

**The Discursive Arena of the Streets and the Postmodern Condition:  
from Demonstration to Metacarnivalization / *A arena discursiva das  
ruas e a condição pós-moderna: da manifestação à metacarnavalização***

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of this article is to show discursive moves in utterances realized in posters in the series of demonstrations that took place in Brazil in 2013 and were mobilized online. These moves signalize relevant ethical and political change. From a dialogic point of view, the demonstrations are described as a discursive communicative chain inspired by the process of carnivalization. The scenario of the streets and of the public square, the momentary alteration in the ordinary social order and the ideological tension which can promote social changes authorize the comparison between the discursive nature of the demonstrations and the carnival process. From that standpoint, concepts of contemporary philosophy, such as metanarrative and the postmodern condition, and the theory of the utterance are articulated in order to interpret the axiological change expressed by the posters. The analysis developed indicates that what started as a multiple agenda demonstration seems to have discursively changed into an ideologically fragmented movement. This fragmented movement allows meaningless utterances to emerge, suggesting that a metacarnivalization takes place.

**KEYWORDS:** Postmodern Condition; Carnivalization; Ethical, Aesthetical, and Political Dimension of Language

**RESUMO**

*Neste artigo, o objetivo é rastrear, na emergência de enunciados realizados em cartazes nas séries de manifestações de rua no Brasil em 2013 e mobilizados em rede, movimentos discursivos que sinalizam relevante alteração ética e política. De um ponto de vista dialógico de linguagem, descrevem-se as manifestações como cadeia comunicativa discursiva inspirada pelo processo de carnavalização. O espaço da rua e da praça pública, a alteração momentânea da ordem social cotidiana e a tensão ideológica que pode fomentar mudanças sociais autorizam a comparação entre a natureza discursiva das manifestações e a do processo de carnavalização. A partir daí, articulam-se teoria enunciativa e conceitos da filosofia contemporânea, como metanarrativa e condição pós-moderna, para interpretar a mudança de perspectiva axiológica flagrada em cartazes das manifestações. A análise esboçada indica que, discursivamente, de uma manifestação com pauta múltipla encaminha-se um movimento ideologicamente fragmentado que permite emergirem enunciados sem sentido, sugerindo a metacarnavalização do evento.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Condição pós-moderna; Carnavalização; Dimensão ético-política e estética da linguagem*

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## Introduction

Among the various street demonstrations which have occasionally mobilized national and international press to focus on Brazil since the military coup in 1964, those which took place in 2013 and in 2014 show one characteristic that is worth highlighting. Besides the heterogeneity of demonstrators, there was also heterogeneity of claims. Thus, what would be at stake in those protests?

The increase of twenty cents on public transportation fare in São Paulo would have been a remarkable event which contributed to trigger off this series of demonstrations all over the country. The *Movimento Passe Livre* (MPL, free translation: Free Pass Movement), which fights for free public transportation, together with various other movements and political parties which support this agenda, called a series of public acts. Those acts started on June 6 and had its sore point on the fourth day, on June 13. On that day, the great support of the population and the repercussion of police violence influenced the tone of the demonstrations.<sup>1</sup> Images, videos and reports that circulated in social networks and in the media managed to change the tone of the following demonstrations.

In this scenario, on June 17, the resulting indignation mobilized the whole country, taking an expressive number of people with various claims to the streets, starting from the capital of São Paulo and not so later on moving to various other cities in the country. This way, the demands started to be diffuse and diverse. They covered specific claims which evidently demark an effectively political discourse, such as the ones related to the pass in Congress of the constitutional amendment 37/2011 (PEC 37), also known as the “PEC of impunity”; the bill known as “gay cure”; and the expenses with the Confederation Cup or with the World Cup. The demands also covered more general, but still political claims, such as the end of political corruption, the repudiation of political parties and the forwarding of the Union budget, among other aspects. The mobilization continued on the following days and a new act took place in the old city centre of São Paulo, on Tuesday, June 18. It was once more marked by violence, and

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<sup>1</sup> On that Thursday, the police excessive action resulted in many injured people, including press members. A reporter and a photographer were hit in the eyes by rubber bullets. Also, about 200 demonstrators were arrested especially under the accusation of bearing vinegar, which is used to minimize the effects of tear gas.

this time the violence was performed by a group of demonstrators, with looting and vandalism.

There were relevant gains at that moment. To say the least, the increase on the public transportation fare was revoked on Wednesday, June 19. On June 20, the already arranged act was kept by MPL (Free Pass Movement) in order to celebrate that repeal of the increase. Even then, demonstrations spread over the country on that Thursday, and the number of people in the streets reached the apex.

According to the Military Police, about 100 thousand people gathered on Paulista Avenue, in São Paulo. That evening, the tense atmosphere was due to conflicts among demonstrators themselves. A group of demonstrators (the majority of whom carried some kind of symbol linked to Brazil, such as national flags or T-shirts) directed some hostility at party groups and social movements. This “civic” group shouted mottos like “without party” to the demonstrators with party flags or any symbol of social movements/entities. Some hours later, hostility and intolerance became physical assault, flags were burned and the group of militants left Paulista Avenue. According to Viana (2013), “on one side, yellow-green scenes, on the other, red scenes” could be seen (p.57).<sup>2</sup>

The conflicts on June 20, 2013 were possible, among other reasons, because of a new type of activism that stands against the political class in general and that denies all sort of possible representation. This way, Nogueira (2013) divides the activism seen on those demonstrations of June 2013 in two types: the old and the new activism. According to the author, on the one hand, there is the traditional militancy, which has a hierarchy and a collective cause agenda. On the other hand, there are the activists “who do not acknowledge any leadership or ideology. They act festively and without a routine, and several times express themselves through satire and mockery. This is a multifocal activism, which embraces various causes simultaneously. Its mobilization is intermittent” (p.54).<sup>3</sup> Thus, it seems to be important to recognize some aspects of the utterances that actualize conflicts in the demonstrations in this new type of activism.

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<sup>2</sup> Text in original: “de um lado, cenas verde-e-amarelas, de outro, cenas vermelhas.”

<sup>3</sup> Text in original: “Não se referencia por líderes ou ideologias. Age festivamente e sem rotinas fixas, valendo-se muitas vezes da sátira e do deboche. É multifocal, abraça várias causas simultaneamente. Sua mobilização é intermitente.”

In this social scenario, the posters, which, by principle, metonymically catch the structuring discourse(s) of the events, caught the attention of people in general and of the media in particular. Those posters were distributed even on an international scale. Focusing on the metonymic dimension of those utterances in the discursive arena of the streets, it is possible to ask: how does the heterogeneity of the agenda change the production of the utterances? And also: how does the circulation on internet fragment and change the semantic potentiality of those utterances? Thus, the aim of this article is to track how the process of metonymization, which is typical of posters in street demonstrations, mobilizes values that structure the political-ideological reference of the movement. This political-ideological reference conveys meaning to what is uttered in this political dispute.

In order to achieve this goal, the argumentative route here is divided in two stages. On the first one, demonstrations are compared to a momentary subversion of a particular social order which may eventually lead to change of social patterns. Based on the Bakhtinian thought, it is argued that the implication of the semiotic and the ideological is a condition to comprehend the discursive possibility of carnivalization. And based on Lyotardian postulates, it is also argued that the postmodern condition can change the key to the production and interpretation of meanings which emerge from collective dimensions. This is because this postmodern condition consists of the fragmentation of discourses which regulate the social order that affects the ways of claiming for new horizons. On the second stage, some posters which circulated on the web and which make evident different interpretation keys are selected and analysed. Utterances which signalize political engagement are contrasted with some others which do not seem to “make meaning.”

### **1 The Discursive Arena of the Streets: Carnival, its Language and its Conditions of Emergence**

The scenario of street demonstrations in Brazil in 2013 seemed to have been a space of ideological dispute marked by the tension between disparate types of discursivization. Turmoil, confusion, mess, violence, brutality, demonstration, claim... various and different values were attributed to those events, which make it possible to define them as discursive arena. They can be defined as *arena* because they constituted

a space of dispute and fight; and they have a discursive nature because, despite the physical conflicts, the values attributed to the events functioned as the matrix of tension. As a discursive arena, demonstrations kept a tension between official and non-official discourses, which makes it possible to identify aspects of carnivalization in the way it is articulated.

In order to understand this comparison between street discursivization and the process of carnivalization, one must consider the concept of *great time* brought about by Bakhtin (1999)<sup>4</sup> as a reading key to the oeuvre in which he actually discusses the carnivalesque universe (BAKHTIN, 1968).<sup>5</sup> Evidently, it does not follow a chronological reading of the sources of the Bakhtinian thought. It interprets this thought by considering the complete reflection on how the operation of language tackles different time references.

Accomplishing the task of discussing the status of literary studies of his time, Bakhtin (1999)<sup>6</sup> considers that it is important to take into account the history of culture to process literary oeuvres. According to what the Russian thinker had already claimed (BAKHTIN, 1990a;<sup>7</sup> 1990b),<sup>8</sup> there is a semantic productivity which takes place on the borders of the fields of human culture. The search for this semantic productivity demands the tracking of what is processed in the intersection of art, life, and knowledge (or, in other words, in the intersection of aesthetics, ethics, and epistemology). Thus, the great literary works could be defined for their escape from their simple temporality. They reaccentuate aspects of past times and, at the same time, create possibilities to signify those aspects again. Here it is worth quoting the thinker's words:

Works break through the boundaries of their own time, they live in centuries, that is, in *great time* and frequently (with great works, always) their lives there are more intense and fuller than are their lives within their own time [...] But the work cannot live in future centuries

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<sup>4</sup> BAKHTIN, M. M. Response to a Question from Novy Mir Editorial Staff. In: *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999, pp.1-9.

<sup>5</sup> BAKHTIN, M. M. *Rabelais and his world*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968

<sup>6</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

<sup>7</sup> BAKHTIN, M. Art and Answerability. In: *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translated by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990a, pp.1-3.

<sup>8</sup> BAKHTIN, M. The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art. In: *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990b, pp.257-325.

without having somehow absorbed past centuries as well. If it had belonged *entirely* to today, (that is, were a product only of its own time) and not a continuation of the past or essentially related to the past, it could not live in the future. Everything that belongs to the present dies along with the present (BAKHTIN, 1999, p.4; emphasis in original).<sup>9</sup>

From this perspective, the concept of *great time* involves both the historical-cultural dimension which cannot be reduced to a concrete situation of an event and the semantic-ideological process of signifying the past again. A thought guided by this concept focuses on the on-going semantic actualization of what is produced on the edge of the boundaries of the fields of culture. The temporal distance, *i. e.*, the non-location in the past, allows asking new questions to the culture of the other (of the past). Those questions could not be raised otherwise. This distance in time and consequently in space and in culture generates what Bakhtin (1999, p.7) calls *creative understanding*.<sup>10</sup> It seems to be the key to the interpretation of the Russian thinker's discussion on carnivalization.

According to Popova (2007), Bakhtin's oeuvre on Rabelais answers to methodological European concerns, especially on Franco-German grounds of 1910 and 1920. For this reason, Popova (2007) sustains that the Russian thinker develops a thorough philological work in that oeuvre. According to her, he searches the language, especially the lexicon, for the potentiality of resignifying cultural processes through carnivalization. Popova claims that this thorough philological work allows one to identify what Bakhtin (1968)<sup>11</sup> actually takes as object: *crisis, transition, change, boundaries of times, religions, and cultures* (POPOVA, 2007). She concludes that the task of this oeuvre is defined by the *creative understanding* of the way the lexicon functions, which produces knowledge grounded in *great time*.

Following this interpretative route, it is possible to say that, for Bakhtin (1968),<sup>12</sup> carnival would be the nucleus of a culture which offered a non-official vision of the world and of human relations by means of laughter in the Middle Ages. This way, carnival opposed the serious tone of the official feudal and religious culture, standing on the border of art and life. This idea of an intermediary sphere between art and life

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<sup>9</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

<sup>10</sup> For reference, see footnote 4.

<sup>11</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

<sup>12</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

allowed people of that time to experience a second world in which a second life could be lived in certain occasions. Carnival would be, therefore, linked to the idea of duality of the world. In this second temporary world, there was room for daring, for utopias. Thus, carnival consequently provided the medieval man with a vision of the future, as well as with a feeling of renewal and change. Public square would be the place where a universal carnival – that means, for all – could be lived free from the distinction of actors and spectators.

This discussion is undertaken by the Russian thinker by means of a work with language. He understands lexicon as a material device of cultural signification in which semantic fields are installed according to the resignification process that takes place in great time. The way of signifying the lower bodily stratum, life, death, and human needs are redrawn in time, and the creative understanding makes possible the comparison of what is produced through temporal boundaries.

Still following this interpretative route and in accordance with Bernardi's (2009) considerations, two recurrent motifs in the images of feasts studied by Bakhtin in the oeuvre on Rabelais and pertinent to this article must be highlighted: dethronement and beatings. Dethronement is relevant because it represents the utopia of the inversion of the political order, the alternation of power relations and of social rules. Beatings are pertinent because they signalize that the physical act is not determinant of the semiotic-ideological value which they generate. Physical clash is not enough to value an act as violent, although in this discussion it can indicate that there is some tension around what is at stake in the social order.

Bakhtin (1968)<sup>13</sup> acknowledges that in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries some changes in the carnivalesque view of the world became increasingly restricted and it turned into what can be called "mere holiday mood" (BAKHTIN, 1968, p.33).<sup>14</sup> However, as the author highlights, this transformation does not destroy the principle of popular carnival party: "Though narrowed and weakened, it still continues to fertilize various areas of life and culture" (BAKHTIN, 1968, pp.33-34).<sup>15</sup> Bernardini (2009) comments that the spirit of feast in Rabelais is marked by what is referred to as *mitten wedding* – custom in which one was allowed to strike blows to any individual without respecting any social

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<sup>13</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

<sup>15</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

hierarchy whatsoever during a wedding feast. The researcher states that “This right symbolized a rupture of all difference among men, who were installed in the kingdom of provisory utopia” (BERNARDINI, 2009, p.91).<sup>16</sup> And she adds:

Indeed, and it is Bakhtin who tells us that the intention of the author went beyond this plan and took place in the history of language itself, which, being sovereign, imposed itself over old values, characterizing a new world conception. Likewise, in relation to the pettifoggers, who were slaughtered in the episode of the *mitten wedding*, the beatings gravely performed in the best comic style also aimed at destroying the ancient world represented by the pettifoggers and, at the same time, helped in the birth of a new world (BERNARDINI, 2009, p.91).<sup>17</sup>

This way, despite the ridiculousness, the physical clash was meant as hope, as the projection of a new horizon, and the semantic field mobilized by lexicon seemed – and still seems – to be the materiality of possible discursivization with various ideological accents.

Considering the creative understanding generated by the distance typical of great time, it is pertinent to articulate the ideas of carnival sustained by Bakhtin and the context of demonstrations in Brazil in June of 2013. However, the distinction between “mere holiday mood” and the process of carnival itself must be highlighted.

Some convergence seems possible in the transposition of the notion of carnivalesque world proposed by Bakhtin to the context of demonstrations in Brazil in June of 2013. People left their routine, their ordinary lives, in order to take part in those demonstrations. When they left their jobs, they did not head home or college. Demonstrations were a temporary deviation from the everyday life, a detour by means of which anyone could become a protestor. For a certain period of time, common life was suspended.

This ordinary life suspension also changed the urban space, overthrowing its official purpose. In São Paulo, important roads and avenues, such as Marginal Pinheiros [Pinheiros Highway], Ponte Estaiada [Cable-Stayed Bridge] and Avenida Faria Lima

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<sup>16</sup> Text in original: “Esse direito simbolizava a ruptura de toda diferença entre os homens, instalados no reino de uma provisória utopia.”

<sup>17</sup> Text in original: “Na realidade, e é Bakhtin que nos diz, a intenção do autor ia muito além desse plano e se realizava na própria história da linguagem que, soberana, se impunha sobre os velhos valores, caracterizando-se como uma nova concepção de mundo. Da mesma forma, em relação aos chicaneiros, massacrados no mesmo episódio das *núpcias de mitene*, as pancadarias praticadas num ritmo solene, no melhor estilo cômico, também objetivavam destruir o mundo antigo representado pelos chicaneiros e, ao mesmo tempo, auxiliavam no nascimento de um novo mundo.”



[Faria Lima Avenue], besides Avenida Paulista [Paulista Avenue], which on June 13 had been the setting for police truculence, were occupied by all sort of people. Spaces usually used by cars in a metropolis such as the capital city of São Paulo had become a great public square. At first, the motivation of those acts which changed the urban space was the public transportation fare. In the streets, people were not mere passers-by, but demonstrators, who did not stay on the sidewalks anymore, but occupied the car lanes in order to transform them into a place for everyone, to be occupied by the people. It was turned into a “universal” and free contact space. Thus, the official spatiality and its restrictions had also been temporarily suspended during demonstrations. In Bakhtin’s words, “the right to break the usual norms of social relations” (1968, p.201)<sup>18</sup> is a “mere festive luxury” (1968, p.95).<sup>19</sup>

Other two aspects which seem to be worth relating are the possibility of social change and the idea of utopia typical of the carnivalesque view of the world. A week before the Government revoked the public transportation fare increase, the commentator Arnaldo Jabor attributed to demonstrators the taint of middle-class rebels who were not worth twenty cents. On June 20, MPL decided to keep the act arranged to take place on Avenida Paulista [Paulista Avenue]. However, this time they aimed at celebrating the achievement of what had been considered impossible, an unreachable fantasy or dream, an “illusion,” as stated by the same commentator in national television.

The rigid and insurmountable limits imposed under the allegation of restriction of costs by the state and city government had been broken by the social mobilization. It triggered off a kind of hope in becoming and a vision of the future, even if limited. One can say that the victory over the twenty cents is part of what Peschanski (2013) calls “real utopia.” Thus, change and renewal become possible by means of this vision of the future. In Bakhtin’s words, the carnivalesque essence allows:

the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things (1968, p.34).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

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<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

Especially on June 20, both the victory of an oppositional movement and the celebration of this victory in a festive act in carnival format could be seen. In this historical and cultural space, utterances reflect and alter the discourses which mobilize the events by means of the different tones they project over these events.

Under the light of creative understanding generated by the distance ensured by the great time, the comparison between the discursive arena of the streets and the process of carnival seems to be even more challenging and productive if the indexes of historical-cultural orientation typical of contemporaneity are considered. In Lyotard's (1984;<sup>21</sup>1993)<sup>22</sup> terms, this orientation relates to the postmodern condition. The challenge and productivity of this articulation are due to two preponderant factors: 1) the Bakhtinian thought is inscribed into a modern finish and, therefore, does not foresee the demands consolidated afterwards in its theoretical and methodological formulation; 2) Lyotard's (1984;<sup>23</sup> 1993)<sup>24</sup> theorization results from his reflection over industrialized and technologically developed Western societies, as the *postmodern condition* requires technical apparatus. Thus, to think of a street discursive sphere in a developing country on present days implies the articulation of aspects which go beyond the ones considered in the texts which base the discussion undertaken here.

In methodological terms, fragments of the demonstrations are focused not *in loco*, but in their discursive manifestation on the web. This is because the aim of this article is to demonstrate what the capture of the event in postmodern format can semantically and ideologically propitiate. This involves thinking about how the circulation on the web – technical device – alters the utterances – daily narrative dimension of concrete utterances – in carnival format – metanarrative dimension, which takes place in great time.

Following the reading of Western culture history proposed by Lyotard (1984)<sup>25</sup> which focuses on the societies provided with technological apparatus, there are two discursive platforms which function as guidelines to the drawing of grand temporalities (in this discussion, *great time*). According to the French philosopher, on the one hand,

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<sup>21</sup> LYOTARD, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

<sup>22</sup> LYOTARD, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982-1985*. Translated by Don Barry et al. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

<sup>23</sup> For reference, see footnote 21.

<sup>24</sup> For reference, see footnote 22.

<sup>25</sup> For reference, see footnote 21.

there is this platform of concrete situations, the one of concrete interactions, of immediate daily relations. It constitutes the narrative platform. On that platform, several social/institutional relations take place. On the other hand, there is the platform in which a regulating discourse bases the values which authorize the utterance on the narrative platform. This would be the metanarrative platform. In historical dimensions, it is possible to compare, for example, the place of deity in the ordering of relations in Europe in the Middle Ages and in Renaissance – just to keep the time span focused by Bakhtin (1968).<sup>26</sup> While in the Middle Ages the Catholic Church ruled and regulated the European culture almost with no counterpart, in the Renaissance, the revisiting of classical values favored other modes of organizing culture.

In the so-called traditional societies, deity functions as the axiological reference which promotes the semantic potentiality of socio-cultural relations. Deity justifies moral values, rules, laws, sense of justice. and so on. On the other hand, in the so-called modern societies, the regulator place of deity is shared by a profusion of other axiological references, such as Reason, the State, among others (DUFOUR, 2008).<sup>27</sup>

On this train of thought, there is not a chronological division between what can be classified as *pre-modern* and *modern*, but there is a change of relational value. The uni-referential metanarrative of deity which regulates the so-called pre-modern paradigm is turned into a multi-referential web in the modern paradigm. Anyway, the discursive hierarchy in which one can identify two narrative platforms is sustained. There is a regulating platform which authorizes the utterances and signification, and there is the daily, situational platform which actualizes the values authorized by the regulating discourse in a singular way. According to Lyotard (1984),<sup>28</sup> the fading of metanarratives is the postmodern condition. Once metanarratives fade, social relations are no longer regulated by the discourse which organizes the culture. Among other alterations, it provokes the fragmentation of the subjects, which results in individuation, and in a certain *utterance chaos* (AMORIM, 2007).

This postmodern condition is established if the technological apparatus changes the validation of knowledge and of the relations that this knowledge mediates

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<sup>26</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

<sup>27</sup> DUFOUR, Dany-Robert. *The Art of Shrinking Heads: The New Servitude of the Liberated in the Era of Total Capitalism*. Translated by David Macey Polity. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> For reference, see footnote 21.

in a way subjects are repositioned. Again, if one considers the relations in the medieval sphere, the Roman Catholic discourse in its metanarrative condition organizes the rituals of feudal culture, justifies social relations, and determines individuals' specific socio-cultural places. In this operation, writing represents a cultural vector, once sacred knowledge was mediated by it. Consequently, the access to this knowledge stratified society the following ways: there were those who could read, and those who could not; there were those who could access the sacred texts, and those who could not; there were those who consulted the source texts directly, and those who accessed them through other people; and so on. In typical modern relations, like scientific practices, other vectors are articulated. The material research conditions and empirical verification function as condition to utterance validation. To sum up, between the regulating metanarrative and the narrative realization, the knowledge which promotes and grounds social relations in a certain culture is validated. But how does this cultural process take place in a context in which the valued knowledge is not linked to a regulating discourse but to technical relations only?

The technical apparatus which allows such alteration can be metonymized by the computer and by the relations it mediates. In order to engage into a relation mediated by the computer, knowledge must be translated into bytes. Once turned into bytes, knowledge can reach the web sphere of circulation. However, in this process, a technical condition, and not a regulator discourse, is required, and this technical condition will meet various discursive nuances. Thus, it is possible to state that the postmodern condition emerges from relations which are technically viable and symbolically liberated from a referential which guides what can be uttered and what makes meaning when uttered.

This condition is relevant to the present discussion because of the impact it has on the possibility of carnivalizing and/or changing reality. At this point, it is worth reformulating the question which guides this article: Do the emergence and web circulation of disparate utterances in the street discursive arena of demonstrations in Brazil in 2013 constitute indexes of the postmodern condition?

## 2 Is it Possible to Carnivalize Carnival? A Dialogical Reading of What Is Demonstrated in Demonstrations

The impact of the demonstrations shows different nuances of the carnivalesque tone of the event. Focusing on the issue raised in this article, verbal-visual quotations of the street acts are selected from different homepages in order to highlight how the ideological heterogeneity of the event generated disparate discourses in relation to what should ideally sustain and promote those acts. The focus here is not the inscription of the utterances on each page, but their distribution on the web and the effect of fragmentation that derives from this distribution. The selected pages are: *Portal Bramare*, which is sustained by the architect and designer Bia Lombardi and which aims at discussing ordinary topics; a page of images of the Universidade de São Paulo [University of São Paulo] (USP), in which the pictures of the demonstrations are listed at random as headlines; one blog of *Veja SP* magazine entitled *Pop! Pop! Pop!*, in which pictures are also listed at random; a report from the news site *Terra*, and the news portal *Portal G1*, specifically the page that registers the posters of the demonstrations. On the first four pages, the pictures are presented with subtitles, and on the last page, the pictures are preceded by some kind of title which anticipates the utterances displayed in the posters. In this uncertain and yet forceful political scenario, what can be understood from this mode of uttering and of distributing utterances?

On USP webpage, various pictures with subtitles are displayed at random in two columns under the title “Demonstration on Paulista Avenue I.”<sup>29</sup> The first picture on top left side presents a clear mark of the political claim sphere. The subtitles indicate: “Demonstrators *set fire* in posters and *banners of political parties* on Paulista Avenue on June 20. Photo: Marcos Santos/USP Imagens” (our emphasis).<sup>30</sup> In the picture (Picture 1), a young man wearing the *V for Revenge* mask<sup>31</sup> holds a poster in which one can read: “Brazil has no insurance [without comma] if it goes for PT... we are to pay.”<sup>32</sup> The poster is produced in handwriting with blue letters except for the highlights in red

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<sup>29</sup> Text in original: “Manifestação na Avenida Paulista I.”

<sup>30</sup> Text in original: “Manifestantes *colocam fogo* em cartazes e *faixas de partidos políticos* na Avenida Paulista dia 20 de junho. Foto: Marcos Santos/USP Imagens.” Available at: <<http://www.imagens.usp.br/?p=18621>>. Access on March 9, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> About the discursive relevance of this mask in this series of demonstrations, see Brait & Dugnani (2014).

<sup>32</sup> Text in original: “O Brasil não tem seguro [sem vírgula] se der PT... quem paga é a gente.” Available at: <<http://www.imagens.usp.br/?p=18621>>. Access on March 9, 2015.

for the term *PT*. The acronym used seems ambiguous. On the one hand, it can refer to the expression “total loss,”<sup>33</sup> *i. e.*, the impossibility of repairing a vehicle which ensures the right of the owner to receive financial compensation for the loss when the vehicle is insured. On the other hand, *PT* can also refer to The Workers’ Party,<sup>34</sup> the party which has occupied the Presidency of Brazil since 2003. This way, the utterance can be understood as a metaphor that aimed at alerting the reader about the risks involved in case the president was re-elected the following year. This is a clear political opposition to the Presidency and to its party.



**Picture 1.** Source: Marcos Santos/USP Imagens.  
Available at: <<http://www.imagens.usp.br/?p=18621>>

On the left side of the poster, a red circle crossed by two lines X-shaped expresses the idea of *forbidden*. In the centre of the picture, it is possible to read *PEC 37*.<sup>35</sup> It presents utterances of dissatisfaction with the political Brazilian scenario and the indexes of a precise political agenda, such as the explicit repudiation of a particular party or the refutation to what is discussed in Congress.

On the bottom of the poster, the expressions *#withouviolence*<sup>36</sup> and *#thegiantwokeup*<sup>37</sup> are displayed. In front of the poster, a hand sets fire on some banners

<sup>33</sup> TN: In Portuguese, PT stands for *Perda Total* [Total Loss].

<sup>34</sup> TN: In Portuguese, PT stands for *Partido dos Trabalhadores* as well. In 2013, this was the party of the President of Brazil and of the Mayer of São Paulo.

<sup>35</sup> Constitutional amendment 37/2011.

<sup>36</sup> Text in original: “#semviolência.”

and on some white & red flags. In the image as a whole, the relation between the utterance #withouviolence and the violence expressed by the flags on fire must be highlighted. The image depicts part of the discussion developed by Arantes (2014) about the pacifist discourse and the notion of “armed peace” (p.413).<sup>38</sup> As the author points out, “those peaceful demonstrators hit the red without any mercy” (p.356).<sup>39</sup> The reference to Brazil – the giant who wakes up – is recurrent in the discursivization of the demonstrations, although it does not always keep the same evaluative tone.

In *Portal Bramare*, the post selected alerts: “BEWARE: #COMETOTHESTREETS BUT YOU MUST KNOW WHY [WITHOUT PERIOD] OTHERWISE THAT #THEGIANTWOKEUP WILL EVENTUALLY GO BACK TO SLEEP... FASTER THAN YOU WOULD LIKE TO.”<sup>40</sup> The opposing wake up-sleep points to two states of political activity of the Brazilian people. The direct reference to Brazil – *giant* – situates the country between the latent and the evident possibility of political positioning. In this frame, Picture 2 is posted with the following subtitle: “I’ve been trying to understand the absurd repression performed by the police against those demonstrators...”<sup>41</sup> In the picture, violence is not evident. On the background, one can see a yellow traffic sign with one intervention: the drawing of a speech balloon in which it is possible to read 3,20 – a reference to the rejected transportation fare. On the foreground, a demonstrator with green and yellow lines painted on his face, wearing a suit and a clown nose, carries a poster. The young man is above the level of the other passers-by and, facing down and smiling, he seems to interact with someone who walks down the street. On the third plan, demonstrators walk, and a Brazilian flag used as a cape stands.

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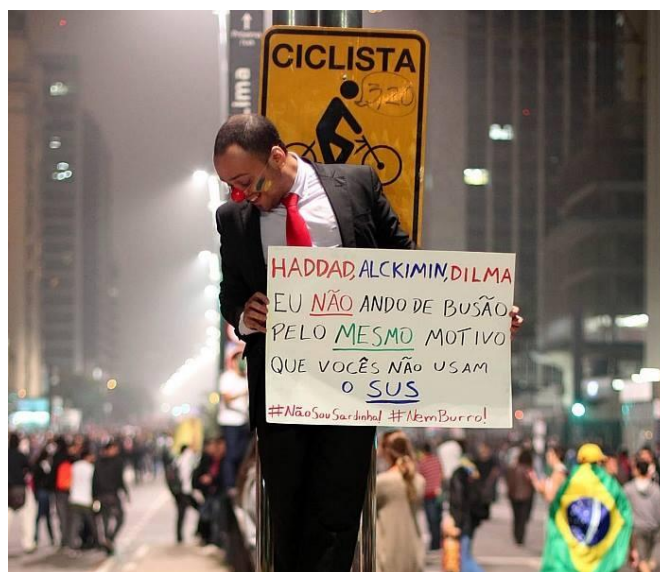
<sup>37</sup> Text in original: “#ogiganteacordou.”

<sup>38</sup> Text in original: “paz armada.”

<sup>39</sup> Text in original: “tais manifestantes pacíficos bateram sem dó nem piedade nos vermelhos.”

<sup>40</sup> Text in original: “Cuidado: #vemprarua mas saiba por que se não aquele #ogiganteacordou vai acabar voltando a dormir... mais rápido do que você gostaria.” Available at: <<http://www.bramare.com.br/2013/06/24/vemprarua/>>. Access on March 9, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Text in original: “Até agora tento entender a absurda repressão praticada pela polícia contra esses manifestantes...” Available at: <<http://www.bramare.com.br/2013/06/24/vemprarua/>>. Access on March 9, 2015.



Picture 2. Source: Portal Bramare.  
Available at: <<http://www.bramare.com.br/2013/06/24/vemprarua/>>

One can read in the poster: “HADDAD, ALCKIMIN, DILMA I DON’T TAKE THE BUS FOR THE SAME REASON YOU DON’T USE SUS.”<sup>42</sup> <sup>43</sup> On the bottom, there is “#Iamneitherasardine”<sup>44</sup> and “#NorStupid!”<sup>45</sup> The name of the Mayor of São Paulo – *HADDAD* – and the name of the President – *DILMA* – are written in red, while the name of the Governor of the state of São Paulo – *ALCKIMIN* – is in blue. Dilma Roussef and Fernando Haddad belong to The Workers’ Party,<sup>46</sup> the colour reference of which is red. Geraldo Alckimin belongs to the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy,<sup>47</sup> the colour reference of which is blue. By listing names of politicians from opponent parties, the utterance expresses discontentment with the political class in general, with no specific target.

The utterance also refers to a feeling of dissatisfaction with the quality of transportation, as well as with other public services, such as the health system.<sup>48</sup> In both cases, there is a political agenda of social interest. The expressions *#Iamneitherasardine* and *#NorStupid!* can be interpreted as a free usage of the word, as in the “marketplace

<sup>42</sup> Text in original: “HADDAD, ALCKIMIN, DILMA EU NÃO ANDO DE BUSÃO PELO MESMO MOTIVO QUE VOCÊS NÃO USAM O SUS.”

<sup>43</sup> TN: Acronym in Portuguese for Brazilian Health System: SUS

<sup>44</sup> Text in original: #NãoSouSardinha.

<sup>45</sup> Text in original: #NemBurro!

<sup>46</sup> TN: Acronym in Portuguese: PT.

<sup>47</sup> TN: Acronym in Portuguese: PSDB.

<sup>48</sup> TN: SUS.



and billingsgate” (BAKHTIN, 1968, p.145),<sup>49</sup> marking the non-official register of the interaction and the carnivalesque tone which sustains the utterance.

In both images, people wearing masks and costumes simulate the altered dress code authorized in carnival. The occupation of the public space in an unusual way, transforming the avenues and streets into pedestrian ways, seems to be another index. Also, in both pictures, nationalist symbols, like the national flag, the national colours, among others, are identified. However, picture 1 distinctly marks a specific political position and points to an oriented agenda, while picture 2 seems to catch a generalization which ends up mitigating its semantic potential. Indeed, what objection is made? What fight is fought? The metanarrative tie which ensures the production of that utterance is not clear. This way, what does this utterance carnivalize? The comparison with other images should take this discussion further.

In the blog of *Veja SP* magazine, *Pop! Pop! Pop!*, the title highlights the non-official and not serious tone of the post: “See 10 funny posters of the demonstrations on Tuesday (18).”<sup>50</sup> With the subtitles “Even Jesus Christ popped up on Paulista [Avenue],”<sup>51</sup> the third picture<sup>52</sup> catches an utterance which is evidently built in the carnivalesque tone. The subtitles announce the desecration of the religious discourse, which is typical of the carnival process. In the image, a blond man wearing a beard, long hair and a kind of white tunic holds the poster. As the subjects in Pictures 1 & 2 do, he wears a costume. On the left side of the poster, one can read: “I came back to support the people!!!,”<sup>53</sup> printed in red capitals. The notion of *coming back* and of *supporting the people* convenes a Christian-Jewish discourse. On the one hand, the return of Jesus Christ marks the end of times, the apocalypse from a Christian point of view. On the other, still according to the Christian discourse, *supporting people* seems to recapture the Jewish expectation in the supposed first coming of the messiah; the expectation for political support towards the release from Roman domain. In that picture, by desecrating his descent from heavens, or by establishing free contact with the other – once the young man holds other two demonstrators to pose for the picture –,

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<sup>49</sup> For reference, see footnote 5.

<sup>50</sup> Text in original: “Veja 10 cartazes divertidos da manifestação de terça (18).” Available at: <<http://vejasp.abril.com.br/blogs/pop/2013/06/19/veja-10-cartazes-divertidos-da-manifestacao-de-terca-18-em-sao-paulo/>> Access on March 9, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Text in original: “Até Jesus Cristo deu um pulinho na Paulista.”

<sup>52</sup> For copyright reasons, the image cannot be displayed here.

<sup>53</sup> Text in original: “Eu voltei para apoiar o povo!!!”

“Jesus” seems to have returned in order to join a political program. The image does not make clear which political program but it facetiously articulates the first and the second coming of Christ in this carnivalized utterance.

On the right side of the poster, one can read: “PEACE/LOVE”<sup>54</sup> and, immediately below that, “JUSTICE!!,”<sup>55</sup> followed by “advance on them BRA”<sup>56</sup> (in the picture, the poster is slightly folded on the bottom right corner, but apparently it is written *BRAZIL* in green and yellow). The reference to the *hippie* ideology so fashionable in the 1960s articulated with the claim for justice shows that the poster is built through ideological syncretism. The structuring axis of this syncretism is the non-official and not serious tone. Once more, green and yellow in the term *Brazil* and the utterance *advance on them, Brazil* point to a nationalist perspective and reinforce tension and conflict among demonstrators on the streets.

Comparing those three pictures, there seems to be a gradation in relation to the precision of the agenda and, therefore, in relation to the political-ideological nature of the utterances. While it is possible to recover a specific political position in the first picture (Picture 1), in the second (Picture 2) and in the third pictures, the carnivalesque tone seems to alter the very proposition of altering the social order. The circulation of those utterances on the web creates variegated discursive productions which dissolve possible metanarrative ties. After all, what does the exposition of those multiple claims mean? Which knowledge validates the potential meanings of those utterances?

In this discursive chain, the fourth picture<sup>57</sup> seems to metonymize the apex of this intransitive resistance with no evident claim. The image shows the back of a senior citizen carrying in one of his hands a hexagon shaped poster apparently wooden made: “AGAINST EVERYTHING,”<sup>58</sup> written in black over a green background.

A kind of general indignation arises from generalized dissatisfaction and from the profusion of agendas resulting in a “mobilization for nothing” (VIANA, 2013, p.56).<sup>59</sup> Thus, the utterance AGAINST EVERYTHING does not indicate any agenda

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<sup>54</sup> Text in original: “PAZ/AMOR.”

<sup>55</sup> Text in original: “JUSTIÇA!!”

<sup>56</sup> Text in original: “pra cima deles BRA.”

<sup>57</sup> Available at: <<http://noticias.terra.com.br/brasil/cidades/com-batalha-ideologica-e-sem-foco-manifestantes-se-dividem-em-sp,69b46ce74956f310VgnVCM10000098cceb0aRCRD.html>> Access on March 9, 2015. For copyright reasons, the Picture cannot be displayed here.

<sup>58</sup> Text in original: “CONTRA TUDO.”

<sup>59</sup> Text in original: “mobilização em torno do nada.”

whatsoever, as *everything* can represent many things and yet nothing. This scenario seems to be profitable to the discursive production of almost meaningless or actually meaningless utterances, as the ones analysed in the sequence.

In the news portal *G1*, images of the demonstrations are listed at random in one specific page. They are presented without subtitles, but preceded by highlights of what is in the posters. In the fifth picture selected,<sup>60</sup> a girl holds a poster with the following utterance: “I WANT A ‘LOUIS VUITTON’ PURSE,”<sup>61</sup> <sup>62</sup> followed by “#COMETOTHESTREET.”<sup>63</sup> *Louis Vuitton* is a fancy French brand which sells purses, bags, and suitcases. The utterance relates to and mocks aid programs of the Federal Government, like Family Allowance,<sup>64</sup> a program which transfers income directly to families in poverty. In this discursive arena, this criticism to government programs seems to dialog with the political dissatisfaction, but in a casual way. It opposes the government without joining any other explicit political position. The utterance seems to move away from the meaning of the demonstration. Being more and more distant from the discourses which mobilize the street discursive arena, one can barely access the political-ideological dimension in the utterance of the sixth picture.<sup>65</sup>

In that picture, the demonstrator wears a clown nose and holds a poster in which one can read: “WE WANT KINDER EGG FOR 1 REAL,”<sup>66</sup> also followed by “#COMETOTHESTREET,” just as the previous picture. In Brazil, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a series of government actions directed to the working classes has R\$ 1 as its emblem. In São Paulo, some popular restaurants called *Bom Prato* [Good Dish] serve meals for this price. Little by little, all the measures of this nature have been associated to this price – R\$ 1. In the poster, if this economic value refers to the political conjuncture, *Kinder Egg*, a chocolate bar produced to the children and which comes with a small toy, changes this reading key, carnivalizing the very context of political claim. What does *Kinder Egg* politically symbolize and imply? The production of utterances without any evident agenda in such a scathing scenario signalizes that the

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<sup>60</sup> Available at: <<http://g1.globo.com/brasil/cartazes-das-manifestacoes/platb/>>. Access on March 9, 2015. For copyright reasons, the picture cannot be displayed here.

<sup>61</sup> Text in original: “QUERO BOLSA “LOUIS VUITTON.”

<sup>62</sup> TN: In Portuguese, the words *purse*, *scholarship* and *stock market* are homonyms: *bolsa*.

<sup>63</sup> Text in original: “#VEMPRARUA.”

<sup>64</sup> Text in original: “Bolsa Família.”

<sup>65</sup> Available at: <<http://g1.globo.com/brasil/cartazes-das-manifestacoes/platb/>>. Access on March 9, 2015. For copyright reasons, the Picture cannot be displayed here.

<sup>66</sup> Text in original: “QUEREMOS KINDER OVO A PREÇO DE 1 REAL!”

metanarrative coercions seem fluid and ineffective at this point. This way, what meaning do they produce? Which agenda do they follow in this arena besides carnivalizing the space already carnivalized? The seventh and last selected picture<sup>67</sup> corroborates this interpretation.

Following this reading script, this picture consolidates the movement of loss of meaning or horizon in the agenda claimed during the demonstrations. In the picture, the demonstrator holds a poster with the utterance “PALIO 98 FOR SALE,”<sup>68</sup> as it is done for advertising a car for sale. Seeing an utterance of this kind, understanding the demonstration as a way of carnivalization and considering the elements previously described, it is possible to advocate that the distribution on the web of metonymic fragments of the demonstrations promotes its carnivalization, *i.e.*, it promotes metacarnivalization.

This way, the inversion of the social order promoted by those discourses is the inversion of the demonstration itself. The mockery, satire, and desecration typical of the carnivalesque view of the world seem to turn to the discursive arena itself, altering the metanarrative coercions which triggered them off.

## Conclusion

In this article, the possibility of production and circulation of utterances apparently liberated from ideological finish in an intense political struggle context is problematized. Those utterances seem to be meaningless in the discursive sphere of the demonstrations. Without denying the historical, cultural and political complexity of what is implicated in the events discussed here, posters are focused on as language mechanisms which metonymically relate to the issue at stake: Does the production of utterances of such a disparate ideological nature in the same discursive sphere result from the postmodern condition?

Taking the process of carnival as the interpretation key to the discursive changes at stake, the analysis undertaken here shows that there is a non-linear movement which goes from uttering with political engagement, even if this engagement is realized by

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<sup>67</sup> Available at: <<http://g1.globo.com/brasil/cartazes-das-manifestacoes/platb/page/2/>>. Access on March 9, 2015. For copyright reasons, the Picture cannot be displayed here.

<sup>68</sup> Text in original: “VENDO PALIO 98.”

means of carnivalization, to a transgressive questioning without an explicit metanarrative coercion. This transgressive stage generates a kind of metacarnivalization which alters the mobilizing agent itself of that arena. This seems to be one of the discursive actualizations of the new activism (NOGUEIRA, 2013).

Thus, an important contribution of this study is highlighted. Although Bakhtinian and Lyotardian postulates have been formulated to describe and analyze different cultural aspects, their theoretical articulation functions as a profitable interpretation key to phenomena which are present in the Brazilian cultural dynamics nowadays.

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