Book Review

Lopes de Barros, Rodrigo. *Distortion and Subversion: Punk Rock Music and the Protests for Free Public Transportation in Brazil (1996–2011).* Liverpool UP, 2022.

In its nearly fifty years of existence, punk rock, as a musical genre and subculture, has generated an impressive and still-growing written record. This ranges from music criticism and historiography to oral histories and memoirs. Birthed in New York and London during the late 1970s, punk—a stripped-down, aggressive, often insurgent form of rock and roll—quickly became a global phenomenon, occasionally breaking through commercially but mostly remaining underground. Punk arrived in Brazil via São Paulo, with the first Brazilian bands (Restos de Nada, Cólera, Condutores de Cadáver, AI-5) forming in 1978–79. Punk and its numerous subgenres have been present in the Brazilian underground ever since.

Given Brazilian punk's geographic and sonic diversity, its long history, and the precarious state of the "punk archive," the task of writing a comprehensive account of Brazilian punk seems daunting. In *Distortion and Subversion,* Rodrigo Lopes de Barros, a critic, scholar, and observer of the Florianópolis punk scene, takes on a narrower, though still rather expansive theme: the interplay between punk and the protests for reduced and free bus fares that occurred in Brazil during the late 1990s and early 2000s. These protests, which began with the Revolta do Buzu in Salvador in 2003 and the Revolta da Catraca in Florianópolis in 2004–05, culminated in the national transit protests of June 2013. Relying principally on lyrical analysis, interviews, and extensive reconstruction of mothballed web content, Lopes de Barros demonstrates the depth of Brazilian punks' engagement with these protests, as participants and commentators.

Punks have a long history of political engagement, from early UK punks' involvement in Rock Against Racism to Pussy Riot's opposition to Vladimir Putin. Lopes de Barros argues for Brazilian punks' political bona fides, affirming that "Brazilian underground punk from the 1970s to the 2000s is basically a movement constructed on the idea of democratized access to music production and political action" (9). Brazilian punk activists' focus on lowering or eliminating bus fares

may seem prosaic. Yet public transportation is vitally important to Brazilian life: many urban Brazilians, particularly working people, rely on public transportation, and this almost always means buses. As Lopes de Barros demonstrates, underfunded, mismanaged, or otherwise inadequate public transportation systems are the "hubs," so to speak, in which some of the defining forces of Brazil's social reality meet. These forces include racial and socioeconomic disparities, unequal access to urban spaces and institutions, and city planners' struggles to keep pace with urban growth. For the punk activists profiled by Lopes de Barros, the protests were not just about reducing or eliminating bus fares but were understood as a means to bring about broader, radical social transformation: "For the Free Fare Movement, the destruction of the current model of public transportation in vogue in the main cities of the country should be a step toward the destruction of the capitalist system. The struggle for the free fare would function as a micro-revolution, which encompasses at a smaller scale the contradictions, difficulties, and lessons of a total revolution" (90).

Distortion and Subversion consists of five chapters, plus an introduction and epilogue. In the introduction and chapter 1 ("The Revolution Will Be Posted Online"), Lopes de Barros describes the political context of Brazilian punk during the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the punks' depth of engagement with the bus protests. He offers as a telling detail the São Paulo band Ordinaria Hit's practice of naming releases for the prevailing fare at the time; compare *3* (released in 2011) with *4,40* (2020). He also notes of the Revolta da Catraca that "[t]he Turnstile Revolts were among the first mass uprisings in Brazil in which the Internet had a central and decisive role" (36). Further, he connects punk's historical reliance on do-it-yourself (DIY) networks for music distribution, information-sharing, and organization to "unmediated" forms of the same made possible by the Internet.

Chapter 2 ("Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Youth: From Salvador to Florianópolis") demonstrates how the Revolta do Buzu anticipated the Revolta da Catraca. The standout band here is Lumpen, a Bahia hardcore outfit active from 2003 to 2010. Lopes de Barros analyzes two of their songs, "Zona de processamento para exportação" (2003) and "Palavras sinceras não são agradáveis de ouvir" (2005), both of which reflect the band's anticapitalism. Lumpen were clearly concerned with public transportation—they listed "o maluco da periferia que pega ônibus lotado" as part of their target audience. Though Lopes de Barros notes that vocalist Róbson Véio participated in the protests, he fails to illustrate

how the connection between Véio's activism and Lumpen goes in the other direction, impacting the band's music.

Chapter 3 ("Island of Wars: Florianópolis Once Again") provides sustained analysis of *Floripa* punks' involvement in the Revolta da Catraca. Lopes de Barros notes that "[t]he city had never experienced a comparable uprising lasting so many days, at least since the end of the Brazilian military dictatorship" (132). He mentions that local punks organized several shows that were tied to the protests, and he describes the involvement in the protests of bands like Black Tainhas. The title of their song "Latão (de lixo) integrado" lampoons the city's Sistema Integrado de Transportes. In the song's lyrics, Black Tainhas denounce high fares, long waits, and uncomfortable buses, and conclude with a typically punk bit of profane, politicized anger: "A tarifa abaixou … aumentou de novo / Vereador anda de carro, então: / Pau no cu do povo!" (quoted in Lopes de Barros 146).

Chapter 4 ("The Happiness of Punks: Carnival and Soccer in Belo Horizonte and Beyond") shifts geographic and topical focus and addresses a tangential but engaging theme: Brazilian punks' changing approach to two emblematic aspects of national culture—Carnaval and soccer—from one of skepticism to one of appropriation. Lopes de Barros describes Belo Horizonte's Carnaval Revolução (2002–08), a politicized, alternative carnival celebration that combined *batucada,* punk, and hardcore, and "debates, lectures, and workshops" on political topics (187). The 2006 and 2008 editions of this event also featured a soccer tournament, which led to the formation of Autônomos FC by a group of São Paulo punks, anarchists, and activists. Their colors are, rather inevitably, black and red, and their uniform features the anarchist letter-A symbol. The lyrics of their official song, minus their reference to a "team" rather than a "crew," sound like they were taken from a hardcore or street punk anthem: "Somos o time mais anarquista / o mais alegre, o mais antifascista / Somos autônomos e revolucionários / contra os nazistas e os autoritários" (quoted in Lopes de Barros 214).

Chapter 5 ("Punks' Jungle: São Paulo") focuses on Verdurada, a bimonthly event organized by São Paulo–based straight edge punks beginning in 1996. Like Carnaval Revolução, Verdurada combined punk and hardcore performances with discussions of social issues, including vegetarianism, gender and sexuality, copyright, and public transportation. As Lopes de Barros details, a 2011 edition of Verdurada featured a lecture about public transportation by the engineer Lúcio Gregori, "then in his 70s, [who had been] rediscovered by the young militants" for

his plan, which he had proposed while working as the city's head of transportation in 1990, for a zero-fare public transit system (249). This anecdote serves as evidence of the Verdurada crowd's degree of commitment to the cause—sitting through a lecture on busing represents a significant tonal shift from pogoing or moshing to punk, after all. It is also, to my mind, exemplary of punk rock's practice of identifying nonpunk musical ancestors (Johnny Cash, for example) and intellectual forebearers (the situationists, Noam Chomsky, etc.).

In the book's epilogue, Lopes de Barros writes that "[p]unk music functioned as a *path* for revolt: the initiator, the conductor, the basis, a point of orientation" (270; author's emphasis). He more than proves this point for the Brazilian punks who were active in the bus protests. The author should particularly be commended for his detective work in reconstructing the networks that connect punks, the bus protests, events like Carnaval Revolução and Verdurada, and even pirate radio and alternative news sites. As for criticisms, I would have appreciated more analysis of how the protests informed Brazilian punk music, beyond topical references to public transportation in some of the songs he cites. And I would have liked at least some discussion of how these songs *sound:* stereotypes to the contrary, punk rock is not a uniform mass of undifferentiated, grating noise. These criticisms aside, *Distortion and Subversion* is a worthy addition to scholarship on Brazilian social movements and on punk. As a Luso-Brazilianist scholar and a punk fan, I found it fascinating.

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