

## Bob Cuspe: microscopic resistance, counterbehavior and the power of 'no' in Angeli's underground comic strips

### Abstract

This article examines the character Bob Cuspe, created by the cartoonist Angeli, in the light of the concept of 'counterbehavior,' i.e. as innovative forms of political resistance that are grounded in the demobilization of power networks and their representatives. By examining the character – specifically the characteristics set out in the inaugural story –, and the discursive references applied to provide it with meaning, we aim to point out how its lifestyle expresses new contemporary resistance forms, insofar as it constitutes a new world, with rules of its own to interact and be together and, at the same time, it keeps a critical condition in mind. This analysis intends to refute the argument, usual in studies about this, that the character manifests a condition alienated from the social and political context in which it is inserted. Finally, we advocate the premise that the magazine *Chiclete com Banana*, where the Bob Cuspe's stories were published, was a space created to reverberate an assumedly melancholic and nihilistic mood, which is not identified with the revolutionary intents and/or utopias of the previous generation of artists, politicians, and intellectuals, and this becomes representative of a large part of the Brazilian youth that grew up silenced and under the impact of fear promoted by the dictatorial State terror.

**Keywords:** Comic Strips. Angeli, 1956. Graphic Humor.

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## Bob Cuspe: resistências microscópicas, contracondutas e a potência do “não” nos quadrinhos *underground* de Angeli

### Resumo

Este artigo analisa o personagem Bob Cuspe, criado pelo cartunista Angeli, à luz do conceito de “contracondutas”, ou seja, como formas inovadoras de resistência política que se fundam na desmobilização das redes de poder e de seus representantes. A partir do exame do personagem – especificamente as características demarcadas na história inaugural –, e das referências discursivas aplicadas para lhe dar sentido, intenta-se assinalar como seu modo de vida expressa novas formas de resistência contemporâneas, na medida em que constitui um novo mundo, com regras próprias de convívio e de estar junto e, ao mesmo tempo, mantém presente uma condição crítica. Com essa análise, pretende-se refutar o argumento, frequente em estudos sobre ele, de que o personagem manifesta uma condição alienada do contexto social e político no qual está inserido. Finalmente, defende-se a premissa de que a revista *Chiclete com Banana*, onde foram veiculadas as histórias de Bob Cuspe, foi um espaço criado para reverberar um humor assumidamente melancólico e niilista, que não se identifica com as intenções e/ou utopias revolucionárias da geração anterior de artistas, políticos e intelectuais, e que se torna representativa de grande parte da juventude brasileira que se formou silenciada e sob o impacto do medo promovido pelo terror do Estado ditatorial.

**Palavras-chave:** Histórias em Quadrinhos. Angeli, 1956. Humor Gráfico.

In the summer of 1989, the U.S. magazine *National Interest* published an essay by the U.S. State Department official Francis Fukuyama, which spots the early signs of the premise that the triumph of liberal capitalist democracy represented the final stage of human ideological evolution; later, this idea was amplified in his book *The end of history and the last man* (FUKUYAMA, 1992). A few months later, the world watched, not without surprise, the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event that became, for obvious reasons, one of the best representations of the paradigm crisis that had already been discussed and experienced during that decade, not only in the academic domain.

For some, the fall of the wall was the materialization of the end of history announced by Fukuyama. For others, it was the threshold of a new world order that made it urgent to outline new theoretical guidelines capable of answering the pending questions in the recent geopolitical context and demarcating new ways of doing politics. Almost twenty years later, still trying to propose an answer to the questions that remained unanswered on the new international scene, Samuel P. Huntington (1997) introduced the diagnosis that the new world organization design might be based primarily on cultural factors, and no longer exclusively for ideological, economic, or political reasons.

Herein it is not my goal to deepen these two thinkers' theses, but I would like to point out that, in common, Fukuyama and Huntington express they think that a new post-ideological order debuted in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which implies, in turn, the understanding that the revolutionary discourses or ideals collapsed, since the inexorability of this new order would render obsolete any attempt to counteract what was established.

Although this theoretical debate does not seem to be directly associated with the object that is approached in this article – the character 'Bob Cuspe' and the magazine *Chiclete com Banana* –, it serves us as a parameter of the discussion unfolded in the intellectual environment at the time of its emergence, the 1980s, providing a set of thoughts with a shape that put into question the so-called 'great explanations' of history and the understanding of the urgency to construct new theories attentive to the new contemporary conditions and supportive of the particular forms of manifestation and opposition (FOUCAULT, 2008; DELEUZE, 2010).

As I believe that the echoes of this debate about the crisis of major ideologies reverberated quite forcefully also in the artistic field, I chose to think of our object as a part of this crisis atmosphere that unfolds in the field of knowledge. In Latin America, this aspect becomes more forceful inasmuch as the arts, still in the 1970s, were added to the intellectual production in order to face the military dictatorships established, strengthening and expanding, to other spaces, the opposition exercises.

Thus, the critique of major interpretative models of history and the debate about the 'end' of major ideological currents added to the context of political openness that unfolded in the late 1970s, also resonated among the cartoonists, demarcating a new humor production attitude; since the 1980s, the almost compulsory trend to think and act politically in such an incisive way stands still.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the intense political-ideological debate, focused on significant and well-defined theoretical frameworks, unfolded, among other vehicles, through the alternative press and it found in the so-called 'guerrilla humor' an important and fundamental source for expanding criticism and resistance to the military dictatorship. In this production type, whose central features were engagement and critical content, the newspaper *Pasquim* and the work by the cartoonist Henfil, published both in the *Pasquim* and in *Jornal do Brasil*, as well as in the magazine of his own, *Fradim*, which circulated between the years 1973 and 1980.

Political satire – conveyed through comic strips, cartoons, and caricatures – had a more than special participation in the propagation of a chronicle of everyday violence exercised by the State against its opponents. Angeli was a member of this generation of cartoonists – like Henfil, Jaguar, Millôr, among others – who, in the 1970s, employed humor with a political function, putting in discussion both the living conditions during the dictatorship and the pressures experienced in the professional sphere. From this perspective, humor would act as a way of showing the arbitrariness of the established dictatorial regime and as an instrument of political action.

Gradually, with the changes in the political and social context and the development of other strategies of political action and activism, political satire begins to share a significant space with the criticism of social conventions, which aims to especially address the practices of the emerging middle class in big urban centers. We may say that Angeli is at the forefront of this change that involves the type, style, theme, and sense of humor that has begun to be built, and which is undoubtedly associated with the transformations that Brazilian society has been experiencing, above all regarding the way of doing politics.

It is in this transition process that the magazine *Chiclete com Banana* appears, created by Arnaldo Angeli Filho<sup>1</sup>, in a partnership with Toninho Mendes, in October 1985, which expresses in its content a new way of conceiving the 'function' of humor, rethinking both the conception of political criticism and the importance of such criticism to the contemporary context. Angeli's testimony, given in an interview to the magazine *Playboy*, illustrates this reflection:

Once, I was looking for Delfim Netto's face to illustrate a humor column and found a picture of him with a framed Chico Caruso's cartoon. Why does a guy frame a critical cartoon? Or because the cartoon did not work or he is smarter than the cartoonist and decided to reverse the situation in his favor. It is the prisoner framing the sentence itself. When I looked at that, I started to analyze my cartoon strips and I thought: damn it, they look like cute little dolls. I could not develop an opinion in a dictatorship situation. Because my attempt is to overthrow the government. It is reasonable that the guy will not fall due to my cartoon strip, but I like to think that I will be able to. (PLAYBOY, 2006, p. 68)

In the wake of the counterculture movement and inspired by the underground comic strips<sup>2</sup> that had already achieved a consolidated space in the USA and began to take the first steps in Brazil during the 1970s<sup>3</sup>, the magazine *Chiclete com Banana* prioritizes the comic strips of social conventions and issues inherent to the culture of a youth that was no longer interested in being committed to specific ideological currents or in being associated with the countercultural signifiers of the 1970s.

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo Angeli's cartoon-strip production came to prominence in Brazil after winning the second place in the Piracicaba Humor Show, in 1972. Before that, he worked producing graphic humor in the pamphlets and trade union newspapers that circulated in the late 1960s and the early 1970s in Brazil. After winning the award in the Humor Show, he began collaborating with the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, where he became responsible for the editorial cartoon and started publishing on a daily basis in the section 'Ilustrada' the strip 'Chiclete with Banana.' During the 1970s, he also collaborated with the production of political cartoons for the alternative newspapers *Pasquim*, *Versus*, *Movimento*. He participated in the creation of *Circo Editorial*, where he published the first album with a story of Bob Cuspe, and the magazine *Chiclete com Banana*, in which he collected the strips produced in the *Folha* until then and its various characters. Until May 2016, he contributed to the *Folha's* daily comic strips. He currently collaborates sporadically with page A2 and the section 'Quadrão,' both in *Folha de S. Paulo*.

<sup>2</sup> "Underground had its culmination in the figure of the American man Robert Crumb. Strongly influenced by the Beat generation and flower power movement, he was the creator of transgressive and amoral characters and roughly sculptural and libertine women, such as the black-skinned Angelfood Macspade and the Devil Girl" (DANTAS, 2004, p. 21).

<sup>3</sup> Previous publications had already adopted the underground style, such as the magazine *Balão*, which became an inaugural landmark of marginal production, and *Bicho*, which in turn excelled by expanding the number of publications, reaching from 12,000 to 15,000 copies, also occupying space on the newsstands. See Cirne (1975).

This new comics trend and the supposedly 'apolitical' behavior of cartoonists like Laerte, Angeli, Paulo Caruso, Luis Gê, Glauco, among others, gained greater reverberation with an article published in 1985 by the magazine *Istoé*, highlighting the social conventions strips, stimulating a heated controversy between the 'old' and 'new' cartoonists, represented by Henfil and Angeli, respectively.

From this conflict between cartoonists, I am interested in taking the following statement by Angeli:

(...) whether my work serves the right wing, this is OK in my mind. It does not serve the right wing, indeed! Much less the left wing. It does serve to make fun of this little insect named as human being. Be her/him situation or opposition. A ridiculous person has no ideology and when she/he tries to have an ideology, things become much more ridiculous. A humorist does not fit to pose as a representative, much less to overthrow any government. At best, he illustrates revolutionary serials, which is no longer humor to turn propaganda. My work does not only try to feed on hunger in the Northeastern region, but also on other hunger events that haunt the human being's mind. If we cannot talk about our weaknesses, we run the risk of becoming donkeys defecating political rules and that was not the reason that brought me to the world. (ANGELI, 1985, p. 41)

This assertion makes it clear that the purpose of his production is bringing to the surface a humor that prioritizes behavioral issues, to the detriment of those considered specifically political, but which should not be characterized simply as 'apolitical,' and this is the premise that I intend to unfold in this article. I think that, just as in the field of knowledge production there was an attempt to construct new ways of thinking about the new geopolitical, economic, and cultural conditions – as stated through Fukuyama and Huntington's propositions –, this cultural product type represents an alternative form of exposure and criticism of established political and social planning systems.

An important aspect of Angeli's production is the ability to immerse in the issues of his time, making visible the contradictions and the crisis condition that permeated the Brazilian society during the period. That is how his characters may be conceived as contemporaries, in the sense proposed by Agamben (2009). The contemporary nature that I assign to the magazine *Chiclete com Banana* and, more specifically, to Angeli's characters, refers to the relationship with his time. Characters such as Bob Cuspe or Rê Bordosa, for instance, are immersed in their time, however, they distanced themselves

and it is through this detachment they become able to let us see the contradictions and problems of that time. They are contemporaries because they have the ability to “neutralize the lights that come from the time to uncover the darkness, the particular darkness, which is not, however, separable from those lights” (AGAMBEN, 2009, p. 63).

Thus, in this line of reasoning, I see the magazine *Chiclete com Banana* as a space created to reverberate an assumedly melancholic and nihilistic humor, which does not identify with the revolutionary intents and/or revolutionary utopias of the previous generation of artists, politicians, and intellectuals, and this becomes representative of the large part of the Brazilian youth that grew up silenced and under the impact of fear promoted by the dictatorial State terror.

To develop my premise, I summarize the magazine *Chiclete com Banana*, then I focus on the analysis of the discursive and behavioral universe of the character Bob Cuspe, whose stories have made him one of the best representations of *underground comix*. Along with the character Rê Bordosa, Bob Cuspe became crucial to give visibility to the behavioral codes and the specific languages of the particular circuits from the 1980s.

The analytical procedure employed is based on the analysis of discursive references applied to provide the character with meaning – specifically the characteristics demarcated in the inaugural story. Although it considers that the sum of the graphic resources – framing, format, view angle, letters, and other elements that appear as visual metaphors – is a significant part of the author's strategy to convey to the reader the expressivity load sought in that narrative, these resources are not the focus of my analysis.

In order to consubstantiate my proposal, I examine the inaugural story of the character, identifying how its lifestyle expresses new forms of contemporary resistance, insofar as, on the one hand, it constitutes a new world with its own rules for interacting and living together, and on the other hand, it maintains a critical condition present, thus refuting the argument that the character manifests a condition alienated from the social and political context in which it is inserted.

## Chiclete com Banana and the comics market for adults in Brazil

The magazine *Chiclete com Banana* was launched on October 15, 1985, by the Circo Editorial, a publishing house directed by the journalist, poet, and art editor Antônio de Souza Mendes Neto, who became known as Toninho Mendes, Angeli's childhood friend. The investment in Angeli's work was interesting for Toninho Mendes to enter the comics market aimed specifically at an adult audience (VERGUEIRO, 2014).

It was a daring venture, because it meant investing in a market still aimed at a children's audience, with massive presence of U.S. comic strips. The partnership with Angeli proved to be an excellent choice, since the latter already had support from critics and the public for his work published on a daily basis in *Folha de S. Paulo*, since he won a prize in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Piracicaba Humor Show, in 1975.

Before the magazine itself was issued, Circo Editorial launched the 'Série Traço e Riso,' with the album *Chiclete com Banana*, which included Angeli's strips published in *Folha de S. Paulo*. In an interview with Silva (2002), Angeli said that the success of this publication – which reached 11 editions – was key for the magazine's later launch.

The first edition of *Chiclete com Banana* came out with a colored front cover, 48 pages in black and white and a print run of 20,000 copies. In the third issue, the print run increased to 40,000 copies, reaching the surprising range of 110,000 copies in issues 7 and 8 and, subsequently, it kept the figure of 90,000 copies, not yet achieved by magazines in the same genre (SILVA, 2011). For 5 years, it maintained the bimonthly periodicity, making a total of 24 issues and some special issues (VERGUEIRO, 2014).

Given the success achieved, Angeli began to devote himself almost entirely to the magazine. In order to do that, he disengaged from the creation of editorial cartoons for *Folha de S. Paulo*, to become responsible for producing the magazine. Thus, until issue 11, we identify an almost total exclusivity of Angeli's characters; starting from issue 12, some contributors, such as Laerte, Luiz Gê, Paulo Caruso, Furio Lonza, Luiz Gustavo, and Glauco, beforehand occasional, become frequent, exempting Angeli from full responsibility for the magazine.



Initially, the flagships of the magazine were the characters Rê Bordosa and Bob Cuspe, already known to the audience through *Folha de S. Paulo*. Subsequently, with the entry of new contributors, other characters and sections gained space and stood out. Everything indicates that this insertion of new contributors, added to the direction that the relation between author, character, and readers was taking, was key for Angeli to make the decision that impressed his readers the most: kill Rê Bordosa.

The issue 'A morte de Rê Bordosa' came out in December 1987 and this was the most sold, two editions with more than 200,000 copies (VERGUEIRO, 2014). Indeed, this was not the only character killed by the author, Bob Cuspe and Meiaoito were also murdered by the author.

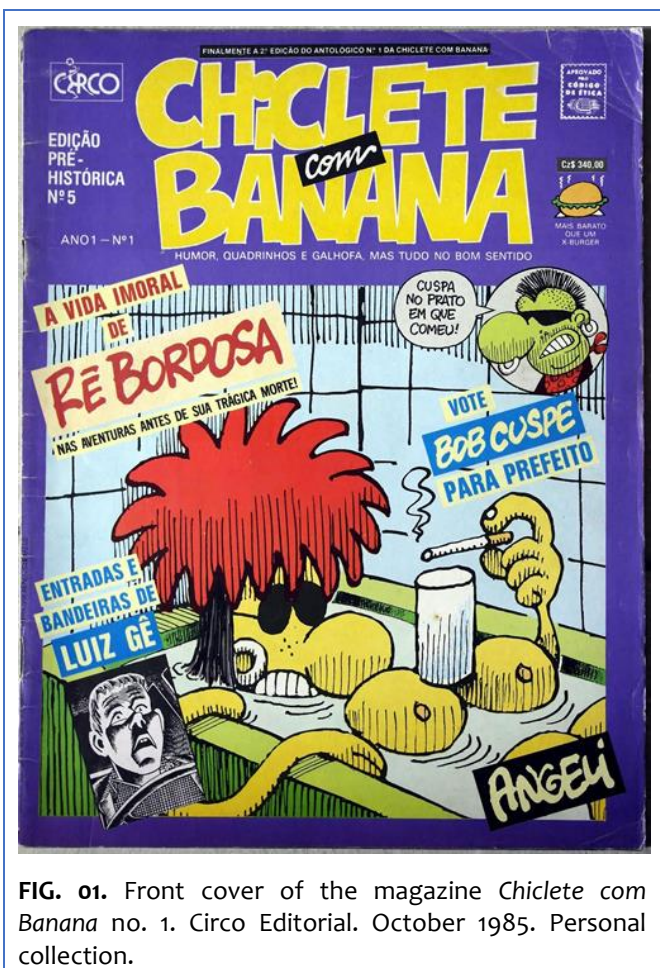


FIG. 01. Front cover of the magazine *Chiclete com Banana* no. 1. Circo Editorial. October 1985. Personal collection.

On the front cover of the first issue there are the characters known to the faithful audience of *Folha de S. Paulo*: Rê Bordosa and Bob Cuspe. Later, new Angeli's characters were added to the magazine, constituting the exotic fauna that, through hyperbolism, downplaying, and breaking of verbal conventions (use of profanity and obscene gestures), suspended social practices and values considered as standards and created propitious situations for allusions to subjects related to sexuality (male and female), homosexuality, drugs, everyday urban life, etc.

The editorial in the magazine's launch announced not only the break with the engaged model of artistic production, but also expressed its attitude on the publishing market focused on U.S. comic strips, until then hegemonic in Brazil. In this, a certain skepticism is also evident with the possibilities created by the recent past, while at the same time it values indifference and affirms its intent to promote, through such a 'tormented reasoning,' the reader's critical potential (NOVAES, 1996).

As a rather general presentation of the magazine, I discuss some aspects that stand out in the inaugural issue, providing it with a profile and, at the same time, a certain singularity. The first point that draws attention is the fact that, unlike much of the print media during the period, the author presents the option of participating in a

different way in the political debate of the time. With no party political ties, Angeli uses this issue to propose what we may define as Bob Cuspe's 'anticandidacy.' 'Anticandidacy' because we do not identify a propositional nature, since in the author's words: "Bob Cuspe is chaos. Bob Cuspe is the end."

Thus, this anticandidacy may be thought of as a mechanism used to counteract the political climate in the period, with the redemocratization process underway, promoting intense transformations in the Brazilian political scene. The option, announced in the editorial, is to remain detached from political-party tendencies, aiming at 'the target and not the shooters,' i.e. contrary to established political status and providing an acid

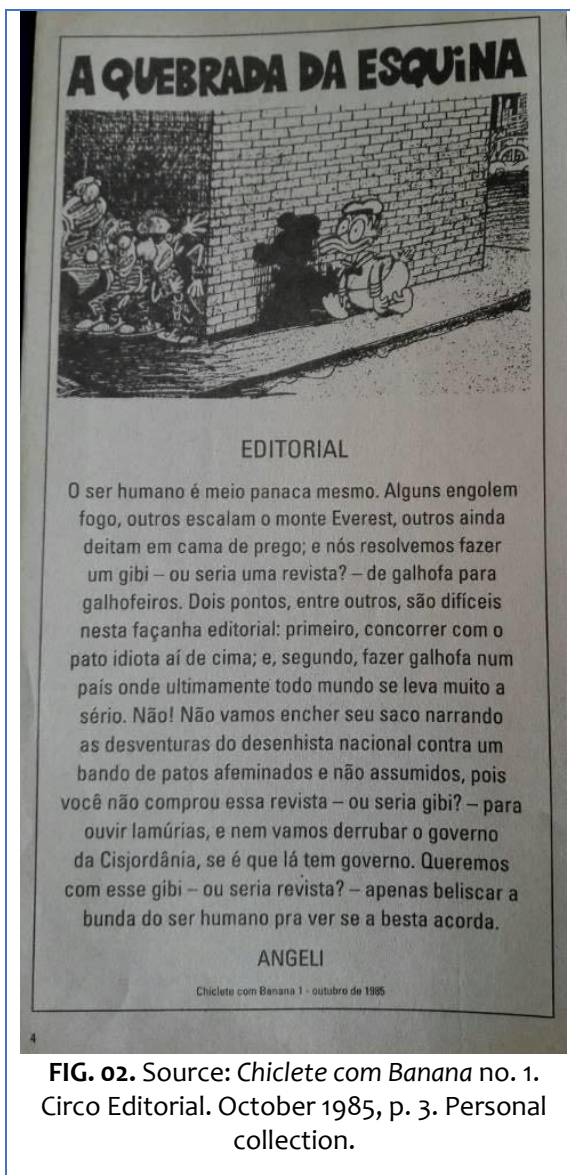


FIG. 02. Source: *Chiclete com Banana* no. 1. Circo Editorial. October 1985, p. 3. Personal collection.

criticism of social conventions insofar as it is intended to “pinch a human being’s ass to see if the stupid wakes up” (ANGELI, 1985, p. 4).

A second aspect that I highlight is the open intent of exposing an authorial view about actual reality, without this representing a testimony of history. This aspect becomes clear when the author is represented in the inaugural story as a sort of Bob Cuspe’s canvasser, an ironic sort of guide that introduces it to the reader.

Through his characters, and specifically the anticandidacy of a character who bears “a long and undeniable curriculum of transgression,” Angeli developed a decisively structural criticism and not only conjunctural criticism, at the same time that it explicitly states its representations about a set of concepts and ideas in force.

A third point to be indicated refers to the characters’ features that are commonly perceived as stereotypes of various social groupings. Some studies, for instance, associate Bob Cuspe with the anarchist movement<sup>4</sup>; for others, it represents the punks<sup>5</sup>; there are still those who identify it as the negation of the urban man model and the values and standards considered as normal<sup>6</sup>. I see that characters like Bob Cuspe and Rê Bordosa go beyond the condition of mere stereotypes, where stereotype means “what designates preconceived convictions about classes and individuals, groups and objects resulting not from a spontaneous estimate of each phenomenon, but from habits of judgment and expectation becoming a routine” (SILVA, 1986, p. 341).

By disregarding the value judgment, such characters do not become mere stereotypes of the urban environment. They carry within themselves references of the author and the collectivity he tries to depict, and their actions and speeches refer the reader to the ways of being and thinking of the collectivity to which this type might be associated, showing the expressive change that takes place in the practices, discourses, and sensitivities of the time. Therefore, they may be thought of as an allegory of a period’s spirit.

In Diniz’s words:

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<sup>4</sup> Santos (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Silva (2002).

<sup>6</sup> Lima (2013)..

Their characters represent particles from a larger context, which may be recognized in these fragments of the social context. Even if it is the result of an artist's exteriorization, this particle or particularity constitutes a dialectical construction, a set of integrated and dynamic elements. But they do not at any time determine a class in themselves, except in the characters that represent a class as Psycho, the Bourgeois, which is a separate case, because this is a criticism of the value position and the bourgeois worldview. (DINIZ, 2001, p. 59)

The characters materialize the author's intent to keep away from the political and cultural traditions that have gained space in Brazil since the 1970s and which sought to present themselves as an alternative democratic option to the authoritarianism in force in those years.

Rê Bordosa and Bob Cuspe, which constitute the magazine's front cover, are the opposite of this revolutionary and optimistic intent that animated social and political movements in the 1960s/70s, and express an apocalyptic view of actual reality and politics. At the same time, by not presenting themselves as stereotypes of urban tribes, they may be conceived as a sign of an epoch. Thus, although they are not a "mirror of the social. (...) they neither reflect the social or are reflected on the social – it is the mirror of the social that disrupts with them" (BAUDRILLARD, 2004, p. 56).

Finally, the relationship established with the means and modes of production, distribution, commercialization, and dissemination of the magazine is highlighted. Although the editorial in the first issue provides acid criticism of the hegemonic U.S. comic strips in Brazil, in the other issues we do not identify this concern in developing criticism of cultural institutions or the bourgeois institutional press and its ideology.

*Chiclete com Banana* was recognized as a part of the cultural industry, but it did not express enthusiasm for this condition. As a cultural product with openly underground influences, the magazine innovated by putting in the foreground what was considered as intolerable, repulsive, or scandalous and valuing the new modes of fruition and consumption, which at that time become individual, and focus on identity-building practices between readers and characters.

Thus, what changes is its position within contemporary culture, instead of being a clandestine force, it becomes prototype of an era and spreads through a wide and voracious consumption and commercialization (JAMESON, 1985).

According to Vergueiro, the differential of *Chiclete com Banana* lied not only on the theme adopted, but also on its:

Presentation, its internal structuring. Its stories are predominantly based on the strip format, (...) a feature that has implications for the magazine's narrative and consequently for its analysis. (VERGUEIRO, 2014, p. 41)

The magazine came to an end in August 1995, after the publication of the album "FHC, Biografia não autorizada", which gathered editorial cartoons made by Angeli during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration. Several reasons were pointed out for this outcome: economic fluctuations, poor administrative management, overwork. I believe that Laerte's words sum up the motivations for this outcome:

It was a combination of the country's economic crisis with a lack of financial support from the publishing house, such as buying paper, stocking, and authors' fatigue, even though each magazine was made by one person, basically. The *Chiclete com Banana* was made by Angeli, the *Piratas* was made by me. The *Geraldão* was not made by Glauco, it was made by Toninho. The fatigued person in the case of *Geraldão* was Toninho. But, anyway, it was like a "one-man show," so the guy hangs out for a while, then... (LAERTE apud SANTOS, 2012, p. 111)

### Bob Cuspe: counterbehavior and the power of 'no'

For analyzing the character Bob Cuspe, I seek anchoring in the notion of counterbehavior that appears, sparsely, in some reflections of Michel Foucault (2008; 2004) to address some types of revolts that are not specifically economic or political, although they are associated with other forms of conflict (GRABOIS, 2011).

In the course *Segurança, Território, População* (2008), Foucault addresses the relations between pastorate and government, glimpsing points of resistance that unfold in the pastorate itself and whose goal might be "wishing to be led in another way, by

other drivers, and by others pastors, for other purposes, and for other forms of salvation, by means of other procedures and other methods” (apud GRABOIS, 2011, p. 15).

Thus, counterbehavior comprise “forms of resistance to power as behavior” that seek to “escape from the others’ behavior... to define for each one the way to behave” (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 257). This notion seems pertinent to address the first appearance of Bob Cuspe, who was announced by the author as a political possibility contrary to the multitude of characters – with their respective ideologies – that appear on the board: Pinochet, hare kishnas, the Pope, Ronald Reagan, in a position of dispute embracing the globe, Jews, among other figures of the time.



FIG. 03. Source: *Chiclete com Banana* no. 1. Circo Editorial. October 1985, p. 3. Personal collection.

With this appearance, the character and its actions acquire another meaning, which I think to be not only the expression of an indifferent or apolitical behavior. In my view, its refusal manifested by the scandalous spits does not express an absolute indifference or withdrawal, or even a behavioral void.

I propose to think them – not only the spits, but its anticandidacy and its behavior as a whole – as counterbehavior, i.e. fragmentary reactions to the social behaviors proposed. Specifically, I think that their actions represent “improbable, spontaneous, violent, irreconcilable forms of microscopic resistance,” which express themselves

differently from the usual patterns of political struggle, working “outside the rationale of great radical disruptions (...), they are, rather, small points of inversion (...), of disobedience (...), and of placing their own forms of domination in judgment (...)” (ALVIM, 2011, p. 12).



FIG. 04. *Chiclete com Banana* no. 1. October 1985, p. 8.  
Personal collection.

and young adults in accordance with patriotic and civic values established by the government as optimal (ROLLEMBERG, 2006).

Therefore, it was an attack that had a specific target, the Moral and Civic Education teacher, or we may name it as disciplinary power, after all the comic strip's caption claims that “(...) power and the little rebel guy have never liked each other;” but we can infer that it also extends to social hierarchies, institutions, guardians, chairmen,

Bob Cuspe's inaugural spit took place suddenly, still in High School, in response to the punishment imposed by his Moral and Civic Education teacher, “sing a hundred times ‘I love you my Brazil.’” The gesture, trivial, becomes a diffuse form of action and expression that runs against a set of values at stake. This reaction aspect becomes clear through the time chosen by the author so that the character's big transformation is put into practice: the Moral and Civic class.

That is, in the face of the military dictatorship's strategy to educate children, teenagers,

and everything that guarantees the power's functioning. The character responds to the teacher's overt wish to lead with counterbehavior – the act of spitting –, which in that context takes the form of resistance.

Thus, I classify Bob Cuspe's actions as little instability points that do not remove the social and political control devices, they contribute to its destabilization. In calling attention to the vitality of these microscopic forms of resistance, I am also pointing to their strength, and it is in this sense that the concept of 'power of no' proposed with acuity by Agamben (2015b), is relevant.

Agamben grounds his ideas on digression about the Aristotelian doctrine regarding the faculties of power and the subjects' 'private presence of power.'

All power to be or to do something is, in fact, (...) always also power not to be or not to do, since otherwise power would always turn into act and with it would be confused (...). This 'power of no' is the cardinal secret of the Aristotelian doctrine of power, which makes every power, by itself, impotent. (AGAMBEN, 2015b, p. 14)

This concept is improved when Agamben analyzes the story of Bartleby, the Scrivener, a character created by Melville (2008), introduced as the "scribe who ceased to write (...) an extreme figure of nothing from which all creation proceeds and, at the same time, the most relentless claim of such nothingness as pure, absolute power" (AGAMBEN, 2015a, p. 26).

Bartleby is a character that epitomizes a paradox, since at the same time it symbolizes nihilism and incarnates absolute **power to** and **power of no**. With his formula "I would rather not," Bartleby exercises his power not to write, i.e. he puts deprivation into action. By aiming such a reflection at Bob Cuspe, I propose to think of it as a contemporary translation of Bartleby's formula: I rather not to.

With this, I intend to resize its inoperability, providing it with a new meaning: that of counterbehavior not seeking to eliminate existing control devices and power networks, since they are seen as inseparable parts of the society in which it lives, but they are repeatedly rejected by their gestures, as well as disqualified and perverted, thus becoming permanent swings in society.



From the time the character “discovered that it possessed a power... the incredible power of spitting in the direction he wanted to,” it takes control of himself and starts leading itself. As it appears in the captions of the story in focus, ‘the civil war’ begins thereafter.

After discovering the new potential, the character decides to create a costume look that makes it different from the aesthetics of beautiful things, thus becoming grotesque (BAKHTIN, 1993). At the same time that it is distinguished from the standard aesthetics – perfect and pre-established –, its appearance becomes as “skewed as the present day times ,” i.e. it expresses the time in which it lives: in the mid-1980s, when Brazil was still plunged in political uncertainties and undergoing serious ideological fractures.

Along with the eschatological nature of its gestures, Bob Cuspe’s aggressive and grotesque image becomes a way of debasing and degrading everything that appears as superior or established. Together – appearance and gesture – they act as practices of denial of a whole life structure, and not only of particular elements of this structure.

That is why, as observed in the story caption, they address “all the things that bored it! From an idiot teacher... to big bullshits in the modern world.” By focusing on tangible and particular aspects of the social structure, the eschatological and grotesque

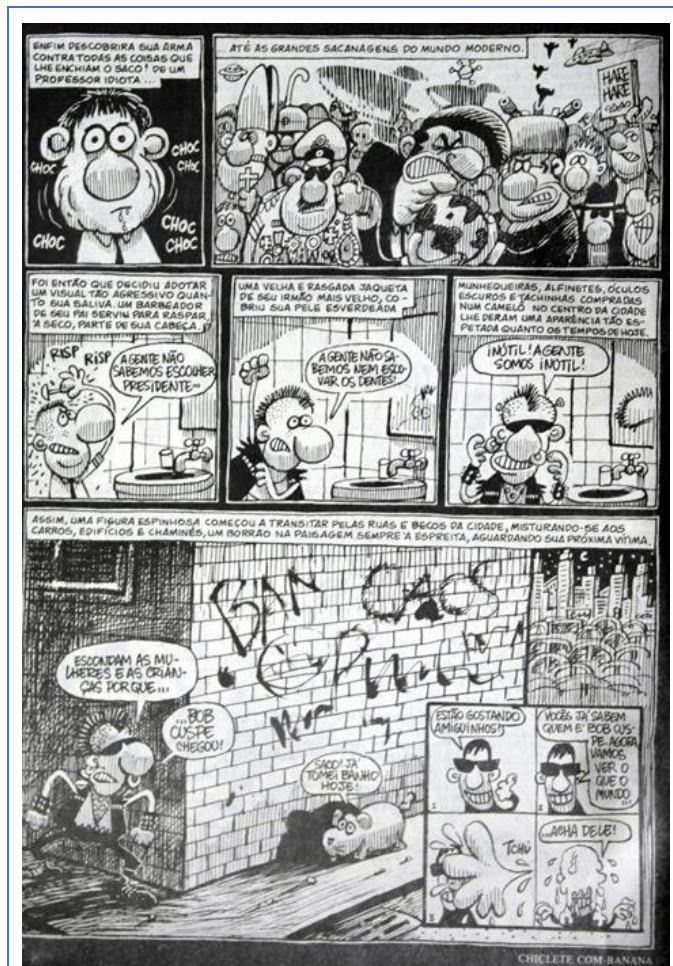


FIG. 05: Chiclete com Banana no. 1. October 1985, p. 8. Personal collection.

nature of this character expresses a form of active and individual struggle and confrontation.

Another interesting aspect, at this inaugural moment, is that although it represents an onslaught against power, there is no gesture or discursive manifestation that reveals the intent to seize power. However, this wish for radical change does not make it inert or peaceful. Rather than thinking of current political and economic models and indicating their contradictions, being critical of the system, in this context, implies perceiving itself immersed in these contradictions and addressing the plural and complex power networks existing in their distinct manifestation forms.

The author uses detachment as a discursive strategy to render strange what is usually seen as familiar, in a sort of unveiling that might serve to present the reader to a perspective on the issues experienced at that time without, however, suggesting an alternative or responses.

Thus, the confrontation that takes place between the character and its teacher, which appears as a power representative, such a confrontation seems to intend to restrain this, demobilizing this, “forcing the teacher to retreat and rearticulate itself, or even building new spaces for struggle” (ALVIM, 2011, p. 42). What is in dispute is something very dear to disciplinary power: behavior. The latter is, at the same time, target and object of both its representative and the character.



FIG. 06: *Chiclete com Banana* no. 1. October 1985, p. 8. Personal collection.

A second counterbehavior that the character adopts is organizing a countersociety in the spaces where it walks: the city alleys, corners, sewers, and streets. When I refer to countersociety, I am thinking of the small communities of marginal urban spaces that appear in its stories.

Living in these environments, Bob Cuspe is presented as strange to society – ‘cancer,’ ‘pus,’ ‘a huge boil in the armpits of society,’ ‘a blur in the landscape.’ However, the author also presents it as the ‘mirror of society,’ a definition that reinserts it in the urban habitat, insofar as this identifies it as a reproduction of a society that refutes it and this society is also refuted by the character. Although the character prefers seclusion in the ‘low’ parts of the city, it is inextricably tied to the ‘high’ parts, since that is where everything that integrates its underworld comes from, so that it becomes a city product.

The relations established to each other are always transient and favor the inversion of social hierarchy, since the leadership, when it exists, is taken by Bob Cuspe himself, i.e. the one with the most unruly life and without any social prestige. Thus, lifestyles in the urban spaces chosen by Angeli (not only in Bob Cuspe’s stories) may be seen as compliments to contingency and ways of looking at the city folds, what is embedded in its bosom, constituting the core of its ambivalence.

The countersociety that Bob Cuspe articulates is also formed by “communities of meaning,” i.e. the gathering of “individuals who adhere to a particular lifestyle, who share certain interests, and identify themselves through them – members, or not, of the underground groups that emerge during the 1980s and 1990s” (LIMA, 2013, p. 81). The author not only evokes an urban imaginary (SILVA, 2001) by means of his own experience, but re-elaborates it in order to create identification links with the reader.

## Conclusion

Bob Cuspe is grounded in the grotesque and absurd tradition. Through the elements characterizing the grotesque – blending, overlapping, celebration of the ugly, insult to the canons of beauty –, the character addresses the time it lives in, the languages spoken, the codes shared, the contradictions inherent to the urban subject which it talks to. It speaks of that fragmented, divided, off-axis society. In a way, we may say that speaking of the actual time also implied speaking of the past tense: after all, what had been done with the revolutionary ideals? With the heroic deeds of the past?

Examining this character, we visualized the audience to which such publications were aimed: young people living in the troubled and unstable 1980s, after two decades of dictatorship, who chose – or were led to choose – an attitude opposed to the engagement that characterized the youth in the 1960s, taking a pessimistic and critical behavior regarding politics and the capitalist system, without, however, posing resistance to the system, since they did not seek the establishment of a new political, economic, or social model, but specifically its problematization.

With characters such as Bob Cuspe, Angeli is not oblivious to the issues of that historical time. On the contrary, I believe that he is absolutely attentive to the new political and cultural demands of the period and, in several stories that, for practical reasons, I chose not to expose in this article, I managed to show the continuity of the archaic in parallel with the disruption conditions inaugurated. I think of this character as a resource used by the intellectual humorist to address in a dense and complex way the precariousness that characterizes the contemporary subject, living in the conditions of instability inherent to that historical context without, this way, claiming to become a 'translator of the truth.'

So, I think that Bob Cuspe may be conceived as a form of criticism of the established political and social ordering systems, which expresses itself through counterbehavior, at the same time it foreshadows a governmentality crisis (SENELLART, 2008).

Moments of crisis and transition are also moments of terminological uncertainty, making it often necessary to create new terms and practices to give meaning to what is experienced, and such choices can never be considered neutral, they imply taking a position before the phenomenon nature to be addressed and the rationale most appropriate to understand it.

Hence, when we turn our gaze to characters like Bob Cuspe, produced in times of crisis, we cannot ignore the categories used to define this moment, because then, in this representation, we can also identify its positioning before what it expresses.

The great character's feat lies precisely in the refusal and in the condition of exclusion, because it is only through this that it is possible to "gather the dissatisfied ones in the world" and to move freely "between city manholes, pipelines, and sewers (...) to face the human being from various angles (...) and to know the weight and odor of modern civilization" (ANGELI, 1985, p. 5).

Foucault points out that power is/comes from everywhere and that resistance points are inseparable from power, as they are the power's "irreducible interlocutors" (FOUCAULT, 1988). In fact, an interesting aspect punctuated by the author is that we cannot speak of resistance in the singular. They only exist in the plural, they are "possible, necessary, improbable, spontaneous, savage, solitary, planned, drawn, violent, irreconcilable, ready to compromise, interested or doomed to sacrifice (...)" (FOUCAULT, 1988, p. 91).

The character Bob Cuspe may be a way of thinking about the new resistance practices that gain space in Brazil during the 1980s. Counterbehavior that show up "as inventive, as mobile" as power, and that, like it, "comes from below and distributes itself strategically" (FOUCAULT, 2004, p. 241). Thus, what a character of this nature can propose is the visibility of another behavior that tries to detach itself from the behavior imposed by others, i.e. self-management.

The specificity of its action lies in taking counterbehavior as behavior, after all, "just as there were other resistance forms, equally wished, or refusals that address power insofar as it exploits economically, there have been no resistance forms to power as behavior?" (FOUCAULT, 2008, p. 257).

It is on the new forms of uprising, which are usually placed outside of history, that we move with these reflections, in order to reintroduce them in history, along with other objects that may make us think of them and their political validity in our contemporary times.

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