

Blunting broken windows: Rio de Janeiro's Olympic dreams

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***Blunting Broken Windows: Rio de Janeiro's Olympic Dreams** is an excerpt from my 2017 doctoral thesis in Urban and Regional Planning at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ, Brazil), in which I seek to approximate the heteroglossic experiences of bodies meeting in the city through textual and thematic juxtaposition. As such, I have departed from standard academic writing and approached the work as a performance text, utilizing protest chants, popular songs, and personal narratives – as well as citations from theoretical essays and newspaper articles – in order to investigate relations between memory, territory, and corporeality. Throughout the work, I switch between different fonts and formatting styles to indicate different authorial voices.*

*In addition to serving as a form of auto-ethnography, **Blunting Broken Windows** is an exercise in self-translation: I wrote the original in Portuguese, which I learned as an adult, and I am only now beginning to translate it into my native English, blending further the text's investigation of urban wandering and personal interrogation.*

1.

August 22, 2016 Olympic Boulevard, Port Zone, Rio de Janeiro

I walk down the Olympic Boulevard with the ghost of Francisco Pereira Passos, the self-proclaimed "Tropical Haussman," mayor of Rio de Janeiro from 1902 to 1906 who expelled tens of thousands of people from their homes to try and make the city look a little bit more like Paris.

It's a cold and rainy Monday, a day declared a public holiday so as to mark the end of the 2016 Olympic Games, to ease the first stage of its slow decomposition, and to facilitate the mass exit of athletes, coaches, bureaucrats, and tourists.

Olympic Ghost Methodology:

In order to carry out research with a ghost at your side and enter into a dream you would prefer not to be a part of, all you need is a combination of basic historical knowledge

(no matter how incomplete);

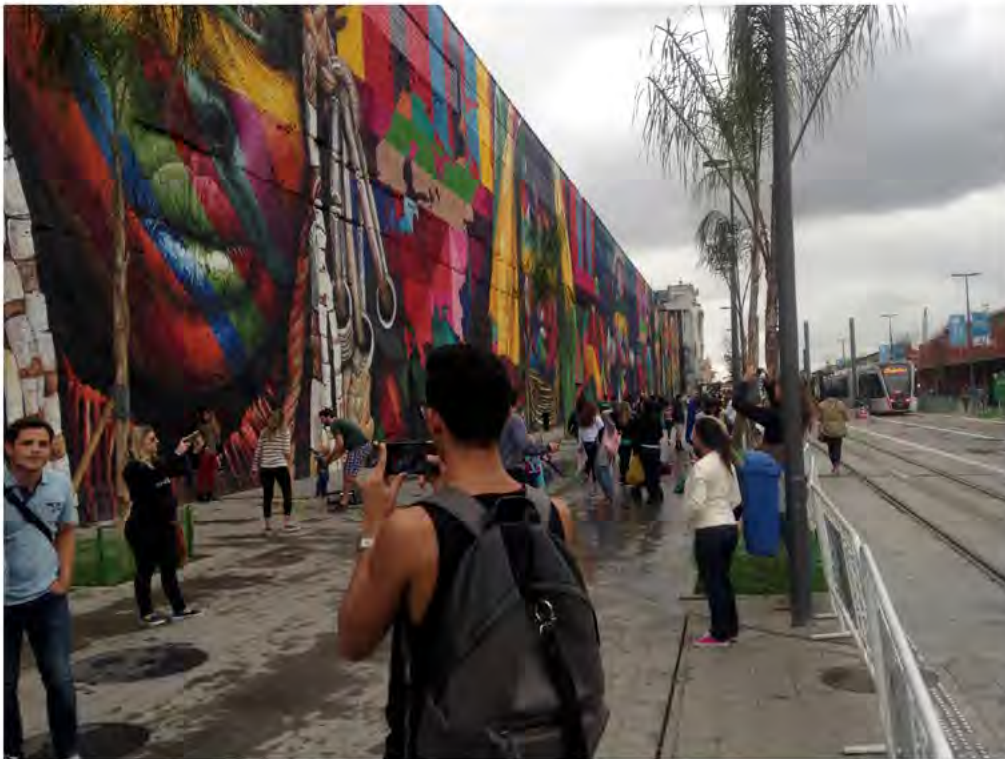
a minimally active imagination

(something that becomes more difficult to exercise during mega-events that go out of their way to sell experiences that can override any imagination, whether individual or collective);

*a sort of Brechtian distancing;
and resigned patience.*

(Big sigh).

Mr. Pereira Passos and I place ourselves here on the Boulevard as observers rather than participants, an identification that the Ghost Mayor's invisibility might help to reinforce. But that distinction doesn't count for much along this giant, pseudo-public promenade, in which to observe is to participate: rambling or wandering among painted walls and thematic houses pausing to pose for selfies and to feel the mega-scale of it all is the base-level involvement of everyone passing through.



The "Boulevard" is a model stretch of 3.2 kilometers

[T]he biggest Olympic live site in the history of the Olympic Games...
(PREFEITURA DO RIO 2016a)

that joins Rio's Port Zone to downtown's Praça XV in front of Guanabara Bay's celebrated "superbacterias." It's zealously watched over by a combination of the Municipal Guard, Military Police, National Guard, Marine Police, and Army Police, as well as Army soldiers holding semi-automatic rifles

...with more than 100 concerts, cultural and sports attractions. (*ibid*)

Such as, for example, a *Bungee Jump* sponsored by Nissan, a hot-air balloon sponsored by Skol Beer, a maquette of the city of Rio de Janeiro sponsored by Lego, and

an Olympic space totally focused on young people (*ibid*)

sponsored, of course, by Coca-Cola.

With the dead mayor's ghost by my side, I walk through this *live site*

(*which, somehow, is left without italics when it's written in Portuguese*)

trying to understand what, exactly, a live site could be.

The designation seems to have been used, at most, once before, during the 2012 London Olympics.

As far as I can tell, a live site is a sort of fusion between a closed street and an open-air shopping mall;

it's a theoretically public space that has been highly patronized, regulated, and that – at least hypothetically – is highly profitable

(*which is to say that, even if the site itself isn't profitable just yet, it's at least capable of generating or inspiring future profits*).

So a *live site* is a concretization of the speculative Dream of an Olympic City.

The ex-mayor understands a little bit about this concretization. Stifling laughter, he opens a ghost newspaper from his days:

...to all of us, this construction of a port, and this radiant promise of long avenues and ample quays sanitizing and beautifying the city still seems to be a dream.

But it is not a dream. Our generation can give thanks to the heavens for the grace it has been conceded in initiating the regeneration of Brazil.

(*O Malho*, "Renascimento", 13/6/1903, em Del Brenna (1985, p. 68))

The almost euphoric smile that I envision on the imagined face of the Ghost Mayor mixes with dozens of smiles from the portraits that cover the façades of three buildings in the middle of the Boulevard. The only figure that can't manage to join in is a cutout boy on the side of a blue building, slouching among the portraits.

The boy is surrounded by dozens of broken windows. Jagged glass is all around him: above his head, at his feet, behind his back, at the same level as his sad, contemplative eyes. But these sharp edges are nearly hidden, overwhelmed by smiling faces.



Broken windows and smiling portraits also cover the two beige buildings on either side of the blue one. But it's only on the blue building – right at the boy's eye level – that a yellow plastic banner, crookedly hung amidst all the broken glass, advertises the building as being for rent. It's also worth mentioning that the dozens of families who formed a squatters' settlement known as Casarão Azul

(the Big Blue House)

were expelled from the blue building in 2009, because they didn't fit into the Dream of an Olympic City being applied to this Port District.

...unfortunately, the building that housed the settlement is still here, intact.

They haven't moved a single brick, it's exactly as it was. There was a big rush to make the residents leave, but it's still here, intact. And one of those residents is living in a space that could be considered a tenement, in a nine square meter room that he lives in with his wife and their six children. So it's very unfortunate, isn't it? They're waiting for this space to become even more valuable through real estate speculation, and the former residents are living in completely precarious situations.

(Santos 2016)

The eviction of Casarão Azul produced a gap that no public authorities had any rush to fill; according to the speculative logic of the Dream of an Olympic City, decorating a building's façade can be much more lucrative than actually inhabiting it.

At the same time, for Casarão Azul – and for the majority of buildings along the Olympic Boulevard – the projected and imagined potential of an Olympic City is worth much more than the physical reality produced and experienced by the people who once lived there. The decorations on the building's façade – especially the cutout of the unsmiling boy – provide the only possible clue about the building's past.

A stable neighborhood of families who care for their homes, mind each other's children, and confidently frown on unwanted intruders can change, in a few years or even a few months, to an inhospitable and frightening jungle. A piece of property is abandoned, weeds grow up, a window is smashed.
(Wilson and Kelling 1982, p. 3)

These days, any City that Dreams of Being Olympic must necessarily dream of following New York's go-get-'em, Zero Tolerance lead; it dreams of following "America's mayor"

and Donald Trump's personal attorney

Rudolph Giuliani, of applying the famous "Broken Windows" model of policing that supposedly saved New York from urban decay in the 1990s, and of Giuliani-fying itself. The Olympic Dream attempts to remake the city, turning it into a center of wealth not by combating poverty, but by crushing the poor. Giuliani-fication naturalizes ideas of cause and effect in crime, singling out the most convenient suspects.

Here, in Giuliani-fied Rio de Janeiro, repressing small crimes and expelling the people potentially responsible for them is meant to turn the city into something vaguely similar to a dreamed-of First World. But the Giuliani-fication process behind the Dream of an Olympic City inverts values that – in other circumstances and other contexts – it claims as being its own.

Within the Dream of an Olympic City that takes on a concrete physical form on the Boulevard,
the empty building of the former Casarão Azul,
the yellow sign that announces the possibility of renting it,
and even the broken windows themselves all become signs of PROGRESS.
Here, the very absence of families taking care of the buildings they live in is what makes the neighborhood supposedly stable.
The presence of these families would be more than an inconvenience; it would be enough to transform the neighborhood into an inhospitable jungle.

The problem with broken windows is not the jagged glass in and of itself, but rather the people that these shards might represent, instigate, and inspire. These shard-people have bodies that carry memories of an entire crushing process of the establishment of power.

Traits attributed to shard-people:

Bodies with dark skin.

Bodies that speak in ways that are said to be less intelligible than the norm.

Bodies with low incomes.

In other words, all the types of bodies that have traditionally inhabited Rio de Janeiro's Port Zone,

But once these shard-people are removed, the windows themselves can remain broken. The graffiti can spread out as a signal of achievement of all the Games' grandiosity, of a spirit that calls itself more and more international.

There's a continuum of disorder. Obviously, murder and graffiti are two vastly different crimes. But they are part of the same continuum, and a climate that tolerates one is more likely to tolerate the other. (Giuliani1998)

This continuum of disorder stands out when a shard-person produces the graffiti. But the continuum of the façades of the mostly empty buildings of a City that Dreams of Being Olympic is completely different.

The largest graffiti of the world is in Gamboa. The 2500 square meter panel is signed by the artist Eduardo Kobra, who has works in more than 20 countries. The artwork is called "Etnias," and it was inspired by the Olympic Rings representing the five continents (Revista Eventos 2016).

(In Brazil, North and South America are usually considered to be two parts of the same continent. Here, Antarctica is just being ignored).

In order to reverse the continuum of disorder, a City that Dreams of Being Olympic must, first and foremost, disappear the kinds of bodies that, much more than any action –

*whether breaking windows, painting graffiti, or –
following Giuliani's logic –
murdering –*

might recall the sort of inhospitable jungle that's so frightening to the Bodies Taken to be Sufficiently Olympic:

Standards for Bodies Taken to be Sufficiently Olympic

Bodies with acceptably light skin,

*with exceptions made for mega-specialized athletes;
tourists from sufficiently distant places
(in this case, São Paulo is good enough);
bodies that are exotic and two-dimensional enough to be painted on façades,
like the so-called "ethnic" faces in Eduardo Kobra's graffiti;
or beer vendors.*

Bodies with sufficient income to walk around the Boulevard;

and, apparently most importantly, bodies without any plan of hanging around here, unless that hanging around brings sufficiently Olympian investments with it.

These are bodies that don't need to be relegated to footnotes.
These are bodies that are basically like mine.

Here, in the Dream of the Olympic City
we solve disorder mostly through forced absence.

Here, in the Dream of the Olympic City
we don't even need to fix broken windows;
blunting them is already enough.

Here, we resolve abandonment with a simple application of two-dimensional
outsiders' faces made out of ink or of paper.

I begin to understand this Giulianified Dream of an Olympic City as a project that,
above all, takes very good care of façades.

2.

During the whole month of August, a Google Translate ad campaign spreads itself
ubiquitously throughout Rio de Janeiro,
on those light-up signs that form the city's more developed bus stops
presenting, in languages from throughout the entire world,
tips and recommendations of a so-called generalized carioca culture:

To say hi to 5 people, you need 10 kisses.
Para dizer oi a cinco pessoas, você precisa de 10 beijos.

“Parada” signifie beaucoup de choses.
“Parada” significa muitas coisas.

(“Parada” means a lot of different things).

للفظ يولد اللطف
Gentileza gera gentileza

(Kindness begets kindness).

Beleza can mean yes, cool, deal, and OK.
Beleza pode significar sim, legal, fechado e tudo bem.

Here, in the middle of the Boulevard, at the core of the Dream, these translated
cariocisms play at being both more specifically local and more historically
meaningful.

В Порто Maravilha, улицы наш музей
No Porto Maravilha, as ruas são nosso museu.

(In the Marvelous Port, the streets are our museum).



In the City That Dreams of Being Olympic, memory – like the city itself – winds up becoming just another product. And even though it's intangible, its packaging is very clearly defined and maintained. Memory is another speculatively profitable brand, a brand that establishes and propagates itself through the absence of shard-people, and their bodies that have already been marked or branded. These shard-people were expelled on all sides of the Olympic Boulevard; in other parts of the city, they were often made absent through lethal erasures.

December 17, 2012
Rua Riachuelo 46, Lapa

It was nighttime when I passed a group of arty-looking folks painting the façade of the building at Rua Riachuelo 46, where 40 families had lived in the Carlos Marighella squat until they were evicted in September 2010.

(Carlos Marighella was a revolutionary communist guerilla assassinated by the Brazilian Armed Forces in 1969; he has become one of the country's foremost leftist martyrs).

On the graying walls of the hollow building – which city workers had sealed with bricks and cement to prevent a new “invasion” – the artists hung enormous God's Eyes and painted a single prompt over and over in enormous letters

FREE YOUR DREAMS
FREE YOUR DREAMS
FREE YOUR DREAMS

Under these words, in slightly smaller letters, another phrase repeated itself dozens of times. One line was left blank, so that whoever was passing by would be able to fill in their own answer.

My dream is _____.
My dream is _____.
My dream is _____.
My dream is _____.
My dream is _____.
My dream is _____.
My dream is _____.
My dream is _____.

Five years before the inauguration of the Olympic Boulevard, the graffiti that used to be so threatening was already showing its clear utility to the City that Dreams of Being Olympic. On the façade of this former squat, it asked for words in sentences that would remain incomplete without the intervention of people who come from somewhere else, words to fill in empty spaces that have been left blank.

(Or, in Portuguese, "left white." In point of fact, expelling the inhabitants of Carlos Marighella – or of any downtown squat in Rio de Janeiro – tends to make the empty space much whiter; which is to say, less Black, with fewer dark-skinned bodies. In spite of any painted interventions that might come with them, these expulsions always make the buildings less colorful).

Once the shard-people have been taken away by force, the spaces they once inhabited can only be filled in by the dreams of those who pass through without any intention of staying. The city-brand inverts itself within the dream, a dream that's easily sold, easily packaged, and

crucially

easily forgotten; it becomes a collective dream of leaving our own marks on the city. And so the dreams of people who have never even entered the Carlos Marighella occupation sprout from its façade like playful stamps that attest to the decisive erasure of its past.

Like the Casarão Azul occupation, Carlos Marighella has also been empty for more than six years.



3.

August 21, 2016
Olympic Boulevard, Port District

I walk alone through the Boulevard on the last night of the Games.

*(The ghost of Francisco Pereira Passos might be present;
he probably is, but I'm not the one invoking him right now).*

Everywhere I turn, this Rio de Janeiro that dreams of being Olympic dresses itself up, marks itself, to show how it's become a global destination par excellence, to prove its highly international character. The game of joining up with brands, of being marked by brands, or of leaving one's own mark on these brands is moving ahead at full steam.

*In this game, of course, the city itself is the main brand
and the principle marker.*

Aside from the forcibly mega scale of activities sponsored by the planet's biggest brands, there are other forces that call themselves every bit as international, even though they operate on much a smaller

(but still fully authorized)

scale:

all down the Boulevard, there are *food trucks*

*(always described that way, in English,
thereby denying any possible similarity to the traditional carioca "podrex,"
a cheap fast food truck affectionately nicknamed for its supposedly rotten offerings)*

selling so-called typical foods from so-called exotic places,
ranging from Mexican tacos
to Belgian chips
to American ice cream
to a pizza that tries hard to call itself Italian.

Anti-methodological footnote:

In my zeal to establish myself as an observer who shows my engagement by not participating in the Boulevard's so-called attractions, I don't spend any money during my perambulations. Therefore, I don't sample any of the offerings from these food trucks.

On the other side of the Boulevard, a food truck on Praça XV describes itself simply as Subúrbio, a reference to poor and working-class communities on the city's periphery. It's like gentrification distilled into a single vehicle and a few sandwiches, a gourmet, exoticized version of burgers you could buy elsewhere for half the price.

At least that's how I imagine it. To be honest, I don't even bother to check out the menu; this is due to my vegetarianism, as well as to my fatigue and my revulsion. I don't claim that these are strictly methodological, but they are all undoubtedly critical components of my approach to research.

The reverse

but equally important

side of this branding through which the city receives the whole world involves showing the whole world as being marked by the City That Dreams of Being Olympic.

In this other classic synecdoche-game, making the part stand for the whole is just as important as making the whole stand for the part. So it's not just that Rio de Janeiro is the world; the world is also Rio de Janeiro.

This sentiment shouts itself in florescent lights just a few short meters away from Casarão Azul, where a literally electrified and illuminated kiosk sponsored by *O Globo* newspaper promises to put

YOU ON THE FRONT PAGE

under the headline

The Whole World is Carioca

The Whole World is Carioca

The Whole World is Carioca

To be carioca, in this case, joins identity to consuming; belonging to the City That Dreams of Being Olympic demands a *buy-in*, a desire that has less to do with purchasing specific products, and more with an acceptance of a speculativeness that shows itself off all down the Boulevard: accepting the possibility that all of this will pay, and pay off well; accepting the passability carried by certain individual bodies; and, above all, accepting the absence of shard-people, those

mostly carioca

bodies that have been hidden or removed in order for the Dream to continue.

Again, I should emphasize here that my gringo whiteness and/or my white gringo-ness allows me to place myself within the Dream without any authority attempting to remove me. In other words: I am part of this "whole world" that's free to consume carioca-ness.

Of course, the physical space of this carioca belonging-dream doesn't include the entire city. A couple blocks away from the Olympic Boulevard, the streets are basically impassable, filled with debris from demolished houses, upturned cobblestones, and unfinished light rail tracks, broken pipes and split wires floating in pools of raw sewage.

Even if those torn-up streets and the sewage don't end the Dream outright, they reinforce the flimsiness of the façades that form a sort of border between the City That Dreams of Being Olympic and the Rio de Janeiro that this Dream tries so hard to cover up, erase, or push out. Behind the Boulevard, or even within the Boulevard – actually, throughout the whole city – you can still see the dust, still feel a sort of haunting. And you don't even have to know how to name it in order to feel it.

The less you speak to Cariocas, as natives of Rio are known, the more you will enjoy this place. (Segal 2016)

The *New York Times'* advice is as precise as it is willfully obnoxious. Because the City That Dreams of Being Olympic also dreams of erasing any other traces of lives that might interfere with its ambitions.



Glossary

Carioca – native to Rio de Janeiro.

Military Police – the “brute squad” of the police force, responsible for most on-the-ground actions throughout the city (such as street-level arrests and incursions into favelas)

Municipal Guard – a sort of auxiliary police squad, responsible for basic law-and-order initiatives, whose members do not carry firearms.

Praça XV – a major plaza on Guanabara Bay in downtown Rio de Janeiro

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