


José and the city: a geographic incursion in the political poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade

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e-172545

revista

Geo 

USP

espaço e tempo

Volume 25 • nº 2 (2021)

ISSN 2179-0892

How to cite this article:

CABAÑAS DA SILVA, F. José and the city: a geographic incursion in the political poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade. **Geosp**, v. 25, n. 2, e-172545, 2021, ISSN 2179-0892

Available at: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/geosp/article/view/172545>. doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2179-0892.geosp.2021.172545>.



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Abstract

This article is part of studies that relate geography and literature and aims to analyze the work “José” (1942), by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, which is part of the author’s most politicized phase (the first half of the 1940s), which also includes the books *Sentimento do mundo* (1940) and *A rosa do povo* (1945). For this, we carry out a critical reading of the poems, with a geographical focus, articulating the issue of politics to urban living in modernity. From the theoretical and methodological point of view, we seek to establish a genuine dialogue between verses and geographical thought, in which there is no hierarchy between the two knowledges and the discourse of the poet and the geographer are intermingled. For this reason, we also produce cartographic material in dialogue with literary content.

Keywords: Drummond. José. Modernity. City. Geography and literature.

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Resumo

Este artigo se insere nos estudos que relacionam geografia e literatura e tem como objetivo analisar a obra “José” (1942), de Carlos Drummond de Andrade, que é parte da fase mais politizada do autor (a primeira metade da década de 1940), que inclui ainda os livros *Sentimento do mundo* (1940) e *A rosa do povo* (1945). Para tanto, fizemos uma leitura crítica dos poemas, com enfoque geográfico, articulando a questão da política à vivência urbana na modernidade. Do ponto de vista teórico-metodológico, procuramos estabelecer um genuíno diálogo entre os versos e o pensamento geográfico, em que não há hierarquia entre os dois saberes e o discurso do poeta e do geógrafo se imiscuem. Por isso, também produzimos material cartográfico dialogando com o conteúdo literário.

Palavras-chave: Drummond. José. Modernidade. Cidade. Geografia e literatura.

José y la ciudad: una incursión geográfica en la poesía política de Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Resumen

Este artículo es parte de los estudios que relacionan geografía y literatura y tiene como objetivo analizar la obra “José” (1942), de Carlos Drummond de Andrade, que es parte de la fase más politizada del autor (la primera mitad de la década de 1940), que también incluye los libros *Sentimento do mundo* (1940) y *A rosa do povo* (1945). Para tanto, realizamos una lectura crítica de los poemas, con un enfoque geográfico, articulando el tema de la política a la vida urbana en la modernidad. Desde el punto de vista teórico y metodológico, buscamos establecer un diálogo genuino entre los versos y el pensamiento geográfico, en el que no haya una jerarquía entre los dos conocimientos y el discurso del poeta y el geógrafo se entremezclan. Por esta razón, también producimos material cartográfico en diálogo con el contenido literario.

Palabras clave: Drummond. José. Modernidad. Ciudad. Geografía y literatura.

Introduction

Geography and literature have been drawing near at a growing pace in past decades, as evidenced by increasing productivity. Brazilian literary critic Antonio Candido (1969) identifies the importance of novelists in interpreting the country before the formation of universities, a dialogue that is often very rich and productive. Historically, literature was driven to think about the country, its space, territory, regions, and people. Thus, geographer tends to find in this literature abundant material for dialogue.

Traditionally, however, geography had given more attention to novels, especially literary realism to the detriment of other genres (Brosseau, 1996; Lafaille, 1989). An inclination that does not wholeheartedly favor opportunities to reflect on space and, therefore, to (re)signify geography.

This article aims to go further, proposing a geographic reflection on Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s work “José”¹, a 1942’s piece of an anthology called *Poesias*. This phase of Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s poetry, which begins with the publication of *Sentimento do Mundo* (“The feeling of the world”) in 1940 and ends with the publication of *A rosa do povo* (“The People’s Rose”), in 1945, is the author’s most politicized period, pieces written by the “greatest social poet of our modern literature”, as Antonio Candido (2011, p. 85) once said.

1 Two of the five poems analyzed here, “A bruxa”/“The Moth” and “O boi”/“The ox”, were taken from the book *Multitudinous Heart* (2015), that brings a special collection of Drummond’s poetry, a book organized and translated by Richard Zenith. For the poem “José” we use the translation made by Len Sousa to AllPoetry community (<https://allpoetry.com/Jos>; accessed on 7/30/2021). The last two, “Edifício Esplendor” and “Os rostos mortos” we choose to keep them in their original version, even if we have made partial translation of the commented parts because there is no official translation work to both.

It was during these years that Drummond, already living in Rio de Janeiro, was asked by Luís Carlos Prestes to be co-editor of the communist-oriented newspaper *Tribuna Popular* (Andrade, 2007, p. 85). These were the years in which the great social poet, one can say, comes narrowly to real political militancy, although he spent a short time there for “disagreeing of its orientation” (Andrade, 2007, p. 86).

Be that as it may, he showed in this times an intensely politicized and urban lyricism. In its written words, politics and the city constantly got tangled, whether in the poetic translation of his Rio de Janeiro experience from 1934 onwards or through Itabira’s memorial treatment, the sad and painful photograph on civil servant’s wall: “Itabira is just a photograph on the wall. But how it hurts!” (poem “Confidência do Itabirano”, from *Sentimento do Mundo*, published in 1940).

Therefore, this article aims to reflect on the poet’s relationship with the city in “José”, an essential collection of Drummond’s political poems that are often ignored in favor of the most well-known *Sentimento do mundo* or *A rosa do povo*. We aim not only to identify the geographical content of his poems, but to think how the city, existence, politics, and poetry intertwine through the voice of a modern poet who strives for transformation – and makes poetry a weapon of resistance: “Even poets arm themselves, and an unarmed poet is actually who’s at the mercy of easy inspiration, always docile to fashions and compromises” (Andrade, 1944, p. 73).

Thus, we bring a geographical and critical reading of the poems in the following pages, discussing more than the geography in his texts, but above all the relationship between subject and space. Indeed, we seek to maximize the poet’s voice in geographic discourse, and it does not behoove us to impose forms or concepts on a discourse that has a libertarian character and works with “the most delicate, the most fragile” (Adorno, 2003, p. 65). At the same time, however, we also understand that the language of geography can contribute and dialogue with poetic language, which we highlighted by taking cartographic expression as one fundamental element of our critical interpretation.

José, where do you go?

“José” is a curious work in Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s poetic creation. It is a twenty-page piece with twelve poems lying within his first poetry anthology, “Poesias”, edited by José Olympio in 1942. They were “new poems, published under the title of *José*, taken from one of the poems” (Gledson, 1981, p. 141). It is usually understood as a transitional work between entre *Sentimento do mundo* (The feeling of the world) (1940) and *A Rosa do povo* (The People’s Rose) (1945) and is portrayed, according to the same Gledson (1981, p. 141), “by a growing confidence that hold tensions while, simultaneously, contains them, and which does not test the poet’s relationship with the world in the totalizing manner of many of *The people’s Rose’s* poems”, but in which the poetic persona increasingly sees himself as an actor. Still based on such an assessment, it is also identified the great importance of space in such poems with fundamental interpretations about contemporary life.

Because of this, it is a book in which the city’s presence is vital. The collection starts with Rio – “In this city of Rio”, the first line of the first poem, “The Moth” (Andrade, 1983, p. 88) – and ends in Itabira – “The waters cover his mustache./ the family, Itabira, everything”, final verses of the last poem, “Viagem na família” (Journey through the family) (Andrade, 1983, p. 108). At least six poems are directly related to urban issues, that is, half of the work, and certainly

among these are the most significant poems, such as “A bruxa” (The Moth), “O boi” (The Ox), “Edifício Esplendor”, “Rua do olhar” and “Os rostos imóveis”.

Let us first reflect on the poem that gives the work its name, “José”:

What now, José?
The party's over,
the lights are off,
the crowd's gone,
the night's gone cold,
what now, José?
what now, you?
you without a name,
who mocks the others,
you who write poetry,
who love, protest?
What now, José?

You have no wife,
you have no speech,
you have no affection,
you can't drink,

you can't smoke,
you can't even spit,
the night's gone cold,
the day didn't come,
the tram didn't come,
laughter didn't come,
utopia didn't come,
and everything ended,
and everything fled,
and everything rotted,
what now, José?²

Here, it seems to us that the poetic persona speaks to another, but it also speaks to himself. But who is José? José, first and foremost, is the everyman with an ordinary name, it is a call to humility as a way to place himself in the world and to find *his* place in the world. It is not by chance this poem was chosen to name the work: José is also the crooked angel (“Go, Carlos, be gauche in life”), the displaced, the clumsy, the ungainly, who asserts himself through the humility of a poet who is not ashamed to address the common man directly and makes an artistic value of it, like so many other modernism members. José is, surely, a political position.

² In: <https://allpoetry.com/Jos>; accessed on 7/30/2021

It is also the historical disillusionment, immortalized in the very first line - “What now, José?” - that evokes a hopeless environment where everything ended, fled, and rotted. José is the plundered man, carnally and spiritually, reduced to an inflicted humility already exposed in his name: “utopia did not come” and José, “a broken man”, was left alone in the dark:

Alone in the dark
like a wild animal,
without tradition,
without a naked wall
to lean against,
without a black horse
that flees galloping,
you march, José!
José, where to?³

The dispossessed man makes his way: where to? It is important to keep in mind that Drummond’s poetry reveals an existential conflict that deeply explores antithesis, synthesizing “a vast system of oppositions” (Sant’Anna, 1972, p. 17). José is thus a political position, which clearly wants to join the excluded everyman, but the poem is also fraught with skepticism, doubt, indecision. José, where to?

The anticity

Because politics presents itself broken up by skepticism and clumsiest steps, it does not point out a well-defined political path. In the meantime, there is the expression of a melancholy that observes the city’s daily life and its social relations, unraveling the political content from subject’s affective frustrations whose loneliness is striking in several poems - such as the inaugural, for example, “The Moth”:

In this city of Rio,
home to two million people,
I’m alone in my room,
I’m alone in America.

Am I really alone?
Just now a sound
announced life at my side.
Not human life, true,
but it’s life. And I feel the moth
caught in the zone of light.

Two million people!
And I wouldn’t need that much...

³ In: <https://allpoetry.com/Jos>; accessed on 7/30/2021

I just need a friend,
one of those quiet, distant
friends that read Horace
but secretly influence
our life, our love, our flesh.
I'm alone, without a friend,
and at this late hour
how can I find one?

And I didn't need that much.
I just needed a woman
to be here, this minute,
to accept this affection
and save from annihilation
the mad minute of mad affection
I have to offer.

Among two million people,
how many women
must be starring in the mirror,
counting up the lost years
until morning arrives
with milk, the paper, some calm.
But how can you find a woman
at this desolate hour?

This city in Rio!
I'm full of tender words,
I know animals song.
I know the wildest kisses,
I've traveled, fought, and learned.
I'm surrounded by eyes,
by hands, affections, yearnings.
But if I try to reach out,
there's nothing but night
and a frightful solitude.

Companions, hear me!
This agitated presence
trying to break through the night
isn't just the moth.
It's the softly panting
secret of a man
(Andrade, 2015, p. 33)

Here, the solitude-crowd dialectics is given clear, stressing the picture of the metropolis huge population and beefing up man's feeling of solitude, "alone in the room", "alone in America": "The man who is unable to people his solitude is equally unable to be alone in a bustling crowd", states Baudelaire (2010, p. 39). In this poem, Drummond actually tries, with some kind of desperation, to populate his solitude. And the struggle, doomed to failure - "But if I try to reach out/ there's nothing but night/ and a frightful solitude" - bear witness of the power of "annihilation" that crowd epitomizes through oppression and disaggregation.

But what's political in this verses? It is precisely the disclosure of the tension between individual and society interests, the first revealing the subjectivity originating from the weakening of the last. It is a profound illustration of one of modernity's most emblematic marks, that a poet grasps intensely – and among them, with no doubt, Baudelaire stands out. In "The Moth", however, this tension symbolizes dehumanization, something well-characterized in the second stanza ("Just now a sound/ announced life at my side./ No human life, true,/ but it's life. And I feel the moth/ caught in the zone of light"), it is a dehumanization hinged with the metropolis's atmosphere of isolation and segmentation.

The poet offers a vision of the city, a political one. It is the city of dryness, of anguish, of a helpless pain that is the fruit of individualism, the city that turns against the urban, the modern times, the industrial city, the Lefebvre's "non-city", which is materiality but undermines its true social nature: it is the anti-city. (Lefebvre, 2002, p. 25)

The man from the herd

This dehumanization, brought to us critically, especially considering the class of Drummond's poetry during this period, is a major feature of the 1942 book, and the context of a city remains the main thrust. We can also feel it in the poem "The ox":

○ solitude of the ox in the field,
○ solitude of the man in the street!
Amid cars, trains, telephones,
and shouts, a wilderness.

○ solitude of the ox in the field,
○ millions suffering without any scourge!
Night or sunlight, it's all the same:
Darkness begins with the dawn.

○ solitude of the ox in the field,
people writing without a sound!
The city defies all explanation
and the houses have no meaning.

○ solitude of the ox in the field!
The ghost ship sails in silence
down the crowded street.

If only a storm of love would strike!
Hands joined together, life saved...
But time is still. The ox is alone.
In the sprawling field, the towering oil rig.
(Andrade, 2015, p. 35)

Dehumanization now starts with an analogy. The “man in the street” (or, the man in the city), surrounded by cars, trains, telephones, seems as lonely and erratic as the “ox in the field”. A dehumanization, thereby, that is consummate through animalization. Beyond the city’s hubbub, behind the mass of things, through the throng of people, of stimuli, a “wilderness” and an enormous emptiness spread. The subjective condition of the threatened man lost in this emptiness is not that far from the sinless brutality of a grazing herd. In the third stanza, in which it seems to be the man the one who feels the ox’s solitude (“O solitude of the ox in the field,/ people writhing without a sound”), man and cattle are merged with the mood of a city, in a baffling and nameless fashion.

In this poem, we can read a value judgment about the city and modernity. Drummond is actually inviting us to think of the brutalization of human life carried out by the modern world – a brutalization that he conveyed through the ox as a metaphor and symbol of alienation, building a powerful and creative lyrical expression. This Nietzschean revival of criticism through ideas like “herd instinct” or “herd man”, brings out images of those who surrender to an amorphous collectivity and to yielding group values that follow their *shepherd* blindly, like slaves to surrender to the henchman. This is the “decadent man”, which is derived from the Christian morality, and which Nietzsche understand as a morality of mediocrity, which nullifies the force of will and the will to power:

All sick and diseased people strive instinctively after a herd-organisation, out of a desire to shake off their sense of oppressive discomfort and weakness; the ascetic priest divines this instinct and promotes it; wherever a herd exists it is the instinct of weakness which has wished for the herd, and the cleverness of the priests which has organised it, for, mark this: by an equally natural necessity the strong strive as much for *isolation* as the weak for *union*: when the former bind themselves it is only with a view to an aggressive joint action and joint satisfaction of their Will for Power, much against the wishes of their individual consciences; the latter, on the contrary, range themselves together with positive *delight* in such a muster—their instincts are as much gratified thereby as the instincts of the “born master” (that is, the solitary beast-of-prey species of man) are disturbed and wounded to the quick by organisation (Nietzsche, 2016, Third Essay, Aphorism 18, emphasis in the original).

This moral critique has turned its arguments to the modern man, especially in “Beyond Good and Evil”:

If one could observe the strangely painful, equally coarse and refined comedy of European Christianity with the derisive and impartial eye of an Epicurean god, I should think one would never cease marvelling and laughing; does it not actually seem that some *single* will has ruled over Europe for eighteen centuries in order to

make a *sublime abortion* of man? He, however, who, with opposite requirements (no longer Epicurean) and with some divine hammer in his hand, could approach this almost voluntary degeneration and stunting of mankind, as exemplified in the European Christian (Pascal, for instance), would he not have to cry aloud with rage, pity, and horror: “Oh, you bunglers, presumptuous pitiful bunglers, what have you done! Was that a work for your hands? How you have hacked and botched my finest stone! What have you presumed to do!”—I should say that Christianity has hitherto been the most portentous of presumptions. Men, not great enough, nor hard enough, to be entitled as artists to take part in *fashioning man*; men, not sufficiently strong and far-sighted to allow, with sublime self-constraint, the obvious law of the thousandfold failures and perishing to prevail; men, not sufficiently noble to see the radically different grades of rank and intervals of rank that separate man from man:—*such* men, with their “equality before God,” have hitherto swayed the destiny of Europe; until at last a dwarfed, almost ludicrous species has been produced, a gregarious animal, something obliging, sickly, mediocre, the European of the present day. (Nietzsche, 2009, Aphorism. 62, emphasis in the original).

It should be remembered that Nietzsche’s criticism has a clear conservative bias. To those who “Belong to the Herd”, the philosopher opposes the aristocratic’s praise to a society that clearly distinguishes the strong and the weak men, in which the former can stand out proudly of their strength, and the latter carries the humility and subservience preached by Christian culture: “every elevation of the type ‘man’, has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society and so it will always be—a society believing in a long scale of gradations of rank and differences of worth among human beings” (Nietzsche, 2009, Aphorism. 257). Democracy life thus can be seen as a one-way street to mediocrity which strengthens the weak by weakening the strong, making people just average.

This is one of the key factors that may hinder a possible dialogue between Nietzschean thought and Marxism. Gyorgy Lukács, for example, elaborates one of the densest interpretations of Nietzsche’s thought, placing it historically in the period of decadence of the bourgeois intelligentsia, which followed the revolution of 1848 and marks the last decades of the 19th century: “Nietzsche’s philosophy performed the ‘social task’ of ‘rescuing’ and ‘redeeming’ this type of bourgeois mind. It offered a road which avoided the need for any break, or indeed any serious conflict, with the bourgeoisie. [...] [what makes him] the leading philosopher of the imperialist reaction” (Lukács, 1959, p. 255/257).

Moreover, his evident refusal to socialism and explicit defense of an imperial Germany make Nietzschean philosophy, for Lukács, a forerunner of Nazi ideology – although this association is refuted by other interpreters. An open and rich debate is trying to answer if Nietzsche’s thought was dialectical or anti-dialectical (Marton, 2009), suggesting that precisely because it was not, a concrete obstacle to the dialogue with Marxism is placed.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche’s critique of the “herd instinct” finds resonance in the Marxist critique of the “mass man” or massification. The political meaning is very different: in Nietzsche, there is the distinction between the higher human beings with their individual strength and those who belong to the herd, representing the mediocrity of ordinary man; in Marxism, there is a

radical critique of the alienation produced by social structures. In any case, however, we find the expression of a radical social critique in both thinkers.

One can find the same posture in Drummond's poem. The modern city massifies. Superficial relationships are established through this massification process carried out by consumption and the praise of the commodity form, which inevitably yields ruptures and alienation: we stress that the ox, if this reasoning were to be followed through, should be read as a symbol of both alienation and dehumanization. Also becomes evident the solitude-crowd dialectics, the lonely being amid the throng, among all the *thingified* beings. In our opinion, the melancholy of Drummond's verses is clearly tributary of his political position – even if it is sparse and somewhat skeptical – at this moment of his literary creation: an elevated expression of its critical stance towards modernity and modern city.

Tight cells

None of the words were chosen randomly, exceptionally, an accident on the way. The poems are bound together, they complement each other. It is necessary to go beyond the fragmentary reading that modern poetry allows and even induces, seeking to read and interpret the works in their totality. Only this way we can take the poems out of isolation, finding the strength that lies in its heart, in its root, grasping the affective tone that unifies them, even if painfully or erratically.

This disordered order is born of the crudest expression, and it is stripped of decorative prose or hardened aesthetic paradigms, which reflect the rawness of the world and its conflicts: modern poetry. The poems reverberate themselves, mirror each other, and perpetually (re)assert its grounds, or, on the contrary, violently refuses its own significance, exposing a dialectics that reaches the edge of meaning and expresses itself outwardly through contrast, always doubting, suspecting, being indecisive. The poet is not an atom apart from society; poems are not collection pieces that can be stacked away aimlessly. The critic's duty is to look for what entangles them – and understand how it happens.

On both the ideological sense as in the social sense of *separation*, *apartheid*, and of being held *incomunicado*, the anguish of alienation, isolation, solitude and the commodifying affection pervade other poems and entangles not only the pages of “José “ but the entire poetry works of Drummond, whilst never losing sight of the modern city. This theme actually meddles in his verses, given life to its characters and objects of criticism. It is a consciousness that is clearly born from a critically reproduced objective-subjective experience. But it is worth pointing out the recurrence of this poetic achievement, which makes geography more than a material background and which highlights the value of historical-geographic context as a starting point for literary achievement, as well as for the dialogue between geography and literature.

For this shattered world, Drummond finds through the poetic expression a precarious unity, exacerbating his frustration with the fragility and fickleness of the emotional ties and material existence, which poetic writing *per se* does not transform. This frustration reveals the desire for “something else” – deeper, denser, something more perennial, abiding, and fuller– recovering, in a stealth way, the cry of “Swamp of Souls: “yes! To eternity”. Poetry is a way of transforming the fragile material existence. The long and seminal poem “Edifício Esplendor” thus acquires centrality:

I

Na areia da praia 1
Oscar risca o projeto.
Salta o edifício
da areia da praia.

No cimento, nem traço 5
da pena dos homens.
As famílias se fecham
em células estanques.

O elevador sem ternura 10
expele, absorve
num ranger monótono
substância humana.

Entretanto há muito 15
se acabaram os homens
Ficaram apenas
tristes moradores.

II

A vida secreta da chave.
Os corpos se unem e
bruscamente se separam.

O copo de uísque e o *blue* 20
destilam ópios de emergência.
Há um retrato na parede,
um espinho no coração,
uma fruta sobre o piano
e um vento marítimo com cheiro de peixe, tristeza, viagens...

Era bom amar, desamar,
morder, uivar, desesperar,
era bom mentir e sofrer.
Que importa a chuva no mar?
a chuva no mundo? o fogo? 30
Os pés andando, que importa?
Os móveis riam, vinha a noite,
o mundo murchava e brotava
a cada espiral de abraço.

E vinha mesmo, sub-reptício, em momentos de carne lassa, certo remorso de Goiás. Goiás, a extinta pureza...	35
○ retrato confiava o bigode.	
III	
Oh que saudades não tenho de minha casa paterna. Era lenta, calma, branca, tinha vastos corredores e nas suas trinta portas trinta crioulas sorrindo,	40
talvez nuas, não me lembro.	45
E tinha também fantasmas, mortos sem extrema-unção, anjos da guarda, bодоques e grandes tachos de doce e grandes cismas de amor, como depois descobrimos.	50
Chora, retrato, chora. Vai crescer a tua barba neste medonho edifício de onde surge tua infância como um copo de veneno.	55
IV	
As complicadas instalações do gás, úteis para suicídio, o terraço onde as camisas tremem, também convite à morte, o pavor do caixão em pé no elevador, o estupendo banheiro de mil cores árabes, onde o corpo esmorece na lascívia frouxa da dissolução prévia. Ah, o corpo, meu corpo, que será do corpo?	60
	65
	70

Meu único corpo, aquele que eu fiz de leite, de ar, de água, de carne, que eu vesti de negro, de branco, de bege, cobri com chapéu, calcei com borracha, cerquei de defesas, embalei, tratei?	75
Meu coitado corpo tão desamparado entre nuvens, ventos, neste aéreo <i>living</i> !	80
V	
Os tapetes envelheciam pisados por outros pés.	85
Do cassino subiam músicas e até o rumor de fichas.	
Nas cortinas, de madrugada, a brisa pousava. Doce.	90
A vida jogada fora voltava pelas janelas.	
Meu pai, meu avô, Alberto... Todos os mortos presentes.	
Já não acendem a luz com suas mãos entrevadas.	95
Fumar ou beber: proibido Os mortos olham e calam-se.	
O retrato descoloria-se, era superfície neutra.	100
As dívidas amontoavam-se. A chuva caiu vinte anos.	
Surgiram costumes loucos e mesmo outros sentimentos.	

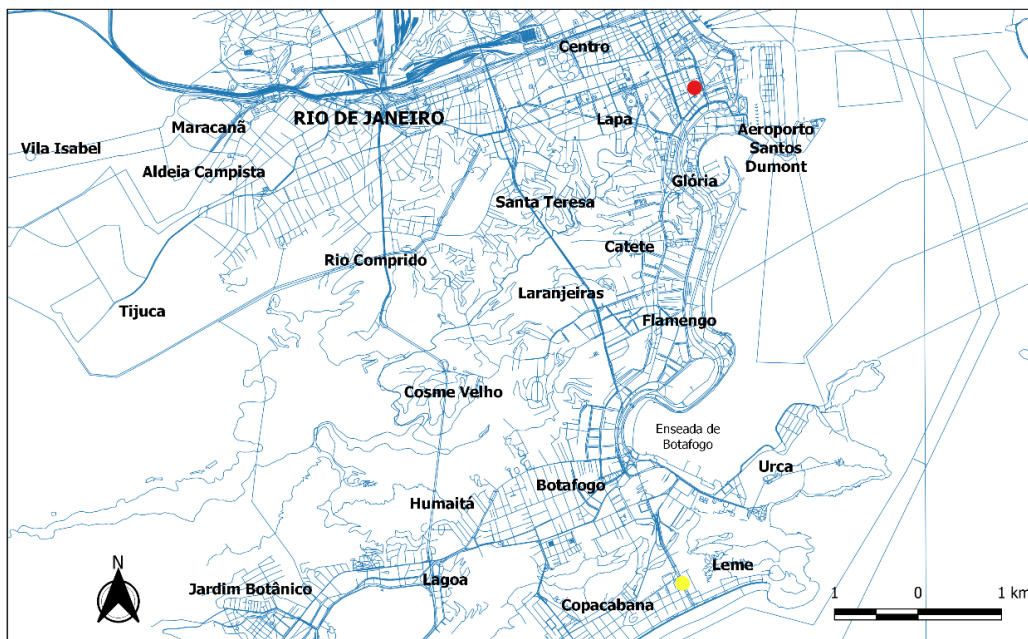
– Que século, meu Deus! diziam os ratos.

E começavam a roer o edifício
(Andrade, 1983, p. 91-94).

In this poem, a powerful critique of modernity is established from the outset. The character Oscar, designing his building in the sand, seems to be a clear reference to Oscar Niemeyer, a leading figure of modern architecture and already an important and prolific architect in 1930s-40s Brazil – especially for his works on the old federal capital, Rio de Janeiro.

One should remember that Drummond was appointed chief of staff of the Minister of Education and Health Gustavo Capanema, in 1934, a position he held until 1945 (Andrade, 2002, p. 123), precisely his most politically fruitful period. The building where the ministry is located, currently named *Edifício Gustavo Capanema*, located at Rua da Imprensa, 16, in downtown Rio, is one of the public buildings designed by Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer partnership in this city. The poet starts from lived space to create his critical poetry. On Map 1, the location of the building in relation to Drummond’s house is shown.

Map 1 – Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s home and workplace in Rio de Janeiro



Legenda
● Residência de Drummond
● Edifício Gustavo Capanema

elaboration: The author, 2019.
data source: Open Street Map, 2019.
geographic coordinate system: WGS84 datum.

We are facing again the (anti)city of dryness, anguish, individualism, and solitude. The poetic strength of architectural creation is consumed in the gray cement that keeps families inside “tight cells”, where the ceaseless chewing of modernity consumes humanity and spits it with a deformed and meaningless social aspect: “a long time ago/men are over / only a few sad dwellers/ have remained” (4th stanza).

The poet tries to dissect his solitude in the metropolis, where “bodies unite and/ separate violently” (5th stanza, lines 17, 18). And the drunkenness, music, “emergency opioms (6.21)”, are never enough. The mournful Itabirano, who keeps a “picture on the wall and a thorn in the heart”, is embalmed by “the smell of fish, sadness, travels that sea wind brings” (6.25): it is the wind from Rio’s seafloor.

But the landscape vanishes into the horizon of painful memories. “Oh, how I miss it not” (10.40): this nostalgia is dialectically affirmed by its negation. The poet misses his birthplace, the large manor house in Itabira, the “smiling crioulas” of his opulent childhood. The nostalgia of childhood, which is born in the solitude of the precarious units of full-grown man, got tangled with the social nostalgia of a proletarianized aristocracy, and for whom the manor past is still a grandiose image (although no less empty): “Cry, my portrait, cry./ Cultivate your beard/ in this hideous building/ from where your childhood springs/ like a glass of poison” (12th stanza). In the fourth chapter we see the theme of suicide. This is a question of subjectivity brought to the extreme, bordering the limits of anguish, solitude, hopelessness and surrounded by “invitations to death (13.61)” in the building named with a caustic irony: Esplendor. This is the building of modernity, that dissolves soul and body, ill-fated to be gnawed by rats like the grandiose past of his noble family: “Oh Lord, what a century!” (24.105).

There is a strong negativity in this poem, clearly depicted in the way that lived space is translated. There is no contradiction in the fact that man is, at the same time, a “herd animal” and a “tight cell”: massification takes place precisely in a mercantile society in which humanity is dissolved into functional roles: “a long time ago/ men are over/ Only a few sad dwellers/ have remained” (4th stanza). This modern housing building is a major symbol of a simultaneous process of massification and alienation: both collective and individual, the edifice is a space of disunion, where social relations are pre-established and the feeling of collectivity is precarious. The subject is locked in a tight cell, like so many other tight cells, until he himself becomes one of these cells. Exposing the living bowels of society, but going beyond, poetry becomes political.

The city and the death

The image of the city as a living organism is recurrent. There is a whole tradition of urban thinking forging ahead on this matter, but we can also note the presence of organic metaphors in everyday life, substantially. In the press, it is common to use “artery” to refer to the main traffic routes, when news and debates about urban traffic are disclosed. Downtown becomes the “heart” of a city, palpitating without stopping. On the other hand, it is fairly common an analogy between the city and a large machine with its steady system operation, which can cool off, but never ceases.

These images and metaphors reveal a “pulse of life” that the city, the work of living men, cements. That is, the city is a throbbing moving body and it seems designed to keep us out from paralysis and death. Immersed in the urban daily life and constantly wandering, man can get distracted while forgetting his tragic fate.

However, this unceasing movement also brings an intrinsic violence, in the modern city especially, where the machine is imperative and man has become totally dissociated from nature. Designed for cars, buildings, trains, and for the execution of atomistic mechanical functions, the city has not been thought to the realization of human existence and communion, and always turns against people aggressively. Living in the anticity, humanity is dissolved into the gears of

capitalist society, advancing towards death. Dryness, anguish and solitude thus reveal a strong “pulse of death”. In “José”, Drummond dissolves the city in death in one of the most beautiful and mournful pieces of the book, “Os rostos imóveis”, dedicated to Otto Maria Carpeaux:

Pai morto, namorada morta. 1
Tia morta, irmão nascido morto.
Primos mortos, amigo morto.
Avô morto, mãe morta
(mãos brancas, retrato sempre inclinado na parede, grão de poeira nos
olhos). 5
Conhecidos mortos, professora morta.
Inimigo morto.

Noiva morta, amigas mortas.
Chefe de trem morto, passageiro morto.
Irreconhecível corpo morto: será homem? bicho?

Cão morto, passarinho morto.
Roseira morta, laranjeiras mortas.
Ar morto, enseada morta.
Esperança, paciência, olhos, sono, mover de mão: mortos.
Homem morto. Luzes acesas. 15
Trabalha à noite, como se fora vivo.

Bom dia! Está mais forte (como se fora vivo).

Morto sem notícia, morto secreto.
Sabe imitar fome, e como finge amor.

E como insiste em andar, e como anda bem. 20
Podia cortar casas, entra pela porta.

Sua mão pálida diz adeus à Rússia.
O tempo nele entra e sai sem conta.

Os mortos passam rápidos, já não há pegá-los.
Mal um se despede, outro te cutuca. 25
Acordei e vi a cidade:
eram mortos mecânicos,
eram casas de mortos,
ondas desfalecidas,
peito exausto cheirando a lírios, 30
pés amarrados.

Dormi e fui à cidade:
toda se queimava,
estalar de bambus,
boca seca, logo crispada. 35
Sonhei e volto à cidade.
Mas já não era a cidade.
Estavam todos mortos, o corregedor-geral verificava etiquetas nos cadáveres.
O próprio corregedor morrera há anos, mas sua mão continuava implacável.
O mau cheiro zumbia em tudo.

Desta varanda sem parapeito contemplo os dois crepúsculos.
Contemplo minha vida fugindo a passo de lobo, quero detê-la, serei mordido?
Olho meus pés, como cresceram, moscas entre eles circulam.
Olho tudo e faço a conta, nada sobrou, estou pobre, pobre, pobre,
mas não posso entrar na roda,
não posso ficar sozinho,
a todos beijarei na testa,
flores úmidas esparzirei,
depois... não há depois nem antes. 50
Frio há por todos os lados,
e um frio central, mais branco ainda.

Mais frio ainda...
Uma brancura que paga bem nossas antigas cóleras e amargos...
Sentir-me tão claro entre vós, beijar-vos e nenhuma poeira em boca ou rosto.
Paz de finas árvores, 56
de montes fráglimos lá embaixo, de ribeiras tímidas, de gestos que já não
podem mais irritar,
doce paz sem olhos, no escuro, no ar.
Doce paz em mim,
em minha família que veio de brumas sem corte de sol
e por estradas subterrâneas regressa às suas ilhas,
na minha rua, no meu tempo – afinal – conciliado,
na minha cidade natal, no meu quarto alugado,
na minha vida, na vida de todos, na suave e profunda morte de mim e de
todos. 64
(Andrade, 1983, p. 99-101).

In certain respects, this poem can be seen as unfolded of “José”, where a deep historical hopelessness is part of each individual: “Hope, patience, eyes, slumber, moving hands: dead people./ Dead man. Lights on./ He works at night, as if he was alive” (3.14,15). However, at this moment the city is enveloped in an environment of despair and death. It is also the place

of dehumanization, with its grieving atmosphere as depicted in the third verse of the second stanza: “Unknow dead body: is it a man? Animal? (2.9,10)”.

This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult poems to interpret in the 1942 book. Resolutely metaphorical and somewhat metaphysical, it seems to be written to drag the reader into an abyss of despair, fully decomposing everything and everyone. It brings to the surface a deep anguish inflamed by exhaustive and imposing omnipresence of death, and which alerts the reader to the inevitability of a common fate: the two twilights mentioned by the poetic persona in the first verse of the penultimate stanza thus seems an image of an inescapable destiny, of him and the world. Taking the “system of oppositions” identified by Sant’Anna (1972, p. 17) as the cornerstone of Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s work, the opposition “Me versus the world” is the synthesis. The inner self and the world reconcile themselves in face of the tragic and relentless destiny of death.

It seems to us, actually, to be a rather evident attempt at a desperately understand life through death: “From this veranda with no parapet I gaze at the two twilights./ I gaze into life fleeing as fast as a wolf, And I want to stop living, will I be bitten?” (9.52,53). Hence death becomes an allegory, moving away from its literal meaning, a symbol of an era’s absolute nothingness: “I woke up and saw the city: / they were mechanical dead, / they were houses of the dead, / diluted waves, / lilies exhaling of the chest exhausted, / with feets tied together” (8.26-31). There is a sequence - “I woke up and saw the city”, “I slept and went to the city” (8.32), “I have dreamed and then I came back to the city” (8.36) - that shows the encounter man and city, with death behind in the three situations, which appropriately indicates this complete jumble between dream and wakefulness, and between literal and figurative senses.

In Italo Calvino’s “Invisible Cities”, there are two special cities to think about the theme of death. In Adelma, every face stared by the visitor reminds him of who has been dead: “If Adelma is a city I am seeing in a dream”, said the traveler, “where you encounter only the dead, the dream frightens me. If Adelma is a real city, inhabited by living people, I need only continue looking at them and the resemblances will dissolve, alien faces will appear, bearing anguish” (Calvino, 1990, p. 89).

In Laudomia, the city is composed of three identically named sides: that of the living, the dead, and the unborn. Both in the city of the living and the dead, streets reveal sequences of identical houses, and the dead have the same names as the living: “On fine afternoons the living population pays a visit to the dead and they decipher their own names on their stone slabs”, and both cities communicate “a story of toil, anger, illusions, emotions”; but in the city of the dead, “all has become necessary, divorced from chance, categorized, set in order. And to feel sure of itself, the living Laudomia has to seek in the Laudomia of the dead the explanation of itself” (Calvino, 1990, p. 127).

One can feel a bit of Adelma and Laudomia in the city of this poem. To each face, someone dead (“static faces”) – or a “stranger who bears anguish”? And the city of “mechanical dead”, where the poetic persona seems to travel – both at dream and wakefulness – is precisely where he seeks an explanation for life. And there is an order, as in Laudomia, and in death, peace is found, as shown by the last stanza.

Should this strong and insistent presence of death be considered contradictory to politics? If we strictly consider that there is only politics in the “pulse of life”, and that politics involves both an aspiration for the future that only find its place in the “world of the living” and the “will to power” born in inescapably carnal and earthly instincts, then death is an absolute contradiction.

The city considered exclusively in a positivist sense, also reveals a contradiction, in addition to its violent face. But one cannot forget that facing death – even through resigned willingness – is an act of resistance, especially in a civilization that institutes a whole system of beliefs and values try to cover up and disguise this inevitability.

This poem seems to petrify the plenty of anguish, affliction, and despair that Drummond is dealing with in this period, feelings which are clearly linked to the historical moment 1940s first half. The poet's consciousness towards the role of modernity in generating anxiety, something materialized through the city, is also quite evident. The tenacity of death is actually a symbol of nothingness and paralysis of an entire era.

Concluding remarks

Approximating geography and literature could open plenty of chances for mutual enrichment. As a science with a “long-term conservative tradition” (Corrêa, 1980, p. 8), geography only recently sees in literature more than a repository of images, insights, and geographic information to play a part in research without any questioning. And this is the reason that literary forms closer to scientific thought, such as the realist novel, enjoyed a certain preference. Indeed, it took some time until geographers began to problematize discourse itself, the limits of representation, and the reality-fiction relationship.

Modern poetry represents an antithetical universe which, through the tensioning of the discourse (literary and scientific) and deconstruction of the form, is a breeding ground for reflection in geographical thought. Furthermore, with the impact and influence of modernity on discursive, thematic and aesthetic spheres, art becomes intensely connected to urban themes. Thus, Drummondian poetry, with its deeply political concerns, also becomes existential. And modernity essential space of existence is definitely the city.

We offered in this brief article a reading of the existential universe of one of the major and neglected works of Drummond, a poet that Antonio Candido defined as “the greatest social poet of our contemporary literature”: in “José”, written in his more politicized moment, the simplicity of the common name and common man reveal deep expressions and reflections on life, modernity, and the city.

Geography's appetite for bringing together images, perceptions, and geographic information, often tries to find in the world of art, eagerly, the perpetual production of space. Because art clearly creates concrete and palpable spatial forms. And because there is geography even in the solitary man reflecting on his life, his space, his city, his everyday life.

After all, what is geography if not man reflecting on all aspects of his spatial dimension? As Dardel (2015, p. 1) tells us, “[...] geographic disquiet precedes and sustains the objective science”. Geographical thinking is not only taken by geographers nor it is confined by university walls or traditional research institutes. It is in the streets, at every corner or pavement, it is in poems, music, films, paintings, in graffiti scattered all over the city walls.

Geography “usually remains discreet, more experienced by people than expressed by them” (Dardel, 2015, p. 34). Thus, art, before being an expression of a geography, is an experienced or lived geography. And Drummond's poems are transparent about this: how important the lived space, everyday life, and socio-spatial relations are in the constitution of this poet as a being. Political and

geographical dimensions are in close dialogue, making space a place of existence and resistance. The politicization of his lyrical work turns against modernity, a structure that he chooses to steer away from: he “is [not] able to willingly integrate into the current discourses of society” (Bosi, 2000, p. 165).

In “José”, a negative confrontation is clear-cut, it exposes a conflict that reaches the greatest expression in 1945 with *A rosa do povo*, “one of the major works of participating literature in Brazil” (Simon, 1978, p. 59). Finally, what we try to demonstrate here is the geographic dimension of this confrontation and the manifested fecundity of Drummond’s work for geographic interpretation of modernity and the modern city.

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Recebido em: 3 maio 2021
Aprovado em: 13 maio 2021