

Brazil's Favela Funk in Film*

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ABSTRACT

Released in 1994, the first documentary film about Brazil's favela funk, the feature-length *Funk Rio*, directed by Sergio Goldenberg, depicted the baile funk dance parties of the time like the "death corridor-style" dances (corredor da morte) and the contests between dance crews. Since then, numerous documentary films have portrayed the evolution of the movement –often demonizing it but at other times romanticizing it– documenting the appearance of subgenres like consciousness funk, proibidão (gangster funk), putaria ("whorish" funk), funk de ostentação ("swag funk") and evangelical funk. This article introduces a crucial and understudied genre of film studies about a vital and understudied Afro-Atlantic youth culture –one that is urgently situated on the front lines of the culture wars in Brazil today. In so doing, it explores the antiphony –or call and response– at the heart of favela funk aesthetics and practice, and draws attention to the philosophical tensions between Black-Atlantic cultures and documentary filmmaking. Finally, it extrapolates upon these tensions to suggest a critique of the rigid dichotomies prevalent in academic perspectives and the epistemological impulses driving them.

Key Words: favela funk, Brazilian documentary films, *Funk Rio*, Black Atlantic studies, antiphony

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In the moment of the *baile* funk dance party, it's like a spirit enters us and renews us to live each day. That's what favela funk is. It's like the air that we breathe.

-Alex¹

I just can't live anymore without the *bailes* funk!

-Tânia²

In the simplest terms, by posing the world as it is against the world as the racially subordinated would like it to be, this musical culture supplies a great deal of courage required to go on living in the present.

-Paul Gilroy³

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 25 years, countless documentary films have been made about Brazilian funk, or favela funk, as it is often called internationally, a close cousin to hip hop, *reggaetón* and Jamaican dance hall. Amid the ongoing crisis of social exclusion and violence taking place in Brazil today, these films offer crucial perspectives on a controversial, yet vital cultural movement. Some of these films focus on the youths who live and breathe for favela funk, the *funkeiros*, as they are called in Portuguese. Such films also tend to focus on the hundreds of enormous dance parties the youths make happen each week across cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, parties known as *bailes* funk. Other films gravitate toward artists, biographies, genres, musical techniques and histories or present analytical theses about Brazilian funk's countercultural relevance. Only a relative few are more professionally produced documentaries, such as the sort likely to be entered into local and international film competitions. Many are semi-professional videos produced by students or activists connected to non-profit organizations. In the past five years or so, several have been created and circulated by YouTubers or other influencers associated with various online outlets, including a few by people from within the favela funk

1 Twenty-four-year-old Alex expresses this sentiment in Sergio Goldenberg's film 1994 *Funk Rio* (15:18-15:31). Portuguese translation: "Quando a gente tá no momento parece que um espírito entra na gente e renova a gente pra viver cada dia no funk. É isso que é o funk. O funk é como se fosse o ar que a gente respira". All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

2 Another protagonist of *Funk Rio*, the young Tânia proclaims her love for *favela* funk with a similar intensity (5:40-5:44). Portuguese: "Eu, Tânia, não consigo viver mais sem o baile funk!"

3 Gilroy makes this observation as part of his discussion of the revolutionary nature of early hip hop in the United States, the musical precursor of Brazil's favela funk (Gilroy 1993, 36).

movement.

This article focuses primarily on a particularly unique and pathbreaking favela funk film, Sergio Goldenberg's *Funk Rio*, from 1994. Not only was it the first-ever documentary on Brazilian funk, but also is the one that focuses most explicitly on the everyday poor and mostly Black funkero youths and their community dance parties.⁴ *Funk Rio* treats Brazilian funk more as a movement than a mere style of music, just as it addresses the bailes funk less as “concerts”, and more as collective performances with much blurrier divisions between performers and audiences. Reflecting on this film's strategies in these terms, in what follows, I consider it a transitional film from Brazil's consciousness raising *cinema novo* movement from the 1960s to the more intimate *retomada*-style feature films appearing just after the release of *Funk Rio* of the 1990s. Even more crucially, I also view it as an embodiment of the Afro-Atlantic aesthetic impulse at the heart of favela funk. The dialogic nature of the film reveals the spirit and form of what Afro-British historian and philosopher Paul Gilroy calls antiphony, or call and response, a defining feature of African diasporic cultural practices (Gilroy 1993, 16-17, 78).

At times, almost any of film about Brazil's favela funk can be relational and humanizing one moment only to be sensationalist or romanticizing the next. Portraying such a vibrant, live musical manifestation on film is challenging. Such is true even for insiders born and raised within Brazilian funk culture, though they may intrinsically understand much more about the movement than newcomers to funk – such as the majority of favela funk film directors. The aim of this paper, in this light, is to suggest a framework for thinking about favela funk films without lumping them too hastily into overly rigid dichotomies. The logic of documentary filmmaking about funk is different epistemologically from that of “doing” funk – not just in recording a song or music video but putting it into motion in bodies and minds of regular people as they collectively dance and sing in live call and response encounters. What makes the film *Funk Rio* so remarkable in this sense is how it overcomes this gap to bring itself more in line with the spirit and form of favela funk cinematographically.

4 Despite the high frequency of racial mixing in favelas and diversity of color among friends and neighbors there, deeply rooted racial hierarchies persist strongly favoring those with lighter skin, especially whites. Still, even though favela funk is undeniably an Afro-Atlantic musical culture, it has indeed provided a space for youths of all colors, including young whites. For more on the complexities of racial relations in Brazil and the rampant racism that still prevails there, see Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Black in Latin America*, chapter one, “Brazil: May Exu Give Me the Power of Speech” (Gates 2011, 12-58).

A detailed treatment of the full range of favela funk documentaries from the previous two and a half decades would require a book-length study.⁵ The intent here instead is to offer an introduction to favela funk documentaries as a unique, relatively understudied genre of filmmaking crucial for understanding the racial, class and gender-related tensions of Brazilian society and culture today. These films are more than storytelling, but also activism. They are efforts to engage and humanize in the face of mainstream prejudices and to overturn stereotypes and call attention to the race, class, sex and gender discrimination so profoundly rooted in Brazilian society.

BACKGROUND

Twenty-year-old Paulo is one of the real-life protagonists featured in *Funk Rio*. Along with Alex and Tânia, quoted at the top of this article, and four other young Black women and men from the urban peripheries of Rio de Janeiro in the early 1990s, the film follows Paulo throughout his daily life before, during and after one of the city's enormous baile funk dance parties. We spend time with him at the dinner table in his home in a hillside favela community with his mother and younger brother Dinho, who uses a wheelchair. We stroll with him through the streets and alleyways of the favela and along a crowded beach. As Paulo and Dinho head across town to their favorite Saturday night dance party, we see them enjoying themselves singing, dancing and flirting on a jam-packed city bus. But what Paulo loves most is attending bailes funk each weekend and the massive gang fights that take place there. The entire middle section of the film cuts back and forth between close-ups of interviews and extended shots of Paulo and the other youths at the dance parties, including their fighting.

For Paulo, nothing can compare to the intensity of a baile funk. Dancing there in that tidal wave of booming electronic beats and loops, surrounded by 5,000 or more sweating bodies and pumping hearts, he says, is absolute

5 Funk carioca has also attained a ubiquitous place in today's television and feature films in Brazil, such as two blockbuster feature films *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*, Meirelles 2002), *Tropa de Elite* (*Elite Squad*, Padilha 2007). It has also been foregrounded in TV shows like Globo's *Cidade dos Homens* (Season 2, Episode 1, "Sábado", Meirelles 2003), *Por Toda Minha Vida* (Season 3, Episode 2, "Claudinho", Pilar 2009) and *Subúrbia* (Carvalho 2012), as well as the Netflix series *Vai Anitta* (Askew 2018) and *Sintonia* (KondZilla 2019). Favela funk's representation in these commercialized, more entertainment-oriented media is not treated here though it is highly deserving of study.

bliss. “You get that feeling of joy, deep in your heart, you know? Filling you up like air”.⁶ Even better, Paulo tells us, when the much-anticipated moment comes and the fighting starts, he feels like he’s being lifted out of the pain and suffering of his harsh everyday existence into a state of rapture. “Imagine when you get that rush that hits you, that big feeling. It’s like you’re in another place, another world”, he explains. His eyes glow as he flashes his bright, toothy smile.⁷ The film moves back to footage of the crowd just as opposing throngs of young men and boys burst into an explosive frenzy of fists, kicks and full-body grappling. The synthesized notes and beats of the song “Sample Playboy”, an early Portuguese-language funk hit by Rio’s Cashbox *equipe*, or “sound team”, keep booming as the DJ uses his mic to pump up the clashing crowd vocally.

When Goldenberg’s film was released in the early 1990s, many of Rio’s *bailes funk* still featured a form of mass brawling known as the *corridor da morte*, or “corridor of death” – the gang fights Paulo loves so passionately.⁸ In those days, as members of groups called *galeras* arrived at the *bailes de corredor* from different favelas and other working-class neighborhoods around Rio, they would dance and socialize in clusters along one half of the club or another, known as Side A and Side B. Between the two halves of the dance halls was a demilitarized strip of empty dance floor, considered a no-man’s-land. As the night wore on, DJs would verbally stoke the rivalries between favelas, and *funkeiros* from both sides would begin encroaching more and more into the open space between testing their courage and taunting one another. At first, bouncers would beat down some youths and forcibly eject them from the dance hall. Later into the night, though, at the climax of the party, things would reach a tipping point and the two sides of the crowd would come wildly crashing together into a collective free-for-all. Typically, the music never stopped. Despite the semi-ritualized nature of these confrontations frequently participants would get injured. Sometimes, people got maimed or even killed.

6 Here, I paraphrase from the original Portuguese: “Aquele coisa grande bate por dentro da gente, né? Abre aquele, aquele ar grande na gente, pô! Abre mais o coração da gente, a alegria forte. Sente a coisa bem forte!” (18:46-18:53).

7 Portuguese: “Imagina a hora que bate um daqueles pancadão, aquela emoção grande, a gente tá em outro lugar, em outro mundo” (18:50-19:00).

8 Just six years before *Funk Rio* in 1988, anthropologist Hermano Vianna published the first academic study of funk carioca, the pioneering *O mundo funk carioca*. Vianna, who attended scores of *bailes funk*, documented the death corridor-style dances, among others. Also, see Hershman (2000).

In the 25 years since *Funk Rio*, favela funk has evolved from the semi-underground status of its early days to spread throughout Brazil, mainly in São Paulo and other cities of the southeast, eventually becoming one of the most culturally and commercially relevant musical styles in Brazil today. It's currently so popular that the sixth-largest YouTube channel in the world, KondZilla, is dedicated to favela funk with over 53 million subscribers and 27 billion views.⁹ Besides the hundreds of gigantesque bailes funk dance parties still held in favelas and other low-income communities across Rio and other southeastern cities today, countless other Brazilian funk-related musical events and parties are also held in middle-class clubs and impoverished communities throughout Brazil.¹⁰ *Favela* funk has achieved truly global status as one of the indisputably best-known representatives of Brazilian music anywhere, especially in the United States and Europe, along with styles like bossa nova, *tropicália* and samba.

Detractors of funk in Brazil over the years have linked it to everything from bad musical taste to crime, drug abuse, hypersexuality, sexism and the loss of Brazilian culture and values. Occasionally, some have gone so far as to propose legislation to ban bailes funk or otherwise restrict funk in Brazil – at times with considerable support and success. The following remarks posted on the YouTube site for Denise Garcia's 2005 favela funk documentary, *Sou Feia Mas Tô na Moda*, illustrate the sort of anger and loathing favela funk often elicits from its critics. Much of that same disdain is often directed at the films themselves, as well:

Fábio: "What a load of horseshit!"

Cláudio: "The day any of you study true music, you'll change your opinion in a heartbeat. This documentary is ridiculous".

Nana é o djabo: "How disgusting...".

9 According to the ranking published on Wikipedia, the channel of KondZilla (the artistic name of Konrad Dantas) is the sixth most-subscribed to YouTube channel in the world, coming in above those of U.S. pop icons Justin Bieber, Ariana Grande and Taylor Swift. Of the five channels above it, only one is a music channel, India's T-Series (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most-subscribed_YouTube_channels#Most-subscribed_channels). As evidence of his newfound status as one of Brazil's most influential producers, KondZilla launched his funk-inspired Netflix original series called *Sintonia* in 2019, helping bring favela funk to millions of new viewers globally.

10 In São Paulo, many funk events are held as *fluxos*, a word meaning "flow", referring to the street parties in which several cars play favela funk from their open trunks which have been fitted with large and powerful speakers. There between the competing sounds of these cars, alongside food trucks and other mobile vendors, funkeiros gather to dance and socialize.

Cleo: "I could just die of shame and sadness seeing so many young people speaking incorrectly, lacking even the slightest evidence of having ever studied and behaving like common prostitutes".

Even within the community of people who appreciated funk in its early years, attitudes regarding the funk carioca scene today are often equally disparaging:

Alex: "Shit, what did they do to funk? It used to be about raising people's consciousness, today it's the soundtrack of the unconscious idiots".¹¹

Proponents of favela funk, on the other hand, are often equally vociferous, heralding it as a vital, revolutionary force in today's society. Along with Brazilian hip hop, they point out, it has given hope and a voice to poor, mostly Black youths of Brazil, as no other musical culture has. In response to its persistent persecution in mainstream society, Brazilian funk activists and other supporters have organized to pass a series of laws aimed at decriminalizing and protecting it both locally and at the level of the federal government. Others have made documentaries film about favela funk, such as those discussed here.

As for documentaries showcasing favela funk, at their best, they give insiders a rare affirming chance to see their lives represented on the screen. Just as crucially, they can offer outsiders a humanizing encounter with this musical culture and the creative and vivacious young people who live it. In an age defined by increasing polarization, they can create opportunities for dialogue, awareness and self-reflection to promote greater empathy and coexistence. No matter what our backgrounds, these films can also help us more honestly face the pain and trauma of the abuse and injustice of our collective histories – a necessary ingredient for healing and moving forward, both as individuals and as a society. At their worst, however, films about favela funk can just as quickly turn sensationalist and objectifying – or even exploitive – in ways that do as much to reinforce caricatures and stereotypes as to challenge them. Instead of being educational, they can become mostly entertaining. Likewise, instead of

11 Here are the original Portuguese YouTube postings: Fábio: "Grande bosta tudo isso!" Cláudio: "Todos vocês vão estudar música de verdade e logo mudarão de opinião, ridículo esse documentário". Nana é o djabo (sic): "Que nojo..." Cleo: "É para morrer de vergonha e de tristeza por ver tantos (as) jovens falando errado, sem estudo mínimo e comportando-se como meretrizes modernas". Alex: "Caralho, o que fizeram com o funk? Antes o funk tentava conscientizar as pessoas, hoje o funk virou trilha sonora dos inconscientes!" Some comments on the site, of course, praise the film.

unmasking the more deep-seated social and political tensions they reflect, films can inadvertently work to oversimplify, trivialize them or cover them up. In this way, in their more superficial moments the movies can inadvertently bolster harmful stereotypes and reinforce the injustices they seek to point out.

More often than not, favela funk documentaries fall somewhere in the middle. To analyze and represent topics related to violence and injustice in everyday life, on film as in the written word, makes for muddy waters. Despite the limitations of such efforts, inherent or otherwise, taken together favela funk documentaries play a vital role in the cultural debates of the country today. They reflect the sweeping changes in Brazilian film and telecommunications of the past few decades in which social media and public access to audiovisual technologies have jumped forward at breakneck speed. They also chart the recent history of contemporary social struggles in the country along with the evolution of favela funk as an Afro-Brazilian cultural expression.

FUNK AND BRAZILIAN CINEMA

Sergio Goldenberg's 1994 *Funk Rio* provides an excellent example of how a documentary film can humanize perspectives likely to appear incomprehensible to the general mainstream public – such as the utopian impulse Paulo describes driving large-scale youth gang fights at urban dance parties. As one of the film's real-life protagonists, Paulo is not a famous figure of favela funk. He is not a DJ, MC, dancer, manager, producer or radio personality like most folks featured in subsequent documentaries on the style nor is he a journalist, social scientist or other researcher. Paulo is simply a funkeiro. He's an ordinary young man –still a boy, really– not much different in his musical tastes or life story from Alex or Tânia (quoted at the top of this essay) or the four other youths featured in the film. Paulo and the others have much in common from the hundreds of thousands of other poor, mostly Black youths or other young people of color from the numerous favelas in and around Rio at the time it was made. As funkeiros, they can do far more than analyze funk culture or display mastery of its musical components, although they do express themselves eloquently throughout the documentary. They can also join together collectively –in mind, body and spirit– to call bailes funk into existence.

Today, people often use the term *funk carioca*, or “Rio-style funk”,

to distinguish Brazilian funk from its distant relative, American funk of the 1960s and 1970s. *Carioca* refers to people and things from Rio de Janeiro.¹² More recently, the term *funk paulista* has come into use to denote the offshoot of funk carioca that has arisen in São Paulo since the 2000s, now equally vital as the Rio scene. In 1994, at the time of Goldenberg's *Funk Rio*, the general public typically called Brazilian funk "fun-kee", pronounced with a Brazilian accent and written as the English word. In the early days, however, the funkeiros who created and lived Brazilian funk also referred to it as the *movimento funk*, or "funk movement". Framing it thus made a powerful statement. With the first part of the formulation, "movimento", they boldly proclaimed that Brazilian funk was not merely a musical style but rather a countercultural social movement. With the second, "funk", they were connecting their movement across Brazilian borders to forms of Black music around the Afro-Atlantic world. Thus, the movimento funk was not only about local people adopting foreign influences into Brazilian music and culture, but also about the ways local carioca people stamped Brazilian influences onto Black Atlantic and other worldwide musical and cultural forms. In spirit and form, the movimento funk was a grand dialogical gesture. It was more than a Brazilian manifestation or even an African diasporic one, but also one with panhuman dimensions.

Just like being a punker, or punk rocker, was far more than being a mere fan of punk rock at the height of that movement, being a funkeiro was generally understood as being far more than just being a fan of Brazilian funk. It made the fans part of an urban tribe. It gave them an attitude and an identity. Everyday rank and file funkeiros were just as essential to funk carioca as singers, dancers, music makers and other industry insiders. Indeed, more so. Being a funkeiro was participatory, like being a DJ, rapper, graffiti artist or break dancer in early hip hop. Whether it was with dancing body, clapping hands, singing voice, fighting fists and hugging arms, funkeiros were instruments of funk and instrumentalists. Without funkeiros, it was impossible to "do funk".

Every week, hundreds of thousands of funkeiros flocked to the great dance parties of the favelas and othering working-class communities of Rio to the bailes funk. In the days of *Funk Rio*, the baile funk was where funk happened – live and in full color. More than anything taking

12 Funk carioca means Rio-style funk, or Rio funk, as opposed to the funk in the United States of old-school artists like James Brown, The Meters and George Clinton's Parliament Funkadelic.

place in a recording studio or being put down on a music album or on the Internet, which had not yet taken off, the baile was the hearth and kitchen of funk carioca. Dance movements and styles were invented, tried out and made famous, along with song lyrics, electronic loops, beats and musical mashups. Slang and urban youth fashions also arose. For boys, it was a mixture between the baseball hats and neck chains and tennis shoes of early hip hop in the United States and the surfer board shorts and tribal tattoos of Rio's beaches. For girls, it was mini-skirts and form fitting stretchy jeans with halter tops or short dresses. The baile funk was a live community encounter of bodies, sweat, driving rhythms and beating hearts. As they gathered in the baile, funkeiro youths found refuge from the scarcity and injustice facing them in their daily lives. They lifted one another up into excitement, abundance, unity and hope.

According to MC Leonardo (Leonardo Pereira Mota), a public intellectual who has risen to prominence from within the milieu of funk carioca itself, the baile funk also stood out historically as perhaps the most critical contact zone between members of different social classes in Rio. Leonardo is not only a pioneer of favela funk as a singer but also maybe the most widely-known grassroots-level activist of funk carioca – along with his similarly militant brother, MC Júnior (Francisco de Assis Mota Júnior). Through their militancy, the duo has not only defended funk politically but also used it for more general consciousness raising in prisons, favelas and *rodas de funk*, or live “funk circles” held at countless protests and rallies. Though the two continue today, much of their past work was done through the now-defunct Rio-based NGO Associação dos Profissionais e Amigos do Funk (APAFUNK).¹³

MC Leonardo argues that this mixture of social classes began in the 1990s in Rio's baile funk at Chapéu Mangueira, a favela located on Babylon Hill, geographically situated between the affluent neighborhoods of Leme, Botofogo, Copacabana and Urca. He points to the pacific relationships between young people of various classes at that time during the dance parties, as middle and upper-class youths flocked to the funk scene. Because of the openness of funk carioca culturally, he argues people were able to meet one another in some of the most dramatically horizontal friendships possible in the city in those days. The MC compares it to the scene of early samba in the first decades of the 20th century in Rio, in which journalists, musicians, and intellectuals from Rio's middle and upper-class

13 For a detailed treatment of favela funk and activism, see Lopes (2010).

met with samba musicians, favela residents and practitioners of the West African-inspired animist religion *candomblé*.¹⁴

Over the years since *Funk Rio*, though scores of other documentary films have come along, to date none has focused as explicitly on funkeiros and bailes funk. In this sense, it approaches favela funk as a movement and a cultural manifestation or what might be called a “scene”, rather than as merely a musical style. In those days, the music and lyrics were closely tied to early American hip hop, especially Afrika Bambaataa’s electronic funk, from New York and music from Miami like Latin freestyle and Miami bass. Maybe that was why Goldenberg chose not to include interviews with funk carioca artists of other cultural elites like MCs and DJs associated with the movement, much less journalists and anthropologists, as most favela funk documentaries do.

Perhaps it’s the result of his personality as a director and his relational bent, an echo of the cinema novo-bent of his iconic mentor and close friend, Eduardo Coutinho – generally regarded as Brazil’s most significant documentary filmmaker. Only a few years earlier, Goldenberg had served as Coutinho’s assistant director for the up-close and intimate neo-realist-style portrait of everyday residents of the Rio’s favela of Santa Marta in the city’s Botafogo neighborhood, *Santa Marta: Duas Semanas no Morro* (*Santa Marta: Two Weeks in the Favela*, 1987). That earlier film similarly depicted ordinary people in their everyday lives in spontaneous and intimate interactions.

In terms of the history of Brazilian cinema, *Funk Rio* sits at a pivotal moment. Shortly after the return of civil government in 1986 after decades of military rule, Brazil’s first popularly elected president, the soon-to-be-impeached Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), ushered in an intensely neo-liberal political wave that nearly brought commercial film production to a halt. Long gone were the days of the Marxist-inspired cinema novo from the 1960s with its emphasis on radical consciousness-raising. As Ivana Bentes argued in her comparative historical work on Brazilian film, thirty some years later, cinema novo icon Glauber Rocha’s revolutionary *estética da fome*, or “aesthetics of hunger”, lost out to a new, more commodified film style (Bentes 2007, 249). Two movies

14 Though he takes up this theme frequently in other interviews and talks as well, MC Leonardo can be seen making this point in *Where Is the Baile Funk Going?* (00:10-01:12), a short, teaser documentary produced in partnership between the NGO Meu Rio and the New School, in New York. Besides Leonardo and Júnior, another pioneering MC and activist with APAFUNK who appears singing in the video is Dollores, an underappreciated figure in funk from Rocinha yet considered to be one of the all-time greats.

she pointed to were Glauber Rocha's iconic *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (*Black God, White Devil*, 1963) and Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Vidas Secas* (*Dry Lives*, 1963). As Brazilian cinema once again took off beginning in the mid-1990s, Bentes affirmed the *retomada*, or "retake", portrayed the poverty-stricken arid, rural backlands of the country and its urban favelas with what she called the *cosmética da fome*, or "cosmetics of hunger". Films she discussed included *Central do Brasil* (*Central Station*, Salles 1998), *Auto da Compadecida* (*A Dog's Will*, Arraes 1999) and *Cidade de Deus* (*City of God*, Meirelles 2002). Marta Peixoto raised similar concerns in her work on the representations of poor people in the new wave of films, arguing that the shallow portrayals of the films of the *retomada* served to reinforce dehumanizing stereotypes more than challenging them (Peixoto 2007, 170-178).¹⁵

Sergio Goldenberg's down-to-earth, unpretentious documentary film, however, like those of Eduardo Coutinho, was in no way superficial or trivializing. Nor was it overly entertaining in any facile, feel-good sentimentalist sense. On the contrary, in adopting its communally dialogic, call and response Afro-Atlantic style of its subject, it served as a model for bridging the gap between the countercultural, awareness-raising films of the 1960s and the intimist ones of the 1990s' *retomada*. A native of Rio, Goldenberg has established himself throughout his career as not only a prolific documentary filmmaker, in his early days, but also a feature film director and a highly successful Globo scriptwriter for soap operas and mini-series (often in partnership with George Moura). In a recent interview at the 2018 Week of Cinema and Market, Goldenberg pointed to the crucial role of empathy in filmmaking. "What we need most of all, what we try for is empathy. It's intimacy. That's what we're trying to write, that universe. That's what we're portraying" (Academia 2018a).¹⁶ In another interview from the same event, he emphasized a nuanced, ambivalent portrayal of characters as real people. "To the extent you can get inside the skin of the character, it'll be better. You need to know everything about him: how he walks, moves, talks, dresses, what his life story is. Mostly avoid making flat characters as good or bad. Characters have to be traced with an electrocardiogram, with ups and downs" (Academia

15 Ester Hamburger similarly argued that one-dimensional realism inadvertently reinforced violence against Brazil's poor (Hamburger 2007, 124). Though less severe in his assessment, Ismael Xavier warned against portrayals of poverty that were exclusively psychological and ethical without treating systematic social exclusion and violence (Xavier 2003, 61-62).

16 Portuguese: "Assim o que a gente precisa em primeiro lugar, né? É que eu busco, né? Assim é ter empatia, né? É ter intimidade, né? Com os personagens, né? Que eu 'tou escrevendo, que a gente, o universo, né? Que a gente 'tá retratando" (1:10-1:27).

2018b).¹⁷

In the film, we follow Alex, Tânia, Ana Paula and Patrícia to a baile funk known for dancing and romance at the practice pavilion for the Mangureira Samba School (Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Estação Primeira de Mangueira). It's located at the foot of the favela of Mangueira in Rio's Zona Norte, or "Northern Zone". In addition to focusing on a live community baile funk as the locus of the film, the film connects the dance to one of the most storied samba schools in Brazilian history emphatically suggest a continuity between funk carioca and the most widely known and influential Afro-Brazilian musical movements before it, samba and carnival. We also accompany three other protagonists of the film, Bebeto, Paulo and Dinho, to the baile known for mass gang-fighting at the Fluminense Club in Niterói across the Guanabara Bay from Rio proper. At the film's end, we accompany the youths as they stroll along the golden sands of Rio's famous beaches.

By contrasting Rio's affluent beachfront areas with the bailes funk and favelas in such a personalized way, the film poignantly thrusts a compact and powerful representation of Rio as a *cidade partida*, or "divided city", much in keeping with the warnings of visionary journalist Zuenir Ventura published the same year the film was made, 1994. The beach versus baile pairing puts social geography and space at the forefront of the film, just as they were at the forefront of real life for Cariocas (and still are).¹⁸ In this context, Goldenberg offers the only brief background aside appearing in *Funk Rio*, connecting it with the essential public debates of the time. This segment is centered around the infamous *arrastões* of 1992, in which hundreds of youths from poor, mostly Black communities staged massive gang fights on the posh beaches of Copacabana and Ipanema, mostly around Arpoador, while some others harassed and robbed beachgoers.¹⁹ The film suggests the *arrastões* occurred as a symptom

17 Portuguese: "Quanto mais você entra no personagem, melhor vai ser. Você precisa saber tudo dele: como ele anda, se movimenta, como fala, como se veste, qual sua história de vida e principalmente cuidar para não criar personagens planos, bons ou maus. O personagem precisa ser como o traçado de um eletrocardiograma, com altos e baixos".

18 Ventura's landmark book, *Cidade Partida*, or "Divided City", focused on activism to combat the increasing racial and class divide in Rio at the time. That activism was spurred on by the massacre of eight homeless people, including six children, at the downtown Candelária Catholic church and the killing of 21 innocent favela residents in Vigário Geral in 1993, both incidents done by off-duty police.

19 The first-ever English language treatment of funk is by George Yúdice and offers a nuanced discussion of how the relationship between funk and the *arrastões* was exaggerated at the time (Yúdice 1994).

of the city's longstanding social divisions more than as a manifestation of funk. The heavy symbolic load of the *arrastões* also serves to intensify the film's juxtaposition of beach and baile as signs of the fundamental social strife gripping Rio.

On the one hand, the protagonists' outing to the posh beaches of Rio of Rio's Southern Zone marks them as utopian spaces of hope for the *funkeiros* and dreams of the possibility of inclusion into a future Brazilian society. But it also confronts them with those same beaches as dystopian spaces that throw the semi-segregation of race relations in the Brazilian society at the time – conditions which persist in considerable measure to our present day. The beaches of Ipanema and Copacabana are territories of the mainstream middle and upper-class populations, many of whom regard the *funkeiros* as intrusive and potentially dangerous. In contrast, *Funk Rio* holds up the underground territories of *bailes funk* as the central stages for the stories of the poor, mostly Black *funkeiros* who are the protagonists of the *movimento funk*.

ANTIPHONY

On one level, *Funk Rio* is set amid a context of cultural circumstances and socio-political tensions particular to Rio and Brazil. On another, however, Goldenberg approaches his subject transnationally as part of the larger, Afro-Atlantic world. Of course, funk carioca is heir to other major Afro-Brazilian traditions like *candomblé*, the West African inspired fighting dances of *capoeira* and the Bahia and Rio's samba of carnival, to name a few. But it is also a close cousin to other musical traditions throughout history and across the African diaspora from both sides of the Atlantic. Black peoples across the region have significant historical, philosophical and aesthetic affinities.

Throughout history, Sub-Saharan Africans and their descendants in Brazil have always played crucial roles. In well over a century since the Abolition and the close of the Imperial Brazil, Rio's favelas have evolved as some of the spaces with the most profoundly vibrant Afro-Atlantic cultural life in the country.²⁰ According to historian Thomas Skidmore, the influence of these peoples in Brazilian society has outweighed that of any other group including European colonizers and the region's native

20 Adriana Facina and Adriana Carvalho Lopes have discussed favela funk as part of the Black Atlantic world in considerable detail (Facina and Lopes 2012).

peoples, who have been significantly decimated throughout colonization and since. It is greater than the influence of others arriving in Brazil in recent times like Italians, Germans, Japanese, other East Asians, Arabs, other Middle Eastern immigrants, Jewish people, recent immigrants from Portugal or people from countries around Latin America (Skidmore 2010, 39). Though it is hard to determine the exact number of slaves brought from Africa to Brazil from the sixteenth century until 1888 when slavery was abolished there, it is generally held that compared to the United States, some ten times more were taken to Brazil.²¹

The Black Atlantic is made up of many different peoples, as British historian and philosopher Paul Gilroy argued halfway around the world at around the same time *Funk Rio* was made. Throughout the years since the beginnings of the transatlantic slave trade in the 16th century, Afro-Atlantic peoples throughout the Americas have experienced similar difficulties, both during slavery and afterward. Through it all, cultural mixing and dialogues have persisted as central characteristics of their strategies to survive and thrive. So too have orality and music, as sounds and ideas have been found, reused and re-signified. Even more than the printed word, they have not been mere means for the transmission of knowledge but also catalysts of collective healing and life for Black Atlantic peoples in their historical struggles. Along the way, those African diasporic peoples have adopted certain features of Western modernity, such as discourses of social justice and human rights. But they have rejected mainly the rationalism associated with it in favor of communal notions of knowledge, power and being.

To encapsulate and describe the relational, communal aesthetics of Black Atlantic cultures, first in religion and music, then in literature and film, Gilroy points to the dialogic notion of antiphony (Gilroy 1993, 16-17, 78). He uses it to refer to the call and response structure so prevalent in Black oral and musical communication. Another scholar of the Afro-Caribbean, Puerto Rican sociologist Ángel Quintero Rivera is similarly emphatic regarding the crucial role of call and response, in his studies of *músicas mulatas*, as he calls hybrid Afro-Caribbean musical forms

21 Henry Louis Gates Jr. states that out of some 11.2 million total slaves forcibly taken to the New World during the roughly 300 years of the slave trade, some 4.9 million went to Brazil alone. By comparison, approximately 450,000 went to the United States (Gates 2011, 20). Brazil was the undisputed most extensive slave colony in the Americas and the last country to end slavery there. According to the database Slave Voyages, a great resource for Black Atlantic and Afro-Latino studies, the total number of slaves embarking on the journey to Brazil was 5,848,266, while the number of those disembarking was dismally lower, at 5,099,816 (<https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>).

of his purview. The characteristics Quintero Rivera associates with these Afro-Caribbean rhythms match up well with Gilroy's even broader Black Atlantic focus, giving a handy list of traits related to call and response and the blurring boundaries between performers and spectators (Quintero Rivera 1998, 35-92). He explains that as part of the intimate communication between the performers and audience, spaces are left within musical structures for vocal and instrumental improvisation.

Vocally, ad-lib occurs in lyrics, sounds and gestures. Musically, improvisation takes place in *descargas*, or "jam sessions", as instrumentalists interact with the singers, the crowd and each other. People in the audience itself are also highly involved as they sing along, dance, clap in syncopated rhythms and make demands on the performers and each other for high levels of energy. *Polivocalidad*, or "polyvocality", also occurs, not just rhythmically in syncopated drumming or the antiphony of the music and voices, but also in the mixture of sounds –and even instruments– borrowed from African, Native and European roots of the Americas. As a result, the hierarchies between voice and instrument are overturned and democratized, as are those between words and signs and other, more physiological and psychological forms of being and expression.

In the context of Rio's favela funk and films, the call and response of antiphony in the Afro-Atlantic world, on the most basic level, works to join people together in the present moment of community performances, as live gatherings. Such collective encounters occur in candomblé sessions, the *rodas*, or "rings", of the Afro-Brazilian fighting dances of capoeira, samba circles or bailes funk – as they do in musical and religious gatherings throughout the Afro-Atlantic world. In these live spaces, as live conversations push out prescripts, fixed categories of all manner are less prevalent. In some of these musical manifestations, fighting and dance mix. In others, entertainment and politics blur together or profane parties and religious experiences bleed into one another.

Through the dialogical back-and-forth flow of antiphony, people bring one another into a historical space as well. This space reaches both forward and backward in time beyond the present moment. It leads to an ancestral past of shared suffering and resistance and to a possible collective future of how things could be. Even more remarkably perhaps is that besides these two temporal dimensions –the live moment of the present and the historical movement between past and future– the call and response of Afro-Atlantic community encounters also entails an otherworldly dimension outside of the constraints of time, or at once within them and beyond them. It is a place and moment in motion, moving back

and forth, where words lead beyond words, music leads beyond music and bodies lead beyond bodies – then back again.

By connecting so intimately with his young protagonists in the film, Goldenberg inadvertently gives us not merely a surface representation of favela funk but rather a typical instance of funk carioca itself. Though *Funk Rio* makes no pretense of being a “piece” of funk carioca explicitly, it still manages to push the bounds between merely documenting funk carioca and embodying it radically. Ultimately, in focusing primarily on everyday funkeiro as the real-life protagonists of the film –and their immersion collectively into community encounters– Goldenberg endows his movie with a call and response heart and soul that brings it firmly into alignment with the aesthetic core of Afro-Atlantic life and practice.

AFTER FUNK RIO

Most favela funk documentaries that have followed since *Funk Rio* have not focused on the masses of funkeiros or the bailes funk themselves, instead highlighting the stars of funk and other members of the artistic caste and industry of funk. It does a tremendous service to funk, and to the masses of funkeiros themselves, of course, to have such highly detailed accounts of their cultural leaders and the evolution of Brazilian funk. Often the films take an analytical approach too in one shape or another to explore controversial issues such as gender and sexuality in funk or crime and violence. Such strategies are necessary and certainly justified. Still, the informational and analytical angles of these films make them more “top-down” than *Funk Rio*, just as it situates them more closely in line with what Gilroy would consider as the tendency towards rationalism of colonialism and Western modernity.

One of these more “top-down” films is the highly entertaining *Favela on Blast* (2008), a musically fascinating account that documents a broad range of artists from the late 1990s and early to mid-2000s. It was directed by Diplo (Wesley Pentz), himself a highly regarded and extremely eclectic songwriter, producer and electronic music DJ from the United States, and Leandro HBL (Leandro Lara), a talented multimedia artist from Belo Horizonte. The film takes considerable effort to contextualize favela funk as a cultural practice of favela residents. It includes some intimate portraits of performers, along with snippets of interactions with ordinary funkeiros here and there. It does an especially good job at cataloging the emerging subgenres of funk at the time it was made, such as *proibidão*, *putaria*,

the musical bricolages of the *montagem*, the lighter, more romantic funk melody and the explicitly politicized funk *consciente*, or consciousness funk – also called *funk de raízes*, or “roots funk”.²² Despite its merits, critics have accused the film of embodying a typically objectifying male gaze that sometimes makes it sensationalist and exoticizing.²³

2005’s *Sou Feia Mas Tô na Moda (I’m Ugly but Trendy, 2005)*, by Denise Garcia from Porto Alegre in Southern Brazil, is an insightful expository film on the controversies of feminism in funk carioca. In a highly detailed and glowing review of the film, Carlos Palombini, far and away one of the most prolific and influential scholars of funk carioca, calls it “[...] a film *à these* [...] about sexual explicitness as a means to women’s empowerment” (Palombini 2012). He makes the point the film should not be regarded so much as a funk carioca film but rather one about that thesis. Though the film focuses almost exclusively on MCs and other cultural ambassadors of funk, rather than on daily life of ordinary funkeiros or bailes, the attention she brings to women in funk is very much needed. Indeed, one of the great debates about favela funk has played out among feminists. Along with Garcia, one side hails the typically hyper-erotic female singers of funk as proto feminists, while the other criticizes them as hapless pawns of the deeply rooted sexism of Brazil.²⁴ Garcia’s film does an outstanding job of bringing this crucial issue to life.

A film that also addresses sexuality is *Inside the Mind of Favela Funk* (Fleur Beemster and Elise Roodenburg, 2016). To its credit, this Danish-Brazilian collaboration gives significant attention to favela residents, even some who do not like funk carioca or even detest it. Even so, rather than penetrating the “mind of favela funk”, as implied by its title, in many ways the film would be better described as an exploration of the sexuality of young people today in Rio’s favelas – through the lens of funk carioca. It offers a blend of highly personal interviews, poetry, song and interactions with today’s funkeiros in the settings of their daily lives, all in ways that update the representations of *Funk Rio* and other earlier videography. Unfortunately, *Inside the Mind of Favela Funk* is only available by a pay function on Vimeo, which restricts its potential impact in raising public awareness about the lives of the youths it depicts.

22 For a thorough ethnographic analysis of proibidão, see Novais (2016) and my own works on the subject (Sneed 2007; 2008; 2019).

23 Emerging Brazilian cultural studies scholar James McNally spent considerable detail in taking the film apart as an example of exploitive cultural piracy (2016).

24 For more information about this debate in the context of the controversies surrounding putaria, see Caetano (2015).

Another important documentary about funk in Brazil is Rafael Melin's *90 Dias com Catra* (*90 Days with Catra*, 2010). It follows one of funk carioca's most enduring and beloved MCs, Mr. Catra, through his daily life amid his multiple wives and thirty some children. The version on YouTube has over six million views, making it perhaps the most frequently viewed favela funk documentary to date.²⁵

A Batalha do Passinho (*Passinho Dance Off*) by Emílio Domingos from 2012 is another film crucial to mention in the vein of the more personalized approaches like *Inside the Mind of Favela Funk*. It's part of his Trilogia do Corpo (Trilogy of the Body) about popular culture and the everyday lives of Rio's urban poor youths. The film focuses on the dance contests of funkeiros dancing *passinho*, or "little step-style", a form of dancing a bit like a vertical variety of breakdancing. Another of Domingo's feature-length documentaries from the trilogy is *Deixa na Régua* (*Fresh Cutz*) from 2017, a film about the stylists and customers involved in the elaborately artistic haircuts at barbershops in favelas and other working-class neighborhoods of the city. His last installment, yet to be released, is called *Favela É Moda*, which follows the daily lives of models from favelas and other working-class neighborhoods of Rio.

Domingo's commitment to dialogic filmmaking closely aligning him with the dialogical spirit of Goldenberg. He sees his creations as working against the prevalence of violence in portrayals of favela life. In one interview, he stated, "Documentary is cinema, and cinema is a way of increasing visibility, allowing for dialogue between viewers and protagonists. It brings together universes that would not usually come in contact any other way" (Kalicheski 2017).²⁶ His recent free and easily available Internet TV series, the homespun *Passinho de Favela* (2018), is reminiscent of Goldenberg's style in its portrayal of the daily life dramas of funkeiro *passinho* dancers as they vie for recognition in the world of Rio's freestyle battles.

In terms of the emphasis Sergio Goldenberg places on ordinary youths and their community gatherings, the only documentary coming close is YouTuber and funkeiro Kelvy Lopes' 2017's *Zói de Gato: O Documentário* (*A Voz da Favela*). It is a biographical homage for Denner Augusto Sena da Silva, known as MC Zói de Gato (MC Cat's Eye), who died in a

25 Mr. Catra, who died in 2018 of complications resulting from gastric cancer, also made his way into Danish filmmaker Andreas Johnsen's 2004 debut, *Mr. Catra: The Faithful*.

26 Portuguese: "Documentário é cinema e cinema é uma forma de tornar temas mais visíveis, permitindo o diálogo entre espectador e personagem. Isso aproxima universos que dificilmente fariam contato por outras vias".

2007 car accident at a mere 14 years old just as favela funk was taking off in his home city of São Paulo. With its slow pace and meandering, amateur production style, the fan-made film presents a relentless procession of doorstep conversations with the *funkeiros* great and small of São Paulo's low-income communities as they pay tribute to the late, great Zóí de Gato.

Like *Funk Rio* though, the film undercuts rigid divisions between professional performers, amateurs, fans and other *funkeiros* in essential ways. In the climax of the video, hundreds of local youths fill a neighborhood park for an emotional inauguration of a graffiti-style community monument in homage of MC Zóí de Gato, unveiled before the eyes of his surprised mother, dona Kátia (Ms. Kátia). The resulting scene in which dona Kátia cries tears that are as much of pride and gratitude as of deep sorrow and sense of loss is unscripted and straightforward, yet raw and powerful. Despite its narrative weaknesses and low-end production quality, *Zóí de Gato: O Documentário* builds to perhaps the most intensely humanizing and emotional encounter in favela funk videography to date.²⁷

POSTSCRIPT

In her insightful study of early hip hop movies, film studies critic Kimberley Monteyne contrasts what she considers to be “true” hip hop films –like Charlie Ahearn’s 1983 cult classic *Wild Style*– versus exploitive “surface” ones like the 1984 *Breakin’* by Joel Silberg (Monteyne 2015, 85-123). In a like manner, Eli Carter in his work on the representation of race in contemporary Brazilian television series contrasts TV shows that challenge the myth of racial democracy in Brazil with others that reinforce it intentionally or not (2018). Without a doubt, such perspectives present applicable arguments for thinking about funk carioca and film. The takeaway in the cases they explore is that just because on the surface such socially minded films appear to be oppositional does not make them truly so.

When it comes to documentary films about favela funk, however, instead of setting out particularly rigid dichotomies about the films, observers should be cautious to avoid imbuing their analyses with too much of a spirit of what Gilroy considers the colonialist thinking of Western

27 Other favela funk documentaries not treated here include: *Funk ostentação: O filme* (Dantas 2012), *Esculacho* (Reis 2013), *Funk ostentação: O sombo* (Mariano 2014), *No Fluxo* (Barreiros 2014) and *As galerias* (Portela 2018).

modernity. It's all too common for us to feel we need to be able to make perfect sense of things and provide final sweeping pronouncements taking all angles into account and wrapping things up airtight. In the favela and the Afro-Atlantic world more generally, things are rarely so cut and dry.

From the ethnomusicology milieu of Brazilian music itself, crucial voices have clamored more and more for the sort of dialogic approaches to public intellectual life the documentary film *Funk Rio* embodies. One such voice is that of the renowned Carioca scholar and public intellectual, Samuel Araújo. His participatory-style research has been pathbreaking. On one side, he has brought together local favela residents of the Center for Studies and Solidary Actions of Maré Favela (Centro de Estudos e Ações Solidárias da Maré, CEASM) – as organic intellectuals. On the other, he has connected them with outside, formal academics of the Ethnomusicological Laboratory of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Laboratório de Etnomusicologia of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, LE-UFRJ). His longstanding collaborative effort between these two units has given him a framework through which to work towards what he hails as “[...] a radical reconfiguration of the community of knowledge producers in a veritable horizontal fashion [...]” (Araújo 2006, 290).

At that heart of his innovative approach to fieldwork, which has been increasingly community-based and community-driven, lies a core group of questions directly applicable to the subject of favela funk and film. Araújo writes:

To what extent could an academic discipline remain standing after that provocative interrogation of academic authority? As rational non-believers in the supernatural or in the supremacy of culture-specific convictions, cultivated by many of the peoples we work with, can we continue to represent Others' social practices, and if we can claim to do so, on what grounds? What to do then with the scholarship accumulated through colonialism, dominance, and exploitation? Can it really be put into a comparative or relational perspective with a truly Other interpretation by those whose voices have not yet been given real autonomy? (Araújo 2006, 290).

In crucial ways, Araújo's dialogic ethnomusicology finds analogies in the everyday speech of residents of Rio's favelas and other working-class neighborhoods. We might say that the object-centered, content-driven ideological orientation of the formal city, which they call *asfalto*, or “asphalt”, is grossly insufficient for sorting out the collective, people-centered,

community-driven notions of knowledge, power and being of the informal favela, which they call *comunidade*, or “community”.

The implications of such an antiphony-based community praxis for filmmaking, as for activism and academic endeavors, are fundamental. The question becomes not so much one of what content we represent or even merely how we express it. Neither is it about mere analysis. Instead, the biggest question is first and foremost one of our openness to undergo personal transformation and assimilation into the communities of the everyday people whose lives we seek to understand.

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