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A ESPACIALIZAÇÃO DA BUNDA E A RESSEXUALIZAÇÃO DA CIDADE
THE BUTT SPATIALIZATION AND THE RESEXUALIZATION OF THE CITY
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Abstract

This research aims to understand how the butt was codified in space as a symbol, allowing a huge network of products to create meaning from the female body and the city of Rio de Janeiro. Beginning in the 1970s, the mass culture expansion reshaped the image of Rio de Janeiro, spreading the female butt as a possible signifier of a Latin American culture associated with colonial fantasies, the advancement of neoliberalism, and pornography. Cultural devices spatialize and connect the butt to the city to inscribe sexual patterns in the promotion of local and global imaginaries, capturing the body of the "Brazilian woman" (incarnated in the Rio-born, white middle class' woman). The research is methodologically supported by Paul Preciado's concept of sex-politics, which seeks to understand dominant forms of biopolitical action in contemporary capitalism, in which sex and technologies for normalizing sexual identities act as agents of power. The purpose of this article is thus to trace the paths by which Brazilian sex politics established a culture of normalization over gender identities linked to city representations. Through the butt, values related to "Brazilianness" as an aesthetic standard and heteronormativity have been strengthened.

Keywords: Butt, Rio de Janeiro, Space, Heteronormativity, Visual culture

1 Introduction: the porn-tropical utopias

Since the 1970s, the city of Rio de Janeiro has been discursively manipulated to project a vision of Brazil that has emerged in global imaginaries as a sexual utopia. The market, the media, and the state all capitalized on

the concept of the "Brazilian woman," using the tanned – but white – *carioca* (Rio-born) woman of the middle classes as a model to regulate nationality. Another symbol, the butt, added meaning to this relationship between body, space, and nation. It began to function as a Rio de Janeiro signifier to produce meaning and connect other signs that rhizomatically gave it meaning and the status of "national" truth, implying that the butt was part of Brazilian nature. Michel Foucault (2006, p. 236) sought to comprehend the forms or conditions for the emergence of discourses that could be considered true or false, realizing the rules for producing truth about something. The book "The History of Sexuality" (1988) discussed the emergence of science and the Modern State as the primary engines in the regime of truth production, determining and acting in the management, for example, of what was normalcy and what was sexual deviation.

Human life administration was fundamental for a type of regulatory power that began to technically calculate life in terms of population, health, or national interest, which Foucault referred to as biopolitics (2008). According to Paul Preciado (2011), it was in the mid-twentieth century that the media and markets began to function as real production regimes. According to Preciado's reading, the centrality of the media and mass culture ensured sex-politics, "a transformation of Foucault's idea of biopolitics in which 'sexual' organs, sexualities, and also the codes of masculinity and femininity became part of power games." (Preciado, 2011, p. 12). According to Preciado, sex organs, reproduction, and gender roles cannot be reduced to "biological" processes of life reproduction. In this sense, sex-political devices such as pornographic representation, for example, acted directly as a tool of power by embedding heterosexual didactics in social relations.

This power regime transformation is known as pharmacopornography. According to Preciado (2010, p. 115), this model emerged after World War II with the advent of body reconstruction techniques, pornography as mass culture, and the pharmacological trade of the body, all of which began to play a role in the production of subjectivity. In this sense, the media and the market began to govern life. This power regime spatialized every part of the body, making it a gear of the neoliberal world. As a result of the anal panic that homosexual sex between men could cause, the butt became territorialized and gendered, that is, a gender was assigned to it so that it gained meaning: heterosexual sex with women. This calculation of power included the butt, which became a product of mass culture that translated models of femininity, sexuality, race, class, and nationality. Thus, this research is methodologically situated in the interpretation of certain cultural symbols, understanding them as part of a regime of truth production in which the images and cultural products circulating from the transformation of cultural policies in Brazil between 1970 and 1980, connected discursive productions on nationality, sex, gender, and race.

This, however, is not a new relationship between the body and the city. On the contrary, it is a widely used discursive tool in the Global South. For colonizers, the colonial experience and its power dynamics involving race, class, and gender resulted in racial-sex fantasies and fetishes. Other Latin American and Caribbean experiences are also crossed by neocolonial tensions in representations. In this sense, as analyzed by Giselle dos Santos, the figure of the black woman was central to the intellectual debate on the construction of Cuban national identity in Cuba during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, regarding the parameters of civilization and barbarism (2016). Through interracial relationships, the mulatto woman represented a conflict between directing the nation toward progress (whiteness) and backwardness (blackness). As a result, there was surveillance and control over black women's bodies and sexuality. From the end of the nineteenth century, the historically constructed association between Havana and sex work ensured the title of *Burdel del Caribe*, which produced a relationship between sex-race and the city.

In general, the colonial experience revealed fantasies created in relation to nature, associating it with the virgin land that was discovered and penetrated. An idea that cut across the various representations of this public sexual utopia and can be explained using the concept of porn-tropics (McClintock, 1995, p. 43). It can be explained by fantasies, fetishes, obsessions, social practices, class, work, race, and gender hierarchies that subjected colonized peoples to the eroticism of beautification. Thus, porn-tropics created a tropical fantasy far removed from reality, echoing the uncertainties and insecurities of these New Worlds and those who lived there. The truth is that this imaginary was predetermined and hierarchized the relationships between colonized and colonizers, resulting in, for example, distances between the categories of race, class, and sex. According to Anne McClintock, religion, money, and sexuality have all been arranged around the concept of "racial fetishism" since the modern imagination expanded to include the concept of primitive.

The author, making a reference to Pietz, suggests that the invention of racial fetishism became central to the sexual surveillance regime, while the policing of sexual fetishism became a priority for the monitoring of the dangerous classes in both Europe and the colonies. Colonized peoples were considered sexual deviants, whereas gender deviants were considered racial deviants (McClintock, 1995, p. 272). Fetishizing colonized peoples was a common practice in travelogues. These authors considered "fetishistic" religions to be the first stages of evolution. Later, as commerce and imperial interests expanded, fetishism became a key component of expansionism. Women figured sexual and humanoid aberrations of all kinds when confronted with the pornographic tradition. The fetishism implied in the encounter situation and in colonial discovery was a

mapping of the virgin land that occurred through an analogy of the sexual scene of origin. The popular concept of virgin land was a reiteration of the concept of empty land.

When crossing the perilous borders of unknown and imagined worlds, explorers ritually made their borders and limits feminine. The eroticization of virgin space was quite common in colonial narratives, allowing the territory to be appropriated, especially the idea of emptying the land called into question the non-ownership of the people who inhabited here, in relation to territorial rights as original populations. As a result, whether through sexual fertilization (rape in most cases) or through violently instituted military intervention, the white man was guaranteed to keep his patrimony. Thus, the reports introduced elements that crossed the myth of discovery, cartographically mapped as a woman's body and sexuality, and supported by the concept of nature. Sherry Ortner (1979) examined how culture always seeks to control and transcend nature itself, by transforming women into a part of that nature, making it culturally "natural" to subordinate or oppress them.

According to Antônio Bispo's (2015) article, most travelers and naturalists who came to collect and catalog the diversity of fauna and flora were seduced by an exoticism of an exuberant and enchanting nature, in which hills, seas, and oceans were taken by the delirium of an erotic sex-tropical fiction. Several regions of Rio de Janeiro have been gendered and sexualized, as in the story about Tijuca: "arrogant and serene, seducing men with a green delirium towards Laranjeiras, or Santa Teresa, who would live jealously seeking the heart of *Corcovado* (the mount where lays the statue of Christ the Redeemer, translator's note)" (Bispo, 2015, n.p., our translation). Thus, the traveler seeking to penetrate national lands in search of various adventures could find, in the exuberance of the land, the fantasy about the woman "(...) to the white-washed cry that he throws to the skies, the tourist of other lands rush in, eager to appreciate the charms he has heard so much about" (Bispo, 2015). These representations, fantasies, and obsessions began to be reincorporated into the urban scene and co-opted by power regimes to produce city statutes of truth.

This occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century, when colonial narratives were incorporated into urban space to promote the idea of a modern Rio de Janeiro in the French mold. According to Claudia Oliveira (2008, p. 203), the concept of "Rio femme – woman" referred to an entire imaginary in the first three decades of the twentieth century centered on the relationship of the modern city and the representation of white femininity by chroniclers of important magazines. In this context, the relationship between white elite women and the city was redesigned to legitimize the occupation of those who gained public space. In this way, unlike colonial narratives, control of women's acts and behaviors in public spaces would ensure civilization's victory over nature (which was historically associated with them). As a result, we can consider that the geographic space embodied in hills and seas, as well as the architectural space figured through monuments and constructions, are both products of a visual culture marked and produced by historical experience and its markers of gender, sex, and race.

Body, nature, and geography collide in what Euler and Denise Siqueira (2011) refer to as body landscape, a composition that fuses body and city in the postcard, resulting in a series of repeated representations of "the wonderful city" and its "girls of Ipanema." These characters disseminated new visibility landmarks about Brazil, allowing them to function as nationality devices in global contexts as well.

2 A by-product of mass culture

The invention of the butt as a space-encoded element enabled a vast network of other products (and by-products) to connect to it: cosmetic inventions, beachwear, songs, plastic surgery techniques, beauty contests, fashion pieces, and countless and incalculable other elements. All tentacular visualities originating in mass culture generated imaginaries and subjectivized social practices concerning the Brazilian woman, her body, and her sexuality. It was during the business military dictatorship that the field of culture was restructured, and the butt effectively became a by-product of mass culture. The reorganization of the so-called symbolic-goods market¹ (Bourdieu, 1987) enabled the operationalization of a broad and complex media representation system that produced new signs for visual consumption and captured Rio de Janeiro and its relationship between body and geography. The relationship between the military dictatorship and business, which created new codes of nationality through visual consumption, resulted in the operationalization of new signs that combined body and space.

According to Renato Ortiz (2012, p. 81), the capitalist system underwent significant changes in its accumulation models following the 1964 military business coup. These capital and dominance patterns came to be managed concurrently with a change in the productive and ideological structure. During the dictatorship, companies used codes of Brazilianness to finance national culture and ideology, which was heavily influenced by issues of race, sex, and gender. From the 1960s onwards, the establishment of a national telecommunications network was a critical factor in the effectiveness and potential of the country's cultural industry expansion. This system, primarily led by television, provided critical technological support for communication to integrate the country, or at least its regions with greater industrial development, through

the production of symbolic goods guided by the mercantile logic of the cultural industry. According to Fábio Crocco (2017), there were also market components that inserted Brazil into a development model aimed at international capital.

The emergence of neoliberalism with the privatization of the state, the deregulation of labor rights, and the dismantling of the state productive system, exemplified by the Thatcher-Reagan era, is one of the most central elements of this process. The restructuring of production and work was accompanied by the deepening of capital transnationalization and the expansion of the cinematization project, as well as the strengthening of the cultural industry. As a result, capitalism underwent a restructuring in order to give new meaning to its project of dominance, in which culture became the economy's production force. Capitalism, which is based on culture, has instrumentalized both practical and pragmatic aspects of its reproduction. These elements were made effective during the period through art and the creation of symbolic elements that incorporated the capitalist ethos of the neoliberal project. This capital restructuring led by culture introduced new elements of a gender economy that sought to elect new characters and promote moral imaginaries about Brazil.

What is interesting is that all of this occurs alongside an authoritarian regime that centralized cultural actions through a national integration project. At the time, the national representation system recreated tropical sexual utopias in a regime of public spatialization. This reinforced power structures embedded in social practices due to differences in race, gender, and class, which directly interfered with the dissemination of signs, images, and products.

3 The body and the resexualization of the city

Cities, according to Robert Park (1979, p. 25), are manufactured through moral zones that can be organized according to the social classification of space, in which the erotic can be a criterion for separation and hierarchization between city territories. In this sense, there is a cartography and a sexual geography inscribed between the city's neighborhoods that becomes more visible. As stated by Maria Luiza Heilborn (1999, p. 99), these moral spaces, which are crossed by eroticization milestones, manifest themselves through meanings associated with cosmopolitanism linked to tourism. Culture and mass tourism, which grew in popularity beginning in the 1960s, were able to reflect on the composition of Rio de Janeiro, as well as its regime of visibility and erasure of bodies deemed abject and undesirable. The slum removal policies of Carlos Lacerda's (1960-1965) had a significant impact in the period from 1962 to 1973, mobilizing a compulsory displacement of at least 140 thousand people from 80 *favelas* (Pestana, 2020, p. 301). The city was transformed into a showcase that drew a large number of tourists. In order to meet the demands of the city's entrepreneurs, the policies made it possible to remove the *favelas*.

The visibility of the *favela-body* was a source of concern. The magazine *Rio Samba e Carnaval*, which was part of the promotional material for EMBRATUR, the institution in charge of the dissemination and official creation of Brazilian tourism strategies, mapped the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro as spaces of sociability in which interaction seeks, in seduction, the purpose of sexual exchange, as seen in the image below (figure 1). As a regular result of the circulation of the "good" body and the "abject" body, the tourist-market perspective inscribed its moral zones. As a result, these moral zones of circulation of the tanned whiteness of the middle classes became the product of homogenization, of a succession of images and representations that sought to transform the local character of Rio de Janeiro into a symbol of Brazil.



Fig. 1: Rio sexual cartographies. Rio Samba and Carnival. Source: Embratur, Revista Rio Samba e Carnaval n.º3 1974.

Rio de Janeiro began to be homogenized in different statements and practices to produce dominance effects from the beaches of its South Zone. The development of a regulatory norm that connected body and space (local-global) was aimed at both what can be subjectified in a body and an entire population to whom a model of truth was assigned. The body, the biopolitical engine of this conflict, was the target of the upkeep of representations about the privilege of circulation in the city, which served the purpose of subjectifying statements and practices about the technological Brazil of the Rio de Janeiro middle classes. The perfect shapes announced Brazil's social and economic development, which not only advertised its beauty models, but also marketed them through associated goods, such as beachwear, that is, when the consumer purchased a piece from the Brazilian beachwear universe, the consumer acquired associated elements that were part of this imaginary that composes Brazilianness. The merchandise served as a conduit for national erotica and its semiotic universe.

If scientific theories condemned the development of Brazil due to miscegenation at the beginning of the twentieth century (Schwarcz, 2016), in the 1970s, the female body figured the victory of the whitening disputes and the tan as a model of white racialization who flirted with blackness without actually negotiating the colonial sex-racial fantasies, according to Ana Paula Boscatti (2020, p. 277). The culture of valuing the body and beauty as expressions of nationality (embodied in middle-class white women) meant aesthetic development as a result of the evolution of the national nature.

The body also figured as a biopolitical device, regulating the national species. After all, Brazilian nature was promoted through the perfect body. Preciado (2008, p. 40) uses the concept of techno-body to explain it as a multiconnected entity that incorporates technology through biomolecular subjectivity management. The techno-body, as Preciado reminds us, is not so much a power to manage life and death as it is a connected techno-living power and control.

The national techno-body arose with the goal of promoting political fictions and truth models, thereby imposing a system of normalization of behavior, care, and affection that negotiated issues of race and sex. The image below (figure 2) depicts the replacement of the city of Rio de Janeiro's most recognizable symbol, Christ the Redeemer, by a female body wearing a thong bikini, allowing one to ponder over the significance of the ass and the body in Brazilian culture. The body's theatricalized statute of truth could incorporate fantasies about national sovereignty, arming itself with meanings inscribed in a language of spatialization that was crossed by new power relations that topologized the materiality of the body. This visual economy, which combined space and body, also enabled the reterritorialization of Brazil as a bio-esthetic category, allowing for the advancement of medical tourism aimed at plastic surgery in the 1980s. Brazil quickly became a factory for the production of bodies. As a result of this representation system that combined a perfect body, technology, and nationality, the Brazilian butt lift, also known as the Brazilian butt, emerged in the 1980s.



Fig. 2: Butt as a nationality regulatory model. Source: Embratur, Revista Rio Samba e Carnaval, n.º 15, 1986.

One of the power effects of cultural devices was the local global promotion of a heterosexual body for the attraction of citizen-consumers through technology and consumption, combined with media circulation and the expansion of the market for symbolic goods. In other words, the body and the city were sex-political gears that were reinforced by cultural devices. The aesthetics of denudation had an effect because it re-sexualized urban space, effectively producing a visual culture aimed at *soft porn*² as the foundation of a process of nationalization and capitalization of sex. As a result, the Brazilian woman and her butt were transformed into sex-political categories, with the butt becoming a potential sexualized national symbol. Therefore, a culture of body normalization was established, which was linked to the city's representation system. First, as an aesthetic standard, and then as heteronormativity, where sexual standards were embedded in the promotion and dissemination of local and global imaginaries. This was the primary source of management of the sex-visual economy articulated by the State and cultural devices in Brazil after 1960: the territorialization of heteronormativity and the nationalization of aesthetic enhancement technologies. Thus, the butt played an important role in this process.

In the national semiotic universe of the beaches in Rio, the strategy of using the female butt as an image was also used to assign sexual roles to a perfect body and normalize them through images. The spatialization of heteronormativity was also a social prophylactic political strategy. According to the armed forces, Brazil was the most favorable location for the expansion of homosexual relationships after the United States: "there is a significant increase in the gay tourist flow towards unexpected tropical pleasures" (Cowan, 2016, p. 45). The fear of gay tourism and the invasion of homosexuality in Brazil enabled the territorialization of heteronormativity through the dissemination of iconography of Rio de Janeiro beaches in the South Zone, especially Ipanema. Consequently, the ethics of sex-politics reproduced itself in a heterosexual culture. What happened in Brazil, particularly in relation to the dissemination of this straight culture in the 1970s and 1980s, was that profound transformations produced by the culture industry and power devices redesigned the national body through tools of visual consumption.

The heterosexual body sculpted through pharmaco-pornographic technologies was defined as a national model that produces truths in this new symbolic framework. Thus, a complex system of discourses emerged: products, services, cultural and artistic pieces that produced meaning and caused the sexual capitalism production machine to distribute imaginaries mediated by the body. As Malysse (2007, p. 105) points out, in Brazil, we have a body culture or body idolatry that defines and distinguishes us as a people. Aside from the numerous markets that construct bodies, sell biotechnological products, plastic surgery, and Lycra bikinis, there is also the intention of inventing and producing normative sex and gender standards. As a result, at this time in Brazil, the butt became a symbol for imagery that was both aesthetic, because it was the result of visual consumption, and ethical, in the sense that it operated according to a moral regulating sexuality.

The butt was inscribed in the local and global aesthetic-ethical about the city and the country, in the curves of Niemeyer's architecture, in the mountainous geography of Pão de Açúcar, in bikinis made in Brazil that populate imaginations and heated up the economy, as a product of the spectacle economy, and of mass culture that capitalized on pornography as a language. Other products, material goods and services, cars (such as the Kadett Ipanema Sol, marketed with the revolutionary butt differential), promises of surgical implants such as the Brazilian "butt," the "Brazilian wax" hair removal, the various types of bikinis, the

Carnival, and so on. The Arch of Apotheosis (figure 3), built by Oscar Niemeyer, perfectly summarized the change in gaze as an example of the economy of consumption and entertainment that stimulated a new way of codifying feelings and meanings. Created in 1984, when Carnival assumed the role of the greatest spectacle on Earth, inciting global multimedia masturbation as central constructions in modern subjectivity, the work portrayed the butt's reach in Brazilian and global mass culture. The design is reminiscent of female buttocks in a thong bikini, structuring Brazilian society's hypersexuality and ideological racialization.



Fig. 3: It is possible to observe the angles of the arch forming a thong bikini. The Rio Samba Walkway. Source: Rio de Janeiro City Hall. Available at: <http://www.rio.rj.gov.br/web/portaldoservidor/exibeconteudo?id=5048468>. Accessed 18 May 2021.

Niemeyer depicted a symbolic system that mediates sex and race without the presence of naked girls, or even girls at all, because nudity had already effectively become a pornographic product. In light of the arguments that penalize any activity for reproductive purposes, with the control of internal spaces, Foucault (1988) characterized sexual practice in the nineteenth century as disciplinary. Similarly, Preciado (2010, p. 129) demonstrated how the industrial economy exploited the productive function of domestic space, which, due to a lack of power, could be characterized as feminine. Architecture is not the result of a naturally established sexual order, but rather a repetition of remade architectural conventions. Niemeyer created landmarks of visibility for heterosexual hypersexuality by recreating the curve as a facade, allowing access to the economy of spectacle provided by mass culture and the spatialization of sex, associated with Rio de Janeiro and its Carnival. He combined the public representation of sexuality, the cultural industry: a multimedia architecture inspired by popular culture, and the promotion of Carnival in Rio de Janeiro.

Niemeyer transformed the exteriority with a public spatialization of body control regimes and making them part of the city's visual consumption in order to radicalize the local sexual utopia experience as a globally marketable popular space. Thus, he not only commercialized a visual culture, but he also ritualized the body and the butt alongside popular spaces of production, the circulation of pleasure and pornography, thereby strengthening a local-global sexual economy geared towards mass culture. The body and its sexual, racial, and aesthetic materiality began to effectively incorporate power technologies, willing to turn them into cogs in a visual economy that invented them, producing, as a result of power, a sex-space cartography that designated white man flows of circulation.

4 Final considerations: The Brazilian butt, global multimedia masturbation

The binary notion that reproduces differences between Europe and Latin America such as: rational and irrational, nature and culture, mind and body, are constitutive elements of the hierarchization produced by colonialism. It is important to remember that the construction of the butt as a sign of nationality is produced

from the very place Brazil occupies in the world. While the North and its theories represent intellectual and scientific advancement, the "anatomized geography of the world" (PELUCIO, 2012, p. 11, our translation) allows us to understand the South as the "ass of the world", as an architecture of rational failure, ethical and moral weakness, and of the animalization of bodies. The Latin American experiences show that racialization and sexualization were a constitutive part of the experience of gender coloniality, as Lugones (2007) points out.

The butt is and was the ideal interpreter for a southern world economy that nationalized its representational technologies alongside the strengthening of the cultural industry and the advancement of neoliberalism. The sexual truth that gave birth to the butt underpins all the practices and discourses that revisit it on a regular basis. To deprive it of the imposed statute of truth, we must peel away the discursive layers that produced a network of powers and knowledge that linked the butt to a national sex-political project. Because it was such a potent historical agent in the 1970s and 1980s, its semiotic strength shaped its own symbolic economy, in which signifiers constantly reinvented themselves.

In the 1990s, it re-territorialized itself, promoting new visible landmarks alongside Bahia. The *Axé* from Bahia perpetuated body control regimes, public heterosexual spatialization, colonial eroticism for mass consumption, and miscegenation. On the other hand, it also brought new codes of blackness, language, body, and aesthetics. In the 2000s, the butt also served as an interpreter of the Brazilian *Funk* symbolic economy in Rio de Janeiro, which once again welcomed visual consumption. The *favela* and its creative power attempted to culturally overthrow the South Zone, which had historically shaped itself as the main character of historical transformations, where it brought the butt back to a series of symbols, new forms, and aesthetic standards.

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1 A symbolic good, according to Bourdieu, is when a mercantile value is ascribed to an artistic or cultural object, being enshrined by market laws to the value of a commodity. A consumer group is formed for these objects, as well as producers of symbolic goods.

2 It is crucial to remember that pornography became "official" as a mass product linked to major national and international publishers during this period. Despite individual acts of censorship, the military did not act in such a way as to obstruct it structurally; on the contrary, they benefited from it in order to promote imaginaries about Brazil.