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Ludic Maps and Capitalist Spectacle in Rio de Janeiro

Abstract

Rio de Janeiro is undergoing a makeover that is undeniably spectacular. Redevelopment schemes are dramatically rearranging the urban landscape, and crucially, this economic growth hinges on the production and circulation of images of the city. This paper explores a site of alterity and resistance where a favela youth collective has re-created Rio from its margins. This miniature world, known as Morrinho and built of bricks, mortar, and re-used materials, hosts a role-playing game featuring thousands of inch-tall avatars. This paper argues that re-visioning the world anew through play makes the society of the spectacle inhabitable and thus contestable. How does the society of the spectacle become a terrain for struggle in Rio? Locating spectacle production in nation-state formation and the urban process, the paper provides a genealogy of the spectacle beyond the modern North Atlantic metropole. Locating the favela within a Brazilian geographical imagination frames ethnographic data collected as an observer and participant in the Morrinho game. While the spectacle may hinge on the relationship between visuality and power, this essay observes how signs take on material lives through ludic re-appropriation. Play becomes a form of commentary, an alternative mode of knowledge about the city, and functions dually as both description of and participant in the social world in which it is embedded.

Under a thick canopy of jackfruit and mango trees in the forested edge of a small favela[1] in Rio de Janeiro lies a peculiar model of the city. Known as Morrinho, or "Little Hill," the mock-up is largely built with tens of thousands of terra-cotta hollow tile bricks—the kind used to construct (life-size) housing in the favela—each cut by mason trowel and hand-painted vibrant

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[1] *Favela* has been translated into English variously as "slum," "shantytown," "informal settlement," and "squatter settlement." In Rio, favela residents often use the less pejorative alternatives *comunidade* (community) or *morro* (hill). The 1950 General Census first defined favelas as opposed to the formal city by a set of criteria regarding size, construction type, legal status of land tenure, and absence of public infrastructures and official signage system. Briefly, scholars have analyzed the historiographic construction of the favela as a social and political category (Valladares 2005; Zaluar and Alvito 1998; Perlman 2010), as a territory of legal and juridical exception (Santos, Marafon, and Sant'Anna 2012; Gonçalves 2013; Magalhães 2014), and as space of drug-gang power exercised through violence (Leeds 1996; Arias 2006; Silva 2008).

colors to resemble houses with tiny windows (see figure 1). The site, sprawling over 400 square

meters of shaded hillside, hosts an ongoing role-playing game played by the model's young

stewards, a group of some fifteen to twenty male youths, who manipulate and ventriloquize

Morrinho's thousands of inch-tall inhabitants. These *bonecos*, [2] made of colorful plastic Lego

bricks with totemic markings are given individual identities and acquire life histories over

months and years of play (see figure 2). The bonecos represent myriad social identities, including

men and women, children and adults, residents, shopkeepers, drug gang members, DJs, police

officers, politicians, prostitutes, and television crews. They enact dramas of romance, commerce,

leisure, violence, and quotidian life using these avatars. Morrinho is not only an objectification

of its creators' affective lives—a spatialized expression of their desires, anxieties, and

aspirations—but also a continual re-engagement with their urban reality.

The rules of the game follow the rules of urban life, as the players judge it. Morrinho

bears a direct if ambiguous relationship to the social reality surrounding it: shortly after the site's

inception in 1997, Rio's elite military police battalion invaded and occupied the youths' home

community, and still use it as a training ground for tactical operations. The municipal

government also implemented a patchwork of engineering projects and social programs aimed at

incorporating the favela into formal real-estate markets. Amid these changes in security and

infrastructure at home, Morrinho became recognized as an art project and traveled in replica

installations at cultural festivals worldwide that, by the first decade of the 21st century, had begun

including "the favela" as a part of Brazil's cultural repertoire. As Morrinho grew into a formally

instituted tourist attraction, art installation, and cultural project, its youth founders, alongside

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[2] In Portuguese, *boneca* denotes "doll" and is also used colloquially to refer to sexually attractive women. Kulick (2009:143) also notes *boneca* being used as a code word for transvestite prostitutes in classified advertisements. In Morrinho, the masculinized *boneco* refers generally to these fashioned plastic game figurines and might correspond best to the English term "action figure." The normative gendering of play in Morrinho is further discussed below.

curators, filmmakers, NGO volunteers, and other collaborators and supporters, began branding it "a small revolution" and deploying a language of architecture, dreams, and desire. Hundreds of thousands have either visited the model *in situ* or seen it in replica. As representational practice, Morrinho both accommodates and disrupts the assumptions and projections of a range of spectators and associates, including art curators, artists, filmmakers, journalists, academics, tour operators, and tourists.

The miniature city is both a reflection of urban reality as well as a para-site (Marcus 2000) where the city is imagined in ways that trouble predominant discourses of Rio, a city that has come to manifest many of the dreams and nightmares of late capitalist urbanization: an expansion of credit-fueled consumption, waterfront "revitalization" developments, spiraling property values, mega-event infrastructure projects, and constant media coverage of the militarization of favela communities. Rio's recent boom in profile if not in fortunes is undeniably spectacular in nature. By "spectacular" I mean to signal not simply its sudden and dramatic appearance but also how this economic growth hinges on the production and circulation of images of the city. But what are its spaces of alterity and resistance? How does the society of the spectacle become a terrain for struggle in Rio? How might we historicize the role of spectacle production in ordering the urban process? This paper investigates geographies and histories mobilized in making the city visible, and thus an object of contested power, to its inhabitants.

I offer an ethnographic account of Morrinho as a ludic map of the city and prism through which to observe the politics and culture of spectacle in Rio. A ludic map, as I conceive it and as Morrinho exemplifies it, does not pretend to pass itself off as a direct representation of a fixed or prescribed external reality. Rather, play as a disposition to the world points to an indeterminacy of the social order in which it is embedded (Malaby 2009). The argument presented here

recognizes that the spectacle has long been conceived as an expression of visuality and the power of visual culture over political and economic life. However, drawing on work showing how visual signs are also material objects and have social lives of their own, I suggest that play, as a mode of representing and engaging with the world, becomes a basis for alternative ways of knowing the city. Morrinho turns out to be neither a field of utopianism nor a naïve reflection of the world, but rather a space for reflection on how the city is lived and represented—and the gap between the two. This descriptive analysis of Morrinho as a space of encounter opens up a discussion within which to rethink the relationship between play and utopianism, spectacle and politics.

In investigating these relations, the paper examines the use of spectacle in its entanglements with racialization, nation-state formation, militarization, urban development, and representations of the city in Brazil. Archival research, historical texts, and audiovisual materials construct a case that the legacies for critical spectacle studies may lie, geographically and historically, beyond the modernist North Atlantic metropole. I also draw on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork at Morrinho and in its surrounding community, during which I became an active playing member of the Morrinho collective. A close reading of one particular satirical short film produced at Morrinho offers a narrative about contemporary struggles over urban territory told by the diminutive bonecos themselves.

In a neoliberal era of interurban competition that pins economic stakes on urban images in the form of mega-event bids and city branding campaigns, the dominant metaphor becomes that of the aspirational metropolis. Cities are being remade not only materially through so-called regeneration projects and gentrification (Smith 2002) but also through what Jennifer Robinson (2002) calls a "regulating fiction" of the global city. Standards must be pursued, codified into

public policy, and industrial waterfronts and other dilapidated areas remade in the pristine image of capitalist dreamscapes. Rio de Janeiro is currently undergoing a high-profile makeover in preparation for hosting the World Cup in 2014 and Olympic Games in 2016. Spectacle as a world-making practice becomes available to all, whether by appropriation or other means. Researchers have noted strategies of slum residents and other marginalized urban dwellers in the global South to mimic or subvert images of global cities precisely to lay claim to the consumerist promises they disclose (Roy and Ong 2011). AbdouMaliq Simone (2001) terms this availability of the spectacle to re-invention "worlding from below." Making the spectacle inhabitable is a means of disrupting the separation it entails between spectator and image, between consumer and producer.

A genealogy of the spectacle

In southeastern France a postman named Ferdinand Cheval built, over some 33 years of his life, a fantastical structure named the Palais Idéal. Around 1879, at 43 years old, Cheval began bringing home oddly-shaped stones, which he collected in his pockets along his delivery rounds. Soon he was filling wheelbarrows every day and working into the night on his personal palace. This singular construction combined a wide range of architectural traditions, from Roman monuments, medieval castles, Alpine chalets, and vernacular forms from French colonies, including the temples of Angkor, Arab mosques, and Algerian Kasbah, all mixed in with touches of fantasy. The completed work stood approximately 26 meters long at a height of eight to ten meters. After its creator's death, the stone assemblage became a pilgrimage site of sorts for French intellectuals who would form the core of the Surrealist and later Situationist movements (Becker 1982). The latter group would coalesce around a critique of functionalist urbanism and set out a program outlining a radical politics and poetics of the city around bridging individual

desire and architectural morphology. André-Franck Conord would declare in 1954, in the Situationist bulletin *Potlatch*, Cheval's creation "the first expression of an architecture of disorientation" (McDonough 2009:42). By the late 1950s, the city itself became the central object of critique and playful re-invention for the Situationist International, and this later became the foundation for Guy Debord's famous critique of the capitalist urban world, *The Society of the Spectacle*. If the group saw radical possibility in the postman's monomaniacal monument of individual desire and fancy, it charged society to imagine a new human condition out of a collective consciousness emancipated from the shackles of capitalism. It is a curious contradiction that a political and intellectual movement known for championing spatial plasticity would find inspiration from such a singular megalithic object as the Palais Idéal, especially considering how urbanization under the dynamics of late capitalism itself has embraced the ephemerality of ever-accelerating cycles of creative destruction. Whereas the remaking of the urban was, for the Situationists, once part and parcel of a radical politics, it was by the end of the century central to reproducing capitalist accumulation, in the form of "revitalization" and "regeneration" schemes (Smith 2002; Davis and Monk 2008; Harvey 2012).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first known written instance of "spectacle" in English is attributed to Yorkshire hermit and religious writer Richard Rolle in 1340: "*Hoppynge & daunceynge of tumblers and herlotis, and oþer spectakils* [Hopping and dancing of tumblers and harlots, and other spectacles]" (Spectacle, n.1 2014). A Wycliffte Bible written circa 1384 reads, "*He stranglide togidre alle that camen forth to the spectacle, or biholdyng* [He strangled together all that came forth to the spectacle, or beholding]" (ibid. 2014). From the Latin *spectaculum* ("a public show"), these usages of the term suggest a carnivalesque gathering of peoples and things, but literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), in his foundational

study of Medieval popular humor and folk culture *Rabelais and his World*, distinguishes between the carnivalesque and the spectacular.

Famously, anthropologist Victor Turner found the inversion of social hierarchies in the playful yet socially circumscribed revelry of Rio's Carnival, where he saw black favela culture descending the hills to dominate the city streets. "The way people play perhaps is more profoundly revealing of a culture than how they work, giving access to their 'heart values'" (Turner 1983:104), he wrote. Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta instead stresses the ideological ambiguity of Carnival, noting how the re-ordering of class, ethnic, and gender divisions reverses Brazil's hierarchical society to represent itself as an egalitarian one. For DaMatta then, Carnival obfuscates rather than destabilizes social inequalities. John Collins notes that 20th-century depictions of Brazilian society as driven by an imaginative capacity to invert or disrupt rather than occupy fixed social categories may be giving way to a new forms of political subjectivity. In his ethnography of the construction of cultural heritage in the Pelourinho district in Salvador, Collins (2011; 2015) finds racial, ethnic, and religious identity ever more reliant on truth-producing dispositions to a patrimonialized past than to the fluid play of surfaces.

As Debord himself announced with aphoristic verve that "separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle" (Debord 1994:20). The power to look, then, to represent the world through that gaze, *and* to pass off that image as equivalent to an external reality, is crucial to understanding how the politics of the spectacle operates. From the cited instances in Middle English through to Debord's conceptualization, we may note how the term connotes a kind of bringing together, in a double sense. In the image itself, a world must be assembled and bestowed with its own sense of totality. This closed whole lies separate from, yet thrives upon, another totality, that of the public that beholds the spectacle. In other words, the spectacle not

only requires a public but constructs it in constituting itself as spectacle. However, there seems to be a certain tidiness to this formulation that forecloses the possibility of resistance or alterity. We might attribute the apparent contemporary staleness of Situationist methods to this perception, although scholars have made recent endeavors to retrieve those elements from the movement to meet the political demands of the present (Wark 2011; Mitchell 2008). What seems to be lacking is an attention to the historicity of the spectacle itself and to its differential constituencies (Pinder 2000; Crary 1989). We might think of the spectacle not so much as a veil obscuring a purported 'truer' reality but rather an arena of political struggle. All spectacles contain within them counter-spectacles. Geographer David Pinder in particular pushes against gloomy assessments of Debord's notion of the spectacle by tracing, primarily from Benjamin and Breton, an intellectual sensibility for the revolutionary potential of the out-of-the-way spaces and outmoded objects of the city. In spite of the emphasis on the ideological function of the spectacle as a totalized simulacrum, I suggest, by observing its very constructedness, to see the spectacle rather as a space of contestation, negotiation, and indeed play. This is as much a theoretical point as a methodological basis for my ethnographic work among Morrinho youth: I was interested in learning how their game drew upon, and sometimes usurped, hegemonic forms of their everyday life.

The urban stands as one of the figures of the spectacle par excellence. Images of the urban come to stand in for the nation, society, civilization, and the world at large. Insofar as the city cannot be perceived, understood, or governed outside what historian Ian Munro calls its "doubles." In his account of the discursive construction of the figure of the crowd in a 16th-century London amid rampant population growth, Munro argues that the physical crisis of overcrowding and its concomitant effects on housing, public health, transport, and social

relations also constituted a symbolic crisis of how Londoners saw and spoke of their city (Munro 2005). The theater presented itself as a key site where the urban "crowd" made the city of London visible and intelligible to its inhabitants. Jean-Christophe Agnew's (1986) history of early modern London likewise claims that the rise of market culture—the liquidity and fungibility of the money form—prompted a crisis of representation that articulated with the institution of the theater. Sixteenth-century dramaturgical productions put forth the public image of the world as a stage, where urban individuals, untethered from social bonds, are only guided by the invisible hand of the market.

In the context of colonial and post-colonial Latin America, Ángel Rama (1996) has argued that the city figured as a bastion of a rational order of signs and, critically, the written word against its hinterlands perceived as the city's opposite: backward, traditional, savage. But I wish to highlight here Nicholas Mirzoeff's *The Right to Look* (2011), a critical history of regimes of rule in the Atlantic World since colonialism. This broadly conceived study demonstrates how hegemonic modes of control have hinged on productions of reality that are historically constituted and variable. Mirzoeff's stated claim in the book is to "provide a critical genealogy for the resistance to the society of the spectacle and the image wars of recent decades" (ibid.:xiv). He formulates a decolonial framework with which to discern and contest what he calls *visuality*. What are we to make of the paradox that sees the immense proliferation and ubiquity of imagery in our world accompanied by their increasing banality?[3] If the right to look is the basis for the common, for the creation of the other and political subjectivity, visuality is its opposite: the authority to claim an exclusive right to look. Since the 17th century, Mirzoeff contends, visuality's three prime sites and archetypal figures have been: the plantation complex

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[3] Mirzoeff is particularly troubled by the release of images of prisoner torture from the Abu Ghraib detention facility in Iraq in late 2003, and the meager political effect these pictures provoked within the U.S.

under the gaze of the overseer, the imperial complex with the Christian missionary bringing light to darkness, and the military-industrial complex operated by the counterinsurgent. In a nod to Foucault, Mirzoeff's visuality concept describes a process of classifying, separating, and moralizing its system to seem right. In this latter sense, visuality also aestheticizes through its self-legitimizing rightness. As demonstrated in the section below, Mirzoeff's framework is useful for historicizing how favelas became an object of state power, social scientific knowledge, and popular culture (Valladares 2005) not only because its modern Atlantic World scope fits the analysis but also because of its refusal to see those spheres of representation and politics as anything but interrelated and co-productive.

The Brazilian geographical imaginary of the city and its hinterlands

Mirzoeff's long-view historical critique of the spectacle prompts me to ask new questions of a spectacularized Rio de Janeiro. Certain objects and spaces come into new focus: In the Rio Municipal Secretariat of Housing archives I encountered shelves filled with cadastral maps, fluvial charts, land-tenure surveys, architectural plans, flora and fauna catalogs, electric grid diagrams, sewage and drainage plans, and so on. Boxes and binders were marked by the name of each favela community undergoing infrastructure projects: Mangueira, Vidigal, Borel, Maré, and dozens of others. In the lobby areas of the municipal building were architectural models and plans on display, and all largely ignored. Chronic housing shortages have historically represented a key expression of and arena of struggle against social inequality in Brazil (Rolnik and Bonduki 1979; Rolnik and Saule Jr. 2001). And, concomitantly, urban planning has long been used as a vehicle for social change (Holston 1989). In the appropriation of urban spaces by the excluded and subjugated, the act of building itself has come to form the basis for claims to the city and to citizenship (Holston 2007). In 1994, Rio's municipal government had launched the Favela-

Bairro, or Slum-to-Neighborhood, program designed to upgrade favela infrastructure, integrate them into the urban fabric, and promote the regularization of residents' property rights (Fiori, Riley, and Ramirez 2001; Burgos 1998; Conde and Magalhães 2004; Jáuregui 2011). These measures pursued ambitious goals of making new citizens and uniting a divided city (Acioly 2001). Sponsored by Inter-American Development Bank, the US$1 billion Favela-Bairro program was one of the world's largest-scale slum-upgrading schemes. Yet Favela-Bairro also departed from its precursors with a strategy not of eradication but rather of integration, with the underlying idea that the favelas are valuable urban territory (Caldeira and Holston 2005). How to realize the economic value of favelas and foster civil society without destroying their cultural value remained the program's key tension.

These maps and models in the heart of the city technocratic beast were part of a series of encounters with a range of representations of favelas that proliferated at the end of the 20th century. NGO-led initiatives aim to destigmatize residents, or *favelados*, through video and photography (Lucas 2012; Rocha 2013). They see this work as a means of shifting a political landscape that has historically excluded this population. Favelas also offer a growing body of visual images for public consumption: films such as *Black Orpheus* (1959), *City of God* (2002), *Favela Rising* (2005), and the television series *City of Men* have depicted favelas in a realist mode as dangerous and beautiful, tragic and vibrant. Peixoto (2007) and Wood (2014) have traced the construction of stereotypes, clichés, purported claims of authenticity about favelas in recent novels, films, and *telenovelas*. In a critique of realist aesthetics in cinematic and literary representations of Rio favelas, Beatriz Jaguaribe (2004) has observed how spectacle entails a separation between participant and spectator, even as the availability of information technologies has democratized the production and circulation of images in Brazil. Robb Larkins (2013) argued

that intensely mediated police operations in one of Rio's most high-profile communites have contributed to the construction of a favela hyper-reality disconnected from residents' lived experience. Licensed tour companies operate in several of the city's oldest and most iconic favelas, each scripting visitor experiences (Freire-Medeiros 2009). Tourists snap photos and post them on-line. Favela Chic is a global brand of music and food. Rio's favelas have generated an ever denser field of representations, even as many remain invisible on official maps of the city.

Disrupting the visuality complex

This history of spectacular violence and exclusion between the state and its quasi-citizens (Cunha and Gomes 2007) is reprised in miniature form in Morrinho. Centers and peripheries remain an enduring trope for reading segregation into the landscape. Morrinho is physically located on the margin of a periphery: in the forested edge of a favela. After ascending a winding path up the hillside community, one climbs a final set of stairs to enter the site. There a spray-painted welcome sign mural on a nearby house greets visitors in English:

> COME AND SEE THE MORRINHO AN INCREDIBLE MODEL THAT REPLICATES THE REALITY DAILY LIFE OF THE FAVELAS. THE MORRINHO IS MADE OF PIECES OF BRICK AND OCCUPIES 300M^2.

Below this message on the same white stucco wall, a single word in red block letters half-obscured by the grime at the base of the wall: TURISMO. The wall is split vertically into two panels by spray-painted faux bricks, and to the right, below the large, bright red eponymous "Projeto Morrinho" is scribbled, in Portuguese (see figure 3):

> THEY SAY THAT I DON'T PRAY FOR THE SOULS OF MY ENEMIES. THAT'S A LIE—I PRAY THAT THEY BURN IN HELL.

The mural addresses different audiences. As a welcome sign in English, the language of international tourism, the mural anticipates the arrival of curious visitors. In Portuguese, an

warning, but for whom exactly? Who is the menacing enemy? Perhaps more ominously, who is the speaking 'I'? The wall self-consciously scripts an object that lies behind it as well as fashions a relationship to different publics. These publics seem jarringly disjunctive: guest and trespasser, sightseer and enemy. The texts present its author(s) as double, as friendly host and as mortal rival. One welcomes the other, while the other desires not merely the other's death but more precisely an eternal life in damnation.

However, the juxtaposition of the messages suggests that "spectator" and "enemy" may not be discrete categories. After all, the 'daily life' of Rio's favela dwellers have long been structured by narratives of slum violence, promiscuity, moral decay, and rebellion as well as vibrancy, creativity, and resourcefulness. This wall text, in its doubleness, in effect recognizes, conditions, and validates a variety of experiences and projects. From within a hillside informal settlement, the two messages play on the ambiguous history of the social and territorial boundary drawn between favela and normative city (*asfalto*), as well as announce the rules of another territory, Morrinho, into which one is about to enter. This agonist discourse troubles the notion that one may engage with this site as a detached observer. By entering, one is potentially invading the space.

This confrontational gesture partly had to do with Morrinho's creators fending off their neighbors' and families' disapproval of their activity, which did not conform to normative rules of gender, age, and working-class identity. Few could understand what these young men were up to, lingering often deep into the night, yelling in high-pitched falsetto voices, playing *funk carioca* music, and scampering around on the edge of the forest. "They'd think it was ugly and distasteful, call it outlaw play (*brincadeira de marginal*). 'What are these boys doing, playing out the lives of bandits?'" Kamal remembers. Douglas recalls a different treatment: "People

would tell us, 'What is this, playing with dolls, this playing house? You are all practically grown men. You should be out getting jobs and girlfriends for yourselves.'" Becoming recognized as artists legitimized Morrinho youth in the face of gender- and age-normative accusations. At the same time, the hours the group could commit to building and playing in Morrinho cannot be understood outside a system of gender roles that conferred leisure time to male youth. Most of their female peers were committed instead to domestic work and care of younger siblings or their own children.

During fieldwork at Morrinho, I soon learned that it was not my mere presence that the youths deemed intrusive but rather my initial assumption of the stance of detached observer. Photographs and videos of play I took in early weeks and months were disruptive not in and of themselves, but rather because I had not situated the camera within the game world of Morrinho. Thus, taking other players' clue that one may only document the world from a situated position, I started to play as the TV Morrinho news crew, driving the toy van to spots of action, placing my camera behind the boneco cameraman, and speaking as the on-the-scene reporter, mimicking the Brazilian sensationalist media tropes regarding favelas. My deeper participation in the game began when a youth created a new boneco for me. I thus learned to play as "Alex," a character who bore my name but, I had to understand, was nonetheless an identity separate from my own ("real-life") one. My task as ethnographer was not to find real-life correlates to the content of play, nor to assess the validity of narratives, but to experience how the contours of the world play creates as plausible and workable by its own rules and conditions.

The rules of play in Morrinho were largely conditioned by space and power. A handpainted sign listed the basic rules of Morrinho: "Bonecos cannot fly. They cannot run faster than a car. They cannot jump distances wider than five fingers. If one falls from a tall height by

accident, it is injured or dies; there are no do-overs." Another sign proclaiming "God knows everything, but He's no snitch"[4] was posted around the model figures in this sense as a cardinal rule of gameplay. This motto, which would also become the title of a feature-length film documenting Morrinho's rise from child's play into international art circuits, emblematizes the way play relates to spectacle within the rules of this game-world: as a player, one may, like a deity, survey the urban world from above, perceive it in its totality, know about others' secret hiding places, or remember faraway and past encounters between strangers. Indeed, Morrinho youth would peer into the labyrinthine alleys of their counterparts' models, spotting sniper positions, and chatter endlessly about the ongoing sagas of each others' bonecos: who survived, who died, who escaped, who got angry with whom, who rose to power, who was expelled. However, in the moment of playing, the horizon of possibility for any given bonecos was shaped entirely by that its own experiences within the world of Morrinho. The lives of bonecos were thus not isomorphic with those of their stewards. Youth manipulated avatars and speak through them, mimicking the falsetto voices of dubbed television cartoons, but in the performance of another social being, one inhabited the partial and partisan knowledge of that particular personage. This is perhaps the chief unwritten rule of Morrinho. One may acquire an almost god-like familiarity with the world of Morrinho by surveying its landscape and eavesdropping on faraway conversations, but in assuming the identity of a boneco a player must constrain his words and acts to the imagined subjectivity of the plastic figurine under his finger. Many arguments would erupt over a player "cheating" by acting on knowledge that his boneco could not have known.

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[4] *Deus sabe tudo mas não é X-9*. A variation on the phrase reads, *Deus ve tudo mas não é X-9* [God sees everything, but He's no snitch]. An "X-9" is slang for police informant and derives from the title of a movie series based on a comic strip, *Secret Agent X-9*, which ran from 1934 to 1996. *Secret Agent X-9* depicted a noir world whose protagonist is a nameless detective working for an unknown agency. See figure 4.

Much of the dramas enacted in Morrinho are mundane and constructive: commerce, romance, transport, leisure. The porosity between lived and play worlds signals a need to treat fiction and mimesis not just according to the inner logic of its world of meanings and relations but as a mode of representing historically entrenched systems of power. As anthropologist Michael Taussig reminds us, "just as histories enter into the functioning of the mimetic faculty, so the mimetic faculty enters into those histories" (1993:xiv). Play becomes a form of commentary, an alternative mode of knowledge about the city, and functions dually as both description of and participant in the social world in which it is embedded.

When armed battles erupted in the Morrinho world, as they occasionally did, I could observe how the game operates with a sense of how violence conditions urban territory, and vice-versa. Blind corners and tight alleyways became key defensible spaces against the "enemy," either a rival drug gang or the military police. The built environment itself became an agent in the unfolding action. Conversely, these virtual shootouts turned on the hierarchy of these organizations. Like pawns in a chess game, lower-ranking bonecos in drug gangs and police forces would be sacrificed, in a way, to snipers whose positions would be revealed in the act of "shooting." Players mimicked the sound of their bonecos' weapons by voicing the blast of a shotgun or rifle. At times third-party arbiters would have to verify whether a shot had "landed" on its target, if there arose a dispute between players. These playful engagements, conditioned by the aim of conquering of enemy territory, were a way of simulating visuality itself. While certainly not a utopian reimagining of the city, Morrinho play often replicated dominant images of favelas as violent spaces. But, crucially, this form of representing the city reassembled tropes of criminality, corruption, extra-legal impunity in ways that laid bare the power structures behind the pretend carnage. Unlike in chess, Morrinho's high-ranked bonecos, like drug-gang bosses or

police colonels, had no special powers or innate attributes superior to lesser figures; they simply wielded political power over others. As another hand-painted sign in the model tautologically puts it: "*O que manda é o poder.* [What rules is power.]" Territorial domination constitutes power, and power constitutes territory. In Morrinho, there is no objective to play beyond this very dynamic. No one can win the game definitively, only seek to control it.

Since 2004, Morrinho has also been used to produce videos narrating tales from the city mixing fable, fantasy, and satire. These films are generally shot with the camera just inches off the ground, with human hands manipulating the boneco "actors" and off-screen voices speaking through the figurines. Scripts are loosely structured, allowing for improvisation and dynamism in action and dialogue. During filming, different takes of the same scene might involve variations in slang or gestures. One 2012 production, made in collaboration with two visiting Master's students from the United States, illustrates how spectacle becomes available to symbolic reworking "from below," quite literally. The title of the ten-minute short, *Barakanã*, plays on the name of Rio's famous stadium, the Maracanã, which became the locus of intense and violent conflicts between neighboring favela residents and mega-event infrastructure projects related to the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games. The opening sequence, set to the soundtrack of Aly Borroso's brassy 1939 melody "Aquarela do Brasil," shows typical images of Rio—Sugarloaf mountain, the Christ the Redeemer statue, a hillside favela—then follows a toy helicopter flying over the Morrinho model. Parallel storylines unfold: an woman welcomes, in English, a tour group to her home community, "Morro do Favela," and laments that, after 25 years of residence there, this may be her last tour. Meanwhile, in a scene rendered in black and

white, the helicopter lands, and from it the bespectacled tycoon Beiço Batista[5] emerges to meet a construction boss wearing a hardhat, who asks him, "So how did the land look?"

"To start with, there's something I didn't like," Batista responds. "There's a favela with some little Indian huts in the area." The contractor assures him that the residents can be removed with a measly compensation offer. "Good, this has to be an *big* project. [*The human hand manipulating Batista makes an expansive gesture with its fingers*.] I can't have any poor people next to me. They're contagion. I want some beautiful mulatas dancing samba." This last remark by Batista hints at the contradiction of a city where cultural production of the popular classes is simultaneously valorized and separated from conditions of its making. It is also a comment on how this class dynamic is bound up with the male gaze and entanglements of gender, sexuality, and race in Brazil (Goldstein 2003). "Put the Indians anywhere else, in a museum, wherever. And tourists should visit modern ventures [*empreendimento*], not favelas to see poverty and misery," Batista declares.

The contractor seizes on the topic of money to discuss invoicing and inquires about incorporating some overbilling [*superfaturação*] into the project. Batista is firm that, whatever the arrangement, he himself must profit the most from it. They toss percentage numbers back and forth, and in the next scene we see a young local football player from the favela "sell out" his community for a lucrative sports sponsorship contract offered by the constructor. A protest movement emerges as demolitions begin. Tiny axes crack at bricks. Military police officers with outsized rifles are called in to forcibly remove the residents who are left holding only bindles of

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[5] The character's name is a pun on Eike Batista, an industrial magnate whose accumulated personal wealth estimated at nearly US$35 billion on mining and gas and oil exploration. With characteristic hubris, he boasted loudly that he would soon be the world's richest man. In 2013, upon reports that production was a fraction of market expectations, five of his six publicly-held business holdings collapsed, bankrupting Batista. It is telling that *Barakanã*'s villain protagonist Beiço Batista seeks to extract surplus value from urban land and sees the presence of favelas as antithetical to the logic of rentier capital. See figure 5. The video is available to view online at the following URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5abZostnY4

their belongings and speak of moving to another favela. The displacement of these bonecos echoes Friedrich Engels on the housing question: "In reality, the bourgeoisie has only one method of solving the housing question after its fashion–that is to say, of solving it in such a way that the solution perpetually renews the question anew," (Engels 1935:74; cf. Harvey 2008). This argument, that capital cannot resolve its contradictions but only move the problem around geographically. The events in *Barakanã* accompanied those of the real-world Maracanã, where the governor of Rio de Janeiro state mandated in 2012 the removal of Aldeia Maracanã, an indigenous enclave near the stadium created in 1910 for the preservation of Amerindian culture in Brazil. The expressed rationale by the state was to make way for a parking lot to meet FIFA requirements for the hosting of the 2014 soccer World Cup, even though the organization itself denied the claim. In March 2013, protestors were met with tear gas from the Military Police, and the residents were relocated to shelters made of repurposed shipping containers in the periphery of the city (Rodrigues 2014).

In the final scene of *Barakanã*, Beiço Batista once again appears from his helicopter, which has landed on the pitch of the stadium. He is satisfied with the construction but is disappointed by the crowd turnout at the inaugural match. "It's VIP only," the constructor reminds Batista, and asks about his payment. Batista presents a suitcase with assurances that all the arrangements have been made, and then promptly leaves again in his helicopter. The contractor opens the case to find only rocks and fumes about the grand deception he has suffered, promising retribution against Batista. To the same exalting tune of pageantry as the opening scene, *Barakanã* closes with bonecos playing football in a half-full stadium. The conclusion is ambiguous and deeply ironic, ending with the jouissance of sport spectacle, after the political machinations that brought it into being.

In bringing together actors of differential power—tourists, ordinary favela residents, a tour guide, a football player, police, demolition crews, a constructor chief, and a billionaire—the film performs the function of spectacle outlined earlier in this paper. It remakes the world as a totality. In the spectacle, power is aestheticized, and aesthetics are driven through with power relations. One can see this notion operationalized in the markers of identity found in the details of the film: Batista's helicopter and eyeglasses, the constructor's hardhat, police rifles, and so on. As Chris Gaffney anticipated before the 2014 World Cup, "Financed with public money and controlled by private interests, World Cup stadiums will be worlds of consumption isolated from their urban and cultural contexts" (Gaffney 2014). What this Morrinho production is able to dramatize, however, are the encounters and conflicts surrounding the construction of spectacular urbanism that belie its apparent seamlessness.

Conclusion

This paper presents historical and ethnographic evidence to recognize spectacles, in presenting reality as total and whole, as a world-making process that involves certain forms of labor. With the case of a fantastical and idiosyncratic structure that captured the imagination of radical thinkers who would form the Situationist International as a precedent, a cultural project in contemporary Rio de Janeiro, where I have conducted fieldwork since 2007, forms the basis of an argument attempting to re-situate the study of spectacular cities in richer historical and cultural contexts. I present a genealogy of the spectacle concept itself that suggests a dual process of bringing-together at work: on the one hand, the spectacle pulls together fictions to present them as a single reality, and on the other, it assembles publics constituted by their very spectatorship. Nicholas Mirzoeff's history of visuality and countervisuality in the Atlantic world

provide a key vocabulary for understanding the role the favela has played in the formation of not only Rio de Janeiro as a city but also the Brazil nation-state. A geography of aestheticized power emerges from this framework from which it becomes possible to rethink the history of state and capitalist intervention in the urban periphery. The figure of the city and the power relations shaping it are dramatized within the rules of Morrinho game and, in particular, one cinematic production staged within its miniature world analyzed in depth here.

Rendering the city visible and graspable is not only a project of powerful interests but also of ordinary urban dwellers. The approach offered in this paper also seeks to shift conversations about mega-event urbanization and regeneration schemes toward a methodology that focuses on particular histories and cultural forces. Social research directed toward actors and objects that observe the spectacle askance, that indeed conspire to construct counter-spectacles, promises not to reinforce the trope of the spectacle as a mercurial and self-evident social fact. Debord's concept of the spectacle drew its power and popularity from its capacity to seemingly explain everything about how capitalism captures and shapes collective desires and fears, but this very ominpotence was also its limitation.

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