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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Contemporary Brazilian Music Film

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This season and catalogue are the result of the AHRC-FAPESP-funded research project “Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediaity as a Historiographic Method” (“IntermIdiá”), 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 chancha das 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 Canaquinha (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 Wernneck, 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 Zéatê di Camargo & Luciano, attracted 5,319,677 spectators, while the latter, focused on the life of rock singer Caruza, reached the figure of 5,082,522. 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); Sonhos Tão Jovens (Antonio Carlos da Fontoura, 2013), on rock singer Renato Russo’s early career; Tim Maia (Mauro Lima, 2014); and Eli (Hugo Prata, 2016). The trend shows no signs of abating, with biopics on chorinho 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: 23 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. 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 277,979 admissions.

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. 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.

In an interview for this catalogue, Hernani Heffner (chief curator of the Cinemateca of the Museu de
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 some important historical reasons. He claims that the inclusion is intended to bridge past and contemporary scenes. 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 cont a 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.7

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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 1920s, both of whom travelled to rural regions to compile popular songs. 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, 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 Excurrel, 2015), *Dancado de Bom* (Deby Brennand, 2016) and *Me, My Father and the Carsicas* (Bia, Men Pat e Os Cariscas, 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 brought to cinemas. In the interview with Mário Derrail 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, Dominguinhos and Bezerra da Silva work as media- tors between popular music and mass media, leading the film crew through the world that is portrayed onscreen.8 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 *Cantores* – *Music for the Eyes* (Cantores – 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.”

As suggested by its title, Chico – Brazilian Artist characterises Chico Buarque as an icon of brasileirismo. The two songs that bookend the film suggest that the documentary should be considered in terms of identity. The first song, “Sinha” (“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.00 The second one, “Para o Amor de 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.

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: Não Conhece Tudo 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, 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 entailed 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. 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’n’alias, 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 rethink- ing 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,
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.” 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 Domingoinhos and Bezerra da Silva), or as cultural icons that crystallize 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 (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 problematic in 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 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. “The nine versions of “Carôta 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 Emílio Salles Gomes and by the Cinema Novo movement. In her text on Títãs - 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 Calli and Renato Terra, 2010), a documentary that focuses on the 1st 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 Purse, 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, the images represent “a score” and the whole dispositif was called “the caverns 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 track.

This “score” that triggers “memory” in the “cavern” establishes a contrast between yesterday and today, which only becomes greater when Gilberto Gil 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 a specificity of images that had 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’s interview with Hernani Heffner, Márcia Derraik and Sérgio Roizenblit, sit alongside replications 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 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 Silva Lima’s essay on Songs and Lisa Purse’s on Títãs - 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 Títãs within the mass media landscape. Similarly, Eduardo Coutinho on Songs (authored by Maria Campanha 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 essays by Lima and Purse provide 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 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 “Pedacinho 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 chord, da Costa e Silva links bossa nova, particularly Tom Jobim’s works, with pictorial...
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 prioritizing 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 Veloso himself, in Caetano Veloso, reminded him of the hand-held filming of Jean-Luc Godard. And Veloso’s own 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 our 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.

2. The list of documentaries can be found in Consuelo Lima and Cláudia Mesquita, Filmes ao redor do documentário brasileiro contemporâneo (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2018), 85–86.
4. See, for example, Márcia Carvalho, “A canção popular na história do cinema brasileiro” (Phd diss, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2015).
7. A significant reflection on the relationship between Villa-Lobos and popular music can be found in Hermínio Belo de Carvalho, O canto do pajé: Villa-Lobos e a Música Popular Brasileira (Rio de Janeiro: Espaço e Tempo, Metal Leve, 1998). Regarding Mário de Andrade’s trips, see Mário de Andrade, O turista, comp. by Telê Porto Antuna Lopes (São Paulo: Duas Cidades Secretaria da Cultura, Ciência e Tecnologia, 1997).
8. For Humberto Mauro’s works on music, see Ireneu Guerin Jr., “Apontamentos para um estudo da música nos filmes de Humberto Mauro,” Revista da Festa Internacional de Cinema e de Arte (9, no. 7 (October 2010): 40–47.
9. An important precedent of this is samba composer Tá Keti, whose life inspired Bis, Norberto Zona, and who had already worked in Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s dispute Rio 100 Degrees F. (Rio: 40 Graus, 1995) as an actor, a member of the crew and with his successful song “A Voz do Morro” (“The Voice from the Hill”).
11. Heise, 255.
17. Another relevant example, albeit not included in the season, is the number of versions of the song “O Óleo Branca” (“White Wing”), by Luiz Gonzaga and Humberto Tenório, included in the documentary The Man Who Bottled Clouds (O Homem que Engarrafava Núvens, Lírio Ferreira, 2000).
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 Hê! Hê! Carnaval! (All! All! Carnival!, Adhemar Gonzaga, 1936), with Carmen Miranda. In one of the copies of Hê! Hê! 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, 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, 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 Resende, 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.
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 Juvenil Guarda or tropicalism. In the 2000s, some films about the 1980s and 90s appeared, focusing on singers and bands like Caruza or Paralamas do Sucesso. On the one hand, this had a natural reason: at a certain point, the topic of the 1990s and 2000s 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 – Ningum Sabe o Durro 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 Río: Brasileirinho (Brasileirinho – Grandes Encontros do Choro, 2005) or Mika Tambellini with This Is Brasil (Tudo É Brasil, 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.

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 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, 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 spokespersons 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 Simó and Noel Rosa. That 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 de Moraes, a biographical and historical study of his ideas and works (Vinicius de Moraes, Lírio Ferreira and Hilton Lacerda, 2007), The House of Tom (A Casa do Tom: Mundo, Monde, Monde, Ana Jobim, 2009) and Wandering Heart (Coração Vagabundo, Walter Carvalho and Sandra Werneck, 2004), Two Sons of Francisco (Dois Filhos de Francisco, Walter Carvalho and Sandra Werneck, 2005) or Gonzaga: From Father to Son (Gonzaga – De Pai Pra Filho, Breno Silva, 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 conspicuous 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 contemporary styles don’t fit in that pantheon, and if you consider heavy metal, soul music or manguinhos, the formula doesn’t work. They cannot be consid- ered 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. Tamburgelli’s Tim Maia (1997), one of the best short music films of the 1990s, which basically consists of him singing and talking in a car in Rio, from Leme to Pontal! And that’s it!

**Vivien (2005)**

The documentary 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—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. Why? It’s all true. 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 such 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
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that moment of Brazilian popular music. However, there is something deeply, did we find elsewhere. It seems to confirm the excellence of the moment in 1967, presenting the performances of the winners in the Festival of TV Record in Brazil. Tropicalism and MPB are revisiting a specific time in the past: the origins of this genre. On the surface, it makes the traditional move of placing the past into a context of dialog with them, while recognising in them the precedents. These interviews are not 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 moment, 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 mythicise it or to confirm the official version, but to establish a critical dialectic between past and present.

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. 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 will 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.

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: Cartula: Music for the Eyes, co-directed with Hilton Lacerda, and The Man Who Bottled Clouds (O Homem que Engarrafava Núvens, 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 ‘baba reflects’ 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 northern music was created in Rio turns everything upside down. And using archival images from 1970s 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.

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 Anzulay’s Os Dois Bússaros (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 Gauchet, 2005), you will see that 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, marisa torga or the lvواز 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?

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

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 1993 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 1970s 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: beansalad and the rise of the music documentary,” in Screen


6. Brazilian music genre originated 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 accordão, the triangle and the bass drum, and its lyrics deal with the life of the poor people from that region.
Artless singing in Eduardo Coutinho’s documentary
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. 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 concert 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.

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 Fic, Marília Rocha, 2000), in which a young woman sings “Cena de Filme” (“Film Scene”), a romantic song that was a hit. In I’ll Raffl Off My Heart (Vou Rifar meu Coração, Ana Rieper, 2012), some people sing and talk about their relationship to brega. In News From a Personal War (Notícias de uma Guerra Particular, João Moreira Sales, 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), 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 that is, a mechanism that structured the film’s mise-en-scene 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. 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), bringing 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
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.”

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 of 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 memory and which is presented on stage in a theatrical or musical way.

On the song’s edge
Déa, in the second interview, talks about a talent 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 moves rhythmically. 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.” The film is also frugal when it comes to sound: empty 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 cappella, 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.

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. Lidia, 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.”

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.”

“Melodramatic narratives, tears demarcate a place of deep communication with the public, within a sensorial and sentimental sphere.” 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.” Shows that focused on audience zeal, on a noisy, granted popular acclaim, that could not be contained by the narrative”.

As the author explains, melodramatic narrative is interesting in engaging the public, rather than in its mere identification or adhesion (melodrama even allows for ambiguities, but never for dissociation, as it 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. It establishes an atmosphere of complicity between characters and the director/crew that favours the subjects’ involvement in an act of self-performed guidance 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 Comoll 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. 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
someone in the crew suggests “happily,” he deliber-
ately 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 Vola do Boêmio”
[“The Bohemian’s Return”]), that lends an air of
consistency to his previous account.
Aparecida is invaded by music and in which a part of the perfor-
mounting the interview’s performative dimension, while
that summon memories and narratives and empha-
sizes the interview’s performative dimension, while
giving us “access to each of the interviewee’s self-
built image.”

We also emphasize “artless singing” scenes devoid
of a corresponding story, lacking any clue as to the
song’s backstory. This occurs withilton, José and
Fátima, who are only shown singing. Fátima had
already been showcased in Babilônia 2000, a docu-
mental in which she takes the crew to the Morro da
Babilônia shanty town, where she sings a Janis Joplin
song. But in Sing, even after conceding the director
a long interview, she only appears singing “I’ve Got a
Feeling…” (“Fateness”), 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 interrupt-
ing 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 or her own auto-mise-en-
sène — 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.”

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
a place in the film. In situations such as these the
viewer does not have enough information to con-
textualize 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

Singing proceeds from Coutinho’s method of creating
situations in which the interview — or conversa-
tion — 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 Ismael Xavier’s
words:

“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.”

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
a place in the film. In situations such as these the
viewer does not have enough information to con-
textualize 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

Singing proceeds from Coutinho’s method of creating
situations in which the interview — or conversa-
tion — 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 Ismael 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 cinematic apparatus,
which looks and listens.”

Xavier talks about the interviewee’s agony (in
terms of competition, of a challenge) when coming
close to the camera-eff ect. When confronted with the tearful catharsis,
Xavier also prompts us to remember the cele-
brated sequence in Master, a Building in Copacabana
in which Coutinho interviews Henriques, a solitary,
retired character who lives in the building the film is
named after, and who had a surprising chance meet-
ning with Frank Sinatra. At the end of the sequence
Henriques sings “My Way,” which tells his life story.
The recorded song begins to play out and he begins
singing and reading the lyrics on a sheet of paper.
His performance begins discreetly, but grows in inten-
sity 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, Henriques sings with greater energy, reach-
ing 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
expression: its high point. Everything culmi-
nates 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 perfor-
manace overflows:

Mr. Henriques 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 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 modulat-
ing the gaze’s invasiveness). And it demands of
Mr. Henriques that he lives out his catharsis like
an actor who ignores the camera, selecting the
filmmaker as mediator (he looks at him and talks
to him).
In Master, a Building in Copacabana the artless singing occurs during specific times (all in there are six moments) that are fundamental to the narra-
tive under construction. If we take duration into account—singing so dear to music and docu-
mentary 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 it oscillates between acting as a dispositif for the controllable (the role of the game is clear: everyone has a song) and the uncontrollable (something singular can emerge from there). Because it appears again and again, and the impression is that Songs narrative temporality is flatter, more horizontal, devoid of climaxes (it oscillates between more and less intense moments, without great ruptures).

Let us recall how artless singing appears in Bac de Lico, 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 (42 km from Rio Film Theaters). In the film there are one-off singing sequences, which are enormously expressive. Among the various workers who make a living from singing sequences, which are enormously expressive. Among the various workers who make a living from the dump, Coutinho interviews Cicera, 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 family photo. One more cut. The woman is now in a desolate situation. The act of singing serves as a break, 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 Rouhi’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.

In Bac de Lico, 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.”

In Songs, singing also takes on a reassuring role, but everything happens in a slightly simpler way than in Bac de Lico, 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. Ozio, 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 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, Silvia 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 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 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 we 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.

Final considerations

Many other factors can be determined from an analy-
sis of Songs (such as, for example, the deliberate deci-
sion 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 understand-
ing 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 somehow visit the artless singing? Why in the final credits)? Why does Songs contain not only a “performance truth” (which would achieve greater legitimacy or authen-
ticity, 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; whether the are songs that highlighted his or her own voice, 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.


What we can conclude is that singing is not a mere accessory or one-off element in the film. It is a central ele-
ment 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 criti-
cally) within the scene and the language of film. In Songs, the “artless singing?” 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 his or her own voice, in order to confront a double agency: 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 authen-
ticity, 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; whether the are songs that highlighted his or her own voice, 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.

Contemporary Brazilian Music Film processes, emphasizes that the film on the agency of its subjectification.

Sung de cena: ensaios sobre o documentário


1. This text is a reduced version of one of the chapters from the doctoral thesis Música em cena: à escuta do documentário brasileiro” (2015), in the Graduate Programme in Communications at the Universidad Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG). In it, we explore 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.


4. Brazilian genre of sentimental music, whose most important singer was Ney de Feraudy, whose Elis Regina’s version is extremely well-known.


6. Such vocal imperfections are a trait that can be associated with the grotesque, the fantastic and even the erotic. Moreover, not every manifestation of intimacy takes on a melodramatic register. This intimate pact should be obvious and reiterated throughout the film, if anything to legitimize this same narrative. Balter uses the example of Nelson Freire (2012) by João Moreira Sales for her, there is shared intimacy in this film between the subject and the core, but it is not channelled into melodrama.

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 told, they know perfectly well how to do it. And they ask themselves, when a doubt occurs, or a slight panic, why don’t the other person say anything? Anything? So it’s my turn? “Jean Louis Comolli, Ver e Poder – A insistência no poder da cena. Cinema, televisão, feitícia, documentário, ed. César Guimarães and Ruben Caieta, trans. Augustin de Tugny, Oswaldo Teixeira and Rubens Canha (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2006), 56.


9. Fernado do Nascimento Gaúchela, 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 beginnings of what is remembered and which, once transformed into being history and being-song, becomes the film’s own expressive substance.” Fernado do Nascimento Gaúchela, “As canções: fabricação e ética da imersão em Eduardo Coutinho,” Revista Interface (São Paulo) 39. no. 38 (2012): 149.

10. In addition to Dílo, 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 performatividad do documentário brasileiro contemporâneo,” (paper, XX Encontro Anual da Compós, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador da Bahia, June 2015).

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

13. According to the director, this was the only “trick” perpetrated by the film, because this is not Fétria’s most important song of her life. Coutinho, “Eu sou uma vida,” interview by Nína Raha, Revista Cult (December 2011).


15. According to the director, this was the only “trick” perpetrated by the film, because this is not Fétria’s most important song of her life. Coutinho, “Eu sou uma vida,” interview by Nína Raha.


19. According to the director, this was the only “trick” perpetrated by the film, because this is not Fétria’s most important song of her life. Coutinho, “Eu sou uma vida,” interview by Nína Raha.

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 were you 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 Nína Raha, Revista Cult (December 2011).


22. According to the director, this was the only “trick” perpetrated by the film, because this is not Fétria’s most important song of her life. Coutinho, “Eu sou uma vida,” interview by Nína Raha.


25. At least two other films that use this disposit can be cited as examples: 25a (Avi Mograbi, 2008) and Au chic resto (Jabbar Rahim, 1990). Both are briefly commented on in our thesis, at the end of the chapter on artless singing.

26. Written by Chiquinho and M. de Feraudy, whose Elis Regina’s version is extremely well-known.


30. Gorbman, “Artless Singing,” 162. The author’s wording resembles Gilles Delaney and Félix Guattari’s formulation at the very beginning of the plateau “On the Ritornello”: “A child in the dark, gripped with fear, commits himself by singing under his breath. He walks and halts to his song, lost, he takes shelter, or orient 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 of the heart in chaos. Perhaps the child skips as he sings, bounces 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 somnolence in Artade’s thread. Or the song of Orpheus: “Gilles Delaney and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minnepolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 31.

Interview with Eduardo Coutinho

Maria 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 músicasertanha, in Bocas de Lívro (1992), or Mr. Henriques 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 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 are there, 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 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.

[…]


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.
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 Ataulfo Alves? Herivelto Martins? Was not that Wilson Batista? Monsueto? Or Manacés? 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-pouri, 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, rhythms 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. Of course there have always been exceptions to this rule—authors whose singularity jumps out: Noel, for example, possibly because of the lyrics’ amazing originality, or Beija, due to the archetypical 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 tediosity 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 1950s), within reach of those that came after bossa nova, allotted due credit to every one. 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
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 carnavalesque marching tune, and for whatever situation a newamba 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 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 carnavalesque marching tune, and for whatever situation a newamba 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.

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Contemporary Brazilian Music Film

...accumulated experience here, which occasions 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 contingency 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 contentions 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 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 mechanic (an almost machine-like division of syllables), combining an absolutely singular anaphora 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. The chorus, as a negation of poverty. The chorus is the opposite of what the song is about; its mere existence serves 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 the Greek tragedy, the chorus in Nelson Cavaquinho’s merge 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 the way that Nelson Rodrigues is modern Brazilian theatre’s father. This is not about a tension between modern form and archaic content. 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 newness 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 up to the world, although is one 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, lá, lá, lá, láália láália láália…” (“And that’s why I sing like this: lá, lá, lá, lá, láália láália…” [“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. Manchester, 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”), the chorus manifest as people, real life, spread out around the place. Singing thus turns the crowd 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, the fact is that listening to him singing is often a scratchy, almost disagreeable experience. His “prepared,” per cussive guitar with its notes that beat more than they...
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 anxiouslyness 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. 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
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, cabeciolav 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 logic. 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 bem longe / Não precisa se preocupar / Só voltarei singing alone (“Vou partir / Não sei se voltarei / Tu bem longe / Não precisa se preocupar / Só voltarei volver / A nossa samba,” in Osvaldo Goeldi (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Cultural “The Axis, 2002). 6. Friedrich Schiller, “Acero do uso do corno na tragédia,” in Teoria da tragédia (São Paulo: EPU, 1992). 7. Iris, 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). 8. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Mítos e tragédia na Grécia antiga (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1999), 2–3 and 12–15. 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 desmauada,” in Ensaio geral, 51–64. 9. See Lorenzo Mammì, “João Gilberto e o projeto utópico da bossa nova,” Novos Estudos (Cebrap, São Paulo), no. 34 (November 1992). 10. Ella 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 artifacts 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 cabocli is a person of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. (Translator’s Note)
The luminous chords

Paulo da Costa e Silva

The crispness of the blue day; the positiveness 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 Mammì 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
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—Serra—said 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 indolent 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 stigma of underdevelopment has, at some point in the late 1950s, embarked on dialogue on equal terms with the very best foreign 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, Theresa 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 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 poetry 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 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, the 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
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 compositions, especially his 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 hallowed 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 we 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...
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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 motif cohesive.

If you jot down on a piece of paper the drawing 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 samba-canção, 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 fundamenta—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.
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 Mammì—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.”

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, emulating 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 revel 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” (“Dragnet”) 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 “Eliscopter” and “Regina-propeller”), as if she were rowing with the song’s own fishermen: “Eh, tem jangada no mar / El, 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 over-dramatized 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,
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, 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 1960s, and under certain circumstances, careers were open to talent. 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 Eli’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 has been on the air for almost forty years? 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 Eli’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 consciousesses—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 rottenness. 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 Suely Costa and Vítor Martins, there is a passage that says: “O mesu 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 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. 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 Bossaudade, presented by Eliete 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 o Linha” (“Let it Out”). Eliete 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 Contrawhile”), “O Calhumbeque” (“The Jalopy”)

No Quero Ver Você Triste” (“I Don’t Want to See
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 Eliete, 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. Droves 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.


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 “Aguas de Março” (“Waters of March”), famous for the rendition by Tom Jobim and Elis Regina. (Translator’s Note)

2. Original: “eliscóptero”, “hélice-Re- gina”. (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 impertinence.

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 [Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1984], 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, 366–367). Ten years later they recorded a famous LP in terms of Elis’s career: Elis & Tom.
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
Contemporary Brazilian Music Film

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 Baldan, 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

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

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(Titãs – A Vida Até Parece uma Festa)
Oscar Rodrigues Alves & Branco Mello, 2008
Wednesday 7 March, 7.45pm
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 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 / Ói girando e a rosa – é vermelha / Ói, girando, girando – Olha a faca / Olha o sangue no máo – é José / Juliana no chão – é José / Outro corpo caído – é José / Seu amigo João – é 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...”)
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 sonorities amplify the acoustic horizons of the

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:

“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,”

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—guerrilla, 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, graphic arts, typography. The duodecaphonic 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 “nation-aliens” 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, and only saw in bossanova 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 Délio Pignatari, Damiano Cozzella, Rogério Duprat, and Sandino Hohagen. Let our music go. Without shackles and without prejudices. Without a handkerchief and without papers.


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1. Repetition in the original. (Editor’s Note)
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 disenchanted, 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, poet and singer who upsets tyrants and brings happiness to so, so many...

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

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 Piu, Lee jeans, stuffed with reason
Papaya, Jarcandá, Surubim
Not Solitary Tinamou, Pierrot and Harlequin
You are so many things that they don't fit here
Innovative, preserver, reincarnated, rejuvenated Language Master

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

1. In English in the original. (Translator’s Note)
2. It refers to Rosa de Peres (1945), a poetry book by Brazilian writer Carlos Drummond de Andrade. (Translator’s Note)
3. Player of arestas, 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 “Vasa 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. (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's diction

Luiz Tuffit

To talk about progress, regression or political engagement in Chico Buarque’s work is to insist on the superficies. 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, liberry, 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. 127). 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 melodico 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 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 sesitura 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 “Luzia,” 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 makes him so unique in the general panorama of Brazilian music is his capacity to incorporate within these contours a vast continuity 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
All the actions described by Chico leave a passionate trace that, backed by melodic tensions, delves deep into any listener’s spirit. “Vai Passar,” “Quando o Carnaval Chegar” or “Apeas de Vôcê” 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 *kitch*, but which, in the condensed and melodic form of the song, sound sublime (take “Atrás da Porta” as an example).

Theatrical 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 combinations turned to iconization of the telephone (“On the Phone”), “O Que É Que a Baiana Tem?” (“What Does the Woman from Bahia Have?”), “Bim Bomb,” “Batmacumba,” etc…, and others more prone to narrativity (“Quando o Samba Acabou” (“When Samba Ended”), “Três Lugares” (“Three Places”), “No Dia em Que Eu Vim-Me Embora” (“The Day I Left”), “Teresinha,” etc…).
Until the 1920s, narrative 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], “Hó-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 versatilty, 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,” “Sóia” (”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 Friaca” (“Wild Foot, Cool Head”), “Lugar comum” (“Commonplace”), “Metáfora” (“Metaphor”), mainly in his African phase: “Babá Alapalá” (“Nanny Alapalá”), “Sarará Miolo” (“Sarará Grain”), “Filhos de Gandhi” (“Gandhi’s Sons”), etc.

Other composers adopted iconisation 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, reso
narrative context. It is still with the tendency towards disjunction, 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 de a mão

A gente agora já não tem medo

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

that it is created the ideal atmosphere and the rupture of the bond:

Pois você sumiu no mundo sem me avisar...

(Because you disappeared in the world without warning me...) (“Isoko e Maria”)

It is still with the tendency towards disjunction,

Que a saudade é o revés de um parto

(That little by little describes an arch
That is worse than being eclipsed)

it becomes compatible with the melody.

As far as this goes, we can unravel one of Chico’s composition secrets. His narratives, 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.

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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 fagada
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 morta, tal 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 modulated 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 it (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 dyshoric characterization of the Brazilian word for longing (saudade), a term that embodies 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 fagada
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 dyshoric 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.

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)
Contemporary Brazilian Music Film

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 sub-urban 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 Adelzonilton, 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.
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 cômodo solto (the beast on the loose, which is the bandit), the caguete (the rat), the sogra (the mother-in-law), the corno (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 realizing that those guys actually have jobs, and they are very hard working 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 cômodos soltos; then we moved to caguete, which is probably the most common subject in Bezerra’s music, and to other topics like corno, 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 authorisation 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.

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 scenes 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 authorisation from them to be in the film, so we blurred the faces. In the case of the sogra (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. Luis Tatit, O século da canção (Cotia: Ateliê Editorial, 2013), 41-44.
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
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 runmate on and challenge aspects of Brazilian culture, society and politics. In their performances, music and lyrics, Titãs combined punk and rock iconography with that of carnival, círculo-teatro (theatre-circus), and teatro de revista (revue theatre), and older Brazilian music forms, such as repente (“imperus”), an improvisational alternating singing style from the North East, that was featured on the band’s fifth album O Bling Blim (1989) via the presence of repente singers Mauro and Quiéria. 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 1981 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 círculo-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.\(^{11}\) It is a moment that is emblematic of the band’s self-conscious and ironizing relationship to Brazilian cultural and artistic histories, and their committee 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, in rehearsals, and in their gigs on stage and on television.

In addition, as concert footage in Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party reveals, alongside these more 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 Escrotos” (“Fucking Beasts”) reflected urgently on Brazilian identity and its redefinition in an era of globalized consumption, social inequality, and political change. Indeed, in 1989 this moved writer Williss 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 social agencies.” 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 reigned 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 intermediariness of the music document: 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 aesthetic circuits, which are home to both its commercial appeal but also its potential for political resistance. The 1980s (post-1981, 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 visually, the “denial of depth vision and multiplication of surface” which degraded video images embody, invites the viewer, in Laura Mark’s words, “to fill in the
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 musician’s body 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 R’Rock’s politics, achieved through the circulation of bootlegged videos, but also through the more foundational circulation of the gestures of live rock performance that those videos capture; 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 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 structures of commercial success on the other. 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 viral 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, 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 (singing duets 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

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.17 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,”18 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 boudoird 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 viral 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.
7. A key proponent of Antropofagia was Roberto Carlos, who Paulo Míklos dueted with later in Titãs – Life Even Looks Like a Party.
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, 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.”

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“Samba,” according to critic Târik 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, Silvio 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
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 and the vestal movements of the porta-estandarte—then that person is Elza.6

“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.”

“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 multiples Dorival Caymmi’s lessons taught to the Portuguese Carmen Miranda’s stylized baiana.7 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.”


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 (“stand-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)
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 Dominguinhos 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 Dominguinhos 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.

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 Sanfoninha), 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 Dominguinhos, 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.
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 vuarãs, with rhythms from Argentina, Italy and Germany, and if you go to the North East you will hear xulú 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 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 carimbó from the Amazonia, the chalanãs from the Pantanal and the ucranhas 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 [Os Homem que Engarrafava Núvens, Lirio 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 Northeast. If I had finished in São Paulo, the film would have 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
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 Dominguinhos’ 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 fulfills the desire of Dominguinhos, 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 don’t see 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 Paraiban writer Ariano Suassuna, there are two Brazils: the official Brazil and the real Brazil. The Brazilian of speeches and 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 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 Rondonia, I made a stopover in Brasilia and presented him my proposal: “I have an idea. My film is one hour and forty minutes long, but I had filmed about 52 more programmes, focusing not only on 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.
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 so-called ‘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 gaúcho 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.


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 Vigilão 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.
Joaquim Alves de Aguiar (1953–2016) was Professor of Latin American 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 Núncio (EDUSP, 1998) and the section devoted to Elis Regina in Lenzia & Elzi (Ateliê, 2002), co-authored with Arisvaldo José Vidal.

Maria Campaña Ramí 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 (Corporação Cine Memória / EDOC, 2012). She has directed the documentaries Mi abuelo, mi héroe (2004) and Derivações (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 Vai (Duas Cidades, 1979), Despensa (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 billboards, 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 in Aesthetics in the Department of Fine Arts at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. He was coordinator of the Bândio Raturu in the Instituto Moreira Salles, where he directed radio documentaries on João Gilberto and Jorge Ben. A music critic in the magazine Pião, he is the author of a tântula de emerald e a pequena renascença de Jorge Ben (Cobogó, 2014).

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

Tom Jobim (1927–1994) was a composer and singer. He was one of the fathers ofbossa nova and the one who contributed most to its internationalisation. In partnership with songwriters like Vinicius de Moraes 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 Ofra da Conceição (1956) and Sinfonia da Abervalda (1966), a suite for the opening ceremony of Brasília, both of which were in collaboration with Vinicius de Moraes.

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 matador (Record, 1995), Aracéli, 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 Maior Praco (Héctor Babenco, 1981).

Lenin Vovas 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, 2012) and Contemporary Action Cinema (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 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 Cojo (Editora 34, 1993), O pão do curso (Editora 34, 2001), Ensaio geral (Globo, 2007), Ó (Iluminuras, 2008), O mau vidraceiro (Globo, 2010), Sermões (Iluminuras, 2015) and Adus, cavalo (Iluminuras, 2017). Among other recognitions, in 2006 he received the Grant Award from the Barnett and Annelee 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 Taitt 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 cantorista: Composição de canções no Brasil (EDUSP, 1996) and O óculo da canção (Ateliê, 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).
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