

**Bruno Carvalho. *Porous City: A Cultural History of Rio de Janeiro*. Liverpool, England: Liverpool University Press, 2013. 235 p.**

Rio de Janeiro's majestic geography, its heterogeneous population, and its diverse cultural manifestations have been the subject of comment and analyses for centuries. Portuguese royal officials, nineteenth-century European and American travelers, journalists, and scholars of all nationalities have described the city and its residents. Although many accounts of the city linger on noting its spectacular natural beauty, most observers spend considerable ink discussing its complex social structure, consistently noting the deep economic gulf between the wealthy and the poor, whether during slavery or after abolition. Journalists' reporting about the city in recent years has tended to reproduce a series of familiar tropes—a carefree people in a divided city; violence and poverty set against a background of picturesque hilltop *favelas* and dazzling seaside beaches; a location of stark contrasts and deep contradictions. . . the list goes on.

This fascination with Rio de Janeiro has produced more books than on any other city in Brazil (and perhaps anywhere in Latin America) whether they are literary works, sociological and anthropological studies, or historical accounts about the

transformations in the urban landscape in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. One might wonder if there is much more to be said. And yet there is. Bruno Carvalho's *Porous City* offers a new and original contribution to this vast array of literature. His brilliant analysis of Rio de Janeiro combines a perceptive use of different theories about urban spaces and Brazilian culture with a wide range of archival sources to offer an innovative reading of the cultural and social interactions that have taken place in an area of the city and a social space that no longer exists as such but was fundamental to the production of samba and Carnival during the early and mid twentieth century. This volume will become essential reading for anyone seriously interested in studying the history of Rio de Janeiro, cities in Latin America, or the questions of urban spaces in the global South.

Scholars have struggled for decades to define the nature of relations between classes and races in Brazil. Is the country a “melting pot” of ethnicities, races, and cultures? Is the term hybridity a useful category for explaining manifestations of poor and working-class culture that are enmeshed in Afro-Brazilian traditions and appropriated by the state and official nationalist discourses? How do we understand and explain the intersections and relationships between white elites and largely Afro-descendant producers of culture? How is it that early twentieth-century racist notions were turned on their heads, and many Afro-Brazilian cultural and social traditions came to symbolize the essence of Brazil? Carvalho's work is important because he shows how there can be receptivity to cultural production produced by people of lower socio-economic backgrounds without disrupting the traditional mechanisms and hierarchies

that remain prevalent despite a seemingly democratic circulation and embracing of music, dance, and other forms of popular culture. The porosity of the city, that is, the fact that there has been a significant circulation of people through the city's working-class and poor neighborhoods, which were also sites of prostitution, bohemian culture, Afro-Brazilian religiosity, and Carnival celebrations, all contributed to a subtle form of exchange that allowed elite intellectuals, musicians, and others to learn about and then promote these manifestations of poor and working-class culture. This porosity also offered the possibility of upward economic and social mobility for some, while retaining most socio-economic structures in place at the same time.

Carvalho's details this process through the examination of Praça Onze in the Cidade Nova (New City), an area of Rio de Janeiro that was the site for the production of samba and Carnival street festivities during the early twentieth century, as well as the home to a heterogeneous population that included Afro-Brazilians and recent Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants. Carvalho traces the history of this space from the late eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century to show how successive populations occupied an area that was at the margins of the elite sections of the city. Populated by gypsies, former slaves, and later European and Middle Eastern immigrants, the liminal nature of this space near downtown Rio de Janeiro made it both a marginal and central location for the inter-transmission of culture. Carvalho draws on an impressive array of sources to recreate and analyze this space and note the changes that have taken place over time. In fact, it is his impressive domination of the fields of both literature and history that makes this work so refreshing and unique. His

literary analyses are based on a sophisticated understanding of the city's topography, its sociological and demographic composition, and its relationship to economics and politics. His interdisciplinary approach to analyzing the past is a model for any historian attempted to break out of the traditional confines of that discipline.

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