the nervous tourist
one american's adventures in salvador, bahia, brazil

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INTRODUCTION

I had to get out. I felt like I had a mental rash or something. My surroundings felt less than real, my life felt short of satisfying. I had spent most of my life in cold northern cities after growing up in a house half-full of Middle Eastern culture. Maybe there was something in my past that told me there were other places in the world where emotions counted for more.

I heard what I needed in Brazilian music. I started listening to it incessantly. Why did so much good stuff come out of Salvador?

The sound of Portuguese started driving me crazy. I think I had an erection the first time I heard my Portuguese professor’s voice on my answering machine. I had thought French was the language of romance, but I was mistaken.

I needed to go. I need to go back. You should probably go, too, but read this book first as there are few shortcuts on the orla learning curve.
GLOSSARY

Acarajé: a deep-fried spicy snack of African origin that you can buy on the streets of Salvador. Its ever-fluctuating price reflects a confidence or a pessimism in the current state of the Brazilian economy.

Axé: meaning literally, “strength.” Pop music native to the state of Bahia that features African drum rhythms under cheesy pop sounds. Daniela Mercury is the genre’s reigning queen, although she’s challenged by Ivete Sangalo, and Margareth Menezes.

Baiana/Baiano: the name for a native of the state of Bahia. “Bahia” is also used to refer to the city of Salvador, its capital.

Berimbau: a one-stringed musical instrument made from a coconut shell, a thick wire, and a wooden pole used as an accompaniment to capoeira, a dance/martial art. Very phallic and very touristic to own.

Bunda: “Ass,” the national obsession. Anal sex is more popular than oral amongst those “polled.”

Cachaga: rum, usually priced at a dollar a bottle.

Capoeira: Brazilian martial art that is currently popular around the world with 20 year olds who come to Salvador to study for 3-6 months.

Capirinha: the other national obsession. A vodka or rum gimlet.

Forró: the “hick” music of the north east of Brazil that everyone listens to during the winter month of June during the festival of Saint John. Traditionally played by a trio (drum, triangle, accordion). Large numbers of city dwellers pile into cars and head towards the interior of the state of Bahia, sporting foam cowboy hats, drinking persimmon liquor, and shooting fireworks at each other.

Gurgel: a brazilian made line of cars popular in the seventies that look like giant matchbox cars come to life. Built on the chasis of Volkswagens with epoxy bodies, these boxy purple, green, and brown treasures can be spotted cruising the orla from time to time.

Morena/Moreno: The popular name for a person with brown skin.

Orla: means “shore.” In the context of this book, the beachfront strip of road-way and its surrounding neighborhoods that have been heavily developed by the state government to encourage tourism.

Pagode: a modern derivate of samba that features lyrics exclusively about bunda. The frat-boy music of Brazil.

Pousada: A youth hostel.

Real/Reais: The official currency of Brazil, currently worth a bit more than 1/3 of a dollar.

Sunga: A man’s small, tight-fitting bathing suit.

Trio elétrico: A sixteen-wheeled truck fitted out with a stage and a large enough sound system to adequately host a large axe band during carnival. The trucks move slowly down the orla, completing a five-mile journey in as many hours.
Along the Orla

There are some days when this place boldly defies logic and I wonder with the whole of my experience how these people drive, work, fuck, build, eat, sleep, talk, read, shit, drink, fight, paint, travel, sing, save money, help each other, wait for a bus, raise children, pay taxes, vote, don't rob banks, foment revolution, or hang themselves from every coconut tree.

Then I buy an acarajé for thirty cents and a caipirinha for a dollar and dance to a free live band until after the last bus. I can stare endlessly at the beauty of these people, and because I actually got paid at my job earlier in the day, the rational world starts to look neurotic, genocidal, and just mostly boring by comparison.

I forget the question.

Here

I am the whitest man here.

When I take off my shirt, children point at me and laugh. Teenagers sneer. Men give the eye that means I am somehow responsible for the economic situation. Mothers pull their children to their hips when I pass on the sidewalk.

I've tried going to the beach. The saltwater enters the sores where cheap sandals have sawed skin. Waves slap me back almost to the beachfront apartment, where 45 minutes later, I return.

I look like breadsticks held together by a money belt. The pale returns the next day.
I'm living with a 47-year-old civil engineer, her daughter, and their maid. They often pull me out of the bed-size bedroom to meet their friends.

Some have had English lessons for years at faded, gas station-colored schools. They ask me, “How are you?” and “What is your name?” I respond in their language, “I’m funky, thanks” or “Call me Bohbee.” I'm a small dog. I understand a few commands. Handed around from one divorcee to another, fed from the table even when I'm not hungry, I get lots of attention.

When I'm outside, cars chase me. They maintain a steady 80 km/hr here, using turn signals and heeding red lights infrequently. At intersections, the seconds of green are counted down on a display, from 45 to zero, until the light turns red.

They produce a lot of cars in this place and a lot of people get killed in traffic.

They spend very little on physical therapy here.

There’s a crowd in fact, hanging around the Instituto de Rehabilitacao now. They’ve got a private bar and sandwich shop; they’ve got the luxury of When.

The crowd there lives in the moment; the rest of us aren’t as lucky. We’re loose in traffic. In an eight way, 16 lane intersection, without a pedestrian crossing. We’re wondering when, when, when, our own fateful moment will come: they can sleep well knowing theirs has already arrived.

The other night (dark and windy), I was walking close to the Instituto when I overtook a young man who had lost the use of one of his legs. He then moved pass me at the eight-lane intersection when, magically, a dead leaf in the shape of a foot fell between us.

I stared at the leaf for seven seconds. Then I walked very rapidly to the traffic island and caught the bus. It was the wrong bus, but it felt good.

Hermann’s Jungle Sitio

Hermann left Germany 18 years ago to work as an electrician in Iraq, repairing the damage of the third to the last war there. He made good money, did some traveling, and came to an isolated spot 45 minutes outside of Salvador to create his jungle sitio (plantation/farm).

(After watching crews erect viewing boxes over sidewalks and cover everything up to the hillsides of Salvador with plywood, I had decided to experience Carnaval from a higher perch).

Over the past seven years, Hermann has hand-cleared acres, built
three houses, had a child, and...is now very fucking lonely. His longterm girlfriend has just left him.

He doesn't speak to locals, and has not spoken to most of his family for years. Hermann spends his days on the sitio clearing the daily harvest of mangoes that break roofing tiles as they fall, studying languages, distilling mushroom liquor, and playing guitar.

He's hampered in his guitar playing by the brain worms. He contracted a case of cerebral parasites in India, "I had these bad headaches," he explained, "Then seizures. They thought it was a tumor."

He's attempted "Purple Haze" for the last few years with mixed results. "Smoke on the Water" comes out a little better, but when we tried "Louie-Louie" we were off by a chord.

Hermann will be returning to Germany to make some money as a temp electrician. He will see his old friends there and look in on their lives with a mixture of pity and incomprehension. Why they struggle so hard, so long, for so little, escapes him.

We smoke fat joints over a fire in his backyard in the tropical night. He looks every part a great barbarian king, like one depicted in a Boris Vallejo print he has hanging in his kitchen.

**Dancing at the Gas Station**

We have just come back from an aborted attempt at Carnaval. The unthinkable happened: it rained in February.

We are now driving 160 km per hr to Praia do Forte, back from Salvador in the rain at midnight.

I ask Hermann for the word for "hydroplaning" in German, but I go unheard over his "blues" mix-tape. Hermann is singing along loud on the chorus to the Bryan Adams song, "The only thing that looks good on me...is you."

I ask him again about the double speed limit action and am told that, "Der radar here doesn't verk at night."

Luckily, Hermann is quite experienced with his Brazilian-made Volkswagen Quantum station wagon ("Not ze same quality as in Germany") and somehow misses the dark people in dark clothes riding dark bicycles, who cross the four-lane expressway in the wet, dark, signal-less night.

Free Carnaval tickets were offered. Hermann's guitar teacher is a 55-year-old San Francisco hippie fronting a samba Elvis Presley cover band that wasn't asked to play Carnaval. The teacher seemed perfectly happy to remain at home that night in his condo with his 20-year-old Baiana girlfriend.

We enter a complementary pre-Carnaval party, which turns out to be a fenced-off parking lot with a few booths set up and a DJ. It has the
feel of a classic rock radio Halloween event. Most of the revelers are Americans, Europeans, and Israelis.

The city has descended upon the neighborhood outside the parking lot. Streets are full of tens of thousands of drunks. But the real action is at the gas station, where six-packs are piled up to the station awnings, and people dance around stereos blasting from out of their Fiat hatchbacks.

Back inside the fence, I get face-painted while Hermann and friend drink Schincariol. Hermann is wearing a sleeveless mesh shirt and sunglasses and has hair that suggests an octopus made from pubic hair. His adamant refusal to wear makeup is met with understanding.

 Somehow, the three hours in the parking lot end and it’s time to join our bloco. Our bloco is a designated space in front of and behind a 16-wheel trailer truck loaded with musicians and speakers. Men are hired to drag a cord along in front and behind the truck to keep other locals out of the space. There are attractive girls in the bloco, but they are with heavily muscled boyfriends.

The music starts. We look stupid and can’t dance. This is ok for a while, then the rain comes.

National television is here so people keep enjoying themselves, but the rain quickly turns into a heavy deluge. Makeup is running everywhere and beer has been rendered ineffective. After another hour of pulls and pinches from divorcees, we head for the car. It takes three hours to get out of Salvador.

Carnaval 2222

I go back for another night of Carnaval sans Hermann, for Gilberto Gil. He is performing for free on top of his Expresso 2222 trio electrico. This truck has a polyurethane case over its entire cab that resembles a giant Brazilian napkin holder.

Gil kicks off around 10:30 pm, and I’m very excited. Ten minutes later, Caetano Veloso joins the fun, and I’m more excited. Then the truck starts moving forward, almost pushing into the crowd, and I’m less ecstatic.

It’s a tricky job: 10,000 people are attempting to dance, get a glimpse of their idols, and stay the fuck away from the truck, as we rumble down a two and a half mile ocean front boarded-up beer greased chute of middle class destruction.

Baianos like to get close and it gets hot, almost to the point of suffocation. But thanks to the towel hats of the Filhos do Ghandhy group, and the sprayings from their holy perfume bottles, I’m able to stay cool and smell reasonably well.

Gil plays for five to six hours with a hoarse voice, as he has done the
night before, as most of the acts have. About once an hour, the band
does a reprise of the most popular song of Carnaval (this year was
"Festa" as interpreted by Ivete Sangalo). The crowd waits for the build­
up to the chorus, then surge forth in a motion that looks something
like fish spawning or the running of the bulls-beautiful if you’re not
being stepped on.

Now it’s four in the morning, and the party continues at the gas
station. We find ourselves shaking our robotic American asses to the
pagode sounds pumped out of the hatchbacks in the parking lot. The
evening was worth the price of admission for most. Only seven people
died this year.

* The Sons of Ghandhy’s Carnaval gear consists of blue socks, white-toweled turbans,
slippers, and printed cotton saris. They’re a fraternal organization that emerged from a
dockworkers strike fifty years ago. During Carnaval, they stress non-violence, singing,
and clean clothing. Their float has a very prominent Brillante laundry detergent sponsor­
ship.

Lençóis is Portuguese for “Sheets”

An enormous woman came running down the hill, screaming some­
thing. A dour middle-aged man followed a minute later, sweating and
shoeless. He made a beeline for his pousada.

Our guide explained that the two had just been robbed. The woman
lost her purse and the man was stripped of everything but his shorts.
The Russian next to me started to giggle.

The second victim was the same man the Russian had openly ridi­
culed the night before for being too uptight at the party: he now thought
the man’s change in demeanor was for the better.

The enormous woman was trying to get the police. Tourist hikers
were starting to clog the start of the trail as the attempts to translate
what she saw sounded like a version of the telephone game. “There
was one guy.” “There were three guys.” “There were three guys with
guns.” This continues for a few minutes, then new rumors start. “The
police have caught them.” “The police are looking for them.” “The po­
lice haven’t responded.” “The policeman is calling for backups.” “The
assailants were underpaid policemen.”

The woman suggested we climb the hill together, possibly to rout the
bandits out of the woods. She starts to climb the hill up to the falls, but
stops when she sees that we aren’t following her. All 29 of us
bottlenecked hikers have silently agreed that getting away from it all
(with our lives) remains our first priority.

Four of us and our guide cut east on a two-hour hike through some
soft rock caves and jungle brush, to an isolated waterfall. We are a
man, woman, guide, and two French freelance television producers.
Five individuals now enjoying a sudden mango-filled oasis, unspoiled by bandits or other people like us.

We dive into the tea-colored lagoon.

A pounding under the ore-stained waterfalls is a fantastic contrast to the tropical swelter.

I get carried away and somehow succeed in convincing my body that it should have a fever. After another four hours of swimming and climbing the park, I become bedridden for ten days.

Chapada National Park is where to go to work off Carnaval. Carnaval leaves you exhausted, tired, hungry, and ready to not hear loud music or see thousands of people in the streets for at least another few months. Lencois, in the middle of the park, is the town that remains rustic, yet full of internet cafes, caipirinhas, drugs, and crepes.

It's not a bad place to be bedridden, either.

**Circular Bus Rides**

The bus didn't stop. I knocked on the back door with the water bottle and one of the half-width doors opened and gummed me into its opening while it continued to roll forward.

The driver was a dead ringer for the guy who played “Ghandy” in Carnaval. There he was sitting benevolently inside of a man-sized silver chalice on top of a float, throwing out petals. Now he's driving a red machine that seems neither festive nor non-violent, stepping on pedals.

We speed down the hill of Vitoria. It turns out to be a great day for aisle surfing. I have inadvertently chosen the Hawaii of downhill bus routes. The bus has a clutch that sounds like people screaming. I swallow my fever and smile.

The small placard had “Campo Grande” written on it, a good sign, as this is where I live. I get on, and the bus takes off in the opposite direction.

Private companies run public buses. Routes are somewhat circular, overlap, and don't go everywhere. Little foot-high placards in their front windows and on their sides have destinations written on them under “Coming” and “Going” columns that do not get updated during the course of the ride.

It took me a while to realize that even locals have to ask the change-taker where the bus is going.

The scenery is still fascinating, but somehow it has become almost 6pm. The bus now drives deeper into a slum and stops. Everybody gets off. I ask about the sign in the window that says, “Campo Grande.” No intelligible response. That was my last coin.

I'm carrying 50 new CDs in three bags. It's a primal must-drag-meat-
back-to-cave thing I'm feeling. I'm wearing bright white socks... I feel vulnerable.

The slum looks friendly enough. A neighborhood samba camp is underway, storefront congregations are singing, bodega shops are selling shirts, and the street dedicated to scrap metal reclamation is now shutting down for the day; I could be happy here if I wasn’t who I am.

Five minutes more of walking around and I’m feeling less self-conscious. The dogs and kids look too happy and malnourished to pose a threat. I spot kids playing soccer near the exit out to the expressway. I barely keep down the urge to get in there and play fullback with the kids. The smell of the open sewer nearby is too overwhelming.

I’m still short of change. Maybe that CD store across the street from the open sewer will give me some change? I buy 40 dollars worth of emergency CDs, and ask the old lady in the back supervising the MasterCard machine for some centavos.

The next bus soon takes on 50 people who are now standing three deep in the aisle. I miss my stop trapped behind the crowd as the driver is now whipping through his route at 50mph. We’re going down dark, double-laned city streets, making u-turns, and climbing hills. The bus is pitching on these tight turns between 10 and 15 degrees and I’m looking around to see how the other riders are coping. They are half holding onto their seats and half holding onto their children.

We race to the next stop and I get off. Something about the quality of outdoor fluorescent lighting makes the city look like a late-night cop show on a small black and white television. I resign myself to walking up the hill. Salvador is too small to be lost in for long. People are eating dinner on their terraces, a local band is rehearsing, and I round the corner to Campo Grande.

I’m happy and home in four hours’ time.

Portuguese Class Homework

Using the Verbs We’ve Learned:

1. You will eat all your words without a drop of water. 2. I want to speak Portuguese like an overdubbed American actor. 3. It is difficult to walk in these sandals. 4. Anna can drink and drive like a Baiana. 5. I am afraid of the telephone. 6. People hug each other here in a way that (could) make their chests explode. 7. I bought a shirt for my new image.

Using the Past Subjunctive:

1. I would have preferred that you did not find my dirty bathing suit. 2. I was not sure that you survived. 3. I was not sure that we would find a seat. 4. We had doubts that you would eat everything. 5. We did
not think you were so sensitive. 6. I was happy that you brought your family with you on our date. 7. I was sad that you had come back only for your dog. 8. Too bad that we could not put our money in a secure location. 9. Stop treating me like an ignorant child.

Present of the Subjunctive:
1. I hope that you are enjoying your career as a Shopping Barra Restroom Attendant. 2. I prefer that you remove your shoes after playing in the rain. 3. I hope that you know how to drive a Gurgel. 4. I am sad that you no longer wear your demonic bikini. 5. I am afraid to live in a world without women. 6. It is sad that you have Oscar Niemeyer, and we have Oscar Meyer.

Future of the Subjunctive:
1. Four months from now, I will have a lot of money by opening a restaurant that weighs people before they eat. 2. In a few months, I will have many friends because I will befriend the corrupt colonel and our picture will be in his newspaper every week. 3. In a few months, I will know every television ad for soap, cars, and insurance, by heart.

(At the Newsstand)
Contents and Summary of “Beauty and Plastic” Magazine
The Glamorous Plastic Surgery Magazine
February issue (year IV, #31)
Cover story: Márcia Goldschmidt—success in having her self-esteem renovated since the plastic (surgery)!
Features:
Small Surgeries, Big Results! Rapid Solutions for Correcting Fan Ears, Fat Neck, and Wrinkles
Compete for:
1 Plastic Surgery
1 Odontological Treatment
10 days at the San Pedro Spa
30 Cellulite Treatments
16 Facial Rejuvenation Sessions
Post-Birth Plastic
Liposuction in the Back

The Plastic of Intimacy-Rediscover The Pleasure!

Inside back cover advertisement:

Endermortherapy Has A Name: Celutrat

(Text):

The system creates a suction and creates a “negative pressure” while two motorized rollers create a massaging “positive pressure.” These two forms combined, allow the Cellutrat to work on numerous kinds of treatment: Liposuction Post Op and Plastic Surgery, Fibrous Cellulite Localized Fat, Size Reduction, Limph Drainage, Skin Toning, and Bad Circulation.

Of Course, I'm An English Teacher

My Brazilian friend said I would have to lie, that the whole society worked like this. Fake a degree, résumé, whatever. A month at the day-care center could balloon into a year of teaching arts and crafts. The Russian tutoring gig moved up a few years into a more recent experience and the music theater projects became more successful.

The school was far away, but paid cash for the day and had a shuttle. By my third decade, I had enough of the professional world to know that job interview success was mostly in the shoes and hand motions.

Dave the Principal knew this, too. I thought to myself, I could be at least as effective as this guy with corny jokes and the prison warden stuff. I walked around the school. It was like my own primary school, bathed in hell. The heat was incredible. The children were thriving in it.

I kept my adult face on and made the rounds. Who was I kidding? Nobody wants to be a substitute teacher badly, nobody needs to fake their way in.

I get the call at eight that morning and take a $15 cab to the school. A fifth-grade teacher had gone home sick. I'm shown around by the school counselor and given some instructions while the kids are in the library, researching a project on Native Americans on the web. I am the substitute. I am the adult.

“Call Me Mr. G.” I'm using The Voice, and it's working. It's much easier than being on stage, because the class runs itself. I give out an essay on Isle of the Blue Dolphin. Amazingly, most of the kids finish it. I prepare a science lesson. Again, the kids go along. We go to lunch.
Lunch is good. I go to the teachers lounge—other expat refugee types; we’re a suspicious-looking lot.

I’ve twenty minutes to prepare the science lesson. Somehow, I manage this. Convection. Radiation. Kinetic energy. I don’t know how much of this got through, but it felt like I had enough plausible deniability on my side. Whew. Period over. Class comes back for the film. Who wants to find the VCR? I only need two of you. What do you mean the other teacher wants it? Ok, I’ll talk to her.

We start Isle of the Blue Dolphin—the movie. The film is awful. The kids know this without needing coffee, cigarettes, or an expensive date to make up their minds. I get out my meter stick and start threatening. I make them listen. I threaten. This works. Period over.

Free period. Time to do homework. I remember some of this geometry stuff. No Portuguese please, just English! The girls are building a Styrofoam shopping mall—it is an American school after all.

I use The T-Voice again, and they clean up. One boy comes in and says another boy is calling him fat. I ask him what does he want to do. He says he wants to see the school counselor. I say ok.

Suddenly the day is over. I write a note to the teacher and then I go get paid and I get paid and the principal is doing his own good cop/bad cop routine with the boy whom I sent to the counselor. I confer with them, then catch a bus to Pituba to hang out with Barry and slurp down some acai, this purple frozen high-energy fruit that is found only in the Amazon and is served iced with granola.

Barry admires the preteens and then we go to a great Italian restaurant with actual tomatoes and I have somehow managed to hold onto some of the day’s money.

Of course I’m an English teacher.

It Was Bad. It Was Wrong. It Felt Really Good.

Daniele agreed to dinner on Friday. I took her to the Italian restaurant in Pelourinho.

I had been waiting for this for a while, maybe too long. I tell her she’s the most beautiful and intelligent woman I have ever seen and that doing a rock band in the U.S. with me would be preferable to her working six days a week at a record store here. It didn’t sound as plausible as I wanted it to.

I got a very sensual peck on the cheek and a commitment to maybe let me buy her dinner sometime in the next year.

So I go to the Pelo the next night with Anne, my Norwegian drinking friend. Pelourinho is Salvador’s historic center. There is a samba dance class on, and this is where Scandinavians go to have experiences.

We get there too late, and the dancing is over. We’re sitting at a table
with the whitest people I have seen outside of myself. Mostly Danes, they are here on intensive two-month stays to extract relevant percussion and body movement information from the locals. Marceo, a non-Dane, is now chatting up Anne. My bruised macho side, still sore from Daniele, feels slighted.

Anne, Marceo, and I start walking back through the Pelo past the begging men, women, and children of Pelo-land. Several streets of this historic district have been renovated in the past decade. It makes for a small scale Salvadorean Disneyland, bordering on one of the poorest parts of the city.

Marceo is sounding a little more intense as we go, telling us of his dreams of moving to Florida where you can make $80 a day doing construction work, and he is kind of drunkenly shouldering me off the sidewalk while Anna swerves to avoid him. It’s midnight on a Monday.

Anne is taking all in a stride, consistent with her role as Norwegian Embaixadora of Being Mentally Undressed 5,000 Times a Day, and we’re halfway home when we’re panhandled by some older boys.

Marceo finally veers off the fork in the road to go to a strip club and Anne and I keep walking for another minute or so. One of the smaller boys who was panhandling us previously runs ahead and turns around with a broken bottle yelling, “Give me the money.”

I’ve been feeling so sexually frustrated this week that I just break out a Peter Sellers karate face and scream, “YEAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” and kick the malnourished kid in the stomach. He runs away.

We keep walking. Five minutes later, the two older boys run after us, with a third in tow. I do the same routine, but they grab Anne’s purse and she lets go. I get a few more bony-knee kicks in and they run away.

I had a frustrating week and took it out on a couple of malnourished teenagers. It was bad. It was wrong. It felt really good.

**Brazilian Record Store Panic Attack**

It doesn’t happen on a regular basis, just when I see one I haven’t been in before. I enter the shop, then the high-speed rack flipping starts. I know a few names by now, but it is usually the cover art that gets me first, then song titles, and the year of the release. Anything around 1972 sounds pretty good to my ears, although everything starts to sound pretty good after a while.

I’ve learnt to recognize the blood rush through my ears when I’m in a record store; I haven’t learned how to ignore it. I start with a stack of two-dozen or so CDs, and there is usually someone to help me out, to put the headphones on, to hold part of my stack or to lead me to other things that I never find very interesting. They are big on over-employ-
ment here. I cannot tell if this is a way to create more jobs, or a hold over of the colonial legacy when people demanded royal treatment.

Albums that start with sound effects, such as waterfalls, are always bad, as are most things made in 1985, thanks to the Yamaha DX-7 keyboard. I can tell with about 90% accuracy from year, cover art, song titles, credits, and a few seconds of tracks 3, 7, & 9, how the record will shape up.

I barely have time to listen to them when I bring them home. Music is not wallpaper to me; it's more like reading and eating at the same time. With learning Portuguese as I go, each record becomes a chapter in a textbook: I'm rushing to the dictionary or verb conjugation book while putting the CD player on pause.

I'm buying records when I'm lonely, when I wish I was making love, or at least having a good conversation. I need to do something with my money, but it gets painful thinking the money spent on records will shorten my time here.

The panic, too, is sometimes discomforting. I scrutinize the stack; did I really need to buy a record by that twenty-four-year-old wannabe because he reminded me of a 24-year-old wannabe I befriended back in Portland? Will I really get much out of a poorly recorded live album without a lyric sheet? Should I be buying something because of its historical value when I'm not planning on living in the culture?

I look at the receipt. I made the mistake of forwarding my mail to my parents' house and now my dad is opening my MasterCard statements and sending me terse reminders of how much I'm spending.

I put my shoes back on and go back into the store and now the mom who owns it is there, so I can't flirt with the daughter. The mom says she can't credit my card. I say, "Try," and she winds up giving me cash from the till that I will probably use up by the weekend.

By this point, my panic has subsided. I go buy a chocolate ice cream cone. I have to stop buying records by female singers who have boyfriends that play all the instruments. That might slow the spending down.

35th Birthday

I got in a fight with Sally, the English girl sharing my apartment. She is one of many European and American women here staying for two to three months, taking dance classes while doing volunteer work in the favelas. Her class learns the dances of the Orixás, the gods of condomble. Sally said the significance of the dances was not explained when her class was learning the movements.

I told her that I thought it was vulgar learning these religious dances without sharing the faith. She said that learning the dances helps her
appreciate the religion and the culture more, and that many of the
dancers are serious and sincere in their approach. That’s true, I said,
but the thought of it still made me uncomfortable, like a group of tour-
ists studying communion wafers for their taste factor.
I was thinking about Sally as I was walking around Shopping Iguatemi
on my birthday. Maybe it was just sexual tension; I feel happily para-
lyzed around beautiful and smart women like Sally, but maybe it was
because I couldn’t stop thinking about my words to her.

From outside the States, our range of attitudes and beliefs look like
variations on a slender theme.

What’s worse than all the judgments and decisions I’ve made about
people over the years is how rich and spoilt I sound trying to rational-
ize my life. As Americans, our buying power defines us much more
than our ideology does. I bought a lot of books that night. I tried to
convince myself that I’d feel better spending money on “worthwhile
things.”

Don’t Call that Reference

I had one of those nights.

I was waiting to hit the shopping mall on a Friday night with my
second best friend and I’m watching the national news in the living
room with a Brazilian family. I see my first best friend, Barry, appear
on the Brazilian national newscast as the main subject of a child porn
dragnet operation.

It ruins the mall plan, it does. I can’t enjoy looking at all the 16-year-
old girls thinking of poor Barry being locked up in a cell in Salvador for
photographing 16-year-old girls.

I knew Barry had some questionable tastes; I just kind of laughed
uncomfortably at what I considered stray remarks. Besides, he could
toss a mean salad.

Also, he had a stable relationship with my other best friend, Susan,
and I haven’t been making scores of friends in the Brazil department.
Besides, I have a supervillainess domination complex, so who am I to
throw the first bolt if everything is still in the holster?

Barry sure has a lot of great records. Right next to his shelf full of
coffee table books about Nabokov, Louis Malle, Post-Anti-Feminism,
Erotic Art, Teenage Girls, Younger Than Teenaged Girls, Child Molest-
ers, and Indie Rock. And lots of films: 36 Fillette, Pretty Baby, Lolita,
and scores of other titles featuring teenaged girls.

Susan seemed only slightly worried about Barry’s tendencies. She
felt reassured by his overwhelming sense of fairness and his kind way
with other people. He’s a vegetarian; he even scolded the checkout girl
at the gourmet supermarket for bullying a delicate tomato. He built
Susan a website that put her in business. Susan’s reservations about him seemed to blend with her generally neurotic outlook on the world.

I like Barry. There is nothing wrong in saying that. I just resent the fact that I’ve been in a state of shock for the last five days, like when Barry landed on the cover of the Brazilian version of Newsweek. I read it. Three times. I find myself fighting the fact that this is not the U.S. and culture and morality can’t always be so easily converted here, despite certain attempts to the contrary.

I resented the way the article made fun of him for being an awkward tall skinny white New Yorker with bad Portuguese. That hit home. I resented the fact that the article said he had no friends.

I was planning a vacation with Barry. I enjoyed record shopping with him. I have no one else to talk to about this. The article mentioned some other disturbing points, but I found these hard to square with my interactions with Barry. I prided myself on being a good judge of character and I thought, at worst, Barry might be strange around the edges but firmly in check. He has a great situation, doing legal work from his home here, why would he want to jeopardize that?

The week moves on, and I have an interview for an English teaching position. The picture-perfect American business major lady is smiling while offering me $4 an hour to teach chemical engineers conversational English at night (Flexible schedule. The students can cancel any time they want.) in the far-off business district. A part of my insides moves outside and blurts out that I just can’t crawl that low. I notice that Barry’s name is still on the resume as a reference.

I walk in the rain from the interview through this business district that looks a lot like those acres of suburban car lot wasteland back in the States. It is pouring and there are no sidewalks and I’m kind of enjoying dipping my leather shoes in the puddles of dirt. I get on a bus and I see the bright orange cover of the magazine with Barry’s face on it in every corner newsstand along the way. It feels like being blinded with Christmas lights mixed with having a very upset stomach.

**Tango Lesson**

She called me a week after I had given up on her. She wanted to see me that night. It was already nine at night and I was tired, searching the newsstands for a Wonder Woman comic book, my kind of pornography. She had previously told me that she only liked making love at night, so when she confirmed a lunch date the next day, I knew I was in for a disappointment.

Coming to lunch dressed like a streetwalker, high red socks, short skirt, and colorful blouse, she was probably just off to teach tango somewhere. She made some very convincing arguments for not returning
my calls, notes, stop-bys, and emails, and as I wanted to believe her, I did.

I suggested that I take some tango lessons from her. She seemed to be tight for cash. I had written a song called “The Bad Tango” about two years ago, and wanted some inside knowledge in case I ever played it again. Maybe I fantasized that I would be the missing tango partner she was searching for.

Shorter than I usually dated, and looking slightly like my mother, Mercedes had a mouth like a whip and a body that needed me near it. It’s funny how the mind works when there’s a hope for romance.

Back from lunch, I briefly thought over my other dance experiences. Square dance lessons in grade school: embarrassing. Grooving awkwardly from the knees to any kind of music I like: always embarrassing. One African dance lesson with Rick the drummer in an attempt to cure our rhythmic retarded-ness: an abortion. A date with Rosemary at a line dance night in Ballard, Washington: a great moment to break up.

The night of the class, I fixed myself a double screwdriver, and walked to her place, just around the corner. She was in full regalia; Purple satin cross-stitched plunge back dress, heavy eye make up and 3-inch heels. Me: jeans and an izod.

Together we ran for the bus and passed what looked to be the largest bookstore in Salvador. I had wanted to go there for weeks. It turned out to be the place where she gave her lessons. The book selection was horrible. Portuguese translations of Barbara Cartland, Portuguese Time Life volumes, and too much Jorge Amado. The security guard had secured a corner of the store for himself where he had a TV set up, and soon, his girlfriend.

Mercedes was on the phone for a half-hour while I introduced myself to the couple that turned out to be the only other students. He was Swiss and she was Salvadorian. We began the lesson 35 minutes late.

Our instructress demonstrated what looked to be very counter-intuitive moves. My shoes hugged the floor when they should have slid. I started sweating profusely. She reassured me that I was doing okay, that as an American dude, I was not used to doing these things with my body. I couldn’t seem to get the moves right. After a while she came over to help. She moved my body closer to hers, and told me that since I was the man I had to initiate all the moves, and that the woman would follow.

One move was to insert my thigh into her crotch and swivel her 90 degrees to the right. The look she gave me implied something indicting or corrective rather than sensual. I was feeling very dumb little-boyish, once again fooled by the liberated girl who demanded old world swagger and new world respect at the same time. I was thinking about Barry’s feelings that men in our society had many fewer options than
women had these days, and I found myself agreeing with him, even if he was in jail for the child porno ring.

Mercedes put me with the Salvadorian, and I actually felt like I was making progress. I didn’t mind the street kids watching us from outside the shop window. We were kind of dancing at this point, or rather, I was sweating a lot and she was leading me along, with only a momentary stumble on my part before the thigh to crotch step.

After class, Mercedes told me that there would be a tango dinner in one of the upper middle class suburbs. I could see myself going; I could see myself helping build up her tango classes, helping arrange special band plus tango nights in Rio Vermelho, and more, as she bought me some popcorn while we were waiting for the bus.

Then she told me she had been seeing a Brazilian for the past few weeks. He’s not black, she said, as to say she was not doing the expected thing.

I found myself feeling sad and angry, but tried to put on a good face. I tried to insert my thigh with a I met someone last night thing...She spun back with a You can’t control when you fall in love I shot a yeah, but I know when I see a future with someone line. We got on the bus. She was still smiling that modern jokey smile at me, the one I thought I was in on; now it felt aimed at me.

She told me that she hadn’t lied to me. I agreed that she probably hadn’t.

I told her I had to get off the bus now, and kissed her goodnight. She finally said, “I’m a woman,” smiled, and shrugged her shoulders. I walked home in the rain, re-imagining the last twenty minutes with five different possible endings.

**World Cup Diary**

**Early Rounds**

Plastic flags everywhere. Firecrackers going off all day. I don’t have TV so I wake up at the cheers, screams, and animal sounds of my neighbors from the 3am telecast.

I don’t know what kind of sounds they’re gonna make if they lose.

Edivaldo, one of the apartment attendants, makes a good-natured comment about the American team that I kind of understand. I will now process every non-understood comment thrown at me as having something to do with the World Cup.

**Quarterfinals Against England**

Pascal and I go to Nicki and Leon’s, two Brits ready to watch England face Brazil at the neighborhood bar. The bar scene extends well over the sidewalk into the street as the game is telecast at 3am.
We’re reggaeing until the show starts. Good-natured insults are thrown all around. I am wearing my gray CCCP soccer jersey for no good reason and get a lot of abuse about Russia being finished, you idiot.

Nobody for a minute expects Brazil to lose. The bar has jammed 60 people around a 16-inch set. The neighborhood queens join in on the taunting. “English putas!” they scream at us, good-naturedly, of course.

Twenty minutes into the first half, Brazil scores. The room erupts and my shorts are soaked by knocked-over beer bottles. Brazil scores again a few minutes later and I am again guilty by association. The plastic bar tables that you see everywhere in Salvador flip over on the floor as easily as they stack.

Reggae dancing until dawn. I go up to the apartment to go to sleep (early bus to Bonfim the next day), but they’re dancing on top of my sleeping bag, too.

**Semifinals Against Turkey**

This time we go to Pelourinho, which is always shown on TV when TV wants a reaction shot from Salvador. I am late, but as there is no one on the street and every television in the nation is on the same channel, I can walk and watch at the same time.

The crowd is smaller than you would anticipate for an 8:30am show. Olodum, the premier African-Brazilian drum group, is presiding over their stage and now there’s 300 people watching the game on an old 13-inch TV set.

The TV camera turns to the crowd; we wait for the cue to dance, and Olodum plays the drums. Again, there is barely any feeling of anxiety as everyone expects Brazil to win.

They do.

The crowd parties all day to the sounds of Bavaria beer cans going “shpffft” while I slink back to my cave to write some music.

**Finals**

On Sunday at 8am, I walk to Pascal’s place where we watch the first half, then walk to a neighborhood bar where Fernando’s leftist publishing friends are watching the game.

I am mistaken for a German on the way over, as I mostly am. It’s difficult to drink beer at 9 in the morning on a Sunday, but we manage. The thought never seems to enter anyone’s mind that Brazil will lose.

Someone once described Baianos to me as being “irrationally optimistic.” I definitely prefer it to cynically realistic.

First goal is scored, and the tables are flipped. The women kiss everybody; the tambourines and pans are banged on.

The second goal is scored and out come the plates of chicken and sweet potatoes.
My guys are down to their last real, so we move on to Pelourinho, where there are already drum groups performing and people milling about.

The vibe is happy, but slightly anti-climatic. Maybe because it's Sunday, the day Baianos loosen up from the stress of being relaxed.

A beautiful thing seeing a crowd sing the words to every song the bands play. I keep thinking, that must be the national anthem, then another equally patriotic tune is played, and everyone sings along. "Pais do Carnaval" by Jorge Ben is definitely the National Anthem.

São João was just a week before, and independence day is in two weeks. "This ain't a serious country," Charlie de Gaulle said.

We walk around the Pelo for the next hour, Pascal, Fernando, Jack and I, snapping photos of the locals. People are mostly people watching. Loud firecrackers go off every few minutes. Fernando is getting tired. He lives on less than 1 real a day with Pascal, does layout for the monthly cultural magazine. He's kind-hearted and often depressed about injustice.

At the Barra lighthouse several trio electricos are set up. Pagode, a samba-derived funky pop style that exclusively features lyrics extolling the virtues of the bunda, is blaring from one of the trucks and the women are mixing cement or liquefying vegetables with their hip movements.

There are other people on the trucks, very middle class, doing nothing but drinking beer. Pagode is very popular with children, particularly the band, E O Tchan!

The crowd looks a little poor and shady where we are standing. Several young dudes surround me. They start to lean into me physically. I'm not expecting anything unusual, but Pascal's radar is up and points the group out to the military police. We walk away, and go over to the other side and meet some young Germans.

Exhausted at this point by a day of eating popcorn and beer, Pascal and I eat some makeshift spaghetti, solve the world's problems, then briefly go out again, looking for a first world discothèque. It is 10pm on a Sunday night, and the streets are full of broken glass and yellow and green streamers. Surprisingly, the streets are empty and quiet, except for groups of roving horny teenagers. We decide to call it a night.

**With Barry, In A Brazilian Jail**

I've been waiting in the waiting room for 20 minutes: low ceilings, gray walls, 5-year-old magazines, and other families in their best polyester and gold, trying hard not to stare at each others' misfortunes.

The level of tension seemed somewhere between the waiting room at Child Protective Services, and a Planned Parenthood clinic. The décor
is similar.

It is 10am and the television is blaring a kids’ show featuring a blonde in a tight blouse talking to a hand puppet. A female pagode singer named Gil comes on the show demonstrating the latest crotch grinding dance sensation to the 6 to 10-year-old studio audience, between plugs for a special new kind of Danon yogurt for kids, with extra sugar.

They call for the Gringo, who is me, and another guy, and we go down the hall to another waiting room. The vibe is comfortable; I can’t really explain this, except that I have worked enough in similar jobs to know how banal these things can feel after a few months. I appreciate the unconscious effort the guard put into creating this feeling, and offer him my stack of books to check. He doesn’t check them.

The second waiting room is better lit than the first, and features several desks and closed circuit monitoring. The guard on duty (I think he was a guard, everyone had on casual clothes), is typing in my passport information, and taking my phone number, as he calls for Barry like he is his son playing ball in the yard.

Barry is happy to see me and looks basically the same, but with more facial hair. Leonardo, Barry’s longtime Brazilian friend, who is also mentioned in the state’s docket, joins us.

Barry says the food is awful, but he is making do. He has some CDs in his hand, and some laundry for Leonardo, who is managing Barry’s affairs while he is in the slammer. The happy banal cop asks me for more personal information, and we all share a few jokes at nobody’s expense.

I don’t get much time with Barry, as the half-hour visit is all he would get in a week. More important is his business with Leonardo, including directions for laundry, what CDs to bring next, and certain financial details.

I am here to give Barry a book on the Salvador music scene that I wasn’t able to give him on his birthday two weeks previous. I also have a grammar book and a dictionary from Susan, Barry’s girlfriend who is fighting her impulses to visit him.

I catch up briefly with Barry, trying my best to keep the conversation banal. I’m here mostly because he’s been a good friend to me, and partially because I want something to write about.

He tells me that there are many interesting things to talk about and makes me promise to come back next week so he can pass on his journal. I agree. He mentions that most of the other prisoners were international, mostly on drug offenses with an odd murder thrown in here and there.

Beyond being punched in the face once, he is getting along with everybody, and they were actually bonding over the fact they had decided they are a family.

We manage to talk about his case. The police have found nothing
incriminating on his servers after a month of searching. Barry is one smart guy. In his deposition, he had admitted to being a co-owner of a child porn portal in Europe, but it was something that would be non-actionable in a Brazilian court.

All the police have are some photos of teen-aged girls in bathing suits, a certain amount of indignation that a gringo had done this in their country, and an awful lot of money that had been going into a new national campaign on child abuse. (Barry had remarked a week before that all this “child abuse nonsense” was probably started with U.S. NGO money, as it looked to be like every other American trend.)

Susan is worried that Barry’s arrogance will sink him, that it is not enough that he is too smart for the international legal world. She is openly hoping that jail time would humble him a bit, ready then to end their relationship and get on with her professional life. We had all joked that the whole thing was a giant “see-I-told-you-so!” thing between girlfriend and boyfriend.

Barry is far from broken and is making active plans for a future in Brazil. Everyone around him is confident about his future. Additionally, Susan said she recently had a Tarot reading on him, and for herself.

Everyone outside of Barry (Susan’s friends, including one who worked for the federal police) thinks that his goose is cooked, that the public pressure to make an example out of him will be too much, even if he hadn’t technically broken any international laws.

There is a definite difference in the degree of faith in the integrity of the Brazilian legal system between the two parties. As a lawyer, Barry has never lost a case in the States.

The half-hour visit ends quickly for Barry. He hands me a letter to give to Susan. I promise him I would come back the next week, and Leonardo works out some more details with Barry. Barry is getting a significant amount of financial help from a rich friend in the states and now has a high-powered Brazilian attorney representing him.

Leonardo gives me a ride back to town, but we first stop at the military police headquarters, just down the street from the federal police. He is making payments on his cab to one of the Lieutenants there, a jovial “Car 54” type I have met before. They bullshit for twenty minutes while I admire the several fine female officers. I have recently come to the ineluctable conclusion that the women here are indeed too damn beautiful to stand. I try not to think about wanting to be arrested by uma gatinha policial.

On the way back, Leonardo and I joke that all men are perverts. I tell him about my policewoman fetish; he volunteers his desire for the big-bootied ladies; and we both speculate about Barry dressing up his girlish-looking 30-year-old girlfriends and spanking them.

Then he tells me that Barry in fact had a blowjob from a 10-year-old
prostitute here a few years ago, who then blackmailed him with photographs for the equivalent of $20. Leonardo drops me off.

I've been trying to re-orient my compass since.

Recife Music Festival

The tent was getting full. Set up inside an auditorium that resembled a parking garage with an accordion roof, there were maybe twenty of us watching the forró band. Outside, in the parking lot-type structure, Sepultura was playing to a mostly male teen audience of several thousand.

The first night was almost entirely forgettable, with the exception of Testiculos do Mary, a very campy nine-piece band in a tremendous amount of prostitute drag. They did some things to a ken doll with a life-size phallus; it put a certain fear in the hearts of the skateboy crowd.

*Forró* is the traditional accordion-driven music of the Northeast. The forró was hot, and suddenly the tent filled up with fat pasty teenagers in Iron Maiden t-shirts. They did something that earned my unequivocal respect: they danced to forró. They danced well to the forró.

The piercings, green hair, and tattoos all blurred, as they moved with their girlfriends in a semi-lambada fashion, girl straddling boy's leg, with arms in a waltz position. Slithering around in semi circles in the tent to the compelling stop-start rhythms of the triangle, accordion, and zabumba (handheld bass drum), they touched something deep and light in the same instant.

Sepultura was still pounding outside like warfare, and here we were in the Christmas-lighted fallout shelter tent with the three old musicians broadcasting a beautiful sound that was received by the kids more earnestly than money from grandparents.

The kids kept coming in and staying for another hour and we were sharing joints and the military police-looking-private-security-force outside the tent didn't bother us. It was beautiful.

The third day started early, with an indie-rocker from my city of Portland, opening the show. He started playing what my friend Gabriele told me Brazilians called, "sad music." It certainly was. Half the audience and me decided to check out the arts n' crafts section, where we joined a crowd playing percussion instruments in the kiosks.

Tom Zé played later that night. Reciting an anti-imperialist text while gesticulating wildly in a stocking cap, he gave an impressive 45-minute show. It was like Allen Ginsberg with The Mothers, or something else distinct.

Between costume changes and songs that were half skits (eating the newspaper, playing with power tools, dancing like a hairy ostrich), Tom
implored the young Recifians to stop acting like cultural prostitutes, to stop voting for right-wing idiots and to try believing in a future for their country. Tom Zé has to be the ultimate optimist for investing all his energy and hope in these causes in a 40 year career. It was an incredible show. The audience applauded, but not wildly; I was afraid that many of them had already swallowed what he was railing against.

I couldn't watch anything else for the rest of the evening. I just kept turning over in my mind Zé's example of a pop music without compromise.

I had got what I'd come to see.

I had another drink, walked around, and let my mind spin. Tom went on to have a heart attack after the show, but I think he's ok now.

**The Difference between a Witch Fetish and a Bad Housemate**

Marseille was 23-years-old, French, owner of a great apartment in the best neighborhood, renting it at a somewhat reasonable price. Her hair that would stand up like Elsa Lanchester's when she made out with her boyfriend. It was trouble from the start.

"Who exactly lives here?" I asked her before I moved in. "Just me and my brother," she responded.

"Do you have any pets?" I asked. "No. No dogs. No cats. No monkeys. No parrots," she smiled.

I moved in a few days later, on the lamb from a dangerous divorcee housing situation.

Unrelatedly, I had caught dengue fever. I stayed in my new bed and planned. I wrote out possible song titles for imaginary albums until I fell asleep. I needed water. I took a carafe out of the refrigerator, only to be scolded by the maid. Marseille backed the maid.

The next day, Marseille brought home a cat. She said she would keep it in her room, which she did, like when she left for the weekend. I fed the cat and then heavily lobbied the brother and the parents against its continued presence. The cat was removed.

The maid didn't have a key. She would pound on the door until someone let her in. Marseille would be up all night singing Jewel and the Cranberries with her unattractive friends and would be asleep until 11am.

I would let the maid in and hear about what it was like raising three children on a minimum monthly salary. The maid was to be fired in a month for stealing. I had been paying her to wash my clothes and never had anything swiped from my room.

I tried to make a goodwill gesture toward Marseille. I offered to take her out to dinner, more than once, only to be stood up at the last minute each time.
One day, two Norwegian girls appeared in the closet-size maid’s quarters. They told me would be staying for two months. I said “Oh,” and took the smarter one out to dinner.

Marseille’s parents came to visit every other week. The father would splay out on the couch and contemplate his problems—his other estranged daughter, his crush on my Portuguese teacher, his near-death illness, and the Norwegian girls.

The mother stayed in the kitchen, or contemplated her rock collection (stones, not the Stones). The Scandinavians and I came to dread the parental visits after the father yelled at one of the girls, and didn’t stop leering at the second.

For a month, the phone would ring incessantly at night. It was Marseille’s former Austrian lover begging to be readmitted to her heart. She would swear at him in Intermediate-level English at a loud volume for up to an hour.

Once, I accidentally let him into the apartment, he refused to speak English with me. Red, the other boy she was then seeing, wouldn’t speak to me at all, but would place a hand on my shoulder while looking Labrador-style into my eyes. He seemed to be saying, I am mute in the world of men. I am a drummer in four local bands and these hands and this beret communicate everything I need to say to you.

I became obsessed with Marseille. She was a new generation Disney villainess. It stirred strange impulses in me.

Her evilness was undisputed: She barely passed on my messages. She used the bathroom in the hall instead of the one in her room. She had many pictures of herself mixed with vintage sambo postcards splattered on her walls. Her only books in her room were the five-volume French equivalent of *Cliff Notes*. She never went to school. She cheated on her term papers. She ate chocolate for breakfast regularly. She watched bad TV incessantly. She never bought toilet paper.

She was a breakthrough in method acting. It turned me on. But her habit of singing the Cranberries off-key in the morning sealed my exit.

One day, a man appeared in the side room. She explained after a few days that the man used to cook at her parents’ restaurant, and because he was black, gay, and illiterate, she took pity on him, trading him the maid’s quarters for work around the house.

I told her that I admired her generous heart.

Joao seemed like a nice guy. Then, I knew I shouldn’t have, but I asked him if he was paying rent. He said he was. A light went off in my head. I left between choruses of “Linger.”

Bob...

I wanted to talk to you this morning, but you were busy! I’ve been thinking a lot about the offer you made to me a month ago: I’m really sorry but you know I cannot accept it!
It's impossible for me to receive only $300.00: you're renting not only a bedroom, but the living room too, the veranda, etc. I hope you'll understand my point of view, 'cause I didn't understand yours!

Anna became your friend, and I don't see where is the problem in dividing a bathroom with her...

Well, if you want to talk, I'll be at home at about 7:30pm... Let's do things clearly for us not to have misunderstood's (this word is not correct!)

Love,
Marseille

Special! Everything in Brazil 30% Off!

The dollar has been going up about ten cents a day for the last two weeks. The financial wizards in all the world capitals do not mince words describing their efforts to manipulate "risk indicators" in a way to affect the upcoming Brazilian presidential election.

They do not want the left-leaning candidate, Lula da Silva, to win and now everybody seems a bit edgy to me.

One of the guys who work at the Laundromat stopped singing his song to look at me and comment about the dollar.

The fruit vendor retrieved the apple rolling down the street, wiped it with his sleeve and put it back on sale.

A woman from mall security loomed over the panhandling family in the parking lot for a few minutes, then left.

Now Patricia is threatening to stand me up on a date. Must be something in the air.

I spent most of the day unsuccessfully trying to locate a CD store so I could do my part to fuck the Brazilians on the currency fluctuations. Luckily for them, the taxicab dropped me off at the wrong store.

On the street where I was dropped off, a crowd of 200 people had surrounded an upper class woman, who was in turn surrounded by four military policemen. The woman looked like some kind of celebrity. Reporters were snapping pictures. The entire mob was now coming down the sidewalk towards me.

I couldn't tell what the crowd wanted and couldn't get out of the way. The woman was ushered into a police car and was whisked off.

The crowd cheered. Someone told me that she had slapped a female security person or salesclerk in the face and now was being arrested.

I tried to take a bus home, but the driver could not change my 50 reais note and told me to get off; I bought an ice cream cone and got on another bus.

The air has turned weird here lately.
Great Wife Hunter

He's here for three weeks after traveling through Africa. He doesn't know anybody, has got a limited amount of time, but knows what to do in these situations. He calls me to go to a *condomblé* ceremony. He calls me to go to Olodum. He calls me for advice on records. He's a nice guy, but that's not why he's here.

Brad is 37 and needs a mate. He's scouring the world for a suitable wife. I am playing his sahib in the film. He pays for the cab and my occasional drink.

Frankly, I need the company.

Suddenly he finds out he must go home for his friend's wedding sooner than he anticipated. He does not want an American woman! His time is running out! It is Thursday night, Brad calls: I heed. The cab picks me up. Brad is negotiating our passage to the shopping mall, where a sea of preternaturally developed teenage girls in one-armed spandex tops are waiting for the rest of their lives to start.

Brad, with one week of Portuguese and a year of Spanish, is now bargaining with the cabbie, trying to talk him down another five reais. The dollar has just gained at least this much value in the last month. This seems to be the subtext for the driver's intransigence—either this or the fact that no cabbies in Salvador ever seem to be making money. Or maybe he knows how to deal with Americans.

*Aeroclubbe* is a mall designed like a private town square following the Disney model. It is very popular with the tiny but growing middle class of Salvador. Its huge parking lot has traditionally been a good place to kidnap somebody. Security has been beefed up recently and they do a good job of chasing the poor kids off the site.

Brad and I decide to stake out the Rock in Rio café, a nightclub known for being thick with prey.

After briefly sniffing the air, we set up position: unbuttoning a few things, buying beers, and launching large inflatable smiles. Flocks of ladies pass by pretending to have places to go. It is a small room. Awkward conversations are soon deployed, but no nets are released.

Several drinks later Brad is randomly dispersing “Boa noches” to scampering denim gazelles. Nada. The band starts, the room is full, and everybody is circulating. Here this means people push you like a turnstile with beer bottles and fraternity muscles. The ladies are more polite; they push with elbows.

Brad continues to smile in a confident way, but his breathable REI wardrobe is failing him. His sexy American beard seems to have been neutralized as well. Unfortunately for Brad, too many items from Berkeley have slipped past customs.

We try to learn from the natives. The muscle and beer guys are grabbing ladies by the hair and kissing them. Strangely, the ladies do not
move away. We watch this repeatedly. This is unheard of in hippie cities. Brad tells me he has previously witnessed this behavior in the wilds of Buenos Aires. We both agree to have our nice-guy genes donated to Goodwill.

Brad starts to test the hair pulling technique, but things goastray. I then temporarily lose track of him. The music has intensified and the sea of elbows, muscles, beer bottles, and spandexed breasts have created a vortex that has sucked him in and deposited me against the back wall.

Out of breath and unable to warn Brad, I watch him helplessly sucked into this horrific vortex and be spun around in every direction like a smiling piece of celery in a vat of morena-colored onion dip.

I wait another half-hour, then I implore Great White to desist. He insists he is enjoying himself, so I give him twenty more minutes as I imagine myself rewrapping my turban and tending to the elephants. I look over—he's having little success emulating the natives' strange thorax-shaking rhythms.

Brad reevaluates. His smile does not betray him. This experienced traveler might be temporarily overwhelmed in a chesty moshpit, but he will learn from this and not repeat his mistakes. We exit for a cab. Brad bargains expertly and ruthlessly. The cabbie then exacts his revenge by driving us home at 140 kph.

**Teaching Notes**

1. The school has changed its name from “Forever” to “Whatever” in a cutting edge ploy to introduce irony marketing to a small upper class Salvadorian public who live in gated-compound/apartment/university/shopping mall hovercrafts that float over large stretches of urban poverty, ignorance, illiteracy, and despair.

2. The school has recently been bought by a local entrepreneur named Samuel, who has returned from a four year stay in American where he was adopted by Mormons, and was introduced to the holy concept of Fear Management. Samuel has spread the gospel amongst the staff and has converted many.

3. One guy, Sandro, had returned from a year in America a raging bongo-banging hippie. He has found something in Fear Management (FM) that resonated. Sandro has recently shaved to a crew cut, assumed a slow deep voice, and babbles endlessly in perfect English about the need for “production” and “results.”

4. The staff was skeptical at first about these new FM techniques. They were then threatened with dismissal. They donned peach-colored lab jackets and mouth the production-results mantra until the end of the month when their paychecks once again had failed to arrive.
They then returned to their previous states of discontent.

5. My students do not want to talk, read, or write. They are here because their parents want them out of the house until dinner. The illiteracy level in the city is over 65%. Their idea of a bookstore here would fit squarely in the category of “Inspirational Card Shop” in the States. They are brilliant Counter Strike and Grand Theft Auto 2 players, however. They ask me to translate sound effects from the games.

6. My two smartest students are also the most corrupt. Both are grandsons of politicians. One is working as coordinator of the right wing party youth movement. Both rarely do their homework and try to compensate by out-talking the rest of their class.

7. I am relieved from teaching half my classes due to student complaints. I am too strict and boring. I am told by the management, once again, that the students do not like to read and write. The person that had hired me has left. The 24-year-old director of the schools marketing operations tells me with a knowing grin that the school must be run as a leisure center as most parents simply want their children out of the house until dinner time. I substitute for other teachers and find many students barely able to converse in English after four years of courses.

8. The school is sold once again, to invisible “American” investors. Salaries are not being paid. There is talk of a strike. Sandro switches sides and becomes a trusted friend and drinking buddy. We are united in our lust for Zuanne, one of the few intellectuals on the teaching staff. There is more talk of a strike. The management tapes the connecting glass door to the teacher room shut.

9. Suddenly and dramatically, a man whose name literally translates into Marcus the Emperor, comes up from the south of the country for an all-staff visit. He apologizes profusely for not paying the teachers and says that we will all receive all salaries Friday. He then says the school was purchased by a software maker to be used as a marketing extension of their English teaching software and that this strategy has failed and the school will soon be on the market again. The Argentinean teachers complain loudly that Spanish is not receiving the respect it deserves at the school, thrown in as it is for free with English lessons. Marcus makes some apologies, promises that there will be paper in the copiers, then lays on infomercial style theatrics, and leaves. The salaries are not paid Friday and some of the teachers hire a lawyer to send a letter to the schools owners.

10. The school is now run by a 24-year-old who is mostly on vacation. Janitors have been fired. Some of the teachers have initiated a lawsuit against the school for back-owed wages and benefits. Morale is low. My adult classes prefer to meet for barbecue and cocktails. I go with it. I ask the newly hired office girl for my paycheck and am told that there is no money for me.
Shorthaired Hippies

I've finally understood the beach concept. It's taken me nine months and 35 years.

I was afraid of the beach. I thought it would make me stupid. It has. I love it.

The sea is the rhythm. The sun is love. I don't worry about the world economy. I don't think about finishing my novel. I just take my skinny ugly white ass to the beach and beg god to turn it black.

I sit in a chair and watch people who look better naked than in clothing saunter past me like they had a million dollars taped to their crotch. They seem to whisper, I dare you to rip up that return plane ticket.

I watch women young enough to be my neighbors obliterate the line between meat and fruit with a whisper. Fuck that west coast-styled mellow trip, they seem to say, or What do you mean you got feet that big and can't dance?

Me, the former vegetarian, buys a stick of immolated shrimp and chews them, shells, petrochemical contaminants, and all. Chews on them, while praising god for this cure for civilization.

La La La Lu Lu Lu

The stickers have been plastered over the apartment elevator, every car on the street, metal poles; basically anything that isn't dogshit or a pebble on the ground. Overnight.

I walk up Avenida 7 de Setembro through the richest neighborhood in Barra, Vitoria, and try to count the cars with red flags or bumper stickers. I stop counting after two minutes.

Walking further along the tree-shaded boulevard, throngs of young people are moving towards the voting stations, girls in their typical skin-tight jeans and spandex tops, sending their usual laser beams at my eyes; most of them are now wearing red, or red and black, the colors of the Worker's Party. These are the same rich young things that walk their poodles out on the street to do their business for the greater good for street cleaners citywide: they are now going Commie.

Almost every upper middle class apartment building has at least one red flag draped out a window. And stranger yet, not one person, I didn't see ONE PERSON wear a button, sticker, t-shirt, or any other indicator for the neo-liberal nephew of Bill Clinton, Joseph Serra.

I go into the public school and see proud fathers in red-starred t-shirts usher in their flag-waving sons and daughters to vote. Middle-aged weekend hippies in Ché-styled berets accented with hammer and sickle cloisonné pins going into vote. I want to go into vote.

I walk out of the Bougie neighborhood over to Centro, the working
class neighborhood, and it's the same thing. What look to be Worker Party rallies are just your average Brazilians stretching out for a beer at 10am after doing their Constitutional duty. Everyone's in red.

And I should explain something about Sundays in Bahia at this point; they're magic.

The entire city goes to the neighborhood bar and the beach and just HANGS OUT all day long. Sundays are this special social glue here that I wish we had in the States. Large numbers of people getting pleasantly smashed in the sun, talking, laughing, singing and dancing all day. On a weekly basis.

I got in this screaming match earlier in the week with a recently returned half English half Baiana grad student. The subject was if people were actually happy here. We couldn't even agree to disagree. Well, I know I was right dammit, even if she had a Master's from London University.

You do not see kids flying kites at freeway roundabouts like they were in city parks anywhere but here. Yeah, I know they don't got shoes on, and read at a second grade level, but there's ten of them and they're all flying these 4-inch square home made paper kites and smiling. Me, I'm the pale guy with the bozo the clown hairstyle hoping that nobody steals my cell phone and credit card: you tell me who's happier.

I get out of my funk from the sight of these kids, and I'm thinking ahead to writing this piece, and the need to get in-depth penetrating interviews with the average Baiano so I stop to talk to about 3-4 different people, and the conversations like this:

Me: Gee, I haven't seen anybody voting for Serra (the opponent) today.
Them: No. It's Lula. Where are you from?
Me: The U.S.
Them: You like Bahia?
Me: Yes
Them: Are you Catholic?
Me: Sort of. Went to a Catholic college and think Thomas Merton is groovy.

Them: I didn't understand a word, but bless you.

So now I'm thinking that I could buy 100 Lula t-shirts for a dollar apiece here and sell them in Portland, Oregon for 15 bucks each. This thought keeps me entertained for a few minutes.

I walk to the Barra lighthouse and there are more Lefties of every stripe, flag waving, and watching the landslide election returns on a projection screen linked to a laptop. It's a dirty old man heaven, with more attractive young women in hammer and sickle halter-tops. The city has provided one of the huge 16-wheeler trio electrico sound trucks and it is blasting a samba, "Lula la lu lu lu lu" at a high volume, alternating with a super hot reggae version of the national anthem.
My friend tells me that, of course, Baianos did the same amount of celebrating for Fernando Collor de Mello (the sexy young president who froze everybody's savings accounts and was impeached), but when Ile Ayê, Salvador's best and most traditional Afro-Brazilian drum and dance troupe appears in all its traditional garb on the trio and kicks it, it's hard not to love this place and you believe they've got a chance to turn this national mess around.*

*The TV reported the next day that 90 percent of Salvador voted for Luis Inacio Lula da Silva, his highest margin in the country.

The Sunga

When I put it on, I was reminded of the time I snuck into my mom's underwear drawer to try on her leotard. I wanted to know what it felt like to be a superhero: It felt like being trapped in a giant itchy sock with someone's hand squeezing your privates. I understood the desire then to jump off buildings.

Twenty-five years later, I was now in Shopping Iguatemi at the Blueman store experiencing the same sensation of having a longstanding body curiosity satisfied, while feeling an overwhelming sense of humiliation at the same time.

I was trying on a black sunga, a tight small men's bathing suit; I thought I was ready.

I had been here for ten months, worked out for 30 minutes each day, and had succeeded in tinting my skin at least 3 percent.

I had seen the older locals, with bellies larger than cement sacks, wearing g-strings. Teenage boys, proudly parading berimbau hard-ons in sungas. Middle-age women with bundas larger than my sofa wear nothing more than a price tag.

Blueman was a modern swimsuit store with lots of pretty tan girls working in it. The other bathing suit option was a pair of 3/4-length surfing pants with Bob Marley's face on the crotch. That would leave my lower quarter half open to tan marks that would resemble dress socks. I went for the sunga.

I was traveling to the giant national park for the second time the next morning. It's known as Brazil's number one eco-resort. You know this from the large billboard at the opening of the park that proclaims this fact. There were easily a hundred items of trash around the foot of that billboard.

The park is beautiful, even if Brazilians insist on driving their large-styled cars through the town's narrow cobbled streets, building hotels where they legally shouldn't, and putting bossa nova-blasting beer stands at the end of many of the more popular hiking trails. Who am I
to tell them what an eco-tour is?

I'd be hooking up with some friends later in the day. I had been to the park once before, and knew enough about the trails to find a swimming hole. I ditched all my stuff at the pousada and walked to the riverbank in the sunga and sandals.

The summer sun hangs low over a hill of carved rock polished by warm copper-tinted streams. I picked a crevasse and prepared to sizzle like chicken bacon. It worked.

Walking back to the pousada, I heard the sounds of an English class in session. I knocked on the door and asked if I could help out. I taught a five-minute lesson on gerunds and evil people in the White House.

When I got back to Nono's Pousada, she joked about how men become more handsome as they get older, and that she had heard that a gringo was walking around naked in the town. I smiled and got ready for the evening of dancing and cachaca drinking ahead.

... 

After another day of hiking, sunning, and swimming, the sunga came up again. Sheila insisted that I had to wear a pair of shorts and a top over the suit before we went to the river (just a ten-minute walk from the center of town). I asked her why, and she answered that the people are very conservative here.

This didn't ring bells with me. Their entire local economy was based on tourism. They could drop beer cans on trails, blast horrible French techno until 3 in the morning, ride their Land Cruisers through streams, yet I couldn't pollute the visual environment with my skinny chicken ass?

I decided to go again with just the sunga because as an American, I acknowledge two feelings: fear and aggression.

My fear was that someone was going to steal my clothes while I'm in the river. No matter how little I have with me, no matter how cheap the things are, I have this constant fear that someone wants to steal what I have. I would rather put up with the humiliation of being laughed at than being robbed. I tanned without fear.

The aggression comes in doing what you want regardless of what anyone thinks. You know, strap on a guitar in front of a bunch of strangers or violate international law. It's that rebellious streak that makes the world love us so much.

Did the people laugh! From the little girls on the street corners to the teenage boys on the street corners to the middle-age women on the street corners. Gringo in sunga! Gringo in sunga! Gringo in sunga! Look at that pasty white stick man! Why, I could feel my smug sense of superiority just boiling in me. I'll show them! I'll write an essay.

Even Muzenza laughed. Muzenza is Deb's boyfriend. Deb owns the
restaurant where the famous English guitarist goes to smoke joints and to attempt to drink himself into a reunion with the band's dead drummer. The famous guitarist's wife has used his signature to start a nongovernmental organization that actually seems to be doing some good, teaching sex education, basic nutrition, etc.

I wanted Muzenza to break it down for me:
M: Gringo, you come to our beach.
B: Muzenza, it was the Indians' beach.
M: Gringo, we watch you and we hate you cos you got money and it goes back to slavery.
B: Muzenza, we hate us too, and the money is easy to get from us; just sell us what we want.
This goes on for another five minutes. Then we both burst out laughing.
This is Brazil. We don't have marches here. We don't have struggle. We go to the beach.
Most of us wear sungas.

Meet Cily

Cily is my first private student. She's 25 and has been living in Salvador for two years, working mostly as a sales associate at Mitchell, a hip clothing store in the mall. She comes from Manaus. Her father is Indian and has been married five times. She has, by her count, 30 brothers and 22 sisters.

She splits a two-bedroom apartment in the working-class neighborhood of Jardim Brasil with her friend, Gina, a hairdresser.

Cily hasn't met many people in her two years here. She works on average 70 hours a week, saving her money to possibly join one of two groups of friends, working food service jobs in Anchorage and London.

Cily gets me a cup of water at the start of each lesson as the understanding here is that gringos wilt easily in the heat.

I'm using one of the Cambridge books on beginning English vocabulary and I become reminded of how illogical and strange sounding English can be, as she tries to wrap her mouth around consonants that sound like animals being run over by underpowered lawnmowers. The Rs and Ws present particular problems. I make her say wreck and work a few hundred times each lesson.

Private students are a hell of a lot easier to teach than classes full of teenagers trying to pass the national college entrance exam. It frankly feels groovy having my every word clung onto so tightly. I pat myself on the head for having succeeded in learning the ugliest sounding language of the Americas.

Cily insists on taking me out to eat. It's a clean place, she adds. The
food is fine, and as I sit down to my thousandth ("Say it. Thhhhhhoussssaaandtttttttttthhhhhhhhhhh") plate of rice and beans. Cily puts on a serious look and wants to know the answer to a very important question.

"Bob, why did you come to Brazil?"

I was kind of surprised she asked this question until my Rio friend set me straight:

"Bob, don’t you realize that everyone wants to get out of here? There is no work, the economy is in the toilet, everybody lies and everybody is corrupt. The apartment attendant even rents out my parking space when I’m not around. Get a clue," she says.

So, I explained to Cily that, you know, Brazil has all this great music, laid-back environment, and happy people. She could kind of see that but got me back focused on dialogues she would need to successfully serve breakfasts in Alaska and the U.K.:

"Can I have some more Nutella, please? This jar seems to be empty."

Imm so sorrrrrrryyyy wee do not have annee morre!

"The sign says, All You Can Eat. Does that include doggy bags?"

No, buht yerr wellcohme to gooh to ze buffet won moar tihme!

"Miss, can I have some more bacon?"

Yeaasssss euuuuu mayhhhhhh!

And so on.

Cily has cancelled many of our planned lessons as she often has to go into work on short notice. This usually works ok with me as the bus ride to her place lasts about an hour. Dirt roads mix with busy streets filled with rows of shops selling replacement blender parts, sink traps, and television antennae.

Nobody’s rioting in the streets, and there are no panhandlers in the working-class neighborhoods. It’s poverty without misery. Many of the shops are covered with the graffiti of what looks to be one guy with bad penmanship. He keeps trying to draw the same horse/signature and gets it right less than half the time.

Last week, Cily again insisted on taking me to lunch. I reluctantly agreed, then came the inevitable questions about my life and marriage eligibility. I remind her that there’s definitely a kindhearted Alaskan or Londoner in her near future. Thanks, though.

Cily wants to work on Sarah Brightman lyrics this week, but I reminded her that we haven’t gotten to the table clearing and dishwashing unit yet. She pays me the 150 reais for the month of lessons on time, and I don’t even have to ask.
17 Prostitutes

The following are ads in the “encounters” section of A Tarde, Salvador’s major daily newspaper. Prostitution is considered “not illegal.” Prices are translated into dollars.

2. Abigail and Carol together, with accessories. 338-2643.
3. Acirema- undeniably beautiful, with a chest to drive you mad. 237-4512.
5. Adriele. For executives only! 922-3000.
6. Aline, brown complexion, hotel. $10. 99 34 78 69.
7. Amália-of Blumenau! Natural blonde, with long, smooth hair. 1m70, 102mm waist. Toned legs, mouth to drive you crazy. High cultural level. $50. Call 99 15 50 42.
13. Young couple will realize your sexual fantasies. She: tall, beautiful. Statuesque, hot. 91 58 81 62 (no other information provided).

Arts Festival Stress

Sometimes being gringo here means having the equivalent of a pair of corduroys and thick socks on while walking the Emotional Carpet of Life. Static electricity can build up quickly and release when you’re not expecting it.

I was at this giant international arts and music festival this past week and was about to “get down” at this large outdoor concert when I had to pee. I go into the spotless bathroom to find neither toilet paper nor soap. Ok. But being that this is Salvador, there is a dude working in the bathroom. He seems to be there doing something, like holding the door open when someone walks in, and emptying the waste-basket. I had to say something to the dude, mostly because over half the jobs
I've done in my professional life have involved restocking the bathroom.

So I say to this guy, "Dude, you don't got any soap or toilet paper in there." And I think he says, "That's not my problem." I go on to say, "Where do you think those hands go?" or something like that, but then I see my friend, Sheila. She laughs at the response, and I give the guy one more try, with her helping translate. I still get, "It's not my problem."

I'm thinking this is the same city that can host an international arts festival, lead a nationwide fight against dengue fever, pioneer drug treatment for AIDS, charge a lot of money for this festival, and they've run out of money for soap?

"Yeah, but the women's room has soap," answers Sheila. "Oh," I say. Well, this might make me the Don Quixote of whatever, but I try without success for the next 20 minutes, talking to two successive layers of people with walkie-talkies, to get the same "nothing we can do about it" response.

I sit down with Sheila, and we wait for the concert to begin because I usually follow the rule of threes, as in, try three times, then give up.

Then, being that this is Salvador, what looks to be none other than Caetano Mother Fucking Veloso sits down next to us in the stands (or a guy that at least says he's Caetano Veloso when someone's buying him a drink).

So I'm kind of nervous seeing the living John Lennon/Bob Dylan of Brazil sitting there (the last time I saw him he was in a trio electrico truck trying to run me and 10,000 people over), but I figure he might give me the over-intellectual punch line I need to finish this story. He does.

"Excuse me," I say. "Are you from here?" "Sort of," replies Caetano. "How can Salvador put on such a great arts festival and not have toilet paper or soap in the bathroom?"

"Ah yes... the bathrooms in Brazil are always a sort of... chaotic beauty, aren't they?"

"Yes they are," I agree. Sheila has a joint. I start to feel better.

**The Year-Long Lunch Hour**

We took an afternoon bus out to the Farolfolia, a pre-Carnaval carnaval that featured about a half-dozen of the large trio electrico 16-wheel musical stages and a cast of 500,000 happy drunk locals. I was feeling my usual mixture of excitement and dread, as after twelve months of tanning and no haircuts, I still couldn't pass for anything other than a hippy German tourist. I was with Mike, a 20-year-old capoeria (martial arts) and morena (brown girl) enthusiast from Se-
attle who was helping me recapture some of my enthusiasm for being in a mass of happy people listening to loud pagode music and doing amazing things with their butts.

After ten minutes in the crowd, Mike was tongue raped by a very happy favela girl. He was smiling. Strangely, we couldn’t find any beer. We kept walking through denser and denser crowds full of young adolescents who would probably be doing nastier things to us than tongue raping, if it weren’t for the presence of the military police.

We passed through organized hoards of dancing kids. The feeling must be somewhat equivalent to a bee’s eye view of the fertilization of the queen. We got caught up in the motion, even without finding beer. I felt a pleasing sensation around my waist, sort of like someone putting his or her hands on me. Then I couldn’t find my wallet (formerly in the side pocket of my black shorts) and saw the smiling face of a 15-year-old and his girlfriend dancing past, saying to me, **What, you think I stole your wallet? I dare you to search me.**

For some reason, I placed my hands together in a sign of prayer and made my most saintly face, pantomiming that he voluntarily return my possession, while simultaneously tried to signal over to the military police to come over and break this kid’s skull. I thought twice about the second thought and let it go. I had only had ten bucks.

Then something amazing happened. Mike bought me two beers, and I felt really good. The static charge of being robbed quickly dissipated. We then ran into Kristelle, the Australian dancer who has given up her life of being shy and sensitive for the freedom of being Latin and vulgar.

The energy was just too fucking good and I was able to dance the white German hippie version of the bee-mating dance like I never had been able to before. The slum chicks were responding and we were trading moves and phone numbers and if I ever want to go to jail on the account of jail bait I...would plead guilty with an explanation.

The party lasted for another hour or so and then poor Mike was abducted by one of those crazy fat middle-aged women that so effectively terrorize shy tourists here. I was left penniless in the streets as the trio electricos continued. I watched a few fights broken up by the military police, who basically use the tactic of beating kids on the heads now and here instead of later charging them for anything: It’s more exciting for the crowd that way.

The scene continued for another half an hour. Strangely, the party had only lasted for eight hours. Vendors suddenly tried to sell me beer in an effort to lighten their load. I explained to one or two that I was robbed. One of the vendors gave me two reais for the bus (the equivalent of a third of a day’s minimum salary). I smiled more sincerely than I had in weeks.

Me and the rest of the city then somehow fit on the dozen or so city
buses present. We let a out a big collective laugh at the tourists throwing up everywhere and the kids being violently shaved off the moving bus’s side entrance whenever they meet with an illegally parked car.

I’ve been in Salvador now for a year and five days.

Carnaval 2003 Notes

1. Crowds. People at concerts here move incessantly, often with elbows out front. Teenage boys uniformly walk a menacing dance somewhat akin to a prizefighter entering a ring, balancing on one foot, then the other, with arms against chests and hands in fists.

2. Bob in a Crowd. The crowd is denser than a rush hour subway. It is very hot and these boys are doing the above-described dance to the disadvantage of women, children, and me.

Some dude is pushing a fist into my back. I turn around and say “Calma” (“cool it”), making eye contact. This seems to help. The problem is that most of the trio electricos have giant cords strung around their perimeter, taking up the whole street, to exclude the nonpaying customers. The only people inside these blocos who could be described as black are working holding the cords up. There is often a push and crush between the workers, people on the street, and the brigades of patrolling police.

I see countless examples of boys pushing girls and children around, with mischievous smiles on their faces. Here comes the crush.

3. Rob the Bob. Within the space of five minutes and 20 feet, I feel no less than 10 attempts of fingers to search my pockets (my money is safely tucked in my crotch, Brazilians are generally homophobic except when they’re in drag).

I try to catch and crush the hands while smiling and making eye contact with their owner’s. They usually own an angelic look, or an indignant one, with the innocent, eyebrow-up expression of “Hey mister, why are you crushing my hand?”

After the crowd opens, I put a finger in the back pocket of a girl who had just done the same to me, in more of a “don’t try to take my money” move than a love gesture. She assumes I want the latter, and immediately suggests we get some drinks. I feel like I’m from another planet and decline the offer. Throughout the night, girls whisper, “bella,” “gatinho” (kitty), “cabeludao” (big hair), or “Mick Jagger” to me.

4. Bob Drunk, But Still Shy. I’m drinking a blend of tamarind juice and cachaca, a half a liter for 30 cents. I’m watching a half-million beautiful poor desperate people having fun, robbing people, dancing, making love on the beach, and attacking each other with their bodies in more obscure ways.

I made the mistake of reading what the Bush administration was
stating about the Iraq situation before I went out. The choice in front of the world seems clear: War there or Sex here.

5. The Law. I walk by the lighthouse, one of the more famous tourist points. The police have set up a temporary pen here to house the boys who've been fighting. They are huddled together close, sitting on the ground. There are about 50 of them, occasionally receiving the baton of a soldier when they attempt to move about too freely. I ask a sergeant what will happen. He tells me they will be released in the morning.

An enterprising vendor is now selling a bottle of cachaca and tamarind to one of the prisoners. A policeman whacks the purchaser on the head; a second pushes the vendor into the pen himself, and then whacks him on the head as well. The first policeman (outside the pen) then makes a public display of crushing the half liter plastic bottle under his boot. This sends an explosion of cachaca over his uniform and that of two other officers surrounding him. The crowd and the other officers laugh. The prisoners are quiet.

6. My Future Wife. Daniela Mercury’s trio electrico comes up. I’m in love with her. She knows this. She waves to me and the other 500,000 men who are also in love with her. I can’t believe her beauty, her tasteful choice of repertoire, and her dress, which makes her look like a gigantic sexualized parrot.

Daniela is an axe singer. This is pop music with an African beat, easily confused with banal pop, except that all the music is played by real musicians and shows last upward of four hours. I can’t take my eyes off her. I am being crushed against the fence on the beach wall. I can barely breathe, but neither can anyone around me. We manage to shake ourselves in a gesture halfway between pagode dancing and suffocation.

7. Seventies-styled Nice Guys Don’t Make It Here. It’s three in the morning and the crush of people and cachaca has taken its effect. A prostitute asks if I want a massage. I ask her if she’s passed her Oregon massage exam. She doesn’t respond. I go home and start composing my song about Daniela Mercury’s thighs.

8. People in the Street. People are camped here in the street for the week. This means sleeping on the curbs where enterprising jobless people usually turn road space into a private parking lot. Kids are dead asleep at three in the afternoon, their feet dangling off the curb. There are articles in the daily paper about families moving from the interior of the state to the capital to buy beer to resell to the crowds, making the equivalent of 30 U.S. dollars for a week of work. This is done mostly by mothers and daughters.

It was mentioned in the article that the men stay at home, are in the streets, or are just not helping out.

9. Walking Around for Hours. I should be hitting on girls. I see poverty and desperation where other guys see lifetime opportunities
and pieces of ass. Oh well. I just walk around for hours. Eight years of living in Portland makes the sight of color in people of every size and shape shocking. The sight of people enjoying themselves at this level of abandon is equally incomprehensible to my shy mind. I just stand against a wall and watch. The girls come up and talk to me.

10. **Talking to Girls About Blocos.** The big activity of the middle class here is buying a ticket into one of the exclusive "blocos." These "blocos" are the blocks of people who have the exclusive right to dance 300 meters in front and behind of a particular 18-wheeled truck piled high with speakers. Tickets to be a part of a bloco is upwards of 300 dollars. This is an astronomical amount of money for a Baiana to pay, considering that more than 40 percent of the population earn less than the equivalent of 50 dollars a month.

Nonetheless, somehow up to 30,000 people here find the money for a ticket. They are identified by a t-shirt that proclaims their allegiance to a particular bloco. Of course, this cuts down severely on the costume-wearing aspect of Carnaval, and I really can't remember seeing anyone wearing anything out of the ordinary in Salvador, but there is a large secondary industry in the customization of these t-shirts for women. As one of my woman students told me, she loves wearing halter-tops.

I'm watching one of these girls in her customized halter-top trying to wretch over the sidewalk railing onto the beach below. This provides a good conversation starter with my neighbors on each side of the railing. They've come from the interior of the state, are studying tourism (a master's degree is available). They need to learn English. They've studied at a private school but can barely converse after three years of classes.

A guy on the opposite side asks for 1 real. I'm drunk so I give it to him. I ask him what he does. He says he's an engineering student. He will be one of the cordeiros later in the week, holding up the ropes to keep the middle class kids safe from the poor kids. This pays three dollars for four hours of work. He thanks me for the 1 real.

The girls want to talk to me. I feel like I'm stuck in a dull film as the combination of my intermediate level of Portuguese and their intermediate level access to education and nutritional foods does not create sexual sparks. I usually just get phone numbers then go home and masturbate in my apartment thinking of the girls on the buses of Pituba, the middle-class suburb.

11. **Daniela Again.** I'm falling out of love with Daniela. She hasn't produced a hit for carnaval yet and is now sporting a rooster haircut derivative of the one Margareth Menezes was wearing the night before. Now I detect a suspicious regularity of beats emanating from the drum kit. A fake! They're using a drum machine and have hired a guy to pretend to be playing a kit! I hope her breasts are real, as I just
finished my song about her.

12. Gilberto Gil. He's goofy. He could be the new Mr. Rodgers. He's clumsier than I am, is singing very little and is spouting off hippie platitudes intermixed with patriotic statements, but his bloco doesn't have ropes and he's a living legend so 5,000 people and I dance and watch him for a few hours.

13. Eating. Your choices are twofold. You can buy a stick of unidentified meat from a street vendor, and get sick or eat at one of the sit-down restaurants and pay a lot of money.

I go to one run by a friendly American. He offers an “international menu” cooked by locals. Sure enough, the food is expensive, greasy, and flavorless. But he's your friend, so you don't tell him how much you wonder why he really came to Brazil.

He spends most of his time in the front half of the restaurant doing damage control by chatting with the tourists and acting friendly.

Your food arrives, and damn if it doesn't look like unidentified meat on a stick with a side of greasy rice. You eat half of it and stare at the tourists.

A man comes by rubbing his belly. Usually, it's a kid's act. You haven't had one decent human interaction all day, and the food is shit, so you make up a plate for this guy.

He immediately asks you if you want to buy any drugs (no). He then asks you to buy him a beer with his dinner (no); and you pretend not to understand his request, which you actually don't on account of his accent. He then asks you for money, to help pay for his ten-year-old kid and you tell him dinner is as much as he gets.

He looks nervous, glaring around. The security dude across the street seems to recognize him. You can't understand his heavily accented lying so you can't even get more of a story out of him. He shakes your hand then tries to offer drugs to a tall “Filho do Ghandy” bloco member.

14. Filhos do Ghandy. These guys manage to look dignified despite wearing blues socks, a wrap dress, and a thinly disguised wrapped towel on their heads. Their bloco, unfortunately, is one of the dullest, but part of their ritual is spraying people with perfume, not a bad move after five hours in the smelly heat.

I'm walking up the Ladeira da Barra and two Filhos do Ghandy dudes are taking a leak against the wall, in plain view (as is the style). A group of girls walk by saying, “Hey, this isn’t a urinal.” The guys don’t waste a minute wiping their hands and immediately run up to them, slapping them on their shoulders while singing some pick-up lines. Surprisingly, this doesn’t make it with the chicks.

15. Last Night of Carnaval. I basically skipped the second to the last night because five days of partying on 30-cent cachaca was making me feel squiggly. I spend the early part of my evening playing chess in the internet cafe with one of the dudes who works there. After a year of
fun fun fun, using your brain seems like a novel experience. People seem a bit frayed at the edges tonight, but the impression fades when the music starts.

I should point out there have been some really boring blocos this year. It is a sad sight to see more people holding up the perimeter cords than people on the inside. There are several unknown singers working the circuit, with sound trucks strangely sponsored by the Brazilian Post Office. One singer has the body of a football player and the head of a pimpled American high school student. She does the dance and sings her blandly sung covers for hours on end. It's fun for about five minutes.

Speaking of no fun, there's an "alternative" trio electrico on one of the shabbier carnaval routes in the Vitoria corredor. It has some pretty piss-poor anti-Bush floats and features the music of the city's only industrial rock chick who must have really rich parents because I've never met a fan. Nobody watches.

16. Daniela Comes Through. Okay, I got a good look at the drummer on this last night, and he appears to be human. She also is playing a different repertoire, songs with strange jazz chords played over the usually snappy beats.

I'm eyeing her closely now as my friend's girlfriend knows her former boyfriend, and tells me I look like him. I try to send her one of those I'm going to tear you in half, you nasty superstar looks, but it probably got misinterpreted as Help, I'm German and can't find the bathroom. Then she invites some bland soap opera-looking dude up to sing some plastic songs. I take a breather.

17. The Largest Drinking Game in the World. I come back an hour later, as Daniela's naturally gas powered trio is halfway to its end point. She has the momentum now, as it feels like the entire city is following her. Then I get stuck in the middle of the largest drinking game in the world:

Every time Daniela raises her right hand in a wave, one-third of the crowd (3,000 people to be safe) takes it as a cue to stop dancing forward, and run backward 100 feet or so, and stop.

They wait for the song's chorus, and then run ahead smashing into the other two-thirds of the crowd. Everybody laughs. Everybody enjoys this. I try it once, but it just feels like being on a rush hour bus full of Brazilians.

Daniela seems to be enjoying this spectacle and tries to execute other commands with the crowd: the sideways smash (not successful), the triple handclap (they get the rhythm down immediately), and the Clap and Spin (don't ask). She keeps happily singing and dancing in her parrot dress on the top of her natural gas-powered truck for another three hours.

She doesn't know how much she needs me to straighten her out.
18. I Finish My Night with Gilberto Gil. He’s got Arnaldo Antunes (a former punk singer turned superstar with the huge success of the *Tribalistas* album) singing my favorite song from his last album (funny number about how your former girlfriend is much happier with her pillow and her hand than she ever was with you). Then Gil resumes control and cuts the damn street to ribbons with a disco-heavy selection of his seventies hits.

Drunken Brazilians come up to me and say strange things like “Are you here to improve your Portuguese?” or “I just love the Jewish people, let me give you my phone number if you are ever in Rio. I’m a computer programmer.”

An entire family is now moving closer to me, away from the hoodlum’s part of the crowd (everybody else), as if my white skin could be used as a good safety beacon in case anyone gets lost.

I almost succeed in killing off the shy man inside of me, but 20 years of being nice and polite have done a lot of damage to my incredible macho-ness. I station myself next to a gorgeous Amazon princess and wait for her to take her head out of her hands and look up and see me. I give it five minutes and split. I then passionately embrace a female friend I recognize and consider this par for the evening.

It’s 4:30 in the morning and I’m going home. The action is now at the gas station convenience store. Nothing left in the refrigerated cases but “superdogs.” I buy a chicken and olive prepacked “Big Sam” (U.S. style) sandwich and walk home. The bands play on until 7:30am.

19. Aftermath. It’s now four o’clock in the afternoon, and I’ve just managed to eat breakfast and leave the apartment. The city is creeping back to life, most stores still boarded up, but the streets are deserted. The sun starts a beautiful sunset on the orla, the narrow strip of middle class civilization that runs from Itapúa through Barra.

Three guys are carrying a conga drum away like a dead soldier.

Groups of hanger-ons are recovering in the streets and teams of workers are taking down the instant scaffold buildings along the Carnaval route down. Apparently 90 people were killed in Rio during Carnaval week, but some of it was attributed to drug trafficking. Seven people died here last year, and I look in vain for a newspaper and a place to eat.

It’s a fantastic sunset.

**We Didn’t Have A Car**

We took a taxi. Not normal. I invited the taxi guy in. He declined. We entered the room and it was like being in a bachelor pad condominium. What an aphrodisiac.

A twenty-foot high cement wall surrounds the large complex. It looks
like a typical middle class beachfront gated compound. The woman in the ticket booth is dressed like a stewardess. She takes our IDs and credit card information. A sports car pulls up beside us, with illegal tinted glass. My students were telling me once how fun it is too cheat in school. They also have a very acceptable term for fooling around: "ficando."

This is how to live. Circular beds, new sheets in plastic, dining room, full dinner menu. Great view of the slum. I could barely concentrate on the sex, just imagining how I'm going to afford living like this for the rest of my life. This isn't too expensive. I mean I could be the pizza delivery guy back in the Midwest and still save enough to come down here once a year.

We rip each other's clothes off. It must be the lighting. We stay up all night and I'm almost as distracted by the surroundings as I am excited by her. I don't think I've ever been this superficially intimate in my life, although others who've known me may beg to differ.

I had just come away from a short relationship with someone who didn't seem to like me. This created some sexual anxiety now as I wasn't sure where my problem was. Now I can't relax and the sex isn't happening.

People like us don't look as pale in these lights.

We test every gadget in the room, eating lots of chocolate in the process. We fall asleep in a tangled mess of her hair, after an hour in the Jacuzzi.

The check: slightly over twenty-five dollars for the night. We're the only people checking out in the morning as most people only stay for a few hours. Walking into the sun strongly shining down on the white cement complex, it takes us ten minutes to find our way out of the facility as it is not designed for pedestrians.

Finding the bus stop, the world looks a little less dangerous after a night's snarking around. We stop at the gourmet supermarket for an American style breakfast. An all you can eat buffet for about four dollars. The language barrier is now only a problem if you want to hold onto conversational devices that really never worked for you in your own culture.

She's got the same kind qualities of girlfriends I had back home. Smart, pretty, and considerate. This fact makes things comfortably familiar, yet disturbing to me for a reason I couldn't see. I break up with her for a reason I still can't fully explain.

**Sundays Are Bullet-Proof**

I'm leaving Pamona's apartment today taking the bus back to my place. It's Sunday and Salvador can do no wrong, though it tries.
The bus is half crowded. A young semi-Rasta teenager sits next to me. I’m assuming he’s slightly gay, and I’m just so irresistible.

I’m a million miles away, scheming up possible boxed-set designs for my career retrospective 10 years from now when he asks me something.

It sounds like, “Blah blah blah, I need money.” Then, “Blah blah blah, my teeth.” We are passing the hospital and I assume I’m being panhandled or some crap so I nod politely, responding, “Blah blah blah your teeth?”

He then says, “Blah blah blah, this is an assault” (and points to his side where there is an imaginary gun) and I slowly realize that he and his friend behind me are trying to rob me, but I’m still in the benevolent It’s-Sunday-in-Brazil feeling, so I just lift his shirt where his imaginary gun is supposed to be, half-pretending to look for a painful abdomen scar or something.

Of course, nothing’s there, and he then briefly moves to the seat across the isle, then comes back over. I make some fast calculations.

One, I’m bigger and better fed than both of them. Two, we are in Barra, where there is at least a token police force out today. Three, there seem to be some other big middle class types who might help me out if I get into trouble. Four, I might actually have something to write about if I try to kick the shit out of these guys.

But did I mention it’s Sunday and you can see the big blue ocean and people drinking cocktails and music playing?

I look back at his scrawny friend. He looks like a very stoned collie with bad teeth. His friend looks like a smarter but equally stoned hamster. I decide to keep playing along with the friendly benevolent tourist act, speaking less Portuguese with every sentence. They say, “Blah blah blah. He doesn’t speak Portuguese,” to the ticket taker who sits at the back of the bus (whose side is he on?). I keep up with the “Blah blah blah, are you in pain?” line of questioning and then just ignore them until my stop comes up.

I get out of my seat, look both of them in the eyes, and shake their hands one by one. “Good luck,” I say. I smile and get off. Going home, I start to feel better. Sundays are bulletproof.

There

It didn’t feel like the States until I go to LAX with its CNN firing from bolted-to-the-floor TV consoles.

I had transferred in Miami, where overhead announcements were given in Portuguese, and the return flight could still be mistaken for something temporary.

I’ve been in a mental coma for four days: I don’t want to hear music. I
try watching cable: nausea. I can barely focus. The sun outside seems artificial; maybe it's the way it reflects on all that asphalt.

My friend in L.A. insists on going to the beach with me. We have trouble finding it, and when we do, the sand looks dirty. Then we can't find guys selling cheese on a stick or coconut water, and I wonder who all the fat pasty people are.

We're leaving the beach and go shower. The shower isn't working. Some guy is insisting that I continue to try to turn the handle, and it takes me a few minutes to realize that he's trying to ridicule me in front of the crowd. Doesn't he know the beach is about love? Is it my sunga?

Now we go for a snack. It costs $20. The store has political-religious tracts attached to each product, explaining how this snack purchase was the best you could do with your money, living in this world at the moment.

Outside, a well-spoken man panhandles me for change. Doesn't he know there are jobs everywhere in this country? Doesn't he know the value of an education?

My friend is complaining to me about her yuppie boyfriend. I tell her we all look rich to Baianos. This gets her upset. We listen to community radio in the car. I can't believe these weird opinions coming out of the mouths of the commentators. They seem to think the world should be...fair.

I think I'm going to find a room somewhere, paint it green, listen to all those records I bought, and jerk off until the color returns to my skin.
APPENDIX

Why Brazilian Teenagers Hate America 
(And love all things American)

The following is an interview with the English conversation class at Forever, a private English school in Graça, a neighborhood in Bahia. The students are Pedro (16), Breno (16), Camilla (14), and João (16). Big thanks to Pascal Folly for letting me speak to his students.

I had requested that we turn off the noisy air conditioner for the sake of the tape recorder, to the dismay of Pedro and Camilla.

Q: Okay, what do you think of the air conditioner?

Pedro: It is essential here because we are in Salvador and it is a very hot city. I don’t like (it) hot. I don’t like (it) hot...I just like cold, cold places, cold weather.

Camilla: It’s always the hottest part of the day I mean, when we’re in closed places we can have a little coldness because it is so hot in the streets. When you go to the malls and get out, I mean it’s like...(sigh) hot.

Breno: Yeah, but I think we need to open the windows and let some air in. We don’t need the air conditioner. I like (it) hot.

João: I think that in the afternoon it is necessary because of the heat, but in the night it is not too necessary.

Q: Salvador feels hot to you? I mean you guys grew up here; you are all from Salvador right?

All: Yeah.

Camilla: Maybe if it was cold we would want it hot...

Q: Have any of you been to America?

Camilla: Yes, I went to Orlando, to Disney world. Everybody does it (laughs).
Breno: Disney world, too.
Pedro: Yes, Disney world and the South of America, Mexico, and Cen­tral America.
Q: Did you like Disney world?
Camilla: Yeah... (Others nod)
Q: Why are you studying English?
Pedro: Because the world says, in certain situations, globalization says, that we have to speak English. If I don’t study English a lot of those people will pass in front of me and I don’t (throws up hands)...
Breno: To get an important job you have to know English.
Q: But not Spanish? I mean most of Latin America speaks Spanish.
Breno: Yeah, I want to learn Spanish. I like it.
Camilla: I’m learning Spanish.
Pedro: We have Spanish too, but Spanish isn’t too important next to English. I think that all organizations that manage, that command the world are North American and speak English and we have to work to study at these things...
Q: Do most of you plan on staying in Brazil for your adult life?
Camilla: No.
João: Yes.
Camilla: No, I plan on going to Germany. I’m learning German.
Q: Why?
Camilla: I don’t know. I like the people. There are so many intelli­gent people that live in Germany. I like everything there. You look at all the powerful countries, Japan, Germany, and The United States, and I probably will not go to Japan cos it’s really tough. And the United States...I don’t think I could live there.
Q: Do many of you listen to American music? (All say yes).
João: Rock and Roll. Rock, Jazz, Blues. And Brazilian music as well of course. I play guitar.
Camilla: All American music.
Breno: Pearl Jam. Everything they do is good. I listen to Brazilian music as well.
João: Pearl Jam.
Camilla: I think nowadays it is impossible not to listen to American music cos you turn on the music video channels like MTV or Much and that’s all you can see. They control everything.
Pedro: All the time we see. We just listen to Brazilian music when we are in our houses and we are in private, when we put on a CD. But in the streets, on the radio, in the car, all the stations play American music.
João: And the kind of Brazilian music that is played on the radio is very bad. Like Pagode or Axé is a kind of music that is very commer­cial, it is very poor.
Breno: I like Pagode.
Camilla: I don’t think much of the American music is very good, like pop, but I like the Backstreet Boys. But if you listen to the songs, you went get much. They are all about the same things, love and you know...
Q: Do any of you like McDonald’s? Ever eat at McDonald’s?
Breno: No.
João: No, I like McDonald’s.
Pedro: Yes. Today I ate there. I ate five cheeseburgers. It was a total of ten. My friend ate five and I ate five, too.
Camilla: I like.
Q: What are your favorite foods, those that don’t eat at McDonald’s.
Breno: I like pizza.
João: I like Baiano food.
Pedro: I like all kinds of food.
Q: In the supermarkets I notice that there are a lot of American foods. Do you eat these? Cheetos? Or Doritos, for example?
All: No.
Camilla: I like Cheetos (laughs).
Pedro: I like.
João: I like.
Q: So, forgive me for saying this, but at times it feels like America to me...do you sometimes think this?
Camilla: Exactly. This is one of the things that makes us hate them.
All: Yeah (laughs).
Pedro: I eat at McDonald’s. I listen to American songs, I see American movies, but I hate America. I hate it.
Q: You hate America?
Pedro: Yes. Yes, because they are making it and we don’t have a place to escape.
Q: Do you all feel this way?
Camilla: It is hard to say, but it is deeply true.
All: (Laughs)
Q: So you hate it, but at the same time you go, you...
Camilla: Because it is the only thing you can do. You don’t have an option.
Q: (to João): Do you feel the same way?
João: Eeeeh, no, but it is true, you have everything American. But you can go out with friends, go to the beach, bars....
Q: You guys go to bars?
Pedro: Sometimes (Everyone laughs). Here it is different.
Q: How does that make you feel then, about the future? Do you feel like you want to fight to change things, or... leave?
João: We want to change, but it is very hard.
Breno: It is difficult for youngsters to try to do anything, but we can try.
Pedro: Yes, try. Because I think to change everything we have here is
very difficult. We can improve the conditions, etc. etc... I think that radical change, I mean, like 'Let's boot the Communists. Let's fight...' I think that that is not right.

Camilla: It is not only our government that needs to change, it is also the United States; it is good for them if we have, you know, bad schools, bad institutions, it is good for them.

Q: Why is it good for them?
Camilla: Because they are gonna be higher (stronger).
João: Yeah.
Pedro: They are higher and maybe they are gonna put a company here and the people here are gonna work for a small price, cheap work.

Q: You seem to be a very outspoken group. Do you think the other students in your school share these opinions?
Breno: Some people.
Pedro: No. I think they just want to think about the pop concerts, they just want to think about a new shirt, a new pair of sneakers.
João: People around me think like me, you know, but many people, no.
Breno: And every young person like us wants to go to Disney world, too.
Pedro: They all want to study in America, to live with a family for a year.

Q: What do you think about George W. Bush?
Camilla: (Laughs). Come on! I can't believe it. How can Americans really like that? He's so terrible. He didn't sign many important things. He's not diplomatic at all.
João: He is a very stupid guy.
Pedro: I think that that man is not a President. And he is not a man. He's something different. He's not diplomatic. He doesn't know how to speak, how to talk. He just likes to kill people. I... and... I don't know. He's a very very stupid guy.

Q: Do you remember Clinton? Do you think he was better? For Brazil?
Camilla: No, I think...
João: For Brazil? It is the same thing. Capitalism makes these problems. The poor countries go down and the rich countries go up.
Camilla: But Clinton could hide it better than Bush can.
Pedro: Clinton was not very bad for Brazil.
Breno: I think Bush looks towards the Amazon as just something to exploit.
All: Yeah.
Camilla: He wants Mexico and Latin America as raw material providers, then he takes these technology things and sells the finished goods back to Brazil.
Pedro: When we accept the aid of the U.S., like from the World Bank,
we see on the global map that Amazonas is just considered an international place. They took out this area from Brazil it is a neutral area to exploit. I think that it is already gone.

Q: What about the future of Brazil? It is not a third world country. There are many people that think one day Brazil will be at the top. Do you see this?

João: No, maybe better than now, but not in the first world.

Breno: If we can change our ways of government.

Pedro: We can improve our status quo in the world, but the powerful countries will not allow us to be at the top with them, to compete and fight with them.

To read more of Bob Gaulke’s interviews with Brazilians
go to www.futuretensebooks.com/futuret/brazil.html
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

An arrogant child, Bob Gaulke grew up in the suburb of Penfield, New York, where his parents gave him too much encouragement.

He’s worked as a post-punk bass player, theatre director, congressional intern, video-maker, cremation operator, sandwich man, folk singer, sperm donor, social worker, file clerk, and opera librettist in Rochester, New York; Rennes, France; Washington, D.C.; Long Beach, California; Seattle, Washington; Bahia, Brazil; and Portland, Oregon.

He’s currently working on other soon to be unsuccessful projects, including an album of songs and a new rock musical.

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I dedicate this book to the memory of my great uncle, Elton Beck.
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Bob Gaulke moved to Salvador, Brazil from Portland, Oregon in the winter of 2001 in a cultural experiment designed to measure the effects of a musical, tropical culture on the body of a cynically nervous 34 year old North American male. He faithfully reported his findings in a series of essays covering interaction with street vendors, dancers, musicians, beach goers, and random members of the Bahian (residents of Salvador) middle class. *The Nervous Tourist* is the hilarious and enlightening result.

Bob Gaulke's dispatches from Bahia, Brazil's Afro-Centric coast, are a virtuoso rush of words. Our correspondent is seduced, rejected, and painfully conscious of class, race, and gender in these fascinating pages. Ride the late bus into the barrio, trawl Nafta-esque malls for crazy samba records, sweat through World Cup mania, and revel in the meteoric people-power rise of Lula with Gaulke as your guide.

— Edith Mirante, author of *Down the Rat Hole*