BRAZILIAN CARNIVAL: EXPRESSION OF POPULAR CULTURE ADAPTING TO THE EFFECTS OF CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGIES

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ABSTRACT

The present text presents some questions and examples that bring to light a reflection on strategies that the Brazilian Carnival has used as a way of survival and adaptation of popular culture to the effects of contemporary technologies, or in the use of these in the specific environment of the samba schools' parade in the Rio de Janeiro's Carnival, or in the configuration of new ways of carnivalesque existence, like the mockup' samba schools.

Keywords: Brazilian Carnival. Samba Schools. Technology. Contemporaneity.

Initial Considerations

The carnival that Brazil is doing today – and which I believe should not be understood as "brazilian carnival", in the singular, but as "brazilian carnivals", because of the immense stylistic, aesthetic and organizational diversity with which it presents itself in our country – does not present a unanimous version in the very history of its emergence and nor on its denomination.

From an anthropological perspective, Da Matta (1997) explains that carnival is close to those social institutions that allow us to feel our own continuity as a group. According to him:

> In carnival, a whole set of social and historical factors is combined and recombined to realize what we perceive as the old or modern carnival, the interior cities and the capital, the North or the South, the rich and the poor. But it can not be forgotten that this is so because all these situations are powerfully dominated by the idea that here we have a special moment: out of time and space, marked by inverted actions; characters, gestures and costumes. (DA MATTA, 1997, p.29)

Góes (2010) considers that the carnival is linked in a very forceful way to Brazil and to its people and that it would be possible to affirm that the celebration constitutes one of our most striking identity traits. The author also testifies that the brazilian carnival reveals multiple forms of expression and decisively strengthens our cultural diversity.

It is extremely difficult to accurately determine the influences and trends that contributed and still contribute to the aesthetic composition and configuration of the contemporary carnival, since today the fast process of communication, the internet and the many possibilities of interaction between peoples of the planet are guiding a hybrid culture that contaminates and is contaminated permanently through innumerable crossings and this has repercussion in the carnival as in other modes of cultural expression of brazilian society.

One of the most affected elements in this relation between person and technology – human being and technique in the context of contemporary popular culture – is the body, which is the main means of expression of popular arts. Body language is a central element of folk dance, folk music, folk crafts, folk rituals, folk theater and much more.

According to Sibilia (2015, p.14),

> In today's 'information society', this fusion between man and technique has deepened and is therefore becoming more crucial and problematic. Certain areas of knowledge are key components of this complexification, such as teleinformatics and the new life sciences. These disciplines, which in principle seem

so different from each other, have a common ground and ambition: they are united in the horizon of universal digitization that illuminates our age and marks its compasses. Precisely in this context, an unusual suspicion arises: the human body, in its old biological configuration, would be becoming 'obsolete'.

It is noteworthy that, regarding to the aesthetic configuration that composes the different carnival moments, there are a number of extremely peculiar elements that are guiding the characteristics pertinent to the way of being and making carnival in each part of Brazil. Thus, although there may be recurrent characteristics associated with carnival throughout the country, the festivity assumes its own airs according to the place in which it takes place, adopting aspects pertinent to the local culture, which are incorporated into the national carnival demarcating specificities fundamentally associated to the subjects that live in that environment and contribute to the process of denomination and identification of the carnival in this or that place of the country.

We can reflect on the peculiar position of the brazilian carnivals, which have become the most popular secular festivity in the world, but also a rich and interwoven mosaic of artistic prowess, a multitude of events, organizations, sources and places of work, social relations, fertile ground for technological experiments and media essays, cradle of multiple cultures. In this sense, it is very important to think about the influence of different aspects of cyberculture in popular culture, especially in the brazilian carnival, for example in the case of social media such as YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, Twitter and other digital platforms, as well as creating new possibilities of carnival, thought and produced especially to these vehicles.

The Contemporaneity in/of the Carnival Parade

The technological resources have always been a very present brand in the scope of street carnival parades, especially in Rio de Janeiro, which is the leading stage of the brazilian carnival. However, particularly in the last decade, different technological innovations have been presented quite forcefully in this scenario, bringing cutting-edge technologies to the avenue and, with this, directly interfering in the aesthetic configuration of the carnival street parade.

This task in this course imposes the need to articulate three concepts that are very important for the contemporary scenario: Art, Science and Technology. About this subject, Domingues brings:

> The diffuse frontiers of artistic and scientific researches with technologies make appear in the contemporary context a territory interspersed with complex genealogical layers: the sensitivity of art, the objectivity of science, the complexity of technologies. The creativity of artists and scientists today constitutes a great community that, together with scientific societies, contemporary institutions

and research centers, is engaged in the search of exploring the characteristics of our technologized daily life. Thus, thinking about the relation between art and life from the perspective of science, technological development and creation, with surprising and engaging aspects sensitive to the creativity of artists and scientists of the 21st century, is one of the most important challenges of the beginning of the millennium. (2003, p.11)

In this sense, it is understood that the massive presence of cutting-edge contemporary technologies in the carnival ends up directly interfering in the creative process of the carnival artists and carnival commissions with a view to the framing and achievement of the parade of samba schools. Technology ceases to be just a support for the realization but, in a forceful way, starts to incorporate itself in the designing and, sometimes, to be the trigger device of the process itself, which contributes to the consolidation of the spectacular condition that the *carioca* carnival has assumed in the last decades.

This intertwining between art and science, art and technology, ended up re-signifying the carnival aesthetics of Rio de Janeiro's Carnival and, consequently, other carnivals throughout Brazil, generating different opinions and impressions about the transformations that were taking place. Luz (2013, p 129) explains:

The carnival of the samba schools is usually called the Street Opera in the carnival's universe. This expression is shared by several professionals of the associations and by several scholars of the subject. The mixture of vocabulary and erudite-academical knowledge with the spontaneity and intuition of the *samba* artists from *carioca*[1] shanty towns began with the entrance of professionals from the School of Fine Arts of Rio de Janeiro in the carnival in the 1960s. Since then the carnival has turned in an "walking opera-balé" as Valença and Valença (1981) conceptualize, and it has turned from a mere street-play to an artistic language. This movement towards the constitution of an artistic language has found throughout the history of the carnival, and still finds, a lot of resistance from the tourists linked to the tradition and what they call "essence of the carnival". The plastic development that the parades gained with the entrance of artists trained in the School of Fine Arts was a watershed in the artistic trajectory of the carnival' samba schools which, however, were not allowed to stop in there.

Paulo Barros, one of the most outstanding carnivalists of the new generation of the Special Group of Samba Schools of Rio de Janeiro, can be brought as one of the best examples of this process of adaptation and use of contemporary technologies in the carnival street parade. Currently as carnivalist at the Unidos do Viradouro

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1   Carioca = from Rio de Janeiro (city).

Samba School (a group that returns to the elite of carioca carnival in 2019), Barros has presented in the parades a series of technological innovations that corroborate the conceptual and aesthetic signature that is its trademark.

It can be said that one of the inaugural and most symbolic moments provided by Barros in the Sambódromo da Sapucaí[2] was in the vice-championship of the Unidos da Tijuca Samba School in 2004, with the plot-theme "Samba Enredo 2004 – The Dream of Creation and Creation of the Dream: the Art of Science in the Time of the Impossible". It is in this parade that Paulo Barros presents a new way of presentation and visual for the floats, from the perspective of "human allegory".

Subtitles 1 and 2: Paulo Barros (left) conceived the DNA Float (right) for Unidos da Tijuca in 2004[3]

Luz (2013) also mentions the artist in the ambit of what the author calls "new revolution" through which the carnival passes today:

> In the twenty-first century there was a new revolution [in the Carnival of Rio de Janeiro], with more and more theatrical and conceptually elaborated parades, mainly based on the work of the carnival artist Paulo Barros, who has exerted a strong influence in many schools. With this, this language was once again brought to new expressive and aesthetics ways. (LUZ, 2013, page 129)

Since then, Barros has also starred in other important moments in the Carnival of the Special Group of Rio de Janeiro in which the new technologies played a decisive role in the aesthetic signature of the parades. Following are two examples of these technological innovations he brought to the carnival parade:

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2   Sambódromo da Sapucaí = samba stage.

3   The picture sourses in this article are found at the end of the text.

Subtitles 3 and 4: In the left-hand image, a Ski Slope is mounted on a Parade Float in the parade of Unidos do Viradouro in 2007. On the right, Poseidon floated with a flyboard and jets of water on the Front Committee of Portela, in 2016.

Subtitle 5: Skirt of the Porta-Bandeira shows an artificial fire effect with 20 thousand LED lamps in the parade of Unidos de Vila Isabel, signed by Paulo Barros in 2018

In addition to Paulo Barros, other carnival artists and samba schools have also adhered to different contemporary technologies and used such resources in their processes of framing and achievement of carnival parades. Each year, it is possible to perceive a progressive and forceful presence of the technology as an already constituent element and inherent in the poetry of the parades that is projected by each Samba School, as we illustrate next:

Subtitles 6 and 7: With the carnival artist Alexandre Louzada, the Mocidade Independente de Padre Miguel Samba School brings Alladin flying down the avenue by means of an Aeromodel, in 2017 (left). In Unidos da Tijuca, in 2015, the Carnival Committee composed by Mauro Quintaes, Annik Salmon, Marcus Paulo, Carlos Carvalho and Hélcio Paim lavished technology with Enlightened Fantasy Wings (right).

It must be also considered that an important factor in this process of high tech technologization of the Samba Schools is the budget. As a rule, investment in state-of-the-art and advanced technologies, or even the development of new technologies specific to or adapted to the context of carnival, is a high cost for carnival schools, and not all of them have enough money to investments of this nature.

It is important to note that these examples refer to the elite of brazilian carnival, which is the Carnival of the Samba Schools of the Special Group of Rio de Janeiro and does not represent the reality of all carnival settings in the country, nor of Rio de Janeiro's carnival. However, even considering what this carnival represents and its influence on the different carnival's contexts of street parades in Brazil, it is possible to perceive that the presence of new technologies that inhabit the daily life of the society as a whole also affect the most different carnival settings, even as in different proportions and, logically, through investments and budgets suited to each reality.

But it is not only the use through equipment and materials that makes the technology to be present in the carnival parades of the Samba Schools of Rio de Janeiro. The theme of "technology" is also a constant in the entanglements of carnival groups, increasingly being problematized and stimulating reflection on the presence of technological advances in our lives and their impact on nature and the environment.

In 2018, Unidos de Vila Isabel presented the plot-theme "Run that the future comes there", a subject of extreme relevance that pointed to the different aspects of the relationship between technology and environment, in which the future mentioned there is nothing more than a way of understanding the present time, as highlighted by Ambiente Brasil (2018):

> The Vila Isabel alert will be made by presenting the trajectories of technological discoveries and inventions by man and their impacts on the environment: the future of the human species depends on environmental conservation. The his-

> tory of technology developed by the human being is sung in discoveries such as the mills, the great navigations, the media and the sciences, in general. As we know, the technological advances that we have achieved so far have won many victories, the eradication of various diseases, remote communication among so many other wonders. However, such wonders have a huge cost that Nature is paying. Therefore, we must take the reins of this scientific advance, to preserve our lives. (AMBIENTE BRASIL website, 2018)

As the lyrics of the samba's plot-theme of this School brought: "Today to think of science, is to be aware of what is to come... So what to give up? Run that the future comes there." Thus, it can be said that, little by little, the technological language is being incorporated into the folk language and amalgamating the contemporary culture with the popular culture, in a movement almost totally harmonic.

Network technologies: the Carnival of/in the media

Thinking about this process of adapting popular culture to the multiple and diverse effects of contemporary technologies means paying attention to the growing and broader presence of the media, social networks and mobile devices in our daily lives. And this is no different in the case of carnival culture.

There is a long time in the past when the only way to watch the broadcast of the Samba Schools parade of *Carioca's* Carnival was to watch on television, live and no rerun, exclusively on the day and time established by the transmitter responsible in the country to transmit it in the television.

At present, there are several online channels (on YouTube, Vimeo and other platforms) where the live shows are broadcast, with the right to before, during and after commentators, specialists or not about carnival, these broadcasts have different investments, resources and technical qualities. In addition, the live video, stream, Facebook Live, Twitter or Instagram Live features are also other live broadcast and broadcast strategies, as well as web radios, where anyone can generate content and display the parades and any other moment of the carnival, live, for free.

Both the aforementioned possibilities, as well as numerous others that this work would not give account of citing or enumerate, point to new paradigms of diffusion and communication of the images and contents produced by the Carnival, where the issuer no longer has the illusion of control the information that is produced, because it does not make any sense. Everything is open, naked, public, unrestricted, democratized and potent of infinite crossings and (re)productions of meaning affected by the condition of virtuality, simultaneity and interactivity.

According to Couchot, Tramus & Bret (2003), we live in a moment when:

> Interactivity has reached a stage of complexity and autonomy. In this sense, it follows the evolution of cybernetics. While the "first cybernetics" wondered more

about the notions of control and communication (in the animal and the machine) and information, the second cybernetics questions preferentially about the notions of self-organization, emerging structures, networks, adaptation and evolution. In an analogous way, while the first interactivity was interested in the interactions between the computer and the man, in a stimulus-response or action-reaction model, the latter is more interested in action as guided by perception, corporeality and sensory-motor processes , by autonomy (or by "autopoïèse"). [...] The dialogue between man and machine becomes more in tune. (2003, 32)

These scenarios also mean that the Samba Schools and other agents linked to the carnival management and diffusion environment are interested and attentive to the virtual environment in a dedicated way, creating channels on various platforms and social networks to interact with their audiences, produce new content, among other multiple possibilities of collaboration and co-participation.

It is practically unthinkable to conceive, nowadays, a Samba School, especially those of greater representativeness, that does not have a good planning and forceful performance in the social networks and multimedia platforms. Such a condition becomes a prerequisite, also, to have a good financial return and an acceptable spectrum of investments of companies, that look for in this visibility the counterpart of return to the money invested in the carnival.

The carnival entities themselves began to transmit the important events and moments of their routines throughout the year, such as the coronation of queens, theme parties, plot-theme presentations and samba's plot-theme contests, among others. This strategy "opens", in a way, the interior of the samba school to the communities (real and virtual) and allows a knowledge and familiarity with the daily life of the carnival, as well as bringing people who live far and/or has no conditions to be present in these moments of the day-to-day of the association.

The popularity in the networks and also a broad performance in terms of communication and dissemination during the year are also contributing factors to the increase in the number of school supporters and even the fans who attend in person at the parade days at the *sambódromo* in the carnival period, which are an important part of the energy and performance of these entities.

The web is also configured in a space of multiple possibilities of the carnival's existence, in addition to traditional practices. Multimedia platforms become catwalks, samba courts, *sambódromos*... in short, spaces for the creation of new carnival poetics, which, even inspired by the traditional forms of folkloric carnival making, propose new paradigms of aesthetic existence for the contemporary carnival, adapting itself to the new times.

An example of this new concept of carnival created in and from the contemporary technological context, crossed through it and absolutely influenced by itself, are the Mockup's Samba Schools.

The Mockup's Carnival is a relatively recent carnival movement that has gained a lot of strength and projection in the last decade, and has been conquering new fans every year, through the creation of parades of samba schools framed and achieved specifically for the virtual environment. One of the important groups of organization and management of this format is the UESM – Union of Mockup' Samba Schools, founded in 2013.

The UESM is an organized entity, which has its own web site and regulation, and which coordinates and manages the criteria, evaluation and formative process of its carnival, and especially the parades of the Mockup' Samba Schools, both of the Special Group and the Access Groups.

In accordance with the Regulations of the entity:

> The UESM exists to allow space for the creation and dissemination of the work of artists (professionals or amateurs) of the carnival, these being active in the carnival real or not, such as carnival artists, directors, interpreters, composers, presidents, choreographers and other carnival characters, with the intention that through their parades they can at the same time to play of carnival making and show their production to the public. For this reason, this production must be original, unique and authorial. Everyone is encouraged to create their own parades or to re-read or re-write scenarios and parades, however, giving them an unprecedented format. [...] "Re-reading" or "re-editing" of a plot-theme is understood as the creation of a new narrative based on a plot-theme already executed, without, however, replicating the spectacle in its forms and technical organization parade (floor plan, script, synopses, etc.). [...] Although it is a carnival parade in a mockup, the miniaturization of real parades is not accepted, as such by copying the production of costumes, props or allegories, or any other parade elements that characterize reproduction on a smaller scale of elements already used in other parades. [...] The repetition of forms, even on a smaller scale, of elements presented from original (real) parades or other virtual leagues or mockups in which the school was inspired to re-read the carnival is vetoed.

By watching a video of the Mockup' Samba parade, it is possible to perceive the richness of details and respect for the creative concepts of the carnival that is presented/realized in the "real" avenue, in the *Sambódromo*. Even using new media, a new broadcasting feature and some aspects of adaptation to the traditional format, there is no denying that they are Samba Schools that were conceived, idealized and designed for a real-virtual parade.

The norms established as parameters by the Union of Mockup' Samba Schools make clear the purpose, where the participating associations must compose a "presentation built from the use of models and miniature dolls that simulates, adapts and recreates the model of the Samba Schools' parade of the real carnival". (UESM WEB SITE, 2018)

Subtitles 8 and 9: Virtual flags of the Mockup' Samba Schools that were champions in 2018 – On the left, G.R.E.S. Arco Íris, which won the Access Group; and, to the right, G.R.E.S.M. Unidos do Tijucano, champion of the Special Group, both by UESM

Subtitle 10: In 2017, the Mockup' Samba School Império de Ouro Branco was champion of the Special Group with the plot-theme "From the sands of the desert an ancient culture: Egypt"

As a curiosity of the carnival work of the Mockup' Samba Schools, it is possible to emphasize that a parade of models may cost from R$ 50 to R$ 1,000, without sponsored plot-theme, and the evaluation items are: Front Commission, Harmony, Customs, Allegories and Props, Plot-theme, *Mestre-Sala* (literally, "he the Master of the Room") and P*orta-Bandeira* ("she who carries the flag) and Evolution, with grades ranging from 8.0 to 10.

Regarding the techniques used to perform the virtual parade, the specialized Carnival site "SECTOR 1" explains:

> In the case of commission and couple, the schools make choreographies with the dolls, animated with the stop-motion technique. For *mestre-sala* and *porta-bandeira*, it is repeated presentations of famous couples of real schools. (...) In front of the drumming wind (*bateria*), there is also a queen of drums, as in the actual parades. And they are doll versions of real components (...). In Evolution, the similarities with the judgment of the real schools are similar: it turns out that

the wings are not very spaced, for example. But jurors must see if there is im-balance in the time used to display wings and cars. If a school shows the wings for a long time and passes quickly by the *baianas* wings, the judge can "canetar" (take points off). The editor's work, in this case, resembles that of a director of harmony. (SECTOR 1 WEB SITE, 2017)

It is believed that, increasingly, the brazilian carnival is adapting itself to the fast and diversified context of contemporary, using technological resources to act directly in its creative context of production of the parades, as well as producing new ways of carnival-folkloric making, as in the case of the Mockup's Samba Schools. It is also important to highlight the growing insertion in the carnival themes of the debate about the presence of technology in our lives, problematizing and drawing attention to what we are living and also what is to come, from the shortest to the furthest future.

Taking as reference this type of popular art in electronic format, which is the Mockup's Carnival, it can be said that it is already a reality that is configured as a possibility of updating and adaptation of the folk culture to the contemporary context of cyberculture. In the words of Mariátegui (2003):

> Electronic art represents an opportunity for artists and scientists to develop new modes of interactivity, finding new languages in interactive forms. Interactivity will reach its full potential when the computer can cultivate relationships with each viewer independently, and the "inter" part of interactivity recognizes the viewer's participation. (MARIÁTEGUI, 2003, p. 162)

The presence of technologies in our society is a path without a return. Although different technological artifacts have been used by man since the earliest times (such as the wheel, for example), it is in the contemporary of the scientific and technological revolutions that the most sudden and frightening changes have unfolded and interfered decisively in everything has to do with our daily lives.

I believe that folk culture and technological culture are not self-excluding and that we will be able to find (as we are already finding) alternatives for mutual co-survival, in which the new is inspired by the traditional and the traditional uses the new to produce a new hybrid generation, capable of overcoming challenges that are yet to come.

Final Considerations

Carnival is an expression of popular culture in Brazil that was created and transformed over many decades, always being linked to the context and the respective technologies, thus expressing its strong relation with the chronology, the time and the calendar. It is possible to think that this characteristic is a type of strategy to survive and to adapt constantly.

Through carnival, the brazilian people invert, reverse and subvert the temporal and controlled daily order throughout the year, reserving the right to create a new way of life in the carnival period, which today is only possible to be thought/understood as absolutely influenced by the technological context of contemporaneity.

Technology is present as a way of updating the carnival folk manifestation, as real-virtual immersion in the contemporary scenario of cyberculture and also in the updating and aesthetic and conceptual (re)configuration of the manifestation, with a view to maintaining the attractive character of spectacle that samba schools took over. This duality between the maintenance of tradition and the assumption of new ways of existing manifestations nowadays, however, generates an endless reflection, and without any winner.

Luz (2013), regarding the clash between traditional and contemporary, recalls:

> Since the creation of the samba schools in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1930s from ranches and cords, there were those who went a step further, reinventing a convention, as well as some who cried out, insulted against this step, defending the convention. The following year, however, many would take the same step, making the invention of the previous year a new convention. And so the carnival was dialogically self-constructed, allowing itself to be an open work that is allowed to reinvent itself, returning to its past to seek new references for the future. (LUZ, 2013, p.130)

The transformations of folkloric manifestations are inevitable, over time. The places are no longer the same, the climates and temperatures are no longer the same, the clothes, products, materials, equipment, technologies, concepts, people are also not the same. Culture is dynamic and, on account of this, it is no longer the same, making the folklore being not the same.

Keeping an essentialist and untouchably romantic view of these issues is almost an attitude of incongruity with what we witness on a daily basis. Rather, we must respect folk traditions and all that they represent as legacy, but we can not close our eyes to the new ways of being, doing and existing that we are living in, in which the real and the virtual have increasingly tenuous and indefinable frontiers. Mariátegui (2003), in this sense, warns:

> The success of science today is not only based on these technological results but also on a careful and balanced combination of inventiveness and control. It is fundamental that the relation between the new media and the old media develop itself as a coevolution, but under a new perspective in which nature and machine unite forming one thing. Somehow this will mean that no important difference between real and virtual experiences will be found. (MARIÁTEGUI, 2003, p.163)

We must be prepared or, more than that, open to the new possibilities of the carnival existence (and all sorts of manifestations of popular and folk cultures) in contemporary times. New times call for new attitudes. However, one certainty we defend here: regardless of form and mode, carnival will not cease to exist for a long time, either through a "real" samba school, or through a mockup' samba school, or even some other mode of making carnival that present itself and finding strategies of survival in this technological scene.

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Picture Sourses

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2 – Picture of the DNA Float:
https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/carnaval/2014/os-carnavais-de-paulo-barros-no-grupo-especial-11296475
3 – Picture of Ski Trail:
http://www.csteam.com.br/noticias/not030.html

4 – Picture of Poseidon floated with a flyboard:
http://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/carnaval/2016/noticia/2016/02/emocao-indescritivel-diz-destaque-do-abre-alas-da-portela.html

5 – Picture of Mestre-Sala ("he the Master of the Room") and Porta-Bandeira ("she who carries the flag):

https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/carnaval/2018/noticia/paulo-barros-usa-dois-quilometros-de-led-no-abre-alas-da-vila-isabel.ghtml

6 – Picture of Alladin flying:
https://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/carnaval/2017/noticia/comissao-de-frente-da-mocidade-tem-aladin-real-e-aeromodelo-que-voa-sobre-sapucai.ghtml

7 – Picture of Illuminated Wings:
https://www.3minovacao.com.br/blog/o-carnaval-na-era-da-inovacao

8 and 9 – Pictures of the Virtual Flags:
http://www.uesm.com.br/carnaval-2019/

10 – Picture of the Mockup:
https://setor1.band.uol.com.br/mundo-de-gulliver-carnavalesco-conheca-as-escolas-de-samba-de-maquete/