

Contemporary Brazilian Music Film

Edited by Albert Elduque

AHRC-FAPESP research project
“Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema:
Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method” (“IntermIdia”)



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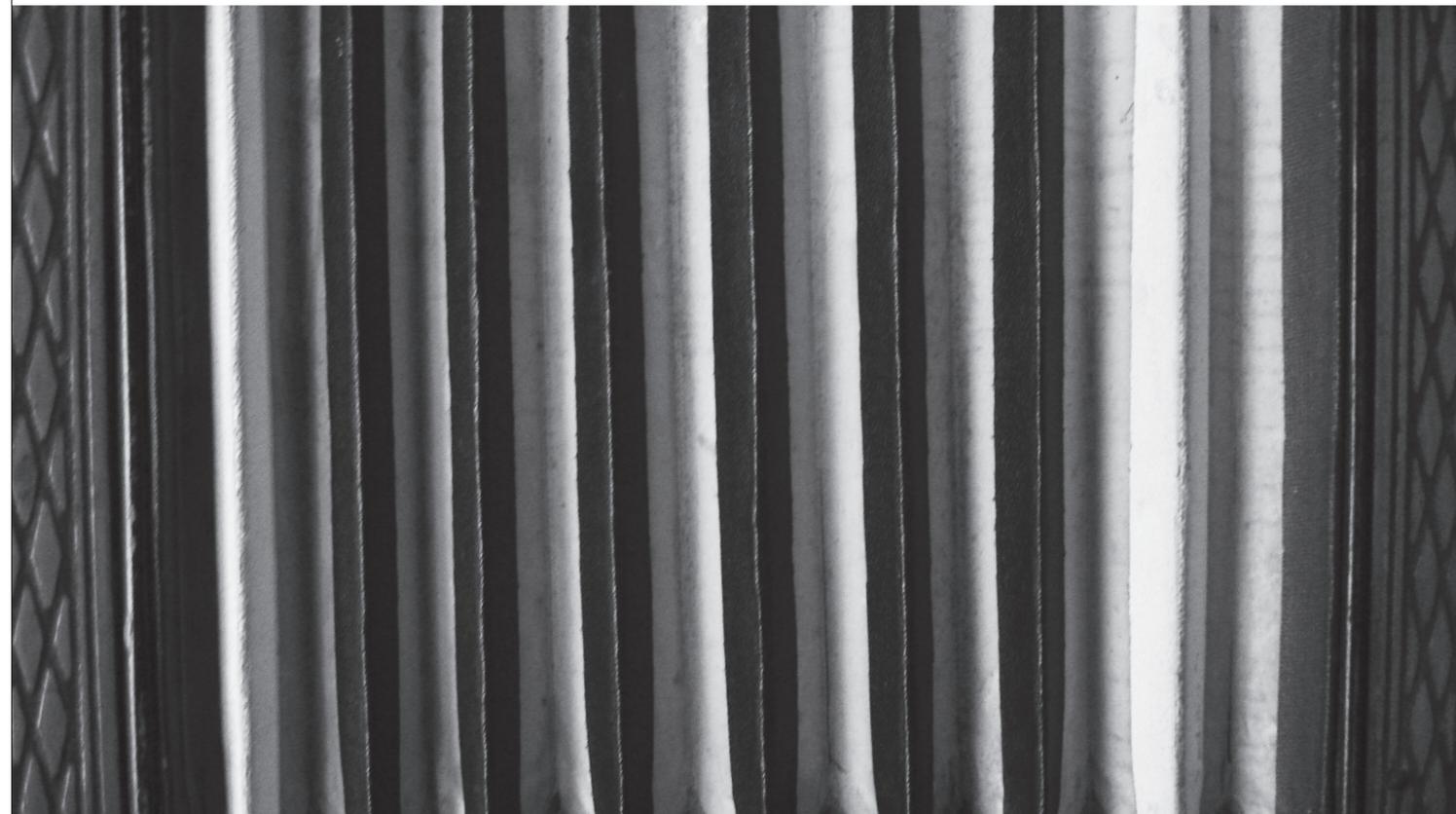
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Elza (2010). Photograph by
Jaguar Produções Artísticas

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Source: Miração Filmes





Introduction

Albert Elduque

This season and catalogue are the result of the AHRC-FAPESP-funded research project “Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method” (“InterMídia”), carried out at the University of Reading (United Kingdom) and the Universidade Federal de São Carlos (Brazil). The main aim of the project is to explore the history of Brazilian cinema, building on those key moments where the intersection and cross-pollination of different arts were more obvious, such as the film prologues of the 1920s, the popular vaudeville genre *teatro de revista* in *chanchadas* in the 1940s, and the cross-over between visual arts and avant-garde cinema in tropicalism. This season and catalogue propose to investigate one of those key moments: the boom of music films in Brazil from the mid-1990s, during a moment known as the *Retomada do Cinema Brasileiro* (the Revival of Brazilian Cinema), when production experienced a significant rise thanks to the increase in public funding. The selection of films presented in this season is thus an effort to understand the reasons and results of this phenomenon. It will be a privileged opportunity to explore the relationship between music, cinema and history through stories, images and songs.

New images for the songs

Over the last twenty years, Brazilian cinema has been hugely interested in music. Or, more precisely, in the history of music. What in the 1960s and 70s consisted mostly of short documentaries, such as *Nelson Cavaquinho* (Leon Hirszman, 1969) and *Gal* (Antonio Carlos da Fontoura, 1970), expanded into feature-length documentaries and fiction films, achieving significant commercial success on Brazilian screens. Two musical biopics, *Two Sons of Francisco* (*Dois Filhos de Francisco*, Breno Silveira, 2005) and *Cazuza: Time Doesn't Stop* (*Cazuza – O Tempo Não Para*, Walter Carvalho and Sandra Werneck, 2004), occupy positions 4 and 20, respectively, on the list of the most successful Brazilian films at the Brazilian box office over the period 1995 to 2016. The former, devoted to the *música sertaneja* (country music) duo Zezé di Camargo & Luciano, attracted 5,319,677 spectators, while the latter, focused on the life of rock

singer Cazuza, reached the figure of 3,082,522.¹ These two films prompted a series of biopics on popular musicians, including *Gonzaga: From Father to Son* (*Gonzaga – De Pai Pra Filho*, Breno Silveira, 2012); *Somos Tão Jovens* (Antonio Carlos da Fontoura, 2013), on rock singer Renato Russo's early career; *Tim Maia* (Mauro Lima, 2014); and *Elis* (Hugo Prata, 2016). The trend shows no signs of abating, with biopics on *choro* composer Pixinguinha and singer Wilson Simonal due to be released in the near future.

In addition, the end of the twentieth century witnessed a boom in national documentaries. Between 1996 and 2007, Brazilian documentaries released in film theatres rose from one or two to more than 20 titles per year. Music played an important role here: 25 documentaries out of the 117 released during that period focused on music, sometimes closely related to other issues, such as urban violence and life in the countryside.² It is not surprising, therefore, that on the list of the 15 most successful Brazilian documentaries in Brazil over the period 1995–2016, nine are devoted to music, and the leading title is *Vinicius* (Miguel Faria Jr., 2005), dedicated to the poet and songwriter Vinicius de Moraes, with 271,979 admissions.³

This trend in fiction and documentary has been led by major production companies, including Conspiração Filmes and Globofilmes, and has elicited academic research within Brazilian universities charting the Brazilian music film phenomenon.⁴ It also caused the emergence of new film festivals, such as the Festival Internacional Cine Música in Conservatória (Rio de Janeiro), since 2007, and In-Edit Brasil in São Paulo, since 2009. The latter is devoted solely to music documentaries as part of a festival network derived from an initial iteration in Barcelona in 2003, which includes Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Greece. Though part of an international network, the Brazilian case stands out: according to Cristian Pascual, the head of international coordination for the festival, in Brazil, In-Edit's national section boasts the highest number of films, and is also the most popular. According to Pascual, this is mainly because Brazil is more of a music exporter than an importer, and the consumption of national music is stronger there than in other countries, thus encouraging the domestic success of their own music documentaries.⁵

In an interview for this catalogue, Hernani Heffner (chief curator of the Cinemateca of the Museu de

LEFT

The Miracle of Santa Luzia (2008).

Source: Miração Filmes



Cazuza: *Time Doesn't Stop* (2004)

Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro) states that the social importance of Brazilian popular music is one of the key reasons for the appeal of these fictions and documentaries in Brazil, though there are also some important historical reasons. He claims that this strand sprang from an interest in reflecting upon the history of the country, to the point that most of the films focus on old genres and singers rather than on the contemporary scene. In doing so, these films appear to build a particular, heterogeneous history of the country through songs. Along the same lines, we can mention Franklin Martins's colossal three-volume work *Quem foi que inventou o Brasil? A música popular conta a história da República*, published in 2015, in which he compiled 1,113 songs relating, year by year, to political events in Brazil. In Martins' view, those songs convey

the invention of the Republic by our people and our music. Rather than a monotonous and bureaucratic list of names, dates and sentences, what springs out from the hundreds of garnered, reunited and contextualized songs is a living story of the Republic, written and sung by millions and millions of Brazilians of different generations.⁶

The nine documentaries and the fictional biopic that make up this season at the Reading Film Theatre are a selection of those films about music that have

stood out on the Brazilian screens over the last 15 years. They should serve as a panorama (though unavoidably incomplete) of the last hundred years of Brazilian music, which includes samba, bossa nova, tropicalism, pop, rock, *baião* and other regional genres. In addition, the season includes the screening of two films by Cinema Novo filmmaker Leon Hirszman: *Work Songs – Sugarcane* (*Cantos de Trabalho – Cana-de-açúcar*, 1976) and *Nelson Cavaquinho*. Their inclusion is intended to bridge past and contemporary films, suggesting a possible historical link in Brazilian cinema through popular songs, rhythms and melodies. Through their portrait of certain singers, musicians and styles, contemporary films establish ties with the old ones—from the musical *chanchadas* of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, to other films about music such as *Rio, Northern Zone* (*Rio Zona Norte*, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1957), *Girl from Ipanema* (*Garota de Ipanema*, Leon Hirszman, 1967) and *Tabu* (Júlio Bressane, 1982)—and they all bring an important section of an intermedial history of Brazilian cinema into being. In addition, as we will see, some of the films of the season go even further, by working with archival materials and proposing alternative histories of Brazilian audio-visual media in their own images.

Songs of the people

Let us now outline some of the features of the highly heterogeneous set of films included in the season. Three of the documentaries are explicitly focused on

how personal and collective histories are written, and how songs are created, consumed and remembered. *Songs* (*As Canções*, 2011), by Eduardo Coutinho, is made up of a series of interviews with members of the public who talk about the songs that were important in their lives. *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* (*O Milagre de Santa Luzia*, Sérgio Roizenblit, 2008) explores the traditions of accordion music by embarking on an anthropological trip across Brazil, under the guidance of accordionist Dominginhos. *Where the Owl Sleeps* (*Onde a Coruja Dorme*, Márcia Derraik and Simplício Neto, 2010) starts as a portrait of the irreverent *pagode* singer Bezerra da Silva, but soon shifts its focus towards the blue-collar workers who composed his most successful songs.

The three films are devised as social collective tapestries that highlight the importance of music for Brazilian citizens and communities, while, at the same time, dealing with the conflict between songs as a collective experience and their assimilation by mass media. The anthropological research that these films invariably undertake (particularly in the case of *The Miracle of Santa Luzia*) echoes the trips made by composer Heitor Villa-Lobos in the first decade of the twentieth century and those of writer Mário de Andrade in the 1930s, both of whom travelled to rural regions to compile popular songs.⁷ They are also reminiscent of the series *Brasilianas* (1945–1964), where filmmaker Humberto Mauro recorded the chants of rural workers in the states of Minas Gerais and São Paulo,⁸ and of the Cinema Novo tendency to record music styles and peoples at the brink of disappearance in the 1960s. Indeed, during the production processes of both *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* and *Where the Owl Sleeps*, some of the protagonists passed away, taking part of a musical tradition with them. Incidentally, this seems to reoccur in a number of documentaries about Brazilian music, including *Partido Alto* (Leon Hirszman, 1976–1982), *Paulo Moura – Alma Brasileira* (Eduardo Escorel, 2013), *Danado de Bom* (Deby Brennand, 2016) and *Me, My Father and the Cariocas* (*Eu, Meu Pai e Os Cariocas*, Lúcia Veríssimo, 2017), which were completed after their protagonists Candeia, Paulo Moura, João Silva and Severino Filho, respectively, had already died. In some cases, these deaths are used within the film to highlight the film's long production process or conflicts derived from copyright restrictions. In the case of *Where the Owl Sleeps*, for example, the record companies would not allow the filmmakers to use the songs for free, even though their composers had agreed, meaning that the first version of the film could not be commercially released. It was only after the death of Bezerra da Silva that the project was recovered and finally



The Miracle of Santa Luzia (2008). Source: Miração Filmes

brought to cinemas. In the interview with Márcia Derraik included in this catalogue the reader will find the details of this tumultuous production process.

The Brazilian artist

One of the main features permeating contemporary Brazilian music films is the relationship between performer and community. In *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* and *Where the Owl Sleeps*, for example, Dominginhos and Bezerra da Silva work as mediators between popular music and mass media, leading the film crew through the world that is portrayed onscreen.⁹ However, in many recent Brazilian documentaries and fiction films, the relationship between the artist and the community is articulated in terms of Brazilian national identity rather than through a process of cultural mediation, tending to follow the structure of a biopic. This season offers some significant examples, such as the documentaries *Cartola – Music for the Eyes* (*Cartola – Música para os Olhos*, Lírio Ferreira and Hilton Lacerda, 2007) and *Chico – Brazilian Artist* (*Chico – Artista Brasileiro*, Miguel Faria Jr., 2015), as well as the fiction film *Elis*. The portraits of Cartola, Chico Buarque de Hollanda and Elis Regina presented in these films explore the lives and work of these artists within the traditions of samba, bossa nova and Brazilian Popular Music (*Música Popular Brasileira* – MPB), but also their relationship with Brazilian identity.

Cartola – Music for the Eyes interweaves the samba singer and composer's life, marked by instability, marginalisation and late recognition, with the history of the country during his lifetime, from 1908 to 1980. The interrelation between the two subjects is quite strong, prompting Tatiana Heise, in an essay devoted to the Brazilian music documentary, to claim that "the assertion of Brazilian national identity is so forceful that it takes precedence over the musician's biography."¹⁰ Heise argues that this and other films of the same genre contain "an overriding concern with *brasileidade*, whether in a critical form, [...] or in a straightforward celebratory manner." According to her, this association of national identity with music can be traced back to the 1920s and the first intellectual and artistic debates on Brazilian identity, which highlighted music as the most obvious expression of the mixed cultural formation of the country.¹¹

As suggested by its title, *Chico – Brazilian Artist* characterises Chico Buarque as an icon of *brasileidade*. The two songs that bookend the film suggest that the documentary should be considered in terms of identity. The first song, "Sinhá" ("Mistress"), is a plea from a black slave tortured by his master and finishes with Chico speaking in the first person and defining himself as someone who has a "voz de pelourinho" ("pillory voice") and the "ares de senhor" ("attitude of a lord"); that is, someone who is descended from both the slave and the master.¹² The second one, "Paratodos" ("For All"), pays homage to a number of Brazilian singers, both masters from the past and others from Chico's own generation. Apart from old shows and an intimate duet with his granddaughter at home, these are the only two songs performed by Chico Buarque in the whole documentary, and they define him as someone who catalyses both the contradictions of Brazilian mixed identity and the richness of its musical traditions; in short, a Brazilian artist. The letter that Tom Jobim wrote to him in 1989 (included in this catalogue) is also eloquent in this regard: "Chico Buarque my national hero / Chico Buarque racial genius / Chico Buarque Brazil's saviour" are its first three, joyful, celebratory verses.

While expressing a particular national feeling through their songs, Brazilian artists also embody the contradictions of the people in the country through their own lives. A permanent feature of these biopics, whether fiction or documentaries, is the depiction of the relationship between parents and sons as a fundamental narrative strand. Fictional movies like *Two Sons of Francisco* or *Gonzaga: From Father to Son*, as well as documentaries such as *Paulinho da Viola – Meu Tempo É Hoje* (Izabel Jaguaribe, 2003) or *Cássia Eller* (Paulo Henrique Fontenelle, 2014), stress the

way in which family relationships reinforce, clash with or contrast with the protagonists' artistic lives. In the films in this season, Cartola and Elis have an unsettling relationship with their parents, while Chico Buarque embarks on research into an unknown brother who was raised in Germany as a way to find out more about his enigmatic father, the intellectual Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda. The importance of paternal and maternal bonds stresses a common trait of the biopic as a whole, which is the tension between an artist and his/her original community or family,¹³ as well as the importance of family within Brazilian society and the problematic relationship with the past which involves both public and private life.

In some cases, the importance of family is palpable in the creative processes of the films themselves. Sons or daughters are often in charge of either the direction or the production of the films, as can be seen in *Vinicius*, co-produced by the songwriter's daughter Suzana de Moraes, and *The Music According to Antonio Carlos Jobim (A Música Segundo Tom Jobim, 2012)*, co-directed with Nelson Pereira dos Santos by the composer's granddaughter Dora Jobim. According to Mariana Duccini, this frequent involvement of children and relatives is due to a generation willing to come to terms with the past, in order to examine the contradictions of a particular artist and redeem him or her in the pantheon of Brazilian culture.¹⁴ Overall, this redemptive intention becomes especially remarkable when the artist has a complicated political past, such as Wilson Simonal, whose career declined because of an alleged collaboration with the military dictatorship's repressive forces; he is redeemed in the documentary *Simonal: No One Knows How Tough It Was (Simonal – Ninguém Sabe o Duro que Dei, Cláudio Manoel, Micael Langer and Calvito Leal, 2009)*. Elis Regina's ambivalent relationship with that same regime is brought to the fore in the film by Hugo Prata in the same way. Once again, the history of music is intertwined with the history of the country, and the artist is the particular figure who catalyses the doubts and the contradictions of the people and the nation.

Lyrics and performances

In trying to understand national identity and history, the role of songs goes far beyond mere appearance as simply examples of the artist's work. Echoing the dilemmas between life and oeuvre, the structure of the musical biopics fluctuates between a narration of the facts, either with fiction sequences (in feature films) or interviews (in documentaries), and performances of the songs. This intermedial fluctuation does not have an equivalent in biopics about painters,



Cartola – Music for the Eyes (2007). Photograph by Café. Source: Raccord

writers or even classic composers, due to the material condition of paintings, novels and symphonies, as well as the time required to experience them. Songs can take a leading role in this regard due to their short duration. When inserted into the film, they can contribute with their lyrics to describe a character, narrate a particular episode, or make a comment that acts as a counterpoint. In *Cartola – Music for the Eyes*, for example, the success and recognition of the protagonist in the media is extolled by his cheerful rendition of "Alegria" ("Joy"), while his funeral is accompanied by his song "Divina Dama" ("Divine Lady"), which seems to evoke death in its first verses: "Tudo acabado / E o baile encerrado..." ("Everything's over / The dance is finished...")

Apart from the interaction between the lyrics and the content of the film, the performance of a particular song offers a wide range of possibilities to filmmakers. As Simon Frith states in his book *Performing Rites*, a song cannot simply be considered an abstract entity limited to its lyrics, but as a multifaceted performance which includes the way the lyrics are sung, as well as the entire visual presentation: the setting, lighting, costumes, etc.¹⁵ *Chico – Brazilian Artist* stages all the performances within a film set that has big, colourful, geometrical forms, and most of the songs

are not sung by Chico Buarque but by other artists such as Mart'nália, Adriana Calcanhoto and Milton Nascimento, who pay homage and establish artistic bonds with him. This re-performance thus allows a dialogue between the original renditions by Chico, which the audience may remember, and the new ones presented by the film, thus superimposing temporal layers and suggesting a certain history for the song. As a matter of fact, the re-performance is an enduring feature of the Brazilian music documentary, probably because it is an effective, condensed way of rethinking the history of the song through a single, present image which evokes a remembered past.

Thus, performances in recent Brazilian cinema about music can describe, narrate or create partnerships and generational bonds. This richness means that some films prefer to celebrate these connections and set aside part or most of the biographical content. One documentary included in this season builds on this tension: *Elza* (Izabel Jaguaribe and Ernesto Baldan, 2010) is devoted to Elza Soares, a symbol of the struggle of black women in Brazil, and who possesses a unique voice that blends samba and jazz with bossa nova. The filmmakers deliberately avoid focusing on the violent, sometimes tragic, life of Elza Soares, which includes her impoverished upbringing,



Chico – Brazilian Artist (2015). Source: 1001 Filmes

her troubled marriage with the footballer Garrincha and the loss of three children, as a way to distance the film from market strategies based on the exploitation of people's private lives.¹⁶ They focus instead on her career and her songs, performed together with friends such as Maria Bethânia and Jorge Ben Jor. Despite including certain features from documentary biopics such as interviews and archive images, the film comes to resemble other Brazilian documentaries that deliberately choose to reject traditional storytelling in order to focus more on how the artist sings; whether it is part of an intimate family reunion, as in *Maria Bethânia – Pedrinha de Aruanda* (Andrucha Waddington, 2007), or in a claustrophobic recording studio, as seen in *Jards* (Eryk Rocha, 2012), a textural film about bodies, microphones and voices rather than a biography of the singer Jards Macalé.

Singing the cinema

By considering some of the contemporary films included in this season, we have seen so far how popular song and cinema can establish an intermedial relationship that considers time as a crucial element. When superimposing song and cinema, the history conveyed by the former contrasts with the present of the filming, thus suggesting a temporal density. We have also seen how particular figures can act as intermedial agents between popular music and cinema, whether it be as mediators between the film

and the community that's portrayed (as in the case of Dominginhos and Bezerra da Silva), or as cultural icons that crystalize the complexities of the country in terms of mixed identity, cultural heritage and political contradictions, as with Cartola, Elis Regina or Chico Buarque. We have examined how songs can interrupt or even replace the narration of the film with their lyrics, as well as establishing artistic bonds between artists through a particular performance. To sum up, we have seen how both songs and figures can galvanise a particular intermedial history of music and cinema.

We can now add a third agent to the songs and the figures: the images themselves. In some of the films presented in this season, these temporal clashes I've described also manifest in the image track, as the present filming of a song is juxtaposed with the use of archival resources from the past. By working with materials that range from cinema itself to newsreels, TV programmes, home movies and music videos, films like *Cartola – Music for the Eyes*, *The Music According to Antonio Carlos Jobim*, *Tropicália* (Marcelo Machado, 2012) and *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party* (*Titãs – A Vida Até Parece uma Festa*, Oscar Rodrigues Alves and Branco Mello, 2008) present a reliable account of a particular time period that enriches the stories they tell, focusing on Cartola, Tom Jobim, the Tropicália movement or the rock band Titãs. However, in doing so, they also suggest



On this page, *The Music According to Antonio Carlos Jobim* (2012)

that dealing with the history of music means dealing with the history of images, questioning it, remaking it, reshaping it, turning it upside-down, giving it new meanings and therefore offering a different history of Brazilian cinema and audio-visual media in general. The song can take on unexpected and surprising functions within this audio-visual exploration. In *Cartola – Music for the Eyes*, for example, it accompanies images from newsreels and films and, by doing so, establishes a link between the artist and the nation. While Cartola's lyrics may tell a personal story of love and despair, the images highlight certain events from Brazilian history and culture of the twentieth century. For instance, his song "Tive Sim" ("Yes, I Had") admits an old love from the past with feelings of nostalgia, but accepts the need to put memories aside, and can be heard over images from Brazil in the 1960s and 70s. These images include cultural icons such as Tom Jobim and Pelé, films such as *Girl from Ipanema* and *Entranced Earth* (*Terra em Transe*, Glauber Rocha, 1967) and also some shocking footage of the violence during the military dictatorship. The link between song and images goes beyond their historical coincidence: the song brings to newsreels and films an intimate longing, while these newsreels and films grant the song a collective dimension. And, just as the memories of "Tive Sim" had to be put aside, the images of the 1960s are also problematized as their glorification of cultural achievement has to coexist alongside some uncomfortable images from



the dictatorship. Here, the song articulates the images from the past, gives them new meanings, reorganises the archives of the country's history and the history of its cinema, and comments on our attitudes to this history, all while highlighting the identification between artist and nation.

In other examples, the relationship between a song and the archives doesn't construct a dialogue, but a series. In *The Music According to Antonio Carlos Jobim* and *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party*, different performances of the same song are placed side-by-side, therefore bringing together a variety of places, times, audio-visual media and, in the former case, artists and languages.¹⁷ The nine versions of "Garota de Ipanema" ("The Girl from Ipanema"), including TV performances in Italian and Japanese, make it clear that the song not only circulates through different figures (as we saw when discussing re-performances) but also through different images. In the same way that a singer has his or her own repertoire, songs have their own visual catalogue, and the result is a non-linear history of audio-visual media that can go from an intimate performance in black-and-white to an elaborate dance with sophisticated camera movements in a TV show.

Strange as it may seem, this collage strategy is not the celebration of an audio-visual heterogeneity, but rather a highlighting of cultural clashes that brings us back to one of the main concerns in the history of Brazilian cinema: the relationship with foreign



culture and production conditions, both highlighted by the essential film historian Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes and by the Cinema Novo movement.¹⁸ In her text on *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party* (included in this catalogue), Lisa Purse describes a sequence comprised of different performances of the song “Bichos Escrotos” (“Fucking Beasts”), pointing to the fact that the collage starts and finishes in the same space: a TV variety show with Silvio Santos, a choice that highlights the tensions between the political subversion of the band and their adaptation to the market. As Purse’s analysis suggests, the non-linear history of audio-visual media that these images construct is by no means innocent or abstract. It highlights, through new strategies, the political and economic hierarchies of images in our current, heterogeneous, YouTube-friendly world.

The collage impulse described above may also be seen as part of a wider strategy through which recent music documentaries consider the history of cinema: a placing of the past next to the present in order to highlight the distance between them. Hernani Heffner, in his interview in this catalogue, points out this striking challenge in the film *A Night in 67 (Uma Noite em 67, Ricardo Calil and Renato Terra, 2010)*, a documentary that focuses on the 3rd Brazilian Popular Music Festival in 1967, which featured Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and Chico Buarque among other singers. But rather than just talk about the festival, these veterans also speak about the unavoidable fact of becoming old. *Tropicália*, the film that Marcelo Machado devoted to the iconic cultural movement of the late 1960s, uses the same strategy, but reinforces its visual construction and grants a particular role to the song. According to the director, the interviews with artists such as Rogério Duarte and Tom Zé took place in a dark room in which some rare images from those times were screened to provoke a certain reaction from the interviewees. For Machado, these images represented “a score” and the whole *dispositif* was called “the cavern of memory.” At the end of the film, we see how the elderly Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil react to images of them forty years younger filmed in Salvador da Bahia around the time of their return from exile in London, including a performance of Gilberto Gil’s song “Back to Bahia.” These were part of the material Leon Hirszman filmed for his unfinished project *Caetano / Gil / Gal*; it had no sound, but Machado identified Gil’s song and accurately synchronised the images with another record.¹⁹

This “score” that triggers “memory” in the “cavern” establishes a contrast between yesterday and today, which only becomes greater when Gilberto Gil



Tropicália (2012)

sings over his own voice. The two voices, the young one and the old, are superimposed, highlighting the temporal contrast. In the materiality of the voice we can feel that years have gone by, that time has passed and it has had an effect on the figures. Here, the song curates the conceptual, historically-charged bond between two images; between past and present. In addition, by working with material from an unfinished project, *Tropicália* proposes the ultimate, most

accomplished intermedial relationship between cinema and song. Here it is not the film that recaptures the memory of the song, it is the song that recaptures cinema, by digging into its leftovers, bringing to life the pieces of a film that wasn’t finished and was left silent, and re-introducing it into the history of Brazilian cinema.

Imagined songs

Over the last twenty years, the intermedial relationship between Brazilian popular song and Brazilian cinema has gained enormous commercial importance and has essentially followed two fundamental strands: working through iconic figures of Brazilian culture and the creative approach to archival images. In this introduction, I have tried to outline these major features through the films screened in this season at the Reading Film Theatre: nine documentaries and a fictional biopic, which will be accompanied by two documentary shorts by Leon Hirszman.

This catalogue has been designed to be used as a companion for the season and the reflections above. The reader will find texts linked with each of the ten screened films, but in different ways: some of the essays are film analyses that examine the films, while others refer to the artists and musical styles portrayed. They have been written either by film or music scholars, journalists, and sometimes by the artists themselves. New material, including the essay by Lisa Purse and the interviews with Hernani Heffner, Márcia Derraik and Sérgio Roizenblit, sit alongside republications of Portuguese or Spanish texts which, with the exception of the pieces by Augusto de Campos and Caetano Veloso, have never been translated into English before.

Immediately after this introduction, the reader will find a conversation with the film curator from the Cinemateca do MAM in Rio de Janeiro, Hernani Heffner, which acts as a gateway to the complexities and contradictions of the contemporary Brazilian music film scene. This introduction has, in some ways, been in dialogue with Heffner’s reflections, which address similar areas but reference different examples and add some surprising counterpoints. Both essays outline a panorama that is examined further by Cristiane da Silveira Lima’s essay on *Songs* and Lisa Purse’s on *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party*, as well as the interviews with Eduardo Coutinho, Márcia Derraik and Sérgio Roizenblit. If we consider that songs can express memories and evoke images, the essays by Lima and Purse are positioned at the opposite extremes of the same spectrum, going from remembered, evoked images in the former, to the visual accumulation of elements of the contemporary

audio-visual landscape in the latter. While Lima is interested in the “artless singing” of common people, Purse analyses the film’s collage strategies and how they convey the political position of *Titãs* within the mass media landscape. The interviews with Eduardo Coutinho on *Songs* (authored by María Campaña Ramia), Márcia Derraik on *Where the Owl Sleeps* and Sérgio Roizenblit on *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* turn our attention to the production processes of music films, stressing the contrast between celebrating popular art and cultural commodification, as well as the need to register certain realities which are concealed from the official history of Brazilian music. Speaking from positions of pragmatism and direct experience, their comments and reflections evoke some political issues which are also present in both Lima’s and Purse’s essays.

Together with these texts, the reader will find essays devoted to those singers, musicians and styles that are portrayed in the season’s films. They may not refer to cinema specifically, but approach music from a point of view which is undoubtedly synesthetic and intermedial. Rather than providing suggestions for ways to watch the films, they instead suggest ways of listening to the songs with cinema in mind.

In this sense, the essay by Nuno Ramos is important not only because of its analysis of Hirszman’s *Nelson Cavaquinho*. Furthermore, it approaches the works of both Cartola and Nelson by stressing their visual and narrative properties. The text says, for example, that Cartola’s roses are different from Nelson’s flowers, and that the melodies of the former “spread themselves out within an expansive and sweeping development,” while Nelson’s “advance, step by step, within a pertinent, but inexorable, movement between here and there, as if we were able to point out its movement with a finger.” In a similar vein, the piece by Luiz Tatit on Chico Buarque is also concerned with the way in which popular song lyrics can convey human tragedies. Ranging from a general overview to a careful analysis of the song “Pedaço de Mim” (“A Piece of Me”), he claims that popular song entails a narrative condensation due to its short length in comparison with a film or a novel, which provides opportunities for metonymy and metaphor. The essay thus demonstrates the complexity and depth that Chico Buarque achieves in each of his verses.

While the text by Nuno Ramos suggests possible images for samba, Paulo da Costa e Silva does the same for bossa nova, and Augusto de Campos and Caetano Veloso for tropicalism. In his piece *The luminous chords*, da Costa e Silva links bossa nova, particularly Tom Jobim’s works, with pictorial



Elis (2016). Source: MPM Film

and musical Impressionism. Both movements share an interest in ephemeral natural elements, like the sun and the sea. In the case of music, this is formalized by prioritising the instant of the chord over the duration of the melody. In a piece written in 1967—precisely when tropicalism was bursting onto the music scene—Augusto de Campos suggested (among many other things) a connection between the lyrics and structure of the new songs and the style of renowned filmmakers. Following a suggestion by his friend Décio Pignatari, he most notably compared “Domingo no Parque” (“Sunday in the Park”), by Gilberto Gil, with the editing of Soviet filmmaker Sergei M. Eisenstein, while “Alegria, Alegria,” by Caetano Veloso, reminded him of the hand-held filming of Jean-Luc Godard. And Veloso himself, in an excerpt from his memoir *Tropical Truth*, gives such a visual account of the creation of his famous song “Tropicália” that it is difficult to say where to place the limits between a collage painting and the lyrics of the song; between what is seen and what is sung.

Finally, together with these essays concerning lyrics and structure, the portraits of Chico Buarque, Elis Regina and Elza Soares that have been included stress the visual importance of these figures and of their vocal renditions, evoking the overarching approach to performance as suggested by Simon Frith. The first one is a beautiful letter written by Tom Jobim in which he describes Chico Buarque’s style and persona with an accumulation of cultural references and myths, which come to resemble a tropicalist collage. In the second text, the late

academic Joaquim Alves de Aguiar celebrates the bossa nova star Elis Regina in terms which foreground the importance once again of the visual. Noting that she was “in many and decisive ways, a television product,” Aguiar describes Regina as “the first great Brazilian singer made to be seen,” and highlights her movements as a fundamental dimension of her songs.” In a similar vein, the testimonies by Tárík de Souza and Roberto Moura on Elza Soares, compiled by José Louzeiro and Lenin Novaes in their biography of the singer, focus particularly on her singing style, as well as on some connections with artists from Brazil and abroad, such as Louis Armstrong and Sarah Vaughan.

By placing this variety of texts in the catalogue, we hope to provide you with a multi-faceted introduction to Brazilian music and the Brazilian music documentary, one that complements and illuminates the programme of films we have curated. But the act of bringing these diverse reflections into one volume also suggests something significant: that most of Brazilian music contains a potential, latent image. It is an image that precedes its use in movies and documentaries, and may be inspired by the lyrics, the structure, the melodies or the chords of the song. It is an image that is created in relation with other arts, somewhere in between music and painting, theatre, cinema and the novel. You are invited to keep this in mind while watching the films during this season, contrasting, in each screening, the image of the song suggested by the words curated in this catalogue with the one screened at the Reading Film Theatre.

In keeping with the suggestion of the late Brazilian critic José Carlos Avellar, we invite you to reflect on the contrast between the film that we *imagine* and the film that we *see*, and, in this case, between the imagined song and the song that is heard. Intermediality can therefore be a way to think our experience as readers and spectators: from experiencing one

medium while, at the same time, having another in mind, to finding new complexities and nuances both in our memories and in our actual experience. Brazilian songs can carry us from this catalogue to the screen, and vice versa, and renew our experience of both, giving us new pleasures and wisdom in our relationship to art.

1. Data collected in the lists of *Filme B*, accessed 28 November 2017, <http://www.filmeb.com.br>.

2. The list of documentaries can be found in Consuelo Lins and Cláudia Mesquita, *Filmar o real: Sobre o documentário brasileiro contemporâneo* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2008), 83–86.

3. *Filme B*, accessed 28 November 2017, <http://www.filmeb.com.br>.

4. See, for example, Márcia Carvalho, “A canção popular na história do cinema brasileiro” (PhD diss, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2009) and Cristiane da Silveira Lima, “Música em cena: à escuta do documentário brasileiro” (PhD diss, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2015).

5. Cristian Pascual, in conversation with the author, June 25, 2017.

6. Franklin Martins, *Quem foi que inventou o Brasil? A música popular conta a história da República. Vol 1* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2015), 25.

7. A significant reflection on the relationship between Villa-Lobos and popular music can be found in Hermínio Bello de Carvalho, *O canto do pajé: Villa-Lobos e a Música Popular Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Espaço e Tempo, Metal Leve, 1988). Regarding Mário de Andrade’s trips, see Mário de Andrade, *O turista aprendiz*, ed. Telê Porto Ancona Lopes

(São Paulo: Duas Cidades: Secretaria da Cultura, Ciência e Tecnologia, 1976).

8. For Humberto Mauro’s works on music, see Irineu Guerrini Jr., “Apontamentos para um estudo da música nos filmes de Humberto Mauro,” *Recine: Revista do Festival Internacional de Cinema de Arquivo* 7, no. 7 (October 2010), 40–45.

9. An important precedent of this is samba composer Zé Keti, whose life inspired *Rio, Northern Zone*, and who had already worked in Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s debut *Rio 100 Degrees F.* (Rio 40 Graus, 1955) as an actor, a member of the crew and with his successful song “A Voz do Morro” (“The Voice from the Hill”).

10. Tatiana Signorelli Heise, “Sounds from Brazil: *brasilidade* and the rise of the music documentary,” in *Screening Songs in Hispanic and Lusophone Cinema*, ed. Lisa Shaw and Rob Stone (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 255.

11. Heise, 260.

12. Alan Scipião, “Siná – Chico Buarque e João Bosco – 2011,” *Decifrando a Música* (blog), September 14, 2012, accessed 2 December 2017, <http://decifrandoamusic.blogspot.co.uk/2012/09/sinha-chico-buarque-e-joao-bosco-2011.html>.

13. George F. Custen, “Making History,” in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, org. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 86–87.

14. Mariana Duccini Junqueira da Silva, “Um imaginário da redenção: Sujeito e história no documentário musical,” *Doc On-line*, no. 12 (August 2012), 18–19, accessed 28 November 2017, http://www.doc.ubi.pt/12/dt_mariana_silva.pdf.

15. Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 158–182.

16. Izabel Jaguaribe, in conversation with the author, August 22, 2017.

17. Another relevant example, albeit not included in the season, is the number of versions of the song “Asa Branca” (“White Wing”), by Luiz Gonzaga and Humberto Teixeira, included in the documentary *The Man Who Bottled Clouds* (*O Homem que Engarrafava Nuvens*, Lirio Ferreira, 2009).

18. See Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, *Cinema: Trajetória no subdesenvolvimento* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1986), and Glauber Rocha, *Revisão crítica do cinema brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1963).

19. Marcelo Machado, in conversation with the author, September 22, 2017.



Chico Buarque. Photograph by Chico Nelson. Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

What about the end of the history? An interview with Hernani Heffner

Albert Elduque

Chief curator in the Cinemateca of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM) and lecturer in the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), Hernani Heffner has devoted his whole life to Brazilian cinema. By exploring obscure documents, watching forgotten films and meeting professionals from different generations, he has become one of the wisest and most respected researchers in film history in the country, and many scholars in Brazil rely on his knowledge, perspective and generosity for their research projects. Not surprisingly, when I talked with him about the recent rise in the number of films on music, his views not only provided a great historical perspective, but also raised some critical points to keep in mind when approaching the relationship between cinema, music and history. In addition, Hernani revealed to me that the only film project he had actually worked on in his life was a music documentary about Victor Assis Brasil, the best sax player in the history of the country; a performer who is also considered the best Brazilian jazz musician ever. Production on that project, which he started in the 1990s, didn't go ahead; but for decades he has had one eye on the genre, maybe secretly waiting for a film on the great sax player that fascinated him decades ago.

In contemporary Brazilian cinema we find a large number of films about the country's music, both documentaries and fictions. Is it just a contemporary phenomenon or are there similar tendencies throughout the history of Brazilian cinema?

I would say that to a certain extent it is a contemporary phenomenon. The previous cases were quite isolated, however they were significant. The first time that Brazilian cinema looked towards a past which was both cinematographic and musical was in the early 1950s, when distributor Oswaldo Massaini relaunched two old films starring important figures in the musical panorama that coincidentally had recently died. Those films were *Berlim na Batucada* (Luiz de Barros, 1944), featuring Francisco Alves, and *Hello! Hello! Carnaval!* (*Alô! Alô! Carnaval*, Adhemar Gonzaga, 1936), with Carmen Miranda. In one of the copies of *Hello! Hello! Carnaval!* he even included a title card which highlighted that the film was being presented again so that the spectator could remember that golden era of Brazilian radio and disc—"those times that we could never get back" or something similar. That quite isolated initiative proposed a new reading of the past through music. We find a few more examples in the next decades, like *The Night of My Love* (*A Noite do Meu Bem*, Jece Valadão, 1968), a feature on Dolores Duran, and *Maysa* (1979), a short film that Jayme Monjardim devoted to her mother, the singer Maysa Matarazzo.

Why have we seen this increase in the number of music films in the last decades?

In the 1980s, Brazil endured a very harsh political and historical situation: the dictatorship had ended, but those were years of hyperinflation, loss of perspectives and low national pride. It is even considered a lost decade, when apparently nothing relevant happened in cultural terms. Cinema was the worst affected sector in that crisis. Embrafilme,¹ which had gradually decreased its funding to film productions, was closed under the presidency of Fernando Collor (1990–1992) and cinema was symbolically extinguished. For this reason, Brazilian cinema—even more than music—searched for the reasons for that failure during the 1990s. In an attempt to understand this situation, it showed a great interest in discussing the past, and many times it did so through biographies. Sometimes it was a remote past, like in the so-called first film of the *Retomada*,² *Carlota Joaquina, Princess of Brazil* (*Carlota Joaquina: Princesa do Brasil*, Carla Camurati, 1995), and other historical features such as *The Battle of Canudos* (*Guerra de Canudos*, Sérgio Rezende, 1997) and *Cruz e Sousa – O Poeta do Desterro* (Sylvio Back, 1998). In the 2000s, the historical approach was mostly taken through documentaries, which were often produced for cable TV and had an interest in more recent characters, frequently from the music scene. As far as I'm concerned, music biopics are an expression of that dialogue with the past, which strives to understand the origins of our political, social and cultural situation, and to clarify if the supposedly triumphant moments were actually triumphant or were just expressions of our eternal defeat.

LEFT

Samba school. Source: newspaper *Aqui São Paulo*.
Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo



Has this tendency evolved over the last twenty years?

We can find some variations. At the end of the 1990s there was an interest in bossa nova and the beginnings of Brazilian rock, be it Jovem Guarda or tropicalism. In the 2000s, some films about the 1980s and 90s appeared, focusing on singers and bands like Cazuza or Paralamas do Sucesso. On the one hand, this had a natural reason: at a certain point, the topic of the 1950s and 60s seemed used up, so it was necessary to look at more recent movements. On the other hand, from Lula's presidency onwards it has been assumed that to understand the present we shouldn't address the dictatorship any more, but the following years instead, that is, 1980s and 90s. Apart from that, I've noticed that in the last few years production slightly moved away from the most problematic cases, such as Wilson Simonal, whose career failed when he was accused of collaborating with the dictatorship—even if *Simonal – No One Knows How Tough It Was* (*Simonal – Ninguém Sabe o Duro que Dei*, Cláudio Manoel, Micael Langer and Calvito Leal, 2009) tries to redeem him. Instead the focus has been on films about bossa nova and its splendid past, like Nelson Pereira dos Santos' and Dora Jobim's *The Music According to Antonio Carlos Jobim* (*A Música Segundo Tom Jobim*, 2012). In that general context, few filmmakers approach Brazilian music with a wider historical perspective, going back to the origins of *choro* and samba, for example. Significantly, some foreigners, like Mika Kaurismäki with his *The Sound of Rio: Brasileirinho* (*Brasileirinho – Grandes Encontros do Choro*, 2005), do adopt this approach. It is not because Brazilians already know about it, because most of them don't. It is because Brazilian culture goes back to the past up to a certain point, but never to the roots, which are symbolically envisaged as pointing to a negative, even traumatic moment.



Cazuza: *Time Doesn't Stop* (2004)

Why is music used as a means for revisiting the past?

Music has a great relevance in Brazilian society. On the one hand, it is our collective unconscious, the cultural expression which establishes an effective dialogue with the whole population. Maybe the lower middle class won't like Caetano Veloso, and the elite won't like the *música sertaneja*,³ but both of them know what these styles of music are and have listened to them at some point. Music is, among Brazilian arts, that which permeates the whole of society. That's why in different historical moments it has catalysed a certain perception and a certain project for the country, like in the times of military dictatorship, when artists like Chico Buarque and Caetano Veloso became spokespeople of a particular national feeling. On the other hand, music is our greatest intellectual field, a role literature had in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that was transferred to music in the 1920s and 30s with samba composers like Sinhô and Noel Rosa. This process peaked in the 1960s, when Caetano Veloso put himself forward as a public intellectual—not as an academic, but as a person who thought about the nation and proposed new ways to perceive it.

In fact, many Brazilian music films establish an identification between the artist and the nation. In this sense, scholar Tatiana Heise discusses *Vinicius* (Miguel Faria Jr., 2005), *Cartola – Music for the Eyes* (*Cartola – Música para os Olhos*, Lírio Ferreira and Hilton Lacerda, 2007), *The House of Tom* (*A Casa do Tom: Mundo, Monde, Mondo*, Ana Jobim, 2009) and *Wandering Heart* (*Coração Vagabundo*, Fernando Grostein Andrade, 2009), analysing how the musical expression of Vinicius de Moraes, Cartola, Tom Jobim and Caetano Veloso, respectively, is presented in relation to *brasilidade*.⁴

Of course. And which films had thought about this relationship for the first time? Surprisingly, not the films of Cinema Novo, but of the so-called Cinema Marginal. Cinema Novo did use Brazilian music and work with Brazilian musicians, but it didn't consider music as its main point of reference. It only did so with instrumental music, like the works by Heitor Villa-Lobos in *Black God, White Devil* (*Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol*, Glauber Rocha, 1964). On the contrary, the genealogy of Brazilian popular music was of the highest interest for Cinema Marginal, with filmmakers like Rogério Sganzerla and Júlio Bressane, for example. Particularly, Sganzerla devoted two films to Noel Rosa (*Noel por Noel* [1981] and *Isto é Noel Rosa* [1990]), made *Mudança de Hendrix* (1977) to explore the influence of this American guitarist on rock'n'roll

and tropicalism, and has a short film on João Gilberto that is called... *Brasil* (1981)! But his most important work in this regard is *All Is Brazil* (*Tudo É Brasil*), completed in 1997, just in the moment of the *Retomada*. In this documentary, the third project that he devoted to the trip Orson Welles made to Brazil to film the unfinished *It's All True* (1942), he focuses on the relationship between the filmmaker and performer Grande Otelo. However, Grande Otelo is approached more as a singer than as an actor, and music becomes the metaphor of Brazil, the allegory of Brazil, the synthesis of Brazil... everything of Brazil! Sganzerla always reflected on these issues with a great degree of complexity, conscious that Brazilian musicality is the result of connections, crossings and contacts.



Vinicius (2005)

The documentary *Me, My Father and the Cariocas* (*Eu, Meu Pai e Os Cariocas – 70 Anos de Música no Brasil*, Lúcia Veríssimo, 2017) makes the same movement: the singer and pianist Severino Filho represents the Os Cariocas band, the band represents bossa nova, and bossa nova represents Brazil. The personal trajectory of the character is intertwined with the history of the country. The film was the winner of the last edition of In-Edit Festival in São Paulo.

Identifying the artist and the nation is a successful association indeed. But we should also consider that in Brazil we have a musical aristocracy—with names like Caetano Veloso and Chico Buarque—and a second division team. And this second division team usually doesn't work out. Take the soul singer Tim Maia, for example. The fictional biopic about him, *Tim Maia* (Mauro Lima, 2014), didn't work out. When you leave the blessed territory—which is samba, *choro*, bossa nova or tropicalism—and go to the music from the periphery, things change. Filmmakers fail in leading with this. Samba schools and black samba singers like Cartola have been in the official pantheon of Brazilian music since the times of Getúlio Vargas, in the 1930s and 40s. But black singers from other, more

contemporary styles don't fit in that pantheon, and if you consider heavy metal, soul music or *manguebeat*, the formula doesn't work. They cannot be considered as metaphors for the whole of Brazil, the films don't know how to deal with this issue, and they fail from different perspectives, including the success among the audience. You cannot say that Tim Maia is a general metaphor for Brazil. It simply doesn't work. You can get an idea of how he was in Flávio R. Tambellini's *Tim Maia* (1987), one of the best short music films of the 1980s, which basically consists of him singing and talking in a car in Rio, from Leme to Pontal.⁵ And that's it!



Tim Maia (2014)

What about other recent biopics, such as *Cazuza: Time Doesn't Stop* (*Cazuza – O Tempo Não Para*, Walter Carvalho and Sandra Werneck, 2004), *Two Sons of Francisco* (*Dois Filhos de Francisco*, Breno Silveira, 2005) or *Gonzaga: From Father to Son* (*Gonzaga – De Pai Pra Filho*, Breno Silveira, 2012)? Do they fit into this conceptual construction that identifies artist with nation?

Two Sons of Francisco was a melodrama where music was not as prominent as it could have been (it had more of a secondary role), but it was an astonishing box office success because it established a connection with a metaphorical origin of the country. Why in this film, which is a biopic of a *música sertaneja* duo, is there a silent, almost abstract, slow-motion sequence of the kids playing football with a cloth ball? That is the synthesis of Brazil that the film is proposing: the city as the place of destruction and capital, the countryside as the realm of purity and good feelings. It may be an old, clichéd and rather obvious synthesis, but it worked out. It wasn't the case with the biopic on Luiz Gonzaga, because the film is told from the perspective of his son Gonzaguinha, who in a way repudiated his origins and the music of his father. Here the musical metaphor was too complex to work out. Finally, the rock singer Cazuza may be intended as a metaphor to criticize Brazil, because of his ideology and lyrics, as well as his own personal

trajectory. He admired *samba-canção* and was the heir of a certain tradition of Brazilian Popular Music (Música Popular Brasileira – MPB), but this facet is almost ignored by the film, which prefers to focus on his figure as a rebel and in his personal tragedy. To a certain extent he represents non-conformism as a symbol of a Brazil that could have worked but didn't. Its launch in 2004 represented the emergence of national rock as a topic in this kind of film.



Two Sons of Francisco (2005)

Do you think the main reason for the success of these films, more than the music that the public already knows, is the fact that they work with national identity?

Yes, indeed. They are narratives of Brazil, and the most successful ones are narratives that redeem Brazil. And not every musician or type of music fits into these narratives. Tim Maia as a character will never redeem Brazil.

Apart from identity, as you said before these films deal with the past. What vision of recent history do they offer?

There are many different kinds of negotiations with the past. Some negotiations may be easy, others traumatic. Some may be positive, others negative. In fact, many of them remove history, bringing the past into the present, but avoiding the past, both in its technical imperfections and in its historical processes. However, if you examine the films carefully, you'll find some works that have a strong conscience of what it means to return to the past in order to understand the present. To me, the best film of this universe is a documentary called *A Night in 67* (*Uma Noite em 67*, Ricardo Calil and Renato Terra, 2010). Why is this film so *sui generis*, distinct and surprising? On the surface, it makes the traditional move of revisiting a specific time in the past: the origins of tropicalism and MPB in the Festival of TV Record in 1967, presenting the performances of the winners in their entirety. It seems to confirm the excellence of that moment of Brazilian popular music. However,

is this the goal of the film, or is there anything else? There is, and we'll find it out if we listen carefully to the contemporary interviews with the main names of the festival, like Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso. These interviews are not talking about the past, but rather about the present. Singers are asked if they feel nostalgic about that time, and they talk about becoming old, and even about the fear of death. Do these issues make sense in a film about 1967? No, but they do in a film from 2010. *A Night in 67* is not talking about a glorious moment in the past, but about its closure. It is saying that history has a beginning, a midpoint and an end. It is asserting that the glorious momentum, if not exhausted, is about to be. And it is questioning if we are dealing with creators or with myths. That generation wanted to change the world and to be eternal, but where is it forty years later? Looking to the past shouldn't be done so as to reconstitute the moment of the event, to mythicize it or to confirm the official version, but to establish a critical dialectic between past and present.



A Night in 67 (2010)

What other films work with history from this dialectical perspective?

There are very few; I would say less than ten. We can mention the documentaries by Lírio Ferreira: *Cartola: Music for the Eyes*, co-directed with Hilton Lacerda, and *The Man Who Bottled Clouds* (*O Homem que Engarrafava Nuvens*, 2009). They give a new reading of history not only through songs, but also working with cinema itself, by using images from the old Brazilian musicals, *chanchadas*, and playing with them, while recognising in them the precedents of contemporary music films. The archival images here are not used as historical evidences of the past, but instead the film establishes a playful and critical dialogue with them. For example, in *The Man Who Bottled Clouds* it is affirmed that *baiano*⁶ is not an original trait of Brazilian culture, but a genre which was created by recording companies in Rio de Janeiro, and this is deeply astonishing—showing how the north-eastern music was created in Rio turns everything

upside down. And using archival images from 1950s *chanchadas* to show how they were part of the culture industry means dismantling any kind of discourse about origins or authenticity. These alternative relationships with the past show us how this past can be very problematic, or even traumatic.



The Man Who Bottled Clouds (2009)

Idealized or dialectical, it seems that in these films music and songs are always enunciated in the past tense, hardly ever in the present tense. They talk about the past, but not about the time of the film. This wasn't always the case, though: I remember Jom Tob Azulay's *Os Doces Bárbaros* (1977), which was a portrait of the music and the society of that particular time, the Brazil of the mid-1970s, through the band integrated by Caetano Veloso, Gal Costa, Gilberto Gil and Maria Bethânia. Jom Tob's film is a present tense documentary because it documents a tour. But if you take recent films about those same characters on tour, like *Wandering Heart*, with Caetano Veloso, or *Maria Bethânia: Music Is Perfume* (*Maria Bethânia – Música é Perfume*, Georges Gachot, 2005), you will see that

1. Embrafilme (Empresa Brasileira de Filmes) was the Brazilian public institution for the promotion of cinema, operating in the areas of production, distribution and exhibition. It was created in 1969, during the military dictatorship, and abolished in 1990.

2. *Retomada do Cinema Brasileiro* ("Brazilian Cinema Revival") was the name given to the historical period in which Brazilian cinema overcame the crisis with a significant increase of public funding and a rise in film production. It is usually considered to have begun around 1994 and to have finished in the early 2000s.

3. Brazilian music genre, usually devoted to romantic themes and sung by a duo of tenors playing *viola caipira* or guitar. Its origins can be found in the traditional music from the Brazilian countryside, although throughout the twentieth century it incorporated influences from other genres, like Paraguayan polkas, Mexican rancheras, pop and rock. From the 1980s onwards it has been consumed en masse in Brazil, and it still occupies most of the places in the music charts.

4. Tatiana Signorelli Heise, "Sounds from Brazil: *brasilidade* and the rise of the music documentary," in *Screening*

songs in Hispanic and Lusophone cinema, ed. Lisa Shaw and Rob Stone (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2012), 248–263.

5. Original: "Do Leme ao Pontal," title of a song by Tim Maia.

6. Brazilian music genre originally from the North East of the country and popularized by Luiz Gonzaga in the 1940s. It is usually played by a band whose main instruments are the accordion, the triangle and the bass drum, and its lyrics deal with the life of the poor people from that region.

they are different, as they already include a vision about the past. One of the issues here is that Brazilian cinema could have an interest in contemporary musical movements, and it doesn't. Why aren't there 50 films about funk, *música sertaneja* or the *brega eletrônico* from Pará? The topic would be interesting and cheap to film, as there is a relatively strong music industry behind those movements. But there is no Brazilian cinema about this. Apart from that, there is a big problem in most of the recent music documentaries: they present themselves as films about history, but they are not. They don't present some kind of documentation or evidence to demonstrate this or that, and sometimes their approach is partial and contradictory. They are not films about history, but films about memory, and if they don't perceive it they fall into a trap. With the exceptions I mentioned, maybe the best being *A Night in 67*: what about death? What about the end of the history?



Wandering Heart (2009)

Interview held in Rio de Janeiro on August 24th, 2017.

Artless singing in Eduardo Coutinho's documentary¹

Cristiane da Silveira Lima

Introduction

In a recent essay, Claudia Gorbman examines what she calls “artless singing” in a set of fiction films: moments in which the character sings in scenes that are integral parts of the realistic diegetic world, when the song occurs between dialogue and music.² A rare moment in films, artless singing is not “film music,” nor is it an area of interest for musical scholars. These are situations that explore not only music, but specific aspects associated with the character's voice properties, gestures and gazes, camera work and editing, direct sound, sound mixing, etc. As the author explains:

These tend to be throwaway moments, when the characters sing in ways people often do in real life: you might hum as you clean the kitchen, or sing along with a familiar TV title theme, or join a friend in belting out a tune whose lyrics fit the occasion or whose recording star you are imitating. I am calling such scenes “artless singing”, for lack of another concise term for singing that, in the conceit of a film story, is not a professional performance, and is done in synch sound with appropriate indices of spatial realism, and without the magical backing of an orchestra. It is a deployment of the voice in film that might seem marginal, but it may well contribute towards our understanding of the possibilities of speech, music, and song in the audiovisual media.³

We are interested in similar—and very unusual—situations that occur in the context of Brazilian documentary films: when there is a song in the film which is sung by ordinary people, who have little or no musical training, devoid of a professional musical context. These are people who listen to songs sung by other people, but who, due to a specific situation instated by the film, start to sing. If we look back, we will only be able to recall very few Brazilian documentaries that feature artless singing. Let us highlight but a handful: the opening sequence of *Like Water Through Stone* (*A Falta que me Faz*, Marília Rocha, 2009), in which a young woman sings “Cena de Filme” (“Film Scene”), a

romantic song that was a hit. In *I'll Raffle Off My Heart* (*Vou Rifar meu Coração*, Ana Rieper, 2012), some people sing and talk about their relationship to *brega*.⁴ In *News From a Personal War* (*Notícias de uma Guerra Particular*, João Moreira Salles, 1999), we are presented the drug trafficking world by a young armed and masked man who sings “Rap das Armas” (“Weapons’ Rap”) while he takes us down a slum’s narrow passages and paths. All the other examples that come to mind take place in films made by the same person: Eduardo Coutinho. Such as the girl who sings the corny romantic song in *Boca de Lixo* (1992); such as Fátima, also known in the community in which she lives as Janis Joplin, in *Babilônia 2000* (2001); such as Henrique, who lives in *Master, a Building in Copacabana* (*Edifício Master*, 2002), and sings Frank Sinatra’s “My Way,” and a series of other tenants in the same building that perform as well; such as Sarita, the woman who sings “Se Esta Rua Fosse Minha” (“If This Street Was Mine”), in *Playing* (*Jogo de Cena*, 2007), to cite just a few examples.

In *Songs* (*As Canções*, 2011), one of the director's last films, artless singing no longer features periodically, but appears systematically: Coutinho asked everyone he filmed to sing and recount to the crew any memories or life stories associated with certain songs. As such, artless singing acted like a *dispositif*,⁵ that is, a mechanism that structured the film's *mise-en-scène* and guided its chosen approach.

The song and the scene

The film begins with a woman, filmed in close-up, while she sings “Minha Namorada” (“My Girlfriend”) by Carlos Lyra and Vinicius de Moraes, whose verses describe sworn love. The frame allows us to see her facial expression, the glint in her eyes. Her body posture, the *vibrato* of her voice, her panting, and slightly off-pitch notes reveal her singing “imperfections” and make it evident the film will highlight this unprofessional musical performance.⁶ At the end of the song, the woman (whom later on we find out is called Sonia) remains silent for a moment, during that brief instant moment of panic where the other person doesn't say anything at all (as Comolli once wrote),⁷ biting her lips as if asking the director: what now? He asks her if she likes it. She says yes, that she did. There is a straight cut. The film title appears.

Another cut and we see for the second time the black chair in which all the other interviewees will

LEFT
Songs (2011)



On this spread, *Songs* (2011)

take a seat (giving a partial view of the back of the stage and the curtains that separate the wings). This set-up refers to *Playing*, but in an inverted way: in that film the chair had its back to the audience, allowing the viewer to see, behind each interviewee, the seats that may be filled by other potential spectators. In addition to this, the film compared stories told by ordinary people with those told by professional actresses, making us “suspicious of documentaries that focus on speech as an expression of subjectivity and as a life testimony.”⁸

Songs also makes obvious its scenic, theatrical dimension by placing once again the chair back on stage, showing that what is at stake are bodies displayed for the gaze. As if to place us inside an upside-down opera, without a pit or orchestra, where each character (the amateur singer) is tentatively invited to be a soloist and portray himself or herself for the camera, for the filmmaker and for those whom the film is intended to be viewed by.

The film turns its attention towards ordinary people, while toughening up the rules of the game. Its artificial dimension is emphasized, but without that self-reflexive logic that governed *Playing*. The stage and the backstage, which correspond to the space for performance and “what is behind it,” are now in the background. The subjects appear from the wings and it is where they go back to after they perform the songs on the film’s stage, but it is also a metaphor to understand the relationship that the documentary establishes with what is “behind the scenes,” hidden or stashed away in one’s memory⁹ and which is presented on stage in a theatrical or musical way.

On the song’s edge

Déa, in the second interview,¹⁰ talks about a talent show presented by Ary Barroso, in which she sang a famous song by Noel Rosa (the words to which she does not know off by heart, even though Coutinho does). When she sings, she looks up and motions repeatedly. Various other people who have been interviewed repeat similar gestures: they spread their



arms and hands, close their eyes, project their voices. The songs are over-performed, which shows that the people being filmed are, in fact, determined to give the best possible performance they can, putting their heart and soul into the temporary role of amateur singer propitiated by the film. When Déa finishes singing the first song, she looks up and opens her arms, as if expecting the audience’s applause. But the crew remains silent.

This excess stands out because *Songs* constitutes an economy of different elements. The set has been emptied of information and there is only a chair and a black curtain in the background. The composition of the shot and the camera movement change slightly, moving towards static camera and close up. Each person is filmed alone, talking with Coutinho, located in the “avant-champ.”¹¹ The film is also frugal when it comes to sound: emptied of noises, so as to prioritize the absolute centrality and audibility of the voices (even the one behind the camera).

As a result, here we are far from the kind of artless singing analysed by Gorbman: unpretentious, informal, so common to the domestic environment, especially in the midst of prosaic actions. Here, singing was completely dissociated from the context of everyday life to become the center of the scene: the documentary shows the artless singing on stage, sung *a capella*, in front of an apparatus exclusively conceived to capture how this song is performed, which is very different from how this would be filmed in fiction films, with a character in front of a TV or under the shower, for example (with the world’s own incidental sound acting as an accompaniment to the melody). Based on the film’s distillation of these elements, every gesture, however small, grows in proportion, generating the feeling that, at times, there is excess in the performances. The use of the term “artless singing” is partially based on the lack of another concise—and precise—term that allows us to name these musical performances given by ordinary people. We adopt such an expression—the risk of alienating it from its original use notwithstanding—because



even in Brazilian documentaries such situations are peripheral, and also rare. In addition, the Portuguese word for artless (*amador*) allows us to emphasize another aspect of *Songs*: it describes the song performed by people who love.¹²

On the verge of a melodrama

In many of the statements there is a regretful or nostalgic tone about the past. The songs the film’s subjects choose in the film offer a synthesis of what is said: “this is the most important song in my life,” they affirm, in an effort to make what they have lived and what they are describing coherent. More than once we are confronted with statements laden with emotion, with subjects whose voice is choked up and eyes filled with water. There is still a melodramatic tone in the film, which is reinforced by the interviewees’ overtly romantic repertoire. Several of them cannot contain their tears, such as Gilmar when he recalls the song “Esmeralda” that his mother used to sing when he was a child. Lídia, after telling the story of a troubled relationship with an older man (who owned a blue Cadillac) in her youth, stops the interview and cries behind the scenes. The camera films her empty chair for a moment while we listen to the woman in tears, out of the lens’s range, but still within range of the microphones. The film seems to flirt here with the media’s most common confessional narratives, which hold the revelation of intimacy in high regard and prioritize the revelation of an unequivocal “truth about one’s self.”¹³

The word melodrama, however, should not be seen in pejorative terms. We emphasize that the film dialogues with a certain sentimentalist matrix that seeks or favours a close emotional bond with the viewer. As Mariana Baltar writes, while addressing what she calls “the documentary’s melodramatic imagination:” “In terms of melodramatic narratives, tears demarcate a place of deep communication with the public, within a sensorial and sentimental sphere.”¹⁴ This excess that we recognize in *Songs* negotiates with a popular matrix tradition that “ranges from popular



shows in fairs and plazas to the kind of literature contained in almanacs and *cordéis*.¹⁵ Shows that focused on audience zeal, on a noisy, exalted populace, that could not be contained by the narrative”¹⁶. As the author explains, melodramatic narrative is interested in engaging the public, rather than in its mere identification or adhesion (melodrama even allows for ambiguities, but never for dissociation, she explains). Hence we have learned that the artless singing is not only a *dispositif* of *mise-en-scène*, but also an element that establishes an effective and affective bond with the spectator. It does not matter so much whether the stories told are believable or not; the expectation is that something moving will be said about these lives and songs, even if it sounds a bit over the top at times.

In addition the film is based on an intimate pact, as formulated by Baltar.¹⁷ It establishes an atmosphere of complicity between characters and the director/crew that favours the subjects’ involvement in an act of self-performance guided by the revelation of intimacy. Coutinho’s interventions are specific, albeit fundamental to the interaction’s evolution: in a hushed tone, he asks for clarification or elicits ramifications of certain comments made by the interviewees, ensuring that the tone is more of talk than a formal and structured interview. The sensorial and sentimental effect of this relation, for the spectator, is that of relative proximity.

The catalyst effect of artless singing

What you see most of the time are subjects fully aware of how they want to be filmed, which highlights the artificial dimension of the *dispositif* elaborated by the director. As Comolli observes about the documentary *mise-en-scène*, we all more or less know what it means to be filmed, and we adjust ourselves when we are in front of a camera during the “take,” so as to address the other’s gaze.¹⁸ In *Songs* this happens in a very pronounced way. José Barbosa, a retired naval officer, asks the crew before leaving the stage: “And now what? Do I leave sadly or happily?” Even though



Songs (2011)

someone in the crew suggests “happily!” he deliberately decides to walk out with his head down. And before completely leaving the stage he “rounds off” his performance by singing the last verses of a well-known song by Adelino Moreira (“A Volta do Boêmio” [“The Bohemian’s Return”]), that lends an air of consistency to his previous account.

A similar gesture is made by Maria Aparecida at the end of the film: after talking about her long-lasting relationship with her husband and claiming not to care about his possible betrayals, she rises from her chair and goes towards Coutinho, breaking with protocol and forcing the camera to change position, and says, “What about this one? ‘The most beautiful dreams I dreamed of, from a thousand chimeras I erected a castle...’”¹⁹ Coutinho begins to sing along with her, but soon restrains himself, letting Maria Aparecida completely take over. Her story is full of situations that render it somewhat implausible, yet no one questions it. She sings a few more verses and leaves the stage waving “goodbye,” with her back to the camera, fully aware that the time has come for her to exit. “Artless singing” reinforces the penchant for performance, although each person is free to create his or her own *mise-en-scène*. It works as a catalyst.

When Coutinho restrains himself, however, it becomes clear that his proximity to the subjects should not be confused with adhesion. Sometimes he takes a step back to keep a distance. At other times it is the actual interviewee who recedes, as in Ózio’s case: Coutinho does not seem to quite understand what he says, he even asks for further explanations, but the man simply responds laconically, eschewing any gaze.

Instead of looking for factual information, and asking such questions as “where were you born?,” Coutinho probes for information linked to sensitive, affective states.²⁰ Instead of facts, he seeks affects. It is not a mere coincidence that the songs chosen by the subjects, for the most part, are about love, betrayal, loss, and mourning. The songs are the creative contribution interviewees make to the film,



Babilônia 2000 (2001)

that summon memories and narratives and emphasize the interview’s performative dimension, while giving us “access to each one of the interviewee’s self-built image.”²¹

We also emphasize “artless singing” scenes devoid of a corresponding story, lacking any clue as to the song’s backstory. This occurs with Nilton, José and Fátima, who are only shown singing. Fátima had already been showcased in *Babilônia 2000*, a documentary in which she takes the crew to the Morro da Babilônia shanty town, where she sings a Janis Joplin song. But in *Songs*, even after conceding the director a long interview, she only appears singing “Ternura” (“Tenderness”²²), a song written by Renato Correa and Donaldson Correia, and made famous by Roberto Carlos and Wanderléa. Although the director does not address her in the film, the spectator cannot help but notice something exceptional about her relationship with the crew: while Fátima sings, she locks eyes with someone to her left, off-camera, with whom she exchanges a brief smile, without interrupting her song.

When a subject’s appearance is exclusively related to singing, it is as if what is being sung expresses more than what is being said: the artless singing is enough. As with many narratives there is an excess, and the interviewee is left to his own *auto-mise-en-scène*—the character seems to “puff up,” and occupy the entire scene, utterly immersed in this desire to become image-sound for the film and, at the same time, weaving a coherent narrative to “justify” the choice of a particular song. When it comes to these other moments there is a step back, as if the film is opening itself up to the viewer’s imagination. “On occasions when they do not [do other things while singing], when they just sing without moving, they appear to bare their souls all the more, revealing truth that dialogue could not credibly contain.”²³ While singing, subjects invest in the scene in a completely different manner from the usual way in which they invest in an interview, for example, and this investment is sometimes enough to secure



On this page, Songs (2011)

a place in the film. In situations such as these the viewer does not have enough information to contextualize the song nor the character’s life story: the viewer is given a margin of freedom to infer freely based on the lyrics that are sung, as well as to simply enjoy the musical performance.

Artless singing in other two films

Songs proceeds from Coutinho’s method of creating situations in which the interview—or conversation—becomes the exclusive dramatic means of approaching filmed subjects who are neither bound to a before or after, nor to any sustained interaction with other subjects in the vicinity. In Ismail Xavier’s words:

At the heart of his method is someone talking about his or her own experience, someone who it is expected will not talk about what is obvious, or use clichés to discuss his or her social condition. What is being sought after is an original form of expression, of becoming a character, of narrating, when the subject is given the chance to make an affirmative statement. Everything that the character reveals comes from his or her actions before the camera, from the conversation with the filmmaker, and from the confrontation with the cinematographic apparatus, which looks and listens.²⁴

Xavier talks about the interviewee’s agony (in terms of competition, of a challenge) when coming face-to-face with the camera-effect.²⁵ On the one hand, there is a desire within the interviewee to speak about oneself, to take ownership of the film’s game, to address oneself to a possible mediator. On the other hand, most of the film’s subjects make a huge effort to obey the rule to not look at the camera and act as if it were not there and focus attention and their statements to the filmmaker and the crew. In *Songs*, interestingly, several characters look directly at the camera, such as Lydia when she sings “O Tempo



Vai Apagar” (“Time Will Erase”²⁶).

Xavier also prompts us to remember the celebrated sequence in *Master, a Building in Copacabana* in which Coutinho interviews Henrique, a solitary, retired character who lives in the building the film is named after, and who had a surprising chance meeting with Frank Sinatra. At the end of the sequence Henrique sings “My Way,” which tells his life story. The recorded song begins to play out and he joins it singing and reading the lyrics on a sheet of paper. His performance begins discreetly, but grows in intensity as the camera moves closer to him. There is a dramatic and resounding apex thanks to the choices made with respect to *mise-en-scène*. As the orchestra joins in, Henrique sings with greater energy, reaching a *fortissimo*, the apex of his performance for the camera (which is very close to him at this point and includes a second camera in the frame—making the presence of technical mediation explicit).

In this example from *Master, a Building in Copacabana*, singing becomes the interview’s most expressive moment: its high point. Everything culminates in this *grand finale* devoted to the delivery of “My Way,” which is the moment when the character is invaded by music and in which a part of the performance overflows:

Mr. Henrique crowns his presence in the film with a performance whose strongpoint is the duet with Frank Sinatra; the camera frames a “second unit” that becomes even more invasive when confronted with the tearful catharsis, composing a close image that we will not exactly see from that particular perspective, because the scene from *Master, a Building in Copacabana* requires a combination between insistence (in duration) and withdrawal (in terms of modulating the gaze’s invasiveness). And it demands of Mr. Henrique that he lives out his catharsis like an actor who ignores the camera, electing the filmmaker as mediator (he looks at him and talks to him).²⁷

In *Master, a Building in Copacabana* the artless singing occurs during specific times (all in all there are six moments) that are fundamental to the narrative under construction. If we take duration into account—something so dear to music and documentary cinema—Henrique’s performance grows in magnitude during his interview: during the song it acquires greater intensity and expressiveness. In *Songs* the artless singing moments do not necessarily act as culminating points and they barely produce a variation within the film’s *mise-en-scène*. If in the director’s other films song amplified a scene, so to speak, in *Songs* it oscillates between acting as a *dispositif* for the controllable (the rule of the game is clear: everyone has to sing) and the uncontrollable (something singular can emerge from there). Because it appears again and again, the impression is that *Songs* narrative temporality is flatter, more horizontal, devoid of climaxes (it oscillates between more and less intense moments, without great raptures).

Let us recall how artless singing appears in *Boca de Lixo*, made by the Centro de Criação de Imagem Popular (CECIP, Center for the Creation of Popular Images), filmed at an open-air garbage dump in Itaoca, within the municipality of São Gonçalo (40 km from Rio de Janeiro). In the film there are one-off singing sequences, which are enormously expressive. Among the various workers who make a living from the dump, Coutinho interviews Cícera, a lady from Pernambuco who went to Rio with her husband. After some time in the dump, she comes home. We hear her voice off-camera saying that God’s mercy can make her life better. Then we see the woman next to her daughter and son-in-law, posing together for the camera, in front of the modest mud-hut, just as in a family photo. One more cut. The woman is now in a house and again invokes the name of God in the hope that He will give her daughter a chance to “follow what she wants.” Coutinho asks the girl what she wants and she responds promptly that she wants to be a singer.

Outside, and barefoot, the girl hums the romantic song “Sonho por Sonho” (“Dream by Dream,” a well-known soap-opera song). She closes her eyes and sings with gusto:

The adolescent who sings is far from being reduced to a mere example of the relationship between popular culture and symbolic media forms. There is something else happening here. We are dealing with the girl-singer who has no stage to perform on, zero stardom and no public; the girl-within-the-image, moving in her own imaginary world, devoid of spectacle or

affectation. An anti-star turning her crazy desire into a fabulation.²⁸

At the end of the film, the young woman reappears singing the same song and once again the family poses for the camera, but now to the sound of José Augusto’s singing (heard on a small radio that the girl holds in her hand). Coutinho encourages her: “sing, sing along!”. And she does.

César Guimarães notices the girl’s difficulty in facing the camera for the second time. Her voice breaks and she looks away,

[...] as if divided between two images: the first one, which was offered to her so she could vicariously act out her desire to be a singer, and the other, more uncertain one in which she does not fit in fully, in which she is still trying to find her place. She abandons her own imaginary world, and her eyes search for the mediator, who has taken a step back in order to show her in her entirety, to show us her immovable alterity. In this case the creative fabulation—which in Perrault and Rouch’s films refers to a legend or a mythical animal—only thrives within the everyday, with its small confrontations, its daily quota of inventiveness, as minimal as this may be, though it is enough to make a stand against the harshness of work and the reification it produces.²⁹

In *Boca de Lixo*, the song surfaces amid an extremely complex sequence (shortly afterwards the film ends, in an ironic tone and nonetheless within a desolate situation). The act of singing serves as a precarious and temporary prospect of fabulation, of inventiveness for everyday life, of the hope that life can be different. “Like whistling in the dark, singing is essentially an attempt to organise something out of chaos—music, as organised sound, gives or promises a comforting structure.”³⁰

In *Songs*, singing also takes on a reassuring role, but everything happens in a slightly simpler way than in *Boca de Lixo*, within an explanatory, causal logic. English Isabell, with her heavy accent, talks about her trip to Brazil to practise capoeira angola, where she met a man she married. Her story is succinct, but she concludes by recounting how, after she was “abandoned” by her husband, her life recommenced because of a samba song. Ózio, on the other hand, had to compose a song for his deceased wife to overcome his mourning. The same happens with Ramon, who wrote an apology to his late father in the guise of a musical lament. As such, the relationship

between what is lived and what is sung is often literal: to understand a life all one has to do is interpret the song literally.

After chanting “Retrato em Branco e Preto” (“A Black and White Portrait”) by Chico Buarque and Tom Jobim, at the end of the film, Sílvia states that singing in front of the camera is tantamount to completing a cycle, putting an end to a troubled love story. It is “like putting icing on the cake,” she says, while also drawing the film to an end. However, when she exits the scene, the camera continues to film the empty chair, as if to say that there will always be a new story to be told/sung. Because it defines itself as a film-panel, in which everyone sings and tells, we can then infer that *Songs* could very well continue ad infinitum. The film ends, but the possibility of narrating and remembering does not: there is no closure, no promise of healing wounds, even though the director truly believes, as he himself put it, such things are possible.

When it came to the interviews I knew people were going to leave the film-set feeling better. Music heals wounds. Like analysis. I think they all had a story that was worth telling and that, to a certain degree, they got over. Because when you sing you overcome that pain and you heal. Music is about that. I am not worried about discovering whether everything is true or not. If they tell it well, then it is true.³¹

Final considerations

Many other factors can be determined from an analysis of *Songs* (such as, for example, the deliberate decision to synchronize sounds and images, the absence of a soundtrack, the insistence on the duration of the shots, etc., aspects present in the director’s other films and equally relevant when it comes to understanding the film’s sound dimension). Due to the impossibility of discussing all of them, we highlight throughout the text but a few in an attempt to show how singing has a catalyzing and enabling effect on the performance of subjects who invest their body and voice into singing.

But some questions remain unanswered: why, after all, does the image have to continue when the interview subjects break out into tears? Why does the sound continue when the woman steps off the stage and weeps behind the curtain? Why did the film require the services of a singing teacher (a fact that we are informed of in the final credits)? Why does Coutinho contain himself and not continue to sing along with his interviewee?

What we can conclude is that singing is not a mere accessory or one-off element in the film. It is a central element of the documentary’s *mise-en-scène*. The big difference in relation to previous films is that the singing body is no longer immersed in the everyday, in the world of life itself. Singing was brought into a “neutralized” space (the stage), where all subjects became singer-actors on equal terms. So the link to actual experience needs to be reconstructed by means of a coherent (and moving) verbal story.

Although it is a peripheral or even rare feature in documentary cinema, “artless singing” is a *dispositif* that prompts reflection on important elements of *mise-en-scène*, both with respect to the best ways to approach filmed subjects, and to the different ways in which filmmakers behave (dialogically or critically) within the scene and the language of film.³² In *Songs*, the “artless singing’s” mode of appearance is closely associated with the interview or conversation format and works, at the same time, as a catalyst for performances of the self and as a device that triggers image-memories associated with life stories. When narrated and shared with the crew and the film, such stories allow subjects to commandeer a personal form of enunciation and engage in the scene with their body and the imperfections of their own voice, in order to confront a double agony: to face up to the documentary’s agenda and also to face up to a form of suffering to which music is somehow linked. All of this contributes not only to a “performance truth” (which would achieve greater legitimacy or authenticity, in Baltar’s words), but also to establish an emotional bond with the spectator who is urged to enjoy musical renditions and to recall his or her own experience associated with the songs:³³ whether they are songs that highlighted his or her own life and that synthesize emblematic moments from the past, or corny or romantic songs that he or she experiences collectively in everyday life. *Songs* that somehow visit and inhabit these spectators.³⁴

First published as “O canto amador no cinema de Eduardo Coutinho” in *Eduardo Coutinho em narrativas*, edited by Míriam Cristina Carlos Silva, Monica Martinez and Diogo Azoubel, 193–207. Votorantim (SP): Provocare, 2016.

1. This text is a reduced version of one of the chapters in the doctoral thesis “Música em cena: à escuta do documentário brasileiro” (2015), in the Postgraduate Programme in Communications at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). In it, we investigate the relationship between a documentary’s sound component and how a spectator listens, based on detailed analysis of a set of films in which music plays a central role in many of its scenes.

2. This text was originally published in English as “Artless Singing,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 5, no. 2 (2011), 157–171. José Cláudio S. Castanheira translated it into Portuguese in Simone Pereira Sá and Fernando Moraes da Costa, eds., *Som + Imagem* (Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2012), 23–41.

3. Gorbman, “Artless Singing,” 157.

4. Brazilian genre of sentimental music, whose most important singer was Reginaldo Rossi. It is often disregarded as being tacky and corny. (Translator’s Note)

5. Consuelo Lins, *O documentário de Eduardo Coutinho* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editora, 2004), 101.

6. Such vocal imperfections are a striking feature of artless singing, as Gorbman explains: “In many cases, it is the imperfections in the voice—breathiness, faltering and quavering, false notes, singing out of comfortable range, pauses, forgotten or mistaken lyrics—that equate amateurishness with authenticity, and that make of the singing a natural and sincere expression of the character.” Gorbman, “Artless Singing,” 159.

7. “In fact, the people filmed are in a position to manage the content of their interventions, to place themselves within the scene. All conditions are given. They create their own *mise-en-scène*, make it heavy or light, shape it through insistence, with their own method for giving signals. And they are not idiots, they know perfectly well how to do it. And they ask themselves, when a doubt occurs, or a slight panic, why doesn’t the other person say anything? Anything? ‘So it’s my turn?’” Jean-Louis Comolli, *Ver e poder – A inocência perdida: cinema, televisão, ficção, documentário*, ed. César Guimarães and Ruben Caixeta, trans. Augustin de Tugny, Oswaldo Teixeira and Ruben Caixeta (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2008), 56.

8. Ilana Feldman Marzochi, “Jogos de cena: ensaios sobre o documentário brasileiro contemporâneo” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 2012), 17.

9. Fernando do Nascimento Gonçalves, who analyzed *Songs* based on the agency of its subjectification processes, emphasizes that the film

“does not seem to speak as much about the songs and stories that express the memories of lived experience, as it does about the intensities and becoming of what is remembered and which, once transformed into being-history and being-song, becomes the film’s own expressive substance.” Fernando do Nascimento Gonçalves, “As canções: fabulação e ética da invenção em Eduardo Coutinho,” *Revista Significação* (São Paulo) 39, no. 38 (2012): 149.

10. In addition to Déa, who sang in TV shows, there are at least four other characters with some previous experience with music practice (whether it be playing an instrument, composing or singing). However, it would be inaccurate to say that the film portrays them as “professional musicians.” The film is committed to treating them as everyday, ordinary people, which is also reinforced by the subtitles that only reveal a first name or nickname.

11. The French term “avant-champ” refers to “being radically out of frame, or behind the camera,” as formulated by Jacques Aumont, and further discussed by André Brasil. In documentary film, in general, it is a stylistic resource, but also an ethical space that allows filmmakers to place themselves inside the scene in relation to the filmed other. See André Brasil, “Formas do antecampo: notas sobre a performatividade no documentário brasileiro contemporâneo” (paper, XX Encontro Anual da Compós, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador da Bahia, June 2013).

12. Word game with the Portuguese word “amador,” which is a synonym of “amateur” or “artless,” but also of “lover” or “loving.” (Translator’s Note)

13. Such a dalliance with a “mediatized confessional” was already present in *Playing*, but there a similar issue is solved through documentary essayism, which privileges opacity, the awareness of mediation and the tensions between subjectivity and its fictional horizons, as Marzochi emphasizes in the chapter “Na contramão do confessional.” Marzochi, “Jogos de cena,” 21–95.

14. Mariana Baltar, “Realidade lacrimosa. Diálogos entre o universo do documentário e a imaginação melodramática” (PhD. diss., Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, 2007), 88. In this doctoral thesis, Mariana Baltar analyses six films, among which is the documentary *Master, a Building in Copacabana*.

15. Traditional self-published poetry, usually from Brazil’s North East. (Translator’s Note)

16. Baltar, “Realidade lacrimosa,” 88.

17. Not every narrative based on excess seeks proximity to melodramatic

imagination, as Baltar explains. Excess is a trait that can be associated with terror, the grotesque, the fantastic and even the erotic. Moreover, not every manifestation of intimacy takes on a melodramatic character. This intimate pact should be obvious and reiterated throughout the narrative, if anything to legitimize this same narrative. Baltar uses the example of *Nelson Freire* (2002) by João Moreira Salles: for her, there is shared intimacy in this film between the subject and the crew, but it is not channelled into melodrama.

18. Comolli, *Ver e poder*.

19. Original lyrics: “Os sonhos mais lindos sonhei, de quimeras mil um castelo ergui...” It is “Fascinação” (“Fascination”), by F. D. Marchetti and M. de Feraudy, whose Elis Regina’s version is extremely well-known.

20. As stated by the director: “I know that the critics will say that it’s a dilution of *Playing* and that I didn’t take it a step further, but there’s something about it in relation to music that no other film has ever attempted, because through this film it’s possible to understand that singing and Brazil have a very unique relationship. It’s also a film in which I stop asking people things like: ‘Where you were born.’ I don’t want to do that anymore and I feel that through this film I managed to stop that.” Eduardo Coutinho, “Eu sou um ator,” interview by Nina Rahe, *Revista Bravo* (December 2011).

21. Eduardo Scorel, “As Canções de Eduardo Coutinho,” *Questões Cinematográficas* (blog), *Revista Piauí, Estadão – O Estado de São Paulo*, January 6, 2012.

22. According to the diretor, this was the only “trick” perpetrated by the film, because this is not Fátima’s most important song of her life. Coutinho, “Eu sou um ator,” interview by Nina Rahe.

23. Gorbman, “Artless Singing,” 158.

24. Ismail Xavier, “Indagações em torno de Eduardo Coutinho e seu diálogo com a tradição moderna,” in *Ensaio no real*, org. Cezar Migliorin (Rio de Janeiro: Azougue Editorial, 2010), 66–67. In this case the author refers to the films Coutinho did after *The Mighty Spirit* (Santo Forte, 1999).

25. Xavier, “Indagações em torno de Eduardo Coutinho e seu diálogo com a tradição moderna,” 72.

26. Written by Chiquinho and Marinho, and known for Roberto Carlos’s rendition.

27. Xavier, “Indagações em torno de Eduardo Coutinho e seu diálogo com a tradição moderna,” 74–75.

28. César Guimarães, “Comum, ordinário, popular: figuras da alteridade no documentário brasileiro

contemporâneo,” in *Ensaio no real*, org. Cezar Migliorin (Rio de Janeiro: Azougue Editorial, 2010), 195.

29. César Guimarães, “Comum, ordinário, popular,” 196.

30. Gorbman, “Artless Singing,” 162. The author’s wording resembles Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s formulation at the very beginning of the plateau “On the Ritornello:” “A child in the dark, gripped with fear, comforts himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song. Lost, he takes shelter, or orients himself with his little song as best he can. The song is like a rough sketch of a calming and stabilizing, calm and stable, center in the heart of

chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings. hastens or slows his pace. But the song itself is already a skip: it jumps from chaos to the beginnings of order in chaos and is in danger of breaking apart at any moment. There is always sonority in Ariadne’s thread. Or the song of Orpheus.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 311.

31. Eduardo Coutinho, “Trilhas de uma vida,” interview by Marília Kodice, *Revista Cult* 164 (December 2011).

32. At least two other films that use this *dispositif* can be cited as examples:

Z32 (Avi Mograbi, 2008) and *Au chic resto pop* (Tahani Rached, 1990). Both are briefly commented on in our thesis, at the end of the chapter on artless singing. See Cristiane da Silveira Lima, “Música em cena: à escuta do documentário brasileiro” (PhD. diss., Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2015), 179–181.

33. Lima, “Música em cena: à escuta do documentário brasileiro,” 177–178.

34. We refer to Drummond’s poem “A música barata” (“The Cheap Song”), which inspired José Miguel Wisnik in a brief analysis of *Songs*. See José Miguel Wisnik, “Música barata,” *O Globo*, December 17th, 2011.



Songs (2011)

Interview with Eduardo Coutinho

María Campaña Ramia

[...]

And finally there's *Songs* (*As Canções*, 2011), where singing doesn't only act as the most direct memory stimulus, but also serves as a kind of cure for a wounded soul...

Of course! That's why singing was always present for me. For production reasons I had to come up with a solution for a cheap, easy film. One day I was going to make one kind of film, the next day I was going to do another, and suddenly I thought: "It's just a matter of searching the streets for people to sing!" I filmed *Songs* in six days and it was an absolute pleasure. I've never had such a pleasurable shoot as this one. I knew I was making a popular movie.

Singing is a constant in your work. This is perhaps made more explicit in *Songs*, but it's always had a fundamental presence. I think back to the young woman who sings *música sertaneja*,¹ in *Boca de Lixo* (1992), or Mr. Henrique and the highpoint of his singing "My Way," to mention only a couple of beloved characters. What happens with them is what Deleuze defined as "the moment of truth," when in musical comedies the protagonist "enters into dance" as if "entering a dream." Only in this case it's more like "entering a song," as if we become someone else when we sing.

To sing... well, look, I sing badly and I don't even have a favourite song, but to sing means... Think of that lady in *Master, a Building in Copacabana* (*Edifício Master*, 2002) who lives alone, has a room full of records and plays the piano. I asked her to sing and she sang "Nunca" ("Never"), by Lupicínio Rodrigues, a singer from Rio Grande do Sul who was very influenced by the bolero, the tango, tragedy, but he sang sambas. She sang this song called "Nunca," which is wonderful. All of Lupicínio's songs are about tragic love: "Nunca nem que o mundo caia sobre mim..." ("Never, not even if the world falls upon me..."). And she really sings! It doesn't matter if she doesn't sing it well. Professional singing does not interest me. She is wonderful when she is singing. That woman sits there alone, in that room, giving an interview... and suddenly she sings. It's beautiful! I just love that, and I especially love it when the person sings without being professional, because there's an emotional bond with a particular song, or with music in general. And there's no band, no guitar, nothing: it was just

a human voice. The human voice! It's absolutely wonderful: when that woman sings, and that song represents a feeling that is so strong inside her, there is no emotion that can surpass it.

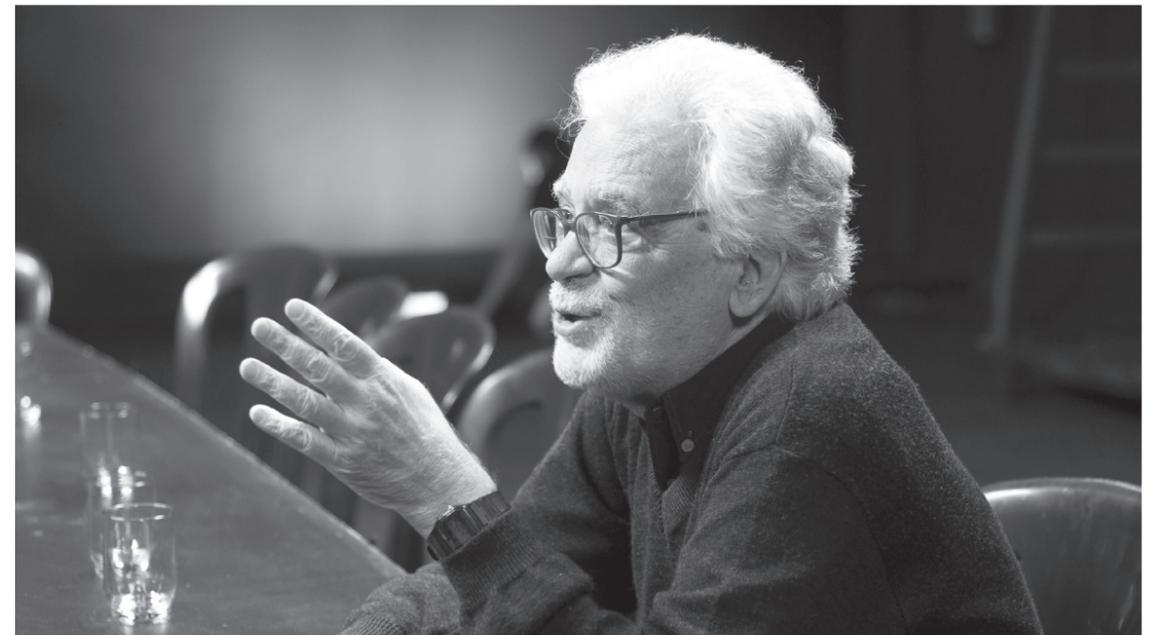
Furthermore, the relationship that Brazilians have with music is not one that is easily replicated in other countries.

I say, exaggerating a little, that if Brazil, through some accident or another, had to destroy all its culture, its literature, its poetry, its fine art, everything, but a single songbook survived with its date, then everything would be all right. Because in a country, in a nation that was illiterate, because even today there is a very high percentage of illiterate people: Who has heard of Guimarães Rosa, Clarice Lispector? Who has ever read them? But with music it's different, because we can all access music. And what does one need from a song? The lyrics. Because people don't judge a song according to how the mandolin or a certain instrument is played—that requires a level of hearing that we do not all have. This is why lyrics must exist, and then there's Roberto Carlos. My thesis was that in *Songs* there is no aesthetic judgment. I am interested in music and the relationship it has to life.

There's a character in the movie, Queimado, who is just wonderful. He talks about a Jorge Ben song and recalls that thanks to that song he made peace with his bride. I asked him: "What is the use of music?" And he said a wonderful thing: "Even though there are smells, you're not always smelling food. But with music, you listen to it, you sing it and you remember something." Music is like a match that you strike and it makes memory more affective, and this is a film about feelings.

Orality is another of Brazil's great themes...

The fact that you meet someone here and within five minutes you are on a first name basis and have become intimate, would be inconceivable in a country like France, which is "Latin" in quotation marks. There's a level of informality that turns every conversation into a personal, different kind of relationship. All of the class differences that there are here, because there really is social inequality, are partly set aside because of the enormous ease with which one person addresses another. You find people who say things with enormous clarity but who are incapable of putting that down on paper. So orality is an essential



Eduardo Coutinho. Source: Videofilmes

aspect because, although people speak well, or badly, with a lot of slang, or none at all, people manage to communicate.

But on the other hand there is a negative element, and it has to do with the power of television which for the last forty years has become so strong that it has become commonplace to speak publicly about one's life. Here people go on *Big Brother* and they are stripped of their privacy in front of the camera, and that is documentary cinema's terrible enemy.

[...]

First published as "No quiero saber cómo es el mundo, sino cómo está", una conversación con Eduardo Coutinho" in *El otro cine de Eduardo Coutinho*, edited by María Campaña Ramia and Cláudia Mesquita, 164–167. Quito: Corporación Cinememoria / Festival Internacional de Cine Documental Encuentros del Otro Cine 'EDOC', 2012.

1. Brazilian music genre, usually devoted to romantic themes and sung by a duo of tenors playing *viola caipira* or guitar. Its origins can be found in the traditional music from the Brazilian countryside, although throughout the twentieth century it incorporated influences from other genres, like Paraguayan polkas, Mexican rancheras, pop and rock. From the 1980s onwards it has been consumed en masse in Brazil, and it still occupies most of the places in the music charts.

Wrinkles – About Nelson Cavaquinho

Nuno Ramos

One of the curious things about Brazilian samba is how hard it is to find out who wrote a song—samba songs are almost always better known than the people who composed them, as if there is an idea of making collective art hovering over them. Assis Valente? Or was it Ataufo Alves? Herivelto Martins? Was not that Wilson Batista? Monsueto? Or Manacéa? The difficulties may be the result of the power, up until bossa nova, of the (very well known) singers over the (less known) composers; or they may come from the biographical precariousness of so many of these composers (which included the constant sale of compositions to the actual singers), as well as the lack of detailed research into this issue. However, it also points towards an aesthetically important question, which deserves some attention. Some of our best composers seem to be a part, even in their moments of glory, of a musical style—the samba—that doesn't require the immediate individualization of each work. And that is how the *pot-pourri*, this detestable way of ironing out the differences within each song, recurs in samba in a way that could not occur in other genres. With themes, rhymes and melodic and harmonious solutions that are immune to this crisis up to a point, and music experiences that tend towards the collective (*roda-de-samba, samba-de-terreiro*), samba seems to quell the space of authorship without much trauma, even though there are so many extraordinary authors.¹ Of course there have always been exceptions to this rule—authors whose singularity jumps out: Noel, for example, possibly because of the lyrics' alarming originality; Caymmi, due to the archetypal simplicity of each find. The list could go on, but it does not seem misguided to presume that the genre reigned supreme over and above any individual conquest during the decades that our samba and a large part of our songs matured.

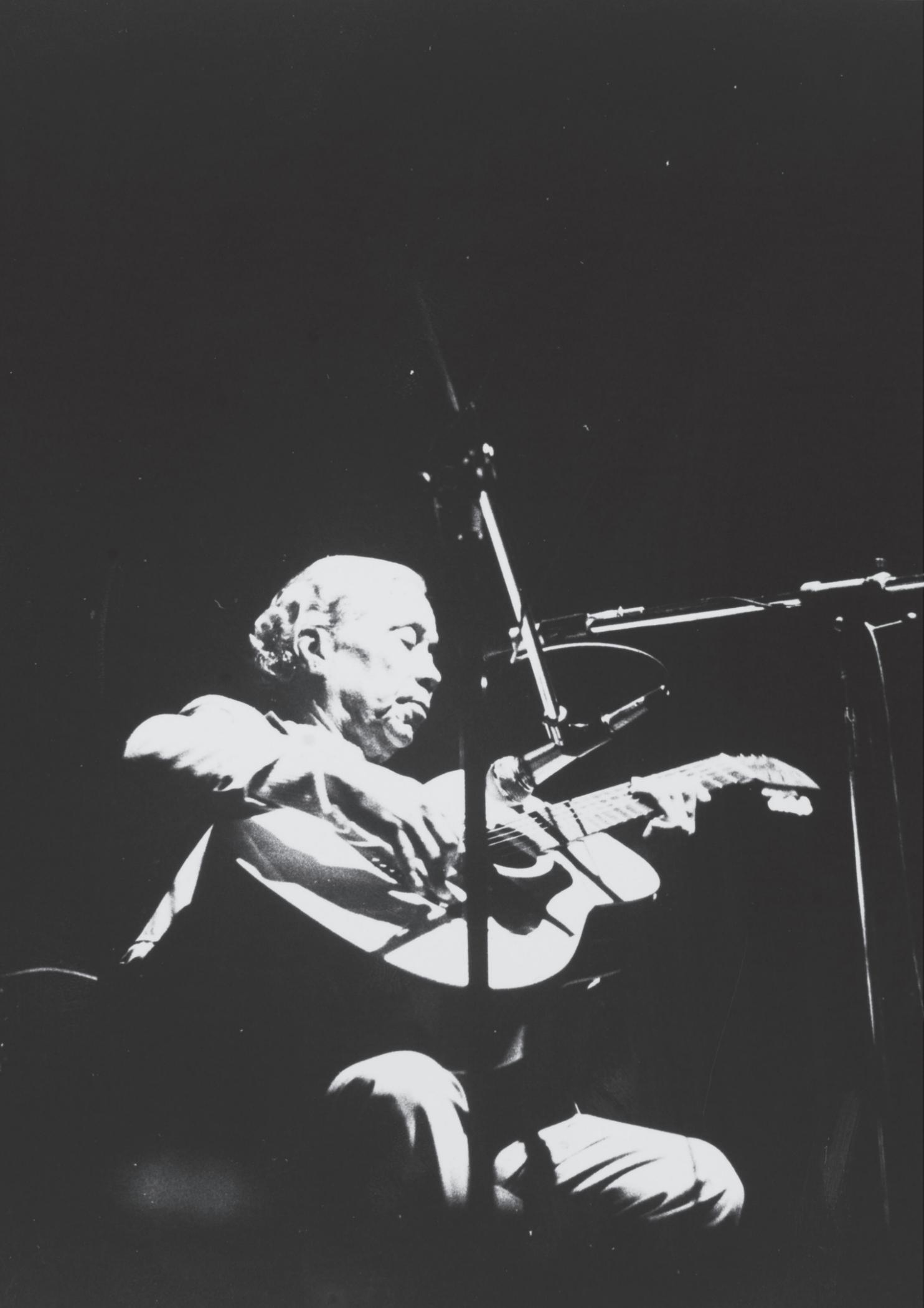
In general, eras rife with linguistic discoveries propitiate this: the extraordinary quality of the Madonnas, during the pre-Renaissance period, prompts them to resemble one another, and often to look like a masterpiece by Bellini; Caravaggio's influence during the Baroque period was so overwhelming that, even though his work was immediately recognizable, it is extremely hard to tell one disciple apart from another (and they are numerous); the

resemblance between Picasso and Braque's work is mesmerizing, as it is with their followers, throughout the years in which analytical and synthetic cubisms were being developed. For better or for worst, it seems that when stylistic conquests are extremely successful (whether produced by an identifiable author or a group of them), the artist's fingerprint does not always take pride of place. Something similar happened in Brazil, during the Baroque period in the state of Minas Gerais, when Aleijadinho's level of artistic excellence became a landmark and at the same time synonymous with that period. We could make an analogy with Hollywood, which is much more resistant when it comes to the notion of authorship than European cinema. After all, one had to wait for the writers of French magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* for a more detailed notion about the identity of each film director at the time. After an initial birth period, there is a stabilization process in which these new stylistic resources often degenerate into tedium and mummification (the "Caravaggesque" is an example of this). But when the thing is still alive, taking shape, trying out new combinations, the good news is that very often the work of an unknown artist achieves status and has the presence of a real masterpiece. In our country, João Gilberto's records are full of such finds—authors no one had ever heard of producing songs as good as those by the great composers. When it becomes forcefully manifest, style offers the average creator, like an anonymous nursery, accessible and fertile raw material.

As it was with so many other things, bossa nova was also a watershed moment when it came to this. From that moment on, the constellation of authors/composers became more clearly defined. There was no such thing as anonymity and the compositions were made use of much better. The development of a second generation cultural industry (television/record industry, which proceeded in the 1960s from the "Radio Era" of the 1930s), within reach of those that came after bossa nova, allotted due credit to everyone. The blend of anonymity and exposure, of (total) amateurism and (minimum) professionalism, draws to a close during this period, which was characteristic of our songwriting until the 1950s. It is hard to say how much of its grandeur came from this rare mixture (specific to the years in which it came into being) between the private, almost familiar world of composer-artists and a reasonable degree of public exposure through the medium of radio or

LEFT

Nelson Cavaquinho. Source: newspaper *Aqui São Paulo*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo





Clementina de Jesus, Paulinho da Viola, Jair do Cavaquinho and Anescar do Salgueiro in the show *Rosa de Ouro*. Photograph by Foto Carlos. Source: newspaper *Última Hora*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

other significant cultural moments such as carnivals, political campaigns and other assorted types of parties (in football stadiums, for example), as well as the incipient record industry. Although extremely amateur, Brazilian music attained a social significance unlike any other form of art within Brazilian culture from the moment it came into being. It had always delighted in the status of being on the tips of peoples' tongues. Specific years were remembered in terms of a particular carnivalesque marching tune, and for whatever situation a new samba song was written. There was an enormous demand that sort of hovered in the air, even though more often than not it did not amount to anything. Songs would then get brought back into a more intimate fold without ever reaching the public and remained there, like a wasted treasure or like a legend, or simply forgotten forever. But this would not have been possible if a number of songs effectively had not fulfilled their destiny and reached the general public, which in turn generated, albeit vicariously, demand for constant production, especially when it came to radio or the burgeoning record industry. With the advent of bossa nova and the growth of the cultural industry, especially with the advent of television reaching those that had not been reached before and targeting those that had not been targeted, there was a change in this relationship between amateurism and professionalism, between

solitude and sharing. It can be said that the classical period of Brazilian songwriting ends here and that this 1960s and 70s generation will become a sort of explosive expression of this crisis.

However, it is against the flow of this new moment so specific to the 1960s, and with greater access to the outside world and closer to a more effective promise of an actual audience, that two extraordinary voices come into being in Rio de Janeiro: Cartola and Nelson Cavaquinho. Recording LPs at the start of the 1970s, they share not only a friendship and affiliation with the same samba school (Mangueira), but also a very long career. They had been reasonably successful in the past (Cartola was recorded by Carmen Miranda, Chico Alves, Mario Reis, Sílvio Caldas and Aracy de Almeida, in the 1930s and 40s; Nelson was recorded by Alcides Gerardi and, more than once, by Ciro Monteiro in the 1940s, and also by Roberto Silva and Dalva de Oliveira in the 1950s), but then they disappeared for a while and made a comeback—prompted by Rio de Janeiro's middle class discovering the city's slums at the start of the 1960s²—with a set of frighteningly strong and mature songs. They were astoundingly original in their point of view and boasting a distinct style of their own. Samba's "common heritage" is interrupted here and a poetic impairment in relation to what was done before becomes overtly obvious and stands out. Even

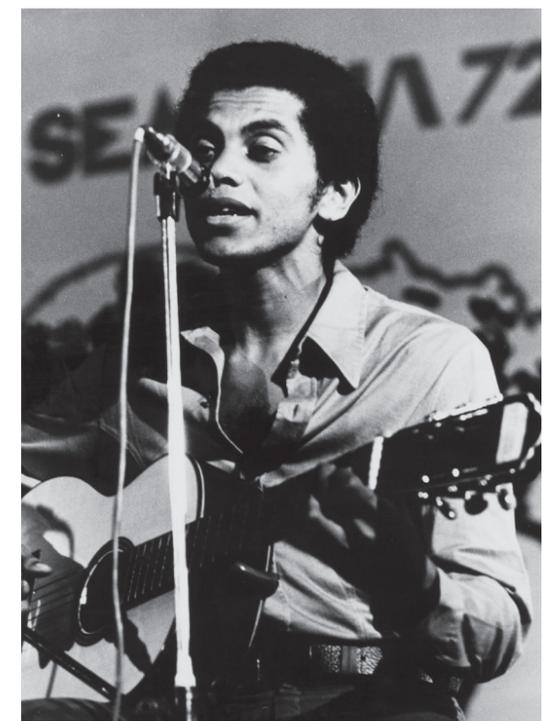


Cartola. Photograph by Chico Nelson. Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

though they practically witnessed the birth of samba (Cartola, one of Mangueira Samba school's founders, was born in 1908; Nelson Cavaquinho in 1911), their best songs serve as a late example of the classic genre of Brazilian popular singing (from the 1930s to 50s), totally disconnected from what it meant to be in the world during that period. Cartola and Nelson participate in samba's golden age as if *in flight*. Cartola can't be found, he is renowned for playing dead; Nelson drifts nomadically, begging for and handing out charity, traipsing the streets, getting horses drunk, bringing chickens home. If Zé Keti presents us in some way the communicable face of this world that resurges—in his partnerships with Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Nara Leão, in the left-wing poetics of such compositions as "Opinião" ("Opinion"), "Acender as Velas" ("To Light the Candles") or "Malvadeza Durão" ("Tough Venom"), or even in the show *Opinião* that he did with Nara Leão and João do Vale—, Nelson and Cartola represent the amateurism that was on its way out in its purest state. The fact is, they actually did almost die—with its particular brand of solitude and forgetting, turned into form and song, on the eve of professionalism and the cultural television industry. And it is in the name of this dissipated side of Brazilian songwriting that they compose in a kind of permanent contact with derision and oblivion which, however, were ineluctably decreasing at that time. And thus they are born, against the tide

of the times, reacting to the almost phobic urgency of the 1960s with a kind of unshakable extemporaneousness. Paulinho da Viola, whose entire being originates in this matrix, adds *conscience* to the mix, which is a characteristic of later works.

Abstraction is the first hallmark of these two composers. They no longer serve, or answer to anything or anyone. In other words—their starting point is a concrete situation that quickly progresses towards a more distant, moral or even cosmic stance. Samba seems to want to free itself from the anecdotal, or from any identity that has a function, a role, a *persona*. To put it another way, it is the actual ascending movement from the concrete to the abstract—that's the path it takes (unlike Paulinho da Viola, whose songs are abstract from the beginning):³ in a samba by Cartola, a friend's breach of trust ("Fui trair meu grande amigo" ["I set out to deceive a great friend of mine"]) leads him, in the beginning of the second part, to a principle such as "Faço tudo para evitar o mal / Sou pelo mal perseguido" ("I do everything to avoid evil / Evil seems to persecute me). The hillside slums, from where the lyrical subject views the world, become primarily, and literally, somewhere high up, distant, isolated. From up high, the composer sits there, alone, supreme. Noel Rosa stabilized a song which was multimorphic, penetrative, clinging to the ground, merged with city life; which was discarded in



Paulinho da Viola. Author: Iolanda Huzak. Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo



Nelson Cavaquinho (1969)

pockets, in the narrow passages, during the early morning hours; and propagated in colloquial speech and within an immediate context, in dance, in the win or lose of the competitions between composers and of the most immediate wannabe. That song, in its countless metamorphoses, wishes to rest now, made of a calmer and more constant matter. And so another characteristic common to both of them seems inevitable: sobriety, a kind of formal clarity, simple or solemn, that creates a distance at the same time as it counterbalances the subject matter's vagueness. The songwriter does not swing, does not deviate, does not trick—he does not behave like a trickster (*malandro*), and the wanton song, that offers itself up at all times to the world's necessities, seems almost absurd in this case. “Over there where sobriety abandons you, that is where you'll find the limit to your thoughts,” Hölderlin used to say.⁴ There is in fact a limit, an outline, within Cartola and Nelson Cavaquinho; a belonging, a kind of contrition that multiplies the songs' seriousness. Perhaps it's why their point of view is always belated—as if life, in a way, has already been lived. Ageing is, therefore, the third characteristic that Nelson and Cartola have in common—the perspective of a life lived. There is accumulated experience here, which occasions

contention and sobriety, and a weariness that comes from it.

Abstract, sober and old—Cartola expresses a more settled, harmonious and classical core; Nelson is more individuated and unconventional, almost disagreeable. Cartola motions towards *conciliation* and Nelson, towards the *tragic*. When it comes to Cartola, the singer, foremost, *advises*. The one who has already lived whispers into the listener's ear: “o mundo é um moinho” (“the world grinds you down”), or “acontece, acontece” (“that's just the way it goes”). He wants to spare the listener and direct him or her to a safe place. “Eu bem sei que não queres voltar para mim (“I know full well that you don't want to come back to me”), but, even so, “Devias vir, para ver os meus olhos tristonhos / E quem sabe sonhar os meus sonhos / Por fim” (“You should come, and look into my sad eyes / And maybe dream my dreams / In the end”). The song is the vehicle for this reconciliation, and Cartola's tuneful treasure allows for an even longer and more abstract excursion. In this way, the great metaphors that conduct his work—the roses that don't talk, the worlds that grind you down, the empty love-nests—and the sumptuous harmonious trajectories, that postpone the return of the melody, both have the same function. They delay

the path towards sad reconciliation; enhancing it, like a slowly mooring boat. Cartola lost, but teaches the listener about this loss, assimilating it anew. His work is that of the enormous metaphor of such loss, that looks like everything—dawn, slums, roses—while remaining always ready to find (that is what a metaphor is) the ideal proportion with the world out there.

For Nelson, what is lost is lost and it never comes back—there is no conciliation, but grievance, shock, stupor. Contrary to his friend and partner's metaphorical and metamorphic principle, his work moves forward in terms of contiguity and metonymy. The dry leaves that fell from a mango tree, on which the composer steps, makes one think of the samba school; the melodies, almost literally, rise and fall, like stations of the cross or down from the hillside slums. Nelson's flowers, unlike Cartola's roses, speak, and do so when he walks past them, “Quando eu passo perto das flores / Quase elas dizem assim: nós amanhã enfeitaremos o teu fim” (“When I walk close to the flowers / They seem to say: tomorrow we will serve as decoration for your end”); the lover is found out because of his physical traits: “O cigarro deixado em meu quarto é a marca que fumas, não podes negar” (“The cigarette left in my room is the brand that you smoke, you can't deny it”). Unlike for Cartola, in which a never-ending enchantment suspends the

elements in order to bring them into relation, in which everything can be transformed into whatever suits it (everything becomes a metaphor for everything else), for Nelson things are what they are, as abstract as they may be, and leave behind marks and signs: “Bem sei a notícia que vens me trazer / Os teus olhos só faltam dizer / É melhor eu me convencer” (“I know all too well what news you bring me / Your eyes are trying to tell me / It's better if I convince myself”).

Nelson's songs almost always have fixed rhymes (pain/shallow watery eyes; face/distaste; world/tramp; away/today⁵) and somewhat archetypal and invariable structures; but what really counts is the melody's sudden movement of ascension and descent. If in Cartola the melodies seem to spread themselves out within an expansive and sweeping development, in Nelson they advance, step by step, within a pertinent, but inexorable, movement between here and there, as if we were able to point out its movement with a finger. They seem confined, trapped within a medium that offers them resistance. His way of singing reinforces such an aspect like no other. Nelson seems to sing *each syllable* as if it were the unity of final meaning; separate from its neighbour as if it existed on its own terms. As a result, the emphasis on each phase of the passage ends up thwarting the lyrical proliferation so characteristic of Cartola's songs (and

Cartola. Source: newspaper *Aqui São Paulo*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

the corresponding vocal tradition aligned with *bel canto*, ever present in Cartola's own rendition of his songs), and re-enforces the singer's confined here and now. There is a closure, a seriousness, an entropic force that the melody must overcome, which is absent from Cartola. Much of Nelson's beauty and singularity comes from this kind of final account between these two adversaries—it is almost surprising that the song was able to come into existence, that it was finally written. It is as if it might well have given in and let itself get lost along the way. The composer sends the melody up and down, within a kind of slow motion between notes, while making a point of showing this—"I'm actually going from here to there." The composition, moreover, is precisely like that—the up and down, the point by point of a melody that threatens to fail.

Which is why, perhaps, there is something in Nelson's songs that leans towards a chorus, which naturally brings together the melody's strained points, one at a time, completing it in its weaknesses, countering its vulnerability. Here more than with any other composer, the collective voice imposes itself. With the exception of a few classics, such as "A Flor e o Espinho" ("The Flower and the Thorn") [whose first and most famous part seems to have been written by Guilherme de Brito] or "Folhas Secas" ("Dry Leaves") [which the two partnered on], almost all the songs seem ready to be sung in chorus. There are various reasons for this: the point of view, also present in the melody, is so abstract, moral, almost religious, that it takes leave of the subjective subtleties and leans towards the collective. His singing, however, is already so personal that it contains these ambiguities. Nelson sings, simultaneously, in an expressive manner (his voice is coarse visceral, unique, full of idiosyncrasies; a percussive guitar, entirely original) and *mechanic* (an almost machine-like division of syllables), combining an absolutely singular antithesis of operatic *bel canto* with a monotonous verbal tempo, which accepts the expressive neutralization of the chorus.

Beyond this, the songs' maceration seems so intense that any prior conciliation with collectivity, imbued with acceptance and neutralization, is more than necessary. The chorus repeatedly proclaims the theme with such enthusiasm that the singer's own entry into the song, by contrast, seems quelled. (Examples include "O Bem e o Mal" ["Good and Evil"], "Rei Vadio" ["Bum King"], "Minha Festa" ["My Party"]—probably Nelson's only happy song, "Vou Partir" ["I'm Leaving"], "Rei Vagabundo" ["Vagabond King"].) Sometimes, on the other hand, it is the exasperated singer that merges with the chorus at the

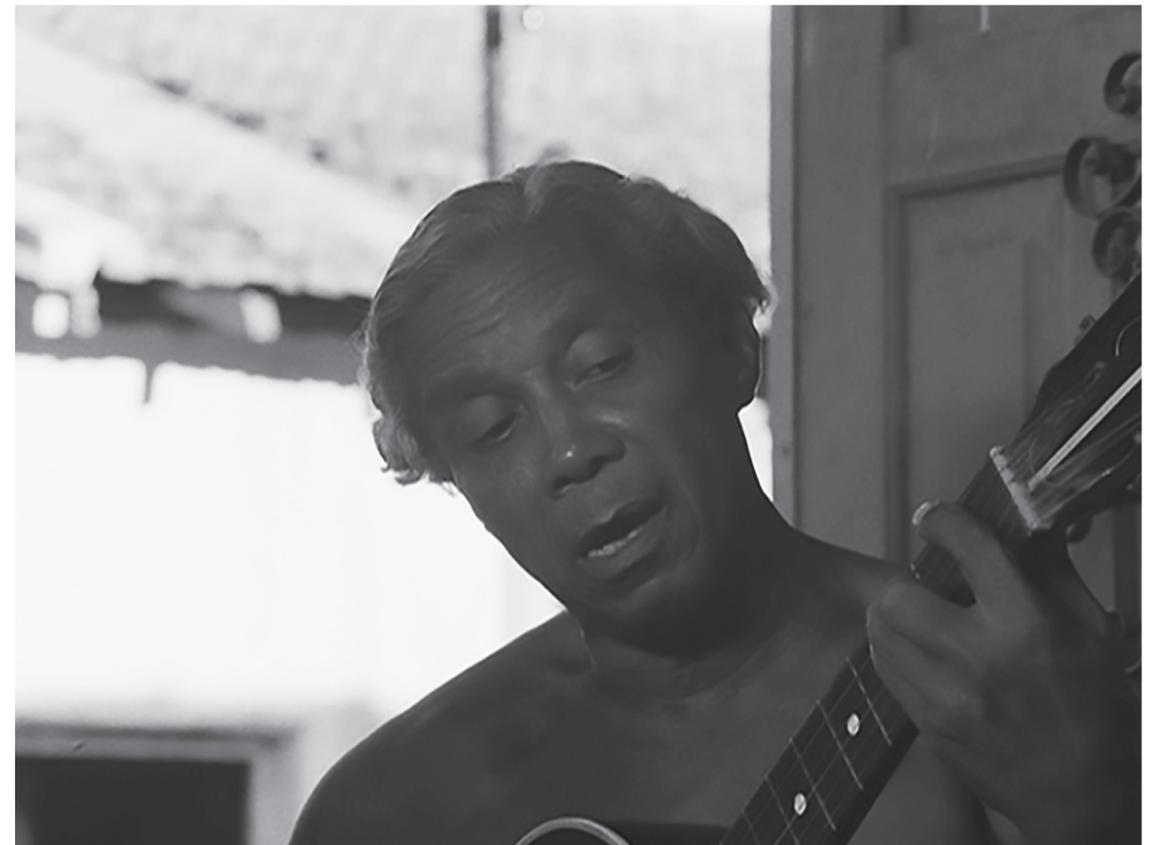
end of the song ("Juízo Final" ["Final Judgement"]). Either way, the chorus lends serenity to this tragic subject, offering succour with its embrace. This is exactly what Schiller says of the tragic Greek chorus:

The tragic characters also require this place of repose [...]. The presence of the chorus, which listens to them as a judging witness, and harnesses the first outbreak of their passion with its intervention, motivates the presence of mind with which they act, and the dignity with which they speak.⁶

When Nelson sings he seems to be exactly like that: circumspect, dignified, contained in some way—*sober*. The classical chorus is a custodian of values that precedes the course of action to which the hero succumbs—Vernant and Vidal-Naquet recognized in the chorus an agrarian, archaic, aristocratic and Homeric poetic form (thus preceding the present world of tragic theatre), in contrast to the spoken prose of the *polis* represented by the tragic actor.⁷ It is obvious that these forces are not marshalled in Nelson Cavaquinho's songs, but I believe it is possible to note a tension in his work that is worthy of reflection; a tension between the subject and the collective, between the singer and composer's present tense and our history's timeless inadequacy, which this chorus seems to awaken and forgive.

Unlike Greek tragedy, the chorus in Nelson Cavaquinho merges the collective and the individual. There are not the two voices that are always preserved in Greek tragedy, in which two diverse times seem to co-exist; neither is there an opposition between the hero's tragic action and the inevitable complaint sung by the "judgemental witness," the chorus. In Nelson's songs the singer and the chorus want to sing together, within a kind of cosmic conciliation that the female and male voices at the end of Nelson's performance of the "Juízo Final" exemplify perfectly. In that song the singer seems to be dragged into these voices, that perform along with him, elevating his words to a level that they would not reach alone. Thus, these two extremes come together; they calm each other, console each other. The song loses an almost unbearable lyrical impairment that tends to dissipate, consoling itself with the very act in which the many sing together.

Everything in Nelson Cavaquinho tends towards the archaic, the out of date. But, unlike another Nelson (Nelson Rodrigues, his contemporary and fellow countryman), he does not seem to realize it. There are not two poles here. Nelson Cavaquinho is not modern Brazilian samba's founding father, in



Nelson Cavaquinho (1969)

the way that Nelson Rodrigues is modern Brazilian theatre's father. This is not about a tension between modern form and archaic content.⁸ This question, present in almost all of Brazilian art, simply does not arise. Much more than archaic, Nelson (like Cartola) seems to have been born outside of his own time, in the opposite direction to the 1950's "promise of happiness" and the demanding nowness of the 1960s. It is from this place that Nelson and Cartola compose, forgotten, but also protected—and it is from this very same place that Paulinho da Viola looks upon the world, although in some way he is fully aware of it. The chorus in Nelson seems to be the very notion of the archaic that is reconciled, transformed into an embrace—and it is not going over the top to add to this concept of the archaic the abuses of secular slavery, the pitiful distribution of income, latent racism, widespread alcoholism, and the ruthlessness of life everywhere. The chorus soothes the singer, who delivers himself to it as if he is being reborn, because it immediately negates all his pain, the pain that the singer is presently singing about—the chorus is the negation of solitude, the negation of betrayal, the negation of poverty. The chorus is the opposite of what the song is about; its mere existence serves as a complete refutation of what is being sung, and it

is not surprising that it ends up becoming the song's theme: "E é por isso que eu canto assim: lá, lálaiá laiálaiá (coro)" ("And that's why I sing like this: lá, laália laiálaiá [chorus]") ["Minha Festa"]. If there is a chorus, then the singer is no longer a poor devil, nor is he alone, but surrounded by brothers, who now sing with him and for him. Mangueira, the samba school that celebrates life, even through death ("Vivo tranquilo em Mangueira porque / Sei que alguém há de chorar quando eu morrer" ["Mangueira gives me peace of mind because / I know someone will cry when I die"]), is the chorus manifest as people, real life, spread out around the place. Singing thus turns the clown into a king and the poor devil into the centre of the world. Nelson, an extreme artist in everything he does, seems to explore in several songs this limit between the almost silent dilacerations of someone who may be incapable of singing the next note, and a kind warm reception which the chorus (revealing the song's own movement) offers.

Nelson Cavaquinho's work sets a kind of aesthetic cap on Brazilian music. Without minimizing the extraordinary beauty of so many of his melodies,¹⁰ the fact is that listening to him singing is often a scratchy, almost disagreeable experience. His "prepared,"¹¹ percussive guitar with its notes that beat more than they



Regina Werneck, Marília Batista and Nelson Cavaquinho in the Teatro de Arena.
Source: newspaper *Última Hora*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

echo; his absurd voice, a sort of anti-João Gilberto in its minimal breath, which prides itself on saying that it is petering out at the end of each verse, or half-verse; his recurring themes, his recurrent rhymes and, most importantly, his higher pitched melodies, ascending and descending step by step in front of us, to create an impressive coming together of sadness, injury and death. Irrespective of the formative years of this poetic approach (between the 1930s and 50s), the fact is that the moment he actually re-emerges into the world, recording or playing from a known

address (during the 1960s), he seems to firmly counter everything that was taking shape around him. Nelson's work eschews the modern/archaic ambivalence that spans the 1950s, 60s and 70s, from the optimism of the first bossa nova song to the tropicalist rupture. He is our immediate contact with all the things that have gone profoundly wrong with us and that nothing can change: internationalization, desire, cosmopolitanism. He manages to sublimate our failure without alluding to the "life that could have been and that was not." Perhaps he owes much



On this page, Nelson Cavaquinho (1969)

of his sobriety and formal solidity to the absence of this composite element, the desire and the refusal of the modern, which characterizes almost everything we have done. When it comes to Nelson, life is what it is and, in a way, what it always was. Which is why it is devoid of anxiousness and does not put forward any particular project. It is as desirable as death is.

In 1968, Leon Hirszman made a small documentary about Nelson Cavaquinho. It is worth the effort to watch it.¹² An unpretentious film in every way; a seemingly disjointed sum of 10 or 15 takes, it is in fact a very strong work, essential to any understanding of Nelson. In the film, as in Hélio Oiticica's contemporary penetrables, everything seems to be *inside*. We are always glued to what it is shown, as if it is impossible to look at anything from afar. However, or perhaps precisely because of this, the camera's complicity in relation to its object, and its object's complicity in relation to the camera, which is so typical of so many recent documentaries and newsreels, is yet to be born here. The over-exposed light, the direct-sound microphone's accidental and absurd presence, the allusion to that and to those behind the scenes, and the absolute lack of naturalness in terms of all the people who appear in the film (except Nelson himself) come together to create an "over there" that the camera disrupts, which is oblivious and heterogeneous, and this is why it is also centred



and authentic. In a particularly happy scene, to the soundtrack "Tire o seu sorriso do caminho" ("Take your smile out of the way"), the camera chases a girl who flees from it desperately, hiding behind her friends, behind hands and her own hair, and serving, in that particular movement, as a target for what appears behind her: a courtyard full of people and house façades, a courtyard that we walk into while fully aware, judging by the behaviour of our hostess, that we should not enter. In another sequence, to the sound of a strange song, whose lyrics mention a five-year-old kid who smokes a cigar and asks for a wife, children drink beer (but it may just be a soft drink), chickens scatter around the house, everything looks drunk, dispersed, at a party and depressed, like a child cruelty scene out of Dickens, but in which our values are no longer of any use. Are children being enticed? Are they really drinking alcohol? Is the effect comic? Tragic? Is Nelson's explicit depression authentic? Dangerous? Is he going to kill the chick in his hands or is he just playing with it? Things in this film seem alien to the same extent that they don't seem ready to appear in front of us. This unreadiness is the film's raw material, without us knowing very well if it's going to be ours on watching it. This is why what is being captured in these long travelling shots is not Cinema Novo's main theme of poverty, along with other related values such as stupor, piety, principles





Nelson Cavaquinho (1969)

and disgust. No, because poverty's *passivity* has been left out, banned by the troubled behaviour of all of those who appeared in the film, banned by Nelson's extremely strange, *caboclo*¹³ and albino presence, but especially due to the songs that appear in the background. What is seen is something that has been forgotten, but which is fully organized within its own oblivion. Something that tolerates the camera, but does not surrender itself to it and manages to get away from it, or to show itself off while it runs away from it, *while directing the camera during its own flight*. The figures and songs come from that place. They return there and want to stay there. They do not need us. The film's final, extraordinary scene deserves description. The song is "Vou Partir," and Nelson is singing alone ("Vou partir / Não sei se voltarei / Tu não me queiras mal / Hoje é Carnaval // Partirei para bem longe / Não precisa se preocupar / Só voltarei pra casa / Quando o Carnaval acabar, acabar" ["I'm going to leave / I do not know if I'll come back / You

do not want me badly / Today is Carnival // I'll go far away / No need to worry / I'll only come home / When Carnival is over, is over"]). The night-time shot starts from outside the open doors of a bar. A zoom reveals a table in whose centre Nelson plays and sings, surrounded by people. Cut to a shot from a distance, from the top, entirely black, where the light of the bar became a small rectangle in the lower part of the frame, in a composition that directly refers, with incredible fidelity, to the world of the woodcuts of Goeldi. At the time of cutting, the chorus enters. For the first time in the entire film, we hear the chorus typical of Nelson's songs; for the first time in the entire film something is filmed from afar. From afar, for the chorus to enter. From afar, because we are left out.

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1. It should not be forgotten how open the samba format is: just slow it down and it becomes a *samba-canção*, one step away from a bolero. This gives composers a stylistic opening that makes recognition even more difficult. Can you believe that Ataulfo Alves, whose music is characterized by samba music with great rhythmic and thematic beats ("valiant", may be the right word), wrote "Saudade da Professorinha" ("Missing the Little Teacher")?

2. Here we should mention *Thelma canta Nelson Cavaquinho* (*Thelma sings Nelson Cavaquinho*, 1966), in which the singer from Bahia duets with Nelson Cavaquinho, in an LP dedicated to his own compositions.

3. Just think about the start of "Foi um Rio Que Passou em Minha Vida" ("A River Broke into my Life"). What does the song talk about, after all? It is like an adversative—like the "Porém, ai, porém" ("Well, oh well") from the second scene—within which the theme ("Um caso diferente / Que marcou num breve tempo / Meu coração para sempre" ["A different affair / Which in no time at all / Forever took hold of my heart"]) is presented. I tried to cover this specific point of view in "Ao redor de Paulinho da Viola," in *Ensaio geral: projetos, roteiros, ensaios, memórias* (São Paulo: Globo, 2007).

4. I found the quotation in a text by Ronaldo Brito about Goeldi. "A nossa sombra," in *Oswaldo Goeldi* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Cultural The Axis, 2002).

5. Original rhymes: "mágoa/olhos rasos d'água," "rosto/desgosto," "mundo/vagabundo," "embora/agora." (Translator's Note)

6. Friedrich Schiller, "Acerca do uso do coro na tragédia," in *Teoria da tragédia* (São Paulo: EPU, 1992), 81. Introduction and notes by Anatol Rosenfeld. English translation by George W. Gregory in *Friedrich Schiller: Poet of Freedom*, vol. IV (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 2003).

7. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Mito e tragédia na Grécia antiga* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1999), 2–3 and 12–13. The case made by Vernant and Vidal-Naquet can be reduced to this: the chorus speaks in archaic poetry and the hero in everyday prose, sculpted by the judicial vocabulary of the city that is constituting itself. In the meantime the hero is the incarnation (hence the use of the mask) of the Homeric demigod, and the chorus the actual community's conscience, which is aware of such an impossibility. Therefore, in the tension between the hero, who already has no place but expresses himself using the city's legal prose, and the chorus, which speaks an

archaic language but incorporates the actual conscience of the hero's own failings, the insoluble conflict between the myth and the civil institutions takes shape between the archaic and the present moment in time.

8. I tried to approach Nelson Rodrigues in terms of the tension between the archaic and the modern in "A noiva desnudada," in *Ensaio geral*, 51–68.

9. See Lorenzo Mammì, "João Gilberto e o projeto utópico da bossa nova," *Novos Estudos* (Cebrap, São Paulo), no. 34 (November 1992).

10. Elis Regina's version, arranged by César Camargo Mariano, of "Folhas Secas," for example, does justice to one of the most delicate and beautiful melodies in our songbook.

11. As is widely known John Cage made several compositions for "Prepared Piano," which have rubbers, bolts and other artefacts on the inside that create an unpredictable beat.

12. Hirszman's entire *oeuvre* is being restored. And yet I managed to find eight minutes of the film (more than half of it) on YouTube. (Editor's Note: Today most of Hirszman's works are available on DVD, including *Nelson Cavaquinho*.)

13. A *caboclo* is a person of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. (Translator's Note)



Nelson Cavaquinho (1969)

The luminous chords

Paulo da Costa e Silva

The crispness of the blue day; the positivity of life; smiling love; the drop of dew on a flower petal; the little fish swimming in the sea; the boat that glides through mirrors of water. Everything in bossa nova seems to suggest an idea of lightness, of luminous balance. Light's own sheer quality, present in so many of the verses in the movement's songs, contrasts with the rougher materiality of concrete things. The songs resemble *sung dreams*—everything in them contributes to create an illusory atmosphere.

As happens in dreams, we have the feeling that time has been suspended. The precise tick of the hands of the clock no longer matters to us—perception has become other. All you need to do is listen carefully to some of João Gilberto's guitar chords, the gentle manner in which his voice fits in with the flow of Jobim's harmony (in the album both recorded with Stan Getz in 1962, for example), to realize how little by little chronological and productive time is slowly replaced by affective time, domestic time, like those undefined hours we spend at home.

Empty time seems to be bossa nova's very essence, especially in Tom Jobim's songs. But it is not about dead emptiness, lived idly, or lived in the absence of life. The empty time that lingers in Tom's songs is full, and must be lived, preferably, in front of a "Paisagem Inútil" ("Useless Landscape")—a title of one of bossa nova's classic songs, written by him and Aloysio de Oliveira. Time has not become totally still, but neither does it weigh on us like a heavy burden which is too hard to bear. What characterizes Tom's compositions is the way they invite us to follow the natural flow of a time that flows as smoothly as a river—a time that triumphs over us. It is from this surrender to the easy flow of time itself that there derives an incredible feeling of lightness that these songs transmit to us. They express the idea of something that happens naturally, that is born spontaneously and beautifully, as playful and efficient as one of Pelé's dribbles.

In a certain way, to indulge oneself in *pure time* is to suspend the chronological time that we try to tame at every turn—the time of the agenda, of commitments, delays, expectations. It is a matter of being in tune with the inexorable flow of life itself—a flow

that does not ask us for any kind of action and which simply drags us along. Lorenzo Mammi even noted that "bossa nova is played so often in elevators and airplanes not only because it is pleasant but because it expresses an effortless ascent."

It is obvious that this "effortless ascent" accompanies a dose of melancholy—to accept the flow of time is to accept the idea that, along with it, life also passes by, which is sad. But this sadness is softened by the very lightness and beauty of a musical movement, through which it is presented to us. As Italian writer Italo Calvino once wrote, melancholy is "sadness that has become light"—and this seems to be a fundamental element of Tom's songs.

Whenever we talk about bossa nova's countless contributions to Brazilian popular music—and there are those who say that there were very few or none at all—it is possible that the *musical representation of lightness* is one of the most crucial.

Whenever there is a desire to create an atmosphere of sober intimacy, moderate joy and lightness, there appears the small voice, the guitar's slow beat and, above all, the soft chords, with fifths and augmented sevenths. This becomes very clear when the music serves as an accompaniment to movies, commercials and television soap operas. This is when bossa nova creates a real moment of rest, a pause within the frantic agitation of modern life, a suspension of accelerated urban time—generally it serves as a frame for seduction scenes, because, besides being a very intimate song, its form which is permeated with voids and silences allows characters to deliver their dialogues through the music with clarity and understanding.

In fact, bossa nova seems to have created a true *apparatus of lightness* for Brazilian composers and performers. This apparatus presupposes the rhythmic synthesis of João Gilberto's guitar, which opened spaces and calmed the "rough sea" of traditional percussion, as well as his style of ultra-tempered interpretation, which resembles an informal conversation with the listener. But it would have never become so complete and efficient—so light!—had it not been for such evolved harmonies developed, most of all, by Tom Jobim.

Contrary to popular belief, Jobim's harmony was not the result of the direct influence of sophisticated cool jazz. In fact, on countless occasions the maestro went as far as to say that his relationship with American music was linked more closely to the great



LEFT

Tom Jobim.

Source: newspaper *Última Hora*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

songwriters—like George and Ira Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Richard Rodgers and Cole Porter, among many others—than to jazz itself. “I think I’ve been more influenced by American music than jazz, because it was what was played on the radio at the time. We didn’t really have any access to jazz. Only experts or very rich people who had sound systems used to listen to jazz,” Tom commented.

The altered chords and dissonance that so much characterized his style, and which would become one of bossa nova’s essential traits, arose from his direct contact with classical music, especially with Ravel and Debussy’s French Impressionism. And when someone insisted on associating bossa nova’s harmony with jazz—saying it was directly appropriated from jazz—usually with the intention of relativizing (negatively, of course) the innovative merits of Tom and company’s music, the maestro would shout: “All this banter about jazz-based harmony is just idle talk. This is how it actually works: jazz has eagerly drunk from every source it can find. Debussy, Ravel, everything. The purist Brazilian opposition is an underdeveloped thing; the way they see it, they have a special lens capable of seeing everything. They are open to everything: Hawaiian, Cuban, Brazilian music: everything. They are all about ‘come hither unto us;’ we’re more about ‘hey, just let us hang loose.’ We create a bossa nova beat; then the day comes when the Americans copy it, and then we’re immediately accused because the Americans had already come up with the beat. We’re always down there at the bottom, because we’re underdeveloped, aren’t we?”

Tom’s outburst was also about taking a stance against those who perceived bossa nova as the result of the misappropriation that an alienated, Americanized, and self-indulgent middle class had made of *genuine* popular music, Rio’s slums’ *true* samba. Until the end of his career the great composer had to endure harsh criticisms levelled at him by old-fashioned, conservative nationalists, and by purists who try to make Brazilian popular music folkloric with talk about genuine roots that no one has ever witnessed.

Without mentioning envious criticisms by Brazilians who simply do not accept the fact that a country marked by the stigmata of underdevelopment has, at some point in the late 1950s, embarked on dialogue on equal terms with the very best foreign music produced. The fact that the world opened up its ears to Brazilian music was certainly one of bossa nova’s greatest achievements. Tropicalist musician Tom Zé remembers Brazil’s unusual emergence in the international art scene like this: “At the beginning of 1958 Brazil was an anonymous raw materials exporter.

In an unprecedented phenomenon, even in terms of ancient history or modernity, it was also exporting art by the end of the year.”

Going back to Tom Jobim, he did not follow a formal educational path when it came to learning music but had some teachers who initiated him in terms of the relevant classical and modern music procedures. One of his first masters, who would teach Tom soon after he started playing the piano, at age 14, was German Hans Joachim Koellreutter—a composer and musicologist who was enormously influential within Brazilian musical circles, having introduced twelve-tone music to Brazil and been the creator of the *Música Viva* movement.

“Koellreutter helped me a lot,” Tom would say, “he taught me the basics and later on taught me some composition and harmony. He was not a dumb piano teacher. He opened my eyes.” It was due to Koellreutter’s expansive vision and thanks to his great master, Villa-Lobos, that Tom discovered that there were no rigid boundaries between popular and erudite music, which allowed him to seek new scales and harmonies for stratified rhythms.

After that, Tom would have classes with composer and conductor Paulo Silva, who was greatly admired by Villa-Lobos, as well as with the pianist Tomás de Terán, who, according to revered instrumentalist Arthur Rubinstein, was the best Spanish pianist there was, as well as with Lúcia Branco. It would be with her that Jobim would deepen his classical music training—Bach, Chopin, Beethoven, Debussy, Ravel and Villa-Lobos—and then devote more and more time to composing. In fact, his initial intention was to be a concert pianist. But because he had a “stiff thumb” and could not play an octave, Tom would never be a great classical pianist, Lúcia pronounced.

It was to her that Tom showed what he considers to be his first effective composition. A waltz, which he wrote when he was only 18 years old and dedicated to his girlfriend and future wife at the time, Thereza Hermanny. The composition, with its great harmonic complexity, already announces its European influences in the likes of Chopin and Ravel. First called “Valsa Sentimental” (“Sentimental Waltz”), the music would receive lyrics by Chico Buarque many years later and become “Imagina” (“Imagine”).

When Jobim introduced harmonic complexity into the heart of Brazilian popular music it was like an inauguration of a new expressive dimension within our song—which already existed but which had never been used with such depth and consciousness. It was also, on the other hand, an investment in the song’s *vertical* dimension, with regards not to the melody’s development in time, but to the chord’s impact



Tom Jobim. Source: newspaper *Última Hora*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

within an instant. It is Tom himself who explains, according to his erudite influences, these two axes: “Bach is more horizontal, Debussy is more vertical. Which means: Bach is not concerned with the chord; he’s concerned with the past, present and future. Stravinsky is often more concerned with verticality with the here-and-now. Music, as Stravinsky says, is a chronological art. For you to have a melody, you have to have a past, present and a future. But when you play a chord it’s instantaneous. It’s like a painting.”

Just like the *sound painting* evoked in some paragraphs above, the solar, imagetic verses of bossa nova’s poetics are supported and strengthened by a visual harmony that suggests an instantaneous sensation, similar to what is experienced before a painting. Jobim’s *light-chord* is like a window that opens itself up in the middle of the song opening up to uncharted territories for melody. It opens up a new field in terms of meanings that enriches not only the production of later songs, but also allows for a much richer

and more elaborate re-reading in terms of nuances of the works from the past.

It is interesting to note that it was often a visual stimulus of some sort that inspired Tom to compose. In a way, the harmonic paths he chose were suggestive of images from nature, scenes, landscapes, lights, shapes and colours. This is made clear from comments made by his daughter, the painter Elizabeth Jobim, about her father:

The way he observed nature, a landscape, the colour of a butterfly, he also applied to colouring musical chords. He would make an image of a song with colours: “This is where a cloud passes, this is where it is sunny.’ Depending on the chord, whether bigger or smaller, the colour changed. He would put a note in the middle of the song because the colour had changed: ‘A wave just passed right there.’ It had different harmonies. Light colours were cheerful, dark



Tom Jobim. Source: Instituto Antonio Carlos Jobim / Jobim Music. Regina Filmes

ones were sad, but nothing was that simple. It was more complex because he used a thousand notes, but he always worked with the notes by giving them colour.

The visual aspect that is a hallmark of Jobim's songs—present in his earliest recorded compositions such as “Teresa da Praia” (“Teresa of the Beach”), “Sinfonia do Rio de Janeiro” (“Symphony of Rio de Janeiro”) and “Foi a Noite” (“There Goes the Night”), until it was fully incorporated as a characteristic of the bossa nova style—can be compared in a more surprising way with the artistic movement that decisively influenced his music: Impressionism. If Tom's indebtedness to Ravel and Debussy is evident through the direct adoption of musical procedures—that were obviously adapted to the laws governing the song—points in common that are less obvious can be found in relation to impressionist painting.

The impressionist painters exchanged the confines of the studio for working in the open air. In order to combat the vices of academic painting, which always made use of the exact same soft light, reproducing precisely the illumination that entered through the studio window, Monet suggested that painting should be done *in loco*, observing the object that was going to be represented directly. In a similar vein Brazilian music also exchanged the “hellish cube” of Copacabana's dives for daytime's sunny expanse. It also rebelled against the romantic excesses of the *sambas-canções*, against their sickly-sweet romanticism, their affected poor lyricism, and waged a battle against the habits and mannerisms that weakened songwriting.

On the other hand, Impressionism also set aside the great epic narratives of French romanticism as espoused by the likes of Jacques-Louis David, Eugène Delacroix and Théodore Géricault, among others.

Nature is rediscovered. But not in a forest inhabited by the Greek gods of old, as seen in romantic pictures, but raw nature, devoid of mythology. Instead of grandiloquent historical narratives—Napoleon's crowning, Socrates' death, the wreck of the Medusa raft—painters such as Monet, Pissarro, and Renoir will paint pictures in which it is almost impossible to define a theme. And when it is possible to define them, they seem to be of no great importance—nymphs, bridges, the setting sun... Unlike the romantics, the painting is no longer impregnated with dramatic intention.

In a way, painting turns back on itself—what counts is the way colours are arranged, the way forms are laid out on the canvas, the play between light and shade. They are portions of landscapes, buildings and small events, which cast narrative content aside. Principally because Impressionism is concerned with *pure sensation*, with the ahistorical, devoid of a past or a future.

In terms of music, there was a considerable focus on harmony. With an eye on the international fairs that took place in nineteenth-century Paris, composers at the time decided to come into direct contact with musical universes that differ from classical Western Tonalism. It is said that Debussy frequented these fairs assiduously, whereupon he would spend hours listening to musical samples from cultures that approached sound in a completely different way to the Europeans. As a result, he felt increasingly drawn to further experimentation, to create new clusters of notes, which in turn formulate new harmonic scenarios.

In fact, unlike romantic music, where the *leitmotiv*—a recurrent melodic motif that exerts a narrative function—has a strong presence, Debussy and Ravel's music becomes generally characterized by the formation of *atmospheres*, blocks of sensations in which very often one barely recognizes a melodic *motif*.

However, it is precisely this investment in sensation, which is more atmospheric than it is narrative, that eventually infiltrates Brazilian music via Tom Jobim's compositions. The dialectical world of history and romance, expressed by melody—a horizontal dimension—in which time is conceived in its evolutionary character, will henceforth be affected by a new harmonic sense—by vertical traits, by the play of sensations.

What is interesting is that this new harmonic complexity also allows for an extraordinary melodic simplification, without losing emotional impact. Much more than acting as a simple support system, in Jobim the chord gains an unprecedented expressive quality, interfering directly in the melody's workings.

The composer's degree of consciousness was such that he was able to extract the utmost expressiveness from a prodigiously simplified, creatively limited and minimal material.

In other words, this new harmonic complexity also allows for a new type of melodic construction, “which is lean because it is poured back to the inside,” as Chico Buarque once commented on Jobim's music, pointing to an aesthetic sensibility that, although contained—or because of it—can be deeply emotive.

The apparent restraint of the melodic phrase nevertheless hides a strong emotional impact, since each small alteration then carries an affective revelation—within a regime of containment, the slightest deviation becomes impregnated with meaning. The melodic concision unleashes an emotional depth that differs from the despair endured by passions and frustrated loves and which is closer to a dream's serene delicacy.

Perhaps the song that best expresses this idea is “Samba de Uma Nota Só” (“One Note Samba”) which Tom composed in partnership with Newton Mendonça. In addition to using metalinguistic procedures, in which music and lyrics go together, commenting on and defining each other, the first part of the song is built on a single note. The halted melody on the Mi note—which is repeated in syncopation—will be collared by the harmonic progression that gives it different colours. It is as if it were a figure cut out against a background that keeps changing, at the same time that it modifies the perception we have of that figure.

The dialogue between melody and harmony becomes so organic that the latter is not merely introduced as an external element—as frequently happened with the *sambas-canções*—but as an intrinsic part and a foundation of the composition. Strangely enough—and this is one of Jobim's magical tricks—the chords fit into our own melodic perception of these songs.

With regards to this, there is a passage written by the musicologist Brasil Rocha Brito that sheds some light on the subject:

The unvaried melodies, that insist upon the repetition of a same note or melodic figuration (transposed or not into pitches), are devoid of interest for an autonomous life: even when we hum or whistle them we are unconsciously imagining ourselves listening to the melody attached to the corresponding harmonic structure.

For this reason it is possible to say that a good part of Jobim's compositions, especially his bossa nova

sa ter mor
 um meu
 cê que é a se
 Vo be o nhor

phase, are built around an apparent contradiction: maximum melodic simplicity combined with maximum harmonic complexity.

Between mid-1958 and late 1959, Tom released a surprising number of beautiful songs that deepened this style: “Aula de Matemática” (“Mathematics Class”) with Marino Pinto; “Caminhos Cruzados” (“Crossed Paths”), “Domingo Azul do Mar” (“Sea Blue Sunday”), “Meditação” (“Meditation”), “Discussão” (“Discussion”), “Desafinado” (“Out of Tune”) and “Samba de Uma Nota Só”, with Newton Mendonça; “Dindi,” “Demais” (“Too Much”), “Eu Preciso de Você” (“I Need You”) and “De Você Eu Gosto” (“I Like You”) with Aloysio de Oliveira; “É Preciso Dizer Adeus” (“We Must Say Goodbye”), “A Felicidade” (“Happiness”), “Canta, Canta Mais” (“Sing, Sing More”), “O Nosso Amor” (“Our Love”), “Sem Você” (“Without You”), “O Que Tinha de Ser” (“What Had To Be”), “Brigas, Nunca Mais” (“No More Fights”), “Por Toda a Minha Vida” (“For All My Life”) and “Eu Sei Que Vou Te Amar” (“I Know I’m Going to Love You”), with Vinicius de Moraes; “Canção da Eterna Despedida” (“Song of Eternal Farewell”), “Esquecendo Você” (“Forgetting You”), “Este Seu Olhar” (“This Your Look”), “Só em Teus Braços” (“Only in Your Arms”) and “Fotografia” (“Photography”), with Tom’s lyrics and music.

With this, it finally became possible to hold back on the broad melodic contours that characterized the *samba-canção*, without losing any emotional effect and without weakening the compositions. Stuffed with chords with diminished fifths and minor nines, Jobim’s harmonies interact intensely with melody. More than that: they present new musical paths and suggest different meanings.

There are huge differences between the predominant melodies in *samba-canção* and the ones the maestro develops in bossa nova. Instead of expansiveness, there is restraint. The long intervals, the sharp

contrasts between bass and treble are set aside in favor of a tone closer to that of speech.

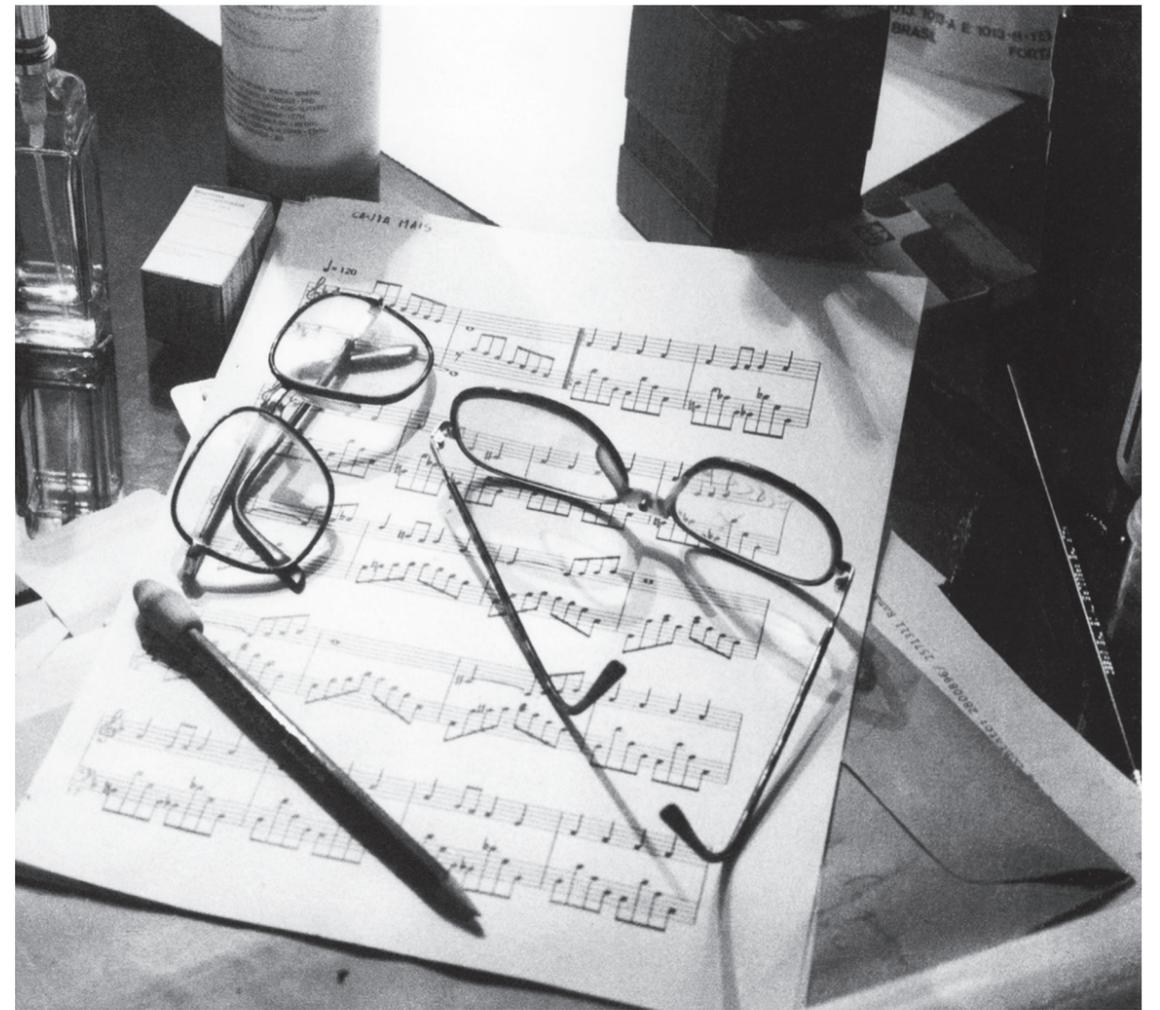
To this extent the melodies develop within the variation of two or three neighbouring notes, nothing more. The intervals are short, economical—usually tone and semitone—and progress step by step, tending to respect the scales’ natural catenation—avoiding the large leaps that cut the song off the prose. The melodic cadence also changes: the notes do not settle anywhere for very long, but they flow uneasily—evoking, as they do in samba, melody’s rhythmic role. Even with a slow tempo, they tend to organize themselves in small modules, generating identification between the song’s parts and making the *motifs* cohesive.

If you jot down on a piece of paper the drawing for a Lupicínio Rodrigues melody and another one for Tom, respecting the proportion of the intervals and pitches of the notes, you will notice the different propositions that envelop each one of them. The classic *samba-canção* “Nervos de Aço” (“Nerves of Steel”), by Lupicínio, begins with the famous narrative verse—“Você sabe o que é ter um amor meu senhor” (“Do you know what it’s like to have a love, my Lord”)—and if you followed the pitches of each syllable, its melodic design would look something like what is shown on the top of this page.

Using the same criteria in terms of scale, the descriptive phrase with which “Corcovado” begins—“Um cantinho, um violão, este amor uma canção” (“A little corner, a guitar, this love a song”), with lyrics and music by Tom—would have a different melodic silhouette (see below).

With these two very brief examples the rigor of Jobim’s melodic restraint of the bossa nova themes is duly noted, in contrast with the broadest and most widespread path, full of “heavens” and “hells,” which defined Lupicínio’s and so many other masters of the *samba-canção* genre’s hallmark. All of the intimacy

Um ti vi lão este mor ma ção
 can nho um o a u can



Tom Jobim’s glasses and score. Photograph by Ana Lontra Jobim. Source: Regina Filmes

that pinpoints the beginning of “Corcovado”—which we see framed, like a photograph, through a window—will be built upon the relay of two notes. Lupicínio, on the other hand, requires abrupt shifts from low to high—and from high to low—and a wandering melody that seems to be on the lookout for something, to create his melodramatic piece.

Jobim’s bossa nova invalidates the dialectic of extremes between tension and rest intrinsic to the *sambas-canções*, so as to bet on half-tints, semitones, accidents and dissonances that open “windows” in the middle of the song, where every slight modification sheds new light on the melodic path, and has the power to change the overall meaning of the composition. Tensions do exist, of course, but they are re-harmonized, they become more complex, less dual, and they dialogue with the chords’ expressivity.

The notes seemed to float above the chords, like scattered clouds in the sky. While the melodies of the depressing songs always sought to work on the dramatic dichotomy between maximum tension and

maximum rest, thereby reinforcing the roles of the tonics and the dominants—the point of maximum tension in relation to the rest of the fundamental—Jobim plays with the relativization of these roles, creating melodic lines that avoid emphasizing their harmonic centres, accentuating notes that are not usually found in the accompanying chord.

At the same time, this new harmonic frame had the effect of releasing the melodic line, making it looser, smoother. This lends bossa nova a sense of lightness that, in the 1950s, rarely happened in Brazilian music and which, of course, was no longer suited to morose lyrics about unhappiness and failed love.

A style of music characterized by lightness and the smooth sensation of flight is no longer compatible with the resounding excesses of romanticism. Everything that bears down is discarded. Feelings such as hatred, excessive jealousy, resentment and desire for revenge seldom afflict lovers in bossa nova songs. Their delicacy cannot endure the destructive force of romantic passions. It is difficult to



Tom Jobim. Source: Instituto Antonio Carlos Jobim / Jobim Music. Regina Filmes

imagine a bossa nova song with a title like “Castigo” (“Punishment”), “Caixa de Ódio” (“Box of Hate”) or “Judiaria” (“Abuse”).

With bossa nova, the cult of remembering gives way to the delight of the instant—a similar situation to impressionist painting, which cast great narratives aside in exchange for pure sensation. But there is still another point in common between the temporal experience that one has when looking at Monet, Renoir and Pissarro’s paintings, and listening to Jobim’s songs. The poet and art critic Ferreira Gullar wrote that: “Impressionism was, among other things, the discovery of nature as mutability, as becoming [...]”

It is no longer a question of revisiting a distant past, of remembering it, but of observing the signs that the passage of time produces on nature, the transformations it engenders. Monet paints Rouen cathedral from more or less the same angle at different times of the day. It is shown bathed in the soft morning light, immersed in dawn’s cold solitude, coloured and shaded by the midday sun’s exceptionally high contrasts. The same place is revisited at

different times, and in each of them it reveals another of its sides.

Perhaps more subtly, this is precisely what happens in Tom’s songs. In general, they almost always follow the classical melodic scheme A-B-A—introduction, development and return to the first part. The surprise comes from the fact that the first part that returns is no longer the same. The harmonic variation causes us to perceive equivalent melodic constructs as “different.”

Luiz Tatit explains this very clearly:

In Jobim’s compositions, even when the *motifs* are analogous, we have the distinct impression that they are always evolving along different sound paths, since the alteration and variety of their support chords transform the harmonic functions of the identical notes, making them sound like they are “others.”

It is equivalent to saying that in the narrative scheme of Jobim’s songs, “the return to the first part of the song is a return to a place that is no longer the same, because time has passed irrespective of us.” And it is precisely the harmony that brings about this perception. It is an acceptance of the world’s transient character, the renunciation of the conquest of time.

Anyone who listens to “Chega de Saudade” (“No More Blues”) hardly realizes that the merry ending in the song’s last part—“apertando assim, colado assim, calado assim...” (“affecting me like that, up close like that, so silent...”)—is a response entirely derived from the melancholic initial part of “não sai de mim, não sai de mim, não sai...” (“it won’t leave me, it won’t leave me, it won’t”). It is similar to Heraclitus’ formulation, in which one does not go back into the same river twice. “Both Niemeyer’s architecture and Tom Jobim’s music,” wrote Lorenzo Mammi—and to these two we could add impressionist painting—“are expressions full of the delight of the singular instance, instead of the voluptuousness of repetition.”

First published as “Os acordes luminosos” in *Bossa Nova: Um retrato em branco e preto*, edited by Núcleo de Estudos em Literatura e Música (NELIM), PUC-Rio Literature Department, 93–103. Rio de Janeiro: PUC-Rio / Santander Universidades, 2008.

NEXT SPREAD

Tom Jobim and Elis Regina. Photograph by Fernando Duarte. Source: Regina Filmes

RIGHT

Tom Jobim. Source: newspaper *Última Hora*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo





Topping Out¹

Joaquim Alves de Aguiar

[...]

With “Menino das Laranjas” (“Orange Boy”), Elis created a new singing style. The verses’ crudeness were packed with a strong rhythm, full of interruptions, and unfettered gestures, exuding a euphoria incongruent with the song, but very much in keeping with someone at the centre of the country’s artistic events who was firmly intent on becoming a top star. It was almost impossible that she would not draw attention or reveal from deep within her the evidences of considerable novelty. She was less than twenty and had energy to spare. The arrangement, so well-adapted to her early career, mixed samba and jazz in order to generate a different kind of bossa nova effect since it discarded the intimate tone so characteristic of Tom and Vinicius’s songs and even more João Gilberto’s singing style. In the last chorus’ appearance, which includes the young vendor’s cry, Elis would drastically sever the rhythm, suspending it in keeping with renowned jazz improvisations common to stage jazz, perhaps even to Broadway style jazz. At the end she was grandiloquent, reminiscent of certain American singers. Her agitated choreography, in which her arms flayed up and down, rounded off the exciting and somewhat aggressive performance style. Samba-jazz, a raucous variation of bossa nova, had found its ideal proponent. The recipe for success was irresistible, and the medium of television was there to show all the details. Without a doubt, Elis Regina was the first great Brazilian singer made to be seen. She was, in many and decisive ways, a television product.

Her next step was her participation in the 1st Brazilian Popular Music Festival, aired on TV Excelsior, under the directorship of Solano Ribeiro. Sung in the same vein as “Menino das Laranjas,” Edu Lobo and Vinicius de Moraes’s “Arrastão” (“Dagnet”) was awarded first place thanks, in large part, to Elis’s performance. Although it’s not its authors’ best creation, “Arrastão” allowed Elis to show off both her vocal and scenic talent. It was the opportunity she needed to project herself more firmly into the Brazilian Popular Music (Música Popular Brasileira – MPB) scenario. The song is divided up into three movements. It starts off at a frantic rhythm, which returns later but only after a sort

of psalm, so she can show off the more modulated aspect of her voice, and, in the end, expresses a more jazzy tempo in keeping with “Menino das Laranjas.” Elis’s singing culminated in a climax and she was then applauded enthusiastically. Her choreography was impressive, her arms would spin in a frenzy (she was nicknamed “Elisopter” and “Regina-propeller”²), as if she were rowing with the song’s own fishermen: “Eh, tem jangada no mar / Ei, ei, ei, hoje tem arrastão / Eh, todo mundo pescar / Vem, vem pra rede João” (“Hey, there’s a raft in the sea / Hey, hey, hey, today there’s a dragnet / Eh, let’s fish, everybody / Come, come to the hammock John”).

We know she was short. She wore high-heels, stuck her chest out, tied her hair up into buns. It was obvious that she wanted to seem taller, to attract attention, demarcate territory, to consolidate her presence in the environment she had just arrived in. Her broad and spontaneous laugh, which revealed her pronounced gums and scrunched up her eyes, lent her face an air of gracefulness. Her constantly exposed arms helped make her figure look slim. She had beautifully shaped legs. She was not particularly beautiful, nor ugly, but a typical Brazilian brunette. She was charming, and there, at the height of her youth, seized by a Dionysian fury, she seemed to be on the brink of an explosion. That was how she took control of the stage and conquered her audience; an audience that she would look upon affectionately, as if it were a multitude of close friends. Besides her artistic talent, Elis Regina had charisma to spare.

Edu and Vinicius’s song was definitively associated with her. But that was not all. “Arrastão” inaugurated the glorious era of MPB festivals, and this sealed the historic nature of Elis’s performance. Her overdramatized voice, facial expressions, and revolving arms were a spectacle apart (undoubtedly dubious in nature), but before which it was impossible to remain indifferent. It sent the radio singing era into oblivion. By comparison even Cely Campelo, whose little rock songs were so conducive to dance, seemed to behave like a traditional singer, singing discreetly into the microphone.

But the best was yet to come. Elis was going to win big. She won the festival in April 4, 1965, one year after her arrival from Porto Alegre, and TV Record was already aware of her emerging talent. Four days after the festival ended, she received the Roquette Pinto trophy, which the broadcaster awarded to the previous year’s top performers. Later that month,

LEFT
Andréia Horta in *Elis* (Hugo Prata, 2016). Source: MPM Film



Elis (2016). Source: MPM Film

she would step onto the stage of the Paramount Theater, along with Jair Rodrigues, to star in one of the celebrated MPB shows produced at the time by Walter Silva, the “Woodpecker.” It is where the Elis & Jair duo came together for the first time. The following month, she was given the *O Fino da Bossa* TV show, that she hosted with the very same Jair. It was her crowning glory. No doubt, those April and May months provided her with incredible days. Elis, who had already exchanged Rio for São Paulo, where remuneration was more substantial, became the highest paid person in Brazilian television at the age of twenty—thanks to the contract she signed with Record. If she wanted to, so goes the legend, she could have bought one apartment a month. For someone who came from a housing estate for workers in Porto Alegre, it was simply a gigantic leap.

By the mid-1960s, the artistic scene had changed a lot from what it had been the previous decade. Bossa nova modified MPB’s musicians. A more refined middle class had created a “white environment” alongside or above the one played on radio, which was the poor person’s empire, largely made up of blacks and mulattoes who gained recognition through music. Commencing with the early 1930s, and under certain circumstances, careers were open to talent.³ As was the case with soccer, the other great Brazilian passion, the “world of samba” was generally avoided by wealthier classes but could (and still can) recognize the average person’s talents, turning that person in certain cases into someone rich and famous.

When Elis’s career launched, the receptiveness was considerable. MPB was undergoing a phase of

renovation: an exchange of physiognomies, styles and proposals; and TV, which was consolidating its productions, decided to focus on new musical talents. Which is when Elis came in handy; she was the missing star everyone needed. She also had what it took to handle a sudden rise to stardom. Furthermore, she was white. Because it is a vehicle that sells images destined for the middle class, which is able to consume and is white (or considers itself as such), Brazilian television—in spite of the country’s overtly mixed race—has always preferred whites. Is it even possible to imagine a black host in charge of a weekly talk show, such as Hebe Camargo’s, which was on the air for over thirty years? Or a couple of black actors starring in the eight o’clock soap opera, which has been on the air for almost forty years?

But there are tolls in the ways of fame. At that time, Elis was dating Solano Ribeiro, the producer of the festival she had just won. A self-induced abortion apparently ended the courtship. According to the social parameters of those years, and the morale of a typical proletarian family in the South, we can conclude that in the artistic community of the metropolis slipping up has a price. In the bill, still, the class bias. The stories narrated by those that were close to her never fail to mention what must have been her greatest wound: the gods had granted her a great talent, but not the cradle. The “white environment” highlighted the social outline of the origin of the artist. In Elis’s case, the grossness of the trait and her explosive temperament that was widely recognized, only accentuated the fact that she was the daughter of a glazier with a washerwoman.

It was as if she were standing, ready to attack before being attacked. Her ethics were along the lines of “dig your elbows in and edge your way in,” which translated into unrestrained ambition. She certainly did not lack two consciousnesses: that of her own talent, and that she was in an environment in which art and business were inseparable, in which money circulated with a certain ease, in the same proportion as rotteness. She was in a war, both public and private. Her family story borders on the dramatic. Elis arrived in Rio with her father; then came her mother and brother. In “Vinte Anos Blue” (“Twenty Years Blue”), a song that she would record in 1972 by Sueli Costa and Vítor Martins, there is a passage that says: “Os meus pais nas minhas costas / [...] Eu tenho mais de vinte anos” (“My parents weigh down on me / [...] I am over twenty years old”). There is nothing truer in this story about a constant struggle than: “Everyone depended on her money and they developed a perverse relationship of dependence in which she seemed to derive considerable pleasure in being exploited by them while humiliating them in return.”⁴ This conduct must have generated violent inner stress. But her character, although poisoned when it came to matters of class, did not prevent Elis from being attractive, even more so because being with her seemed like a good career move. There were more than just a few who approached her, who seduced her and who were seduced by her. There were many who thought that she could make herself more refined: “This girl from the South is just a hick. She still smells like barbecue.” The remark, attributed to Tom Jobim,

is just one among many that make light of the emerging MPB little star.⁵ Elis had terrible table manners, she dressed clumsily, and her way of speaking let on immediately that she did not come from a very good background. On top of this there was her foul temper, which was widely publicized at the time by the gutter press (she was nicknamed “Pepper” around the same time, and not just by chance).

But going back to the story, TV Record was starting its own party with Elis. It became the leading broadcasting station overnight. *O Fino da Bossa*, which was an outright success, was created by the famous “A Team,” made up of Manoel Carlos, Paulinho Machado de Carvalho (the station’s owner’s son), Nilton Travesso and Raul Duarte. Music programmes suddenly became a major avenue to be explored, and this was fulfilled to the letter. That same year debuted *Bossaude*, presented by Elizete Cardoso, and *Jovem Guarda*, with Roberto Carlos as a host. It should be noted that none of these anchors was new to the business. Elis, as we have seen, had become a well-known public figure the previous year thanks to “Menino das Laranjas” (without mentioning the fact that she had just won the festival). Jair Rodrigues had also just become a success in 1964 with the samba song “Deixa Isso pra Lá” (“Leave It Out”). Elizete Cardoso was a very prestigious singer, extremely popular with the public. Roberto Carlos was already a household name (he had been a regular fixture in the charts since 1963: “Splish Splash,” “Parei Na Contramão” [“I Stopped Contraflow”], “O Calhambeque” [“The Jalopy”], “Não Quero Ver Você Triste” [“I Don’t Want to See



Elis (2016). Source: MPM Film

you Sad”], among others, were constantly played on the radio). Even Erasmo Carlos and Wanderléa, Roberto’s supporting acts, already had their own admirers. Except for Elizete, they were in their twenties; some had more talent, others had less, but they were all ready to fill their pockets with money.

It seems obvious that TV Record’s musicals catered to absolutely everyone. The fanatical fans of the Beatles, the greatest rock sensation after Elvis Presley, could enjoy *Jovem Guarda* on Sunday afternoons; it was an acclimatized variant on what was being done back at base (in England or the United States) in terms of pop music. Fervent nationalists, lovers of the new samba and bossa nova, could suddenly watch the *O Fino* TV show. The older ones, if they turned their noses down on new kinds of music, could still lean back on *Bossaudade*. Drove of guests contributed to livening up all three television programmes. The latest discoveries in rock music showed up on *Jovem Guarda*, the new generation of

MPB stars would play on *Fino*, and singers from the radio era frequented *Bossaudade*. Can you imagine, nowadays, three music programmes on a single television channel, with a permanent parade of stars singing and playing live every single week? Never again would popular music be as celebrated by the media as it was during TV Record’s golden age. In its thirty-five years of existence, TV Globo did not do half of what Paulo Machado de Carvalho’s station did for MPB in just three years (1965–1968). TV Record scanned the scene, absorbed and cultivated both beginners and famous singers; young and old artists.

[...]

First published as “Festa da Cumeeira” in *Leniza & Elis*, by Joaquim Alves de Aguiar & Ariovaldo José Vidal, 88–96. Cotia: Ateliê Editorial, 2002.

1. The original title in Portuguese is “Festa da Cumeeira” (“Ridge Party”), a traditional Brazilian party to celebrate the construction of a house. The author mentions it because it is part of the lyrics of the song “Águas de Março” (“Waters of March”), famous for the rendition by Tom Jobim and Elis Regina. (Translator’s Note)

2. Original: “eliscóptero”, “hélice-Regina”. (Translator’s Note)

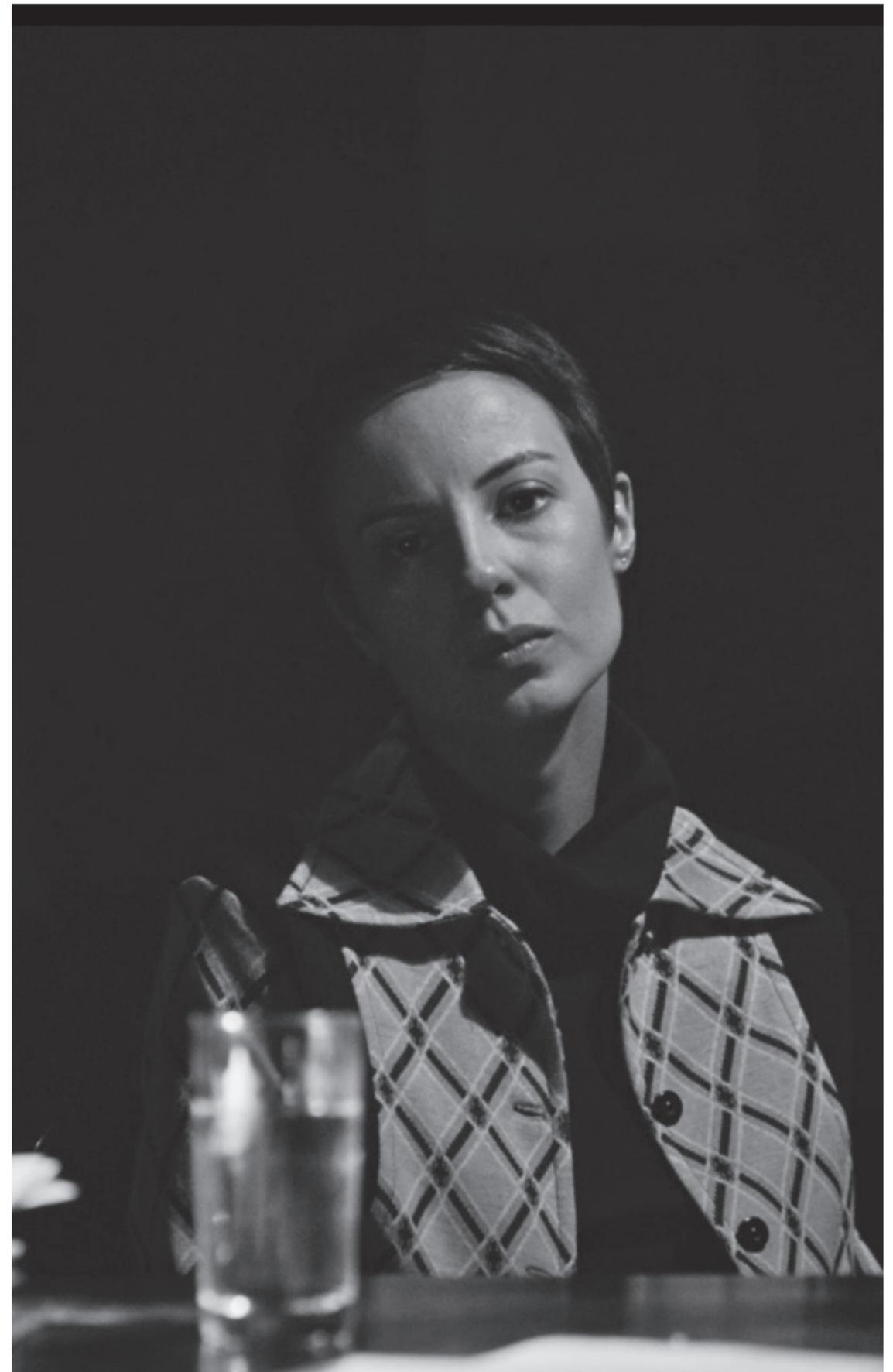
3. In nineteenth-century Europe, the arts, especially those linked to entertainment, presented the common person with the opportunity for social recognition and ascension. See Eric Hobsbawm, “A Carreira Aberta ao Talento,” in *A Era das Revoluções* (1789–1848), 6th ed.

(Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1977), 203–220. A century later, there would be a similar phenomenon in Brazil, thanks to radio impresarios.

4. This is Ruy Castro’s observation, in his book *Chega de Saudade: A história e as histórias da Bossa Nova* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1990), 368. In Regina Echeverria’s book we find several passages about Elis’s tumultuous relationship with her family, and how money always was at the forefront of every problem (*Furacão Elis* [São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro: Círculo do Livro, Nórdica, 1985]). Elis was, against her will, a kind of “goose that laid the golden egg” for her parents and brother (see Ronaldo Bôscoli’s testimony, page 82). She felt

exploited from the very moment her career began. After her marrying Bôscoli, she made a point of removing her maiden name (Carvalho Costa) becoming thus Elis Regina Bôscoli. See Luiz Carlos Maciel and Ângela Chaves, *Eles e Eu: Memórias de Ronaldo Bôscoli* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1994), 206.

5. Tom vetoed Elis singing on the LP called *Pobre Menina Rica* (*Poor Little Rich Girl*) [featuring songs by Carlos Lyra and Vinicius de Moraes], on which he was doing the arranging, seeing as Elis was more of a “poor little poor girl” (Ruy Castro, *Chega de Saudade*, 360–361). Ten years later they recorded a famous LP in terms of Elis’s career: *Elis & Tom*.



RIGHT
Elis (2016). Source: MPM Film

Screenings

(clockwise)

Songs (As Canções)

Eduardo Coutinho, 2011

Wednesday 17 January, 7.45pm

Preceded by **Work Songs – Sugarcane**

(Cantos de Trabalho – Cana-de-açúcar,

Leon Hirszman, 1976)

Cartola – Music for the Eyes

(Cartola – Música para os Olhos)

Lírio Ferreira and Hilton Lacerda, 2007

Wednesday 24 January, 7.45pm

Preceded by **Nelson Cavaquinho**

(Leon Hirszman, 1969)

The Music According to Antonio Carlos Jobim

(A Música Segundo Tom Jobim)

Nelson Pereira dos Santos & Dora Jobim, 2012

Wednesday 31 January, 7.45pm

Elis

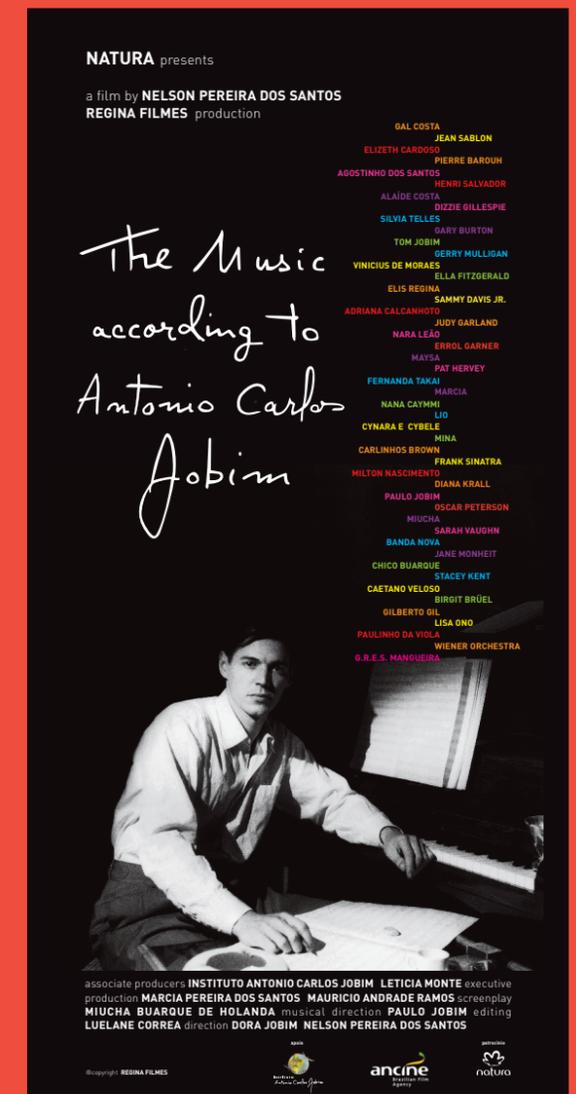
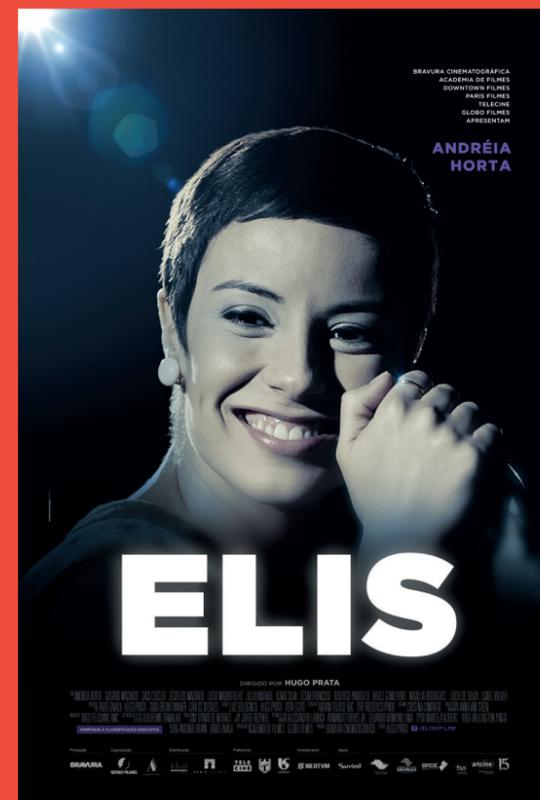
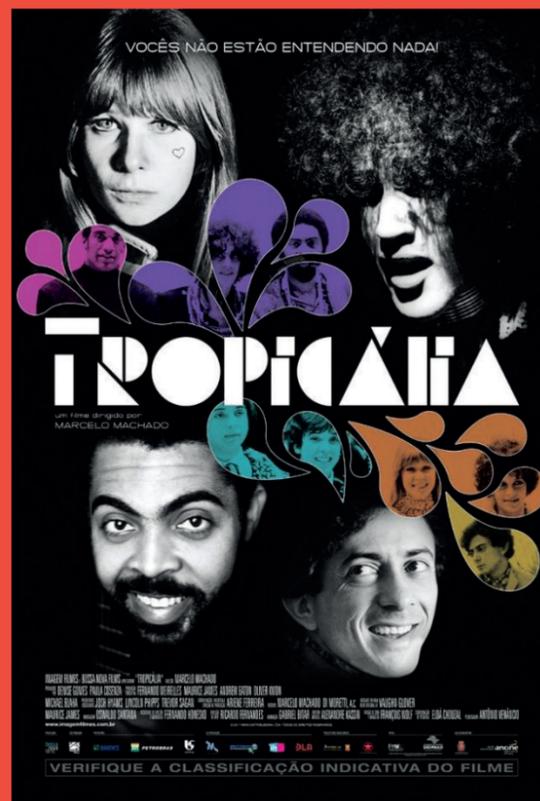
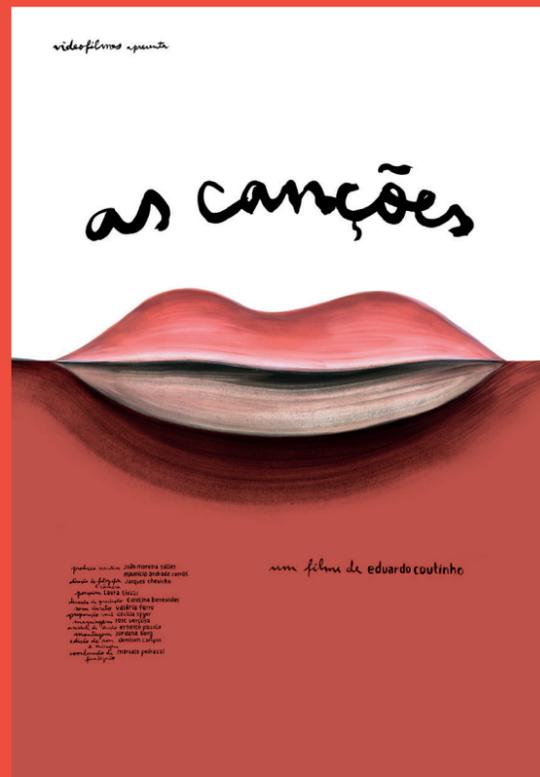
Hugo Prata, 2016

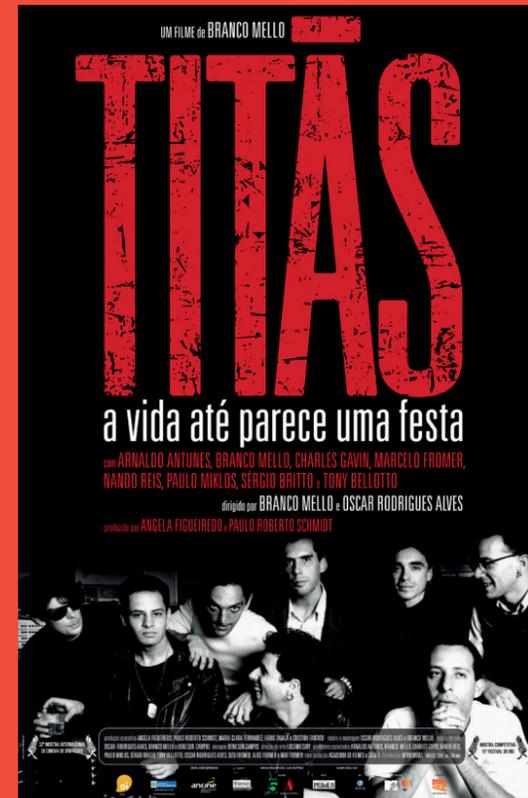
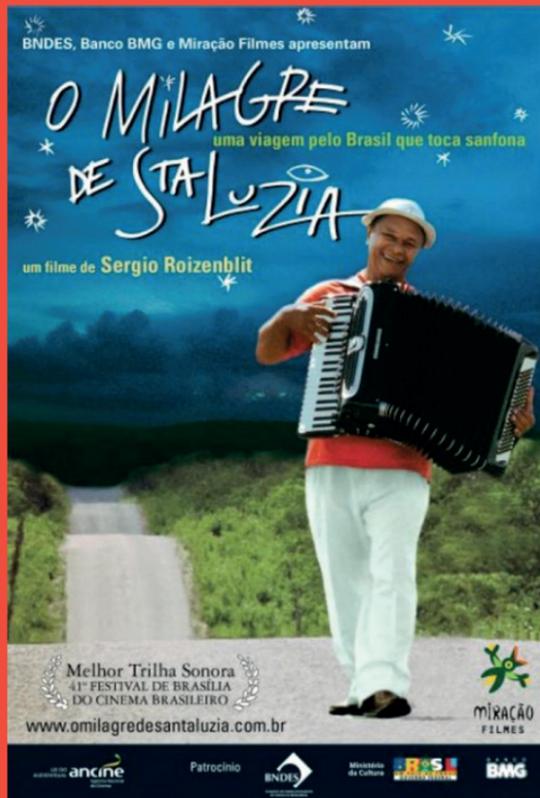
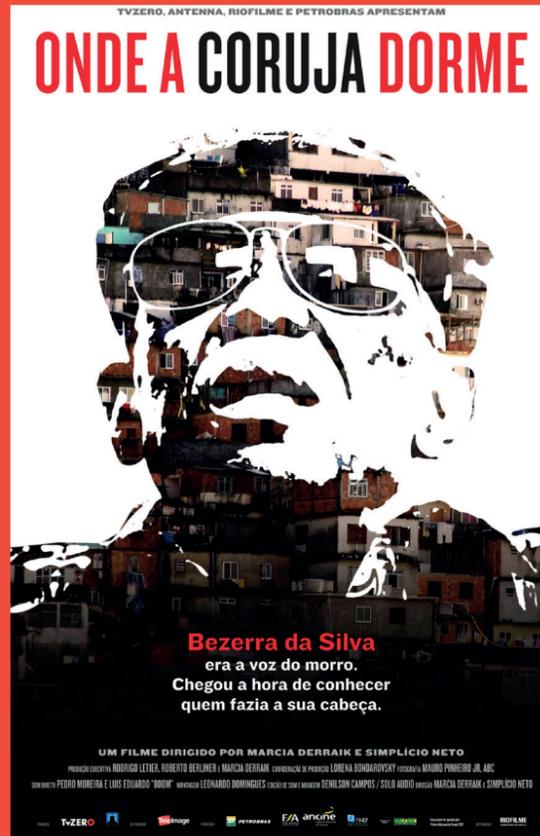
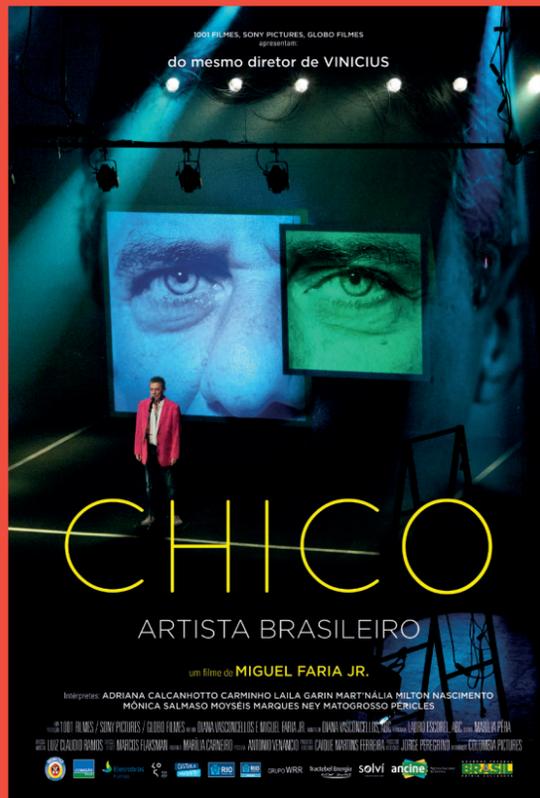
Wednesday 7 February, 7.45pm

Tropicália

Marcelo Machado, 2012

Wednesday 14 February, 7.45pm





Chico - Brazilian Artist
(Chico - Artista Brasileiro)

Miguel Faria Jr., 2015
Wednesday 21 February, 7.45pm

Where the Owl Sleeps
(Onde A Coruja Dorme) + Q&A with Márcia Derraik

Márcia Derraik & Simplício Neto, 2010
Wednesday 28 February, 7.45pm

Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party
(Titãs - A Vida Até Parece uma Festa)

Oscar Rodrigues Alves & Branco Mello, 2008
Wednesday 7 March, 7.45pm

Elza

Izabel Jaguaribe & Ernesto Baldañ, 2010
Wednesday 14 March, 7.45pm

The Miracle of Santa Luzia
(O Milagre de Santa Luzia) + Q&A with Sérgio Roizenblit & Luciano Maia

Sérgio Roizenblit, 2008
Wednesday 21 March, 7.45pm

Closing Party: Luciano Maia at the RISC

Friday 23 March, 9:00pm
Reading International Solidarity Centre
35-39 London Street
RG1 4PS
Reading, Berkshire

All the screenings will take place in the Reading Film Theatre.

Palmer Building, Whiteknights Campus,
University of Reading
RG6 2AH
Reading, Berkshire

The explosion of “Alegria, Alegria” (1967)

Augusto de Campos

“Alegria, Alegria” (“Joy, Joy”), by Caetano Veloso, seems to take on at this moment an importance similar to “Desafinado” (“Out of Tune”) as an expression of a critical position-taking in relation to the paths of Brazilian popular music. Standing up for the “anti-musical behavior” of those who are “out-of-tune,” Newton Mendonça and Tom Jobim (via João Gilberto) put into that composition the theory and practice of a movement: the sentimental (and very well tuned, as a matter of fact) exclamation of “Desafinado” should be understood as a manifesto against the prejudices of classical harmony, which prevented a supposed interlocutor of the lyrics (or the public, at that point) from accepting the dissonant harmonies of bossa nova as “harmonized,” as familiar or “musical.” The explosion of “Alegria, Alegria” has the feeling of a new, strongly necessary exclamation-manifesto in the face of the crisis of insecurity that has created a number of prejudices and taken hold of Brazilian popular music, threatening to interrupt its evolutionary march. It is a crisis that has become more acute in recent years, with symptoms of fear and resentment, in relation to the musical phenomenon of the Beatles, their international projection, and their local impact on the music of the Jovem Guarda.

Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil have refused to opt between the “holy war” against *iê-iê-iê* and ostrich-like behavior, which feigns ignorance or disdains the emergence of musicians, composers, and interpreters such as the Beatles in the genre of “young people’s music,” who often have great sensibility even when they are not truly innovative. With “Alegria, Alegria” and “Domingo no Parque” (“Sunday in the Park”) they have proposed, in an Oswaldian way, “to digest” that which is new in these mass and youth movements and to incorporate the achievements of modern popular music in their own work, without abdicating formal principles clearly founded on northeastern musical roots.

One could say that “Alegria, Alegria” and “Domingo no Parque” represent complementary sides of the same attitude, the same movement: they both attempt to liberate national music from the closed system of supposedly “nationalist” prejudices that in

truth are merely solipsist and isolationist. Like early bossa nova compositions, they exemplify freedom of research and experimentation, which are essential, even in art for mass consumption such as popular music, in order to avoid stagnation.

But it is “Alegria, Alegria” that most clearly states this critical standpoint, stamped in its lyrics. For this very reason, in the larger context of Brazilian popular music, the “Why not?” in the verse of the song took on the characteristics of an exclamation-challenge. And it was in that sense that the composer, accompanied by the Beat Boys in the first presentation of the song, would triumph over the prejudiced disapproval with which the audience received the band and would end up exclaiming at the end, arms opened to the conquered audience, “Why not?”

Going against the redundant tide of acoustic guitars and “Marias,” the lyrics of “Alegria, Alegria” evoke the unforeseen aspects of urban reality, which are multiple and fragmentary. In the lyrics, isomorphically captured noun-fragments from the modern information implosion predominate: crimes, space ships, guerillas, cardinals, the faces of presidents, kisses, teeth, legs, flags, the bomb, and Brigitte Bardot. It is the world of newsstands, of “so much news,” the world of high-speed communication, and of the “information mosaic” to which Marshall McLuhan refers. In this sense, one could say that “Alegria, Alegria” takes the opposite path of “A Banda” (“The Band”) [a song by Chico Buarque that won first prize in the previous edition of the Brazilian Popular Music Festival]. Of the two songs, “A Banda” immerses itself in the past in the evocative search for the purity of marching bands and park gazebos. “Alegria, Alegria,” on the other hand, is drenched with the present and is directly involved in the day-to-day aspects of modern, urban communication in Brazil and the rest of the world.

Like Gilberto Gil’s wonderful lyrics to “Domingo no Parque,” Caetano’s have cinematographic characteristics. Yet, as Décio Pignatari remarked to me, while the lyrics of Gil are reminiscent of Eisensteinian montage, with his close-ups and fusions (“O sorvete é morango – é vermelho / Ôi girando e a rosa – é vermelha / Ôi, girando, girando – Olha a faca / Olha o sangue no mão – ê José / Juliana no chão – ê José / Outro corpo caído – ê José / Seu amigo João – ê José” [“The ice cream is strawberry – it is red / Oh spinning and the rose – is red / Oh spinning, spinning – look at the knife / Look at the blood on

LEFT

March of the One Hundred Thousand
(Passeata dos Cem Mil), Rio de Janeiro, 26 June 1968.
Photograph by Campanela Neto. Source: Mr Bongo





Caetano Veloso. Source: Mr Bongo

the hand – it's José / Juliana on the floor – it's José / Another body fallen – it's José / His friend João – it's José”]), Veloso's are hand-held-camera lyrics, more in the informal and open fashion of Godard, absorbing casual reality “in between photos and names.”

The adversaries of the “universal sound” of Caetano and Gil have misunderstood the problem of innovation in these compositions. It is not about merely adding electric guitars to Brazilian popular music as a superficial adornment. The dislocation of instruments associated with the Jovem Guarda to the arena of Brazilian Popular Music (Música Popular Brasileira – MPB) already has a “meaning” that is “new information” and it is so disturbing that there were many people who were aurally confused to the point that they could not perceive in which rhythm “Alegria, Alegria” was being played. The electronic sonorities amplify the acoustic horizons of the listener to a musical universe where dissonance and noise are commonplace. On the other hand, even though simple, the melody of “Alegria, Alegria” does not abandon the use of the large and unexpected musical intervals that are an innovative characteristic of Caetano's songs (“Boa Palavra” [“Good Word”] and “Um Dia” [“One Day”]). For its part, “Domingo no Parque” plays with greater complexity in terms of musical arrangement: in the definitive recording, the composition is a true assemblage of documentary fragments (noise from the park), “classical”

instruments, and a markedly regional rhythm (capoeira), with the berimbau interacting marvelously with the electric instruments and the typical vocalization of Gil in counterpoint to the choral accompaniment of “youth music”—a montage of noises, words, sounds, and cries.

And here one should remember the essential contribution of the arranger Rogério Duprat, in and of itself a turning point for Brazilian popular music. The collaboration between a composer of popular music and a composer of the avant-garde (even though Rogério doesn't like to be called that, his knowledge and practice of contemporary high musical culture justifies this classification) was an event that many would have guessed impossible. This encounter, which was so successful, demonstrates that there are no rigid barriers between popular music and erudite music any more. Did not Paul McCartney's electric guitar discover the “electronic” Stockhausen? Even though popular music essentially works at the level of redundancy (that, in terms of information theory, is contrary to innovation)—which is inherent to any communication with a large audience—it does not escape the general law of the “aesthetic of forms,” defined by A. Moles as a dialectic between the banal and original, foreseeable and unforeseeable, redundant and informative. Therefore, its rapprochement to avant-garde erudite music, which, on the contrary, works exclusively with original information, can only

have beneficial effects on popular music, making its composers and listeners more demanding and providing popular music with a greater significance than mere entertainment.

In an interview with Dirceu Soares (“Música é Gil é Pop, Música é Pop é Veloso” [“Music is Gil is pop, music is pop is Veloso”], *Jornal da Tarde*, October 20, 1967), Gilberto Gil sought to define his and Caetano Veloso's new compositions as “pop music.” The expression is debatable because pop art already has a defined meaning in the field of visual art and could suggest a relation of dependence that does not really exist beyond certain affinities. But Gil's explanation demonstrates that he knows quite well what he wants. It is worth repeating: “pop music,” he says, “is music that succeeds in communicating in a simple way such as a street sign, a billboard, a traffic signal, a comic book.” “Domingo no Parque” plays with words, music, sound and ideas in a montage with the parameters of modern communication: the layout, the arrangement, the final art. According to Gil, in “Alegria, Alegria,”

the words with contemporary meaning and interest—guerilla, Brigitte Bardot, Coca-Cola, faces of presidents, space ships—awaken and guide the perception of people towards the total meaning of the things that are being said. And the familiarity, the sense of participation in Veloso's creation transforms “Alegria, Alegria,” suddenly, into a song of consciousness of an entire urban middle class in Latin America.

Put in these terms, the position of Caetano and Gil is quite close to that of the Brazilian avant-garde. And especially from the standpoint of concrete poetry, intimately related to the avant-garde music of São Paulo, we find in Rogério Duprat, Damiano Cozzella, Willy Corrêa de Oliveira, and Gilberto Mendes its most talented composers. In the manifesto “Nova Poesia: Concreta” written by Décio Pignatari in 1956, there were already indications of the anthropophagy of Oswald de Andrade:

america of the south
america of the sun
america of salt

a general art of language, propaganda, radio,
television, cinema, a popular art.

the importance of the eye in high-speed communication: from luminous advertisements to cartoons. [...] the collaboration of visual arts,



Caetano Veloso. Photograph by Paulo Salomão. Source: Editora Abril, Mr Bongo

graphic arts, typography. The duodecaponic series (anton webern) and electronic music (boulez, stockhausen), the cinema, points of reference.

There will be no lack of advice and admonishments by “hardliners” who warn against the risks of the creative adventure of Caetano and Gil, just as there was no lack of such warnings when bossa nova and concrete poetry emerged. A short time ago, I read an article whose title is symptomatic: “It is dangerous to have ‘alegria, alegria.’” It reminded me of those depressed judges from the poem by Mayakovsky who wanted “to enclose in a circle of incisions / the birds, the women and laughter.”

And it is precisely against this, against this kind of fear, that the song-manifesto of Caetano Veloso sends its message. In this stage of development of our music, the discrimination proposed by the “nationalists” will only permit us to provide musical raw material (exotic rhythms) for foreign countries. Bossa nova put an end to this state of things, transforming Brazil into an exporter of finished products

from its creative industry for the first time, and having composers like Jobim and interpreters like João Gilberto respected as true masters.

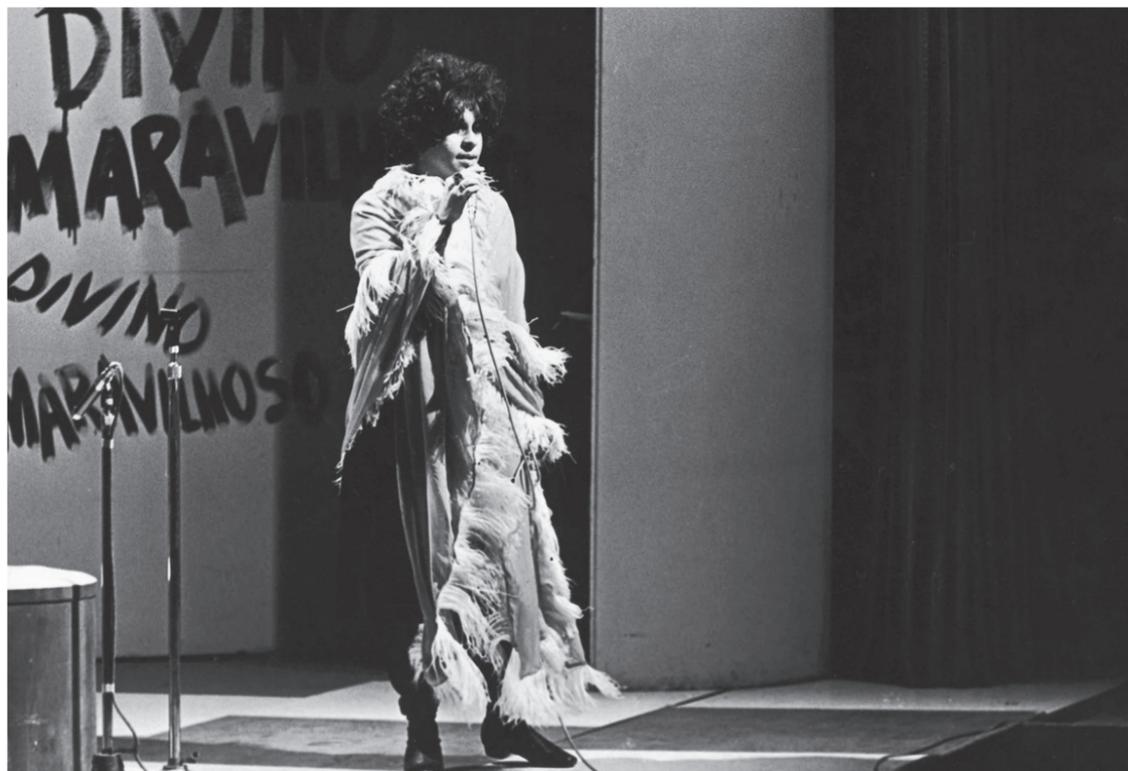
If these innovators had listened to the advice given to them at the time, which warned of the dangers of being out of tune, out of tune,¹ and only saw in bossa nova the jazzification of our music, we would continue exporting “voodoo for tourists” up to this day, as Oswald would say.

It is necessary to be done with this defeatist mentality, which claims that an underdeveloped country can only produce underdeveloped art. Brazilian artistic production (which does not exclude, in a country with social classes as diversified as ours, the authentic regional element—not mimicked by urbane Sebastianist authors) had attained maturity by 1922, and universality by 1956. There is absolutely nothing to fear. One can and should move forward freely. And therefore, there is no reason to refuse any of the resources of modern technology from more developed countries: electric instruments, montages,

arrangements, new sonorities. I do not believe that it is necessary, right now, to break the guitar, since João Gilberto’s guitar style is still the slogan and the rudder of all of our music. But breaking traditions and taboos is the least of it. “Let me go, let me yell,” the old advertisement said, rediscovered and transformed into a happening by Décio Pignatari, Damiano Cozzella, Rogério Duprat, and Sandino Hohagen. Let our music go. Without shackles and without prejudices. Without a handkerchief and without papers.

First published as “A explosão de Alegria, Alegria” in *O Estado de São Paulo*, 25 November, 1967, and included in *Balanço da bossa: Antologia crítica da moderna música popular brasileira*, edited by Augusto de Campos, 139–145. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1968. Translated into English by Christopher J. Dunn, Aaron Lorenz and Renata Nascimento in *Tropicália: A revolution in Brazilian culture – 1967/1972*, edited by Carlos Basualdo, 257–260. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2005.

1. Repetition in the original. (Editor’s Note)



Gal Costa. Photograph by Paulo Salomão. Source: Editora Abril, Mr Bongo

The chapter ‘Tropicália’ has been removed from the digital version of this book for copyright reasons.

Chico Buarque meu herói nacional
 Chico Buarque gênio da raça
 Chico Buarque salvação do Brasil

A Lealdade, a generosidade, a coragem
 Chico carrega grandes cruzes, sua estrada é uma subida pedregosa
 Seu desenho é preciso, atlético, ágil, bailarino.
 Let's dance! Eterno, simples, sofisticado, criador de melodias bruscas, nítidas, onde a Vida e a Noite estão sempre presentes, o Dia e a Noite, o Homem e a Mulher, tristeza e alegria, o modo menor e o modo maior, onde o admirável intérprete revela o grande compositor, o sambista, o melomano inventivo, o creador, o grande artista, o poeta maior Francisco Buarque de Hollanda, o jogador de futebol, o defensor dos desvalidos, dos desatizados, das crianças que só comem luz, que mexe com os prepotentes, que discute com Deus e mora no coração do povo.
 Chico Buarque Rosa do Povo, seresteiro poeta e cantor que aborrece os tiranos e alegria a tantos, tantos...

Chico Buarque Alegria do Povo, até seu fox-trote é brasileiro.
 Zona Norte, Malandragem, Noel Rosa, Sinuca, Neruda, Futebol, tudo canta na tua inesgotável Lyra, tudo canta no martelo.

Bom Tempo, Bota água no feijão, Pra ver a banda passar, vem comer, vem jantar, menino Jesus, dia das mães, vou abrir a porta, Deus, Pai, afasta de mim este cálice de vinho tinto de sangue, Chico também não evitou os assuntos escabrosos, sangue, tortura, derrame, hemorragia...
 Houve um momento em que temi pela tua sorte e te falei, mas creio que o pior já passou.

Chico Buarque homem do povo
 Fla Flu, calça Lee, carnadas de região
 Mamão, Jacarandá, Surubim
 Macuco não, Pierrot e Arlequim
 Você é tanta coisa que meu cabe aqui
 Inovador, preservador, reincarnado, redivivo
 Mestre da língua
 Cabelos negros
 Olhos de gato selvagem
 Dos grandes gatos do mato
 Olhos glaucos, luminosos
 Teu sorriso inesquecível
 O Francisco, nosso querido amigo
 Tuas chuteiras caminham numa estrada de pó e esperança

Tom Jobim

Nov York Outubro 89

Letter to Chico

Tom Jobim

Chico Buarque my national hero
 Chico Buarque racial genius
 Chico Buarque Brazil's saviour

Loyalty, generosity, courage

Chico carries large crosses, his road is a rocky ascent

An antiquated, athletic, agile, dancer's figure

Let's dance! Eternal, simple, sophisticated; creator of sharp, sudden melodies, where Life and Death are always present, Day and Night, Man and Woman, sadness and joy, the minor mode and the major mode; where the admirable performer reveals the great composer, the samba musician, the inventive melomaniac, the creator, the great artist, the major poet Francisco Buarque de Hollanda, the soccer player, defender of underdogs, of the disenfranchised, of the children that only eat light; who upsets the arrogant, who quarrels with God and lives in the peoples' heart.

Chico Buarque Rose of the People,³ seresteiro³ poet and singer who upsets tyrants and brings happiness to so, so many...

Chico Buarque Joy of the People,⁴ even his fox trot is Brazilian. Northern Rio, Trickery, Noel Rosa, Pool rooms, Neruda, Football, everything sings in your inexhaustible Lyra,⁵ everything sings in the hammer.⁶

Fair Weather, Water the beans, To see the band go by, come and eat, come to dinner, baby Jesus, mother's day, I'll open the door, God, Father, keep this cup of blood red wine away from me. Neither did Chico shy away from the scurrilous subjects, blood, torture, stroke, and haemorrhage...

There was a time when I feared for your luck and I told you, but I think the worst is over.

Chico Buarque man of the people
 Fla Flu,⁷ Lee jeans, stuffed with reason
 Papaya, Jacarandá,⁸ Surubim⁹
 Not Solitary Tinamou, Pierrot and Harlequin
 You are so many things that they don't fit here
 Innovative, preserver, reincarnated, rejuvenated
 Language Master
 Raven hair
 Wild cat's eyes
 The great forest cats'
 Luminous green blue eyes,
 Your unforgettable smile
 Oh Francisco, our dear friend
 Your trainers tread a dusty, hopeful road.

Tom Jobim

New York

October '89

First published as “Carta ao Chico” in *Chico Buarque: letra e música*, vol. 1, 7–8. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989.

1. In English in the original. (Translator’s Note)

2. It refers to *Rosa do Povo* (1945), a poetry book by Brazilian writer Carlos Drummond de Andrade. (Translator’s Note)

3. Player of *serestas*, traditional Brazilian romantic songs similar to serenades, but played indoors. (Translator’s Note)

4. “Alegria do Povo” was one of the nicknames of Brazilian footballer Manuel dos Santos Francisco, Garrincha (1933–1983). (Translator’s Note)

5. Wordplay which refers both to the musical instrument “lira” (“lyre”) and to singer and songwriter Carlos Lyra, who wrote with Chico Buarque the song “Essa Passou” (“That Went By”). (Translator’s Note)

6. The original “martelo” may refer to the piano hammer and to a kind of stanza compound by a variable number of decasyllabic verses (from six to ten), which is used in dares. (Translator’s Note)

7. Reference to the rivalry between football teams Flamengo vs. Fluminense. (Translator’s Note).

8. Tree with violet, bell-shaped flowers which is native to South America. The word also refers to the family of flowering plants of which this tree is part. (Translator’s Note)

9. Freshwater fish that can be found in different regions in Brazil, like Amazonia, Mato Grosso, Tocantins and Mato Grosso do Sul. In the South it is called “pintado.” (Translator’s Note)



Chico Buarque. Photograph by José Vasco. Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

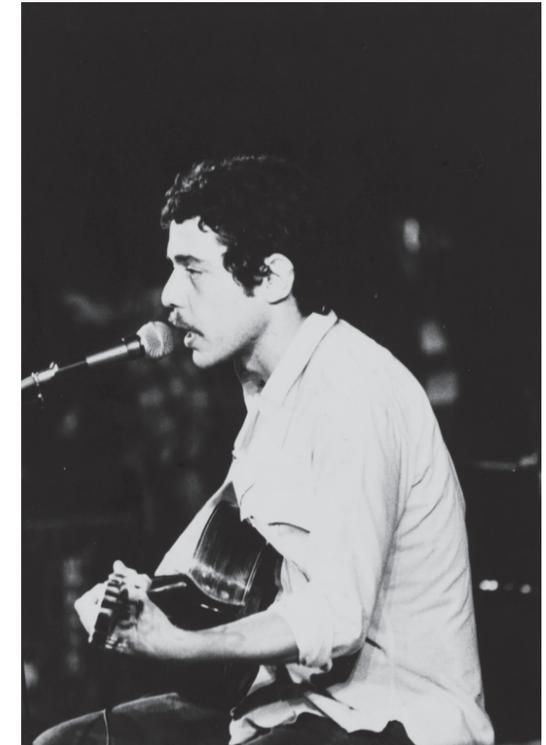
Chico Buarque’s diction

Luiz Tatit

To talk about progress, regression or political engagement in Chico Buarque’s work is to insist on the superfluous. One needs to talk about depth. A product of the mid-1960s, Chico had nothing to do with what was in vogue at the time. His formal source of inspiration begins with João Gilberto (in terms of how the guitar is played and the voice worked), but his main object of interest was the song-experience. It had already been scrutinised by pioneers like Noel Rosa and Ismael Silva, but it hadn’t been taken up after the unrestrained spread of the passion in boleros and *sambas-canções* from the 1940s and 50s, and bossa nova’s schematization of the most passionate of contents. Like his predecessors, Chico balanced the emotional charge of accumulated experience with samba rhythms, as well as with the creation of enunciative figures. He exuded skill and vocation at a time when the cultural market still had not become totally planned out and no one knew for sure how influential TV was in terms of a singer’s career. Spontaneous production was still fertile ground for high-risk investments. All in all, everything was just starting off at a time where singing would soon become big business.

Depth in popular singing boils down to general, scattered and complex themes—such as solitude, liberty, love—within a short period of time (around three minutes), intensely activated in emotional terms. The deep composition can generate feelings whose strength we are only able to feel in films or novels that follow another concept of duration (cf. these same examples as they relate to the skill of the vocal situation, p. 127¹). Everything depends on the arrangement that was agreed upon between persuasive processes auxiliated by the harmonic base. More than just a question of merit, the deeper compositions reveal the composer’s special expertise in terms of just saying what the melody is able to intensify. To this extent, a keen insight is needed in order to interpret the insinuations of the intonation and, consequently, in choosing a compatible text. Almost all the great composers had experiences with deep creations. Chico Buarque made them his own diction.

Fully aware that he writes lyrics for songs and not for poetry, in the literary sense of the word, Chico has been able to concentrate on the task of extracting the maximum verbal yield from melodic insinuations. Similarly, because he is an excellent composer of melodies, who is indifferent to purely musical questions, he has been able to conceive outlines that



Chico Buarque. Photograph by Sérgio de Oliveira. Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

were already suggestive in terms of singing: melodies that really want to say something.

The elaboration of potentially good melodies for composing songs with is a route to unravelling new paths in terms of tessitura without allowing passionate ruptures (jumps in intervals, sudden rises in pitch) to unbalance the intonation project responsible for creating musical figures. Hence the discontinuous modules which are then followed by gradual progressions, as seen in “Luiza,”² so as to avoid entropic singing or, even more than that, its desemantization.

Chico is a great builder of melodic insinuations, that maintain the song’s balance and natural intonation, but what makes him so unique in the general panorama of Brazilian music is his capacity to incorporate within these contours a vast contingency of narrative adventures, combined with the lyrics, therefore considerably augmenting the song’s substance.

If the chosen theme calls forth, for example, the feeling of an amorous loss, the character’s obsessive passion leaves traces of previous occurrences that



Chico Buarque. Photograph by Mirian Fichtner. Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

victimized him, and leaves traces with regards to the lifestyle that precipitated such a loss as well as potential traces, capable of foreseeing future events:

Olhos nos olhos, quero ver o que você diz
Quero ver como suporta me ver tão feliz

*(Eye to eye, I want to see what you have to say
I want to see how you can bare to see me so happy)*

All this helps bring together, within the normal time of a song's duration, narrative steps that, when suppressed, would tend to impair emotional content. It is as if the listener was able to capture the various layers involved in a passionate state of affairs. Hence the amplification of the song's substance and the notion of depth to define Chico Buarque's music.

Passion and *action* are complementary concepts, much studied by today's semiotics. Passion translates the perplexed (and almost always transitory) state of passivity that can be found along the various crossroads of life's narratives. Passion results from past actions and often causes new doings, depending on the tension stored in the individual's mind (or heart). The action, on the other hand, activates the narrative nucleus in which the state of mind's transformations are processed. By developing actions, we pursue our

objects throughout life, facing competitors, overcoming obstacles, losing trials, conquering alliances and we do all of this with such commitment that the nature of the desired objects ends up defining us as subjects. In addition to their decisive moments, the actions imply a terminal stage of evaluation and recognition of the subject's immediate value or incompetence and presuppose another initial qualification and training stage for the character to overcome narrative trials.

On some occasions, Chico centres himself at the heart of a decisive action ("Realejo" ["Barrel Organ"], "Acorda Amor" ["Wake Up My Love"]); in others he stops short at the performance's qualification stage: "João e Maria" ("João and Maria"), "Ana de Amsterdam" ("Ana of Amsterdam"), "Quando o Carnaval Chegar" ("When the Carnival Comes"). In others, he even evaluates narrative paths that sanction positively or negatively the character's performance: "Quem Te Viu, Quem Te Vê" ("How You've Changed"), "Apesar de Você" ("In Spite of You"), "Meu Guri" ("My Boy"). Sometimes, within the briefness of a song, he traverses the three main stages of narrativity: preparation, the action itself and the final evaluation, thus founding linearly complete songlines, such as in "Geni e o Zeppelin" ("Geni and the Zeppelin"), "Construção" ("Construction"), "A

Banda" ("The Band"), "Valsinha" ("Little Waltz"), "Vai Passar" ("It Will Go By").

All the actions described by Chico leave a passionate trace that, backed by melodic tensions, delve deep into any listener's spirit. "Vai Passar," "Quando o Carnaval Chegar" or "Apesar de Você" reiterate, in all their stanzas, the passage from the feeling of frustration to the exhilaration of elation. "Construção" or "Geni e o Zeppelin" explore the passionate notion of indignation within those gradations that articulate human, subhuman, and inhuman behavior. "Meu Guri" describes the blind and unconditional love behind the most visible social emblems. At the limit, the actions or stages of actions so well conducted by the text service underlying passion and it is precisely this passion that is so moving.

Most of the time, however, Chico's text focuses directly on passion and, as happens so often in the song universe, it extracts its emotional tension from the state of disjunction with the object of desire. From the almost idyllic lyricism of "Januária" or "Carolina" to the unsavoury cruelty of "Atrás da Porta" ("Behind the Door"), the preponderant feeling is that of lack. From the affective generality to the particularization of concrete cases—in which the figurative commitment of whoever sings is much greater—the composer abandoned his observer stance while taking on the contents as lived experience. The reduction and particularization of the focus intensified the heat of the feelings that were expressed, expanding the range of narratives involved.

All his songs in the feminine gender, among others, explore the tension contained in a passionate state that suggests innumerable narratives which are previous, posterior, cause or consequence of that momentary passion that afflicts the character. Chico conceives of passion as a state capable of condensing narratives, much like a "being" edified by "doing." That is why his songs always seem to be lined with layers of meaning that give three-dimensional depth to the melodic line. His actions are infused with passion. His passions condense narratives that often extend beyond musical boundaries.

This special attraction over narrativity may be the same that attracts Chico to Brazilian dramaturgy. Right at the start of his career he already showed a keen interest in the theatre, writing countless plays, always based on explicit narrativity. His songs are quite often fragments of dramatic scenes which, if played out in a theatre, would not extend much beyond a mastery of *kitsch*, but which, in the condensed and melodic form of the song, sound sublime (take "Atrás da Porta" as an example).

Theatre is the most complete form of representation of a narrative segment of life. It seals within its spatial limits a micro-universe that reproduces human behavior, as if it were a field of simulation and experimentation of our experiences. Perhaps it portrays, even more so, a general principle of ordering the human imagination as suggested, within the relevant technical and operational justifications, by the field of semiotics.

The idea that we think in terms of narratives and that these constitute a kind of "syntagmatic intelligence" finds resonance in the mythologies found in how collectives are formed throughout history. Narrative articulations between myths (personified differently in each epoch) have always helped man think about his life in the world and in his social life.

If, in the philosophical tradition, mythic thought opposes logical thinking to some extent, in art the narrative tendency opposes and complements the iconic tendency, radically represented by the concrete movement in fine art and literature. It all happens as if the construction of an icon (plastic or linguistic), starting from the raw materials of the code's expression, were capable of making the narrative already widely disseminated in almost all social phenomena more abstract, or, more precisely, if it were capable of synthesizing it in the compact form of a multifaceted object. On the other hand, it is as if the narrative's analytical form were to unmask the hidden dimensions of our social and affective contents, animating and making their relationships dynamic on an anthropomorphic scale. The history of the arts is pinpointed by a constant oscillation between these two tendencies, as if one balanced the redundancies or inadequacies of the other.

The Brazilian popular song, like any other form of artistic expression, also accommodates these two tendencies although, by its very nature, it avoids the exploration of one of its poles. Its inevitable linearity undermines the formation and effectiveness of "sound icons," even though successful experiences in this field are on the rise. Its short duration, on the other hand, restricts narrative investments in dimensions compatible with the available time. But, when it comes to trends, there have always been compositions tuned to iconization ("Pelo Telefone" ["On the Phone"], "O Que é Que a Baiana Tem?" ["What Does the Woman from Bahia Have?"], "Bim Bom," "Batmacumba," etc...), and others more prone to narrativity ("Quando o Samba Acabou" ["When Samba Ended"], "Três Lágrimas" ["Three Tears"], "No Dia em Que Eu Vim-Me Embora" ["The Day I Left"], "Teresinha", etc...).

Until the 1950s, narrativity prevailed as the most effective way of conceiving a songline. With the advent of bossa nova, iconization was definitively adopted and became associated with the thematic behavior of the melody in João Gilberto's voice. "Samba de Uma Nota Só" ("One Note Samba"), "O Barquinho" ("Little Boat"), "Garota de Ipanema" ("The Girl from Ipanema") [the first part], "Hô-Bá-Lá-Lá" and even the "Samba da Minha Terra"'s ("The Samba from My Homeland") reinterpretation clearly illustrate this inclination towards the icon (without in any way abandoning narrativity). Caetano Veloso, along with his well-known versatility, assiduously explored the iconic form during his tropicalist phase ("Clara," "Acrilírico") up until his recent partnerships with one of Brazil's main concrete poets, Augusto de Campos, in "Dias" ("Days") and "Pulsar" ("To Pulsate"). In the 70s he composed countless such creations: "Araçá Blue," "Jóia" ("Joy"), "Lua Lua Lua Lua" ("Moon Moon Moon Moon"), "Pipoca Moderna" ("Modern Popcorn"), "Gravidade" ("Gravity"), "A Grande Borboleta" ("The Big Butterfly"), "Peixe" ("Fish"), etc... Gilberto Gil also made inroads when it came to icons ("Pé Quente Cabeça Fria" ["Wild Foot, Cool Head"], "Lugar-comum" ["Commonplace"], "Metáfora" ["Metaphor"]), mainly in his African phase: "Babá Alapalá" ("Nanny Alapalá"), "Sarárá Miolo" ("Sarárá Grain"), "Filhos de Gandhi" ("Gandhi's Sons"), etc. Other composers adopted iconization as a personal trademark when it came to writing the lyrics: Luiz Melodia, Walter Franco and, in part, Djavan.

Although narrativity continues to dominate composers' general tendency, if anything because its chances of success in the market are much greater, the concrete movement, whether in terms of imagery or sound, has already been taken up as a stylistic resource even if only temporarily in an eminently narrative context.

Even though he is an expert at alliteration, resonance and generating sensible images, Chico Buarque never made these features the central object of his compositions. Even in rare playful creations such as "Passaredo" ("Flock of Birds"), in which the icon predominates, the narrative dimension appears in the chorus as if already virtually contained throughout the stanzas:

Bico calado, toma cuidado
Que o homem vem aí

*(Zipped lips, beware
The man is coming)*



Chico Buarque. Photograph by Paulo Barbosa.
Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

It turns out that Chico's diction is viscerally committed to myth, to drama and to the emotions specific to narrative thinking. Everything, for the author, must be analyzed and staged, if not at the source of creation, at least the moment the final meaning is sensed. The syntheses he produces are narrative and not iconic. Inside the passionate state several narrative programmes are interwoven, which come to define the text's tense atmosphere and the way it becomes compatible with the melody.

As far as this goes, we can unravel one of Chico's composition secrets. His narratives, as all-inclusive as they were, are always linked to a cohesive and autonomous passionate nucleus. Seeing as the melodic tensions arise precisely from this same nucleus, the song answers to an integral sense that is specific to it.

At a time when the struggle against the military dictatorship's excesses became an important part of Chico's personal experience, the social issues were evidently absorbed by his verses. However, even at this moment in time the narratives did not become detached from the passionate core. At the time of their release, such compositions, when not censored, were extremely well-received by the complicit general public, which understood the "clearly" encrypted messages. But the songs were equally popular with the less informed public who, indifferent to current

affairs, continued to relish Chico's songs. Having turned "our history's unhappy pages," it turned out that the songs were not dated, and that their powers of enchantment remained intact.

Chico shapes the passionate core with such skill that it matters little what interpretive dress covers it. The drama of disjunction and the feeling that something is lacking, which is an archetype that applies to all collectivities and all individualities throughout history, is revived by Chico through extremely varied narrative and sensory solutions that all contribute towards giving a significant specificity to a relationship which is in itself largely general. In order for the disjunction to provoke lack's emotive effect in all its fullness, it takes a lot of originality and a lot of concentration on the passionate focus of scission, so as to mobilize a game of physical and mental approaches and withdrawals towards the desired object.

It's when the "eyes looking at eyes" come close that one perceives the consequence of separation: "Sem você eu passo bem demais" ("I'm doing just great without you"), in "Olhos nos Olhos" ("Eye to Eye"). It is in the tender and unimpeded union of infantile space/time,

Vem, me dê a mão
A gente agora já não tinha medo

*(Come, give me your hand
We no longer feared anything)*

that it is created the ideal atmosphere for the sudden suspension of the dream and the rupture of the bond:

Pois você sumiu no mundo sem me avisar...
(Because you disappeared in the world without warning me...) ["João e Maria"]

It is still with the tendency towards disjunction,

Dei pra maldizer o nosso lar
Pra sujar teu nome, te humilhar

*(I cursed our home
I defiled thy name, humiliated thee)*

that attempts to conquer the total conjunction,

Só pra mostrar que inda sou tua
(Just to show that I'm still yours)

and all of this is energized by dramatic physical closeness,

E me agarrei nos teus cabelos
Nos teus pêlos, teu pijama
Nos teus pés...

*(And I clung to your hair
To your body hair, your pyjamas
To your feet...)* ["Atrás da Porta"]

and imminent deviations: "seu olhar era de adeus" ("his expression said farewell") or "sem carinho, sem coberta" ("without affection, without cover") [*idem*].

It is within this focus that Chico works the emotions, directing tensions within the passionate core. It is within this focus that he reduces the text to only that which the melody can intensify.

This composer's ability gained in strength throughout the 70s until it reached an unbridled degree of sophistication in terms of Brazilian songwriting when he composed "Pedaço de Mim" ("A Piece of Me").

Oh pedaço de mim
Oh metade afastada de mim
Leva o teu olhar

Que a saudade é o pior tormento
É pior do que o esquecimento
É pior do que se entrevar

*(Oh piece of me
Oh my other half that is estranged from me
Take your gaze
Because longing is the worst torment
It's worse than forgetfulness
It's worse than being eclipsed)*

Oh pedaço de mim
Oh metade exilada de mim
Leva os teus sinais
Que a saudade dói como um barco
Que aos poucos descreve um arco
E evita atracar no cais

*(Oh piece of me
Oh my other half that is exiled from me
Take your signs
Because longing hurts like a boat
That little by little describes an arch
And avoids mooring on the quay)*

Oh pedaço de mim
Oh metade arrancada de mim
Leva o vulto teu
Que a saudade é o revés de um parto

A saudade é arrumar o quarto
Do filho que já morreu

*(Oh piece of me
Oh my other half that is torn away from me
Take your shadow
Because longing is the reverse of a birth
Longing is cleaning the room
Of the son who died)*

Oh pedaço de mim
Oh metade amputada de mim
Leva o que há de ti
Que a saudade dói latejada
É assim como uma figada
No membro que já perdi

*(Oh piece of me
Oh my other half that is amputated from me
Take what's left of you
Because longing hurts like hell
It's like a hook
In the member I've already lost)*

Oh pedaço de mim
Oh metade adorada de mim
Lava os olhos meus
Que a saudade é o pior castigo
E eu não quero levar comigo
A mortalha do amor... adeus

*(Oh piece of me
Oh my other half that I love
Wash my eyes
Because longing is the worst punishment
And I don't want to take with me
This love shroud ... goodbye)*

Departing from an unalterable melodic grid (which we do not describe here), fully modalized by “being” and articulated by tensions based on frequency, the author writes five stanzas whose metaphorical precision makes opposing energies of proximity and withdrawal palpitate.

The desire for the other is so intense that, when faced with the impossibility of living it, the only thing left to do is to beg for its (the other's) complete disappearance. Any “signs” of the beloved entity only serve to renew the feeling of absence and the penance of living at a distance. And this disjunction is especially painful in the longing for the other that it engenders.

The desperate paradox contained in the lyrics presupposes that being united is vital and indispensable, while actual circumstances (and herein there is an open space that leads towards the leap beyond the song) call for complete estrangement.

The metonymic resource of perceiving the other as an integral part of oneself lends unusual weight to the focus on separation. Estrangement takes on the meaning of a shattered identity like schizophrenia which has been inoculated from the outside in. After all, the other half has been tragically “estranged,” “exiled,” “torn away,” and “amputated” from the body, leaving behind a pain which is “like hell” and “like a hook,” just like an incurable injury. With this radical treatment of a disjunctive relation, the author ends up digging up the semantic universal theme that underlies this relation, although it does not always need to be updated: the notion of death. Much more than just a dissatisfaction with an unrealizable desire, the distance from the other leads to the body's and the very unity of the being's fragmentation, which amounts to death.

The oscillation between nearness and remoteness is masterfully conceived by the metaphor of the boat that deviates from its course and gradually intensifies the tension produced by absence by distancing itself from the quay:

Que a saudade dói como um barco
Que aos poucos descreve um arco
E evita atracar no cais

*(Because longing hurts like a boat
That little by little describes an arch
And avoids mooring on the quay)*

Death's irreversible separation is documented by reversing the ideal model of the meeting represented by birth:

Que a saudade é o revés de um parto
A saudade é arrumar o quarto
Do filho que já morreu

*(Because longing is the reverse of a birth
Longing is cleaning the room
Of the son who died)*

The dysphoric characterization of the Brazilian word for longing (*saudade*), a term that emblazons a disjunctive relationship with pain, is channelled through sensitive touch, in the very stanza that outlines the metonymic loss foreshadowed in the title “Pedaço de Mim.”

Que a saudade dói latejada
É assim como uma figada
No membro que já perdi

*(Because longing hurts like hell
It's like a hook
In the member I've already lost)*

All these textual experiments are directed at sculpting the passionate core in order to gain the maximum yield between melodic tensions. Chico does not abandon the focus of the juncture, nor does he abandon the manoeuvres between proximity and withdrawal. On the inside of these images that indicate visceral union there emerge the appeals for separation: “Take your gaze,” “Take your signs,” “Take your shadow” and “Take what's left of you.”

In just a few minutes of song, the disjunctive tension reaches its zenith, consubstantiated in the notion of death. Successive specifications of the dysphoric sense of a “nostalgic longing” for love,

within this picture of laceration, end up identifying it with the tragic feeling of a “love shroud.” It is the ultimate separation and the ultimate “goodbye;” a symbol of the total disintegration of one's being.

The disjunctive content of the song, which was launched during the amnesty movement (1978), was immediately incorporated by the political cause—apparently with the composer's explicit support—becoming one of the most poignant manifestos of that time. Having overcome this stage in Brazil's history, “Pedaço de Mim” remains intact with its passionate nucleus carved and polished by Chico's lyrics, no longer serving an amnesty but serving instead the eternal human drama of separation.

[...]

First published as “Dicção de Chico Buarque” in *O Cancionista: Composição de canções no Brasil*, 233–241. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1996.

1. The author refers to his analysis of Lupicínio Rodrigues's diction in the same book. (Editor's Note)

2. The author refers to Tom Jobim's “Luiza,” previously analysed in his book. (Editor's Note)

3. Algirdas Julien Greimas & Joseph Courtès, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris: Hachette, 1979), 249.



Chico Buarque. Photograph by Sérgio de Oliveira. Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

Vindicating the composer: An interview with Márcia Derraik about *Where the Owl Sleeps*

Albert Elduque

If we were asked to name ten classics of Brazilian cinema about music, Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Rio, Northern Zone* (*Rio Zona Norte*, 1957) and Leon Hirszman's *Partido Alto* (1976–1982) would surely be among our choices. And if we had to think of a contemporary film that recaptures the topics of those two films and combines them perfectly, the result would probably be Márcia Derraik's and Simplício Neto's *Where the Owl Sleeps* (*Onde a Coruja Dorme*, 2010). On the one hand, this recent documentary calls to mind the story of the exploited suburban composer of Pereira dos Santos's Cinema Novo classic, a strong denunciation of samba's misuse at the hands of the culture industry, which fails to recognise the real artists' work. On the other, like Hirszman's documentary, it shows how *partido alto*, a genre of samba, is born out of everyday situations, establishing a bridge between conversation and song that Luiz Tatit considers a fundamental feature of Brazilian music.¹ Initially, *Where the Owl Sleeps* was intended to be a short film portrait of the famous singer Bezerra da Silva (1927–2005), but ended up becoming a window into the life of Rio de Janeiro's favelas and a defence of a range of unknown artists. In this interview Márcia Derraik not only highlights some of the main ideas about the production process of the documentary, but she also reveals that the film suffered from those same contradictions between the culture industry and authorship. Its making turned therefore into a cinematographic mirror of the one that it depicted.

How was the film conceived? What was the project's initial idea?

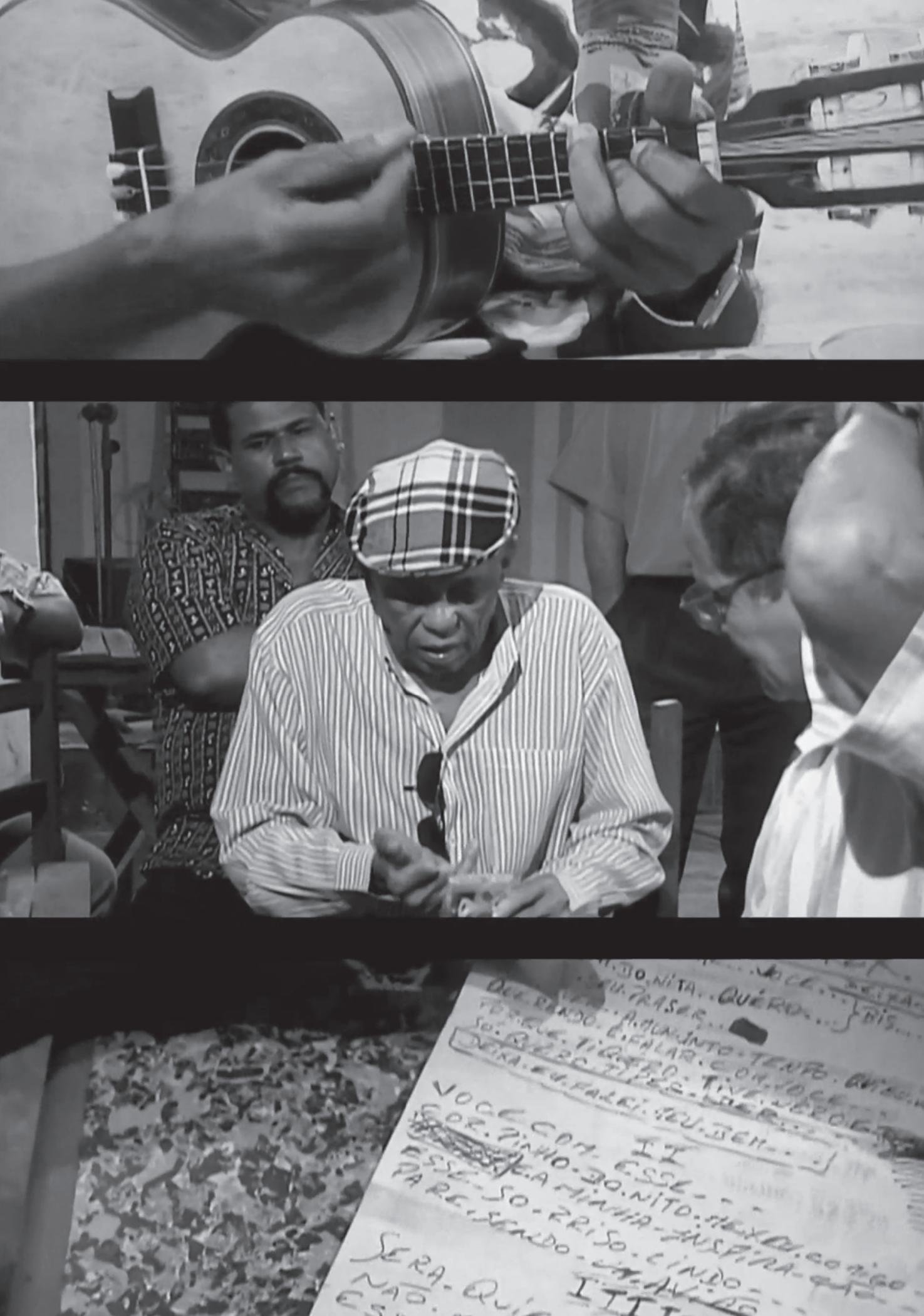
Our initial idea was to make a documentary about Bezerra da Silva himself, because we were big fans of his and enjoyed listening to his music. So, I sat down with Simplício Neto to discuss what the focus of the film should be, and he said: "What don't we know about Bezerra? What hasn't MTV explained about him yet?" And then he reminded me that Bezerra wasn't the composer of his songs, but that they were created by a range of men in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. He always tried to acknowledge the work of these real composers, with hilarious nicknames such as Claudinho Inspiração or Adelsonilton, and in the movie you can even see them in a big picture on the cover of one of his discs. But who really were these guys? We had never heard about them. This new perspective was crucial, so Simplício, who at first was just the screenwriter of the film, became a director as well. While the focus was initially on Bezerra, suddenly we moved to the guys that were behind him. Our plan was to create a work that was analogous to what he did: he used to go to favelas and to the Baixada Fluminense, to find these guys. And we decided to do the same: to go there, find these guys and show their faces.

Were these men the composers of all the songs by Bezerra da Silva?

Bezerra is the composer of one, two or maybe three songs, but no more. Of course Bezerra shaped them, but the composers were those other guys. But you shouldn't think that he was a smart middle-class man who exploited them. He also came from a very poor background, having left his birthplace Recife at the age of fourteen to travel to Rio, hiding himself in a boat. In the tragic and funny tone that characterised his lyrics, he used to say that in the middle of the ocean the captain discovered him and said: "What I should do with you? Should I throw you into the sea?" And he replied: "It wouldn't be worse than it is now." And then he arrived in Rio and, after a while, started to live in Cantagalo, a favela near Copacabana. When he grew up, he worked as a painter and as a construction worker before becoming a musician for orchestras and radio. In the late 1960s, he became an individual performer with the name Bezerra da Silva. He performed *partido alto* and *pagode*, special genres of samba, and his lyrics, while funny, always refer to the tragic life in the slums. Rappers, for example, are very fond of him and consider him as a reference.

LEFT

Where the Owl Sleeps (2010)



Watching the documentary, it is obvious that the composers from the favela became quite familiar with the crew, as they seem very relaxed in front of the camera: they sing, they make jokes, they talk about drugs, about women... How did you suggest the topics to them?

Actually, what we did was to take all the records by Bezerra and separate them in subjects: the *malandro* (the street-smart guy), the *bicho solto* (the beast on the loose, which is the bandit), the *cagete* (the rat), the *sogra* (the mother-in-law), the *cornio* (the cuckold), and the songs that talk about composers themselves. We knew which composers had written about each of these topics, we knew them through the songs, so we went to find them. Our first surprise was realising that those guys actually have jobs, and they are very hard workers indeed. The widespread image of the *malandro* is that of the guy who doesn't work, who manages to get by without getting his hands or clothes dirty. He is not a bandit, but he knows how to profit from different situations. And we discovered that the guys that call themselves *malandros* work hard to sustain their families; they wake up at four o'clock in the morning to go to their jobs... In the documentary you can see the guy that works in refrigeration and is proud of it, or the fireman that removes corpses from fires and car accidents. Such a horrible routine...

It is very interesting that the documentary starts and finishes with the composers working.

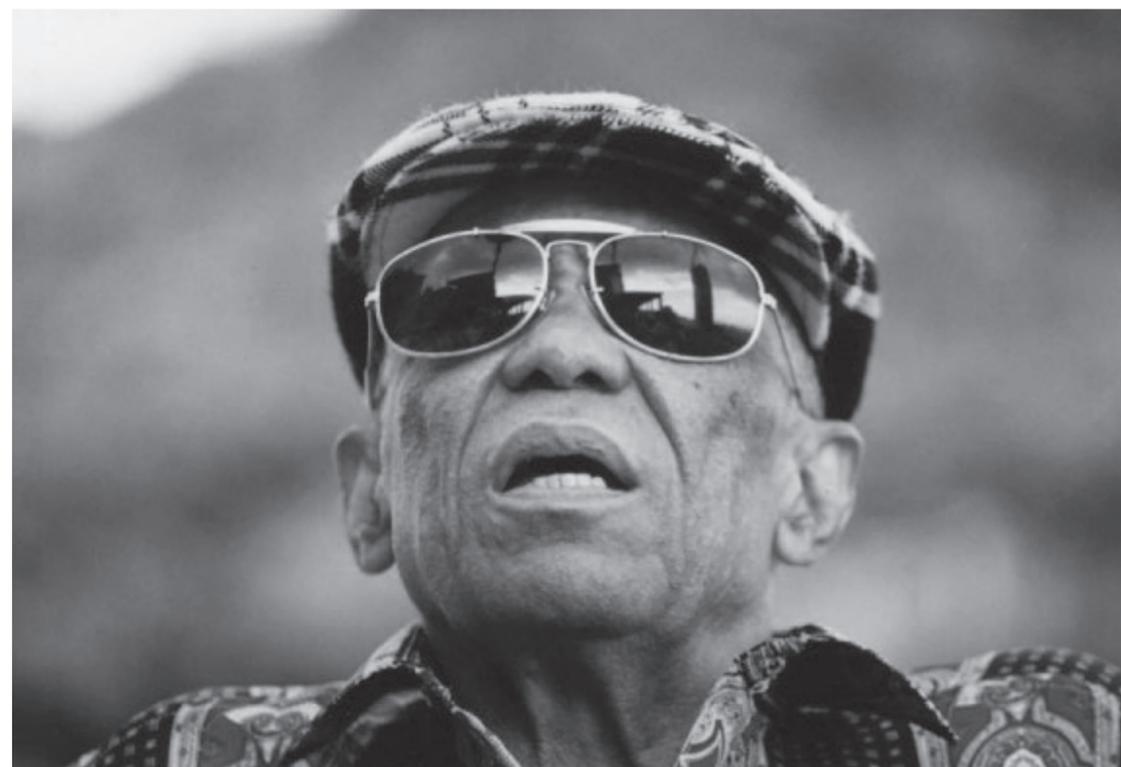
In fact, we created a kind of circle. We actually designed it in the script. We began presenting them at their jobs, showing their decision to be workers instead of anything else, and then we explained why they are *malandros* and not *bichos soltos*; then we moved to *cagete*, which is probably the most common subject in Bezerra's music, and to other topics like *cornio*, *sogra* and *macumba*, a syncretic religion in Brazil. And before closing with the jobs again, we discussed their situation as authors, which is quite complicated and was fundamental in the documentary. Just think that these guys are the composers of commercial hits, and if they were born in a country like the United States or the United Kingdom they would be rich, or would live in a very comfortable situation! But the reality in Brazil is that there is a level of unfairness in terms of respect given to the artist; there is no efficient recourse to justice or copyright, and they don't have control of their songs once they sell them. So these guys, despite being the composers of hits, are poor!

There are three versions of the film: a short film and a medium-length-version from 2001, and then the definitive one, from 2010, with 20 minutes more, which was released commercially in Brazil in 2012. It was more than ten years until the definitive version, and in the meantime Bezerra died, as well as some of the composers. Why did you make three versions of the same story?

In fact, at first we had money to do a short movie, but the material we found was so amazing that, in addition to the required 15-minute short, we edited a version of 52 minutes. This medium length film became a bit of a success, but always as an obscure movie, in non-official channels, as we didn't have the rights for the songs, and we couldn't sell or present it. People liked it, but we couldn't show it publicly! When Bezerra died in 2005, Roberto Berliner, the producer from TV Zero, told us that that film had to be cleared in order to be sold and seen, so he began a process to get money for another version. In order to remember the character, he asked us to put more Bezerra in, and we did that. And we also decided to remove the statements by prestigious specialists or artists like Jorge Ben Jor and Paulo Lins that appeared in previous versions, because we realised that the composers didn't need other people to legitimise them. This way we made the complete feature film.

You said that you didn't have the rights to the songs. Didn't the composers allow you to use them for free?

Of course they did, but we didn't have the authorization from the record companies. Even if they were singing their own songs, we couldn't use them commercially, because they don't own their music any more. In the movie they talk about it: once you have sold your music, it is the company that decides what to do with it. For me it was a big surprise, I had never realised that I couldn't show their own music in a movie about them! So we had to pay the record companies, but the budget didn't cover that. To tell the truth, there is no set fee and the companies charge what they want. So we went through lots of bureaucracy, submitted the film to lots of sponsors, and finally raised the money to clear the music. The composers would receive through the record companies somehow, because if you pay the record company they have to pay them, but sometimes their relationship is complicated and they may never receive this money. This is the Brazilian reality in terms of authorship.



Bezerra da Silva. Photograph by Paulo Castiglione

Apart from the relevance of Bezerra and the absence of prestigious people from outside the slums, in the last version there is another change: you put black lines on the eyes of some characters, and blur the faces of others.

Yes, we had to do that in archival images and in some we filmed for the topic *Sogra*. When we went to the lawyers to clear the movie, they told us that we couldn't use that material, because we didn't have the image rights of those people. We paid for the old images of the policemen, but we didn't know who those guys were, neither did we have any authorization from them to be in the film, so we blurred the faces. In the case of the *sogras* (mothers-in-law), we used the black lines, which are the same that are used in TV images of minors of age who can't be exposed.

It was a kind of joke we made out of this limitation. To tell the truth, in Brazil this issue with image rights is ridiculous. Just imagine: if you want to make a documentary about former president Fernando Collor, for example, you need his authorization to use his images. For this reason, your work will be completely favourable to him, you won't be able to say anything that he doesn't like! The documentary will end up being an official, uncritical portrait of what is already widely known, with no criticism at all to status quo. Which was the opposite of our intentions when approaching samba and music industry in *Where the Owl Sleeps*. Fortunately enough, we had the faces of the composers to tell that story.

Interview held in London on 4th March, 2016.

1. Luiz Tatit, *O século da canção* (Cotia: Ateliê Editorial, 2004), 41-44.

Between phonographic perfection and resistance: *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party*

Lisa Purse

Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party (*Titãs – A Vida Até Parece Uma Festa*, 2008) tells the story of Titãs (“Titans”), one of the major bands of the Brazilian Rock (BRock) movement that emerged in the 1980s. The documentary is a directorial collaboration between filmmaker Oscar Rodrigues Alves and Titãs band member Branco Mello, who had been filming his band mates onstage, backstage, in the recording studio, and in homes and hotel rooms from the moment he could first afford a camera in 1986. The documentary combines Mello’s footage (VHS, Super 8, mini DV) with recordings—some clearly bootlegged—of broadcast television appearances, live performances, backstage interviews, and news reports, brought together in an often playful bricolage. Mello’s involvement could have produced a film that was simply celebratory and nostalgic, but what emerges is a more complex creation, one that draws on the dialogic potential of its range of different footage fragments from different moments in time, producing strategic juxtapositions that reflect on the band’s shifting relationship to a wider political and musical landscape.

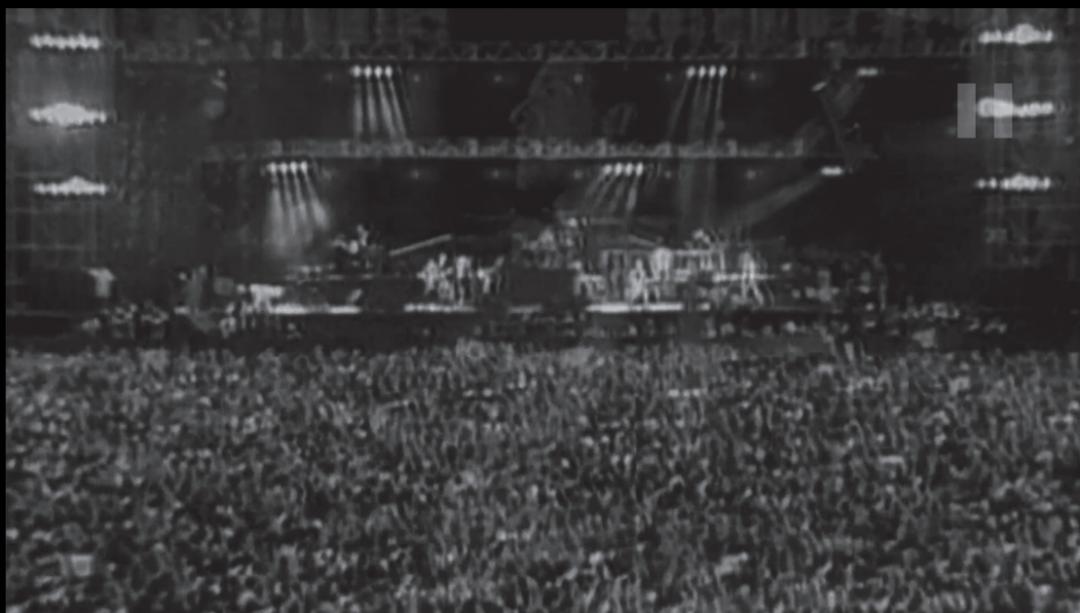
The BRock movement occupies a culturally uneasy position in Brazilian music as a result of the circumstances of its emergence, the music it took as its inspiration, and what it correspondingly rejected of Brazil’s musical heritage. The early 1980s were shaped by the process of *abertura* (democratization), begun in 1978, that eventually brought military rule to an end in March 1985. Titãs were part of a generation of young musicians who shared the initial optimism *abertura* precipitated, and the disillusionment that followed as inflation, unemployment and foreign debt subsequently escalated.¹ Questioning the political classes, traditional social mores and Brazilian identity in a world of civil rule, and able, due to the relaxation of censorship laws under *abertura*, to access a wider range of international music, Brazilian rock bands like Titãs, *Ultraje a Rigor*, *Blitz*, *Barão Vermelho* and *Os Paralamas do Sucesso* alighted upon British punk rock, new wave movements, Anglophone rock and heavy metal as fitting forms of expression. They found an audience with politically engaged young people who no longer viewed Brazilian Popular Music

(*Música Popular Brasileira – MPB*) as relevant to the contemporary political moment.² By the time of 1985’s “Rock in Rio” music festival, which attracted 1 million people (many dressed in the colours of the Brazilian flag) to see Brazilian rock bands perform alongside MPB stars and major US and UK artists, TV Globo reporters were using the celebratory moniker “democratic rock” to describe the movement.³

However, scholarly perspectives on BRock have been less salutary. Martha Tupinambá de Ulhôa notes that there has been a reluctance to take BRock seriously as an object of study, because it is “made for popular consumption,” and because there is “resistance to admitting that rock might have some kind of ‘national’ character.”⁴ BRock is more frequently seen as an example of U.S. cultural imperialism than a legitimately Brazilian mode of musical expression, and its ability to address the socio-political in Brazil has been persistently questioned: for example, in 1994 Joaquim Alves de Aguiar suggested that “Rock does not overcome the tension between the traces of revolt and the acceptance imposed by the mechanisms of cultural industry, which dilute the power of rock’s messages, barring them from going beyond simple observation or personal and silent rebellion.”⁵ Sean Stroud’s work on musical nationalism⁶ shows that “cultural invasion” has been an ever-present fear in reflections by commentators, artists and indeed politicians on the relationship of Brazilian music to foreign cultural influences. In the 1980s U.S. rock music was designated as a form to be resisted, but the tension between Brazilian roots and international rock had been creatively fruitful, as much as they were also the cause of debate, for previous generations too. In the early 1960s the *Jovem Guarda* (Young Guard) drew on Anglo-American rock’n’roll to great commercial acclaim, but, like BRock, suffered accusations of a lack of cultural or political engagement.⁷ In this period MPB musicians such as Gilberto Gil initially resisted rock, participating in the so-called “March Against Electric Guitars,” a 1966 São Paulo protest against foreign music. Yet the electric guitar was subsequently embraced by figures such as Gil and Caetano Veloso, in a musical synthesis of Anglo-American rock and traditional Brazilian forms that became known as tropicalism, and which provided the basis for future rock infusions into MPB.⁸

LEFT

Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party (2008)



By the 1980s, when a crisis-ridden U.S. music industry was attempting to aggressively colonise other national markets including Brazil, the fear that Brazilian musical identity would be irrevocably changed by a new wave of cultural imperialism seemed, for some, to be sharply epitomized by BRock. Yet these perspectives underestimate the extent to which BRock music and its associated live and recorded performances drew creatively on multiple influences, including Brazilian cultural heritage, in politically pertinent ways. As Jorge Cardoso Filho has pointed out, while BRock certainly did take up US and UK rock's rhythms, instruments, physical performance stances and vocal intonations, it also "gradually digested and transformed these characteristics, using, among other things, oblique humor, mockery, and irony" in both lyrics and in performance, to ruminate on and challenge aspects of Brazilian culture, society and politics.⁹ In their performances, music and lyrics, Titãs combined punk and rock iconography with that of carnival, *circo-teatro* (theatre-circus), and *teatro de revista* (revue theatre), and older Brazilian music forms, such as *repente* ("impetus"), an improvisational alternating singing style from the North East, that was featured on the band's fifth album *Ô Blésq Blom* (1989) via the presence of *repente* singers Mauro and Quitéria. It is also pertinent that the first Titãs gig we see in *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party* (after the prologue and opening title sequence) is not a music concert but an ironic piece of performance art presented in 1982 in the Teatro Lira Paulistana in São Paulo, featuring Paulo Miklos in drag as Mella Adams, an occult researcher who has been possessed by the spirit of a singer. The Teatro Lira Paulistana was famous for its showcasing of the work of playwrights, musicians, and artists who were part of the Vanguarda Paulista, a São Paulo-based creative movement of which Titãs and other rock bands were a part. The Mella Adams sketch references the *circo-teatro* travelling variety shows still widespread in 1980s São Paulo's urban and suburban venues, while the cross-dressing element of the show references *chanchada* (popular musical comedies of the 1930s, 40s and 50s) and *teatro de revista*.¹⁰ It is a moment that is emblematic of the band's self-conscious and ironizing relationship to Brazilian cultural and artistic histories, and their commitment to similarly self-conscious modes of theatrical performance and costume, both demonstrated further in the film by the many featured moments of play-acting backstage, in hotel rooms, or in rehearsals, and in their gigs onstage and on television.

In addition, as concert footage in *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party* reveals, alongside these more



On this spread, *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party* (2008)

playful elements exists a seriousness of political intent, part of an overarching commitment to unruly resistance. In albums like *Televisão* (*Television*) from 1985 and *Cabeça Dinossauro* (*Dinosaur Head*) from 1986, Titãs deployed their self-conscious irony in aggressive—and aggressively performed—lyrics of social or political critique. Songs such as "Massacre" ("Massacre"), "Polícia" ("Police"), "Estado Violência" ("State Violence"), "Porrada" ("Punch"), and "Bichos

social agencies".¹¹ *Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party* uses a strategy of accumulation of different live and television performances to showcase the force and urgency of this critique and the ways in which Titãs gave it physical, musical and lyrical form.

An example of this strategy is the film's treatment of the song "Bichos Escrotos." The sequence begins with a 1988 appearance of Titãs on the *Programa Silvio Santos*, a personality-based television variety show that was common in the 1980s and had its own roots in popular theatre and the circus.¹² According to music documentary's conventional framing of performance archives, we would expect to stay with this iteration of the song for the duration of the sequence. But while the audio track remains with the 1988 television appearance, the image track switches between a series of performances, including professionally shot stadium gigs, broadcast television performances on stages of various sizes while regaled in various costumes, and home video footage of band rehearsals. This collage of not one but an array of historical performances offers an intensification of the inherent intermediality of the music documentary: the mediums through which the musicians' creative labour circulates—the music itself, lyrics, vocal performance, the music concert, the television performance, the television interview—combine here in a denser configuration that juxtaposes and foregrounds the different visual grains of the recording formats, such as broadcast television, video and film.

The sequence's preoccupation with the visual textures of video, and particularly degraded video, are a historicized reminder of rock music's affective circuits, which are home to both its commercial appeal but also its potential for political resistance. The 1980s (post-1982, in Brazil) was the era of the home video recorder, that is, the era of domestic recordings and pirated and bootlegged videos. People could record their favourite band's televised appearances, and copy concert and music videos, and circulate these material artifacts around networks of friends and fans. As Lucas Hilderbrand has pointed out in a different context, bootlegged tapes "multiply function as fetishes: as precious objects, as the products of reproductive labor, as substitutes for absent film prints or commercially produced videos... and as souvenirs of the fans who have made them."¹³ Rather than prioritizing clear, sharp images, the sequence purposefully shifts between different levels of image degradation, inferring the circuits of copying and sharing Hilderbrand describes. This haptic visuality, the "denial of depth vision and multiplication of surface" which degraded video images embody, invites the viewer, in Laura Marks's words, "to fill in the



Escrotos" ("Fucking Beasts") reflected urgently on Brazilian identity and its redefinition in an era of globalized consumption, social inequity, and political change. Indeed, in 1989 this moved writer Willis Guerra Filho to call their lyrics "a critical register of the Brazilian way of life, of our society nowadays, with its great insecurity where the people are attacked from all sides, from bandits and the police, from insects and DDT, from the state and



On this spread, *Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party* (2008)

gaps in the image, engage with the traces the image leaves.”¹⁴ Here, the “trace” in question is that of the musicians’ bodies in the act of live performance, and the affective circuits created by them, and which are remembered by fans, across a number of concert and television performances that span the first two decades of Titãs’ career.

Not merely indicative of a nostalgic impulse, multi-textured haptic sequences like this assert the collective nature and consequences of BRock’s politics, achieved through the circulation of bootlegged videos, but also through the more foundational circulation of the gestures of live rock performativity that those videos curate. Just as physical gestures migrate across cinema, acquiring “force and significance through repetition and variation,”¹⁵ the aggressive physical gestures (raised arms, pointing fingers) that have traditionally expressed rock music’s political and cultural oppositionality¹⁶ migrate in this sequence between band members, between band members and fans, and across performances across the band’s history. These exchanges of somatic intensity celebrate and memorialize the music and ritual of rock performance, but also the solidarity it engendered. And it is significant that this intensely visually textured collage should choose to focus upon “Bichos Escrotos.” As Silvio Santos himself implies with his joking reluctance to say the name of the song at the beginning of the sequence, “Bichos Escrotos” uses bad language as a strategy to disrupt and critique civil society. Although the song was performed live from 1982 onwards, it was initially banned by the military regime from being recorded or played on the radio, and was only released on record in 1986.¹⁷ So in its mapping of the life of “Bichos Escrotos,” from banned song to televised entertainment, the sequence marks out a transition between military and civil rule that is precisely at issue for the band in their early work. The dynamic audiovisual mapping of this transitional song’s trajectory from censored object to a site of somatic exchange, exemplifies the documentary’s wider attempt to reclaim Titãs as a



political rock band, one of a number of 1980s BRock groups who transformed U.S. and U.K. rock music for a specifically Brazilian context, and to address specifically Brazilian questions.

After the bracing vigour of the “Bichos Escrotos” lyrics and its stadium renditions, *Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party* chooses to return to Silvio Santos and the relatively staid confines of family-focused variety television. It is a move echoed across other accumulative sequences, in which a return to key television appearances is an integral part of the collage of performances the film enacts. It demonstrates the filmmakers’ commitment not just to celebrate and recuperate Titãs, but also to reveal the tensions between political critique and the band’s growing commercial success. The title of this essay references the words of music producer Pena Schmidt, who notes that the band’s third album, *Cabeça Dinossauro*, was a musical manifestation of Titãs’ central dilemma, “between indulging in phonographic perfection or the affirmation of rebellion.”¹⁸ This dilemma also manifests in the band’s ancillary activities, including television appearances and music videos; the desire to critique a new era of intensified commodification and consumerism, while also needing to participate in it to win fans and revenue.

It is a tension distilled in the moment that band member Marcelo Fromer is forced to minimise the political import of the song “Televisão,” precisely because he is promoting the band to a television audience: in a televised interview he is shown explaining diplomatically,

The song “Televisão” says “A televisão me deixou burro, muito burro demais / Agora todas coisas que eu penso me parecem iguais” (“Television has made me dumber, much too dumb / And every thought I have is now the same”). The words say that, but we always liked television, and we wanted to talk about television, which has always been important to us.



Fromer’s words are framed, in this sequence, by a larger collage of different renditions of the song on television shows and in the music video, which work to show the interpenetration of the impulse towards television exposure with the creative ways the band use elements of theatrical performance to extend their songs’ critiques (singer and songwriter Arnaldo Antunes is shown in one television appearance self-reflexively placing his head inside a television set, for example).

Titãs fully embraced the communicative potential of the music video form, and through it began to find new platforms for critique and intervention, as *Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party* seeks to demonstrate. For example, the film features Titãs’ music video for “Comida” (“Food”) [1987], which uses visual collage to juxtapose band members with Warhol-esque stacks of food tins, and mimics video playback and rewind functions to show Arnaldo Antunes putting products back on supermarket shelves while reflecting in the lyrics on consumerism and its relation to questions of human sustenance (“A gente não quer só comida / A gente quer comida, diversão e arte” [“We do not want just food / We want food, fun and art”]). It is easy to see the music video format simply in terms of commercialization, particularly if one thinks of the global ambitions of MTV, which arrived, courtesy of MTV Brasil, in 1990. Yet this is to ignore the cultural specificity of the video clip in Brazil during the period of Titãs’ emergence—a history that pre-dates MTV Brasil. If television variety shows were one stalwart of the domestic viewing experience in the early 1980s (*Programa Silvio Santos*, *Hebe* [hosted by Hebe Camargo], and *Cassino do Chacrinha* are just some of the shows *Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party* draws from), another was the video clip show (for example, *Mocidade Independente* [June–August 1981] and *Fábrica do Som* [1983–1984]), which showcased contemporary Brazilian music alongside examples of Brazilian experimental video art.¹⁹ As Yvana Fechine notes, such shows “often featured avant-garde work from other artistic genres, such as the concrete poetry of



the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos,”²⁰ showcasing an independent video movement that Fechine locates in a longer tradition of revolutionary and experimental Brazilian filmmaking. Nevertheless, once again the filmmakers find ways to point up the band’s competing commercial and political impulses.

The compelling rhythms and visuals of the “Comida” music video are bookended by two languorous sequences in which the band members put together a “stew” on top of a cooker, combining elements which they say show “the very materials we ended up using in the mix” (“mix” perhaps referring to the recording session for the song “Comida”). It is an elaborate joke, the pot full of broken records, a canister of Gillette shaving cream, a pot of pills, a plastic bag, some toothpaste, but the joke falls flat, the pot’s contents more symbolic of the band’s wastefulness in this off-stage moment than any political intent. This kind of comparison, in which a moment of creative brilliance is juxtaposed with a moment of destructive or wasteful offstage behaviour, is also evidenced elsewhere: later in the music documentary a vivid live performance of “AA UU” (1986) is intercut with footage of band members trashing a backstage area for no obvious purpose. Thus, the patterning of juxtapositions in *Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party* suggests, among other things, a tension between overt questioning on the one hand and complicity in the structures of commercial success on the other.

Yet the cutaways to backstage antics also demonstrate the camaraderie of this band, a celebratory, and important, component of the documentary’s ambitions. From Titãs’ beginnings in a nine-strong collective, to the loss of Arnaldo Antunes and Nando Reis to their solo musical endeavours, and of Marcelo Fromer to a road traffic accident, *Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party* finds many opportunities to underscore the collective nature of the band’s creative process (songwriting duties moved between band members, and songs were often written by more than one band member at a time, as the documentary often shows), as well as foregrounding the



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contributions of individuals. The emerging narrative of the band-as-family is one of the more traditionally celebratory biographical aspects of the film, but its most pointed manifestation continues to be shaped by Mello and Alves's commitment to show not just the achievement but also the conflict inherent to the creative process. A performance of the 1996 song "Família" ("Family") initiates a montage of Titãs' real family members—footage and photographs of partners, parents, and children. The rather sentimental tone of the montage is immediately punctured by a cut to a fragment from a backstage interview with Brazilian rock singer Rita Lee, who wonders, "This thing of them being together for 15 years... I've never been able to stay with someone for 15 years!"

The final section of the documentary busies itself with returns, introspection and memorialization, mirroring the preoccupations of Titãs' more recent musical endeavours in songs like "Epitáfio" ("Epitaph", 2001) and "Isso" ("That", 2001), and exploring the emotional impact of Fromer's death, Branco Mello's illness, and the shrinking band membership in some detail. Yet the ending restates the band's performative nature and the self-reflexive



collage aesthetic that seeks to capture its character and impact. There is not one but several endings: the raw energy of a live performance of 2003's resurgent "Nós Estamos Bem" ("We're Fine"); a montage of different iterations of the band bowing in front of large cheering crowds; 1988 backstage footage of them singing Carlos Imperial's "A Praça" ("The Square" [1967], a song that captures the regret of visiting the same square but without friends from the past); and, finally, another bit of hotel room horseplay, as Paulo Miklos, lit by a bedside lamp, delivers a parody of a critical review in an unknown context ("Didn't like the fact it was so short, it ended so quickly"). Here we find the success and pathos of the Titãs journey, juxtaposed with by Miklos' tonally disruptive undated parody. In this way, like its unruly, creatively pluralist subject, the documentary refuses to be pinned down, even in its final seconds offering a collage of audiovisual fragments, each of which subtly shifts the ground on which the audience is encouraged to respond, and which, in accumulated combination, capture the energy of these socio-politically engaged musicians.

1. Sean Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition in Brazilian Popular Music: Politics, Culture and the Creation of Música Popular Brasileira* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008), 101.

2. Arthur Dapieve, *BRock: o rock brasileiro dos anos 80*, 4th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Editoria 34, 2004), 23.

3. Jorge Cardoso Filho, "Marks of a Recent *Antropofagia*: The Listening Practices of the Albums *Acabou Chorare* (Novos Baianos) and *Selvagem?* (Paralamas do Sucesso)," in *Made in Brazil: Studies in Popular Music*, ed. Martha Tupinambá de Ulhôa, Cláudia Azevedo and Felipe Trotta (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 94.

4. Martha Tupinambá de Ulhôa, "Let Me Sing My BRock: Learning to Listen to Brazilian Rock," in *Rockin' Las Américas: The Global Politics of*

Rock in Latin/o America, ed. Deborah Pacini Hernández, Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Eric Zolov (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 200.

5. Joaquim Alves de Aguiar, "Panorama da Música Popular Brasileira (da Bossa Nova ao rock dos anos 80)," in *Brasil: o trânsito da memória*, ed. Saul Sosnowski and Jorge Schwartz (São Paulo: EDUSP, 1994), 171.

6. Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition in Brazilian Popular Music*.

7. A key proponent of Jovem Guarda was Roberto Carlos, who Paulo Miklos duets with later in *Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party*, in a 1998 appearance on Roberto Carlos's television show.

8. Stroud, *The Defence of Tradition in Brazilian Popular Music*, 25. I also thank Albert Elduque for an enriching

conversation about this earlier moment in Brazilian music history.

9. Cardoso Filho, "Marks of a Recent *Antropofagia*," 102.

10. Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 13.

11. Willis Guerra Filho in a comment made to Chris McGowan, and reprinted in Chris McGowan and Ricardo Pessanha, *The Brazilian Sound: Samba, Bossa Nova and the Popular Music of Brazil*, new ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 199.

12. Dennison and Shaw, *Popular Cinema in Brazil*, 13.

13. Lucas Hilderbrand, "Grainy Days and Mondays: *Superstar* and *Bootleg Aesthetics*," *Camera Obscura* 57, no. 19.3 (2004), 80.

14. Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 333, 341.

15. Lesley Stern, "Putting on a Show, or The Ghostliness of Gesture," *Lola* 5 (July 2003), accessed 15 July 2017, lolajournal.com/5/putting_show.html.

16. Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd edition (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008), 78.

17. Titãs, interview by Jô Soares, *Programa do Jô*, TV Globo, 21 July, 2014, accessed 4 April 2017, globoplay.globo.com/v/3512812/.

18. Pena Schmidt, interviewed by Luiz Felipe Reis and Leonardo Lichote in their article, "Peça e livro celebram os 30 anos de 'Cabeça dinossauro', dos Titãs," *O Globo*, 20 October, 2016, accessed 1 May 2017, oglobo.globo.com/cultura/peca-livro-celebram-os-30-anos-de-ca-

beca-dinossauro-dos-titas-20317034. The translation is mine.

19. Yvana Fechine, "O vídeo como um projeto utópico de televisão," in *Made in Brasil: Três décadas do vídeo brasileiro (Three decades of Brazilian video)*, edited by Arlindo Machado, bilingual edition (São Paulo: Itaú cultural, 2007), 328–329. Page numbers are from the English translation section.

20. *Ibid.*, 329.



Titãs - Life Even Looks Like a Party (2008)

Elza Soares

José Louzeiro & Lenin Novaes

The can of water became a crown of light and love
According to critic and musicologist Roberto Moura, “Elza Soares is probably one of Brazilian music’s three most important stylists, and I use the word stylist on purpose to define someone who created a hallmark. There is the singer whose voice is pure, who always finds just the right note, somewhere along the lines of an Ângela Maria or Elis Regina. But alongside these performers there is also the stylist who, even though she is not necessarily Apollonian, nor shaped beautifully, becomes touching through her resourceful use of originality.”

“Dalva de Oliveira did not have that sweet voice,” says Roberto, “but she had a vocal range that allowed her to reach fantastic high notes. An absolutely unique style. Elza Soares, on the other hand, has a very rare timbre, a crazy swinging. Her capacity to live is extraordinary. Her permanence is outstanding. Unlike Garrincha,¹ she is not a meteorite.”

“I do not remember Elza singing ‘Lama’ (‘Mud’) in Ary Barroso’s talent show, but the first time I came into contact with her I can assure you I was startled. ‘Se Acaso Você Chegasse’ (‘If Per Chance You Arrived’) is as serious as you can get. In my opinion she was ready when she arrived, and she shone brightly at the Odeon with Lupicínio Rodrigues’s song. It was a 78 r.p.m. that I looked for immediately, and asked my parents to buy. I became absolutely fascinated with her work. From that moment on she recorded more and more records, and I kept them all. Elza had an absolutely unmistakable hallmark.”

Some people try to compare her to Billie Holiday, whose life was equally complicated and extremely sad, but Roberto Moura disagrees...

“It is obvious that Elza’s life story is very sad, just like Billie’s,” he says, “but her singing is extremely happy. I have very rarely seen her giving off a negative or a heavy vibe, like Billie does. There is an example that can be given with regards to that: a song like ‘Night and Day,’ recorded by a whole slew of singers, including the glorious Frank Sinatra, goes up. Cole Porter’s line—‘Night and day, you are the one’—in Billie’s voice is completely down. Which is why I do not see any similarity between the two of them. Nor with Bessie Smith.”



Elza Soares. Source: newspaper *Aqui São Paulo*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

“It is as if singing affords her a powerful catharsis. When she steps on stage, she leaves behind the curtain all her suffering, all that karma. To be honest, as much as I try, I still cannot understand what kind of internal strength she finds to operate this transmutation. It is an impressive factor. It could well be her defense mechanism. If she took her pain and her personal agony onto stage, perhaps she would not bear. And so her organism, in its infinite wisdom, found a way to deal with it through art.”

The rhythmic enchantress invented the vocal swing

“Samba,” according to critic Tárík de Souza, “did not exist in the early days of Brazil’s popular music. All four greats from the golden age—Orlando Silva, Chico Alves, Sílvio Caldas and Carlos Galhardo—recorded sambas as well as other genres, that included specific versions. The same applies to the star Dalva (a prominent tango singer), Aracy Cortes, Ângela Maria, Emilinha, Marlene and even

LEFT
Elza (2010)

Aracy de Almeida. But, if there is one person who deserves and dignifies the title of samba singer—with drums in her throat, the feet of a *passista*² and the vestal³ movements of the *porta-estandarte*⁴—then that person is Elza.”

“The singer’s relationship to jazz is quite unusual. An empirical connection with the genre from New Orleans is evident in the recordings, especially in the instant hit ‘Se Acaso Você Chegasse,’ but it is nothing like bossa nova’s fusion programme. Elza seems to have fused jazz and samba together via Africa, bypassing any European harmonic intermediation. Her scat is closer to Louis Armstrong than it is to Miles Davis. It is not just by chance that one of her records was called, rather politically incorrectly today, *A Bossa Negra* (*Black Bossa*).”

“Elza’s vocal potential is not at its strongest in the range, but it is in its coloratura, in the human richness of the raised tone, in the conscious use of the hoarseness as support of balance and seal of experience. Elza often suggests notes instead of hurting them. There is even an excellent record in which she duels with Wilson das Neves’s drums in a kind of exteriorization of what I said earlier.”

1. The footballer Manuel Francisco dos Santos (1933–1983), named Garrincha, was married to Elza Soares from 1968 to 1982. (Translator’s note)

2. A *passista* is a person who dances samba in the Carnival parades. (Translator’s note)

3. The original is “vestual”, which seems to mix “vestal” (“vestal”, in reference to the priestesses of Roman

goddess Vesta) and “gestual” (“gestural”). (Translator’s note)

4. A *porta-estandarte* (“standard-bearer”) or *porta-bandeira* (“flag-bearer”) is a person who carries a standard or a flag in a ceremony or procession. Here it refers to the woman that brings the flag of a particular samba school and dances with the *mestre-sala* (“master of the room”) in the Carnival parades. Three or four different couples

of *porta-estandarte* and *mestre-sala* from the same school may walk in the parade, but the first one is the most important and the one which is evaluated by the judges. (Translator’s Note)

5. A *baiana* is a woman from the northeastern state of Bahia, whose dressing style was used as a trademark by singer and actress Carmen Miranda, especially in her career in Hollywood in the 1940s. (Translator’s Note)

“Obviously so. Her vocal *ginga*, or swing, is typical of someone who had to avoid all kinds of adversity. Of someone who had to balance a lot of water filled tins on her head. Her waist movement could only be learnt through suffering. Negritude flows through the pores of the songs she recorded like a natural sap, without artificial coloring.”

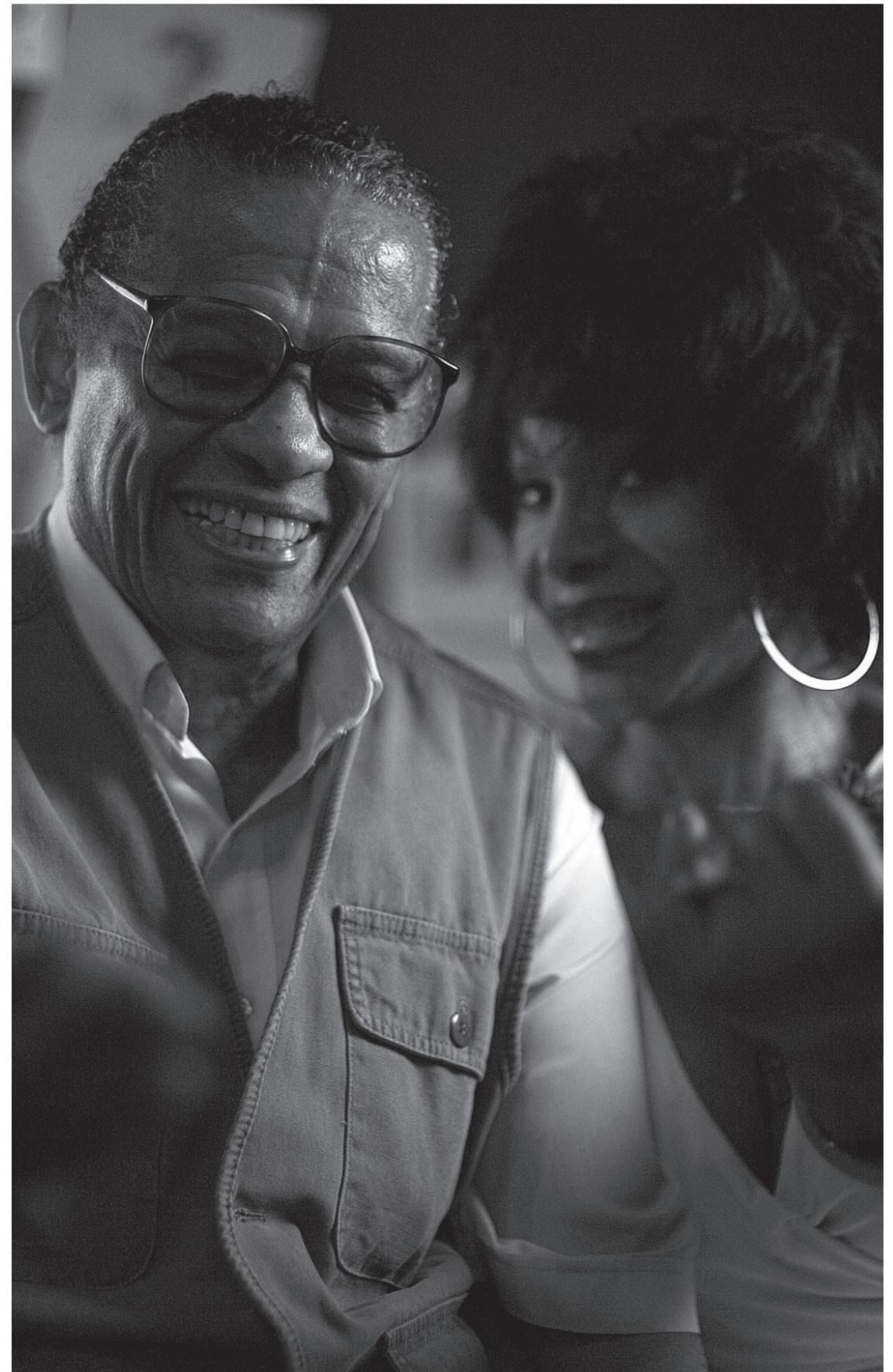
“More than lascivious, Elza is Brazilian Popular Music’s (*Música Popular Brasileira – MPB*) sensual *mulattress*. Her flirtatious singing multiplies Dorival Caymmi’s lessons taught to the Portuguese Carmen Miranda’s stylized *baiana*.⁵ The difference being that Elza was raised already swinging in her splendid carioca crib.”

“When it comes to jazz, she can be compared to Sarah Vaughan’s vocal bebop, and in Brazil she can be placed alongside the great black dames Clementina de Jesus and Carmen Costa. But any comparison seems a little bit forced, because the truth is that Elza is absolutely unique. And at the moment she still has not left behind any direct disciples.”

First published in *Elza Soares: Cantando para não enlouquecer*, 320–321 and 374–375. São Paulo: Globo, 1997.

RIGHT

Elton Medeiros and Elza Soares in *Elza* (2010).
Photograph by Jaguar Produções Artísticas

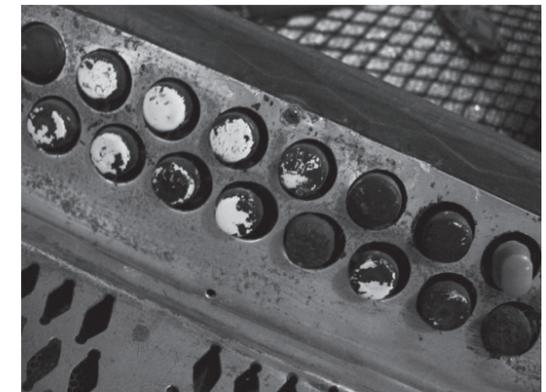


Making it visible: An interview with Sérgio Roizenblit about *The Miracle of Santa Luzia*

Albert Elduque

In his detailed account of the history of bossa nova, the journalist Ruy Castro devoted some lines to drawing a sharp opposition between the guitar and the accordion in Brazil during the 1950s. On the one hand, the guitar, popularised by João Gilberto and his rendition of “Chega de Saudade” (“No More Blues”), revealed the striking bossa nova style and incarnated the emblem of a new generation. Meanwhile, the accordion represented all that those new musicians were fighting against, and learning to play it was perceived as a kind of punishment for rebellious youngsters. Unfortunately, Castro’s opposition is quite biased and rather unfair, talking of “that hellish national fixation with the accordion,” in the same way that the American humourist Ambrose Bierce referred to it as “an instrument with the feelings of a murderer.”

Sérgio Roizenblit’s *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* (*O Milagre de Santa Luzia*, 2008), a documentary which eventually also led to a series for the Brazilian network TV Cultura (from 2012 onwards), does not deal with this duality at all, but nevertheless seems to imply it. Roizenblit’s work is precisely interested in the music that bossa nova left behind, out there in the countryside, even though it may have been influenced by it. For a year, Roizenblit and his crew travelled across Brazil with accordion player and singer Dominginhos to interview and document different performers of regional popular music, from Pernambuco to the Pantanal, from São Paulo to Rio Grande do Sul. Their production process turned into an anthropological expedition to seek out musical experiences away from the urban centres and sheltered from mass media. The project as a whole started more than ten years ago and—even after the death of Dominginhos in 2013—continues to make new recordings, showing that popular musicians may disappear, but their music, more or less transformed, remains and will always remain alive.



Source: Miração Filmes

How did *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* project begin?

Around 2002 I worked with music specialist Myriam Taubkin in the project *The Brazil of the Accordion* (*O Brasil da Sanfona*), which was part of her long-term research *Brazilian Memory* (*Memória Brasileira*). Since 1987, she has explored the cultural relevance of several instruments in Brazil, like guitars and percussion, and I have often worked with her, being in charge of the audio-visual recordings. In the case of *The Brazil of the Accordion*, I produced the DVD which was released with the book. It was made up of quite simple videos of the shows, with the addition of a narrative structure and some statements, and in spite of its plainness people did like it quite a lot. So I started to think that a new project may spring from there, and it did. For *The Miracle of Santa Luzia*, I visited accordion players from all over Brazil with the guidance of Dominginhos, the greatest performer in

the whole country, who was already in *The Brazil of the Accordion*. He knew the country very well because he never took planes and went everywhere by car, even if he was performing two thousand kilometres away. And we started to document all those musicians in different regions of Brazil. We also used a few images from *The Brazil of the Accordion*, like the interview with the poet Patativa de Assaré (who had already died when the new project came into being) reciting—by heart—a long praise to *baião* singer Luiz Gonzaga. There was, however, a crucial difference between these two projects: *The Brazil of the Accordion* was a film about the accordion which had Brazil as a background, while in *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* the accordion was in the background and the main topic was Brazil itself. We inverted that relation. The film is indeed much more about Brazil than about the accordion, because it puts aside any technical explanation about the instrument and rather strives to understand an unknown, inland country, which represents 80% of the Brazilian territory.

LEFT

Dominginhos. Source: Miração Filmes



Luiz Gonzaga. Source: newspaper *Aqui São Paulo*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

Although it is a film about Brazil, the beginning of *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* is quite focused on Luiz Gonzaga (1912–1989). Did you have the idea of making a film about him at any point?

No, we didn't. In fact, we did and we didn't. Once I read in a film review that *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* is a film about Luiz Gonzaga where Luiz Gonzaga doesn't appear, but hovers over it. For me it was clear that the trip had to start with that image of Dominginhos playing the accordion in the road between Serrita and Exú, because Luiz Gonzaga was born there, and in fact everything started with Luiz Gonzaga. Why? Because he was the first artist to present regional music for the whole of Brazil, outside of the traditions of Rio and São Paulo. As the filmmaker Marcelo Machado once told me, Gonzaga may have been Brazil's first pop artist. Indeed, before him we find only Pedro Raimundo, an accordion player from the southern state of Santa Catarina, who inspired him. Gonzaga saw this guy dressed up as a gaucho, and also decided to perform disguised in regional fashion. He chose typical northeastern clothes, similar to those of *cangaceiro* Lampião,² and that made a great impact. In the 1950s, the *sertão*³ of the North East, where Luiz Gonzaga came from, was almost unknown to the rest of Brazil, because it had been completely isolated for a long time. So just imagine: a guy bursts into the public scene from this unknown place, singing a music that nobody ever

heard, with clothes that nobody ever saw, and he becomes the biggest musical success in the country. Just imagine his power! The film is called *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* because Luiz Gonzaga was born on December 13th, the day of Saint Lucy, and because his arrival was indeed a miracle: it opened the doors to regional culture. That regional culture was eventually broadcasted only because Luiz Gonzaga existed. From that point onwards, regional musical traditions, like the *carimbo* from the Amazonia, the *chalanas* from the Pantanal and the *vanerão* from the South have been heard and admired all over the country. Everything started with him.

A curious thing about Luiz Gonzaga is that there is a feature film on him (Gonzaga: From Father to Son [Gonzaga: De Pai pra Filho, Breno Silveira, 2012]), but to my knowledge there are no documentaries. However, we find documentaries about the writers of his songs, like Humberto Teixeira (The Man Who Bottled Clouds [O Homem que Engarrafava Nuvens, Lírio Ferreira, 2009]), João Silva (Danado de Bom [Deby Brennand, 2016]) and Onildo Almeida (Onildo Almeida – Groove Man [Helder Lopes and Cláudio Bezerra, 2017]), but not about Gonzaga himself. In all of them he is present without being the main character, just as in *The Miracle of Santa Luzia*.

Indeed, I wanted to film a documentary on him to be released in 2012, coinciding with the centenary of his birth, but we couldn't put it into practice. He is so omnipresent because he influenced a lot of people, and had a lot of faces: sometimes he acted as if he was a big landowner, a coronelzão; he knew how to manipulate the media better than anybody else; he represented regional culture; and he was a crooner, like a Louis Armstrong from the North East! His songs are incredible, because they talk about everything. If you want to know who the Northeasterner is, just listen to Luiz Gonzaga. That's pure philosophy, he was like a Guimarães Rosa⁴ of popular music. People are still far from understanding the magnitude of his work.



Luiz Gonzaga. Source: newspaper *Aqui São Paulo*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo

The thesis of the film is that accordion players can be found all over Brazil, and therefore the instrument defines the national identity in a way. Does the accordion unify the country?

It does, but in a very singular way. The accordion has the particularity that it is the instrument of the party all over the country, because it brings the community together and makes a feast on its own: an accordion player is enough to start it. This happens in the Central West, in the South East, in the North East, in the South... wherever you are. But the musical and cultural particularities of these regions are preserved, they aren't contaminated or erased by the accordion: if you go to the South you'll find the *vanerão*, with rhythms from Argentina, Italy and Germany, and if you go to the North East you will hear *baião* or *forró*, with a very different tuning. In this regard, the accordion is completely different from the *viola caipira*, another very popular instrument in Brazil. *Viola caipira* is played all over the country as well, but most of the people play it with rhythms from Minas Gerais and São Paulo. The power of the instrument is much stronger than the kind of melody you are going to hear, so the music associated with the *viola caipira* is unified. Not so in the case of the accordion: the accordion takes the traditions of each place and expresses them with respect, without determining them, and creating a party. The *viola caipira* contaminates the local, while the accordion is contaminated by it.

The film goes through different places in the North East, the Pantanal, Rio Grande do Sul, Minas Gerais and São Paulo. At that last destination, it seems that it is about to end, because São Paulo is a cosmopolitan city where the tradition of the accordion can be mixed with music from anywhere in the world. However, after that chapter, the film returns to the North East to end there. Why did you decide to make this trip back?

To tell the truth, at first the trip as a concept didn't have a specific end. But when we interviewed Gabriel Levy, I changed my mind. Levy, an accordion player from São Paulo, highlighted a bridge with Arabic culture that was far older than the hybrid music that he currently plays. He said that there are some musical scales that can be found both in Arabic music and in the Brazilian music from the North East, because the isolation of this region preserved the medieval musical culture of the Iberian Peninsula, which was strongly influenced by Arabic culture. This music arrived there centuries ago and remained somehow untouched, experiencing a particular evolution. That comment by Gabriel Levy was revealing in terms of showing how things can be inter-related in an impressive and unexpected way. I found that amazing, it was obvious that we couldn't leave it aside, so I decided to close the documentary by returning to the North East. If I had finished in São Paulo, the film would have started in one place and ended in another. But in this way it didn't end in any place, it was a circle where one end meets the other. It was like the word



Gabriel Levy. Source: Miração Filmes

“nonada” (“something of little value”) in Guimarães Rosa’s book *Grande Sertão Veredas*: it is the first word and reappears in the next-to-last line; after that, the book finishes with the symbol of the infinite, creating a kind of conceptual circle. In the film I wanted to suggest a circular idea of culture, where everything is interrelated, even if we cannot understand why. Even if some people think that *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* should have finished in São Paulo, I still stand for the return to the North East. The story starts there and has to end there as well.

That change allowed you to highlight the topic of the interior immigration in Brazil, with Dominginhos remembering the trip he did with his father at the age of thirteen, leaving behind his birthplace Garanhuns, in the northeastern state of Pernambuco, to head towards Rio de Janeiro.

When the filmmaker Tata Amaral saw *The Miracle of Santa Luzia*, she told me that it was a film about diaspora, and indeed it talks about those often-discussed migration processes of our days. Luiz Gonzaga’s song “Triste Partida” (“The Sad Departure”), written by Patativa de Assaré, may be the most essential thing we have about diaspora in terms of poetry and music. When at a particular point in the film Dominginhos remembers this song and that his father never returned to the North East, you can see in his drama the drama of millions of compatriots. São Paulo is a city of migrants: most of us are sons or grandsons of

people from somewhere else and have relatives not only in other parts of Brazil, but in other parts of the world. For example, my mother is Romanian. Being moved by Dominginhos’ story is in the DNA of every Brazilian, because we are descendants of people who had to travel leaving everything behind. The Jews did it, the Northeasterners did it, the war refugees do it. For the narrative structure of the film, that became very important. At the first stages of the editing, the sequences about this topic were positioned in the beginning, in the part focused on the North East. But when Gabriel Levy told us that incredible story I felt that returning to the *sertão* was the key to closing the film. At the end, the film fulfils the desire of Dominginhos, and of many people who once left their homes, because it goes back. Many Brazilians felt it represented them, and many have thanked me enthusiastically for this.

There are many Brazilian films that talk about the reality of the nation, and where people may feel recognised. Why do you think your film had this special effect?

Because it constitutes a rescue for the Brazilians. Here in Brazil we have the tradition of talking only about the misfortunes. Just think for a moment. While we have films with great characters, there is no film that affirms “what a great country it is.” Can you think of any one that says this? And if you go anywhere else in the world, you find dozens of movies which show the greatness of the national culture. In the editing stage, I told my associate Tatiana: “Tatiana, I don’t care whether the audience likes the film or not. What I’d like is that after watching it people say: ‘Wow, Brazil is great! My country is great!’” Indeed, I can’t reconcile myself with the fact that here everything is built to destroy self-love and pride. It seems that we are the characters of the human tragedy, but we are not. Corruption and inequality are present all over the world; maybe here we have more than in other parts, but they are not exclusively Brazilian flaws. According to the Paraíba writer Ariano Suassuna, there are two Brazils: the official Brazil and the real Brazil. The Brazil of speeches and of corruption, the one you see in the TV, is the official Brazil. But there is also a real Brazil, made up of happy, honest, hard-working people; people that may be poor, may be almost illiterate, and may ignore what happens outside of the country, but nevertheless they meet together, fraternize, enjoy their lives. And if you meet them you will be welcomed, regardless of who you are and where you come from. *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* talks about this Brazil, which is concealed and which we don’t see. Some people complained to



Dominginhos and Renato Borghetti. Source: Miração Filmes

me: “Don’t you think you are showing an overly nice Brazil?” And I said: “Well, when Fernando Meirelles did *City of God* (*Cidade de Deus*, 2002) nobody criticised him for depicting it as being too ugly, and everyone thought that it was an important film because it was a portrait of Brazil.” I’m sorry, but it is not a portrait of Brazil. The film may be amazing as a story, but it neither represents Brazil nor the neighbourhood of *Cidade de Deus*. It represents just a face of *Cidade de Deus*.

You continued working with that invisible world in a TV programme also called *The Miracle of Santa Luzia*. How was that new project born?

When the film was ready, some friends sent a DVD to Juca Ferreira, who at that time was the Minister of Culture. He watched the film and loved it, and one day I received a call from the ministry. “Your film is marvellous, beautiful, and I’m calling to thank you,” he said. “People have to see your film. If you have an idea, you can count on me.” Sometime later, in a trip to Rondônia, I made a stopover in Brasília and presented him my proposal: “I have an idea. My film is one hour and forty minutes long, but I had filmed 120 hours of material. It is obvious that the accordion in Brazil is a topic that deserves more than just one

feature-length documentary. Why don’t we make a TV programme?” This way, the 30-minute episodes would allow us to make a better use of the recorded material, and calling Dominginhos to be our guide again would help him financially. So the Ministry of Culture gave us money and we made 52 programmes about 52 accordion players. The series became one of the five biggest successes in TV Cultura, so you may get an idea of the longing people have for traditional, regional culture. It was so successful that we made 52 more programmes, focusing not only on accordionists, but also on other musicians from different traditions. Now, I’m going to make *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* with 13 female artists. So the project has ended up being a research endeavour about Brazilian traditional music, with an archive that now will increase up to almost 120 registered musicians.



Genaro. Source: Miração Filmes

It is a precious archive indeed, as it includes not only their music but also their images.

In fact, some of these musicians never recorded a disc in their lives, and many of them are already dead. There are cases in which *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* is the only public memory of their art, a memory that is saved now. I consider video the best tool we have to record information, because the fact of seeing the person is not comparable to anything else. In addition, although we haven't launched any CDs, from the second TV season of *The Miracle of Santa Luzia* we have recorded the performances with CD quality. I'd like to use all this material in a different way in the future, maybe removing the interviews and keeping just the music, and working with social networks. In fact, right now it came to my mind that I could create a radio network, *The Miracle of Santa Luzia Radio*. I had never thought about it, but it may work, because I already have an enormous archive, with 104 musicians and around 500 songs.

This huge project shows that the real Brazil you talked about before is very real indeed. But will this Brazil exist for a long time?

No, it will come to an end, just as Europe did. Both Europe and the United States became culturally sterile, and the whole world will, even Africa. As long as the oral tradition resists the power of the written word, these differences will be preserved. Once the written word becomes the standard, everything will be over. A book from the Ministry of Education will tell everyone what the world is, and that's all. Not by chance, the Europeans that come to Brazil are impressed by this amazing diversity that doesn't exist there anymore. Of course, to praise this diversity is not without problems: as urban, cosmopolitan people, we would like the people from rural areas to remain as they are, with their genuine and singular traditions, and this is quite unfair, because we are globalized, and it is okay for us to be like this. We cannot tell the others how they should be, or be nostalgic about a life that we already left behind. Apart from that, it is difficult to make exact predictions. Everyone thought that globalization would be the ultimate form of cultural sterilization, however it has created the relevance of what is called "world music," as well as the proliferation of alternative cultural channels

on the net. For example, the accordionist Luizinho Calixto has recently resurrected the sanfona de oito baixos (eight-bass accordion), and a lot of performers of this instrument are appearing here and there. But at the same time there are striking mixtures, like the current fashion in Rio Grande do Sul, in southern Brazil: the so-called Tchê Music takes its name from Axé Music, from the North East, but changing to "tchê," which is a gaucho expression to say "you." And altogether with this regionalism, the word

"music" is used in English! Without being nostalgic or praising for an artificial preservation, I think that the world depicted in the film will be over, you can be sure. But the human being will find new ways to continue popular traditions, because one needs this genuine culture to understand oneself, to be more than an amorphous piece of flesh. In short, to feel alive.

Interview held in São Paulo on 6th July, 2017.

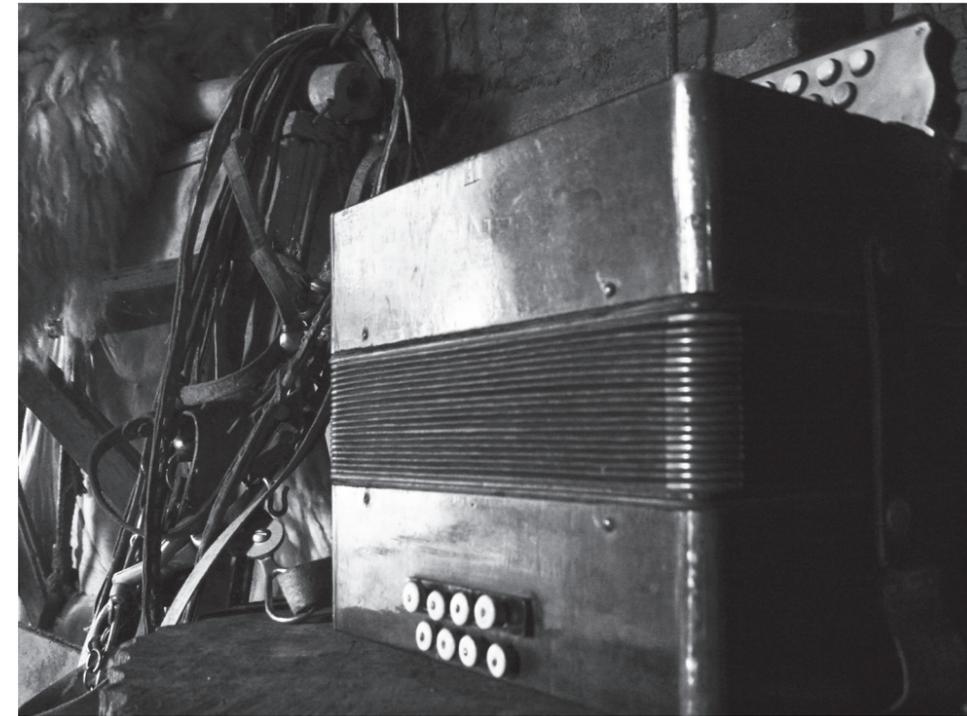
1. Ruy Castro, *Chega de saudade: A história e as histórias da Bossa Nova* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1990), 197–198. Translation by the author.

2. The *cangaceiros* were social bandits of the Brazilian North East which existed from the eighteenth century,

although they became more important in the period 1870–1940, with names like Vigulino Ferreira da Silva, known as Lampião (1898–1938). *Cangaceiros* were the product of social injustice and would fight against authorities and landowners.

3. Brazilian inland, rural territory.

4. Brazilian diplomat and writer (1908–1967). His most important work is the novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (1956), translated into English with the name *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*.



Source: Miração Filmes

NEXT SPREAD

Gal Costa and Dominginhos

Source: newspaper *Movimento*. Arquivo Público do Estado de São Paulo



Biographies

Joaquim Alves de Aguiar (1953–2016) was Professor of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature in the School of Philosophy, Literature and Human Sciences in the Universidade de São Paulo. He wrote extensively on literature and popular music, and was the author of *A poesia da canção: Lirismo e história nas letras da MPB* (Scipione, 1993), *Espaços da memória: Um estudo sobre Pedro Nava* (EDUSP, 1998) and the section devoted to Elis Regina in *Leniza & Elis* (Ateliê, 2002), co-authored with Ariovaldo José Vidal.

María Campaña Ramia is a journalist and documentary filmmaker. She was the artistic director of the International Documentary Film Festival Encuentros del Otro Cine – EDOC (Quito) and currently serves as programmer at the Ambulante Documentary Film Festival (Mexico). She has been an invited curator for the Instituto Moreira Salles (Rio de Janeiro). She has written film criticism for different media and is the co-editor, together with Cláudia Mesquita, of the book *El otro cine de Eduardo Coutinho* (Corporación Cinememoria / EDOC, 2012). She has directed the documentaries *Mi abuelo, mi héroe* (2004) and *Derivadas* (2015).

Augusto de Campos is a poet, translator and literary and music critic. Together with his brother Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari, he was one of the founders of the magazine *Noigandres* (1952–1962) and the Concrete Poetry movement in Brazil. Most of his visual poems were assembled in *Viva Vaia* (Duas Cidades, 1979), *Despoesia* (Perspectiva, 1994), *Não* (Perspectiva, 2003) and *Outro* (Perspectiva, 2015), and since 1980 he has intensified his experiments with new media, presenting his poems on electric billboard, videotext, neon, hologram and laser, computer graphics, and multimedia events. He has translated works by Pound, Joyce, Stein, Cummings and Mayakovsky. He has received the Pablo Neruda Ibero-American Award for Poetry (2015) and the Janus Pannonius Grand Prize for Poetry (2017).

Paulo da Costa e Silva is Lecturer of Aesthetics in the Department of Fine Arts at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. He was coordinator of the Rádio Batuta in the Instituto Moreira Salles, where he directed radio documentaries on João Gilberto and Jorge Ben. A music critic in the magazine *Piauí*, he is the author of *A tábua de esmeralda e a pequena renascença de Jorge Ben* (Cobogó, 2014).

Albert Elduque is a postdoctoral researcher on the InterMedia Project at the University of Reading. He obtained his PhD from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) in 2014, with a thesis focused on filmmakers Pier Paolo Pasolini, Marco Ferreri and Glauber Rocha among others from a comparative perspective. He is co-editor of the journal *Cinema Comparat/ive Cinema*, published by the Universitat Pompeu Fabra. His current research focuses on contemporary Brazilian films about music, including fiction and documentary genres.

Tom Jobim (1927–1994) was a composer and singer. He was one of the fathers of bossa nova and the one who contributed most to its internationalisation. In partnership with songwriters like Vinicius de Moares and Newton Mendonça, he was the composer of some of the most important songs of the movement, such as “Chega de Saudade,” “Garota de Ipanema” and “Desafinado.” Other important works were the music for the theatre play *Orfeu da Conceição* (1956) and *Sinfonia da Alvorada* (1960), a suite for the opening ceremony of Brasília, both of which were in collaboration with Vinicius de Moares.

José Louzeiro is a journalist, writer and screenwriter. Since the early 1950s he worked for different newspapers in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, such as *Diário Carioca*, *Última Hora* and *Correio da Manhã*, and became known as a crime reporter. He is the author of 40 books and is considered to have introduced the non-fiction novel in Brazil, with works such as *Lúcio Flávio, o passageiro da agonia* (Record, 1975), *Aracelli, meu amor* (Record, 1976) and *Infância dos mortos* (Record, 1977). He has also been the screenwriter of ten films, including adaptations of his own works, such as *Pixote: A Lei do Mais Fraco* (Héctor Babenco, 1981).

Lenin Novaes is a journalist and producer of cultural events. He created and promoted the contest “Poesia para Jornalistas” and is one of the coordinators of the Rio Festival of *Choro*, organised by the Museum of Image and Sound in Rio de Janeiro. He is a press consultant for the Centre of Health Sciences at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro and adviser for the Brazilian Press Association. He co-authored, together with José Louzeiro, the biography *Elza Soares: Cantando para não enlouquecer* (1997).

Lisa Purse is Associate Professor of Film in the Department of Film, Theatre & Television at the University of Reading. She is the author of *Digital Imaging in Popular Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and *Contemporary Action Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), and co-editor of *Disappearing War: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Cinema and Erasure in the Post-9/11 World* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017). She has published widely on genre cinema, digital aesthetics, and the relationships between film style and the politics of representation in mainstream cinema.

Nuno Ramos is a visual artist, writer, filmmaker and composer. His works combine engraving, painting, photography, installation, poetry and video, and have been regularly exhibited in Brazil and abroad; standing out the Venice Biennale in 1995, where he was the representative of the Brazilian pavilion, and the São Paulo Biennale in 1985, 1989, 1994 and 2010. As a writer, he has published *Cujo* (Editora 34, 1993), *O pão do corvo* (Editora 34, 2001), *Ensaio geral* (Globo, 2007), *Ó* (Iluminuras, 2008), *O mau vidraceiro* (Globo, 2010), *Sermões* (Iluminuras, 2015) and *Adeus, cavalo* (Iluminuras, 2017). Among other recognitions, in 2006 he received the Grant Award from the Barnett and Annalee Newman Foundation for his entire career.

Cristiane da Silveira Lima is a Lecturer in Communication and Multimedia at the Universidade Estadual de Maringá (UEM). In 2015 she received a PhD in Social Communication from the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais with the dissertation *Música em cena: à escuta do documentário brasileiro*, which focused on the Brazilian music documentary. From 2016 to 2017 she was the coordinator of the Seminar of Theory and Aesthetics of Sound in Audiovisual within the Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos de Cinema e Audiovisual (Socine).

Luiz Tatit is a musician, linguist and Professor at the School of Philosophy, Literature and Human Sciences in the Universidade de São Paulo. He has carried out an extensive research on semiotics and Brazilian popular song, which includes, among other books, *Semiótica da canção. Melodia e letra* (Escuta, 1994), *O cancionista: Composição de canções no Brasil* (EDUSP, 1996) and *O século da canção* (Atelier, 2004). He was one of the founders of the Grupo Rumo (1974–1991), an avant-garde music band in São Paulo, and since 1997 has released five discs as a solo artist.

Caetano Veloso is a composer and singer. His career spans for more than fifty years and is a landmark in the history of Brazilian music. He was one of the main ideologues of tropicalism, launched with the compilation LP-manifesto *Tropicália ou Panis et Circencis* in 1968. His work is influenced by Brazilian music traditions, foreign styles, popular culture and avant-garde movements such as Concrete Poetry. His career also includes soundtracks and the short-lived band Doces Bárbaros (1976), together with Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa and Maria Bethânia. In 1997 he published his memoir *Verdade Tropical* (Companhia das Letras), translated into English as *Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil* (Bloomsbury, 2003).

Contemporary Brazilian Music Film

Edited by

Albert Elduque

Texts by

Joaquim Alves de Aguiar, María Campaña Ramia, Augusto de Campos, Paulo da Costa e Silva, Albert Elduque, Tom Jobim, José Louzeiro, Lenin Novaes, Lisa Purse, Nuno Ramos, Cristiane da Silveira Lima, Luiz Tatit, Caetano Veloso.

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Cartola – Music for the Eyes (2007).
Photograph by Cafi. Source: Raccord

