light of day for the light of Light.]

To swap the “luz do dia” for the “luz da light” is more than just a pun for someone preferring bohemian late nights to a traditional working person’s schedule. It not only privileges a foreign company and technology over what is natural and native but also literally swaps the Portuguese word *luz* for the English equivalent *light* in order to gain the recognition that comes with speaking a language dominant in the worlds of letters and finance. Thus, “the light of Light” was associated with what was *chic*: high society, international influence, and nightlife.

The song tells the tale of a *pronto*, slang at the time for someone without money, who is able to pass as high society by being in the right places, jumping between French and English, and knowing how to increase his social capital according to *carioca* norms (Sondré). Muniz Sondré describes the influence of writers in creating a mystique around the idea of imported high culture: “o uísque, o champanhe, a ostentação de riqueza nas grandes recepções ou em boates são elementos estéticos, digamos assim, que, discursivamente celebrados por colunistas, ajudaram a construir a mitologia do grand monde ou ‘café-soçaite’” [whiskey, champagne, and ostentatious wealth at grand receptions or clubs are what we can call the aesthetic elements that, discursively celebrated by columnists, helped create a mythology of *grand monde* or café-society]. To swap the “luz do dia” for the “luz da light” is thus to cross over to the world of high society and cultural capital, the fantasy of the song’s *pronto*.

Remembering the 1900s in his 1954 memoir *Um homem sem profissão: sob as ordens de mamãe* [A Man without a Profession: Under Mama’s Orders], Oswald de

Andrade recalls how his father traded the light of day for the light of Light in a far more lucrative fashion than the *pronto* in “Café Soçate” will ever manage.⁴⁴ As a councilman, businessman, and major player in the transformations and expansions of São Paulo in the early 1900s, Oswald’s father could benefit from the increased property values that would come from Light’s installation of electric streetcar lines through São Paulo neighborhoods. In an era of industrialization and rapid growth in São Paulo, building public works was a profitable business. Yet beyond the financial rewards of improving the city’s public transportation, Oswald’s father, like many others, was wowed by the size and novelty of Light’s projects.

Oswald remembers his father describing a trip to Light’s hydroelectric power plant in Parnaíba and emphasizing the scale of the pipes: “Meu pai contava que atravessara, sem se curvar, por dentro de canos enormes por onde passaria a água represada” [My father said that he, without hunching down, walked within the enormous pipes through which the reservoir water passed] (47). In Oswald’s memory, Light’s power plant was registered as an industrial wonderland that challenged notions of size and scale. Moreover, Oswald recounts witnessing his father’s central role in a public celebration of Light’s urban transport. Oswald’s father drove a Light streetcar during the inauguration of the new neighborhood, Vila Cerqueira César, which included a new streetcar line.⁴⁵ Oswald watches his father literally steering a symbol of the progress of the rapidly industrializing city. Electric streetcars were not only symbolic of progress but a spectacle in and of themselves.

⁴⁴ The memoir was initially published with a longer title: *Um homem sem profissão: memórias e confissões sob as ordens de mamãe* [A Man without a Profession: Memories and Confessions under Mama’s Orders].

⁴⁵ Vila Cerqueira César was the name given to a rural area of São Paulo that Oswald’s father transformed into an urban neighborhood.

Although these personal recollections of his father's involvement with Light depict a harmonious relationship to the company, other passages emphasize the darker side of Light. In his memoir, Oswald uses Light's first electric streetcars in São Paulo to critique foreign companies active in Brazil. Oswald underscores the conflict without taking sides:

Um mistério esse negócio de eletricidade. Ninguém sabia como era. Caso é que funcionava. Para isso as ruas da pequena São Paulo de 1900 enchiam-se de fios e de postes. . . . Havia os favoráveis, os que previam um grande progresso para a Capital com a aquisição da energia elétrica. Mas havia também os que cheiravam negociata na vinda de capitais estrangeiros para cá. (47)

[This electricity business was a mystery. No one knew what it was like. Or if it worked. The streets of the small São Paulo of 1900 filled up with wires and poles for it. . . . There were those in favor, those who foresaw great progress for the Capital with the acquisition of electric energy. But there were also those who smelled a scam in the arrival of foreign capital.]

For “those in favor,” electric power, symbolic of unbridled possibility, was the key to national progress because it could legitimate the nation as a competitive player in the modern world.

However, not everyone was enthusiastic about the arrival of electrical wires and the machines they powered. Those who “smelled a scam,” as Oswald calls them, were uncomfortable with how progress via state-of-the-art public works made Brazil dependent on exterior forces. Why not use *Brazilian* resources and specialists to expand the country's progress? This group feared that foreign companies working in Brazil might reproduce the cycles of dependence 300 years of colonialism had established. With this dependence in mind, Oswald notes, “já se conhecia alguma coisa da exploração colonial de nossas possibilidades pelos países mais avançados” [a thing or two was already known

about more advanced countries' colonial exploitation of our resources] (47), suggesting that Brazilian resources should, yet often did not, benefit Brazilians. Light was taking advantage of a country that did not have the capital and resources to lay tracks, erect electrical lines, and build new streetcars itself. Oswald's autobiography underscores the controversy between allowing foreign companies and specialists to build Brazil's public works and organically creating such public works domestically, despite the challenges of limited resources.

Disputing Cubatão in the 1960s

This final section analyzes two patriotic texts from the early 1960s, which are concerned with Brazilian progress, yet mark two extremes in arguments of status quo versus change, free trade versus closed borders, and private versus public control of utilities and industry. Paulo Guilherme Martins's 1961 political pamphlet "Um dia na vida do Brasilino" [A Day in the Life of Brasilino] depicts Light as an obstacle to Brazilian economic independence. In contrast, the unsigned 1962 illustrated biography *Billings* portrays Light as the catalyst of Brazilian economic independence.

The pamphlet emphasizes how the Brazilian government and media support Light and other foreign companies' hegemonic economic power in Brazil and how citizens are brainwashed into supporting it too. Thus, the pamphlet reads as a call to citizens to increase their consciousness of a problem with various perpetrators, both national and foreign. In the manifesto, "CAPITAL ESTRANGEIRO" [FOREIGN CAPITAL], always written in uppercase letters, sneaks its way into all areas of Brazilian life. Although Martins's pamphlet predates economic historian Andre Gunder Frank's 1966 essay "The

Development of Underdevelopment,” which laid the foundation for dependency theory, it offers the same radical solution: cut ties with the world economic system and establish a non-exploitative and non-dependent economic system. When the Brazilian military regime took power several years after the publication of “Um dia na vida do Brasilino,” the communist guerilla resistance adopted the pamphlet as representative of its cause. This led the regime to ban the text in 1964 (Santos Filho). For some, it was xenophobic, reactionary, and naïve, while for others it was nationalistic, revolutionary, and perceptive.

The pamphlet begins with two quotations that embody what Martins views as the Brazilian government and media’s denial of foreign exploitation in Brazil:

“Não existe imperialismo no Brasil.”
CARLOS LACERDA, na *“Tribuna da Imprensa”*

“Essa história de imperialismo não passa de invenção de falsos nacionalistas que pretendem impedir o progresso da nação.”
De *“O Estado de São Paulo”* (5)

[*“Imperialism doesn’t exist in Brazil.”*]
CARLOS LACERDA in the *“Tribuna da Imprensa”*

“That imperialism story is nothing more than the invention of false nationalists who want to impede the progress of the nation.”
From *“O Estado de São Paulo”*]

Martins tracks how Brasilino—an invented character representative of the average bourgeois Brazilian—is ignorant that market capitalism is exploiting his country. The pamphlet tracks the products that Brasilino consumes back to their country of origin to reveal the extent to which economically dominant nations control Brazilian commerce. Of all the companies listed (such as Gillette, General Electric, Volkswagen, and the

British American Tobacco Company), Light arises most often and is, therefore, most blatantly pinpointed as an obstacle to Brazilian progress.⁴⁶

In the humorous pamphlet, the narrator points out how Brasilino is in the dark about Light. For instance, by using “energia que é da Light” [Light’s energy], Brasilino “inicia o seu dia pagando dividendos ao CAPITAL ESTRANGEIRO” [begins his day paying dividends to FOREIGN CAPITAL] (7). His gas-powered water heater is provided by City, which is part of the Light group. Light’s electricity runs the Swiss elevator in Brasilino’s building and so on. Driving from Santos to São Paulo, Brasilino spots Light’s penstocks and a large sign boasting that Light’s Cubatão is the largest hydroelectric plant in South America. Enthusiastically, Brasilino thinks to himself, “Isto sim! A Light! A Light! A Light que fêz a grandeza de São Paulo” [Yes! Light! Light! Light! Light made São Paulo great] (12). However, the narrator vehemently corrects Brasilino’s misplaced pride: “Brasilino confunde Light com Energia. Êle não sabe que o que fêz a grandeza de São Paulo não foi a Cia. Light e sim a Energia e que, se a Energia não pertencesse à Light, São Paulo seria dez vezes maior ou o Brasil dez vezes menos miserável” [Brasilino confuses Light and Energy. He doesn’t know that what made São Paulo great wasn’t the Light Co., but Energy and that, if the Energy weren’t owned by Light, São Paulo would be ten times bigger, or Brazil ten times less poor] (12). Martins argues that economically dominant countries suck up Brazil’s wealth, continuing the cycle of colonial dependence in a neo-colonial fashion.

In contrast, *Billings* confirms Light’s roseate role in Brazil’s path toward progress. Much like Kipling’s essay about Cubatão, it focuses on how one man tackles

⁴⁶ As a Canadian company, Light is, however, an outlier in the diatribe of primarily US companies. The pamphlet alludes to Light being a British company (12); this is not the case, but the company did rely on the British stock market for funds (Hausman 143).

the Serra do Mar to build the Cubatão Power Plant. This man is the American hydroelectric engineer Asa White Kenney Billings (1876-1949). Billings worked for Light and briefly served as the company's president from 1944 to 1946 at the end of his career. The unsigned biography, in its own words, is a story of “duas cidades e os parques industriais que cresceram à volta delas - e a vida de um homem que ajudou a abrir-lhes o caminho do progresso” [two cities and the industrial parks around them – and the life of the man who helped open the path to progress there] (3). While Martins's pamphlet focuses on what has gone wrong in Brazil over the decades, *Billings* is an unwavering progress narrative that tracks the steady evolution toward Brazil's industrial greatness in a comic-book format.⁴⁷ All that stood in the way of Brazil and Light's progress was natural setbacks, which Billings managed to surpass. This type of apolitical conflict, to return to Santiago's “O entre-lugar do discurso latino-americano,” underscores purity and unity where Martins saw exploitation. In the simplest terms, Martins casts Light as the enemy of Brazilian progress, whereas *Billings* casts nature in this role.

The biography emphasizes the engineering challenges faced in the construction, in the 1920s, of Cubatão on the Serra do Mar, the mountain range where the power plant was built. Thanks to Billings, the biography informs, “pela primeira vez, a Serra do Mar, que já fora um dos maiores obstáculos ao progresso do Brasil, seria forçada a trabalhar para esse mesmo progresso” [For the first time, the Serra do Mar, that had been one of the greatest obstacles to Brazil's progress, would be forced to work for that same progress] (16). Billings thus transforms a natural setback into a vehicle for industrial

⁴⁷ It was published in Rio de Janeiro by Editora Brasil-América Ltda (Ebal), famous for popularizing comic books in Brazil via its publications of DC and Marvel superhero tales in translation. Beyond traditional comic books, Ebal published illustrated versions of Brazilian and world classics, and in the late 1950s and early 1960s it published an eclectic series of illustrated biographies (of, among others, Theodor Herzl, Americo Vespucci, and Frederic Chopin) of which *Billings* was a part.

development. The narrator boasts that some people referred to Billings as the “Moses of Brazil” because he reversed the flow of water in the Pinheiros River to turn it into a canal to power Cubatão (19, 25). Much like in Kipling’s Brazil essays, the text underscores how Brazilian natural resources present opportunities for and limitations to industrial development. After describing the successful construction of Cubatão, the biography reads, “assim foi vencida a batalha da Serra do Mar” [thus the battle of Serra do Mar was won] (33), explicitly using bellicose language to emphasize the conflict between man and nature. The text praises man’s capacity to transform seemingly untamable nature into power.

Not only did Billings conquer nature, but he also had an ingenious vision for the future of Cubatão, which allowed it to be expanded in the subsequent decades. The biography later brags that Cubatão is now the largest hydroelectric power plant in South America, a fact which “Um dia na vida do Brasilino” laments due to the plant’s foreign ownership. Although the size of one power plant is not an accurate measure of a country’s industrial production, it had symbolic importance for Brazil as the nation was trying to legitimate itself as a key player in the world market. To surpass all other countries in the region in an area of infrastructure was a badge of honor, and record-breaking public works projects have a long history of being major factors in national progress narratives, as is the focus of the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Both “Um dia na vida do Brasilino” and *Billings* mention Cubatão’s superlative production to make opposing arguments about the best form of progress for Brazil. In *Billings*, the US engineer is given credit for laying the groundwork for Cubatão’s future expansion.

The biography legitimates Light’s interests and highlights Light’s contributions to

Brazil's economic independence:

Billings não presenciou o grande surto de desenvolvimento que o Brasil sofreu nos últimos anos. Não pôde testemunhar o aparecimento de indústrias - como a de automóveis - que fazem com que o Brasil se aproxime cada vez mais de sua completa independência econômica. Entretanto, tudo isso é, em parte, fruto dos seus esforços pessoais. (33)

[Billings didn't witness the great surge in Brazil's development that has taken place in the last years. He couldn't behold the appearance of industries - like automobiles - that move Brazil ever closer to complete economic independence. However, all that is, in part, the fruit of his personal efforts.]

The back cover underscores this point, noting that Billings helped Brazil “a formar uma sólida base para a industrialização e a emancipação da economia brasileira” [in forming a solid base for the industrialization and the emancipation of the Brazilian economy].

The biography is framed as the story of a *national* hero, despite Billing's not being Brazilian. By mentioning that the Brazilian government rightfully awarded Billings with the *Ordem do Cruzeiro do Sul* [Order of the Southern Cross], described as the highest honor a foreigner can receive in Brazil, and by implicitly praising the government's choice to facilitate Light's projects, the biography gives a glowing report card to Brazilian progress over the previous half century. In contrast, “Um dia na vida do Brasilino” uses Cubatão and other examples to attack government choices regarding Brazilian economic and industrial progress in a way that was, as previously mentioned, threatening enough to the military dictatorship that it banned the pamphlet.

Conclusion

The conflicts and resolutions (or lack thereof) presented in these representations of Light reveal divergent understandings of Brazil's primary infrastructural challenges and the best methods to resolve them. A rift has long existed in Brazil regarding foreign involvement in public works. One camp, exemplified by the Billings biography and Kipling's travelogue, argues that it does not matter where the engineers and company presidents are from as long as the results of their work benefit the country's industrial development. The other camp, represented by "Um dia na vida do Brasilino" and various other cultural texts analyzed in this chapter, is deeply skeptical of any foreign involvement and argues for more nationalization of public works and stricter regulations of foreign companies in Brazil.

This chapter has drawn inspiration from Hayden White's seminal argument that historians provide meaning to their historical writing by indicating what kind of story they are telling, a strategy he refers to as emplotment. Emplotment shows how historical writing relies on the narrative devices of fiction (31, 7). A similar phenomenon occurs in cultural texts that reference Light. Since these texts draw on more or less the same set of facts about Light what differs between them is less the information than the way of presenting it. The choice of a central conflict—be it man versus nature or Brazilian versus foreign capital—influences how writers can frame Light as either a catalyst or an obstruction to Brazil's industrial and infrastructural progress. These choices elucidate rifts about the role economically dominant nations should play in the country's development.

I have focused primarily on representations that challenge Light's power in Brazil. These texts develop conflicts that disturb well-established cultural norms by challenging the power of the company with humor, outrage, or wordplay. These devices, as Silviano Santiago reminds us, demonstrate Latin American writers' (and in some cases ordinary people's) lack of innocence about postcolonial power structures. By making visible their knowledge of Light's power, these authors call for greater awareness and reflection about who controls public works and how they do so. As we look at representations of Light over the decades, it becomes evident how Brazilians both understood and challenged the power the company had in Brazil.

CHAPTER THREE
THE REAL AND PROMISED BRASÍLIA: AN ASYMMETRICAL SYMBOL IN 1960s
BRAZILIAN LITERATURE

Like the construction of the *Avenida Central* in 1905, the construction of Brasília in the 1960s was a tour-de-force of government speed and ambition, meant to propel Brazil into a glorious future. The infrastructural impetus behind the new capital was similar to that of the *Avenida Central*: President Juscelino Kubitschek (JK) believed that if the government built the framework, order and progress, the Positivist motto on the nation's flag since 1889, would follow suit. Like Mayor Pereira Passos, JK led the nation in a time of economic prosperity, making his bold infrastructural plans feasible. However, while the *Avenida Central* boasted of being built in the style of Paris's wide boulevards, which had been imitated all over the world, Brasília bragged of being unlike anything the world had ever seen. Brasília's architect Oscar Niemeyer argued that "quem vai a Brasília gostar ou não dos palácios, mas não poder dizer que viu antes coisa parecida" [whoever goes to Brasília may or may not like the palaces, but they can't say that they've ever seen anything similar] (qtd. in Costa Couto 16). The Brazilian modernist movement of the 1920s had compellingly advocated for the creation of a national culture that drew on foreign influences, but transformed them into something utterly original, as opposed to a humdrum national culture that simply imitated foreign styles. The modernists called for the creation of a Brazilian culture that would be exported to other countries rather than import the culture of dominant nations to Brazil. Oswald de Andrade encapsulates this

concept with the title of his 1924 modernist *Manifesto da poesia pau-brasil* (later shortened to *Manifesto pau-brasil* [Brazil-wood Manifesto]), which implies that Brazilian arts should be, as Brazil-wood historically was, a major export.⁴⁸ The movement's message was highly influential, extending into subsequent decades and shaping the Brazilians elite's perception of the worth of national production.

An iconic moment for legitimizing the excellence of Brazilian culture was the birth of *bossa nova* in 1958, a musical genre that mixed samba, jazz, and poetic lyrics in a seductive form that soon became popular worldwide. The president could not have dreamt of better international press for his administration (1956-61) than the success of *bossa nova* and Brazil's 1958 World Cup victory, both of which took place alongside the construction of the new capital, which was meant to signify Brazil's boundless progress.⁴⁹ The 1950s in Brazil was an era of newness, as was epitomized by three popular names of the time: *bossa nova*, *cinema novo* (an experimental film genre) and NOVACAP⁵⁰ (the company that built Brasília). In the 1950s everything was labeled *novo* [new], and in the 60s the key word became *popular*, then *marginal* in the 70s (Velooso 186).⁵¹ Novelty and hope abounded, and Brasília was the visual icon of the nation's transformation.

⁴⁸ In the 16th century, Brazil-wood, which was plentiful in Brazil, was an extremely profitable Brazilian export because it was used in Europe to make a red dye. It thus became Brazil's first major export.

⁴⁹ Writer Benjamin Moser compares the hopefulness of JK's Brazil to that of John F. Kennedy's America: "JK, like his contemporary JFK, presided over a brief Camelot, an era of good feelings, in which Brazilians felt their country was finally becoming the place they had always hoped it could be" (69).

⁵⁰ NOVACAP is the abbreviated name of the Companhia Urbanizadora da Nova Capital [Urbanizing Company of the New Capital], which was established in September 1956 to build Brasília.

⁵¹ As anthropologist Mariza Veloso and literary critic Angélica Madeira observe, "Assim como nos anos 50, cognominados de 'anos dourados', tudo era 'novo' — Bossa-Nova, Cinema Novo —, nos 60 tudo se tornou 'popular' — Centro Popular de Cultura (CPC), música popular brasileira (MPB) —, nos anos 70, todas as manifestações estéticas que não se identificavam com o *status quo* eram dominadas 'marginais'" [As in the 50s, known as the 'golden years,' everything was 'new' —Bossa-Nova, Cinema Novo—, in the 60s everything became 'popular' —The Popular Center of Culture (CPC), Brazilian popular music (MPB)

Unlike most cities, Brasília existed as a promise before it existed as an actual place: it promised to symbolize JK's motto of "fifty years of progress in five." Its modernist *superquadras* promised to create a more egalitarian residential model where various social classes would intermingle. It promised to earn the praise of designers and architects around the world. Its network of highways and central location promised to unify the nation from within. The country's new capital promised to symbolize Brazilian self-sufficiency, national progress, hope, innovation, and democracy. It was a tall order for a city.

The promise of a transformative capital inevitably informed any visit to the actual city. To write about Brasília in the 1960s was to write about a dual city, part symbol and part reality. This dual city grew out of an impulse—both in official discourse and everyday speech—to oversimplify representations of the real city in order to preserve its mythic promise of national progress. The oversimplifications derived, in part, from a national desire to showcase how Brazil had found an authentic path toward its own progress, as opposed to copying preexisting models in other nations. My concern is not with whether or not Brasília truly represented authenticity because arguments can easily be made for or against. Instead, I engage Brazil's desire to represent itself as forging an original type of progress by creating Brasília and some authors' contestation of aspects of this plan. In short, how did people evaluate Brasília's achievement of a promise?

Four texts from the 1960s challenge the government and citizens' efforts to preserve the ideal of the new capital. Instead, these texts expose the city's asymmetries and complexities. Guimarães Rosa's short story "As margens da alegria" [The Margins of

—, in the 70s, all of the aesthetic manifestations that did not identify with the *status quo* were called 'marginal'] (186).

Happiness] (1962) and Clarice Lispector's *crônica* "Brasília: cinco dias" [Brasília: Five Days] (1964) react to idealizations of Brasília that represent it as *the* symbol of national progress. The authors' formally experimental and remarkably apolitical texts focus instead on the malleability of the symbol of Brasília and the complex ways in which people respond to the modernist capital. In José Marques da Silva's *Diário de um candango* [Diary of a *Candango*] (1963), the asymmetry that is of greatest interest is the disconnect between how the new capital purported to be more egalitarian than other major Brazilian cities, yet ended up being deeply segregated by class. This phenomenon did not keep Brasília from being a symbol of national progress, but called into question who had access to that progress. I analyze three aspects of the promise/reality tension in José Geraldo Vieira's novel *Paralelo 16: Brasília* [Parallel 16: Brasília] (1966), which relate to the previous three texts. First, Vieira's novel calls attention to the delusional conviction that the modernist design of Brasília would massively influence residents' behavior. Second, it develops how members of the Brazilian middle class and elite insisted rhetorically on Brasília's democratic achievements while their actions contradicted their words. Third, it demonstrates how preserving the idealized version of Brasília seemed essential to some for maintaining the country's morale. The four texts, both fiction and nonfiction, consider the duality between the symbolic and the real Brasília during the construction of the capital and in the years immediately following its inauguration.

João Guimarães Rosa's "As margens da alegria"

In Guimarães Rosa's "As margens da alegria" [The Margins of Happiness], a boy, about ten years old, discovers the fragility of his happiness during a trip with his aunt and uncle to see "a grande cidade" [the great city] under construction. It is the first short story in Guimarães Rosa's anthology *Primeiras estórias* [First Stories]. The short story reinforces the confluences between fiction and non-fiction as it begins, "Esta é a estória," employing the same hybrid word of the book's title, a Brazilian neologism that merges the Portuguese for *history* with the English for *story* (Rónai 18). Brasília is never called by its name, which emphasizes how it has symbolic, but not sociopolitical importance for the boy. In contrast, the unnamed characters—Boy, Mother, Father, Aunt, and Uncle—always appear in capital letters, as if to emphasize that the interior space of the home was far more significant to the boy than any geographic space categorized by a proper noun. The namelessness has the added effect of giving a legend-like feel to the short story to parallel the mythic moment in Brazilian history. Since the boy knows that it is a privilege to take this trip with his aunt and uncle, he hides his negative reaction to the city under construction, so as not to seem ungrateful or unimpressed. His reaction illustrates the pressure citizens were under to see Brasília as a purely positive symbol, even as more complicated reactions to it were experienced.

Although the boy was initially thrilled about visiting the great city, on arrival his excitement shifts to a turkey in the yard of the place he and his aunt and uncle are staying. His emotional reaction to the turkey is euphoric and sounds like a description of Brasília's Pilot Plan, a name referring to Lúcio Costa's airplane-shaped layout of the capital's governmental, residential, and commercial areas. His euphoria indicates the

mystery of what we react to positively and suggests the irony that an encounter with a bird might be more emotionally powerful than an encounter with a great capital in the making. The boy admires the turkey that is “todo em esferas e planos” [all in spheres and planes] (51), an image that we might expect to be attributed to the dome over Brasília’s Senate chamber and the inverted dome over the Hall of Deputies on the plane of the same flat roof.⁵² The boy admires the bird with its “reflexos de verdes metais em azul-e-preto” [streaks of green metals in blue-and-black] (51), an industrial-sounding image that reads like a description of the reflections in one of Brasília’s many glass walls. Other words that the boy uses to describe the fowl, which could easily be reactions to Brasília, include: “Belo, belo!” [Lovely! lovely!], “brusco, rijo” [brusque, severe], “poder” [power], “Sua ríspida grandeza tonitruante” [Its thunderous, brusque grandeur], and “Satisfazia os olhos, era de se tanger trombeta” [It satisfied one’s eyes, it deserved trumpet music] (51).

Despite his expectations about the great city, what speaks to the boy in Brasília is organic, not manmade. On a trip to an estate beside the new capital, the flora and fauna—especially the birds—give the boy an intense sense of joy unlike anything he has experienced previously, as if his “margins of happiness” were expanding.⁵³ The text reads, “Sustentava-se delas [as coisas que viu na natureza na Brasília] sua incessante

⁵² This short story has been excellently translated by Barbara Shelby in her full translation of *Primeiras histórias* entitled *The Third Bank of the River and Other Stories* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968). She translates the short story’s title as “The Thin Edge of Happiness.” Likewise, Clarice Lispector’s *crônica* has been masterfully translated by the renowned translator Giovanni Pontiero in his full translation of *A legião estrangeira* entitled *The Foreign Legion: Stories and Chronicles* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1986). He translates the *crônica*’s title as “Five days in Brasília.” Since I am more concerned with providing literal translations than stylistically elegant ones, I have translated passages from both texts myself.

⁵³ The estate they visit in the short story is the Sítio do Ipê, which was the name of NOVACAP’s chief engineer Israel Pinheiro’s estate. Pinheiro later became governor of Minas Gerais. Guimarães Rosa’s short story mentions engineers with whom the boy and his aunt and uncle stayed. It is possible, though never made explicit, that the estate they visited was Pinheiro’s.

alegria, sob espécie sonhosa, bebida, em novos aumentos de amor” [His incessant happiness sustained itself on them [the things he saw in nature in Brasília], under a wistful, quenched category, in new swells of love] (52). The beauty of plants and birds is not what first comes to mind when envisioning Brasília, but the boy’s reaction serves as a reminder that happiness is individual and capricious, not something easily cultivated or molded by a utopian city with modernist ideals.

The short story reaches a climax when the boy, after his trip to the estate, discovers that the turkey he so admired has been killed for dinner. Crestfallen by the killing of the turkey and influenced by his recent trip to see wildlife, the boy visits the construction site of the Brasília airport and can see only gloom in the dusty, barren spot where the construction workers, with their hefty machinery, have an unfair advantage over the trees. As the trip to the wilderness allowed the boy to feel an extreme of happiness never felt by him before, the experience at the construction site makes him feel an extreme of despair. Almost unable to bear the tour of the site, the boy describes what he sees and his reaction to it: “o um horizonte, homens no trabalho de terraplenagem, os caminhões de cascalho, as vagas árvores, um ribeirão de águas cinzentas, o velame-do-campo apenas uma planta desbotada, o encantamento morto e sem pássaros, o ar cheio de poeira” [the a horizon, men at work earthmoving, the gravel trucks, the vacant trees, a stream of grey water, the flannel flower merely a faded plant, the enchantment dead and bird-less, the air full of dust] (53). On page one, the narrator tells us that this is *the* “estória” and that the boy would spend a few days in the place where they were building *the* “grande cidade,” yet here, where the narrator takes on the boy’s sentiments, the definitiveness of this place is questioned: *the* horizon falters and becomes just *a* horizon,

weakening its importance and singularity. The flowers that the boy saw and learned the names of at the estate have faded, and the enchantment of the place dies without the sound of the birds. The very thing that is supposed to excite him spooks him.

Although the boy privileges flora and fauna over the construction site, the short story does not provide material for a pastoral reading; due to the boy's giddy mood flying to Brasília, we have reason to believe that if his first stop had been the construction site he would have been just as enchanted by it as by the turkey and the wilderness. The text seems far more concerned with exploring, both formally and thematically, the fragility and extremes of our emotions and the factors—fatigue, discovery, beauty, and so on—that influence them: “Sua fadiga, de impedida emoção, formava um medo secreto: descobria o possível de outras adversidades, no mundo maquinal, no hostil espaço: e que entre o contentamento e a desilusão, na balança infidelíssima, quase nada medeia. Abaixava a cabecinha” [His fatigue, from impeded emotion, formed a secret fear: discovered the possible of other adversities, in the machine world, in the hostile space; and that between contentment and disillusion, on the terribly unfaithful scale, almost nothing mediated. He lowered his small head] (53). The verb *discovered* has an ambiguous subject in Portuguese—either *fear* or *the boy*, and the use of the adjective *possible* instead of the noun *possibility* causes the reader to move slowly over the sentence and experience a sense of a reading that is off kilter, which is how the boy feels. Despite this low moment of discovering how quickly disillusion can descend upon us, the short story ends on a hopeful note as the sighting of a glowing firefly renews the boy's happiness. The boy's discovery about the limits of his happiness resonates with the limits of Brasília's bold promise, which outsized what any city could actually deliver.

Frequently in the narrative, the subjects and objects of sentences are ambiguous, which downplays the definitiveness of the subject, as if to suggest that Brasília cannot symbolize anything definitively since its liminal symbolism varies, depending on the beholder and the context.

Clarice Lispector's "Brasília: cinco dias"

Like Guimarães Rosa's short story, Clarice's "Brasília: Cinco Dias,"⁵⁴ written after a trip she took to the city in 1962, challenges the utopian symbol of Brazil promoted by the government. It does so by developing one person's complex and contradictory emotional reaction to the city. Versions of this *crônica* have appeared in different books by Clarice, but I will focus on her first publication of the *crônica* in 1964 in *A legião estrangeira* [*The Foreign Legion*].⁵⁵ The *crônica* depicts Brasília with perplexing metaphors, simultaneously grand and outlandish, which mimic the sensations of estrangement and wonder that the capital itself evokes. Like other strands of modernism, Brasília's international style architecture was designed to defamiliarize in order to provoke new forms of social interaction and new ways of looking.⁵⁶ Brasília makes its

⁵⁴ This *crônica* has been published under different names. In *A descoberta do mundo* [The Discovery of the World] (1984), the posthumous collection of Clarice's *crônicas* that were published in *Jornal do Brasil* from 1967 to 1973, the *crônica* appears under the name, "Nos primeiros começos de Brasília" [In the First Beginnings of Brasília]. In *Elenco de cronistas modernos* [List of Modern Cronistas] (1976), a collection of *crônicas* by various authors, the *crônica* appears as "Brasília: 1962." I refer to the *crônica* by its title in *A legião estrangeira*.

⁵⁵ In her collection *Para não esquecer* [To Not Forget], Clarice adds a second part to this *crônica*: a longer piece triggered by her return to Brasília in 1974, her second and last trip to the capital. Since I am focusing on representations of Brasília from the 1960s to gauge more immediate reactions to the capital, I have chosen not to consider this addition, however it is a compelling text in which Clarice ventures into a cyclical exploration of self and city, in which each triggers an exploration of the other. In 1986, Zuleica Porto and Sérgio Bazi made the eleven-minute film, *Brasiliários*, inspired by this expanded version of the *crônica*, in which Cláudia Pereira plays Clarice.

⁵⁶ The international style is a term coined by architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock and architect Philip Johnson to describe commonalities in architecture that began to arise in 1922. They describe it clearly in their 1931 book *The International Style*. Brasília falls into this category in both its intent and

onlooker aware of texture, form, negative space, the central role of cars, the blueness of the sky, and the absence of street life far more than most cities. Clarice reproduces this defamiliarization with a confessional first-person narrative that defamiliarizes by switching tenses and registers as it mixes metaphors, while creating both a fantastical creation myth for the capital and a genuine description of what it is like to be there. Clarice tells us that Brasília “Foi construída sem lugar para ratos. Toda uma parte nossa, a pior, exatamente a que tem horror de ratos, essa parte não tem lugar em Brasília” [It was built with no place for rats. A whole part of us, the worst, exactly the part that’s terrified of rats, doesn’t have a place in Brasília] (134). Her wording is unsettling, and it suggests that the utopian project was grounded more in exclusion than inclusion, pushing out what was imperfect and marginal in the name of progress.

Like the boy in “As Margens da Alegria,” Clarice senses the need for something natural in Brasília to counteract its unnaturalness: she asks where the giraffes are, wants to see 500,000 eagles spread around, and suggests that white horses running wild are what is missing in the city that she describes as “assexuada” [asexual] (136), evoking its unnaturalness. Clarice recounts that “Se tirassem meu retrato em pé em Brasília, quando revelassem a fotografia só sairia a paisagem” [If they took my picture standing in Brasília, when they developed the photograph only the landscape would appear] (135). What is generally background—buildings—becomes foreground, and this is the startling irony of the planned city: it is still known more for its buildings than its residents. The

aesthetic. In terms of intent, many of Brasília’s buildings were standardized in such a way that they were easy to reproduce, to construct with prefabricated material, and to build quickly. Many of the building designs, in theory, were determined by the buildings’ function. In terms of aesthetic, Brasília’s buildings employ the materials and traits of the international style: reinforced concrete, glass, *pilotis*, the use of white and natural colors, flat roofs, stark contrasts between vertical and horizontal volumes, and curtain walls. Inherent in its very name, the international style tended to reject local history and vernacular style, which is particularly evident in the case of Brasília and which has been a source of criticism.

suggestion of the landscape taking over in the photograph gestures toward the extraordinary light of the almost cloudless city where sunlight bounces ruthlessly off the buildings' white walls.

Furthering this sentiment, Clarice tells us that “Brasília ainda não tem o homem de Brasília” [Brasília still doesn't have the man of Brasília] (133). The *crônica* begins, “Brasília é construída na linha do horizonte” [Brasília is constructed on the horizon line] (133), evoking the idea of a place that, like the horizon, is visible but unreachable. The duality created between the city Clarice describes and the image of an unreachable city on a horizon dovetails with the duality between the real and the promised Brasília. However Clarice warns that “os ratos, todos muito grandes, estão invadindo” [the rats, all very large, are invading] (134), as if to imply that now that the construction is finished, the imperfect reality of Brasília is influencing its idealized promise.

Both Guimarães Rosa and Clarice resist the strong temptation of the time to simplistically commend or condemn Brasília as a success or a failure, and they do so by developing a single character's emotional reaction to the real and symbolic city. Clarice insists on an ambiguous relationship to the capital: “Há alguma coisa aqui que me dá medo. Quando eu descobrir o que me assusta, saberei também o que amo aqui” [There is something here that scares me. When I discover what it is that frightens me, I will also know what I love here] (137). She describes Brasília's mystery, pointing to the way in which the city seems built more for cars than people, “Quando morri, um dia abri os olhos e era Brasília. Eu estava sozinha no mundo. Havia um táxi parado. Sem chofer” [When I died, one day I opened my eyes and it was Brasília. I was alone in the world. There was a stopped taxi. No driver] (133). The startling use of the past tense “when I

died,” as opposed to “when I die” or “if I were dead,” and the liberties the sentence takes with grammar add to the sense of alienation the city provokes; the sentence, like the city, cannot be fully understood. Both defy the laws we commonly associate with grammar and urban planning. Clarice writes that anywhere a child stands in Brasília, he may fall, and fall off of the world.

Alongside these metaphors, the *crônica* praises Brasília’s urban planner, Lúcio Costa, and its architect, Oscar Niemeyer, in a way that transparently likens the successes of their aesthetic plan to Clarice’s goals for her literature, marking what she views as an affinity between their artistic projects: “Os dois arquitetos não pensaram em construir beleza, seria fácil; eles ergueram o espanto inexplicado. A criação não é uma compreensão, é um novo mistério” [The two architects didn’t think of building beauty, that would be easy; they created inexplicable shock. Creation isn’t comprehension, it’s a new mystery] (133). Her arresting images of Brasília read not as criticism, but as efforts to recreate the “inexplicable shock” and “new mystery” of Brasília in the form of writing.

Part of Clarice’s process of reacting to the city is to invent a mythic past for it. This invention draws attention to how the city has already cultivated its own myths. A passage from JK’s biography *A marcha do amanhecer* [The March of Dawn] exemplifies the nebulous line between national mythmaking and national history. In addition, it demonstrates how Brasília took on a mythic aura, which Clarice reworks in her text. On several occasions in his biography, JK refers to the historical roots of the plans to build Brasília. He shapes Brazilian history as if it were inevitably leading to the moment when he would create the new capital:

Desde 1789 até minha posse na Presidência da República, nesses 167 anos, a idéia [da Brasília] veio amadurecendo no País. Em tôdas as horas-chaves da vida nacional ela era desfraldada, e em tôdas as Constituições foi posta em destaque: na de 91, na de 34 e na de 46. E tão atual se manteve, que o próprio Congresso, que me deu posse, tinha em mãos o relatório final que marcava o local da construção. (57)

[In the 167 years from 1789 to my appointment as President of the Republic, the idea [of Brasília] was developing in the Country. In all of the key hours of national life it was unfurled, and in all of the Constitutions it was underscored: in that of 91, 34, and 46. It remained so germane that the Congress that appointed me had in hand a final report that indicated the location of the construction.]

He begins this legitimization of Brasília in 1789 when the rebels known as the Inconfidentes Mineiros demanded that Brazil's capital be moved to the center of the country (Alexander 214). By mentioning the "key hours of national life," he alludes to the fact that the name Brasília was invented in 1822, the year of the declaration of independence. This occurred when a Brazilian deputy to the Portuguese parliament declared in a bill that "in the center of Brazil, between the headwaters of the confluent rivers Paraguai and Amazonas, the capital of this kingdom will be founded, to be called Brasília, or by some other name" (Alexander 214; Cardoso de Castro 11 qtd. in Evenson 106).

Although JK claims to refer to all of the Brazilian constitutions, he selectively refers to the three—1891, 1934, and 1946—that mention the relocation of the capital to the center of the country. By claiming to refer to all of the constitutions, but omitting two—the Imperial Constitution (1824) and the Estado Novo Constitution (1937)—he denies the existence of moments in Brazilian history when Dom Pedro I and Getúlio Vargas promulgated constitutions that increased their power over all branches of government. Since JK imagines a more democratic past for his country by omitting these

constitutions, it is easier for him to utilize this past to legitimate building Brasília.

Moreover, by using superlative language (the word *all* twice and ample exaggeration) and the verb “unfurl,” which evokes the image of the flag, he enhances the sense that the project is epic and patriotic.

Clarice, like any Brazilian with access to the media, witnessed how politicians described Brasília in mythic terms of this type, referring to it as the capital of hope and the symbol of Brazilian progress. Therefore, when Clarice creates obviously fictitious creation myths for Brasília dotted with references to the capital’s architect and urban planner, the combination of the imagined and the real makes the reader question existing myths of nation formation and simplistic renditions of Brasília. In this sense, the *crônica*’s myth-making relates to Nietzsche’s concept of “genealogy,” which contests pure beginnings and origins of things because such absolutes deny historicity. By creating overtly outlandish beginnings for Brasília, Clarice draws attention to how the city has commonly been mythified in ways that deny its genealogy in a Nietzschean sense. For instance, efforts to emphasize the pure Brazilian-ness and authenticity of Brasília overlook the extent to which the capital draws on European modernist traditions and that it is remarkably similar to French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier’s planned city of Chandigarh in northern India.

The *crônica* takes on the tone of a creation myth: “Quando o mundo foi criado, foi preciso criar um homem especialmente para aquele mundo. Nós somos todos deformados pela adaptação à liberdade de Deus. Não sabemos como seríamos se tivéssemos sido criados em primeiro lugar, e depois o mundo deformado às nossas necessidades” [When the world was created, a people needed to be created especially for

that world. We are all deformed by that adaptation at God's will. We don't know how it would have been if we were created first and afterward the world had been deformed to fit our needs] (133). The use of the verb *deform* instead of *form* adds new valence to the Judeo-Christian creation myth, as it makes the reader contemplate how being deformed by God might vary from being formed by God. The word *deform* suggests how God changed our form to fit the world, which also evokes how our environment influences us. By mentioning our lack of knowledge about the reverse scenario—God creating the world to fit the needs of people—Clarice calls attention to the possibility of alternative myths. On the one hand, this reference to the creation myth allows us to contemplate the strangeness of planned cities, like Brasília, which are built all at once before they are inhabited, reversing the gradual progressions of city construction that tend to start with a small settlement of people and expand in response to the needs of the population. On the other hand, the suggestion of a reverse order—people *then* world—and the use of the negative verb *deform* evoke the artificial and arbitrary nature of myths.

Clarice playfully invents a creation myth for Brasília, inspired by the white, barren, and glistening feel of the city, thus letting the present inform or deform the past:

No séc. IV a.C. era habitada por homens e mulheres louros e altíssimos, que não eram americanos nem suecos, e que faiscavam ao sol. Eram todos cegos. É por isso que em Brasília não há onde esbarrar. Os brasiliários vestiam-se de ouro branco. A raça se extinguiu porque nasciam poucos filhos. Quanto mais belos os brasiliários, mais cegos e mais puros e mais faiscantes, e menos filhos. (134)

[In the 4th century B.C. it was inhabited by blonde, very tall men and women who were not Americans or Swedes and who glittered in the sun. They were all blind. That's why in Brasília there's nothing to bump into. The Brasília people wore white gold. The race went extinct because few children were born. The more beautiful the Brasília people, the blinder, the purer, the shinier, and the fewer children.]

The author imagines a group who populated the capital after the extinction of the Brasília­nese people, and the loose likeness between these people and the *candangos*—the nickname for the construction workers who built Brasília—has the effect of subtly recognizing how the workers, who were primarily from northeastern Brazil, went largely unrecognized in the dominant myths about Brasília. She writes that “milênios depois [Brasília] foi descoberta por um bando de foragidos que em nenhum outro lugar seriam recebidos” [Millennia later it [Brasília] was discovered by a gang of outcasts who were welcomed nowhere else] (134), like many of the migrant workers who went to Brasília to find employment in the late 1950s, often fleeing droughts and floods and viewing Brasília as a promise of prosperity. She imagines how they created camps, as the *candangos* made squatter camps. However, she envisions a city that they excavate as opposed to build, evoking how Brasília’s buildings look something like ruins due to their whiteness and simplicity, and creating a link between this myth and that of the Brasília­nese: “Ali acenderam fogo, armaram tendas, pouco a pouco escavando as areias que soterravam a cidade. Esses eram homens e mulheres, menores e morenos. . . . por serem fugitivos e desesperados, tinham em nome de que viver e morrer” [There they lit fires, put up tents, little by little digging up the sand that covered the city. They were men and women, smaller and darker. . . . because they were desperate fugitives they had something to live and die for] (134). Like all of the *crônica*’s images, this one comes in a flash, immediately replaced by something different, a pattern that allows Brasília to stir contradictory emotions simultaneously and celebrates the capital’s plurality as a symbol.

In another representation of the mystery of the new capital, Clarice reacts to oversimplified symbolic readings of Brasília. She writes that an authoritative, but anonymous “they,” by creating Brasília, “quiseram negar que a gente não presta” [wanted to negate that we don’t matter] (134). The accusation applies to national myths too, as such myths order events and construct an explanatory story of people’s purpose to counteract the sense that the past is chaotic, unjust, and purposeless. Clarice writes that “É Brasília pura. – A cidade de Brasília fica fora da cidade” [It’s pure Brasília – The city of Brasília is outside of the city] (136). What comes to mind is the idealized promise of Brasília, which exists only outside of the actual city. In the idealized new capital, “não há lugar para as tentações” [there’s no place for temptations] (135), but Clarice challenges this ideal by imagining that unheard-of crimes will be committed in this supposedly utopian place. When the author states that the city has “espaço calculado para as nuvens” [room calculated for the clouds] (134), she mocks the desire to control. She likens this total control over the outcome of the city to a dictatorship: “A construção de Brasília: a de um Estado totalitário” [The construction of Brasília: that of a totalitarian State] (134), an accurate premonition of the government that would soon inhabit the Pilot Plan. She humorously evokes her sense of not being allowed to be in a bad mood in Brasília: “Brasília não me deixa ficar cansada. Persegue um pouco. Bem disposta, bem disposta, bem disposta, sinto-me bem” [Brasília won’t let me get tired. It pursues me a little. In a good mood, in a good mood, in a good mood, I feel good] (136). The purposefulness of the project and the aesthetic harmony of the design pressure her to feel good within the city, despite the impossibility of that transformation and her rejection of it. The *crônica* celebrates the multiple reactions to Brasília with the effect of challenging simplistic

symbolic readings of the city. Thus, Clarice depicts Brasília as far more than a symbol of progress. It is an intricate, inspiring place that stirs in her contradictory emotions and narratives.

José Marques da Silva's *Diário de um candango*

In José Marques da Silva's diary, the asymmetry that is of greatest interest is one of social class. The new capital purported to be more egalitarian than other major Brazilians cities, yet ended up being deeply segregated by class.⁵⁷ He recognizes Brasília as a symbol of progress, but asks: progress for *whom*? Answering this question leads to internal conflicts. Marques da Silva, for instance, simultaneously holds two seemingly irreconcilable feelings, one of national pride triggered by the construction of Brasília, the other of disgust of his country's treatment of the poor during and after the new capital's construction. Marques da Silva, a man in his twenties from the state of Goiás, praises Brasília as "a maravilha do século" [the marvel of the century] (78). Yet without missing a beat, he condemns the deplorable treatment of the *candangos* after the completion of the new capital. Interestingly, Marques da Silva self-identifies as a *candango* although he has never done manual labor in Brasília. He used to work as a receptionist at the Brasília Palace Hotel and now runs and owns a restaurant in a satellite city, yet he seems to identify with the *candangos* because he is a poor man hustling to make a living in the new capital and enduring the hardships of its periphery. Later *candango* came to refer to any resident of Brasília, but Marques da Silva uses it solely to refer to working-class residents.

⁵⁷ Speaking to this point more generally, historian Carla Maria Junho Anastasia writes of JK: "não obstante o sucesso de sua política econômica, a maioria dos brasileiros pouco ou nada ganhou com ela." [Despite the success of his economic policy, the majority of Brazilians gained little or nothing from it] (18).

Rats that ransack the pantry of Marques da Silva's restaurant, and they seem to be from the same colony as the rats that Clarice warns are invading the city, evidence of the inevitable imperfections not calculated in the city's plans. Rats are just one of the many stark differences between the Vila Planalto, the satellite city where Marques da Silva lives and works, and the Pilot Plan:

Por enquanto, é a Vila a escrófula da mais moderna cidade do mundo. Que contraste! Nobreza e miséria! Desta lama onde vivemos, dêste imundo chiqueiro, nós contemplamos os Ministérios, símbolos da prosperidade e da ordem em nossa Pátria. De um lado, os grandes prédios, a praça monumental que embasbaca qualquer estrangeiro, e do outro . . . a podridão, os homens maltrapilhos, os mendigos nauseabundos! (105)

[For now, it's the tuberculous Vila of the most modern city in the world. What a contrast! Nobility and misery! From this mud where we live, from this filthy sty, we contemplate the Ministries, symbols of the prosperity and the order of our Patria. On one side, the grand buildings, the monumental plaza that amazes any foreigner, and on the other . . . the rottenness, the tattered men, the nauseating beggars!]

Marques da Silva views Brasília in terms of its class divisions. For instance, he writes that rainstorms in Brasília are a spectacle for the rich, who inhabit apartments, yet a tragedy for the poor, whose shacks might not be left standing after heavy showers (78).

Marques da Silva feels excluded from Brazil's progress because of his economic class, but he is excited about the symbols of this progress—cars, buildings, railways, construction workers, and especially highways: “Olhei por uma estrada, vinha um Aero-Willys . . . lindo mesmo êsse príncipe das estradas. O Brasil é forte, é pujante, é realizador. Quem diria, há poucos anos, que o Brasil seria capaz de produzir tanta coisa que comprovasse nossa eficiência e capacidade de trabalho?” [I looked at a highway and an Aero-Willys was coming . . . a real beauty this prince of the highways. Brazil is

strong, it's booming, it's accomplished. Who would have said just a few years ago that Brazil would be able to produce so much that proves our efficiency and capacity to work?)] (108).

When it comes to more abstract feelings of patriotism, Marques da Silva feels included in the national imaginary and national modernization, despite his awareness of being excluded from its concrete benefits. He idealizes Brasília's construction workers as possessing superhuman strength and admirable nobility: "Não são homens comuns, são gigantes, são heróis lutando com suas espadas, por um ideal mais elevado e dignificante. São assim os *candangos* de Brasília" [They are not common men; they are giants, heroes fighting with their swords for a higher, more dignified ideal. That's how Brasília's *candangos* are] (51). After establishing the worth of these men, Marques da Silva resentfully describes how Brasília abused them and himself: "Os *candangos* não mais reclamam nada; estão mesmo pobres, pobres como Jó; Brasília os despojara de tudo o que tinham, deixando-os ao léu. Eu mesmo sou um deles" [The *candangos* no longer complain about anything; they're real poor, poor as Job; Brasília stripped them of everything they had, leaving them aimless. I myself am one of them] (138). Brasília only briefly improved their quality of life and then left them without any structures of support.

Although by no means linear, this resentment of Brasília crescendos in the afterword in which he addresses the *candangos* personally, speaking to how the government cheated them with the promise of Brasília: "E Brasília, *candango*? Brasília para nós foi uma ilusão. Deixe Brasília milionária. Vá para a lavoura, que de seus esforços precisa" [And Brasília, *candango*? Brasília was an illusion for us. Leave well-to-do Brasília. Go to the fields that need your strength] (149). Yet, no matter how emphatic

Marques da Silva sounds, his relationship to Brazil's progress is quite ambivalent. Even as he condemns its systematic exclusion of the poor, he celebrates its shiny commodities.

Appropriate to the time period and to JK's priorities, Marques da Silva sees highways as the key to Brazil's future progress. He writes of his city of origin, Ipameri, Goiás and refers to Mauro Borges Teixeira, the governor of Goiás from 1961 to 1964: "Será que o Mauro . . . ainda se lembra dos 5 mil quilômetros que prometeu deixar prontos em Goiás no término do seu governo? Rasgue, Mauro, uma estrada de Ipameri à Cristalina; talvez com isso tire essa cidade do ostracismo em que ela se acha. É um apêlo dos ipamerinos, que me fazem intérprete das suas aspirações" [Does Mauro . . . still remember the 5 thousand kilometers that he promised to have ready in Goiás by the end of his term? Pave, Mauro, a highway from Ipameri to Cristalina; perhaps that would pull the city from the isolation in which it exists. It's an appeal from the people of Ipameri who designate me as the interpreter of their aspirations] (113). Marques da Silva shares the sentiment of the time that roads were the ticket to Brazil's modernization. The four main initiatives of the JK administration's *Plano de Metas* [Plan of Goals] were to develop the areas of energy, transportation, heavy industry, and food production. One of JK's main tactics for modernizing Brazil was via transportation, so he focused on road construction, automobile (truck, car, and tractor) manufacturing, improvement of the rail system, and the creation of a capital that showcased and celebrated car culture.

In his essay "Cultura e política, 1964-1969" [Culture and Politics, 1964-1969], literary critic Roberto Schwarz argues that a Brazilian version of Marxism was, to a greater or lesser extent, part of the "ideological arsenal" of Vargas, Kubitschek, Quadros, and Goulart (66). However, this—as Schwarz calls it— "rose-colored Marxism" was not

concerned with the class struggle and the redistribution of capital, but merely with anti-imperial efforts (66). Therefore, it easily found support among the Brazilian elite and did not lead to revolution. Although the government pitched Brasília as a project more aligned with the class struggle than it actually was—a source of Marques da Silva’s bitterness—the outcomes of JK’s projects coincided with an anti-imperialist ideology that sought to increase Brazil’s self-sufficiency. Marques da Silva seems to share JK’s vision that transportation was central to Brazil’s development, even though he cannot afford a car. Marques da Silva’s mutual feelings of excitement and resentment demonstrate how Brasília, even in the mind of one individual, was a flexible symbol. Such simultaneous emotions complicate the unequivocal symbol of greatness the government hoped to create.

José Geraldo Vieira’s *Paralelo 16: Brasília*

José Geraldo Vieira’s novel *Paralelo 16: Brasília*, published in 1966, also explores the duality between the real and the promised city. The title may be inspired by John Dos Passos’s *42nd Parallel* (1930)—his first novel in his USA trilogy. Like Dos Passos, Vieira mixes genres, such as speeches, letters, traditional prose, experimental prose, and historic accounts. With a larger cast of characters and a longer time frame (1957-1963) than the other three texts examined in this chapter, *Paralelo 16* specifically tracks how citizens responded to the promise of Brasília during its construction and the reality of Brasília once they were living in the finished city. The novel pays particular attention to how people projected unrealistic expectations onto Brasília, related to its modernist design, its relationship to social class, and its role as a symbol of the country’s

self-sufficiency. Citizens imbued the city under construction with powers of mythic proportions. In addition, the novel confounds romanticized views of the capital by offering flashes of a less utopian place in the making, which reveal Brasília's paradoxes often with humor and playful embellishment.

Background about José Geraldo Vieira and *Paralelo 16: Brasília*

Although Vieira is practically unknown now, he was a major author of his time. Some contextualization about him and his fiction will help ground my argument. Vieira was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1897 and died in São Paulo in 1977. He studied medicine in Rio de Janeiro, receiving his degree in 1919, which may help explain why doctors and detailed medical ailments are frequent in his fiction. He then went to Paris where he took specialized courses, returning to Brazil in the early 1920s. He wrote novels, stories, poetry, and literary and art criticism, the latter of which he dedicated much of his career to.

Vieira ran against the literary grain of his time in that, although he was friends with modernist writers and lived in São Paulo, he did not write in a modernist style. He published novels during the same period as the regionalist 1930s generation, yet his highly cosmopolitan novels primarily take place in Brazilian cities and in Europe. More than setting, what separates Vieira from the regionalist writers is his disinterest in reproducing colloquial speech, providing a social message, or depicting Brazilian poverty. Other authors of the time—such as Lúcio Cardoso, Clarice Lispector, João Guimarães Rosa, and Murilo Rubião—tended to write in an abstract and intimate style, unlike Vieira's straightforward, plot-driven approach. Despite being a bit of a misfit,

Vieira was a highly acclaimed writer in Brazilian literary circles during his lifetime, as remarks from Jorge Amado, Sérgio Milliet, and Oswald de Andrade demonstrate. Jorge Amado wrote that Vieira “é, a meu ver, sobretudo, o romancista que melhor mostrou o homem brasileiro como parte do drama do nosso tempo” [is, in my view, above all, the novelist who best demonstrated how the Brazilian man is part of the drama of our time] (qtd. in *José Geraldo Vieira* 15).⁵⁸ Literary critic Sérgio Milliet both seconded Amado’s sentiment and found fault with certain elements of Vieira’s prose. Praising Vieira’s novel *A ladeira da memória* [The Slope of Memory] in a 1950 review, Milliet defends the European influence of Vieira’s prose:

Ninguém mais de seu momento histórico, entretanto, que esse José Geraldo Vieira complexo e simples, atento ao internacionalismo da cultura, ao marginalismo dos que sofrem a influência européia e amam a terra tropical, ouvem engasgados os sambas de Noel Rosa e as músicas de Satie, entendem de Freud e compram figas de Guiné aos fornecedores de macumbeiros. (*Diário Crítico* Vol. 7 179)

[No one is more a part of his historical moment, however, than José Geraldo Vieira, complex and simple, attentive to the internationalism of culture, to the marginalization of those who are influenced by Europe and love the tropical land, listen choked up to Noel Rosa’s sambas and Satie’s songs, understand Freud, and buy fist-shaped ex-votos from *macumba* devotees.]

Although Milliet appreciates Vieira’s imagination, surrealism (*Diário Crítico* Vol 5 112), cultural knowledge (*Diário Crítico*. Vol 2 12), and international perspective, he finds faults with Vieira’s talents as a fiction writer. On several occasions, Milliet accuses Vieira of creating characters who are merely spokespeople for the author’s own ideas: “não se mostra romancista, porem [sic] ensaísta [sic] preocupado em plantar na mente

⁵⁸ Jorge Amado’s original quotation is from the 2 December 1962 edition of the *Jornal do Comércio*.

dos protagonistas as suas idéias próprias [sic], em expô-las e discuti-las sem ter sequer o cuidado de mudar de linguagem” [he seems like less of a novelist and more of an essayist concerned about planting his own ideas in the mind of his characters and of showing and debating these ideas without even bothering to change the language] (*Diário Crítico*. Vol. 2 12). Milliet’s other criticisms of Vieira are related: Vieira can be an intellectual exhibitionist, he does not develop his characters enough (primarily psychologically) for his reader to care about them, and his language can be artificial (*Diário Crítico*. Vol. 3 251, *Diário Crítico*. Vol. 5 112-113). Vieira, who lived for years in France and Germany, is known as an erudite, well-traveled author who incorporated these aspects of himself into his fiction. Commenting on these characteristics a decade before São Paulo’s four hundredth anniversary, Oswald de Andrade wrote, “José Geraldo não tem quatrocentos anos de São Paulo, mas tem quatrocentos anos de inteligência” [José Geraldo may not have the four hundred years São Paulo has, but he has four hundred years of intelligence] (qtd. *José Geraldo Vieira* 17).⁵⁹

Paralelo 16: Brasília, Vieira’s eighth novel, published when he was seventy years old, recounts relatively chronologically the story of the building of Brasília and its first years as capital. However, as the narrator self-consciously proclaims, it is a “história pan-brasileira” [a pan-Brazilian story [or history]] (70), which goes to great lengths to describe all regions of Brazil and their historic importance. *Paralelo 16* begins when the main character, a young pilot named Amauri Menezes who works for the Brazilian Air Force transporting NOVACAP staff and government goods, flies in a plane toward

⁵⁹ Vieira’s most acclaimed novel is *A quadragésima porta* [The Fortieth Door], which takes place primarily in rural Portugal between 1914 and the early 1940s, with parts in other European cities. Vieira wrote a “European” novel at a time when Brazilian writers were concerned with setting their fiction in underrepresented areas of their country.

Brasília.⁶⁰ The literary twist is clever: the pilot himself has a similar perspective of the novel's setting as the third person, omniscient narrator. Most of the characters work for NOVACAP, therefore the history of the making of a capital is also the history of a company. Although the novel has various subplots, the main intimate story relates to Amauri's love life. He is romantically involved with a fun loving set of twins from Rio de Janeiro, Lia and Raquel Abranches, and the hardworking Jaci Lucena from Conceição do Araguaia, Pará. *Paralelo 16* focuses primarily on the political and military elite and the ways in which the idea of Brasília triggered their imaginations, but it portrays *candangos*, Brasília's workers, as well, often in comparison to rubber tappers of the 1940s.

The 263-page novel is divided into four *cadernos* [sections]. At the beginning of each section, a list of subsections, labeled with letters and given titles, is provided, but the reader's only indication of the transition from one subsection to another is a blank space on the page. Vieira's novel is hybrid in its style, at times reading like a pedantic tour through Brazil's landscape and history full of highly specialized vocabulary, at other times reading like a comedic screenplay. Vieira himself sought a cinematic element in his writing, as he mentioned in a speech given at the *Academia Paulista de Letras* [The São Paulo Academy of Letters] on 19 October 1971: "A minha obra pretende não por vaidade e sim por tradição, continuar Fernão Lopes e Zurara, porém quanto ao mundo de hoje. Não como história, mas como estórias. Pretende ainda transformar o livro, a página, em

⁶⁰ Although it is unclear if the author himself had this connection in mind, a real Amauri (sometimes spelled *Amaury*) who worked for NOVACAP had a significant role in a mysterious part of Brasília's history. Near the satellite city Vila Planalto, there was a lowland *candango* settlement, which was submerged in water to form the Paranoá Lake ("Attractions: Nautical Tourism"). The NOVACAP employee Amauri de Almeida led an association formed to relocate the population from this settlement to Sobradinho using NOVACAP funds. The original settlement, which was created in 1958 and submerged in 1960, became known, at least as early as 1961, as "Vila Amauri" ("História de Sobradinho"). This incident resonates with Canudo's submersion after the construction of the Cocorobó Dam.

vídeo” [My work intends, not out of vanity but for tradition’s sake, to continue that of Fernão Lopes and Zurura, however, in relationship to today’s world and not as a history, but as *estórias*. It attempts, moreover, to transform the book, the page, into video] (“Depoimento de José Geraldo Vieira” 101). Vieira thus looks to Portugal’s great medieval chroniclers as inspiration for his novel that recounts the epic tale of Brasília’s making with more concern for narrative development than factual accuracy. Critic Paulo Rónai describes the word *estória* that gained popularity in the 1960s in Brazil: “Esse neologismo de sabor popular, adotado por número crescente de ficcionistas e críticos, embora ainda não registrado pelos dicionaristas, destina-se a absorver um dos significados de ‘história’, o de ‘conto’ (= *short story*)” [That neologism with a popular flavor, adopted by a growing number of fiction writers and critics, although not yet registered by dictionaries, looks to absorb one of the meanings of “história,” that of “short story”] (18). Why not use the word *conto*? It seems that writers were drawn away from the word *conto* and toward the freshness of the new word *estória* because of its popular feel and the way in which it drew attention to the confluences between narrating fiction and narrating history.

Literary critic Nelly Novaes Coelho emphasizes *Paralelo 16*’s mixture of fact and fiction: “Em estilo que oscila entre a reportagem, o ensaio e a ficção, *Paralelo 16* segue realisticamente todas as fases do nascimento da nova capital, e acima de tudo, fixa a epopéia humana que ficou definitivamente ligada às raízes daquela engrenagem que fez de Brasília um fenômeno único no mundo” [In a style that shifts between reporting, essay, and fiction, *Paralelo 16* realistically follows all of the stages of the birth of the new capital, and above all, focuses on the human epic that became definitively rooted to

the works that made Brasília a unique phenomenon in the world] (51). Following this concern with chronicling an epic construction project, many of the characters are talking heads for positions regarding Brasília: the city makes people feel alienated, is incontestable evidence of Brazil's self-sufficiency, gives some the opportunity to become rich quickly, and so on. Perhaps for this reason, the characters have an unrealistic supply of dates, historical references, foreign words, erudite knowledge, and statistics in their heads. This knowledge allows them to prove their points better, though it makes for unrealistic dialogues. In this respect, much of Sérgio Milliet's criticism of Vieira's earlier novels holds true for this later novel as well.

Paralelo 16 is laden with intertextuality and explicit references to Brazilian writers. The novel's detailed descriptions of geography, foretold by the title reference to the southern latitude line near which Brasília lies, are reminiscent of Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões*. Its employment of indigenous words for flora and fauna is reminiscent of José de Alencar's *indianista* novels. The love triangle involving a set of elite *carioca* twins that takes place at a moment of political transition smacks of Machado de Assis' *Esau e Jacó*. Vieira employs long lists of plants, animals, types of food, and other aspects of Brazilian culture much like Mário de Andrade does in *Macunaíma*. Brazilian essayist and poet Antônio Rangel Bandeira notes Vieira's signature inclusion of such lists: "uma multidão de personagens, viagens, países, citações, debates, ou, estudos sobre arte, recordações pessoais, fatos históricos, descrições de paisagens, além daquele culto da enumeração que, às vezes, a torna cansativa" [a crowd of characters, trips, countries, quotations, debates, or studies about art, personal recollections, historic facts, descriptions of landscape, beyond that cult of enumeration that, at times, is tiring] (80).

One such list in *Paralelo 16* describes the photographs taped around the edge of a barber's mirror, which provide a panorama of the prominent sports figures, actors, and politicians of the late 1950s, broadening the reader's sense of the visual symbols of the era.

Certain themes run throughout Vieira's oeuvre: guilt, the intervention of fantastical or mythic elements in otherwise realistic stories, medicine, the tragedy of war, art criticism, and elite culture. All of these elements are present in *Paralelo 16*. In the novel, Amauri feels guilty about the death of a lover, which leads him to quit his job and provokes the novel's most moving dialogue. The mythical element of the novel is the presence of the Wandering Jew of many names in Brasília who purports to have been alive for 1,987 years, building monuments in the world's great cities and escaping persecution. Like Brazilian author Samuel Rawet, Vieira had a particular interest in the figure of the Wandering Jew. In Vieira's novel *A Mulher que Fugiu de Sodoma* [The Woman Who Escaped Sodom], the eight-year-old daughter of a Rio de Janeiro millionaire has a picture book called *O Judeu Errante* [The Wandering Jew] with illustrations of the title character travelling over mountains and oceans. Vieira himself, in 1971, mentioned this character as part of his initial inspiration for *Paralelo 16*: "me situou em seguida em São Paulo, donde me fui em romance assistir à construção e à inauguração de Brasília, levando comigo, como *hippie* milenar, o judeu errante" [then I settled in São Paulo, where I went via novel to attend the construction and inauguration of Brasília, bringing with me, like a millennial hippie, the Wandering Jew] ("Depoimento de José Geraldo Vieira" 101). Medicine enters the novel via the role of the São Paulo doctor, Maia Guimarães, who moves to Brasília to be a politician, but ends up being

called on as a medical doctor in a crucial scene at the end of the novel. The tragedy of war arises in *Paralelo 16* in the frequent references to the atomic bomb and the ways in which it forever altered human history. In terms of art criticism, Vieira dedicates a substantial section of the novel to lectures by art critics about Brasília. Members of the Brazilian elite in Brasília and Rio de Janeiro comprise the novel's lead cast of characters.

Blackouts and Transformative Designs

Two scenes about deviant sexual behavior demonstrate how, despite Brasília's modernist intention of increasing social order, it merely moved disorder to private spaces and to the periphery, allowing it to better showcase its utopian façade. In Rio de Janeiro, the street is the epicenter—of social life, deviance, and disorder—as demonstrated by the many scenes in the novel that take place in or refer to the city's beaches, streets, city center, and public spaces. In contrast to this highly public and central space of activity, most of the scenes in Brasília take place in private spaces, such as elite hotels, homes, and offices. Sexual deviance that occurs in the street and in the city center in Rio de Janeiro moves in Brasília to private spaces or to hidden spaces on the outskirts. The metaphor of the blackout arises in moments of lust in both Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, demonstrating differences between the two cities and the limitations of the new capital's aspiration to increase social order.

One night in Rio de Janeiro, “as luzes da Light de repente se apagaram, e não havia luar” [Light's lights had suddenly gone out, and there was no moon] (229). As in the First Republic, in the mid 1900s electric light continued to be tied to civilizing efforts and public safety. This blackout, which spans the entire city of Rio de Janeiro, alludes to a practical and a symbolic motive for transferring the capital. In practical terms, the

growing infrastructural constraints of Rio de Janeiro were one of the motivating factors for the transfer, and one of these constraints was insufficient electric power, which caused frequent power outs. In addition, Rio de Janeiro had a housing shortage difficult to solve in a city tucked between the ocean and steep mountains that hindered expansion. As the population surpassed the city's ability to provide sufficient public services, problems with traffic and telephone lines were common, as were gas and water shortages (Evenson 9). Many believed that Brasília would not suffer from such problems because it would have entirely new infrastructure and be less constrained by geography. The blackout in the novel reveals Rio de Janeiro's disorder, which, following the convictions of modernist design, the new capital was meant to tackle. The narrator notes that in the dark the city appears as it did in the sixteenth century or before there was even a city at all, which further separates Rio de Janeiro from Brasília, the separation of old from new, of outdated from updated. The darkness of Rio de Janeiro contrasts with a scene in which a character flipping through the popular magazines *Manchete* and *Cruzeiro* just after Brasília's inauguration reads the photograph caption, "*Acendem-se tôdas as luzes de Brasília*" [*All of Brasília's lights are turned on*] (183), which links light to innovation and spectacle. The Rio de Janeiro blackout gestures to the fact that the city was functionally unfit to be the capital, while Brasília offers a fresh alternative, not only promising better infrastructure, but also linking Brazilian cities from the country's interior via an impressive network of highways that would fan out from Brasília.⁶¹

The blackout falls upon Rio de Janeiro shortly after Amauri has taken the Abranches twins to the hilltop neighborhood of Santa Teresa to see the view one night,

⁶¹ For an excellent analysis of this fan of highways, see chapter one "Premises and Paradoxes" of James Holston's *The Modernist City*, particularly the section "The Idea of Brasília."

and the malfunction of the Canadian utility company aids their romance, suggesting that the breakdown of public services can encourage deviant behavior. The twins have been flirting with Amauri for months, steeling kisses when possible and inviting him to their Brasília home for romantic evenings; however, the sudden blackout emboldened them: “as duas virgens queriam entregar-se” [the two virgins wanted to give themselves to him] (230). Amauri takes their lead unaware that the evening’s adventure will be of another kind:

[Amauri] agarrou Raquel pelas fontes, olhou-a bem de perto, beijou-lhe a boca, os olhos, os seios, largou-a e ao agarrar do mesmo modo Lia pelas têmporas e beijá-la, palpá-la, não conseguiu estabelecer diferença nem nos rostos, nos cabelos, nos seios, nem muito menos ter noção de que uma estava à direita, a outra à esquerda. . . .Aplicou as duas de encontro à muralha, e primeiro aderiu a uma, logo passou a aderir à outra, e ambas já faziam menção de despir-se quando farfalhou qualquer coisa perto e os três largando-se, ouviram uma voz:
— O dinheiro! E as jóias!! (230)

[[Amauri] grabbed Raquel by her temples, looked at her closely, and kissed her on the lips, eyes, and breasts. He let her go and grabbed Lia in the same way, holding her face and kissing her, caressing her. He couldn’t tell the difference between their faces, hair, breasts, nor guess who was to the right and the left. . . . He put them both against the wall and first went toward one, then right to the other, and both were already undressing themselves when something rustled nearby and all three, letting go of one another, heard a voice:
“Your money! And jewelry!!”]

Suddenly, the lights go back on, and Amauri is able to fight off the thief, but unable to further his advances with the twins. The narrator frames the blackout in such a way as to imply that the sudden absence of light, symbolic of a disorderly capital, invited sexual and illegal transgression, which were then prevented by the return of electricity.

However, the implication can only go so far since, as gleaned from the romantic rendezvous in the twins' home in Brasília, the new capital does not discourage sexual encounters, but merely changes where such encounters take place. The bold, monumental architecture framed by wide-open spaces and the nature of Brasília's zoning make it too dispersed to be manageable on foot. The austerity and deliberateness of Brasília's architecture were meant to promote hard work and efficiency. The intentional absence of street life was meant to transfer socializing from spontaneous street gatherings to presumably safer and more orderly clubs, hotels, and homes. And the *superquadras*, the residential neighborhoods, were intended to mix members of different social classes in intimate, small settings designed to diminish the class hierarchies of the work environment within the residential environment (Holston 80). In Brasília, the twins and Amauri meet for romantic, drunken flings in the twins' apartment, whereas in Rio de Janeiro socializing takes place in the street. Simone de Beauvoir, after visiting Brazil's new capital, described this lack of street socializing dramatically: "the street does not exist in Brasília and never will" (Beauvoir 551 qtd. in Evenson 103). Although public light helps keep the twins' virginity intact in the Santa Teresa scene, the reader imagines that no type of vigilance could keep this racy pair in check for long. In fact, part of their motivation for moving to Brasília, in addition to adventure and a salary boost, is the increased independence, since they would be far from their watchful mother. Amauri's three love interests eagerly expect that place, in the form of the new capital, will transform their lives: "As três, mal ouviram falar em Brasília, logo se mexerem, agiram, providenciaram remoção para lá, pressentindo a possibilidade duma vida diferente, duma existência inédita" [All three, as soon as they heard of Brasília began to stir, agitate, make

arrangements to be transferred there, foreseeing the possibility of a different life, a unique existence] (31). Indeed, the three exemplify the promotions that Brasília made possible for the well-educated young professionals who were willing to make the move (Evenson 181), yet place and design did much less to transform society than had been predicted.

Vieira's narrator playfully addresses the extreme to which some people imagined that urban planning and a new location could transform residents. The novel's São Paulo lawyer Adaauto imagines that the students at the Universidade de Brasília, founded in 1962, will miraculously be transformed into a "geração culta, equilibrada, de biblioteca e de laboratório" [library and laboratory generation that was cultured and balanced], but he discovers, to his chagrin, that they are "uma rapaziada felpuda, descabelada, de barbicha metistofética, de calças McGregor sem vincos" [a messy, long-haired lot, with Mephistopheles goatees and McGregor pants with no pleats] (201), no different than young hippies elsewhere.⁶² What Brasília was supposed to be in theory was starkly different from what it became in practice, in part because it began as a plan too utopian to be fully realizable. The disconnect between Brasília the symbol of progress, efficiency, lawfulness, and order and Brasília the less pristine reality is a central theme of the novel, as another reference to a blackout reveals.

The lack of light coming through the windows of a brothel in the Núcleo Bandeirante, a workers' camp turned neighborhood, is referred to as a "prudent blackout." A deviant element of society is discreetly hidden from view, implying that despite the ambitious goals of a city meant to transform society, aspects of human nature that deviate from normative moral codes are not annihilated, just pushed into the dark.

⁶² McGregor is a men's clothing company that made popular polyester pants in the 1960s.

Four *candangos* walk past a brothel on the outskirts of the Núcleo Bandeirante late one Saturday night: “Acabada a área da Cidade Satélite, também acaba a iluminação . . . Os quatro passam meio depressa, meio envergonhados, defronte do Chalé das Iraras. . . . o prostíbulo hipòcritamente se configura em prédio acanhado de madeira, com as seis janelas da frente e as quatro do lado fechadas e revestidas de pano preto, num *blackout* prudente” [Where the Satellite City ends, the lighting also ends . . . A bit embarrassed, the four hurry past the Marten Chalet. . . . the brothel hypocritically lies in a narrow wooden building, with its six front windows and four side windows closed and covered in black cloth, in a prudent blackout] (82). The metaphor is coy: urban blackouts occur by accident often causing major problems and costing the city money, whereas the marginal brothel fully controls its blackout. Roles are reversed, as the state is in chaos and the underworld under control.

Although at other times the novel delights in describing the erotic, such as in the Rio de Janeiro blackout scene, the description of the Marten Chalet does not describe a sexual rendezvous, but an efficient building design and business model. There is great irony in a novel about Brasília describing a brothel in more depth than any monumental government buildings. Despite modernism’s goal of transforming life via art and design, people’s tastes were not so easily altered. During the construction of Brasília, there were over 2000 adults in the authorized workers’ camps, over half of whom were single and 85% of whom were male, a stark contrast to the nation’s 39% single and 50% male population at the time (IBGE 1959 qtd. in Holston 215), which created an “overwhelmingly male culture of abundant cash, ambition, and pent up desire” (Holston 223), as Vieira portrays.

The brothel scene may be read as a mild parody of the international style of architecture's concern with function over form, a stance that Niemeyer rejected (Cavalvanti 97). The narrator describes the Marten Chalet in which traffic flows smoothly in one direction as men enter the waiting room and bar through one entrance, then go through one of the six doors along the back wall that open into specific bedrooms, then exit through the back doors of the bedrooms without ever retracing their path. At the ring of a bell, the second shift of prostitutes quickly replaces the first, much like shifts of construction workers. The scene offers the irony of the international style's functionalism being more purely followed on the margins of Brasília—in a wooden bordello no less—where the lack of resources make function naturally trump form. The construction of Brasília, which was done in haste with huge numbers of workers, created a large market for the prostitution industry, which found increasingly mechanized ways to turn the largest possible profit. Hence, both the logic of how to run an efficient business and the logic of designing a building purely with function in mind are disassociated from the governmental project of building Brasília by means of a suggestion that such methods are as old as the first profession. Both the blackout in Rio de Janeiro and the metaphoric blackout in the brothel demonstrate the possibilities and limitations of urban infrastructure's ability to influence behavior and the ways in which the construction of Brasília increased interest in efforts to transform society via design.

Class Hierarchies

While the scenes of sexual deviance in the old and new capital reveal the failure of form (the design of Brasília) to change content (the inevitable disorder of life), two key scenes in *Paralelo 16* demonstrate a similar tension between form and content in

relationship to class hierarchies in Brasília. The construction of Brasília briefly united members of different social classes and this union became integral to the discourse of legitimizing Brasília as an agent of social transformation when, in reality, the well-established social hierarchies remained in place throughout. The two scenes—one taking place in a barbershop, the other at the inauguration of the first residential *superquadra*—reveal how the elite showcased Brasília’s democratic ideals in their speech, yet undermined it in their actions. One scene takes place in the Núcleo Bandeirante at Timóteo Mineiro’s barbershop, which “aos sábados se democratiza” [on Saturdays becomes democratic] (60), meaning that it serves *candangos*. Yet the class division remains intact: the barbershop “na metade esquerda atend[e] a clientes de categoria e na metade direita serv[e] fregueses comuns” [serves high class clients on the left side and common costumers on the right side] (59). There is an ironic clash between how Timóteo talks about egalitarianism, but reinforces class hierarchies.

The barber portrays his barbershop as evidence of the egalitarian utopia Brasília is meant to become: “Aqui entram membros do Conselho de Fiscalização, dos departamentos e divisões da NOVACAP, fiscais do IPASE, do IAPI. O Dr. Saião entrava aqui de botas, em mangas de camisa, sentia-se bem entre os candangos. Como eu. Exatamente. Não nutro preconceito. A solidariedade humana é a grande característica dos acampamentos” [Members of the Financial Council, the departments and divisions of NOVACAP, IPASE and IAPI supervisors come here. Mr. Saião⁶³ came here in boots and shirt sleeves, he felt good among the *candangos*. Like me. Exactly. I’m not prejudiced.

⁶³ Bernardo Sayão was one of the directors of NOVACAP in 1956 and 1957. He was, in 1958, put in charge of building the northern part of the Transbrásilia Highway from Belém to Brasília. When they were clearing the forest, a tree accidentally fell on him and he died. Sayão was the most high profile person to die in a construction accident in Brasília, and the tragedy received a great deal of attention.

Human solidarity is the great characteristic of the camps] (61). The barber refers to a widely held idea that, at the construction site, people of all social classes were frantically involved in one project, wearing similar work clothes, experiencing the stress of the rush, and covered in the same dust, which had a leveling effect. This leveling effect created a brief, superficial solidarity among classes, which lasted until the end of the construction, when Brasília arose as a starkly class-divided city. However, Timóteo's lack of prejudice has its limits as he differentiates strongly between elite and working class clients. He, for example, allows Amauri to cut in front of a long line of *candangos* waiting in the barber shop and obsequiously offers Amauri a pill meant to keep the smell of the workers' "sovacos, virilhas, hálitos e suores" [armpits, groins, bad breath, and sweat] (60) from giving him a headache, thus apologizing for how the workers contaminate his barbershop on Saturdays.

Amauri is compelled to censure the barber's complaints of the working class clients, yet the language of the pilot's censure is so pretentious that it undermines his message: "são cheiros que têm a autenticidade orgânica das emanções do trabalho" [they are odors that have the organic authenticity of the emanations of work] (60). Referring to the pill that the barber gives him, Amauri connects Brasília's workers to those of ancient cities in order to celebrate them, but he comes across as trying to prove himself learned, which reads as a performance of his high status: "Deviam feder assim os construtores de Babilônia, Mênfis e Alexandria. Mas você dispõe das vantagens do progresso científico, e a tal respeito é mais feliz do que Hamurabi, Ransés e os Ptolomeus" [The construction workers of Babylon, Memphis, and Alexandria must have stunk like that. But you possess the advantage of scientific progress, and in that respect you are happier than

Hammurabi, Ramses, and the Ptolemies] (63). Although Timóteo is rude about the *candangos* when he speaks to Amauri, when he shaves the *candango* José Maria de Encarnação, Timóteo is thorough, congenial, and offers a fair price, which underscores the camaraderie between classes.

A similar mixture of social classes occurs during the inauguration of Brasília's first *superquadra*. Although the blue and white-collar workers celebrate in the same place eating the same type of meat—*paca*⁶⁴—the treatment of the poor and rich is divided in such a way as to foretell who the *superquadras* will actually be for. In the park, the *candangos* eat *paca* from a large oval table while watching a silent film projected on one of the residential building's white walls. In contrast, the elite celebrate from a second floor apartment in an adjacent residential building at a party full of the iconography of privilege: the guests listen to Brazilian opera and classical music, drink European wine and cognac, and eat off of the silverware of the Brasília Palace, a glamorous hotel designed by Oscar Niemeyer. The elite are “isolados lá em cima” [isolated above] (108) watching the crowd below ““com tolerância democrática”” [‘with democratic tolerance’] (109), a term that indicates their lack of real conviction that Brasília can or should dramatically alter class hierarchies.

An interaction between Amauri and a NOVACAP employee serves as one of many of the novel's examples of the clash between the system of favors and the system of democracy. The elite members of the Brasília construction team in *Paralelo 16* frequently use the words *democracy*, *democratic*, and *democratize* to legitimize building Brasília, yet see no contradiction between this representation of Brasília as a beacon of

⁶⁴ Paca is a large brown rodent with white spots found in tropical and subtropical America.

social democracy and their own scramble to obtain the best housing, salaries, and promotions through undemocratic means. When the guests are leaving the *superquadra* party, Amauri, drunk and standing up on a jeep, calls the Abranches twins and their coworker to view the spectacle of the party, likening it to ancient amphitheatres to give it a mythic gravitas. He makes no effort to see the event as egalitarian and once again shows off his knowledge of ancient culture: “Venham, subam para aqui. Vejam com olhos de ver, como espectadores cultas, eruditas, o efeito na unidade de vizinhança. Aquela mesa no centro! . . . Não está parecendo o kólion de Epidauro? A cáveade Aspendos?” [Come up here. Behold with your seeing eyes, as cultured, erudite spectators, the effect of the neighborhood unity. That table in the center! . . . Doesn’t it seem like the Epidaurus *kólion*? The Aspendos *cáveade*?] (110). Eneida Rabelo, a NOVACAP colleague, accuses Amauri of being elitist as if it were somehow forbidden to speak of class divisions that everyone knew existed, “Ora, tenente, deixe disso! Volte ao natural! Democratize-se!” [Come off it, lieutenant! Speak normally! Democratize yourself!] (110). Yet Eneida herself takes a NOVACAP job in Paris selling residential lots to rich foreigners, thus facilitating the process of blocking working class access to the relatively few apartments within the Pilot Plan.

The Brasília NOVACAP staff receives a postcard from Eneida from Paris in which she laments the growth of slums around Brasília. Her postcard triggers Amauri’s resentment of the lower classes’ exclusion from Brasília, a reality far different than the plan. Amauri thinks to himself angrily: “Favelas . . . Os pais doam sangue para transfusões, os filhos engraxam sapatos de turistas, e tu, sirigaita em menopausa, ganhas em dólares para oferecer lotes da Asa Norte ao Selassié da Abissínia e da Asa Sul a

Onassis e Calas, exploradores da jogatina internacional” [*Favelas* . . . Parents donate blood for transfusions, children shine tourists’ shoes, and you, menopausal minx, are paid in dollars to offer North Wing lots to [Haile] Selassie of Abyssinia and South Wing lots to [Aristotle] Onassis and [Maria] Callas, exploiters of the international gambling addiction] (237-8). José Marques da Silva’s diary provides another view of how people were cheated out of housing. His friend Salvador, who was an office boy at the Palácio do Planalto, the home of the executive branch of government, was denied the apartment he was promised (73). It is one of the many examples in the diary of working class residents of the new capital feeling cheated by Brasília’s promises.

The contradictions between the Brasília bourgeoisie’s purported belief and its actions can be linked historically to contradictions present in the previous century. Brazilian independence was based on European political models taken out of context and projected onto a slave-powered agrarian economy. As Roberto Schwarz famously argues in his essay “As idéias fora do lugar” [Ideas out of Place] (784), the Brazilian bourgeoisie purported to adopt European liberalism while still dependent on slavery, despite liberalism’s fundamental defense of individual freedoms. The Brasília bourgeoisie faced the challenge of reconciling the democracy that Brasília symbolized and a desire to maintain the comforts that came with a wide income gap. As much as Amauri may idealize the promise of Brasília, he himself moves within a world of favors, more than he would ever admit. After his love affair with the twins becomes widely known, his grandfather, in order to quell the scandal, finds Amauri a Brazilian Air Force job abroad. Amauri does not apply for or earn the job. Instead, it is a favor his grandfather arranges. Martinho thinks to himself, “Preciso custe o que custar arranjar a nomeação de Amauri

para Washington” [At whatever cost, I need to arrange for Amauri a nomination to go to Washington] (236). Vieira’s novel demonstrates how many members of the Brasília elite unconsciously lived a contradiction in their simultaneous belief that Brasília symbolized democracy and their use of favors.

Brazil’s Self-Esteem

Certain members of the military elite in *Paralelo 16* romanticize Brasília’s role in the country’s progress to the point of insisting on a simplistic progress narrative for Brazil, yet their conviction demonstrates how Brasília marked a fundamental transition in the country. The main debates about progress presented in fictional representations of infrastructure shifted remarkably from the *belle époque* period (1894-1914) to the 1960s due to the growth of Brazilian industry and infrastructure, which allowed for increasing self-sufficiency in the nation. While debates about progress found in representations of the first electric streetcars and streetlights centered on conflicts about how much influence should be ceded to foreign companies and aesthetics, industrial developments that took place between 1920 and 1960 shifted the debate to one about how Brazil should develop itself.⁶⁵ One of the most extreme examples of this shift occurred when trying to choose an urban planner for Brasília. When Le Corbusier wrote to JK offering himself as

⁶⁵ The 1920s saw the growth of small, urban industry, especially in São Paulo. The junior military officers of the 1920s, following certain aspects of Positivism that remained popular, advocated for industrial and technological development in Brazil (Eakin 40). The historic modernist arts extravaganza, the “Semana de Arte Moderna” [The Week of Modern Art], held in São Paulo in 1922 loudly affirmed that Brazil no longer needed to copy European styles since it had found an authentic voice of its own in music, visual, and literary arts. During the 1930s and 40s, Getúlio Vargas promoted Brazilian industry, and by the 1940s about 90 percent of consumer goods were manufactured domestically (Eakin 44). Yet it was JK who drastically expanded infrastructure more than any other president by expanding the industries of iron, steel, communication systems, highway building, construction, electricity generation, and vehicle manufacturing (Eakin 50; Skidmore 203). While Vargas shied away from international loans, JK borrowed heavily from wealthier nations to boost Brazil’s industry (Souza 116), which led to increased inflation.

the urban planner of the new capital, the president did not even bother responding to the renowned architect (Cavalcanti 92) because Brasília and its web of highways were to be designed and built by Brazilians. The convictions of Amauri's grandfather, the retired Admiral Martinho Higino, and the Air Force pilot Enéias in *Paralelo 16* represent the patriotic desire, held by JK himself, for Brasília to be an unequivocal symbol of national progress.

In the novel, Martinho insists that Brasília symbolizes democracy, modernization, fairness, and hope. He makes his arguments by connecting the construction of Brasília to a larger historical context via knowledge he acquired during his career with the Brazilian navy; but this historicization is by no means impartial. Martinho contrasts the harrowing working conditions of the rubber boom that took place in Brazil during World War II with the far superior working conditions of the construction of Brasília—which offered better pay and professional advancement—in order to establish a progress narrative in which Brazil and its government are continually improving themselves. Thus, the novel demonstrates how some members of the Brazilian elite denied inequality to make themselves feel better about their lives and their country. Martinho says, “O nosso comportamento durante o apogeu da hévea foi o de subdesenvolvidos, de novo-ricos ignaros! . . . Compare-se, a propósito, aquelas atitudes da burguesia nortista com a esclarecida cautela estatal no caso agora de Brasília!” [Our behavior at the peak of the rubber boom was that of underdeveloped people, of an ignorant nouveau riche! . . . Compare, therefore, the attitudes of that northern bourgeoisie with the enlightened caution of the state in regard to Brasília now!] (40). He claims Brasília is a hyperbolic source of social democracy:

Nunca houve no Brasil, e raramente terá havido no mundo, uma oportunidade mais democrática para o povo. Isto é, para o povo obrigado ao nomadismo por falta de condições sedentárias úteis. A construção de Brasília . . . dá ensejo a essas massas empíricas se transformarem em equipes técnicas . . . Eu vi as condições em que trabalhavam os seringueiros. Agora, gente das mesmas bandas que êles, do Nordeste, desde inícios de 57 converge para o Planalto Central. (52-53)

[There has never been in Brazil, and rarely will be in the world, a more democratic opportunity for the people. That is, for the people forced to be nomads because of the lack of stable employment available. The construction of Brasília . . . gives these empirical masses an opportunity to transform themselves into technical teams . . . I saw the conditions in which the rubber tappers worked. Now, people like them, from the Northeast, since the beginning of 57 converge in the Central Plateau.]

Although Martinho views Brasília as the major impetus of change, he sees improvement throughout Brazil. He admits some problems, such as inflation, but shrugs them off as not impeding the economic growth of Brazil's poor. He romanticizes the quality of life in the *favelas*: "Ah! Deus é brasileiro sim. Mesmo agora, com o atual estado proveniente de tanta coisa, inclusive a inflação, nas favelas há rádios e televisões mais as respectivas antenas, e em cada carnaval os blocos dos morros gastam milhões com fantasias tipo Versalhes" [Oh! God is Brazilian indeed. Even now, in the current state that derives from so many things, including inflation, the *favelas* have radios and televisions with their respective antennas and in every carnival the *favela* floats spend millions on Versailles-style costumes] (48). Amauri playfully teases Martinho about his fervent idealism: "Bravos, avô! O senhor é o patriarca do otimismo" [Bravo, granddad! You are the patriarch of optimism] (52). However, the nickname only feeds Martinho's romanticization, which seems heavily influenced by JK's own conception of the capital as both a rupture with the past and a symbol of democracy.

Four former rubber tappers turned *candangos* initially share Martinho's optimism (minus the pomp), but the novel, by eliminating these characters from the plot, cleverly implies that they were overoptimistic and that there was no place for them in the completed Brasília. Lines from a conversation among the four *candangos* suggest that some rural people were eager for the urban job opportunities that a more industrialized Brazil could offer to relatively unskilled workers, especially after the catastrophic drought in the northeast at the end of 1958 (Holston 260): "A verdade é que não damos para lavradores. A seca e a enchente acabaram descorçoando a gente. Damos mesmo é para operários, candangos" [The truth is that we aren't meant to be farmers. The droughts and the floods ended up disheartening us. We were meant to be workmen, *candangos*] (77). These characters share both Martinho's confidence in the promise of Brasília and his hatred of rubber tapping. Although the *candangos* do not elaborate on the horrors of rubber tapping, the narrator explains that the *candangos* Vitalino and Indalécio, who formed and dried the rubber, suffered permanent and severe damage to their eyes, lungs, and skin. Vitalino surprisingly projects his resentment onto the physical Amazon by hoping to help build the BR-14 highway, which spans from Brasília to Belém, Pará: "ando com vontade de me alistar como trabalhador da BR-14. Assim me vingarei da floresta pondo-a abaixo com máquinas" [I'd like to sign up to work on the BR-14. Then, I'd get my revenge on the rainforest by bulldozing it] (75). Thus, by a strange twist, highway construction is linked to vengeance against inhumane working conditions.

Yet after the inauguration of Brasília, these characters, who have been relatively well developed, are never mentioned again, with no word of where they are. During the building of Brasília as told in *Paralelo 16*, the elite members of NOVACAP frequently

interact with workers in friendly exchanges, and the narrator develops working-class characters in depth in the first part of the novel. However, as the possibility of Brasília's Pilot Plan housing lower-class residents grows slim and as the construction jobs begin to peter out after the capital's inauguration, the *candangos* cease to appear in the text. The poor are only mentioned as a conglomeration.

Impoverished satellite cities continued to expand around Brasília in a way that ironically created, as James Holston describes, class divisions that were more extreme than in other Brazilian cities:

the organization of an authorized periphery around the capital created a kind of dual social order which was both legally and spatially segregated. . . . While the central districts of other metropolitan regions featured a mixture of elite residential quarters and slums, there was an absolute spatial segregation of the two in Brasília. In fact, the Plano Piloto was and is surrounded by a moat, a so-called green belt or recreational zone, 14 kilometers wide, which separates it from the nearest satellite city. (283)

Brasília became a comfortable, pleasant place for middle class families. People frequently comment on what a good city it is for raising children (Calvalcanti 102). Yet, it is a challenging place for the poor who work there, but live in satellite cities, and, therefore, have long commutes and little access to the benefits of the modernist city.

Like Martinho, the pilot Enéias, who works for NOVACAP, wants to keep the symbol of Brasília untarnished, but the narrator's inclusion of less utopian scenes challenges the symbol of Brasília the pilot endeavors to keep intact. The pilots Jair and Enéias argue about how best to represent Brasília, thus illustrating the shift in the debate about infrastructure that now placed Brazil, as opposed to foreign companies, at the center of the country's own development. The question is no longer how much power

should be given to foreign companies but how Brazilians ought to depict their own country's development of itself, which is a radical change. When Captain Jair mentions rumors about corruption in Brasília, Major Enéias complains that many Brazilians self-effacingly claim that their country is underdeveloped. He expresses his dislike of disparaging comments about Brasília, which he believes undermine Brazil's rapid progress:

Agora, quando está surgindo uma construção ciclópica mas harmoniosa, que em hipótese alguma resulta de predomínio duma organização de patifes e canalhas porque o ritmo dela demonstra capacidade, sacrifício, virtudes técnicas que não podem existir sem senso de responsabilidade e ética, então propalamos que somos corruptos. . . . quando afinal de contas Brasília é uma sigla de virtudes nacionais. (103)

[Now, a construction project is taking place that is Cyclopean, but harmonious, and in no way is it the result of a dominant team of rascals and scoundrels because the rhythm of the project demonstrates the team's efficiency and sacrifice, technical virtues that can't exist without a sense of responsibility and ethics. Then we spread rumors that we're corrupt. . . . when all things considered Brasília spells national virtue.]

Enéias would consider it unpatriotic to say anything negative about Brasília. Without explicitly acknowledging that there has been any corruption in the construction of Brasília, Enéias dismisses the idea by grandly noting that corruption is not unique to the new capital but inevitable in all large projects: "Obras de tamanha amplitude, em qualquer parte do mundo e em qualquer tempo, em qualquer raça e em qualquer povo, atraem oportunistas" [Projects of such size, in any part of the world at any time, of any race or any people, attract opportunists] (103). Whereas Enéias prefers to draw attention away from such opportunists, the narrator, conversely, provides more details about them, a choice that undermines Enéias's preference. Jaci and Juçara have begun noticing

entre os freqüentadores de hotéis, da NOVACAP, dos canteiros-de-obras, certo Estado-Maior e respectivos espões, de gabarito superior à classe dos fornecedores e dos caixeiros-viajantes. Determinada gente ambígua que conhecia cedo, antes da publicação no *Diário Oficial* dos termos das concorrências, o quantum dos orçamentos, e que assim podia apresentar projetos e sabia a hora de apresentá-los. (87)

[among those who frequented the hotels, NOVACAP, and the building sites, a certain captain-general and respective spies of a mold superior to that of the contractors and traveling salesmen. These ambiguous people knew the terms of the competitions and the amount of the budgets before the *Diário Oficial* came out, and therefore could present projects and knew when to do so.]

Yet, in keeping with Enéias's opinion, the narrator gives us few other details about corruption and does not describe any corrupt characters, as if to evoke the idea that while corruption exists it is an exception to the rule.

For Enéias, to be patriotic is to praise Brazil unconditionally, since he believes that that is what it takes for people to begin to believe in the country. After listing how the construction of Brasília has been impressive and honest, he asks, “Estamos ou não estamos dando ao mundo uma prova singular da nossa auto-suficiência?” [Are we or are we not giving the world remarkable proof of our self-sufficiency?] (103–104).

Throughout his novel, Vieira explores the symbolic richness of Brasília before and after its construction. His use of the metaphor of the blackout reveals the social impact that modernist architecture was designed to have and the ways in which it fell short in the Brazilian capital. His descriptions of a Núcleo Bandeirante barbershop and the inauguration of the first *superquadra* exemplify how people spoke of radical transformations of class hierarchies in Brazil while their actions contradicted their words. Vieira creates dialogues and debates which elucidate how maintaining certain myths

about Brasília's perfection was important to certain Brazilians because the new capital was symbolic of the country's self-sufficiency, an image they believed should not be tarnished by negativity. No matter how different characters choose to represent Brasília, they are all drawn to its symbolic significance, agreeing on the boldness of the project that attracted massive international attention and altered the future of the country. Brasília was literally and figuratively at the center of national progress.

Conclusion

In a country generally celebrated above all else for the beauty of its coastline and rainforests, Brasília challenges exclusively nature-focused visions of Brazil. Unlike the former capital, Rio de Janeiro—which was primarily praised for its beaches and dramatic green hills—Brasília is a city celebrated for its design and architecture, elements that were planned and built for and by Brazilians. This is a remarkable shift from what is natural (Sugar Loaf and Ipanema Beach) or European (the *Avenida Central*) in style to what is manmade and distinctively national, such as the airplane-shaped plan for the new capital, the Itamarity Palace, the National Theater, and the Supreme Court. These elements, as well as the scale of the new capital and the optimism of the era, increased Brasília's symbolic weight. Fictional texts set in Brasília recognize the extent to which the symbol of the new capital looms heavily over the real city.

This chapter has explored the how four texts develop the intricacies and contradictions of Brasília, in part to complicate common oversimplifications of the capital as *the* symbol of national progress that legitimated the country in the eyes of natives and foreigners. João Guimarães Rosa's short story "As margens da felicidade"

considers how a young boy's frightened reaction to Brasília under construction contrasted with his joyful response to a turkey, to investigate the complexity and capriciousness of our emotional reactions and the impossibility of creating anything utopian. Clarice Lispector's *crônica* "Brasília: cinco dias" creates mythic pasts for Brasília that undermine idealizations of the new capital and respond to the city's unique formal elements. José Marques da Silva's diary *Diário de um candango* reveals how even those who felt deceived by the promise of Brasília often saw the new capital as symbolic of Brazilian progress. José Geraldo Vieira's novel *Paralelo 16: Brasília* uncovers the tension between the promised and the real Brasília by engaging expectations about its design's capacity to transform human behavior, double standards regarding the capital's democratic ideal, and motivations for upholding an idealized view of Brasília.

Writers were drawn to the city's self-conscious construction and aesthetic project, which—as Clarice hints—revealed the similarities between making a planned city and making a work of art. Returning to the contrast mentioned between the 1950s as the era of the *novo* and the 1960s as the era of the *popular*, it seems that the tension inherent in this transition resonates with how 1960s fiction regarded the late 1950s construction project. Brasília succeeded marvelously in its ambitions to be new, yet largely failed in its ambitions to be egalitarian. Writing from an era with a growing concern for the *popular*, the authors investigate how the tension between new and popular manifests itself in the tension between the symbolic representations and the daily realities of Brasília.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROGRESS NARRATIVES AND MONUMENTAL PUBLIC WORKS: BRAZIL UNDER THE MILITARY REGIME (1964-1985)

In 1971, one of Brazil's most famous musicians, Caetano Veloso, then self-exiled in London due to his politically controversial music, was allowed to travel to Brazil for his parents' fortieth wedding anniversary. Upon arrival at the international airport in Rio de Janeiro, Caetano was detained by the police. Their goal? Make him write a song in praise of the Transamazon Highway, a massive public works project launched by the military dictatorship (1964-1985) in 1970 (Dunn 164). The government was not only creating *actual* public works, but also *narratives* about those public works, and it sought the publicity of one of its greatest singers. Caetano, who had publicly opposed the regime, was now being pressured to sing the praises of one of its major development projects. He refused.⁶⁶

Economic prosperity allowed for the construction of superlatively large public works, which the military regime used with varying success as symbols of its victory as a

⁶⁶ A few hours later, he was released. Getúlio Vargas's *Estado Novo* (1937-1945) also used music to further patriotic programs meant to legitimize a dictatorship, as Daryle Williams argues:

Several studies on popular music have demonstrated how the DIP [Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda (Department of the Press and of Propaganda)], hoping to "educate" samba, called upon well-known musicians and lyricists to compose samba lyrics that praised the Estado Novo or Vargas for the bounty of gifts that they had bestowed on the nation. When these compositions hit the airwaves, they helped popularize and commercialize hyperpatriotic lyrics that complemented the Vargas regime's goals of civic renewal and social uplift. With titles such as *Glória do Brasil!* (Glories of Brazil!), *Salve 19 de Abril!* (Long live April 19! [Vargas's birthday]), and *É Negócio Casar* (It's time to get married), the ideological message for these state-sponsored sambas was not difficult to understand. (86) (The first brackets are my own and the second are the authors.)

modernizer. The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time marked by two oppositions, one related to Brazil's actual public works, the other related to narratives about these structures. The first opposition is between Brazil's financial surge, known as the economic miracle (1969-1973), and the military regime's draconian repression of political resistance. The second is the opposition between government-funded progress narratives and alternative texts that contest such progress narratives. To exemplify these oppositions, this chapter first examines a government-sponsored anthology of praise poems to the Transamazon highway, then offers an in-depth analysis of Domingos Pellegrini's 1977 short story "A maior ponte do mundo" [The Longest Bridge in the World], which challenges a bridge's contribution to Brazil's progress. A brief introduction to the regime's public works will help frame this analysis.

Three massive public works initiatives—often suggestively referred to in Portuguese as "obras faraônicas" [Pharaonic structures]—were started during President Emílio Garrastazu Médici's administration (1969-1974): the Transamazon Highway, the Itaipu Dam (a joint initiative with Paraguay), and the Rio-Niterói Bridge.⁶⁷ The Transamazon Highway was to continue due west from pre-existing northeastern highways to cross a vast stretch of the Amazon rainforest that had previously been unreachable by motor vehicle, thereby connecting the Peruvian border to the Atlantic Ocean. The Itaipu Dam was the world's largest hydroelectric power station until the

⁶⁷ These projects have captured the imagination of artists from Brazil and beyond. In 1979, Henri Pitaut wrote *Las siete caídas del Río Paraná* [The Seven Falls of the Paraná River], a novel initially written in French, which was published only in Spanish. Dedicated to the Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner and explicitly anti-communist, the novel laments how the Itaipu Dam covered the Paraguayan waterfalls known as the Saltos de Guairá. The *carioca* writer and doctor Jorge Martins de Oliveira wrote the novel *Atentado em Itaipu* [Attack in Itaipu] in 1983 in which he imagines the collapse of the Itaipu Dam and its consequences. A visit to Iguazu Falls and the Itaipu Dam in 1988 inspired Philip Glass's "Itaipu," a symphonic cantata, the third movement of which is entitled "The Dam."

completion of the Three Gorges Dam in China in 2008. The Rio-Niterói Bridge, connecting the two cities in its name, was the longest box girder bridge—a flat bridge with no towers—in the world when it was completed.

Brazil's military dictatorship, which patriotically described the country under its rule as “Brasil grande” [Big Brazil], sought more than efficiency and the promotion of industry from its intensive construction of public works. As the name “Brasil grande” implies, size mattered. Both the actual construction projects and the narratives of progress surrounding them were instrumental to the regime's self-image. One of Médici's speeches, broadcast on the radio and on television in honor of the seventh anniversary of the Revolution of 1964⁶⁸ argued that in order to overcome hardship, Brazil must “promover o desenvolvimento em dimensões mundiais” [promote development on a global scale] (*Tarefa de todos nós* 82). Speaking more specifically to the superlative nature of the regime's development initiatives, Médici, in a speech given in 1971 described the Itaipu Dam as being built by a bi-national company “que não terá paralelo, no mundo, por sua natureza e magnitude” [that is unparalleled in the world in its nature and magnitude] (*O povo não está só* 36). A government-sponsored book about the Transamazon Highway construction described the highway as “a mais gigantesca via terrestre pioneira em construção no mundo” [the most gigantic pioneer highway in the world] (*Transamazônica: uma experiência rodoviária nos trópicos* 1).

The Brazilian military regime's preoccupation with creating narratives to highlight the superlative aspects of its large public works is rooted in the origins of its power. Since the military seized power unconstitutionally, yet was obsessed with law

⁶⁸ The Revolution of 1964 is the official term for the coup that put the military regime in power.

abidance, its officials went to great lengths to—as historian Thomas Skidmore phrases it—“legitimar o ilegítimo” [legitimize the illegitimate] (225). Historian Carlos Fico elaborates Skidmore’s succinct argument, observing that the military regime, “embora autoritário, ditatorial, não pretendia ser identificado desse modo. . . . os militares buscaram o rodízio dos presidentes . . . tentaram construir um arcabouço legal com atos institucionais que ‘ocultassem’ sua ilegitimidade” [albeit authoritarian, dictatorial, did not intend to be identified as such. . . . the military officers selected an assortment of presidents . . . they tried to construct a legal framework with institutional acts that ‘hid’ their illegitimacy] (95). The modernization symbolized by the regime’s massive public works could serve to legitimize the dictatorship both at home and abroad by demonstrating its success in a specific area of national progress. Along with Brazil’s 1970 World Cup victory and the so-called economic miracle, the regime could use record-breaking public works to bolster its public image. But infrastructure could only aid the dictatorship’s legitimacy if its citizens and the world saw these public works through the same lens of modernization and miracle. The dictatorship needed to control not just the bridges, but what those bridges would symbolize.

Building some of the world’s biggest public works would symbolize the supposed greatness and modern nature of the regime, an attempt to legitimize a late bloomer among Latin American dictatorships, which was particularly important for the regime’s reputation abroad. These public works were simultaneously monuments of economic development, and monuments to the regime’s progress. What I shall refer to henceforth as the regime’s *public works progress narrative* is the way in which the government scripted its superlative public works as proof of its success at modernizing the country,

which was essential to its legitimization of its rule. To this end, the regime sought the endorsement of artists, both famous and amateur.

The regime solicited artists' praise for its large-scale public works, a tactic in keeping with its propaganda strategy that sought, as Fico argues, to inspire patriotism without direct references to a specific political party or dictator (146). In 1969, the Minister of Transport Mário de Andreazza established the first National Transportation Week, a massive endeavor to amp up the regime's public works progress narrative. Such progress narratives helped justify the tax dollars the government would spend on roads. Moreover, celebrations of the regime's public works distracted attention from the government's censorship, restrictions, and violence.

The first National Transportation Week was held in July, and it included contests for the best paintings, prints, and sculptures related to the week's theme as well as the organization of an anthology, *Livro dos transportes* [Book of Transport], edited by Dinah Silveira de Queiróz (Silveira de Queiróz 432). The extensive anthology features fictional and nonfictional texts, ranging from a passage from the famed *Carta de Pêro Vaz de Caminha a El-Rei D. Manuel* [Letter from Pero Vaz de Caminha to King Manuel] written in 1500, to modernist poems by Mário de Andrade, to a recent newspaper article written by Mário de Andreazza. Through contests, publications, and propaganda, the regime sought to generate in the people a sense of their participation in and approval of the country's development (Fico 130). This preoccupation with constructing public opinions as well as public works continued in subsequent years. From 1971 to 1973, the military regime's Assessoria Especial de Relações Públicas (Aerp) launched three propaganda campaigns geared toward construction: *Em Tempo de Construir* [Time for Construction],

Você Constrói o Brasil [You Build Brazil], and the *País que se Transforma e se Constrói* [Country that Transforms Itself and Constructs Itself] (Fico 121).

While Caetano's resisted bowing down to the Transamazon Highway, many Brazilians were eager to write praise poems in its honor. In 1971, the *Serviço de Documentação do Ministério dos Transportes* [Documentation Service of the Ministry of Transport] held a competition for the "best" poem about the Transamazon Highway. The selection committee judged the poems more on their patriotic praise than their literary attributes. A total of 803 poems were entered, twenty of which were published in the anthology *Tempo de estrada: 20 poemas da Transamazônica* [Road Time: 20 Poems of the Transamazon] in November of 1972 by the same Documentation Service.⁶⁹

By selecting the twenty most glowing depictions of the highway for *Tempo de estrada*, the government cleverly created a framework that allows the Brazilian people do its promotion for it. Moreover, the book *Tempo de estrada* was distributed free of charge, allowing it to be disseminated easily. The poems refer directly to the government's reasons for building the highway. Many provide lists of the raw materials expected to be found along the highway, especially gold and diamonds. Some poems speak to concerns about protecting the Brazilian portion of the Amazon from "cobiça estrangeira" [foreign greed] (Setti in Duarte 41). Many address the humanitarian effort to provide farmland along the Transamazon for poor Northeasterners. For example, one poem announces that the highway will mark the

Fim das andanças
de todos os nordestinos,
que, por séculos,
foram da desgraça peregrinos,

⁶⁹ The *Instituto Nacional do Livro* [National Book Institute] also supported the publication (Duarte 7).

fugindo das secas,
sem destino. (Soares Dutra in Duarte 135)

[End of the wanderings
of all the Northeasterners
who, for centuries,
disgraced, became pilgrims,
escaping the droughts,
without destiny.]

In addition, the selected poems emphasized the government's desire to facilitate transportation and further integrate the Amazon rainforest into the country's network of highways;

E o norte-sul, leste-oeste,
não mais Brasil bi-partido
e sim partilha-verdade,
hão de encontrar o seu pleno
sentido de liberdade! (Prado in Duarte 148)

[And the north-south, east-west,
no longer Brazil bipartite
but now true-sharing,
they will find their full
sense of liberty!]

The flat and predictable poems have little literary merit. But that was never their purpose. They were chosen as the “best” because they contribute to a progress narrative in which the Transamazon Highway—and by extension the regime that built it—is leading the country unequivocally toward modernization. The poems refer to the highway as the “via-progresso” [progress-way] (Dias Otto in Duarte 36) that represents Brazil's “marcha do progresso” [march toward progress] (Setti in Duarte 41) built by the “pioneiros do progresso” [pioneers of progress] (Castro Lima in Duarte 186), using construction trucks whose powerful wheels “marcarão todo progresso” [will mark all progress] in the Amazonian “seio do progresso” [breast of progress] (Castro Chamma in Duarte 82, 83).

Strengthening this progress narrative, most of the poems adopt a collective “we,” showing how the project benefits the entire nation. The highway was controversial because it exposed a vast swath of rainforest to environmentally detrimental forms of logging, ranching, mining, and agriculture (Smith 755-61). However, several poems link deforestation to progress, backing the widely felt sentiment that Brazil had the right, if not the duty, to reap economic benefits from its land. Sections from two poems elucidate this stance:

Corta, corta, Meninão,
Em todas as direções,
Não permitas que a lâmina repouse
Um segundo.
E olha com respeito a dádiva divina,
A Pátria luminosa que te coube (Whately in Duarte 162)

Árvores anosas
de tronco gigante
serão derrubadas
para que em sua marcha
triunfal
passe o progresso (Siqueira in Duarte 155)

[Cut, cut, Big Boy,
In all directions,
Don't let the blade rest
A second.
And look with respect at the divine gift,
The luminous *Pátria* that covers you]

[Age-old trees
with gigantic trunks
will be chopped down
so that in its march
triumphal
progress passes]

The poetry anthology and Caetano's refusal to praise the Transamazon Highway illustrate how public works may become entwined in competing representations of Brazil.

The propaganda poems demonstrate the sentiments that Domingos Pellegrini's short story "A maior ponte do mundo"—the focus of this chapter—is writing against. As his title ironically suggests, his short story questions the logic by which the biggest public works necessarily equal the most legitimate form of progress. Pellegrini challenges the regime's progress narrative by exposing the public works' ambiguities. The author uncovers smaller, more personal loyalties, which are overshadowed by the superlative narrative favored by the regime. In so doing, Pellegrini asks Brazilians to reexamine their value system, and their attachment to so-called progress. The short story, published in 1977 in Pellegrini's anthology *O homem vermelho* [The Red Man] and tweaked by the author in minimal ways in subsequent editions, has been ranked one of the one-hundred best Brazilian short stories of the 20th century, anthologized and reprinted in various editions.⁷⁰

Ostensibly, Pellegrini's narrator, an electrician, sets out to tell the story of a lost set of pliers. The short story begins:

Eu tinha um alicate que só vendo, encabado de plástico amarelo, na escuridão fosforecia [sic]; de aço alemão legítimo; usei oito anos quase todo dia, foi meu companheiro em Ibatinga, Acaraí, Salto Osório, Ilha Solteira e Salto Capivara. Se juntasse um metro de cada fio que cortei naquele alicate, tinha cobre pro resto da vida. Daí, quando você perde uma ferramenta que já usou muito, é o mesmo que perder um dedo.⁷¹ (107)

[I had a pair of pliers that you should've seen, covered in yellow plastic, they shined in the dark; legitimate German steel; I used them almost every day for eight years, they were my pals in Ibatinga, Acaraí, Salto Osório, Ilha Solteira and Salto Capivara. If you put together a meter of every wire I cut with those pliers, you'd have enough copper for a lifetime. So, when you lose a tool that you've used a lot, it's the same as losing a finger.]

⁷⁰ It is included in the publisher Objetiva's anthology of the one-hundred best short stories of the twentieth century selected by Italo Moriconi.

⁷¹ All quotations from Pellegrini's short story come from his 2005 anthology *Melhores Contos: Domingos Pellegrini*. This is, in Pellegrini's view, the most complete version of the story (Email interview).

The narrator has traveled throughout Brazil working as an electrician on dams built during the military regime, thus he has given power to the nation's industry. He is proud of his work, but his pride is tempered by the loss of his pliers, a loss that is eerily likened to physical violence, and which frames the short story's development of a more drastic loss. The electrician loses his pliers while wiring the Rio-Niterói Bridge. This is significant because, despite pressure from bridge officials to admire the superlative structure, the narrator opts to invest loyalty in a decidedly smaller and more personal object than the regime's public works. To tell the story of losing his pliers, the narrator focuses on another topic also smaller and more personal than the bridge itself: his and his aptly nicknamed friend and fellow electrician 50 Volts's experience wiring it. By focusing on this small, personal element of the bridge's construction and revealing how the bridge's superlative length was used to mask coercion, the short story exposes the ambiguities that are necessarily omitted from the regime's public works progress narrative. Pellegrini's short story contrasts the genuineness of personal, human loyalties with the hollowness of the regime's sweeping, superlative claims.

While the Transamazon Highway was among the regime's most controversial and ill-fated projects, the Rio-Niterói Bridge was one of its most successful. The eight-mile bridge was an engineering feat masterminded by a team of 150 engineers and employing, at its peak, ten thousand workers ("Maior ponte do Brasil faz aniversário"). It facilitates transportation for all social classes in Niterói and Rio de Janeiro, the latter of which is a city whose hills, lake, coast, and population density make road construction and traffic solutions especially challenging. The bridge's construction did not cause any major displacement of people and buildings. By demonstrating how the bridge triggers the

narrator's conflicted feelings of both awe and disgust, the short story shows the ambiguities inherent in the bridge's connotations. The bridge is, on the one hand, an engineering feat and a source of common good and, on the other, a project that condoned inhumane working conditions and took the lives of an unknown number of workers. The military regime never released the death toll of bridge builders under the pretext that it was a matter of national security ("Último símbolo do Brasil grande").

Because its construction both began and ended during the military dictatorship, the Rio-Niterói Bridge was a jewel in the regime's crown, even though the economic boom had ended by the time the bridge was completed. In 1974, at the inauguration of the bridge, Minister of Transport Andreazza addressed an audience of roughly 10,000, referring to the symbolism of the bridge (Mano). He called the bridge a "novo símbolo de um País novo" [a new symbol of a new Country] and a "símbolo de nossa determinação" [symbol of our determination] (213), referring to all Brazilians. At another point in his address, he elaborates on the bridge's symbolism, describing it as a "monumento à Revolução de 1964" [monument to the Revolution of 1964] (212) that

simboliza ainda em sua majestade:

- a decisão do povo brasileiro de vencer todos os obstáculos ao nosso pleno desenvolvimento econômico e social;
- a capacidade da engenharia brasileira de projetar e executar projetos da maior complexidade;
- a dedicação e o exemplo do operário brasileiro, cujo ânimo, até nas horas dramáticas desta obra, jamais arrefeceu, tendo ao contrário, saído fortalecido dos eventuais reveses próprios de empreendimento de tamanha envergadura;
- o constante apoio da opinião pública aos órgãos do Governo federal incumbidos de desenvolver o singular projeto. (212)

[symbolizes in its majesty:

- the Brazilian people's decision to overcome all of the obstacles to our complete economic and social development;

- Brazilian engineers’ capacity to plan and execute projects of the greatest complexity;
- the dedication and the example of the Brazilian worker whose courage, even in the most dramatic hours of this project, never faltered, but on the contrary, was strengthened by the occasional setbacks of an undertaking of such a vast scope;
- public opinion’s constant support of the federal government in charge of developing the singular project.]

While the bridge did indeed carry this symbolic weight for many, Pellegrini’s short story calls into question Andreazza’s grandiose representation of the bridge’s national symbolism. In 1967, Artur da Costa e Silva became the second military president to be elected indirectly by congress, and the bridge, inaugurated after his death, was officially named the Ponte Presidente Costa e Silva in his honor. During Costa e Silva’s term, the AI-5 (“Acto Institucional Número 5” [Institutional Act Number 5]) decree was issued. AI-5 marked the start of the *anos de chumbo* [lead years] phase of military rule, which lasted until the end of the Médici administration in March 1974. During these years, the government took drastic steps to consolidate its power and suppress political opposition. Among other severe actions, AI-5 suspended habeas corpus, closed the National Congress for almost a year, and began the censorship of art and media deemed politically subversive. Not surprisingly, Brazilians opted to call the Ponte Presidente Costa e Silva by another name, the Ponte Rio-Niterói [Rio-Niterói Bridge]. It was a neutral, descriptive title that predated the official name, indicating the bridge’s beginning and end points.⁷² Beyond being conveniently shorter, the latter name opts for geographic identifiers over historical legacy, much like the present national currency, the Real, which depicts animals, not national heroes. Going against the apolitical grain of geographic

⁷²A *Ponte Rio-Niterói* is the title of a 1966 book-form study on whether to build a tunnel or a bridge to connect Rio de Janeiro and Niterói.

identification, Pellegrini retrieves a controversial legacy of the bridge: the unregulated mistreatment of its construction workers.

The author's various hats as a fiction writer, journalist, and political militant merge in "A maior ponte." In 1975, Pellegrini worked as a special reporter and assistant editor at the now-defunct newspaper *Panorama*, based out of Londrina, Paraná. For the first edition, he wrote a long article about workers in and around Porecatu, Paraná, which recounts low wages, child labor, deaths of dam workers, prostitution, rape, and forced overtime. Pellegrini's inspiration for writing the short story was the account of the ex-electrician Angelino Vaccarelli, who, in Pellegrini's long article, describes being forced to work twenty-four-hour shifts on the Rio-Niterói Bridge:

— Foi meu pior serviço, fui prá lá emprestado pela Companhia, disseram que era emergência, caso nacional. Faltava um mês pra inauguração e a parte elétrica estava crua, não tinha nada. Então foi uma guerra. Teve muitos dias de trabalhar 24 horas, até cair. No [sic] ultimos [sic] dias o negócio era molhar a cabeça e continuar. Do Carnaval só vi o barulho, não podia sair – e se saísse era [sic] só pra cair numa cama. Mesmo assim só deu pra preparar uma iluminação de emergência.

Angelino encerra esta história de grandes construções:

— Aí chegou o dia da inauguração. A gente trabalhou a noite inteira, de manhã evacuaram todo mundo. Às 10 horas foi a inauguração, a gente nem viu porque foi dormir um pouco. Meio-dia a gente voltou pra continuar até terminar o serviço, os carros já estavam passando. Nunca pude ver aquela ponte iluminada de longe, de noite. Vi em fotografia de revista. (40)

[— It was my worst job, I was loaned by the Company, they said it was an emergency, a national issue. There was only a month left before the inauguration, and the electrical part was raw, it had nothing. So it was a battle. There were many days that we worked for 24 hours, until we collapsed. In the last days, it was just wet your head and keep going. All I saw of Carnival was the noise, we couldn't leave – and if we did leave it was to fall onto a bed. Even so, we only had time to prepare emergency lighting.

Angelino finishes the story of big construction projects:

— Then inauguration day came. We worked all night, they evacuated everyone in the morning. The inauguration was at 10, but we

didn't even see it because we went to sleep for a bit. At noon we went back to finish the job, the cars were passing. I never got to see that bridge lit up at night up from afar. I saw a photograph in a magazine.]

This deposition was Pellegrini's source for what it was like to work on the bridge, as well as his inspiration for writing the short story (Email interview). However, "A maior ponte" in no way mimics the format of an interview. Although any reader aware of the sociopolitical context of the short story will read into it a critique of the regime and its relationship to class struggles, its narrator is unconcerned with politics. In the nonchalant voice of a man telling a story to a friend, the narrator describes how he lost his pliers during a bad job.

A brief summary of the electrician's bad job and the events leading up to it will contextualize this analysis. The unnamed narrator and 50 Volts are abruptly called off a dam they are wiring in order to travel to Rio de Janeiro to help wire the Rio-Niterói Bridge before its inauguration. Bridge officials keenly perceive how time is running dangerously short for them to complete the bridge by its 4 March 1974 deadline, which is weeks away. This project is a swansong of sorts because the possibility of limitless Brazilian public works projects is waning along with the economy, especially after the 1973 oil crisis. The officials portray the structure as a symbol of Brazil's superlative progress in order to obtain the compliance of workers and mask repressive work conditions under a sheen of patriotism. Officials oblige electricians to work extremely long shifts, so 50 Volts and the narrator—fed up—try to quit but are forced to keep working. The conditions become continually worse, and the short story ends after the workers finish the job, at which point most of them celebrate, but the narrator sulks over his lost pliers. The forced labor on the bridge serves as a microcosm of the military

regime's restrictions throughout the country, yet in a subtle enough way for the short story to have gone uncensored during the dictatorship (Pellegrini, Email interview).

Aware that work conditions will be brutal, the bridge officials in the short story offer "gifts" to electricians before they arrive at the bridge in order to preemptively silence expected complaints. Although paid triple time, the electricians will be subjected to unconstitutional forced labor, so these initial gifts and bonuses are meant to compensate them informally without any legal intervention. These incentives reveal the bridge officials' efforts to compel workers to accept subjection without protest.

Moreover, the gifts the company offers the electricians are stereotypically masculine—as much alcohol and meat as they can muster, followed by a visit to a brothel, all free of charge. Beyond buying the electricians' compliance, the company is selling a version of masculinity in which building the world's longest bridge, no matter what the conditions, is cast as a manly, patriotic service to one's country. The job facilitates stereotypically masculine behavior: heartily eating, fornicating, drinking alcohol, working with one's hands, possessing physical strength, earning good money, and being patriotic. By offering such opportunities, the bridge officials intend for the workers to believe that the job's benefits outweigh its oppressive conditions. Much in the same way as Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser describes in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation," in the short story the bridge officials use gifts and bribes to coerce the electricians into freely submitting to the subjection of forced labor. The gifts encourage workers to construct illusions about production, illusions in which they are singled-out, lucky beneficiaries, as opposed to victims trapped

in a repressive labor system.⁷³ However, the narrator and 50 Volts are not so easily fooled.

The narrator makes frequent, detailed references to symbols of Brazil and Rio de Janeiro, thereby establishing a tension between allowing the bridge to join their distinguished ranks and rejecting its suitability as a national symbol. He mentions *churrasco* (Brazilian barbeque), *feijoada* (Brazilian bean stew), the Guanabara Bay, the Christ the Redeemer statue, *cachaça* (cane liquor), and André Filho's 1935 carnival hit *Cidade Maravilhosa* [Marvelous City], sung by Carmen Miranda's sister Aurora. While he is working on the bridge, the company officials continually remind the workers that the bridge is a source of “*orgulho nacional*” [national pride] (117), elevating it to the rank of national icon. The narrator, however, invents an alternative metaphor for the bridge, one that evokes not a glorious national symbol but an out-of-control cow. This manic cow is overproducing various liquids, creating danger and chaos on the bridge: “um monte de fio que entrava aqui, saía ali, ninguém entendia por que nem como; uma casa-de-força com ligação pra todo lado sem controle nenhum, parecia uma vaca com duzentas tetas, uma dando leite, outra dando café, outra café com leite”⁷⁴ [piles of wires that came in over here, went out over there, no one could make sense of it: a power station that connected all over the place without any controls, it was like a cow with two hundred teats, one giving milk, another giving coffee, another *café au lait*] (113). The metaphor

⁷³ On this subject of illusion, Althusser writes, “all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (44).

⁷⁴ Pellegrini originally published this sentence ending with “dando café,” but subsequent publications include the additional four words, which are quoted above. Pellegrini prefers the later version (Email interview).

falls into the classic literary trope of technological advancements turning on their human creators.⁷⁵ The messy and potentially lethal wires have different voltages, and the inconsistency causes the electricians to receive frequent shocks. While the officials want the new bridge to join the ranks of national icons, the narrator rejects his superiors' stance, suggesting that the government's desire for progress has created a monster. The turmoil that takes place on the worksite echoes the political climate of the time.

Awestruck by the bridge's length, yet appalled by the work conditions upon it, the narrator has an ambiguous relationship to the structure. Nevertheless, he avoids giving full credence to the bridge officials' claim that the project is the pride of Brazil. After the narrator briefly comments on the scale of the bridge project, he immediately returns to the theme of the oppression of its workers, as if to avoid romanticizing the bridge, while still acknowledging the impressiveness of the structure. When he describes how, on the bridge, wires were measured by the kilometer not the meter, he then says that the men who were assembling this wire were spending “dezoito, vinte, vinte e quatro horas de alicate na mão” [eighteen, twenty, twenty-four hours, pliers in hand] (113). When he stands on a bridge lamppost, the narrator recounts seeing thousands of workers, more than he had ever seen at a dam. He does not see a magnificent scene of collective effort. Instead, he observes angry workers in one another's way, pushed along by badgering foremen who want the work done faster.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The classic example of this is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), but a more relevant instance from Brazilian literature is Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's 1979 short story “O homem que procurava a máquina” [The Man Who Searched for the Machine]. In Brandão's short story, a celebrated new machine employs a town but gradually destroys the place's soul, diversified economy, and natural spaces, an allusion to neocolonial exploitation of Brazil.

⁷⁶ The author's depiction of the bridge is reminiscent of the work of another Brazilian master of perspective: Sebastião Salgado. Pellegrini's narrator describes thousands of workers seen like ants from above, an image that recalls the horror and beauty of Salgado's 1986 photographs of the miners at the Serra Pelada goldmine in the state of Pará. Here, coated in mud, thousands of workers haul heavy sacks up long,

Pellegrini's short story refuses to let the length of the bridge be manipulated into proof of national progress without also considering the conditions under which the bridge laborers are working. Despite his position of inferiority in a dialogue with a bridge visitor, the narrator challenges the visitor's assumptions about national progress. This bridge visitor, dressed in a suit, asks the narrator if he is proud to be working on the world's longest bridge. By feigning ignorance, the electrician challenges the questioner's focus on the bridge as a statistic: "Respondi olha, nem sabia que é a maior ponte do mundo, pra mim é só uma ponte. Mas ele insistiu. Pois saiba que é a maior ponte do mundo, e trabalhar nela é um privilégio pra todos nós. Aí eu perguntei nós quem? O senhor trabalha no que aqui?" [I responded, look, I didn't even know it was the world's longest bridge, to me it's just a bridge. But he insisted. You should know that it's the longest bridge in the world, and that working on it is a privilege for all of us. Then I asked, us who? Sir, what do you do here?] (112). By purposefully denying the bridge's record-breaking length, the narrator shifts attention to those who are building it, metaphorically making the bridge the product of its workers. To the extent that the man in the suit is symbolic of the power of the state and the elite, the electrician's refusal to think the way he is being commanded to think constitutes a challenge to the oppressive social hierarchy.

The use of titles on the bridge also demonstrates social hierarchies. The titles given to the men on the bridge nuance our perception of how class informed the bridge's role as an icon of national progress. Men in suits on the bridge call the workers *peão*

narrow ladders perched side by side. There are so many people on the ladders that they cover the entire expanse of the mine wall, creating a tantalizing visual effect. Salgado and Pellegrini illustrate the duality between the dreadful work conditions, and the beauty of the wide-angle perspective of a work site.

[peon], a title that the bridge workers themselves use to refer to one another, perhaps ironically or as a sign of their professional identification, implying more about shared purpose than class. The workers call the men in suits *senhor* [sir]. Philosopher Marilena Chauí writes of Brazil's use of inaccurate honorary titles as signs of prestige and power. The most common example is the still-prevalent use of the term *doutor* [doctor] to demonstrate the speaker's inferiority to the man being addressed, which Chauí refers to as the imaginary substitute for the old titles of nobility from the colonial period (15). In Pellegrini's short story, the titles of *senhor* and *peão* reproduce the hierarchical relationship between rural landholders and their slaves or farm workers, demonstrating how little egalitarian progress has been made, despite the material progress represented by public works. This contradiction resonates even more when one considers how the years of the Brazilian economic boom exacerbated the inequality in the distribution of wealth (Weiss 66).

The use of the term *senhor* in the short story illustrates the oppressive nature of the work environment. In order to force themselves not to fall asleep, the electricians pour water over their heads, increasing the risk and possible severity of electric shocks, an eerie allusion to the fact that the Brazilian government used electric shock and sleep deprivation as forms of torture contemporaneously. Bridge visitors ask the wet electricians if everything is going well, and "A gente só respondia sim-senhor, sim-senhor, sim-senhor, tudo que perguntassem a resposta era sim-senhor, feito banda de fantasmas. Se dissessem que aquela era a menor ponte do mundo a gente ia responder sim-senhor, porque eu pelo menos não ouvia mais nada, a mão trabalhava com a cabeça dormindo" [We only responded yes-sir, yes-sir, yes-sir, everything they asked the answer

was yes-sir, like a gang of ghosts. If they said that it was the shortest bridge in the world we would have responded yes-sir because I at least couldn't hear anymore, my hand worked while my head was sleeping] (117-18). The image of a hand working alone without any input from the mind suggests that workers were treated like beasts of labor forced to continue in the dangerous working conditions because finishing the bridge in time for its inauguration is valued over the safety of individuals.

One official forced the electricians to keep working for two days straight without sleep under the premise that if they did not “a ponte ia ficar com uma parte escura, não podia, era uma vergonha; vamos lá, pessoal, essa ponte é o orgulho do Brasil” [the bridge would be left with a dark part, that wouldn't do, it would be shameful; let's go, guys, this bridge is the pride of Brazil] (118). The line, coming after the narrator's account of the death of a colleague on the bridge and the maiming of another, ironically highlights what the bridge officials conceal: the shameful work conditions and the hypocrisy of scripting the rush as vital to the pride of Brazil. Deadlines, money, and record-breaking projects are valued over individual freedoms and lives, a bleak interpretation of the successful capitalist enterprise that Brazil's economic boom was meant to represent.

Just as the military regime's torture is alluded to, so too is its capacity to use public works as a façade to cover up something less glorious. After being forced to finish the lighting in time for the inauguration, the narrator reflects on the fragility of this structure that appears to be strong: “Então botamos lá uma iluminação de emergência muito bem disfarçada, bonita, quem olhasse achava aquilo uma maravilha, parecia uma árvore de Natal, mas se batesse um vento mais forte ia tudo pro mar” [Then we put up emergency lighting there, very well concealed, pretty, whoever saw it would think it was

marvelous, it looked like a Christmas tree, but if a stronger wind blew, it would've gone straight into the sea] (118). Likewise, the publication of "A maior ponte" during the regime exposed how the government's public works progress narrative was far weaker than it might appear.

When the narrator and 50 Volts attempt to quit, the company responds by legitimizing the project in the name of the nation. The company officials, thus, privilege national duty over workers' rights. An engineer from their company tells the two electricians that they cannot quit because it would not be honorable and that the company will never forget their service "naquela ponte, um orgulho nacional" [on that bridge, a site of national pride] (117). At the same time, an unidentified man in a suit opens his jacket enough to show the .38 caliber handgun on his belt and warns that the electricians better get back to work or they will only leave the bridge dead. Pretending not to notice his thuggish colleague, the company engineer continues speaking, reminding the electricians of the bonus awaiting them if they stay on the company's good side. The official line of national honor only superficially conceals the violence of the situation.

Returning to work in his sleep-deprived stupor, the narrator challenges the aesthetic glory of the bridge in a curious reversal in which light and water, which are normally pleasing elements of a bridge vista, are seen as harsh. This reversal underscores the contrast between the glorious symbol Brazil aimed to create and the narrator's unidealized image of the bridge. In a climactic scene, electricians are forced to work a twenty-four hour shift the night before the bridge's inauguration in order to light the final section. This is no tourist's view of the Marvelous City with the Rio-Niterói Bridge shimmering over the Guanabara Bay. While officials speak of national pride, the

dangerously sleep-deprived narrator despairs, balancing from a lamppost ten meters above the bridge as the wind pounds: “dava zonzeira, dava remorso de ser eletricitista e raiva de quem inventou a eletricidade” [it made you dizzy, it made you regret being an electrician and furious at whoever invented electricity] (118). The Rio-Niterói Bridge impressively links two distant points of land, yet in the short story the impressive contrasts of land, sea, and sky are dwarfed by the oppression taking place on the bridge. The lit bridge at night has long been a symbol of urban beauty, a beauty derived in part from the contrast between the heaviness of the structures (which 19th-century steel enhancements allowed to be much larger) and the delicacy of their many reflected lights. Yet, in “A maior ponte,” a lit bridge at night evokes resentment of inhumane labor conditions.

The fact that the narrator blames “whoever invented electricity” illustrates the difficulty of assigning blame about the work conditions. Various private companies, state and federal governments, and funding from British banks converge in this project, which was symbolically initiated by Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Rio de Janeiro in November of 1968 (“Rainha iniciou simbòlicamente [sic]”). Is the timely completion of a massive bridge worth the oppression of workers and even the deaths of some? Although not part of the short story, in reality, a Mass was held on the evening of the bridge’s inauguration to honor those who had died building the bridge, so officials did, in fact, acknowledge lost lives; however the short story implies that these deaths were avoidable (“1974 – A saga da Ponte Rio-Niterói”). In “A maior ponte,” the construction of the Rio-Niterói Bridge represents a step forward in infrastructural progress that involved a step

backward in social progress. It, thus, mirrors the same forwards/backwards pattern of the military dictatorship.

What is meant to be a glorious structure appears to the narrator as unwelcoming. After the completion of the bridge lighting, the narrator's company transports its electricians to the beach to bathe. They have not bathed in a long time. While the others clean off the evidence of days of endless work, the narrator, still filthy, searches for his lost pliers, which normally rest on his belt. Symbolically, he cannot or will not wash off the harrowing experience as casually as the other workers will. His refusal is even greater because he has never before been in the ocean, but the novelty of his first salt-water swim is not enough to lure him in. He wants to go back to the bridge to look for his tool, but now that the bridge is open to cars, it is not safe to do so. The permanence of the loss is striking. The lost pliers symbolize the loss of rights, dignity, safety, health, and self-possession. The oppression—be it on the bridge specifically or during the worst years of the dictatorship in general—took something from the narrator that he cannot recover.

While both the narrator and 50 Volts were forced to work long shifts on the bridge, they have a choice as to how they remember it, and this choice relates to their perceptions of national progress. The narrator is resentful of the oppressive working conditions, the sleep deprivation, and the deaths that occurred on the bridge. In contrast, 50 Volts prefers to forget the trauma and instead feel proud of having helped construct a symbol of national progress. As anthropologist Teresa Caldeira articulates, Brazilians often took pride in Brazil's economic surge even when they did not benefit from it:

Under military rule, the GDP (gross domestic product) grew by as much as 12 percent annually in the early 1970s. Economic progress was based on foreign debt and direct state intervention in the economy. This intervention was responsible for, among other things, the creation of a new

infrastructure of roads and satellite communities and the expansion of public facilities and services, such as a national system of health care and social security. However, everything was done without the political participation of the masses and without distribution of wealth. . . . despite the political repression, the population took pride in their ‘miraculously’ modern country. (*City of Walls* 42)

Notwithstanding the economic inequality and the governmental restrictions, some chose to take pride in the country’s material developments rather than contesting the government’s political repression. The electrician 50 Volts “diz que um dia vai ao Rio só pra ver a ponte iluminada” [says that one day he’ll go to Rio just to see the bridge lit up] (120). In contrast, the narrator dismisses any interest in seeing the bridge in person by claiming that he already saw it in a magazine, which was enough. Unlike the narrator, 50 Volts appears to separate the degrading experience from his awe of the gigantic structure that he helped create. Like José da Silva Marques, the Brasília diary writer of the previous chapter, 50 Volts is simultaneously appalled by the working conditions in his country and moved by a sense of patriotism triggered by Brazil’s infrastructural development. This opposition can also be seen as the electricians’ choice between regarding themselves as the victims of or the players in Brazil’s development strategy.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Another literary text written in opposition to the regime relates to the military dictatorship’s use of public works as part of its progress narrative and, therefore, deserves to be mentioned. Read retrospectively, Dias Gomes’s little-known one-act play *O Túnel* [The Tunnel] foreshadows the tortures, media spin, massive public works, and harsh censorship that took place shortly after he wrote it in 1968. With specific regard to public works, *O Túnel* foretells how the military regime made use of its (as of yet not built) large-scale public works projects to legitimize itself abroad. In the absurdist play, which is set in Rio de Janeiro, a tunnel traffic jam that starts in 1964 and is still present in 1968 stands, as Dias Gomes describes himself, for the military regime (*Apenas um subversivo* 227). This tunnel becomes the home of those unfortunate enough to have gotten stuck in the traffic jam. Had the government allowed the play to be staged when it was written, contemporary audiences possibly would have associated the tunnel with the recently-finished Rebouças Tunnel in Rio de Janeiro. The Director of Transport is more concerned with international legitimization than with the functionality of public works at home. Addressing the tunnel dwellers on the radio, he celebrates that, “com a graça de Deus, comemoramos quatro anos de bem sucedido engarrafamento” [with the grace of God, we commemorate four years of successful traffic jams] (784).

These words call into question the competing notions of a “successful” government from the tongue-in-cheek angle of a Marxist play’s critique of a right-wing regime. The Director verbally warps the catastrophe into something positive: “O número de acidentes na área do engarrafamento caiu em 93,5%

As critic Roberto Schwarz famously stated in 1969, “apesar da ditadura da direita há relativa hegemonia cultural da esquerda no país” (“Cultura e Política” 72) [despite the right-wing dictatorship there is relative left-wing cultural hegemony in the country], a phenomenon that continued to the end of the regime and which is demonstrated by Pellegrini’s short story. Pellegrini’s short story attacks the regime’s attempt to “legitimize the illegitimate,” to return to Skidmore’s phrase. While the military regime sought to measure national progress by public works, “A maior ponte” exposes ambiguities and contradictions that such a progress narrative inevitably overlooks. By focusing on small and personal objects and instances, the short story offers an alternative to loyalty to the regime’s public works, thus humanizing these structures, allowing them to be something more than superlative statistics. The short story challenges a dominant attitude that building something global in scale somehow lets a government off the hook in terms of its treatment of citizens and workers. To mourn a set of pliers is to mourn how a progress narrative via massive public works denies the importance of what is small and personal, as opposed to gigantic and public. Pellegrini’s “A maior ponte” explores the power that an infrastructural symbol wields as it transforms that symbol by shrinking it into something smaller: a worker’s loss of his pliers and of his right to rest between work shifts.

superando o nosso planejamento. E o prestígio internacional do nosso Serviço de Trânsito começa a ser recuperado” [The number of traffic jam accidents has fallen 93.5%, exceeding our plans. And the international prestige of our Transport Service is beginning to be recuperated] (784). Mário Andreazza was already Minister in 1968, so it is possible that contemporary audiences would have associated the play’s caricatured tunnel official with him. Thus, Dias Gomes critiques public works projects done for international reputé more than for the well-being of a country’s own people. After the Director of Transport announces that the government is going to destroy all the tunnels, the drivers honk in protest, and the curtain falls, leaving their fate undisclosed to the audience. With this proclaimed demise of the tunnel and the government’s abandonment of the possibility of functional public works, the satire critiques the choices and values of the military regime.

CHAPTER FIVE
I DREAMED THE CITY STOPPED: FAILED PUBLIC WORKS IN FERRÉZ'S
CAPÃO PECADO AND LUIZ RUFFATO'S *ELES ERAM MUITOS CAVALOS*

Throughout this dissertation, I have analyzed how literary representations of public works can nuance our understanding of competing notions of national progress. In this final chapter, I focus on representations of failed public works in two contemporary texts about São Paulo, both of which I will refer to as novels although they do not fit neatly into any literary genre: Ferréz's *Capão Pecado* [Capão Sin] and Luiz Ruffato's *Eles eram muitos cavalos* [They Were Many Horses]. In the São Paulo depicted in these texts, public works are not being built or improved as has been the case in most of the texts analyzed in this study. Broken, vulnerable, or conspicuously absent, urban public works are failing, and their failure is wearing away some citizens' morale. Failed public works make their way into characters' metaphors and daydreams, as the physical city permeates people's imaginations.

Capão Pecado, published in 2000, tracks the lives of a few young residents of Capão Redondo, a *favela* far west and south of the center of São Paulo in the Zona Sul [South Side]. In addition to being a writer, Ferréz also founded 1DASUL (www.1dasul.com.br), a cultural project that organizes artistic events in São Paulo's Zona Sul. In keeping with Ferréz's shared hats as a writer and a community activist, *Capão Pecado*, Ferréz's most well known novel, is explicitly political. As Ferréz himself puts it, "Eu sou um ativista político que escreve" [I'm a political activist who writes] ("Ferréz na

televisão francesa”). Each chapter of this dissertation has analyzed national progress, paying particular attention to the term’s many meanings. *Capão Pecado* conceives of national progress as entailing the improvement of the quality of life of those who live in Brazil’s *favelas*. The novel connects the failures of national progress to the lack of adequate public works in *favelas*. By drawing the reader toward local, specific instances of failed public works in various formats (photographs, essays, metaphors, and the novel’s setting), *Capão Pecado* triggers the desire to protect failed public works.

In turn, Ruffato’s *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, published in 2001, is an experimental novel composed of sixty-nine vignettes, written in a style that reproduces the sense of alienation that São Paulo can cause, in part because of infrastructural failures. Like the novels of the high modernists (such as Kafka, Pound, and Woolf), it approaches the city as a place of—to borrow a term from literary critic David Pike—mythical alienation (9). Failed public works in *Eles eram muitos cavalos* act as the physical embodiment of characters’ feelings of disconnection, dissatisfaction, inequality, distortion, and doom. These negative sentiments involve the dangers and consequences of not having access to public works.

Although Ferréz and Ruffato are both well-known contemporary Brazilian authors, they fall into categories that are so polarized (low/high, pop/erudite) that critics rarely compare their fiction. This chapter bridges this divide by considering how both novels use infrastructural failure to examine themes of anarchy, apocalypse, instability, violence, inequality, and urban ruin. A literary contextualization of *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, by literary critic Karl Erik Schollhammer, provides a sense of where this novel and *Capão Pecado* merge. He writes that *Eles eram muitos cavalos*

é comprometido com a realidade social do Brasil contemporâneo e inscreve-se na tradição de narrativa urbana que ocupa uma posição central na literatura brasileira a partir da década de 1960, privilegiando histórias de pessoas comuns em seus encontros com o medo, a violência, o crime, a miséria, mas também com sonhos e expectativas de moradores da capital paulista. (69)

[is involved in the contemporary Brazilian social reality and locates itself in the tradition of the urban narrative that has occupied a central position in Brazilian literature since the 1960s, privileging the stories of common people in their encounters with fear, violence, crime, and poverty, but also with the dreams and expectations of residents of São Paulo's capital.]

Capão Pecado and *Eles eram muitos cavalos* share a concern with violence, crime, and poverty, which connects them to the Brazilian master of these themes, Rubem Fonseca. As a point of departure for a study of commonalities between *Capão Pecado* and *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, I briefly turn to the fiction of Fonseca, a looming legacy over subsequent Brazilian fiction set in gritty cityscapes. Like the work of Ferréz and Ruffato, Fonseca's treatment of public works unveils the material deterioration of urban Brazil, although focused on Rio de Janeiro, not São Paulo. However, unlike Ferréz and Ruffato, Fonseca uses failed public works in ironic reproductions of sensationalism that complicate ethical codes.

In Fonseca's work, the depictions of infrastructural destruction sate the reader's voyeuristic appetite for seedy underworlds. The start of Fonseca's acclaimed novel *A grande arte* (*High Art*), published in 1983, is particularly illustrative of this point. The novel's first lines refer to major infrastructural transitions taking place in Rio de Janeiro: the notorious prostitution zone Vila Mimosa was gradually being demolished to erect the *Cidade Nova* [New City], where office and apartment buildings were built in the 1970s and the Rio de Janeiro City Hall was built in 1982:

As casas estavam sendo demolidas para dar espaço a um outro lugar chamado Cidade Nova. Eram casas de um pavimento, com portas e janelas de persianas de madeira pintadas de azul, abrindo diretamente na calçada. Ainda estava intacto um lado inteiro da rua, a última que restava da velha zona do meretrício. Ouvia-se o barulho das máquinas derrubando as paredes ainda de pé. O fino pó ocre dos tijolos destruídos pairava no ar quente. Não seriam mais vistas prostitutas nas janelas brincando com os clientes que passavam (9)

[The houses were being torn down to make room for another place called Cidade Nova. They were one story houses whose doors and windows, which had wooden shutters painted blue, opened directly onto the sidewalk. One whole side of the street was still intact, all that was left of the old red light zone. You heard the sound of the machines knocking down the last of the remaining walls. The fine, ochre powder of shattered tiles floated in the hot air. Prostitutes would no longer be seen in the windows playing with the clients who walked past]

While we can imagine the military government promoting this reconstruction as a step forward for Rio de Janeiro, as the name *Cidade Nova* implies, the novel's narrator offers an opposing view.

The narration evokes nostalgia for elements of the city that are disappearing: the quaint colonial architecture symbolized by the Portuguese-style tiles and blue trim, the sociality of the street, and unconcealed deviance. Thus, the *noir* novel begins with the transition from marginality, crime, sex, and historic architecture to the official presence of the state and the construction of mundane high rises. However, as the novel unfolds, it becomes clear that this official attempt to eradicate Rio de Janeiro's underworlds—key sites in the text—is unsuccessful. The “new” city is only a flimsy façade. Like much of Fonseca's fiction, this novel turns taboos on their head to expose hypocritical ways that societies form ethical opinions.

Fonseca's underground world of crime, sex, and violence draws the reader in because of its forbidden otherness. He dots his high-intensity detective plots with lewd pulp-fiction style scenes. Yet, he delivers these scenes with a literary command and eloquence that turn them into something more than pulp fiction. Noting this interplay between high and low culture, literary critic Nelson Vieira posits that Fonseca "creates an atmosphere of blatant violence which, on the one hand, rubs society's nose in the gutter of life in order to jolt its bastions of rigidity and complacency, while displaying his own 'high art' and erudition by making pertinent intertextual references" ("Closing the Gap' between High and Low" 114). This "gutter of life" is literally the locale of the *bildung* of the criminal Zakkai in *A grande arte*. As he recounts his personal story, Zakkai aims to excite and appall his listener: "Morei nos bueiros, com os ratos. Já cuspiram, mijaram e cagaram em mim. Ou eu morria ou virava essa maravilha que sou" [I lived in the gutters, with the rats. They spat, pissed, and shat on me. I could either die or turn into this marvel that I am] (148). Zakkai explains his old residence, adopting the nonchalance of Fonseca's narrators, which contrasts with the repugnance of the scene: "passei a dormir dentro de um bueiro. As baratas passeavam em cima do meu corpo, mas eu sabia que não iam me fazer nenhum mal, no máximo chupar um pedacinho de lábio aqui, uma pelinha do dedo ali" [I began sleeping in the gutter. The cockroaches walked over my body, but I knew they wouldn't hurt me, at most they'd suck a bit of my lip, or the skin on my finger] (255). Zakkai is anything but a reliable source of information and—like the narrator himself—he enjoys shocking listeners. Yet, independent of the veracity of his story, he mentions the gutters to take pride in his own ingenuity and to delight in the

grotesque, not to praise public works. He survived despite government services and not thanks to them.

Representations of public works in the fiction of Fonseca, Ferréz, and Ruffato reveal how these structures take on symbolic meanings related to borders, class, abandonment, and ethical codes. In using representations of failed public works to mimic pulp detective fiction, yet also to challenge social norms, Fonseca engages with public works aesthetically and thematically. In contrast, Ferréz's *Capão Pecado* uses representations of public works primarily thematically, as a sociopolitical manifestation of what is wrong with abandoning urban public space. Ruffato, in turn, utilizes representations of infrastructural failures as a means to aesthetic experimentation that allow for reflections on feelings, such as alienation.

Capão Pecado

Background

Ferréz, , the penname of Reginaldo Ferreira da Silva, writes and promotes what he refers to as “Literatura Marginal” [Marginal Literature]. In 2005, he edited the literary anthology *Literatura Marginal: talentos da escrita periférica* [Marginal Literature: Talents of Peripheral Writing]. In “Terrorismo literário” [Literary Terrorism], his introduction to the anthology, he describes this new genre:

A Literatura Marginal, sempre é bom frisar, é uma literatura feita por minorias, sejam elas raciais ou socioeconômicas. Literatura feita à margem dos núcleos centrais do saber e da grande cultura nacional, isto é, de grande poder aquisitivo. Mas alguns dizem que sua principal característica é a linguagem, é o jeito como falamos, como contamos a história, bom, isso fica para os estudiosos. (12)

It is always good to emphasize that *Literatura Marginal* is a literature written by minorities, be they racial or socioeconomic. It is literature written on the margins

of both knowledge and the great national culture's central nuclei. By great national culture, I mean that with great purchasing power. But some say that *Literatura Marginal*'s principal characteristic is language, the way we talk, how we tell stories. Well, that's up to the scholars.

I link three prominent aspects of *Capão Pecado* to earlier traditions, touched upon in Ferréz explanation of *Literatura Marginal*. First, the novel is social criticism of the marginalization of the Brazilian poor. We can trace a line back to Aluísio Azevedo's social naturalist novel *O cortiço* [*The Slum*], published in 1890. This novel demonstrates how the structures of colonialism, including greed and exploitation, were reproduced in the Second Empire (1840-1889), focusing specifically on the lives of masons and washerwomen living in a privately-owned Rio de Janeiro tenement with almost no access to public works. Lima Barreto would be another predecessor, especially because his fiction is more concerned with its message than its aesthetics.

Second, *Capão Pecado* intends to capture in writing the spoken Portuguese of a specific peripheral community. Two of the most prominent examples of this objective are the regionalist writers of the northeast, writing in the 1930s, and Guimarães Rosa, but many have done similar work in urban contexts, including Aluísio Azevedo and Lima Barreto. Finally, *Capão Pecado* is a narrative in which someone from a subaltern community recounts the story of his own community from within, as opposed to being represented by an outsider. In this sense, we can link Ferréz's work, although fictional, to Carolina Maria de Jesus's famous abridged diary *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada* (*Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus*), published in 1960 and praised by Ferréz and other *Literatura Marginal* authors. Like in *Capão Pecado*, the issue of substandard public works is prevalent in the diary. For instance, one of Jesus's

monthly expenses is an exorbitant electric bill, equaling more than a day's wages.

Linking *Capão Pecado* to a non-fictional text brings up the tenuous line within the novel between fact and fiction, as Ferréz and his contributors locate their narrative in a markedly real community—Capão Redondo—despite its fictional characters.

As mentioned, *Capão Pecado* does not fit neatly into the category of novel, which is due to the collective nature of the project. Hip-hop artists wrote short nonfictional texts found before certain chapters, various people contributed photographs, and an unnamed contributor drew a sketch found on the inseam of the pages. *Capão Pecado* is a collective scrapbook of a marginalized community with Ferréz as its head voice. In a televised interview, Ferréz stated, “Tem que fazer literatura ficar pop” [You have to turn literature into pop] (“Ferréz na televisão francesa”), presumably by writing in a familiar style that is inviting to a wide array of readers. Ferréz's fiction is “pop” in another sense too. Artistic representations of *favelas* are in style, a trend epitomized by the international popularity of Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund's 2002 film *Cidade de Deus* [*City of God*].

In his 2002 essay “O cosmopolitismo do pobre” [The Cosmopolitanism of the Poor], literary critic Silviano Santiago observes the recent international visibility of artistic production taking place in Brazilian *favelas*. He gives the example of the actors, who formed the organization Nós do Morro [We from the Favela] and acted in *City of God*, who have been invited to speak about their work all over the world. He argues that, two or three decades ago, this type of contact between the professionals of a hegemonic culture and young representatives of a poor culture would have been unthinkable in Brazil, with the exception of the work done by anthropologists and missionaries with

indigenous people. More than 110 unprofessional actors from poor neighborhoods acted in *City of God*. Ferréz, who also has been invited abroad to speak, fits within this phenomenon of the international recognition of *favela* residents' artistic production. *Capão Pecado* has a dual effect of both empowering those from within Capão Redondo by making them feel recognized, but also of exporting to the Brazilian elite and foreign readers, albeit occasionally stereotypical, a vision of the depravity of the *favelas*. The novel is stereotypical because it reduces the *favela* to almost exclusively a place of drug trafficking and murder with little representation of the bulk of residents who are not engaged in such activities. Moreover, anthropologist Teresa Caldeira observes the reductive representation of women in *Capão Pecado*: "Many books of the so-called marginal literature share this negative version of women. A clear example is the novel *Capão Pecado* by Ferréz. . . In this novel, the female characters are either suffering mothers or seductive women responsible for the destruction of the men who get involved with them" ("I Came to Sabotage" 148). Despite the accuracy of Caldeira's statement, *Capão Pecado* provides an intriguing lens into conceptions of identity, language, and struggle in a São Paulo *favela*.

When I refer to *Capão Pecado*, I refer to the first edition, published by the small publisher Labortexto Editorial in São Paulo in 2000. Five years later, the publishing giant Objetiva published the novel in a remarkably different form. The Labortexto version includes the words "participação Mano Brown" [with Mano Brown's participation], while the Objetiva cover does not acknowledge Mano Brown. Other changes occur in various parts of the text: the dedication, the acknowledgments, the preface, the short texts written by people other than Ferréz, and Ferréz's own narrative. These changes include

modifications, substitutions, and inclusions of entirely new material. In addition, the Objetiva version has no photographs and, therefore, no color. Overall, the changes made in the second edition lessen, though do not eliminate, the sense that the book is a collaborative effort because the reader does not see images of the place. The absence of photographs additionally weakens the novel's connection to the actual Capão Redondo.

Although I do not know the motives for these changes, it seems that the choice to do away with the photographs and the color could have been to cut costs. Certain choices, such as the content on the book flaps and the inclusion of a new note written by Ferréz, which does not mention these changes, presumably were marketing decisions. Moreover, there could have been a desire—on the part of the publisher or Ferréz—to bring the main author to the fore more emphatically.⁷⁸ On his blog under the entry “Super oferta” [Great Deal], Ferréz writes about the new edition, “o livro que consagrou minha carreira de escritor, vai sair com nova capa e novas participações, além de ter uma nova introdução, mostrando o tanto que mudou minha vida em 5 anos” [the book that made my career as a writer, is going to come out with a new cover and new contributions, beyond having a new introduction, showing how much my life has changed in five years] and in interviews he has offered equally ambiguous explanations of the changes. Most of my analysis is relevant to both editions.

⁷⁸ The Objetiva version does not include the list of acknowledgements, has the dedication to Marcos Roberto de Almeida from the first version but not the poem dedicated to him, and lacks the second dedication written in paragraph form. Also, it lacks the list of locations beginning with the universe then becoming increasingly more specific (South America, Brasil, São Paulo...), until it reaches Capão Redondo with the message “Bem-vindos ao fundo do mundo” [Welcome to the bottom of the earth]. The second edition moved the short text “A número 1 sem troféu” [To Number 1 without a Trophy] by hip hop artist Mano Brown to the inside flaps of the front and back covers with slightly altered paragraph divisions and a few small changes. In addition to Mano Brown's text, the second edition includes four short texts not written by Ferréz, two of which are in the first version and two of which are new. The Labortexto version includes two short texts not written by Ferréz, which are not in the Objetiva version.

Capão Pecado is set in a specific geographic place, so a brief overview of the actual area can aid a reading of the novel. Capão Redondo is both the name of a *favela* and of an entire district, comprising fifty-eight *favelas* and *vilas*, with, according to the 2000 census, a total population of about 242,000 (Ponciano 49-50). The district arose around 1950 when poor people from the Northeast and those who were pushed out of the central neighborhoods by gentrification began to move there. At present, it has one of the highest murder rates in São Paulo, which can help us understand the string of murders in *Capão Pecado* as something more than gratuitous sensationalism (Caldeira “I Came to Sabotage” 119). In the language Tupi, *capão* means “island of forest,” referring to a group of trees clustered in the middle of a clearing (Ponciano 49), an etymology mentioned in Ferréz’s novel.⁷⁹ Ferréz transforms the neighborhood’s name into *Capão Pecado*, furthering the sense of abandonment there. Levino Ponciano, in his encyclopedia of São Paulo neighborhoods, dedicates a good deal of his description of Capão Redondo to the infrastructural failures of the district in much the same way as *Capão Pecado*’s characters and contributors. Ponciano writes, “No distrito de Capão Redondo existem vilas sem nenhuma infra-estrutura governmental. Em algumas vilas tudo é pirateado – da energia elétrica até a água” [In the district of Capão Redondo there are *vilas* without any governmental infrastructure. In some *vilas* everything is pirated – from electricity to water] (50). While Brazilian elites occasionally complain about marginalized Brazilians stealing public utilities, Ponciano’s description justifies the theft by first explaining that the government has not done its part, therefore placing the blame on the government not on individuals.

⁷⁹ One character offers a different etymology. He hears that *capão* was the name of a large, straw basket made by indigenous Brazilians, and that the area earned that name because, from afar, it resembled a round (*redondo*) basket.

The way to refer to poor, urban areas in Brazil is a point of controversy.

Comunidades, morros, favelas, and novas centralidades are a few preferences. Literary critic Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda witnessed an extensive debate on the subject among her college-age students, a group composed half of students from Rio de Janeiro *favelas*, half from more affluent areas. While some suggested that *comunidade* [community] is more politically correct, students from *favelas* mentioned that the term *comunidade* implies an absent negative adjective, such as *poor* or *marginalized* community and, thus, constitutes only half a name. These students preferred *favela* (Personal Interview).⁸⁰ Some Brazilian geographers prefer the term *novas centralidades* [new centralities], a technical term unknown to the vast majority of Brazilians. I choose the word *favela* because it seems to be the preference of the Literatura Marginal authors, and it is neither slang nor an obscure technical term.

Public Works in *Capão Pecado*

Anthropologist James Holston argues that “the most important condition of poverty on the periphery of Brazil’s cities is the lack of basic urban services” (26), a condition well developed in *Capão Pecado*. Ferréz’s novel links failed public works to a specific community, thus triggering readers’ desire to protect such services. Philosopher Gaston Bachelard writes that his analyses of the “felicitous space” within homes “seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love” (xxxv). The contributors of *Capão Pecado* demonstrate how Capão Redondo has not been defended against adverse forces

⁸⁰ For a history of the word *favela*, see Licia Valladares’s article “A Gênese da Favela Carioca. A Produção Anterior às Ciências Sociais.”

(drugs, violence, poverty, stench, accidents, and decay), but how it is, nonetheless, the space they love. One such example comes from the short text written by singer Mano Brown from the widely popular hip-hop group Racionais MCs. After listing what is wrong with Capão Redondo (including the lack of public works), he writes, “Eu amo essa porra!” [I love this shit!] (24). Literary critic Bruce Robbins makes a point similar to Bachelard’s, but directly tied to public works and fiction. In an analysis of the melancholy smell of infrastructure in Boston in Jonathan Franzen’s novel *Strong Motion* (1992), Robbins argues that infrastructural failures prompt a desire to protect what is in the public domain:

To me, Franzen’s landscape of abandonment sets going a rhetoric of seduction. When he tells us that infrastructure is neglected, he makes us want to preserve it, to care for it. This is of course not everyone’s idea of passion. The caring implied here seems sober and familial, a love devoted less to erotic ecstasy than to fighting the inevitability of decay. (28)

Capão Pecado also sets going a rhetoric of seduction. However, it laments a type of decay that is not inevitable, but the result of a lack of investment in public works. The novel implies that to protect physical spaces is in turn to protect the safety, dignity, and health of those who inhabit them. Through literal and metaphoric references to public works, primarily sewages systems, Ferréz signals the impact of public works on individual lives and its ties to notions of citizenship. Moreover, failed public works act as a conduit between Ferréz’s chapters, the short texts by other authors, and the photographs, which are not otherwise linked by plot or characters. Thus, the setting of Capão Redondo, marked by failed public works, gives coherence to *Capão Pecado* as a whole.

Our desire to protect the public works represented in *Capão Pecado* stems from their connection to a specific community, which personalizes a problem. This community has an identity, a shared struggle, and a sense of belonging threatened by abandoned public works. This small scale grants the reader the intimacy to want to protect a neglected space on the terms that Bachelard and Robbins mention. Although the novel itself portrays a fractured community laden with betrayals, addictions, and murders, the nonfictional short texts and the photographs in *Capão Pecado* provide a sense of the strong bonds in Capão Redondo.

Various literal, visual, and metaphoric references to failed public works underscore how the community of Capão Redondo has been excluded from the rights that ought to accompany citizenship. For instance, Ferréz dedicates his novel to (among others) those who “não puderam ser cidadãos, pois lhe impediram de ter direitos, mas lhe foram cobrados deveres” [couldn’t be citizens because they were denied their rights, but held accountable for regulations] (11), explicitly emphasizing how citizenship often translates into benefits for the rich and penalties for the poor. Hip-hop artist Conceito Moral, in his two-page contribution to *Capão Pecado*, connects this lack of citizenship to a lack of access to public works, implying that one cannot exist without the other:

Subúrbio, periferia, o inferno da cidade, onde pessoas vivem no mais baixo nível da cidadania, tá ligado? Não bastasse isso, vivem amontoadas em barracos sem qualquer condição básica de higiene, o córrego a céu aberto, a água escassa, a energia é puxada por extensões malfeitas e sem proteção (os famosos gatos) (159)

[*Subúrbio*, periphery, the hell of the city, where people live at the lowest level of citizenship, know what I’m saying? If that weren’t enough, they live heaped up in shacks without even the basic conditions of hygiene, the stream of sewage in the open air, scarce water, electricity brought in on badly made and unprotected extensions (the famous *gatos*).]

Conceito Moral underscores how access to public works polarizes citizenship along class lines.

Gatos are jury-rigged connections to city electrical lines. By calling the *gato* “famous,” Conceito Moral self-consciously refers to the process, in which he takes part, of representing *favelas*. He alludes to how *gatos* have become a symbol of the *favela*, sometimes to the point of becoming cliché embodiments of struggle, fragility, and inequality.⁸¹ This use of the word *famoso* is ironic. Conceito Moral seems to imply that exotified and graphic representations of the *favela* have become stylish items of consumption beyond the *favela*, yet for many the *gato* is not a famous symbol, but a precarious reality. Over a dozen of *Capão Pecado*’s photographs depict the zigzag of *gatos*, and one photograph in particular, by Teresa Eça, shows a close-up of how *gatos* are connected to the city electrical poles, images that reinforce the message of Conceito Moral’s text.

Mano Brown makes an intriguing connection between public works and geography, linked to second-class citizenship. His text establishes how a bridge separates two worlds, evidence of how physical borders become social borders that determine the level of citizenship granted to residents: “a gente aqui do Capão nunca ia conseguir chamar a atenção do resto do mundo, porque da ponte João Dias pra cá é outro mundo, tá ligado?” [Here in the Capão we’re never going to be able to get the attention of the rest of the world because from the João Dias Bridge to here is another world, know what I’m

⁸¹ Another prominent, yet oppositional symbol of the *favela*, which is also somewhat cliché, is present in *Capão Pecado* in a small drawing at the bottom of each of its pages: the kite flying freely in the air above the crowded *favela*. As literary critic Marta Peixoto underscores in her article, “Rio’s Favelas in Recent Fiction and Film: Commonplaces of Urban Segregation,” *favelas* are frequently stereotyped as a mixture of heaven and hell. The juxtaposition of *gatos* and kites is an illustrative example of this phenomenon.

saying?]) (23). Ironically, a bridge severs as opposed to connects, fostering feelings of resentment and exclusion. The João Dias Bridge spans in the east-west direction over the Pinheiros River. Looking at a map, a visible difference between the sides of the bridge is evident: the roads east of the bridge are mostly built in grid form, whereas those west of the bridge weave around in denser, more chaotic configurations.

The geographic space that Brown refers to as spanning from the bridge to Capão Redondo indicates the peripheral status of those who are far south and far west of the center of the city. *Capão Pecado* privileges the general state of being on the periphery of a Brazilian urban center over the specific characteristics of the Zona Sul of São Paulo. For instance, in his short text, rapper Outraversão [Anotherversion] writes:

Periferia é tudo igual, não importa o lugar: Zona Oeste, Leste, Norte ou Sul. Não importa se é no Rio de Janeiro, em Minas Gerais, Brasília ou em São Paulo. Enfim, seja lá qual for o lugar, sempre serão os mesmos problemas que desqualificam o povo + pobre, moradores de casas amontoadas umas em cima das outras. (89)

[The periphery is all the same, it doesn't matter where: West, East, North or South Side. It doesn't matter if it's in Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Brasília or São Paulo. In short, no matter what the place, the problems that disqualify the poorest people, residents of houses stacked 1 on top of the other, will always be the same.]

Even by choosing the term *periferia*, which Ferréz often employs too, Outraversão emphasizes the dual social and geographic marginality of Brazil's poorest urban citizens.

This conception of the periphery relates to an intriguing argument made by literary critic Nirvana Tanoukhi about engaging fiction's relationship to scale. She writes, "the fact that the distance between two adjacent neighborhoods of unequal wealth cannot be measured numerically necessitates an understanding of geographic scale as a

process—a process that establishes distances dually: by differentiating places *qualitatively* and demarcating boundaries *quantitatively*” (603). The term *periferia* contains both a qualitative and a quantitative meaning with relationship to the center.

Capão Pecado’s photographs make the real Capão Redondo visible for those both familiar and unfamiliar with the neighborhood. *Capão Pecado*’s thirty-eighty photographs highlight infrastructural failures related to electricity, roads, and drainage. The photographs register as amateur, candid snapshots, not always entirely focused.⁸² These photographs reinforce the need for improved public works, a claim which is echoed in the text. What is most intriguing about the photographs is that most of them make no pretensions to be artistic or pretty and seem to have been shot spontaneously, capturing something natural about the neighborhood. Unlike the photographs in novels such as W. G. Sebald’s *The Emigrants* (1993) or Bernardo Carvalho’s 2002 novel *Nove noites* [Nine Nights], which serve, in a typically postmodern fashion, to destabilize a distinction between reality and fiction, the photographs in *Capão Pecado* situate the novel in a real neighborhood.⁸³

Alongside the contributions from hip hop artists, the photographs give the book the appearance of a collaborative multimedia portrait of a place, which emphasizes community activism. Thus, the role of these photographs is more journalistic than literary. The rap group Realismo Frontal (now renamed Negrodo) in their short text in *Capão Pecado* addresses this collective effort: “o grupo Realismo Frontal tem o imenso

⁸² Teresa Eça took most of the photographs depicting infrastructural problems. In an interview about *Capão Pecado*, Ferréz describes that Teresa Eça was the most experienced of the photographers and that she came to Capão Redondo to take pictures with him (“Entrevista Ferréz”). A photograph by Eça shows densely packed homes that appear to connect to the only road navigable by car, which presents a fire hazard, resonating with the novel’s description of the Pereira family who are asphyxiated by coal fumes in their own home. Two of Eça’s photographs depict a canal or stream with trash floating in it.

⁸³ I refer to the back flap photograph of the author in *Nove noites*.

prazer de estar participando desta importante obra literária que envolve a sociedade no geral” [The group Realismo Frontal has the immense pleasure to be participating in this important literary work that involves society in general] (133). The centrality of failed public works within this portrait of Capão Redondo highlights how this problem is part of the community’s struggle and identity.

Brazilian urban underworlds are a key theme in *Capão Pecado*, as the title evokes. Sewage, a classical symbol of marginality, is instrumental to the portrayal of Capão Redondo as an underworld. As geographer Matthew Gandy argues, “Sewers have long been used as metaphors for the hidden worlds of crime, poverty and political insurrection, and there is a rich legacy of representations ranging across literature, cinema and music” (24). In *Capão Pecado*, what belongs in hell—the abject, putrid, and unsightly sewage—has seeped up to earth; the waste, which is commonly hidden underground, is exposed for all to see and, more importantly, smell. A character falls into a cesspool (*fossa*) on the street, the smell of which makes him vomit.

A group of Capão Redondo men discover a corpse in a river and see that “na perna esquerda do falecido havia uma corrente, e nela, amarrada metade de uma tampa de bueiro” [on the left leg of the dead man there was a chain, and tied to it half of a manhole cover] (68). The manhole cover, a device meant to separate the sewer from the street, had been used to weigh down the corpse of a murdered man. While a similar scene in a text by Fonseca might establish the *noir* ambience of a gloomy world of crime, Ferréz’s reference strikes a more *engage*, chord related to the degradation of society.

The most famous literary sewer scenes are those from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862) that take place in the perilous underground sewer pipes of Paris in the

1830s. Hugo's scenes were based on 1836 reports about Paris's sewers written by hygienist Dr. Alexandre Jean Baptiste Parent Duchâtelet, of the Paris Board of Health (Wilson 50). Likewise, Ferréz, and most of the authors analyzed in this study, draw on real elements of public works to shape their fictional narratives, a tendency that underscores an interest in how people relate to their physical surroundings and how the public works of São Paulo affect citizens' notion of belonging to or being excluded from the city. The text emphasizes the powerful effect of the sewage: it strips residents of dignity, self-esteem, and comfort.

Ferréz reinforces the infrastructural failures via his metaphors as well, as if to emphasize how such problems seep into people's psyche. A group of Capão Redondo boys smoke marijuana, "não sabendo que o que estava subindo ali era fumaça, mas o que certamente estava descendo era a auto-estima, que descia pelo esgoto" [not aware that what was rising was the smoke, but what certainly was dropping was their self-esteem, which went down the sewer] (67-68). The protagonist Rael uses the same metaphor to describe his friend Testa's crack habit: "um traguinho e a auto-estima escorreu pelo esgoto" [One drag and his self-esteem drained into the sewer] (113).⁸⁴ Like Lima Barreto's fiction, the strength of Ferréz's novel lies in its depiction of urban depravity and the consequences of such poverty, but the language itself lacks vibrancy. The sewage metaphor begs the reader to look to the sociopolitical and historical factors at play to understand individual actions—in this case the drug use of these young men—and suggests the fragility of self-esteem under these conditions.

⁸⁴ A more familiar translation of these metaphors into English would be "went down the drain," but I intentionally translated more directly from the Portuguese to highlight the emphasis on sewers.

Eles eram muitos cavalos

Background

Eles eram muitos cavalos has been widely praised by critics for its originality, especially since it captures contemporary, urban life in an innovative way. Due to its stylistic innovations and urban Brazilian setting, *Eles eram muitos cavalos* often has been compared to Brazilian modernist narratives, especially Mário de Andrade's 1922 collection of poems *Paulicéia desvairada* [*Hallucinated City*], which reproduces the hubbub of São Paulo's streets during a time of rapid industrialization, and Oswald de Andrade's 1924 novel *As memórias sentimentais de João Miramar* [*The Sentimental Memoir of João Miramar*], which, like *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, is narrated in short, often disconnected vignettes, although Oswald's novel has main characters who are present throughout and is much more humorous. Literary critic Helder Macedo describes *Eles eram muitos cavalos* as "um livro que só depois do modernismo teria podido ser escrito, como uma nova 'paulicéia desvairada'" [a book that only after modernism could have been written, like a new 'paulicéia desvairada'] (53). Both *João Miramar* and *Eles eram muitos cavalos* include characters who measure their sense of self by their commodities in São Paulo, a critique of how a consumption-driven high life can warp one's values.

Like modernist narratives set in São Paulo, *Eles eram muitos cavalos* focuses on the mood of the street, concerned more with tone than plot. However, unlike its predecessors it has no descriptions of crowds, focusing instead on personal instances from individuals' lives. The modernists were attracted to the challenge of describing the rapid urbanization that transformed São Paulo, which these writers achieved by depicting

the crowd. In contrast, Ruffato focuses on stimulation, contradiction, and stress in one of the world's largest cities. Without any continuous plotline or reoccurring characters, the reader becomes attached to the city itself, seen from different viewpoints. Therefore, the novel reads as a portrait of São Paulo.

Holston writes the following of the effect of avant-garde art, an argument that also rings true for the vignettes in *Eles eram muitos cavalos*: “The avant-gardes developed techniques of shock—such as fragmentation, absurd juxtaposition, and montage—not so much to end in nihilistic relativism, but rather to stimulate a critical attitude toward the means-end rationalities of cultural order” (6). Fragmentation also links Ruffato's text to the experimental novels of the 1960s and 70s that subversively protest the military dictatorship via fiction, such as Ignácio Loyola Brandão's *Zero* [Zero] (1974) and Ivan Ângelo's *A festa* [The Celebration] (1976). Schollhammer pinpoints part of what is most poignant about Ruffato's style: it seeks to create the effects of reality without reproducing it in a realistic, causal, or coherent narrative (69). It is a novel that takes patience, yet has occasional jovial, linear vignettes, such as “Taxi.”

If *Capão Pecado* is “pop,” *Eles eram muitos cavalos* is the opposite. It is intentionally taxing to read. The novel's disjointedness, lack of plot, fragments that read as found textual objects, and frequent incomprehensibility make it an arduous albeit fascinating read, one that is most satisfying from a highly intellectual perspective in which the reader reflects on the abrasive impact this form and content have, perhaps with former experimental fiction in mind. Intertextuality adds richness to the novel. Ruffato's title comes from a line in Cecília Meireles's 1953 *Romanceiro da Inconfidência*, a long poem recounting the history of Minas Gerais from early colonial times to the 1789

Brazilian independence movement known as the Inconfidência Mineira. Also, like James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920), Ruffato's novel takes place in the span of one day, from 9 May 2000 to dawn of the following day.

While Ferréz's social messages are direct, Ruffato's are subtler. Macedo borrows an apt metaphor from Baudelaire to describe how Ruffato takes social implications into account: "Luiz Ruffato teve a integridade de ser também, como Baudelaire dizia que deveria ser o poeta, 'um caleidoscópio equipado de consciência'" [Luiz Ruffato had the integrity to be also, like Baudelaire said the poet should be, 'a kaleidoscope equipped with a conscience'] (54). The conscience comes not from the tone of the writing, but from where Ruffato chooses to point his kaleidoscope, which tends to be bleak scenes of São Paulo.

Public Works in *Eles eram muitos cavalos*

Throughout *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, characters describe badly lit streets, open sewage, a dark bus stop, a metaphoric blackout, shootouts on highways, horrendous traffic jams, and other infrastructural failures that underscore the deterioration of public works. Parallel to this is the related deterioration of social relations, expressed by the communicative disconnect between the characters of each vignette who never meet, though they reside in the same city. Thus, the form reinforces a theme. In *Capão Pecado*, depictions of broken public works serve primarily to convey a sociopolitical message about inequality. However, in *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, broken public works accentuate something more personal: the sense of disconnection, dissatisfaction, inequality, distortion, and doom felt by characters.

Roads are a common setting for the novel's vignettes, and they accentuate differences among characters and among the narrators and characters. The vignette "A caminho" [On the way] takes place in a car where a trader, obsessed with money, sex, and drugs, speeds along a São Paulo highway while dancing at the wheel. Although the driver, perhaps high on cocaine, ignores problems with the road, the narrator fixates on the bad condition of the highway by listing them:

O Neon vaga veloz por sobre o asfalto irregular, ignorando ressaltos, lombadas, regos, buracos, saliências, costelas, seixos, negra nesga na noite negra, aprisionada, a música hipnótica, tum-tum tum-tum, rege o tronco que trance, tum-tum tum-tum (11)

[The Neon speeds along over the irregular asphalt, ignoring bumps, ridges, dips, holes, overhangs, uneven pavement, pebbles, black nook in the black night, imprisoned, the hypnotic music, tum-tum tum-tum, guides his twisting torso, tum-tum tum-tum]

This list creates a tension in priorities between the trader who tunes out the bumpy road and the narrator who pulls the reader's attention toward it, especially as the "tum-tum" could refer to either the music or the sound the car makes going over bumps.

Relative to the confusion of the rest of "A caminho," the list of what is wrong with the highway is clear, which makes the reader latch onto it as one of the few certainties of the vignette. The rest of "A caminho" is hard to follow. The present and past tenses mix, and the present is used to portray the past. The narrator shifts back and forth from the third to first person. Three characters speak, but there is no indication that a part of the text is dialogue. It is unclear at first if the driver is the trader or his boss. Moreover, Ruffato often does not indicate sentences' subjects, so it is ambiguous what or

who the subject of the verb is, like the vague *Eles* in the novel's title. Much of the text is italicized, offset, in boldface, left unpunctuated, phonetically spelled, or not capitalized.

The novel positions “A caminho” beside “De cor” [By heart], a vignette in which characters do not have the privilege of tuning out problems with public works. A boy, his father, and another man walk along a dark, busy highway because they cannot afford to take the buses that whiz past in this vignette and the previous one. Read one beside the other, the two vignettes highlight disconnection and inequality.

For the protagonist of the vignette “O que quer uma mulher” [What a woman wants], roads are sites of violence that trigger her to articulate her desires. Although she speaks of desires beyond necessity—the desire to travel, to buy something new, and to eat out—a story she tells about the previous evening demonstrates a more pressing desire for safety. Driving home, she is caught in the middle of a shootout along the highway. She contemplates running away, but fears someone will steal the car. Instead, she crouches, afraid she will die alone, until the cars behind her beep when the shooting is through. She starts the car again, passing the carnage and the arrested men with their arms up, stripped down to their underwear. The moment of loneliness and fear is a catalyst for her: “eu decidi que não quero mais essa vida pra mim não não quero” [I decided that I don't want this life for me anymore no I don't want it] (24).

As the most intimate representation of public works in *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, “O que quer uma mulher” connects public and private desires. After the shooting, the protagonist confronts her husband about her desire to be better provided for. As she confronts him, her complaints about material failures in her city and her home come together since she feels well provided for by neither her government nor her husband.

She has what she needs to survive, but she wants more: comfort, financial security, physical pleasure, a functional home, and a life without fear of violence. It is through complaints about the failures of public works, both inside and outside her home, that she articulates these desires beyond necessity, paying particular attention to light.

Partial light and partial vision surface frequently in the vignette, evoking partial dysfunction. The woman's eyeglasses are scratched and held together by a band-aid. Her husband has astigmatism. Through the window, the woman observes the people waiting for the bus "reguardados pela luz anêmica do poste" [protected by the anemic light of the streetlamp] (23). The anthropomorphic light is sickly, providing only partial illumination. She lights the kitchen with only a forty-watt light bulb and complains to her husband that they are behind on their payments. Due to financial struggles, they have had to cut back on light, but only she notices. She complains to her husband, "nem pra trocar uma lâmpada você serve" [you can't even change a light bulb] (26). The third person narrator describes "o rosto lusco-fusco da mulher" [the twilight face of the woman] who craves more light (25). With two children, the couple makes less each month than they spend. The woman lists her husband's attributes (faithful, honest, and hardworking), but repeats, generalizing to all women, "*uma mulher uma mulher precisa de muito mais do que isso*" [a woman a woman needs much more than that] (26) .

The references to light evoke her longing for safety, for comfort, and, by extension, her desire to have her financial and sexual desires fulfilled by her husband. He—an educator—thrives off knowledge for knowledge's sake, reading Foucault for pleasure at breakfast. However, his love of ideas torments his practical wife. The tragedy in her mind is not their poverty itself, but his "opção pela pobreza" [choice of poverty]

(25). His wife wants more. She wants her husband to be more useful, to make more money, and to be more physically intimate with her. Weak and failing public works help articulate these desires.

In turn, infrastructural failure in the vignette “Crânio” [Cranium] works on both a metaphoric and a literal level to examine class relationships, fear, violence, and resentment. The narrator proudly describes his drug-free, bookworm sixteen-year-old brother, Crânio, as being “preto que nem a água preta que escorre no meio dos barracos” [black as the black water that runs between the shacks] (98). The description serves as much to tell us the color of Crânio’s skin (darker than the narrator’s due to their different fathers) as to describe where they come from: a destitute neighborhood that lacks any sewer system, which makes Crânio’s reading habits all the more extraordinary. The narrator describes a tragic encounter his innocent brother has with the legal system in which “a polícia mandou ele deitar no chão sujo a cara encostada no riozinho de esgoto” [the police made him lie on the dirty ground his face against a river of sewage] (103). They then torture him. The sewage enters Crânio’s mouth, evoking contamination, police brutality, and injustice as experienced by a young, poor man of color.

The vignette illustrates the deterioration of public works, the violence of the streets, and one of São Paulo’s strongest symbols of economic division and public failures: the helicopters used for intra-city travel to avoid traffic delays and violence. When Crânio discovers that the narrator and his friends killed a man they were robbing at a streetlight, he proclaims, “seus babacas os ricos não estão nas ruas estão lá no alto em helicópteros” [you idiots the rich aren’t on the streets they are up there in helicopters] (101). Crânio’s words are confirmed in the vignette “Assim” [Like that], in which a

business man in a private helicopter laments that the rivers are contaminated and the streets smell of urine. To improve, he proclaims, “*precisaríamos reinventar uma civilização*” [we would need to reinvent civilization] (36), but as he philosophizes from his vantage of privilege looking down on the fetid city, he never considers that the wealth and priorities that cause him to travel to work via helicopter could be part of the problem.

The privilege he enjoys contrasts with the vignette “Crânio,” which ends when the narrator seeks revenge on the police officers who beat Crânio, leaving the reader with a cycle of violence, related to poverty, public neglect, police brutality, police absence, and lack of jobs. This violence even infiltrates the language of *Eles eram muitos cavalos*: sentences do not end, paragraphs are not punctuated, and stylistic elements—such as font, size, indentation, boldface, layout, italicization, and capitalization—follow no logic. As literary critic Lúcia Sá identifies, these stylistic choices reinforce the sense of incompleteness in the text, as if something were missing in these people’s lives (95). This incompleteness includes many characters’ lack of access to public works.

In *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, public works’ function occasionally morphs, creating unrest. For instance, in the previously mentioned highway shooting in “O que quer uma mulher,” the highway becomes a war zone as opposed to a network to link different parts of the city, and the car becomes an emergency shelter as opposed to a means of transport. A common distortion of public works in urban Brazil is the robberies that take place at traffic lights, so frequent that it is legal to run red lights late at night in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, to avoid hold ups while stopped. Historically, a shift in what streets symbolize is noteworthy: While the *Avenida Central* marked Brazil’s grand entrance into the twentieth century by providing its capital with a Haussmann-style

boulevard that increased safety and encouraged commerce and sociability, in Ruffato's novel roads have regressed into a symbol of deterioration and urban anarchy.

Other distortions are less violent than distressing. As previously mentioned, in the vignette "De cor," three people walk along a São Paulo highway because they cannot afford to take a bus. The highway was not intended for pedestrians, and, therefore, is dangerous for walkers. The boy uses bus destination placards to practice his outstanding national geography. Thus, he creates an alternative function for the buses he cannot afford to take. He knows the name of every city in Brazil, but has no way to reach most of them. Representations of cars play a similar role in *Capão Pecado*. Characters who would never be able to afford to own cars work at metalworks where they may spend their days manufacturing them. Two photographs in *Capão Pecado* portray children playing in wrecked cars, one of which is a *fusca*. The *fusca*, or Volkswagen bug, is an iconic symbol of entrance into middle-class life, here depicted in shambles, thus rendering such an entrance unimaginable. In these examples, as public works are distorted from a source of order to one of disorder, characters' psychosocial health decreases as they experience uncertainty and dysfunction.

A conversation between two couples, meeting to decide if they want to swap partners for a sexual swing, takes the opposite vantage point of "Crânio"'s narrator. One character refers to where *baianos* [people from Bahia. Read: poor and dark-skinned] will end up if they lose their low-wage jobs:

M – É... pra ficar nos faróis assaltando a gente...
 N – É... a gente não tem mais sossego nem dentro de casa...
 A – Vocês moram em casa?
 N – Não, apartamento...

A – Vocês é que têm sorte... Nós moramos em casa... um perigo danado... tem que pagar segurança... um gasto que não deveríamos ter... a gente já paga imposto... (113)

[M – Yeah... hanging out at traffic lights, robbing us...

N – Yeah... we're no longer safe in our own homes...

A – Do you live in a house?

N – No, an apartment...

A – You're lucky... We live in a house... really dangerous... we have to pay for security guards... an expense we shouldn't have... we already pay taxes...]

Homes, which as supposed to be beacons of safety, are threatened, and a character blames the government for this unrest. In her book *City of Walls*, Teresa Caldeira establishes a compelling argument for why discussions of crime, are so popular. She writes that narratives of crime

attempt to establish order in a universe that seems to have lost coherence. Amid the chaotic feelings associated with the spread of random violence in city space, these narratives attempt to reestablish order and meaning. Contrary to the experience of crime, which disrupts meaning and disorders the world, the talk of crime symbolically reorders it by trying to reestablish a static picture of the world. This symbolic reordering is expressed in very simplistic terms, relying on the creation of clear-cut oppositional categories, the most important of which are good and evil. (20)

The swinging couples' conversation about *baianos* holding up cars and robbing houses creates oppositional categories of black versus white, poor versus rich, and good versus evil. By reproducing this good versus evil paradigm beside other vignettes that offer sympathetic portrayals of the perpetrators of crimes, Ruffato calls such paradigms into question. His novel complicates the simplistic paradigm of crime narratives, refusing a style that returns coherence to the world. Instead, his narrative increases the disorder, often employing broken public works to this end.

This distortion and the general dysfunction of public works spur apocalyptic worries about the city, which is stretched beyond its infrastructural capacity. For instance, in the vignette “Táxi,” a cab driver dreams of a São Paulo on the verge of self-destruction: “Sabe que uma vez sonhei que a cidade parou? Parou mesmo, totalmente. Um engarrafamento imenso” [You know that I once dreamed that the city stopped? Really, it totally stopped. One huge traffic jam] (84). It is a humorous moment in the novel: a cab driver in a city with some of the world’s worst traffic jams imagines his hell scenario. The predominant sense is that what lies in the public domain—in this case congested roads—is no longer functional or controllable. In a novel focused more on the portrayal of the city than any particular character, this vision of a massive traffic jam furthers the sense of rush, panic, abandonment, and dysfunction that São Paulo instills in some. The image of a city that comes to a complete halt as its public works cease to function is reminiscent of another highly-acclaimed Lusophone novel: José Saramago’s 1995 novel *Ensaio sobre a cegueira* (*Blindness*). A massive blindness epidemic leaves a city with no one to care for its roads, waterworks, and electricity, resulting in apocalyptic chaos and reminding the reader of the human hand behind public works.

The apocalyptic sentiments of *Eles eram muitos cavalos* are taken to the extreme in “Tudo acaba” [Everything ends], a vignette in which a character imagines the ghost town that São Paulo will become, starting from inside a crumbling apartment and zooming out to a panorama of the entire city:

as vigas terão de ser reforçadas a água que se infiltra no teto do banheiro e que já provocou o rejunte dos ladrilhos se imiscuirá por entre as colunas os fios de eletricidade endurecerão provocando curto-circuitos e o prédio condenado arruinado será tomado por sem-teto mendigos drogados malucos traficantes disputarão o ponto e tudo findará porque tudo acaba e

este quarto em que . . . esgoto escorrendo pelas paredes . . . nada disso restará nada o bairro se transformará em lugar ermo a morte sob cada poste de luz apagada em cada esquina . . . são paulo inteira decadência (72)

[the rafters will need to be reinforced the water that leaks into the bathroom ceiling and that already caused the tile joints to get into the columns the electrical wires will harden causing short circuits and the condemned ruined building will be taken over by crazy homeless drug addicts drug traffickers will fight over the spot and everything will end because everything ends and this room in which . . . sewage dripping down the walls . . . none of this will be left none the neighborhood will turn into a deserted place death under every turned off streetlight on every corner. . . são paulo complete decadence]

The gothic daydream portrays a collapse that starts in the private realm and works outward to the entire city, in one pessimist's meanderings about São Paulo's apocalyptic fate. The city, stripped even of the capital letters in its name, ends up lawless, deserted, and fetid.

Literary historian Pascale Casanova, writing about Paris, makes a compelling case for why writers invent apocalyptic fates for cities:

It was not until the theme of the apocalyptic destruction of Paris—an obligatory aspect of chronicles and evocations of Paris throughout the nineteenth century—gained currency that it became possible to raise the city, through the tragic fate that awaited it, to the rank of the great mythical cities, Ninevah [sic], Babylon, and Thebes: "All the great cities have met a violent death," wrote Maxime Du Camp. "World history is the account of the destruction of great capitals; these excessive and hydrocephalic bodies seem fated to disappear in cataclysms." To evoke the disappearance of Paris was therefore only a way of making it appear still greater than it was and, by snatching it from the clutches of history, of elevating it to the rank of universal myth. (27)

Does Ruffato elevate São Paulo to the realm of mythical city in his apocalyptic scenes?

No. There is nothing glorious or romantic about his apocalyptic imagery. However,

following the suit of the Brazilian modernists, he does elevate São Paulo to the status of a literary city that need not be depicted in purely sociopolitical terms. His focus on formal elements relates to Casanova's argument about the autonomy of literary countries:

the autonomy enjoyed by the most literary countries is marked chiefly by the depoliticization of literature: the almost complete disappearance of popular or national themes, the appearance of 'pure' writing—texts that, freed from the obligation to help to develop a particular national identity, have no social or political 'function'—and, as an aspect of this, the emergence of formal experimentation, which is to say of forms detached from political purpose and unencumbered by nonliterary conceptions of literature. (199)

Ruffato continues the Brazilian tradition of extreme formal experimentation, begun in the 1920s. Moreover, he utilizes failed public works to contemplate, formally and thematically, contemporary life in São Paulo and feelings of alienation.

Conclusion

Both novels analyzed in this chapter are deeply located in a specific place, mentioned by name repeatedly, but that place is not the same in both texts. While Ferréz represents the streets of one peripheral district—Capão Redondo—Ruffato's kaleidoscope points throughout São Paulo's streets. Ferréz's novel provides a homogenous, cohesive portrait of part of the city, whereas *Eles eram muitos cavalos* provides a chaotic, heterogeneous portrait of various fragments of the city. *Capão Pecado* tells the story of a marginal São Paulo community, whereas Ruffato's novel shows the extremes of who calls the same city home.

Having explored the failed public works in these two novels, it is now relevant to ask why the authors choose such negative aspects of São Paulo's public works when they

could have chosen the city's infrastructural successes (paving, sewers, sanitation, and electricity) from the 1990s to present as the backdrop of their texts (Caldeira "I Came to Sabotage" 113). Failed public works help the authors unfold their narratives. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the novels are concerned with anarchy, apocalypse, instability, violence, inequality, and urban ruin, pessimistic themes that call for a certain type of dismal setting. Furthermore, the novels reflect on the ties between public space, violence, poverty, and neglect, making a case for taking better care of public works.

The results of the authors' depictions of failed public works are twofold. On the one hand, they aid in the literary objective of creating a dark setting in which dysfunction and vulnerability reign. Thus, problems with public works grate away at the interior, intimate spaces within the urban subjects. On the other hand, this failure demonstrates how stark class lines delineate who has access to basic public works. The abandonment of public works and their uneven distribution across São Paulo in the novels trigger in the reader a desire to protect public works and make them more widely available.

Caldeira views the creation of public space as central to making São Paulo safer. This is the positive equivalent of the novels' depiction of how deteriorating public spaces decrease safety. She writes: "the main challenge to the expansion of democracy and to the control of violence is to create public space where issues of inequality and racism can be addressed without cynicism and denial and simultaneously to create institutions capable of giving meaning to notions of justice and of protecting the lives and bodies of subaltern people" ("I Came to Sabotage" 103). Vieira makes a similar point specifically in relationship to *Eles eram muitos cavalos*: "Como os sistemas urbano, social, político, e econômico falharam em fornecer espaços e recursos básicos para estas necessidades,

talvez um dos primeiros passos no caminho para entender este problema massivo é por meio da expressão da arte e da cultura” [As the urban, social, political, and economic systems failed to provide space and basic resources for these people in need, perhaps one of the first steps in the path to understanding this massive problem is via artistic and cultural expression] (“O desafio do urbanismo” 128). *Capão Pecado* and *Eles eram muitos cavalos*’ renditions of São Paulo call for the same protection of public space since they articulate public works as integral to citizens’ well being. The question remains as to who is responsible for this failure of public works. While writers such as Lima Barreto blame the city government for infrastructural problems, there is no longer a straightforward culprit for the infrastructural breakdown in these two novels about twenty-first century São Paulo. Instead, open markets, national migrations, stark economic inequality, as well as limited government intervention all play a part.

CONCLUSION

Sociologist David McCrone argues that “The ‘narrative’ of the nation is told and retold through national histories, literatures, the media and popular culture, which together provide a set of images, stories, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals” (52). Throughout this dissertation, I have examined representations of Brazilian public works in national histories, literatures, media, and popular culture that together provide a set of images, stories, and national symbols. Would this make representations of Brazilian public works a subset of McCrone’s “narrative” of the nation? Yes and no. McCrone’s theory underscores how the nation is an imaginary construction made up of the narratives that form the supposed collective ethos of a place and its people. Its counterpart is the state, a real entity with employees, offices, laws, and so on. If representations of public works are *narratives of the nation*, they are also *narratives of the state*. Returning to Amanda Claybaugh’s observation, which I noted in chapter two, representations of public works make visible the role of the government and its institutions (the state) as well as give shape to the imagined entity of the nation.

Brazilian authors show us how citizens, governments, and companies invest public works with meaning. In the hands of these writers, public works become symbols of glamour, class conflict, hope, foreign exploitation, efficiency, exorbitance, and self-sufficiency. All of these listed items relate to notions of national progress with regard to both the real entity of the *state* (how funds are allocated for public works) and the imaginary entity of the *nation* (what these public works expose about the ethos of Brazil). Opinions about public works projects reveal a great deal about Brazilians’ appraisal of

national progress. Throughout this dissertation, I have explored how Brazil creates actual public works as well as narratives about those public works. Both, I have argued, shape the multifaceted representations of the nation and of the state.

From the 1900s to the 1970s, Brazil frequently embarked on massive public works projects. Electric streetcars, electric streetlights, highways, power plants, and bridges were built. Governments and companies used these public works as symbols of national progress, scripting them into what I have referred to as *public works progress narratives*. While these progress narratives used public works as proof of national progress, Brazilian writers questioned the idealizations of such narratives. Arguments emerged over aesthetic, practical, and class-related concerns.

To conclude, I would like to bring up three final points. The first is the notion of *infrastructural literacy*, a possible lens through which to see what representations of public works *do*. The second is an analysis of streetlight smashing in 1904. This is a poignant example of public works literally, as opposed to figuratively, being the object of attack, which has not been the case with any of the other public works analyzed in this dissertation. I will close with a foreign portrayal of how public works fit into Brazil's national narrative. It is an exhibit on display at a Los Angeles museum. Since the streetlight smashing precedes the 1905 installation of the *Avenida Central's* electric streetlights and the exhibit succeeds the 2001 publication of *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, these two examples constitute chronological bookends for this dissertation.

Infrastructural Literacy

The representations of public works analyzed throughout this dissertation encourage awareness that we might refer to as *infrastructural literacy*. By infrastructural literacy, I mean the capacity and curiosity to examine the meanings imbedded in public works, especially the ways in which public works become sites of contention. I have chosen the word *literacy* because of the parallel between interpreting words (a type of symbol) to decode the meanings of sentences and interpreting representations of public works (another type of symbol) to decode what these representations tell us about a place, people, or culture. The literacy metaphor works on various levels, referring to the infrastructural literacy of a character, an author, or a critic, although my particular concern in this dissertation is the critic or reader.

For instance, when Lima Barreto imagines electric lights lining the caves of Castelo Hill in 1905, he beckons his reader to see the electric streetlights of the urban renewal project as symbols of elitism. When João do Rio lavishes praise on the lights of the 1908 National Exposition, he leads his reader to see how these lights are symbolic of glamour and Brazilian modernity. Many representations of Light demonstrate how, throughout much of the twentieth century in southeastern Brazil, people regarded Light-owned public works as objects symbolic of Brazil's dependence on foreign capital. Representations of Brasília, when it was under construction and recently finished, highlight the discrepancies between what the new capital and its highways promised and what they delivered. The military regime's use of public works reveal how such structures were employed to legitimize the rule of a government that took power unconstitutionally. In *Capão Pecado* and *Eles eram muitos cavalos*, dysfunctional public works identify government neglect and symbolize characters' feelings of alienation and

abandonment. Brazilian representations of public works allow us to decode the ways in which these structures had and have significance that transcends utility.

Streetlight Smashing

Infrastructural literacy allows us to perceive the symbolic importance of public works that goes beyond their practical function, yet their practical function can also be symbolic. In 1904, streetlights were elegant cast iron structures that made cities safer, showed off urban charms, and decorated streets. However, for those who were infuriated with the scope of the government's power, streetlights were a convenient victim: by putting out the light, one could challenge how enlightened the government actually was. In the cases examined thus far, public works were the subject of celebration or protest, yet during the 1904 Vaccination Revolt streetlights were the *object* of protest.

The Vaccination Revolt began on 10 November 1904, the day before the mandatory smallpox vaccination law was to take effect in Rio de Janeiro. In protest, *cariocas* smashed gas streetlamps. Protestors opted to send a visual, public message to voice their feeling of having their individual freedom violated. José Vieira, in his 1905 novel *O bota-abaixo: chronica de 1904* [The Tear-Down: Chronicle of 1904], comically describes the instigators of this lamp smashing:

o povo escolheu para responsaveis das suas miserias e victimas da sua vingança os lampeões da iluminação publica. Dentro em dois dias, era gloria pessoal ter quebrado os vidros de um combustor. Os bravos que inventaram essa maneira de combate á vaccina foram os vendedores de jornaes, os garotos de cortiço, os operarios desoccupados, os capangas de politicos cariocas. (169)

[the people chose the public streetlights as the ones responsible for their misery and as the victims of their revenge. Within two days, it was a sign

of personal glory to have broken the glass of a streetlamp. The angry men who invented this style of combat against the vaccination were the newspaper sellers, the tenement boys, the unemployed laborers, and the thugs of carioca politicians.]

The *carioca* poor are the laughingstock of the scene, Don Quixotes and Sancho Panzas, attacking windmills with the utmost sense of purpose. The humor of the description caters to the biases of Vieira's intended readers—the *carioca* elite, yet as the passage continues, the rich end up being portrayed as more foolish than the poor: “Mas os vagabundos de gravata tentados pela leitura dos jornaes e pelas feições picarescas da revolta, não subiam ao seu bonde ou ao seu trem virgens de jogar uma pedrada ou puxar o gatilho de um revolver” [However, the white collar vagabonds, tempted by what they read in the paper or by the picaresque aspects of the revolt, were no virgins to having thrown a rock or pulled a trigger by the time they'd caught their trolley or train] (169). While the poor were justifiably resentful of sanitation and hygiene campaigns⁸⁵, nothing practical, according to the narrator, could legitimate the *carioca* elite's frivolous, apolitical lamp smashing. The passage's humor derives from a reversal: the elite entered the politicized space of the masses. Yet, it was only for the brief hedonistic pleasure of breaking public objects as part of a street spectacle.

Vieira's depiction suggests that the “white collar vagabonds” delighted in lamp smashing purely for sport. Dating politically motivated streetlight smashing back to the

⁸⁵ The Vaccination Revolt was atypical for Brazil in that the government ceded to the protestors' desire to have the mandatory vaccine law dropped, a point for popular uprising, but ironically—as people only came to understand long afterward—a mute point. The smallpox vaccination was one of the few elements of the health campaigns that was straightforwardly beneficial to people of all social classes.

seventeenth century, Schivelbusch describes how this act of rebellion offered the immediate, cathartic satisfaction of putting out the light⁸⁶:

Whatever the details and methods, smashing lanterns was obviously an extremely enjoyable activity . . . the darkness that prevailed after the lanterns had gone out stood for disorder and freedom. Added to this visual experience of omnipotence was a no less pleasurable aural one. The sound of breaking glass is like an explosion. Something that a moment ago was solid, an object with a highly symbolic significance, is suddenly wiped out. (98)

As breaking public lights became a symbol of civic fury, replacing them became a symbol of state stability. By 19 November 1904, the *Jornal do Brasil* gave the following report: “streets are almost clear of the mountains of garbage and destruction that during the last days have made them almost impassable; public lighting is reestablished; and the transit of streetcars on all lines is completely restored” (qtd. in Meade 109). A streetlight at the time was a tall, strong, illuminated pillar of state power, a beacon of the Positivist motto “ordem e progresso” [order and progress], which has waved on the national flag since the proclamation of the Republic in 1889.⁸⁷ However, streetlight smashing in the revolt offered a visual and dangerously anarchical display of the city officials’ incapacity to control their citizens. Not surprisingly, the city officials quickly made repairs, both for practical reasons and as an assertion of their control via operational public works.

Jurassic Technologies

⁸⁶ As early as the seventeenth century, lantern smashing existed in Paris as an “individual, libertine phenomenon,” but it was not until the Paris revolutions and rebellions in the nineteenth century that it became a “collective, plebian movement” (Schivelbusch 99-100).

⁸⁷ The motto “Ordem e Progresso” was inspired by philosopher Auguste Comte’s motto of positivism: “L’amour pour principe et l’ordre pour base; le progrès pour but” [Love as the principle and order as the basis; progress as the goal] (149). Historian Michael Goebel points out that, albeit it counterintuitive, the instigators of Latin American liberal nation-building projects “perceived no contradiction in claiming universal(ist) sources as their preferred blueprint for what they saw as the civilizing mission of forging a nation from above” (9). These nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century nationalistic projects were, indeed, quite cosmopolitan.

Los Angeles's Museum of Jurassic Technologies—a place with a cult following among artists and academics—displays in its permanent collection an exhibit about Wilhelm Sonnabend, a German engineer. While working for the German industrial company Krupp in Buenos Aires, Sonnabend was commissioned to build a 700-meter suspension footbridge spanning from Argentina to Brazil, overlooking the Iguazu Falls, South America's equivalent to Niagara. The bridge was built just ten meters from the *Garganta del Diablo* [Devil's Throat], the largest of the falls, as well as a natural wonder, tourist attraction, and part of the gushing Paraná River that powers the Itaipu Dam. A headset at the exhibit provides a monologue about how on 17 February 1887 in a large storm, the almost-completed bridge was torn from its moorings on the Brazilian side. The suspension bridge draped from the Argentine side for three months. A large three-dimensional model in a dark room of the museum depicts the haunting scene of a bridge dangling into the river with the waterfall behind it. From the perspective of the viewer, the model freezes in time the months when the remnants of an engineering blunder remained uncomfortably visible to the public eye. Moreover, the model transforms a place that holds bragging rights as a must-see among tourists in Latin America into an ominous space where nature's powers outdo those of engineering.

When I first saw the exhibit, I ruminated about how I had been to the Argentine and Brazilian sides of Iguazu Falls, yet could recall no mention of this footbridge gone wrong. Was this omission an effort to erase an inglorious infrastructural mishap that might spook visitors as they traversed the walkways that lead to lookouts of the falls? I realized what the exhibit disconcertingly omits: any indication that this story is an invention. The engineer, the suspension bridge, and the storm are fabrications

superimposed on a real geographic place and dreamt up by a museum concerned with questioning the very role of museums and their presentation of so-called facts. The power of the story—part of a larger exhibit about the Sonnabend family—comes in part from its plausibility: European and North American engineers have been responsible for much of the infrastructural engineering that has taken place in Latin America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Southern Cone's geography and the agendas of many of its governments have, over the decades, encouraged massive projects, such as the Rio-Niterói Bridge and the Itaipu Dam.

At the start of this dissertation, I referred to Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's line, "Há tantos anos, foi descoberta a vela de cera, a maior invenção depois da lâmpada elétrica" [Years ago, the wax candle was discovered, the greatest invention since the electric lamp] (191). The museum exhibit causes as similar double-take as this miniature chapter from the novel *Zero*. Both add new valence to the idea of infrastructural literacy, likening it perhaps to media literacy by encouraging us to question what we are told.

However, what to me is most intriguing about the exhibit is not how it questions the order of things, but how it allows the viewer to invent a chapter of history. While looking at the model of the waterfall and fallen bridge, I thought of Euclides da Cunha and João do Rio's diatribes about Brazil's dependence on German engineering, mentioned in my introduction. Both men, I mused, would have felt vindicated by this demonstrable example of the ineptitude of German engineering that might motivate Brazil to train and trust more native engineers to design the country's bridges, dams, and tunnels. In other museum visitors, the exhibit presumably inspires quite different fictions.

The poet A. R. Ammons notes a similar invitation to imagine, which he finds in poetry:

poetry leads us to the unstructured sources of our beings, to the unknown, and returns us to our rational, structured selves refreshed. Having once experienced the mystery, plenitude, contradiction, and composure of a work of art, we afterward have a built-in resistance to the slogans and propaganda of oversimplification that have often contributed to the destruction of human life. (8)

His observation resonates particularly strongly with the most artistically innovative representations of public works analyzed in this dissertation, such as those of João Guimarães Rosa and Clarice Lispector. However, most of the fictional representations of public works explored throughout these pages challenge the oversimplification of public works progress narratives, allowing readers to return refreshed to the public works they use daily.

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