

Regina Célia Colônia

Regina Célia Colônia-Willner was born in Rio de Janeiro. During her early childhood her family lived in Ecuador where she learned Spanish and Quechua, the language of the Incas. She went to school in Paris and traveled extensively. Later, as a journalist, Colônia lived among the Indians in northern Brazil, and all these experiences are reflected in her first book, a volume of poetry, *Sumaimana* (1974). Her fiction is often characterized by experiments in form, and also reflects her early personal experiences, as it combines Indian and Christian symbologies with elements from contemporary urban life. Her other publications include *Canção para o Totem* (1975), *Sob o Pé de Damasco, sob a Chuva* (1984), and *Os Leões de Luziânia* (1985), from which "Copacabana from 5 to 7" was taken. Translated into Italian, German, Polish, and French, her short stories and poetry appear in numerous anthologies in Brazil and abroad. Colônia has won several literary awards including the distinguished Prêmio Jabuti honoring *Canção para o Totem* as the best book of short stories published in Brazil in 1975. Colônia, currently living in Georgia, in the United States, holds a Ph.D. in Psychology from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and in 1998 won the prestigious George E. Briggs Award from the American Psychological Association for her scientific research in Cognitive Systems Engineering.

Copacabana from 5 to 7



More than 350,000 inhabitants share Copacabana's daybreak — the swirl of hoses washing the streets, the ring of bakeries' cash registers, the bundles of newspapers that fly out of the trucks. The sound of a typewriter at a neighbor's. But also the sound of the sea, heard more clearly at this time of day, and the birds singing in the streets close to the hills. The outdoor markets being set up for the day: crashing wood, shouts, flowers, the smell of fish, the curved canopy tops seen from the apartments above.

From 5 to 7 in the morning, since the banks aren't open yet, everyone lives off of what they've held from the day before. The inhabitants (I, you, Rodrigo, Glória, Rômulo, and the others) stop seeing each street in its nocturnal depth, to perceive it stretching out: its previous connections and the ones up ahead, bridges that lead to other signs. The dynamic of the image being, at this hour, that of joining together moving parts, replaceable ones, whose combination produces meaning and a new object.

Given that, says Rodrigo, our duration (which one recovers upon entering the new day) creates an order that will be rebuilt tomorrow.

Coastal Territory

From Cantina Sorrento to the Pigalle Bar, chairs that partook of last night's chats balance themselves over their front feet, leaned up against the tables. Or stacked up on the terraces.

At five o'clock in the morning, the streetlights still on, in spite of the dawn braking across the sky, Agenor, night watchman at a garage on Atlántica Avenue, opens the door to let in the last car, a white Fiat.

The few taxis drive along, empty, the meter light on. A rooster crows over by Chapéu Mangueira Hill.

In front of Gaio Marti grocery, the truck picks up piles of packing crates and used cardboard boxes. A driver drinks his first coffee, the blue and silver bus pulled up beside the café, the engine running. You can already see a ribbon of pink on the horizon, and it's beginning to clear up toward Marimbás, where nine fishermen (pants rolled up, straw hats) pull the *Flor de Copacabana* through the sand, rolling wooden logs underneath the boat.

Up around Copacabana Palace Hotel, the first jogger, while running, checks his watch. And passes by the pushcart where Jorge Alves de Santana sells hot dogs and cold drinks. Jorge works from nine at night to nine a.m., lives in Caxias,¹ is married, has four kids. He says business picks up from three to five o'clock in the morning.

"When couples are getting back from the Barra district, for example."

At 5:40, a man in white overalls is washing the windows of the California Hotel. At the Rian theater (on Mondays) the signs for the movie of the week are changed. At the Petrobrás gas stations, the shift that came on at ten at night work their last half-hour, while the seagulls fly low over the ocean. A man riding his bike in front of Rio Jerez restaurant causes a flurry of pigeons to scatter into the air. Beige and white, blacks and grays and whites, oh . . . so beautiful.

At this time of day, the Alaska Gallery passageway is deserted. The gray, white, slate-blue pigeons take over the tables and chairs of the Spanish restaurant. A territory where at night wine was served to go with the *Calamares en su tinta* (squid served in its own ink).

A VW slowly patrols the start of the day. Corporal Demerval and the patrol driver Hélio say that they've been on the job since noon yesterday; their shift will end at six this morning.

Rodrigo stirs between the sheets,
the shoulders rub against the sheet, the shoulders.

Rodrigo crouches
to prepare for the sudden impact with the earth, from the soles of his feet
to the tips of his ears, and the snap of the parachute's pull is what finally
steadies him, the approaching ground underneath.

"Many collisions happen in the wee hours of the morning, because of the folks that are leaving the nightclubs. They increase on weekends and holidays."

Suddenly, 28 German tourists, for a few days a part of the floating population of Copacabana, pour out of the Miramar Hotel. Verissimo is the driver of the bus that will take them to Galeão Airport. He left the garage at 2:20 in the morning, he lives in Vigário Geral. Just like the yellow Lufthansa bus that he drives, there are many more parked alongside of the hotels on the Atlantic flank of the district.

Each Block's Daily Bread

At 5:10 in the morning, Arnaldo, a Portuguese, hurries down Joaquim Nabuco Street, wicker basket on his shoulder, pushing his small cart full of bread. Approaching Raul Pompéia Street, he stops. Opens the lid of the cart. Three doormen walk up. He wraps up three baguettes in three leaves of brown paper. The doormen leave. Arnaldo fills up the basket with loaves that he pulls out of the cart. Puts it on his head. Runs into a building, through the service door.

There are four empty buses in front of the Igreja Bar, and one table on the sidewalk where drivers sign the arrival and departure schedules. On the traffic-free street, you can still hear the waves breaking on the shore. The ocean's scent permeates everything.

At six o'clock in the morning, on Nossa Senhora de Copacabana Avenue, the store fronts are still lit up. The windows of the sauna on Djalma Ulrich Street open. For just a moment you can see one of the employees, in uniform, exercising with bar-bells.

In front of the supermarkets, produce trucks are unloading crates of bananas and sacks of potatoes. A Brahma beer truck beside one of the CCPL milk trucks.

The lobby of the Copacabana Metro theatre is being washed vigorously with a mop and bucket. In front of the Shopping Center, a woman waits for the bus with a bundle of clothes on her head. The guy who sells fish out of the back of his van on Hilário de Gouveia Avenue opens the rear doors and set up for the day.

At 6:30, in Copacabana, there

Rodrigo goes
higher up in the air, the parachute magnificently open, rising between
the clouds.

Rodrigo swings back and forth, as he rises;
the fierce wind blowing against his face, the clouds and the green fields
further and further away, down below. Above in the dark blue sky, a
scarlet circle appears closer and closer.

are now more people waiting for the bus. Piles of bundled magazines accumulate by the newsstands, before going on display. In the playground at Serzedelo Correia Square, a child plays on the swings: huge curves take her up into the trees' tops.

Levels of Communication

The La Licorne Night Club is closed, and the Menescal Gallery is being washed with a great fuss of buckets and hoses. Multiple levels of communication, between 5 and 7 o'clock in the morning, declare a truce. The bright orange telephone booths are vacant.

But other communications resume. At 6:10, Guilherme opens the doors of the Western Telegraph Co. Ltd., on the beach front. Spitting out of the machine that worked all night, the messages start to be distributed. If there is something urgent, a call is made. Guilherme, blue eyes bright and awake, lives in Andaraí. He gets up at 5:00 in order to arrive in Copacabana by 6:00.

On Prado Junior Street, between Viveiros de Castro and Barata Ribeiro Streets, the Plaza night club remained open for business up until the hour that Guilherme woke up, in Andaraí. At the Beco da Fome tavern on the corner, the night shift customers still maintain a conversation now steadied by frequent silences and the Aspirin bought at the pharmacy out front, where Cláudio works from 10 to 7.

"It's a good thing that the *Beco* stays open all night. We don't run the risk of being held up," he says.

At 6:35, at Garrafas Alley (or "Toss the Keys, My Darling" Alley), between Duvivier and Rodolfo Dantas Streets, the birds sing. There is hardly any movement. At the Bucharest Bar, a man dressed in a yellow smock jacket with green lapels noisily opens the metal door, to discuss soccer with a friend.

Now there are people reading the pages tacked up on the sides of the newsstands. Salvador opens at 5:00 and up until 6:00 takes new deliveries; returns the unsold papers from the day before.

"I've lived 10 years in Italy, 27 on Gustavo Sampaio Street," he says, handing a copy of *Time* to a regular customer.

Rodrigo, with one more bit of effort, feels his feet reach the airplane's door; his hands reencounter the doorway, sure-footed, his parachute all folded up on his back, after the rise and the shout:

"Now!"

"My love!"

The line for the Golden Wheat Bakery, runs beside Salvador's newsstand and targets more than just the daily French bread: milk, sugar, coffee, butter, cheese, yogurt. Renildo says:

"Starting at 7 we must use two cash registers because the line picks up. Sundays it's even busier. Only later."

Glória Dias Pinto puts her purchases in her bag. A print kerchief on her head and the paper underneath her arm, she hurries back to the house where she works. For she has to serve breakfast to the family she works for and go down to the bus stop with their boy, who leaves for school at 10 till 7.

Racket in hand, in shorts, t-shirt, socks and white tennis shoes, a young man crosses opposite the maids, with long strides toward the fortress. The Leme Tennis Club opens at 7 o'clock.

A bicycle delivering bread goes up the Mascarenhas de Morais Street. The taxi driver wipes the windshield while waiting on the light at the corner of Belfort Roxo and Barata Ribeiro Streets.

What Doesn't Get Lost Changes

At 7 o'clock on the dot, Tonelero Street is invaded by push-cars, the hurried noises of the wheels, the orange uniforms of the trash collectors that spread out through the other streets.

Just in front of the steps to Santa Leocádia Alley (that comes out onto Pompeu Loureiro Street), the enormous yellow garbage truck rushes past. Swinging on the back, four garbage men steady themselves against the wind.

At the same time you start to hear the first hammer blows at the construction sites. There's a line at the Barros Barreto Health Clinic. Buses go by full.

At Lido Square, children pile into the public school classrooms. Workers dressed in red coveralls start working on the sidewalks of Atlântica Avenue.

Rodrigo just woke up, relishing the taste in his mouth; between waves of lights, his tongue investigates the delightful taste. Lia, all smiles, eyes closed, still trembling, arches her back and stretches in the curve of his arms.

"I dreamed I was coming back up from a parachute jump, redoing the whole journey, rising, ascending until I reached the airplane's door, and there were you (it was you) my love, my fragrant filly."

Also at seven, mass starts. Along the beach, facing the sea, men slice the air vigorously with their arms. Meanwhile a girl in a yellow blouse comes back from the beach leading a dalmatian on a leash. Another dog trots down the sidewalk, towed along by the left hand of the guy whose right hand steers a Volkswagen.

Down on Siqueira Campos Street, Alcir pauses a moment, his broom in the air, as he looks toward the sea. The yellow cart still empty. Alcir lives in Brás de Pina. He has nine kids and is 38 years old.

"If I wasn't working as a garbage man, I'd be fishing," he tells his girlfriend. "I used to work one day down at City Hall and three out on the boat, what we called a 12 on, 36 off. I'd sell my fish on Quinze Square. I liked to catch shrimp. But nowadays we can't: we must work every day of the week. And I'm not going to lose my nine years on the job."

From five to seven in the morning, somewhere between the horizontal dawn of the beach and the day that falls vertically into the interior streets, the people of Copacabana come back into the spatial-temporal universe. Or to quote Rômulo, a nine-year-old kid from Copacabana (for whom, by the way, I wrote this book):

"You know what I found out? If all the watches stopped, time would just keep on going."

Rodrigo slows his run, raises his hand, the taxi stops. He'll get there on time. When the car pulls away, you can see the plates clear as day: Rio de Janeiro — Persépolis.

Translated by Sara E. Cooper and Regina Célia Colônia

Notes

1. Caxias is a large working-class district on the outskirts of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Other similar neighborhoods are mentioned in the story: Vigário Geral, Andaraí, and Brás de Pina. Like Caxias, these three districts lie at the north end of Rio de Janeiro, a long distance away from Copacabana.