

Lisette Lagnado \*

# Hatred Among Us

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**Lisette Lagnado** é crítica de arte, curadora e escritora, atualmente uma das curadoras da 11ª edição da Bienal de Berlim. Doutora em Filosofia, de 2014 a 2017 esteve integralmente envolvida na governança da Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, seja como diretora e curadora de Ensino e Programas Públicos. Antes dessa mostra, foi curadora da 27ª Bienal de São Paulo (“Como Viver Junto”, 2006), com escopo conceitual baseado no Programa ambiental de Hélio Oiticica.

**Abstract** *The article describes and analyzes in a historical context the Experiências of Flávio de Carvalho (1899–1973) carried out since the first half of the 20th century, as well as presenting connections of those artistic actions with the contemporary cultural and political scene in Brazil, marked by religious interference. The artist is mentioned in the 11th edition of the Berlin Biennale, of which the author is one of the curators. The exhibition was structured based on the free updating of themes exposed in four “experiences” of FC. The exhibition is spread over four venues (until 11/1/2020), each with its own repertoire: the Anti-church (Kunst -Werke), the Showcase for dissident bodies (the daad), the inverted Museum (Gropius Bau) and the Living Archive (ExRotaprint). (This text was first published in Flávio de Carvalho: Experience no. 2, Performed on a Corpus Christi Procession. A Possible Theory and an Experiment, published by the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2020. Copyright: Lisette Lagnado and Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art).*

**Keywords** *Flavio de Carvalho, Experiências, Nationalism, CAM (Clube dos Artistas Modernos), 11th Berlin Biennial.*

### Ódio entre nós

**Resumo** O artigo descreve e analisa em contexto histórico as Experiências de Flávio de Carvalho (1899–1973) realizadas desde a primeira metade do século XX assim como apresenta conexões daquelas ações artísticas com a cena cultural e política contemporânea no Brasil, marcada por interferências religiosas. O artista é evocado na 11ª edição da Bienal de Berlim, da qual a autora é uma das curadoras. A mostra foi estruturada a partir da livre atualização de temas expostos em quatro “experiências” de FC. A exposição se espalha em quatro sedes (até 1/11/2020), cada uma com um repertório próprio: a Anti-igreja (Kunst-Werke), a Vitrine para corpos dissidentes (o daad), o Museu invertido (Gropius Bau) e o Arquivo vivo (ExRotaprint). (Este texto foi primeiramente publicado em Flávio de Carvalho: Experience no. 2, Performed on a Corpus Christi Procession. A Possible Theory and an Experiment, published by the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2020. Copyright: Lisette Lagnado and Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art).

**Palavras chave** Flavio de Carvalho, Experiências, Nacionalismo, CAM (Clube dos Artistas Modernos), 11ª Bienal de Berlim.

### Odio entre nosotros

**Resumen** El artículo describe y analiza en un contexto histórico las Experiencias de Flávio de Carvalho (1899–1973) llevadas a cabo desde la primera mitad del siglo XX, además de presentar conexiones entre esas acciones artísticas y la escena cultural y política contemporánea en Brasil, marcada por la interferencia religiosa. El artista es mencionado en la 11ª edición de la Bienal de Berlín, de la cual la autora es una de los curadores. La exposición se estructuró en base a la actualización de los temas expuestos en cuatro “experiencias” de FC. La exposición se distribuye en cuatro sedes (hasta el 1/11/2020), cada una con su repertorio propio: la Anti-iglesia (Kunst -Werke), la Escaparate de los cuerpos disidentes (el daad), el Museo invertido (Gropius Bau) y el Archivo Vivo (ExRotaprint). (Este texto se publica por primera vez en Flávio de Carvalho: Experience no. 2, Performed on a Corpus Christi Procession. A Possible Theory and an Experiment, published by the Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, 2020. Copyright: Lisette Lagnado and Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art).

**Palabras clave** Flavio de Carvalho, Experiências, Nacionalismo, CAM (Clube dos Artistas Modernos), 11ª Bienal de Berlin.

Considering that the book *Experiência no. 2, realizada sobre uma procissão de Corpus Christi* [Experience no. 2, Performed on a Corpus Christi Procession] was ironically dedicated to the Pope Pius XI and the then Archbishop of São Paulo upon publication in 1931, one cannot help wondering to whom would it be addressed today. An initiative by the Brazilian architect and artist Flávio de Carvalho (1899–1973), the book chronicles and analyzes a public experiment that he carried out in the streets of downtown São Paulo, where he decided to conspicuously walk against the flow of a religious procession without removing his hat. As de Carvalho moves along the street, the crowd watching the procession grows increasingly hostile, and ultimately the police have to protect him from being lynched by an angry mob.

The original publication, printed in a signed and numbered edition of 3,000 copies, was divided in various chapters and illustrated with the artist's own drawings, the whereabouts of which are currently unknown.<sup>1</sup> De Carvalho subtitled the book to add an additional layer of meaning: "A Possible Theory and an Experiment." Reproducing only the section dedicated to the account of the events as they unfolded, the actual experiment, this present edition constitutes the first translation of the Portuguese text into English and German. It is worth noting that de Carvalho describes the events in a language suggesting that the psycho-social nature of the setup presented a kind of scientific experiment, thus consciously using terms such as "reagent," "mechanism," and "results." The reproduction of a newspaper report on the episode at the front of the book functions as a piece of "evidence" underlining that the experiment really did take place. *Experiência no. 2* features all the elements of an artistic happening and has fueled several art historical readings drawing from the context and language of performance. Nevertheless, considering de Carvalho's wide-ranging study of urbanism, it may be more productive to look at his walk in close relation to certain irreverent Situationist drifts.<sup>2</sup>

The description of de Carvalho's experience during his experiment—chapter one in the original publication, "A Experiência" [The Experiment]—is reproduced here.<sup>3</sup> This was followed by a chapter of critical analysis "Analyse," in which de Carvalho outlines a powerful parallel between a religious procession and a nationalist parade—both driven by invisible leaders—and touches on topics such as "the idea of god and homeland," "political totemism," the crowd as a "living organism," and the "process of fetishism," as indicated by the headings of subchapters. Four additional chapters study the soul of worshippers and the bond between religion and the idea of nation: "O parâmetro da artúcia," [The Parameter of Astuteness] "A triologia" [The Trilogy], "O complexo de onipotência" [The Omnipotence Complex], and "Instincto grvegario" [Herd Instinct]. None of them has been included in this publication since their contents would lead too far into the debate surrounding the theoretical perspectives current at the time.

Written in the first person, the text “An Experiment” is an empirical enquiry guided by the artist’s reading of Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913) but also works by authors like James George Frazer, Francis James Gillen, and Walther Baldwin Spencer. If one reads beyond the (obviously) outdated references to psychology as a science— notions that were still new and not widespread in Brazil at the time— and a certain chauvinistic arrogance that occasionally rears its head, the document is pioneering in describing a defenseless body caught up in the destructive emotions of a fervent crowd. The text’s contemporary relevance is the historical arc it draws from the 1930s to the current rise of far-right politics; from the Catholic religiosity of de Carvalho’s era to the infiltration of Pentecostalism into many Latin American countries today. Certain complexes withstand the passing of time, as demonstrated by the Dresden city council’s recent declaration of a “Nazi emergency,” and by the larger world captured by far-right demonstrations of fanaticism. De Carvalho is almost lynched for provoking a religious crowd: “I needed to make the crowd think, establish some kind of doubt ...” The essay makes a devastating diagnosis: contradicting the core beliefs shared by a group of people triggers their fascist drives, and in the face of an angry mob any attempt at communication is doomed to failure: “I had the feeling that once incited, people join in a mass of collective hatred.” At this moment, all voices are shouting “Lynch!” The angry choir is unanimous, uniting young and old, men and women ... and priests. De Carvalho survives the call for him to be lynched through his “astuteness,” as he describes, but what turn might events have taken, if the hunted had been someone other than a well-dressed, white male?

## Four Experiências of Flávio de Carvalho

Flávio de Carvalho was one of Brazil’s major Modernist artists and intellectuals during the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, before the emergence of Concretism. He is known for producing theoretical investigations inspired by a constant critical rethinking of and experimentation with social space.<sup>4</sup> At the core of his work is the very particular sense of *experiência* that he puts into practice. It underlies a profusion of articles, interviews, and manifestos, in which the artist—acting as a kind of sociologist of culture—examines several elements of the quotidian, focusing on the conceptual figure of the despot-patriarch, whether in the form of the “father-god” or the “beloved homeland.” When analyzing the basis for a new era, he assumed the “Christian cycle” brought by colonization would not withstand industrial capitalism, which was still in an embryonic phase in the Brazil of the 1930s.

At the 4th Pan American Congress of Architects in Rio de Janeiro in 1930, de Carvalho presented his vision of *A cidade do homem nu* [The City of the Naked Man], in which he asserts that family and private property will be prohibited in the “city of the future.” His urban complex features a center for

the reanimation of exhausted desires, a research center based on scientific criteria, a teaching and orientation center, a gestation center, and a (smaller) hospital center. The center for food and religion is located at the erotic zone, occupying a prominent position as a place where the libido is freed. The arrival of modernity would thus bring liberation from the “scholastic” taboos rooted in “Old Europe” and disseminated throughout the American continent by Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

As a mixture of literary reportage and the accounts of an amateur ethnologist, de Carvalho’s writings hold a singular position within the realm of texts by artists. Indeed, de Carvalho did not (and could not!) predict the civilizing crisis of the post-colonial, post-extractive city. De Carvalho’s “new ego” carries the revolutionary germ of anti-colonialism, while also fetishizing technology—a paradigm underlying avant-garde (but also fascist) discourses. Hence this case study is extremely pertinent to understanding certain contradictions of the present political climate, such as the popular support for attacks on democracy.

The genealogy of de Carvalho’s *Experiências* is not easy to trace. There is no work that the artist ever formally designated as *Experiência no. 1*, which can best be described in terms of rumor. Various sources offer possible explanations as to why he publicly started with *Experiência no. 2*, skipping over the first. De Carvalho’s biographer, J. Toledo, considers the first to be a simulated attempt at drowning himself which the artist undertook in order to test the reaction of a group of acquaintances. *Experiência no. 1* could also have been the architecture project he submitted in 1927, using the pseudonym “Eficácia” [Efficacy], for the Government Palace of São Paulo; or the project entered in the Christopher Columbus Memorial Lighthouse Competition of 1928. Both were rejected but announced with wide press coverage.<sup>6</sup> This eccentric self-proclaimed “ex-engineer” also considered himself an inventor, and he managed to assure that each of his interventions was extensively documented, even leaking snippets of information to the press in a manner that today would be considered fake news. His strategic use of the press to document his work is an aspect of all his *Experiências*. However, in terms of *Experiência no. 1* it does not matter which rumor is the most truthful. Fact is: rumors matter in art and political history.

After *Experiência no. 2*, de Carvalho expanded his interest in mass phenomena to include studies of the psychology of entertainment.<sup>7</sup> In 1932, together with fellow artists, he founded the Clube dos Artistas Modernos [Club of Modern Artists]. The CAM became an important hub for diverse activities, equipped with a library and a bar, and offered an intense cultural agenda for a provincial São Paulo at the time of its industrial transformation. In this lively space, Trotskyist and art critic Mário Pedrosa introduced the works of German artist Käthe Kollwitz in an exhibition. A conference by Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros, Russian posters, and proletarian artworks were presented in Brazil for the first time at CAM. The same year, 1933, de Carvalho worked with the doctor Osório César to organize a month dedicated to exhibiting and discussing the artistic production of children and mental health patients. In this context, it is worth highlighting that de Carvalho was reading Sigmund Freud’s

essays on mass psychology, which had not been translated to Portuguese at the time. Despite its many activities, the lifespan of this space for experimentation was abruptly cut short in 1934, when the police forbade the performance of de Carvalho's play *O Bailado do Deus Morto* [The Dance of the Dead God] on grounds of profanity. The piece was part of de Carvalho's *Teatro da Experiência* [Theater of Experience], a new kind of theater that involved a combined experimental use of lights, costumes, vocals, and choreographies performed by non-actors.

*Experiência no. 3* from 1956 marks a return to de Carvalho's investigation on human flows in urban spaces through the launch of his *New Look*, a masculine outfit designed for the "New Man" of the tropics. The artist's concept for a contemporary dress code was informed by his extensive research into dress cultures of diverse periods and geographies. To present his "look," the architect took to the streets in a prêt-à-porter protest against the inadequacy of European dress for inhabitants of tropical cities. The action was preceded by a series of articles published in *Diário de São Paulo* focusing on the transformations of clothing through different epochs. *Experiência no. 3* makes a fundamental link between the garments we wear and how our bodies inhabit and transform the environment. No longer a placid agrarian society, São Paulo was undergoing the changes brought by the advent of wild capitalism, and a new capital (Brasília) had been announced. Whereas in the previous *Experiência* the artist had been forced to flee the mob in order to survive, in the latter action de Carvalho assumes the role of the leader marching at the front of a parade.

*Experiência no. 4* (1958) is inspired by the idea of finding the supposedly lost descendants of Umbelinda Valério, a (perhaps fictional) white woman abducted by an indigenous tribe. This narrative becomes the plot for a film to be shot in the rainforest of the Upper Amazon. A highly problematic expedition combining de Carvalho's appetite for art and ethnology was the basis for *Experiência no. 4*. Every detail (vaccines, medicine, food) was anticipated, and more than 300 entries were assembled in a Xirianã dictionary to help the crew communicate with the shaman. The artist—who rejected perspectives that Claude Lévi-Strauss had enshrined in the book *Tristes Tropiques* (1955)—planned a series of articles on the everyday life of indigenous people. To the press, he also announced that he was carrying hundreds of objects to be exchanged with the indigenous population, in order to build a collection for a potential Ethnological Museum.<sup>8</sup> Promoted by de Carvalho in the press, the actual expedition was a complete failure, in which the artist came much closer to losing his life than in *Experiência no. 2*. In the rainforest he was swallowed by the green expanse, did not understand the indigenous rituals, and knew that snakebite could kill him. He did indeed face real danger at the Rio Negro during an argument with the guide.<sup>9</sup> Before the backdrop of contemporary debates surrounding the restitution of cultural heritage, this dreadful expedition assumes allegorical proportions in relation to the ethics behind Western ethnographic collections.

Throughout his various public experiments de Carvalho addressed marches, processions, and parades from artistic, religious, psychoanalytical, and political perspectives. The psychological parallels drawn in *Experiência no. 2* between religious processions and nationalist parades are linked to the

constant return in his work to the figure of the father and what could today be understood as the necropolitical drive of the patriarch. Using methods later adopted by conceptual artists (such as the use of mass media for self-promotion), de Carvalho remains an emblematic figure within Latin American utopianism, its projects and its failures.<sup>10</sup> And although history is traditionally narrated through successful events, it is the investigation of some of his fiascoes that uncovers relevant epistemological shifts.

## People, Crowd, Mass, Horde, Herd ...

It is Sunday, the day of Corpus Christi, 1931. Flávio de Carvalho takes to the streets in downtown São Paulo and inserts himself into a religious procession, walking against the current of Christian worshippers. Strategically keeping to the edge of the procession allows him to observe and establish direct eye contact with participants in the parade on the one side and with the public watching it on the other. The event brings together a heterogeneous mass—of “old, resigned Black men,” “old women of both colors,” “brotherhoods of Colored men.” But the unusual presence of this white, tall man, wearing a green hat and moving against the flow, quickly incites hostile reactions from the crowd. Through his actions and words de Carvalho decides to amplify the indignation of the crowd, which is initially diffuse and contained. Confronting the tumult caused by his irreverent stance, he simultaneously adopts an attitude of arrogance, starting to swiftly flirt and express superiority towards the procession’s female contingent. He describes the “daughters of Mary” with typical alpha male expressions: noting that some are “quite pretty,” others “ugly” and “fat women,” and observing to what extent they became “submissive” in response to his flirting with them.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, he admits his own “arrogance,” describing in confessional detail how he relished these interactions and the “heroic” stance he enjoyed in the eyes of the women—all while claiming to be in mortal danger. Conveying a certain humor, this passage ultimately highlights his utter disregard for the supposed sanctity of the procession.

The sacrifice of the father-god, a thesis formulated in Sigmund Freud’s 1915 text *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, traverses de Carvalho’s “Analyse,” the second chapter of his account about the procession experience. Freud developed the myth of primordial parricide to pinpoint the origins of the emotional impulse to annihilate an identified “enemy.” The concepts of “Christ” and “homeland” take on the function of patriarchal entities, both products of narcissistic projections forging an image of an “invisible leader.” In contrast to the “submission” of the worshippers and other “effeminate” subjects, the desire for murder displays itself as a “virile revolt.” De Carvalho reasons, preaches, and protests: “I’m alone ... I’m one against a thousand ...- I’m just one.” Vainly.

The description of the experiment unfolds in two movements: it

reveals how a profane person can succeed in throwing the stance of the pious off balance, reaching its climax with cries for the artist to be lynched; and how fear disintegrates a living organism facing the threat of death. The artist's perception, illustrated step by step, brings together details ranging from clothing to architecture. It analyzes the formation of one mass of humans inside another, resorting to analogies with herds of animals. The crowd possesses rhythm, plasticity, and volume. De Carvalho's text is valuable as a testimony from an age that overlaps with unspeakable things unfolding in Europe—the barbarity coming from the masses bewitched by fascism and Nazism. Elias Canetti would dedicate a monumental book to this issue in 1960—*Crowds and Power*—which begins with a surprising premise: the panic surrounding physical contact with and contamination by the unknown Other. Viewed in this context, Carvalho acts as a precursor to the twentieth-century discussion surrounding the dissolution of the individual in the crowd and the assimilation of the crowd in the individual, and more critically, addressing the figures of the survivor, the schizophrenic with delusions of persecution.<sup>12</sup> His remarks on an invisible leader carry even more interesting connotations in the digital age.

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Since 1997 the city of São Paulo has been hosting the LGBTQI+ Pride Parade in June, the same month as the Corpus Christi celebration. One million people take to the streets.<sup>13</sup> Such scale would have been unthinkable to de Carvalho. Today, the figures of “Christ” and “homeland” that he analyzed have merged in an accelerated manner, together attracting big crowds who reject the separation of religion and the state, as evidenced in the March for Jesus, an annual international event organized in Brazil by the Igreja Renascer em Cristo [Reborn in Christ Church]. The threat to the secularity of the state posed by the influence of Evangelical churches is a phenomenon that follows in the footsteps of the neoliberal motto of individualism and entrepreneurship.

Reading de Carvalho's text written in 1931, one cannot help but draw parallels with other warning signs of the reemergence of the totalitarianism that the world had supposedly rooted out after World War II. “History repeats itself ... first as tragedy, then as farce,” wrote Karl Marx in his *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* in 1852. Marx's quote comes back to us again to sound the alarm in the face of ongoing genocides. Achille Mbembe's scrutiny of “enmity” emphasizes the “fantasy of extermination” as a compelling desire: for an enemy, for apartheid, for separation and enclosure.<sup>14</sup> The historical figures of the *Nègre* and the *Jude* must include any type of human being deprived of rights, any dissident, immigrant, or refugee escaping totalitarian regimes.

While in 1931 Flávio de Carvalho wryly dedicated his *Experiência* no. 2 to the pope and archbishop, an appropriate dedication today could be to the Brazilian cultural official, who in January 2020 deliberately and



- 1 The original book was designated a second edition by the artist, who wanted to give the impression that the first edition had sold out.
- 2 In 2010, I organized an exhibition that explored the hypothesis of Flávio de Carvalho as a Situationist *avant la lettre*. See: *Drifts and Derivations. Experiences, journeys, and morphologies* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2010).
- 3 It should be stressed that the term *experiência* can either be translated as "experience" or "experiment" and entails both connotations.
- 4 Based on a similar restlessness, the exp. 1 exhibition of the 11th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art was titled *The Bones of the World*, after the travelogue *Os ossos do mundo* written by the artist during his time in Europe from 1934 to 1935. Part of the exhibition drew potential analogies between Flávio de Carvalho's chronicles of his travels to Europe and the current rise in fascist policies around the world. The curators are certainly aware of the problems inherent to theses developed by a white male educated in civil engineering at Durham University. Nonetheless, the actions of defiance and nonconformity in which he engaged illuminate productive contradictions.
- 5 To follow Flávio de Carvalho's ideas, it is important to understand the role of poet Oswald de Andrade's concept of "cultural anthropophagy" from 1928 in the development of Brazilian Modernism. However, Modernism as a vanguardist movement has become controversial due to its colonial scaffolding and appropriation of indigenous symbols. For more information, see the story of Makunaimã by Jaider Esbell: <https://jaideresbell.com.br/site/2019/09/13/makunaima-omito-atraves-do-tempo> (last accessed January 18, 2020).
- 6 Flávio de Carvalho's project was reproduced in: Albert Kelsey, *Programas y Reglas de la segunda etapa del concurso para la selección del arquitecto que construirá el Faro Monumental que las naciones del mundo erigirán en la República Dominicana a la Memoria de Cristóbal Colón* junto con el informe del jurado internacional, los diseños premiados y otros muchos también sometidos a la primera etapa, Unión Panamericana (New York, 1931).
- 7 Flávio de Carvalho's interest in entertainment relates to Siegfried Kraauer's studies on popular culture in the Weimar Republic of Germany.
- 8 See chapter 20 of J. Toledo, *Flávio de Carvalho: o comedor de emoções* (São Paulo: Brasiliense/Campina: Editora da Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 1994).
- 9 According to an unpublished statement by Raymond Frajmund, the photographer who was with de Carvalho on the expedition to the Amazon, as communicated to the author in November 2009 in São Paulo.
- 10 Flávio de Carvalho's proposal from 1957 for an International University of Music, which was to be built in the mountains of São Paulo, figures as an authentic example of both utopian and failed initiatives. The original blueprints are considered lost.
- 11 According to artist and researcher Marcelo Moreschi, Flávio de Carvalho had an Argentinean edition of *Sex and Character* (1903) by Otto Weininger in his library. I am thankful for the valuable exchange with Moreschi while preparing this essay.
- 12 In his book *Crowds and Power* (1960), Elias Canetti's interpretation of the famous clinical case of the German judge Daniel Paul Schreber highlights the link between National Socialism and the development of madness.
- 13 Protesting gender violence, the *Marcha das Vadias* is a reframing of the Slut Walk, a gathering of mothers, daughters, grandmothers, prostitutes, saints, sluts ... See: <https://marchadasvadiasdf.wordpress.com/manifesto-porquemarchamos> (last accessed January 20, 2020).
- 14 Achille Mbembe, "The Society of Enmity," in *Necropolitics* (Theory in Forms) (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

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