

Towards an Alternative 1922: Popular Culture and Rio de Janeiro's Vernacular Modernisms

Para um 1922 alternativo: cultura popular e modernismo vernacular no Rio de Janeiro

Maite Conde*

Lisa Shaw**

ABSTRACT

This article explores cultural innovations taking place in Rio de Janeiro in 1922. The year evidenced numerous changes in the then capital. These have, though, been eclipsed by the dominant focus on avant-garde experimentations by modernist artists in São Paulo. Returning to 1922 and zooming in on Rio, this article explores transformations that altered the space of the city, and its popular cultural landscape. By doing so, the article seeks to widen the landscape of Brazil's cultural modernity to encompass developments taking place beyond the confines of the modernist movement and the city of São Paulo. It does this by analysing cultural revolutions taking place in 1922 in terms of Rio's "vernacular modernisms", to borrow from Miriam Hansen (1999). Specifically it explores changes in urban planning, in popular music and live per-

RESUMO

Este artigo explora as inovações culturais que ocorrem no Rio de Janeiro em 1922. Uma série de mudanças se dão na então capital ao longo do ano, as quais foram, no entanto, eclipsadas pelo enfoque dominante nas experiências vanguardistas de artistas modernistas em São Paulo. Voltando a 1922 e tomando como foco o Rio, este artigo explora as transformações que alteraram o próprio espaço da cidade e a sua paisagem cultural popular. Ao fazê-lo, procura alargar a paisagem da modernidade cultural do Brasil para abranger desenvolvimentos que ocorrem para além dos estreitos limites do movimento modernista e da cidade de São Paulo. Faz isto analisando as revoluções culturais modernas ocorridas em 1922 em termos dos "modernismos vernáculos" do Rio, segundo a aceção de Miriam Hansen (1999). Explora especificamente as mudanças ocorridas no

* University of Cambridge, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire, UK. mc534@cam.ac.uk <<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8856-2689>>

** University of Liverpool, Liverpool, Merseyside, UK. lisa.shaw@liverpool.ac.uk <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9483-3489>>

formance, in the *teatro de revista* and in popular literature.

Keywords: Rio de Janeiro in 1922; Vernacular modernism; *Teatro de revista*; Oito Batutas; *Enervadas*; Brazil's Centennial Exposition.

planejamento urbano, na música popular e na performance ao vivo, no teatro de revista e na literatura popular.

Palavras-chaves: Rio de Janeiro em 1922; modernismo vernacular; teatro de revista; Oito Batutas; *Enervadas*; Exposição Internacional do Centenário da Independência.

INTRODUCTION: REMAPPING BRAZIL'S MODERNITIES BEYOND THE GREAT DIVIDE

American poet Ezra Pound referred to 1922 as year one of a new era (Jackson, 2013, p. 1). The year has been taken as significant for high modernism in European literature, with the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T. S. Elliot's *The Waste Land* and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*, amongst other groundbreaking modernist texts. In Brazil too, 1922 is seen as marking the start of high modernism. As is well known, in February that year a group of iconoclastic Brazilian writers and artists gathered in São Paulo's Municipal Theater and declared Brazil's artistic independence. Their declaration officially inaugurated the *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Week of Modern Art), giving rise to what is known as the Brazilian modernist movement, or simply, *modernismo*. The Week of Modern Art featured prose readings, music concerts, art exhibitions and discussions on aesthetic theory, and it officially marked the coronation of a movement that had been gaining strength over the previous decade.

The multifaceted nature of the Week of Modern Art underscores *modernismo's* multidisciplinary character. As Randal Johnson points out, "Brazilian modernism was a heterogeneous movement encompassing a multiplicity of aesthetic, cultural, social and political proposals" (Johnson, 1999, p. 188). Despite this heterogeneity, its adherents were united around a common concern: the need to create a new art in and for Brazil. This concern underpinned the movement's "heroic" period, from 1922 to 1930, after which the coherent group splintered along different ideological and aesthetic lines. During this period *modernismo* was characterized by an opposition to traditional European models that had dominated Brazilian letters since the end of the nineteenth century. Parnassian poetry became a particular target of attack. Its strict metric and rhyme schemes, rigidly stratified structures, and academic discourse based on a blind adherence to French culture were satirized during the Week of Modern Art as out of touch with modern Brazilian society.

For the modernists, Parnassianism's mimicry of French literature evidenced a colonial mentality, in which writers passively imported European forms wholesale. Moving away from such blind allegiance to foreign models, the modernists sought to create literary forms that would engage with and articulate the processes of modernization under way in Brazil. The 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna*, in this sense, contributes to what Andreas Huyssen has referred to as "Geographies of Modernism in a Globalising World". For Huyssen, the presence of cultural experiments and upheavals beyond Europe and the United States challenges the idea of modernity as a North Atlantic universal and of modernism as a European phenomenon. It is a reminder, Huyssen states, that there is never only one modernism (Huyssen, 2007, p. 193). Developments in Brazil in 1922 and the start of *modernismo* thus testify to the existence of multiple modernisms. Yet, if the Brazilian avant-garde movement expands the global map of modernism beyond the dominant territories of Europe and North America, it does little to contest the universal and universalizing definition of modernism. "Brazil 1922" experienced several cultural upheavals beyond those inaugurated in February that year by the small group of artists in São Paulo. Innovations were taking place not just in that city but also in other urban centres, notably, as we examine, in Rio de Janeiro. Yet, despite being the country's then capital, Rio has been excluded from explorations of Brazil's cultural modernity (Cardoso, 2021). Dominated by a social and political elite whose interests lay in maintaining economically dependent relations with Europe, the city does not seem to fit the commonplace temporal narrative of modernity as signifying a rupture from tradition and break with the past. The very geography of Rio seems to concretize this link with Europe. At the start of the 20th century, the city was subject to a radical transformation intended to provide it with a modern topography. This new urban identity was transplanted from Europe, specifically from Paris. The city's new blueprint was modelled on Georges Haussmann's mid-century reforms of the French capital, with architectural styles and even Parisian flora and fauna imported to the Brazilian capital (Sevcenko, 1983, p. 36), transforming it into a tropical Belle Époque (see Needell, 1987). Given this transplantation of a foreign or "out of place" (Schwarz, 2014) urban identity, it is tempting to see Rio's transformation as evidencing a continued colonial mentality – the newly made city emerging as a blind copy of Paris. In this sense, Brazil's then capital defies the common narrative of modernity's break with the past, a narrative that in Rio is figured not just temporally but also spatially.

Rio's reforms were, however, the result of real transformations taking place

in Brazil. These cannot be isolated from the international conjuncture, as they coincided with and were part of the expansion of global capitalism. By the start of the twentieth century the economy of Europe stepped up a gear. Searching for new markets for their surplus goods Europeans turned to so-called peripheral areas, which increased their exports of raw materials for manufactured goods that included new technologies and consumer items. Rio's Parisian-styled transformation was a manifestation of this new economic landscape that resulted from capitalist development not only as a European phenomenon but also a specifically Brazilian manifestation. In Rio, these developments fostered migration and immigration, providing the city with a diverse linguistic, social and cultural landscape. It also led to improvements in transportation, new technologies, and capitalist accumulation, all of which provoked profound social dislocations, including changes in traditional social hierarchies and in gender and race relations. These transformations had a profound effect on popular cultural production, including mass mediated, mass produced and mass consumed phenomena, which radically changed the fabric of everyday life, promoting and articulating new forms of experience and interaction. It is this everyday landscape of Rio's cultural modernity that we explore here.

Like the modernist revolt in São Paulo, these changes in Rio challenged the contours of Brazil's traditional culture. They also translated metropolitan culture revealing the transatlantic dialogues that according to K. David Jackson characterize modernism in Brazil (Jackson, 2021, p. 1). Yet the mass produced and mass consumed transformations that took place in Rio in 1922 have been ignored in discussions of modernism in Brazil, eclipsed by the focus on São Paulo's avant-garde experimentations. This eclipse is not surprising. As Huyssen reminds us, mass culture has always existed as the repressed side of modernism proper, as its hidden dialectic (see Huyssen, 1986, pp. 3-16). In examining "Rio 1922", this article illuminates this repressed side of Brazil's cultural modernity, examining upheavals taking place in the city's urban planning and architecture, popular music, popular theatre, and literary landscape. These case studies (for want of a better phrase) are not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, in zooming in on certain cultural changes taking place in Rio 1922, our intention is to broaden the lens through which the country's cultural modernity can be understood. In other words, seeking to expand the geographies of Brazil's modernisms, this article maps "alternative modernities"¹, exploring a wider landscape of transformations in urban life, which responded to the restructuring of society. In doing so, we seek to relocate the very notion

of the aesthetics of modernity as pertaining not solely to the art institute, to a set of aesthetic styles pursued by a group of intellectuals, but also to everyday mass culture, foregrounding Brazil's "vernacular modernisms" (Hansen, p. 1). These other modernisms may not evidence the "critical nationalism" that Esther Gabara theorizes as central to the aesthetic project self-consciously pursued by São Paulo's artists in their rejection of copying European forms, yet they were part of the historical formation of modernity in Brazil, and reveal a larger set of cultural, aesthetic, technological, economic, social and political transformations, with an emphasis on difference, change and newness. In Rio, this newness held a special appeal for an emerging mass public, providing them with a sensory reflexive horizon for the experience of modernity taking place in everyday life.

MODERNITY AS INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION: THE 1922 CENTENNIAL EXPOSITION

7 September 1922. This date marked one hundred years of Brazil's independence from Portugal. To mark the historic day, the country's officials planned a grandiose event, namely the staging of an international exhibition that would demonstrate, to cite President Epitácio Pessoa, that the nation's "progress was real" (quoted in Sant'ana, 2008, p. 101). Planned to be the largest event held under the Republic, the show was to display Brazil's advancements – industrial, economic, social and cultural – and to confirm its modern identity in the year that the country's emancipation was celebrated.

Brazil, of course, was no stranger to the so-called "Age of Exhibitions". The country had staged its own National Expositions throughout the late nineteenth century, the first taking place in Rio on 2 December 1861². Inaugurated by Emperor D. Pedro II, the fair comprised of some 9,000 objects and 4,538 exhibitors from all over Brazil, selected in previous provincial exhibitions, with free shipments for exhibits provided by rail and naval transport companies (Sant'ana, 2008, p. 28). Over 50,000 visitors attended the event in just over a month (Andermann, 2009, p. 349). The success of the 1861 show prompted subsequent national fairs, also held in Rio, in 1866, 1873, and 1875³. Despite their "national" dimensions, these exhibitions were planned largely as preparations for respective international fairs⁴. The first took place in 1876, when Brazil participated in the Great London Exhibition, followed by subsequent shows in Paris (1867), Vienna (1873) and Philadelphia (1876)

(Rezende, 2010, p. 19)⁵.

The 1860s and the 1870s, then, witnessed great advances in Brazil's "exhibitionary complex" (to use Tony Bennett), in terms of the strategies devised to represent the country and the number of exhibits and exhibitors sent abroad. This participation in foreign expositions continued with the onset of the Republic, with national displays at The World's Columbia Exhibition held in Chicago in 1893, and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St Louis (Rezende, 2010, p. 26). Far from a continuation of the past, however, the inclination to participate in international exhibitions held in the United States reveals the political and commercial paradigms favoured by the Republican regime. While the Empire had sought commercial and cultural ties with Europe, through participation in exhibitions held there, the Republicans favoured a Pan-American, federalist, and allegedly democratic view of national progress (Rezende, 2010, p. 28)⁶. It was as part of their strategy to use exhibitions to display new political affirmations and a new national hegemony that Republicans took the unprecedented step of hosting the first international exhibition held outside of both Europe and the USA.

The 1922 Centenary Exhibition, then, was different from Brazil's previous participation in World Fairs. The intention was not to participate in modernity elsewhere but rather to stage and display it for a mass audience at home. This difference corresponds with what Francisco Foot Hardman discusses as a relocation of modernity in Brazil (Foot Hardman, 2005). With the start of the Republic, the "modern" was no longer deemed as something foreign or "out of place", but rather as something that could be produced on domestic soil. This new imaginary accelerated following World War One, which prompted what Fernando Rosenberg calls a geopolitical shift in Brazil and Spanish America (Rosenberg, 2006, p. 3). While European countries had previously been symbols of progress to be imitated, the war years initiated a transformation in Latin America's cultural and social landscape, such that Latin America no longer voiced a longing to be like Europe. The post-war collapse in France and elsewhere put an end to Brazil's blind allegiance to European civilization. The country's social and cultural elites turned to the United States whose geographical proximity and success in overcoming its colonial past to become an economic powerhouse made it a more fitting model for Brazil, showing that modernity could be produced at home⁷.

Image 1 – Cover of the Official Program to the 1922 Centenary Exhibition
(Comissão Executiva da Comemoração..., 2021)



This shift was evident in the staging of the 1922 Exposition which was marked by the desire to project a modern nationalism. If, as Andermann writes, international exhibitions taking place across Europe and the USA in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were modernity's first mass mediatic forms, projecting spectacles of trade and industry for mass consumption (Andermann, 2009, p. 333), Brazil's 1922 Centennial Exposition was a mass spectacle of modern nationalism to be projected at home for domestic and international audiences. The fair's scopic regime thus set out to conquer not just an international audience, but a national one too. In this sense the Centennial Exposition was intended as a heterotopian display of national development that asserted the sovereignty of the Republic through visual consumption.

To ensure a local public, organisers arranged free entry days for domestic visitors, thereby allowing Brazilians to attend the event and witness the display of national development in person. Thousands of Cariocas flocked to the fair.

According to the *Correio da Manhã*, 22,000 people visited on September 9, and 100,000 on September 10 (Na Exposição Internacional, 1922, p. 1). This mass staging of citizenry was important politically, given the fact that the country had been witnessing social and political upheaval in the form of the first general strikes, the founding of the Communist Party just months before the fair, and the rise of the *tenente* movement against the Republic⁸. It was also important commercially. In the post-war years, local manufacture had begun to conquer vernacular markets, particularly in the areas of consumer goods and light manufacture: textiles, furniture, food, and beverages (Andermann, 2009, p. 336). Domestic audiences were thus targeted as consumers (not just visual) of Brazil's material development. Indeed, booths selling national products encouraged their commercial participation in Brazil's progress.

The Fair's celebration of the nation's development was only to be expected given that the event marked Brazil's centenary of independence from Portugal. Consequently, the Exhibition was part of "a wave of demonstrations of and an intense search for a definition of what would actually be the national" (Sant'ana, 2008, p. 36)⁹. This nationalism was evidenced by the Exposition's architectural design. Pavilions were designed by national architects, in order to project a national style¹⁰. It may seem somewhat surprising, therefore, that the architectural style chosen to represent the host country was one that incorporated features from the colonial past. Most of the pavilions were built in the so-called neocolonial style¹¹. Paradoxically, this Portuguese style offered the possibility of something new through the reformulation of an old European form. Mário de Andrade, one of the main protagonists of the *Semana de Arte Moderna*, promoted the style, calling it a "maternal architecture" (quoted in López-Durán, 2018, p. 99). In a series of articles published in *Diário Nacional* in 1928, Andrade celebrated the architects working for the "normalization" of the neocolonial as a modern national style (López-Durán, 2018, p. 100).

The modern revival of the Portuguese style was also surprising given the location where the Exposition was held. The event took place on the initial site of the colonial capital, established in 1565. Called *Morro do Castelo*, the hillside had been the site of Portuguese power, with buildings that included the seat of government, a church, the viceroy's residence and those of other high-ranking dignitaries. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, far from a space of power and prestige, *Castelo* had become a refuge for the poor. It housed *cortiços*, where the city's working classes, mainly immigrants and former slaves, lived in overcrowded and unhygienic conditions. Under the modernizing ethos of the 1920s, the city's authorities viewed the hillside as a

degraded, backward space that, along with its undesirable inhabitants, needed to be eliminated. The press reinforced these views. The *Revista da Semana* referred to the hill an “aesthetic monstrosity” (quoted in López-Durán, 2018, p. 58) and *Careta* magazine denounced *Castelo* as a “*montanha de estrume*” that had to be removed (quoted in Paixão, 2008, p. 33). In 1920, this removal became reality. In just two years, the hill and its 408 buildings housing 4,200 low-income families were destroyed, providing a *tabula rasa* for the Exposition (López-Durán, 2018, p. 58)¹².

Race was implicated in this destruction. Lorraine Leu notes that the *Morro* existed in the Brazilian imaginary as “a black space” with “the descriptors that official discourse and the press employed for the hillside also used to characterise blackness: backward, colonial, criminal, indolent, insanitary” (Leu, 2020, p. 9). This underscores “the racialised violence” of the Exposition, which “annihilated places in which people of color resided” (Leu, 2020, p. 10). Much of the modern Brazil displayed at the fair also elided the nation’s Afro-Brazilian presence. While vestiges of the indigenous were represented, for instance in the Romantic Indianism of *O Guarany*, the opera performed at the Teatro Municipal, the contemporary existence of Afro-Brazilian populations was disavowed, part of an effort to purge the country of the stigma of supposed racial inferiority (Andermann, 2009, p. 345). This illustrates Brazilian modernity’s ambivalence towards race¹³. Interestingly, however, despite this elision, the band predominantly made up of Afro-Brazilians, the Oito Batutas, was contracted to perform at the Exposition. Their presence testifies to the prestige the group gained during their recent sojourn in Paris, something that highlights another modernism in Rio 1922, one in which blackness, sanctioned by foreigners abroad, was seen and heard.

MODERN COSMOPOLITANISM AND A NEW POPULAR MUSIC: THE OITO BATUTAS

During the first months of the Centennial Exposition, the Oito Batutas played in nightclubs and at private parties in Paris between February and August 1922¹⁴. Their performances in the French capital occurred on the initiative of Antônio Lopes de Amorim Diniz (better known as Duque), a Salvador native who popularized the maxixe dance in Parisian ballrooms in the 1910s¹⁵. Duque was artistic director of the chic Shéhérazade cabaret club, where the band – known as Les Batutas – first appeared to Parisian audiences,

billed in newspaper advertisements as “this extraordinary Brazilian band, unique in the world, with its rousing gaiety, made up of virtuosos nicknamed the kings of rhythm and of the samba” (Les Batutas, 1922, p. 2; Les Batutas, 1922, p. 6). By May 1922 they were the star attraction at Duque’s entrepreneurial venture, Chez Duque (17, Rue Caumartin), and from 1 June performed at his open-air venue, La Réserve de Saint Cloud (Boulevard Senard). There they appeared on the same bill as Bernard Kay’s American Jazz-Band, creating a conducive environment for transnational musical dialogues. Bastos has illustrated how the Oito Batutas’ samba repertoire was marketed by drawing on the popularity of jazz in the city, yet its unique quality was equally asserted: “it is evident that samba was the group’s trademark, and that this musicality was understood in a contrapuntal relationship with jazz, thus being simultaneously related to and distinct from it” (Bastos, 2008, pp. 14-15)¹⁶. The influence of offstage interactions with jazz musicians in Paris on the musical development of the Oito Batutas has been widely discussed, particularly in the case of Pixinguinha, who began playing the saxophone after coming into contact with the instrument in Paris¹⁷. Their Parisian sojourn clearly had an impact on the group’s musical styles.

Image 2 – Photograph of the Oito Batutas after their Return to Brazil from Paris (IMS).



On the eve of their departure to Europe the band was associated with the

bucolic, sentimental *modinha*, with lyrics that exoticized rural Brazil, as indicated in Benjamim Costallat's famous journalistic piece in defence of their trip: "They will take in their guitars the singing soul of Brazil: the *modinha*. They will take with them the true Brazilian music, which has still not been contaminated by foreign influences" (quoted in Cabral, 1997, p. 84). The Grupo Caxangá, from which the members of the Oito Batutas were hand-picked by Isaac Frankel to perform in his Cine Palais, along with Donga and Pixinguinha, was formed in the context of a vogue for preindustrial music in Brazil, including genres like the *modinha* and the *canção sertaneja* (backlands ballads). Members of the Grupo Caxangá dressed as *sertanejos* or northeastern peasants in leather clothes and *cangaceiro* (bandit) type hats. The "true Brazilian music" referred to by Costallat above was considered, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, to be that of the rural world, specifically the *sertão*. It is no coincidence that Arnaldo Guinle funded two trips by Donga and Pixinguinha into Brazil's interior to search for traditional folk songs to be included in an anthology of Brazilian popular music (Vianna, 1999, p. 83)¹⁸. The Oito Batutas extended this tried-and-trusted repertoire to embrace samba, *choro* and *maxixe*, not least in Paris; as Pixinguinha stated when interviewed by the Museu da Imagem e do Som in Rio: "...we stuck to what we knew: samba, *choro*, *maxixe*" (Barroso, 1970, p. 24). The choice to focus on performing samba in France drew clearly on the genre's popularity as a dancehall rhythm that emerged from the maxixe, but more significantly illustrated a "conscious foregrounding of this urban, modern music at the expense of the rural, folkloric styles that had dominated their repertoire in Brazil. Drawing on samba's Afro-Brazilian origins, Les Batutas commodified their blackness in Paris, basking in the reflected 'heat' of African American jazz rhythms" (Shaw, 2018, pp. 84-85).

The group's visual style, as reflected in photographs taken before and after their spell in Europe, evidently experienced a permanent shift in 1922. *A Noite* featured a photograph of all eight members wearing the typical rustic dress of the *sertanejo* peasant, holding their traditional instruments, alongside an article entitled "The 8 Batutas Embark Tomorrow for Europe" (Os "8 Batutas" embarcam..., 1922, p. 6). On 14 August 1922, the same newspaper announced the group's return to Brazil from Paris with a markedly different photograph in which all eight are dressed in black dinner suits, white shirts and bow ties (A música regional brasileira..., 1922, p. 6). Although their instruments remain the same, they are now accompanied by Duque to the right of the image, asserting himself as bandleader, elegantly attired in tails. A famous photograph (Image 2) subsequently taken of the band in Brazil by Augusto Malta evidences

their adoption of typical jazz poses, urban attire and jazz instruments like the saxophone and trombone¹⁹. Duque's entrepreneurial savvy undoubtedly informed the band's sartorial choices in Paris, in compliance with the fashion for black tie in the nightlife venues of Montmartre, which awakened after the First World War with a new aura of cosmopolitanism and elegance. As Jackson writes, "The bourgeoisie again came to this part of Paris, but now, far from being the source of ridicule, evening dress was expected or even required as people rolled up to the clubs in limousines or the taxicabs that were replacing the horse-drawn carriages on the city's streets after the war" (Jackson, 2003, p. 55). Montmartre was the natural home away from home for Les Batutas, since the low rents and jazz music venues led many Afro-Americans to live there, with the neighbourhood functioning as a "point of transition between the United States and Paris" (Jackson, 2003, p. 56). By adopting the local evening dress code, the Oito Batutas appealed to Parisian jazz fans and the considerable number of US tourists passing through the city, "who already loved jazz and were likely to delight in a South American band who looked like jazz musicians but offered a new 'exotic' twist" (Shaw, 2018, p. 87). When they returned to Brazil in August 1922 they kept this new visual style, presenting themselves as cosmopolitan Afro-diasporic musicians far removed from their previous incarnation as interpreters of rural, preindustrial northeastern rhythms. For Seigel the Brazilian elite "quickly realized that the Batutas could be used to set Brazil and the United States on the same plane, a prestige-winning comparison long a treasured project of Brazilians seeking to coax from foreigners the recognition they thought warranted by Brazil's dominance in the Southern Cone" (Seigel, 2009, p. 130).

The departure for Paris of the Oito Batutas in February 1922 had prompted a racist backlash in some quarters of the Brazilian press²⁰, yet on their return in August they were deemed worthy of performing at the General Motors Pavilion and the US Embassy as part of the Centennial Exhibition held in Rio, as noted above. In addition, they were invited to collaborate with the *Batucada*, performing their Parisian musical repertoire in one of this company's revues. By extension, the samba genre that they performed was to be permanently inflected by the Oito Batutas' trans-Atlantic journey and its cultural interactions and dialogues. On its return to Brazil after these transformative months of 1922 where it encountered European modernity first hand, samba was imbued with a cosmopolitan cachet that, alongside the other cultural agents associated with its consecration as national music (see Vianna,

1999, p. 112), allowed the genre to be accepted by the white elite as a quintessential element of the “national” culture of the 1920s.

INNOVATIONS ON STAGE: *THE TEATRO DE REVISTA*

If 1922 marked the transformation of attitudes to samba music in Brazil, one forged through international links and connections, it also saw the birth of the golden age of popular theatre in Brazil, which was likewise influenced by transnational dialogues. The year witnessed creativity and innovation in the theatrical landscape that would continue until the early 1940s and that was centred predominantly in Rio. Various forms of stage performance – operetta, *sainete*, *burlata*, *revista* – matured after 1920, seizing on the patriotic zeitgeist triggered by the centennial commemorations. As Cavalcanti de Paiva writes:

The flourishing did not happen by chance or by magic; 1922 is a key year. Brazilianness was vigorously being fomented by talented playwrights; it exploded, arguably, with an epidermal and cheerful nationalism that galvanized the country, taking as a key reference the Centenary of the Independence from Portugal (Cavalcanti de Paiva, 1991, pp. 216-217. Translated)²¹.

In keeping with the traditionally irreverent spirit of Rio’s revue theatre, the superficiality of this “epidermal nationalism” was frequently the butt of the joke in plays, as were other aspects of *carioca* daily life, not least modern manners. All were humorously critiqued, for example, in the revue *Nós pelas costas*, which premiered at the city’s Teatro Recreio on New Year’s Eve in 1921, where it ran until 22 January 1922 (Cavalcanti de Paiva, 1991, p. 219). This marked the re-opening of this theatre after extensive modernisation, following in the footsteps of its rival venue, the Teatro São José.

The arrival of the Parisian theatrical company Ba-ta-clan in Rio in 1922 was a watershed moment for the evolution of home-grown revue theatre, and references to Madame Rasimi’s troupe became one of the most common metonyms for modernity employed by revue writers and promoters in the 1920s (Shaw, 2018, pp. 96-98; pp. 106-109)²². The Ba-ta-clan’s shows combined luxurious sets and costumes with female nudity, priding themselves on the physical charms of their chorus girls. When the novelty of bare breasts began to wear off, these young women shocked audiences with their shaved eyebrows and armpits, adding a new dimension to their nudity. They were also the first

chorus girls in the city to display bare legs. The company arrived in Rio in 1922 with 113 members, including singers, chorus girls, actors, clowns, musicians, and a large technical team. They brought with them lighting and smoke effects, modern bands and daring, meticulous choreography. They were afforded a stage at the elite Lyrico theatre on Largo da Carioca for a three-month run. Another foreign company of a similar size, Velasco, hailing from Madrid and headed by the Spaniard Eulogio Velasco, arrived in Brazil's capital shortly afterwards, bringing a similarly large team and again combining lavish costumes with female flesh. Local theatre professionals analysed the technical aspects of the productions of both troupes, which would soon influence Brazilian revue theatre profoundly. Between or before performances, the Ba-taclan's statuesque, free-spirited French chorus girls rubbed shoulders with high-society gentlemen in glamorous venues like O Bar Nacional in the Galeria Cruzeiro and the Sorveteria Alvear, during what was known as the *heure bleue* between 5pm and 7pm, giving rise to numerous scandals (Castro, 2019, pp. 210-212). Madame Rasimi's troupe brought with it new aesthetics as well as an "apelo erótico alcançado mediante a mostra generosa do nu feminino" (Cavalcanti de Paiva, 1991, p. 218). Initially tolerated by the censors for fear of appearing narrow-minded, this shocking innovation led chorus girls in Brazilian theatrical companies to shed the traditional thick-knitted legwear. One example was the revue *Vamos Pintar o Sete*, that premiered on 9 November at Rio's Teatro São José, which featured a nude Pepita de Abreu and bare-legged chorus girls, daring elements that impressed some but not all critics, as did the production's unprecedented lighting effects and the physical modernisation of the theatre itself, which had reopened with various improvements. The Ba-taclan equally introduced to Brazil's popular stage more organised choreography in the group's dance numbers, which had previously been mostly improvised by local troupes, with choreographers from the world of opera and classical ballet and tap dance teachers involved for the first time in rehearsals (Cavalcanti de Paiva, 1991, p. 218).

Image 3 – Pepita de Abreu, Star of the Teatro de Revista, 1917 (Fado Sou, 2017).



After 1922 Brazilian revue theatre would never be the same and the name Ba-ta-clan and neologisms derived from it would repeatedly resurface throughout the decade as a metonym for Parisian modernity in the dialogue and titles of revues, advertisements and press items (Shaw, 2018, pp. 106-109). This renovation of Brazilian popular stage performance around the latest trends emanating from Paris would continue into the 1930s and 1940s, notably in the productions of the Tro-ló-ló company headed by Jardel Jércolis, founded in 1925 and rebranded in 1932 as the *Grande Companhia de Espetáculos Modernos*. Inspired by the success of Josephine Baker in Paris, Jércolis incorporated black Brazilian artists into his theatrical evocations of cosmopolitan performance, equally aligning his revues with US cultural practices such as jazz. 1922 marked the entrance of Brazilian revue theatre into a transnational performance space characterised by a shared aesthetic cosmopolitanism and modernism that was reflected in the themes and allusions of revue texts, casting choices, innovative sets and costumes, and new genres of musical and dance numbers (see Shaw, 2018, pp. 109-114).

A NEW PUBLIC LANDSCAPE FOR LITERATURE

The “erotic appeal” involving the display of women in the 1920s was not limited to the theatre. A new literary landscape in Rio was also capturing people’s attention with scandalous stories involving sex, drugs and especially

the licentious behaviour of young female protagonists. This featured in the novel *Enervadas*, published in 1922 by writer and journalist Maria Cecília Bandeira de Melo Vasconcelos, using the pseudonym Madame Chrysanthème. Vasconcelos' alias was taken from Pierre Loti's 1888 novel of the same name, which was hugely popular in Brazil. A fictionalised diary, the French novel details an affair between a French naval officer and Chrysanthème, a temporary "bride" purchased in Nagasaki and then discarded. Loti's novel was not just Vasconcelos' literary appellation; it also inspired *Enervadas*, whose epistolary form describes various love affairs of the young Cariocan girl, Lúcia.

Enervadas thus offers a modern Brazilian female revision of the 19th-century French novel²³. This revision is perhaps to be expected. Daughter of writer and women's rights activist Emílio Moncorvo Bandeira de Melo, who wrote as Carmen Dolores, Vasconcelos "did not grow up oblivious to contemporary discussions regarding gender"²⁴ (Maia, 2020, p. 60. Translated). Consequently "she was a fierce defender of women's rights" in her journalistic texts, which dealt with "discussions concerning the problems experienced by women in their daily lives"²⁵ (Maia, 2020, p. 60. Translated). *Enervadas* engages with contemporary concerns regarding women's problems in Brazil, articulating what Susan Besse (1996) calls "the modernization of gender inequality". This modernization took place within a broader ideological framework wrought by industrialization and urbanization and socio-economic changes following World War I. This included growth of a consumer economy composed of domestic and foreign goods that altered the role and place of women in urban life, especially in Rio. Expanding industrial and commercial venues provided more employment for working- and middle-class women and new technologies freed them from domestic chores, giving them freedom to pursue activities beyond the home. The development of urban leisure sites also incorporated upper- and middle-class women into public life.

The 1920s, therefore, brought about a significant transformation for Brazilian women. Their integration into the workplace, and their emergence as a target in the growing consumer economy, liberated large numbers of women from the constraints of domesticity, making them more visible in public spaces. The press reported on the appearance of women in public life. Illustrated journals published snapshots of women in downtown Rio called "*instantâneos*". The photographs are vivid illustrations of women's public visibility, testifying to the changing sexual boundaries of urban life. The public contours of this new woman were synthesized in 1920 by J. Carlos' caricature, the *Melindrosa*. Linked to the city and its leisure venues, the *melindrosa* projected the radical

makeover of the image of female identity in relation to the family, superimposing traditional values of motherhood and domesticity with the appeals of the city's modern life, its spaces of pleasure and consumer-oriented culture.

Image 4 – J. Carlos' *Melindrosa* from *Para Todos Magazine* (J. Carlos, 1922, n.p.).



The *melindrosa* was intimately linked to a consumer landscape, her image emerging from the pages of newspapers and magazines. The press featured illustrations of Brazil's "It girl" alongside commentaries on her modern lifestyle, self-consciously drawing on discourses regarding changing femininity. Glossy magazines that catered to women, such as *Revista Feminina*, also drew on the new woman's contours, dedicating considerable space to disseminating her public lifestyle. Women readers were crucial to these magazines largely because of the latter's dependence on revenue from department store advertising aimed at female shoppers. They featured colourful advertisements that extolled the wonders of modern technological items and fashions, which underscored the new Brazilian woman's centrality to the consumer market.

The emergence of this new woman, however, was not universally celebrated. Discourses emerged regarding the dangers of women's abandonment of the home. Newspapers emphasised rises in the number of failed marriages and cartoons featured women spurning household chores to engage in frivolous activities beyond the home. Consequently, discourses emerged that sought to

contain women's adventures within the domestic space. Key here were medical discourses. Psychiatrists versed in Freudian theories, in particular, became prominent in the 1920s and began discussing maladies affecting women's public activities. Antônio Austregésilo Lima, for example, stated that nervous disability, or neurasthenia, had reached epidemic proportions, with women especially susceptible to the disease (Besse, 1996, p. 25).

Lúcia, the main character and narrator of *Enervadas*, epitomises Brazil's new woman and her critiques. She immediately tells us she is suffering from what her physician has diagnosed as “un nervosismo”, caused by too much activity, or as Lúcia herself describes it, “an excess of thoughts, an urge to enjoy life”²⁶ (Chrysanthème, 1922, p. 4. Translated). Cataloguing the symptoms of her modern illness, Lúcia sets out to disprove Dr Maceu's diagnosis, to show that the male doctor “knows nothing of female maladies”²⁷ (Chrysanthème, 1922, p. 6. Translated). Far from ill, she diagnoses herself as “a woman of her own times”²⁸ (Chrysanthème, 1922, p. 6. Translated). Her narrative is thus a rebellion and details her public adventures as “uma enervada”:

If they had diagnosed me with exhaustion, or as neurasthenic, with a congested liver or a bad kidney, I would have cried, feared death, [...] but “nervosism”, the very name that the doctor gave to all my imbalances as a fashionable modern woman, has forced me to outline, from now on, on these pieces of paper, everything that happens to me and with me, so that the doctor will see that medicine is a science of trickery, ignorance and meaningless words²⁹ (Chrysanthème, 1922, pp. 5-6. Translated).

The “desequilíbrios de moça de moda e da época” that Lúcia mentions start with an impulsive marriage – based purely on physical attraction – and continue throughout her memoirs, which describe her passionate feelings for a priest, various love affairs, her divorce, her evening outings to dance foxtrots and tangos and to watch movies, as well as numerous parties featuring morphine and cocaine. With its licentious character and sexual exploits, *Enervadas* keys into the sensational novels that Alessandra El Far notes had been popular in Brazil since the end of the nineteenth century. Yet, as Beatriz Resende observes, *Enervadas* is also part of a new literary landscape emerging in 1920s Rio that was linked to the mass press.

The press was crucial to *Enervadas*, which first appeared in serialised form in the newspaper *A pátria* in 1921. The novel's journalistic origins are unsurprising. Vasconcelos was a regular contributor to newspapers, writing

crônicas in publications like *O Paiz*, *Gazeta de notícias*, *O cruzeiro*, *A Imprensa* and *Correio paulistano* (see Maia, 2020, p. 60). The novel's first-person narrative, simple prose and accounts of Rio, gesture towards the work of the *cronista*, providing readers with snapshots of modern life from the point of view of a *melindrosa*³⁰. The mass dimensions of the press, however, influenced more than the novel's content. Vasconcelos ardently advertised *Enervadas* in newspapers. Announcements for the book featured in the press, in advertisements that told readers it was "forthcoming", "soon to be released" or "just published". This testifies to changes within writing culture in 1920s Rio. Urbanization produced an expanding reading public in the capital, leading to a growing market for books that could stimulate and satisfy readers' desires. Acutely aware of this new market, Vasconcelos set out to appeal to it. The writer took special care in advertising her book and in its actual design. The original cover featured a colourful graphic design of a young *melindrosa* in a conscious effort to make the novel more attractive. This visual design had a commercial imperative, intending to make the book more appealing to the reading public.

As Beatriz Resende has outlined, other Carioca writers similarly keyed into the new commercial landscape of writing. Théó-Filho and Benjamin Costallat especially became attuned to a growing literary market, penning similarly sensational novels that were widely advertised and also carefully designed as attractive material objects. Indeed, Costallat hired Emiliano Di Cavalcanti to produce a spectacular cover for his 1923 novel *Mademoiselle Cinema* to garner consumers' visual attention. Such marketing ploys were highly successful. "In a country with few readers and where, even today, editions rarely exceed three thousand, these authors used to sell – as was the case with Costallat – seventy thousand copies."³¹ (Resende, 2014, p. 78. Translated). For Resende, Costallat, Théó-Filho and Vasconcelos, "They were authors in tune with the public's taste of 'modernity'; they published novels or practiced writing chronicles in newspapers and magazines, intrinsically in texts that were linked to the life of the city."³² (Resende, 2014, p. 79. Translated).

By 1922 a key and crucial part of this public was female. Women, especially Rio's "new women", were an important part of the growing market of readers, aiding the sales of newspapers, magazines like *Revista Feminina*, and novels. Flora Süssekind refers to an appeal to female readers as a key sales technique for writers (Süssekind, 1997, p. 44). Théó-Filho, Costallat and Vasconcelos all featured female protagonists or *melindrosas* in their works, incorporating not just a feature of public life but one of its key consumers³³. *Enervadas*, though, differs from the works of Théó-Filho and Costallat. While these two authors

detailed the public lifestyles of Rio's *melindrosas* in their writing, they were also careful to censure their behaviours. Indeed, when *Mademoiselle Cinema* was apprehended for its "immoral" content, Costallat issued a stark rebuke of Rosalina Pontes, its character, stating that through her he was defending "praise for the Brazilian family, [...] overtly showing our miserable times and our miserable customs" (Translated)³⁴. Vasconcelos produced no such critique of Lúcia and her modern ways. Instead, her novel undermines such critiques as its first-person prose challenges the medical discourse that has diagnosed the young Carioca as "enervada". As the protagonist states, she is simply "a woman of her times" (Translated)³⁵. Vasconcelos' novel too was part of the era, providing women with novels they could consume and whose protagonists reflected the public lifestyles now available to their female readers.

CONCLUSION

Enervadas did not, then, just represent modern life in Rio, it was part of changes taking place in the city's everyday life, articulating what Marshall Berman calls a "modernism in the streets"³⁶. This modernism was evident elsewhere in the capital's cultural landscape. It was present in the 1922 centennial celebrations, which staged global modernity in the city for a domestic audience to see, consume and experience; in the Oito Batutas' cosmopolitan updating of Afro-Brazilian popular music and the *teatro de revista's* innovative practices and *mise-en-scène*. These transformations, then, were not limited to intellectual debates regarding the new era taking place in the art institute, they were related to broader transformations in the city's public space, and they registered their impacts on Brazilian society, not least in how they affected race, class and gender relations.

To focus on transformations in Cariocan culture, then, creates a space for understanding modernism as a wider, more diverse phenomenon, beyond the *Semana de Arte Moderna* and Brazil's high culture, eluding the single-logic genealogy that begins in February at São Paulo's *Teatro Municipal*. This alternative focus opens up ideas of cultural modernity, to crucially encompass a notion of modernism that is more than a set of ideas and practices pursued by a group of artists and intellectuals. It allows us to see how modernism encompasses a wider range of cultural and artistic practices, including popular mass practices that register, respond to, and reflect upon the experience of modernity, not least a paradigmatic shift in how culture is produced and consumed. It is these shifts in producing and consuming culture that are

evident in Rio 1922, its urban design, its popular theatre, popular music and popular literature, where the modernising changes were seen, heard and felt.

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NOTES

¹ For a theoretical discussion of alternative modernities see Gaonkar (2001, pp. 1-24).

² For more on the national expositions see Turazzi (1995), and Andermann (2009).

³ See Turazzi (1995), and also Rezende (2010) for a discussion of these national expositions.

⁴ The Empire of Brazil sent inspectors to the Crystal Palace Exposition of 1855 and Paris Universal Exposition of 1955 to report on the marvels of industrial progress displayed in order to make national displays that could be sent abroad (Andermann, 2009, p. 359, note 5).

⁵ The Brazilian Empire was the region's major and most regular exhibitor at international fairs. Andermann (2009), Turazzi (1995), and Tenorio-Trillo (1996).

⁶ For more on Brazil's relationship with the United States see Seigel (2009).

⁷ This shift was of course also economic. The post-war years saw increasing loans from the United States, an indication of the country's new relations with and new dependency on foreign industrial powers. See Johnson (1999, p. 190).

⁸ For the wider social and political context of 1922 see Johnson (1999, p. 190).

⁹ "uma onda de manifestações e intensa busca pela definição do que seria de fato o nacional". See Sant'Anna, 2008, p. 36

¹⁰ The organising committee held a competition, in which architects were invited to submit designs. For a discussion of the architecture at the 1922 Centennial Exposition see López-Durán (2018).

¹¹ This was championed by physician and art critic Mariano Filho. Proponents of the style themselves, however, rejected the term neocolonial and preferred instead traditional Brazilian architecture. See López-Durán (2018, p. 70).

¹² The destruction of *Morro do Castelo* is explored at length by Lorraine Leu (2020).

¹³ For the ambivalence of race in modernity and modern nation building see Paul Gilroy (1995).

¹⁴ The Oito Batutas was formed when Isaac Frankel, manager of the Cine Palais in Rio, one of the city's most fashionable cinemas, recruited members of the Grupo Caxangá, most notably Afro-Brazilian musicians Pixinguinha and Donga, to entertain patrons in the venue's waiting room. They gave their first performance in April 1919. The group's repertoire was an eclectic mix of the music of the *sertão* and urban Brazilian styles, and this combined with the novelty of Afro-descendent musicians playing for elite cinemagoers – a reflection of the shortage of white musicians in the city caused by the Spanish flu epidemic

– garnered them popularity and success, as reflected in the local press. In 1919 and 1920 they performed in the states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, travelling to the country's northeast in 1921. They attracted the attention of millionaire entrepreneur Arnaldo Guinle, who employed them for private performances at his home in Rio, and together with Duque and diplomat Lauro Müller, masterminded their visit to Paris in 1922. For more details see Shaw (2018, pp. 79-81).

¹⁵ In 1914-15 Duque established the Dancing Palace venue in Paris's Luna Park, where he starred alongside his dance partner, Mlle. Gaby and a so-called "Hawaiian Orchestra". The inauguration of this establishment was attended by France's then president, Raymond Poincaré. In 1915 he also opened a dance academy in the French capital and one in Rio de Janeiro, going on to tour in Argentina and Uruguay. His brand of the maxixe was further popularized in New York, where it was marketed as a French export. As a consequence of Duque's success in Paris, enthusiastically received by the Brazilian press, the status of the maxixe dance style, which emerged in the 1870s, changed dramatically. What was once equated with pornography in certain circles as a result of its risqué choreography, became a respectable, sanitized and "whitened" dance. For further details see Shaw (2018, pp. 71-79).

¹⁶ On 16 February 1922, the day of their first performance, the newspaper *Le Journal* announced: "Les Batutas are not a jazz band. They do not play piano or drums. They are special instrumentalists of accomplished virtuosity, with a wonderful, infectious gaiety." (*L'Orchestre des Batutas n'est*, 1922, p. 5).

¹⁷ See, for example, Vianna (1999, pp. 83-84); Cabral (1997, pp. 111-123); Tinhorão (2015, pp. 29-35); and Marcondes (1998, p. 584).

¹⁸ As Vianna writes, "When Arnaldo Guinle financed a Brazilian tour for João Pernambucano and the Oito Batutas, the purpose was partly to facilitate their desire to collect folk music, then defined exclusively in rural terms. In other words, the connoisseurs of Brazilian popular culture tended to elide it, in these years, with the idea of a national folklore, and to identify that with the sertanejo phenomenon of northeastern Brazil. The Oito Batutas rode that wave of interest to national and international success" (1999, p. 83).

¹⁹ Photograph from the Augusto Malta "Personalidades" Collection, courtesy of the Museu da Imagem e do Som, Rio de Janeiro.

²⁰ A certain A. Fernandes, writing in the *Diário de Pernambuco*, for example, claimed he did not know whether to laugh or cry, and failed to understand how the Brazilian government could allow to be shown in Paris "an affected, negroid and ridiculous Brazil." Cited in Cabral (1997, p. 84). Similar racially motivated outbursts from journalists had been triggered in response to the appearance of the band at the elite Cine Palais. The classical musician Júlio Reis, for example, told the newspaper *A Rua* that the music of the Oito Batutas was "inappropriate for the educated ears of aristocratic moviegoers" and said that he was "ashamed" of their scandalous presence in this upscale cinema (quoted in Vianna, 1999, p. 82).

²¹ "O florescer não se deu por acaso e nem por passe de mágica; 1922 é um ano-chave. A brasilidade vinha sendo semeada com vigor por dramaturgos de talento; explodiu, justificadamente, com um nacionalismo epidérmico e alegre que galvanizou o país tomando para

referencial o Centenário da Independência comprada a Portugal”. Cavalcanti de Paiva also argues that the nationalist spirit in *teatro de revista* was also a reaction to prior subordination to the Portuguese model in terms of form and content, following the deaths of Artur Azevedo and Moreira Sampaio, who left a void filled by the Portuguese model (Paiva, 1991, pp. 217-218).

²² This was the eponymous resident company of the Bataclan theatre in the Bastille area of Paris, which had been bought by Albertine Rasimi in 1910, and whose success was to outstrip that of rival venues like the Moulin Rouge, the Folies Bergère and Olympia (Castro, 2019, pp. 210-212).

²³ Scholars have underscored this novel’s feminism and that of Vasconcelos’ work overall. See Maia (2020, pp. 59-61) and Pinto (1999).

²⁴ “não cresceu alheia às discussões de gênero de sua época”.

²⁵ “ela foi uma defensora ferina dos direitos femininos”; “discussões a respeito dos problemas vivenciados no dia a dia da mulher”.

²⁶ “esse atropelamento de pensamentos, essa ânsia de gozar a vida.”

²⁷ “não entende nada de moléstias femininas”.

²⁸ “uma mulher bem de sua época”.

²⁹ “Se me tivessem achado esgotada, neurastênica, com o fígado congesto ou o rim mal colocado, eu choraria, temeria a morte, [...] mas ‘enervada’, título com que ele agraciou todos os meus desequilíbrios de moça de moda e da época, obriga-me a alinhar, de ora em diante, em folhas de papel, tudo o que se passa em mim e comigo, para que ele tenha a certeza depois, de que a medicina é uma ciência de intrujice, de ignorância e de palavras sem alcance e sem sentido”.

³⁰ For more on the *crônica* see Candido (1992).

³¹ “En un país de pocos lectores donde, hoy, las ediciones pocas veces pasan de tres mil volúmenes, estos autores llegaban – como es el caso de Costallat – a vender setenta mil ejemplares de una novela”.

³² “Eran autores sintonizados con el gusto de ‘modernidad’ del público, que publicaban novelas o practicaban en los periódicos y revistas la escritura de crónicas, intrínsecamente ligado a la propia vida de la ciudad”.

³³ These writers were not alone in catering to a female readership. By the late 1910s a number of prominent authors, like Olavo Bilac, Coelho Netto, Afrânio Peixoto and Afonso Arinos, contributed articles to women’s magazines, including *Revista feminina*. They used female pseudonyms to differentiate their serious literary works from more trivial and feminine forms of writing. This highlights a process of literary differentiation in Brazil that by the 1920s had become gendered: it delineated mass forms of writing as feminine, and made more authentic culture the prerogative of men, which highlights the exclusion of women (as producers and consumers) from the realm of “high art”. See Conde (2012, pp. 125-175).

³⁴ “a veneração pela família brasileira, [...] mostrando a nu a triste época e os tristes costumes.” The 1999 edition of *Mademoiselle Cinema* includes critiques of the novel as well as Costallat’s own rebuke. See Costallat (1923, pp. 1-7).

³⁵ “uma mulher da sua época”.

³⁶ See chapter two in Berman’s classic text *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (2010, pp. 212-249).

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