



PROJECT MUSE®

Contemporary Carioca

Moehn, Frederick

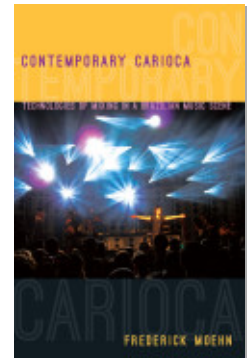
Published by Duke University Press

Moehn, Frederick.

Contemporary Carioca: Technologies of Mixing in a Brazilian Music Scene.

Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/16154>

6 ON CANNIBALS AND CHAMELEONS

The fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and . . . and . . . and . . .”
— Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, “What Is a Minor Literature?”

At the end of the 1990s, the musicologist Cristina Magaldi took stock of the flourish of hybrid pop music styles that had emerged in Brazil during that decade and noted that imported genres such as rock, funk, and rap were neither “enhancements” of local traditions (citing Sutton 1996, 265) nor simple “cross-fertilization[s].” Rather, they served as “positive additions to the choices available to Brazilians to express themselves in modern times” (Magaldi 1999, 318). Her wide-ranging analysis identified interesting trends characterizing a postdictatorship popular music scene in which Brazilians had begun to think of musical genres and styles that originated abroad “as part of their own culture” (310). Published on the eve of the new millennium, Magaldi’s article was both ahead of its time and a product of it: the latter because she attributed a key role in emerging tendencies to what were then, despite widespread piracy, still comparatively confident multinational recording labels; the former because she anticipated a fric-

tionless dynamic between “foreign” influences and “national” ones—a dynamic that was not yet, this book has shown, fully realized. “Apologies for the use of rock or any other international music” were no longer needed, Magaldi argued, and “there was no need to transform the imported sounds themselves to make them look (and sound) more ‘Brazilian’” (309). Musical Brazilianness, she suggested, was no longer a fundamental preoccupation (311).

To be sure, the old paradigms (such as the national-popular model of the student left in the 1960s) had lost their relevance. The imperative to make “national” culture was gone. But the *desire* to define what it meant to be Brazilian in the contemporary world—and musically to perform Brazilianness—was as strong as ever. Foreign influences were now regarded as positive additions according to an and/and rather than either/or ideology, as Magaldi suggested (see also Sansone 1996, 207). The Tropicalists Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil counterpoised their *som universal* (universal sound), which sought to incorporate international pop music, against the national-popular model back in 1967 at a televised song festival. Surprisingly, this dynamic once again came to be pertinent to discussions of Brazilian popular music in the 1990s. Yes, the “power to move at will between the national and the foreign” was celebrated in postdictatorship music scenes in Brazil (Magaldi 1999, 326); the “MPB: Engagement or alienation?” debate examined in the preface confirmed the importance of an ideal of absolute stylistic freedom. But while few seemed to be worried that “imported” genres would outright displace characteristically “Brazilian” ones, the balance of instrumentation, rhythms, and sounds from rock, samba, regional folkloric genres, and black diaspora influences was still actively being negotiated in Brazilian pop. In 1999 Arto Lindsay, who produced Caetano Veloso’s *Estrangeiro* (among various other Brazilian recordings), told Gerald Marzorati of the *New York Times* that “in Tropicalia, you let the rough edges show, that was the point. The meaning was in the juxtaposition. The juxtaposition said something about the world” (1999). If the music examined herein really shares something with Tropicália, it is in some of the roughness of its edges (although the specific edges and roughnesses are different): it’s where the friction is, the sticky materiality produced by desiring bodies in global encounters (Tsing 2005, 1).

As the recording industry entered into crisis and digital technologies became increasingly affordable, and as audiences for world music grew larger, many Brazilian musicians exploited the creative tensions they had

always worked with to produce not only subjectivities and identities but also “products and profits” (Guilbault 2007, 265). Some have in a sense marketed discourses of inclusive mixture as the Brazilian musical brand. The popular music press has eaten it up, as demonstrated by Lenine’s Paris Cité concert program, in which a journalist referred to the singer-songwriter as “le cannibale” and cited Lévi-Strauss’s odyssey from civilization to barbarism and back (chapter 2). I do not write this cynically: these individuals have worked tirelessly to make a living in a difficult career path and in a setting mostly unfavorable to taking chances in creative expression or following uncertain paths. As analysts, we perhaps appreciate too little the extent to which many pop musicians must balance the need to make money from their endeavors with the desire to find meaning and intensity in them.

These are serious games, to riff on Ortner’s term (1996, 12). The work that the musicians in this book accomplished (along with various peers outside the scope of my analysis) facilitated the consolidation of what some observers have begun to call the *Nova MPB* (New MPB). This New MPB still prioritizes the communicative capacity of the popular song; it remains indebted to the main singer-songwriters of the 1960s and 1970s, and in some ways to the Brazilian rock of the 1980s. However, as Fred Coelho has affirmed, it generally rejects older market formulas, and it has nurtured a generation of collaborative musician-producers who are indeed less anxious about cultural imperialism (Soares 2011). In Rio, Lenine’s younger collaborator Jr Tostoi and other figures such as Alexandre Kassin have become masters of imperturbable and/or music production.

Insights from practice theory are helpful for framing the relationship between acting subjects and individual and collective projects, or for talking about class, taste, and “restricted” fields of production. But there is always something more happening when people sculpt their entire becoming around making music. There are those “entanglements” that are rendered audible, as Jocelyne Guilbault has put it (2005)—interconnected intensities pertaining to the construction of a democratic public sphere and the consolidation of “neoliberal” and global cultures of consumption; to Ogum and the “Afro” heritage in Brazilian culture; to Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and giving rock the boot while bringing percussion out from the background where it had been but a “perfume” and — *porra!* — getting a sound *do caralho* out of a goat-skin drumhead on a “detuned” tambourine; to the Nordeste, mangue beat, Pernambuco speaking to the world in *côco*, *maracatu*, *forró*,

embolada, and ciranda cyberpunk with pifes, alfaias, and violas caipiras, the Miscegenation Mass and echoes of the Portuguese “ão”; to deepening the human relationship and “pulverizing” strategies of self-promotion; to taking drum kits apart and playing batucada with rock ‘n’ roll pressure because no drummer has six arms—the massaroca, the suingue, carnival blocos in the South Zone, cuícas, surdos, caixas de guerra, and hub-caps, *life-groove-play-party-pleasure-joy in the here and now* (Keil 2002b, 40), the Tupy astronaut in participatory, presentational, and studio worlds of music making; to female *band leaders*, Pindorama Matriarchy, funk, lata, Funk ‘n Lata, veneno da lata, good blood, the Duel between the Faithful Ones and the Lovers; to bundinha, contradiction, urban cannibals, urban violence, the divided city and the promiscuity of the South Zone; to simple songs, pretty, orderly melodies within Afro-cybernetic hurricanes, interferences, deterritorialized noises, electric guitars and Mutators; to mixing sessions with Jim Ball in New York City, mirrors, digital cameras, the false, everything new again with skin and strings—difference AND repetition!; to the Tropicália renaissance, the evolutionary line, pagode and disgusted subjects (Lawler 2005), corruption, homogenization, individuality, “artisan” production and the Real Plan; to São Sebastião and samba, samba, more samba. Becoming. Samba. Becoming-samba.

The preceding chapters trace cartographies of milieus—“worlds at once social, symbolic, and material, infused with the ‘affects’ and ‘intensities’ of their own subjectivities”—and of the trajectories individuals pursue as they engage their interests, their passions, their needs (Biehl and Locke 2010, 323). I am keen to embrace unfinishedness: our theorizing is inescapably incomplete and my understanding of Brazilian music making is partial. In this sense, this book is sympathetic to a recent shift in sociocultural anthropology toward drawing “mid-level” or “partial but suggestive connections” between specific aspects of large-scale problems and more localized refractions (Knauff 2006, 411). Scholars are creatively and critically mixing theoretical argumentation, ethnographic and historical narrative, subjective impressions, and sometimes “activist voicing,” Bruce M. Knauff observes (411). In a somewhat similar vein, Kathleen Stewart has advocated “weak theory” for “an unfinished world” (2008).

The artists I came to know in Rio continue to develop their careers, occasionally producing new albums (including recent ones that did not make it into my analysis), and sometimes branching out into other endeavors. From Lisbon, Portugal, where I was revising this manuscript in 2010, I

checked Paulinho Moska's website and found a couple of MP3s from what appeared to be a forthcoming album. A quick e-mail exchange verified that he was in fact about to release a new album (the two-CD boxed set *Muito Pouco*), and that he and his partner were expecting a new child. "Lots of work and happiness here," Moska wrote back. His television program, he noted, was already in its fifth season, and he had produced an edition of *Zombido* for the radio. I am far from Rio de Janeiro, and much is happening there outside my purview. My knowledge of the local scene is incomplete, but interesting pieces accrue to the assemblage, often via virtual networking, but sometimes in old-fashioned ways, such as when Brazilian musicians pass through Lisbon or New York.

Pedro Luís, I learn, has published a poetic intertextual homage to Lenine and Suzano's *Olho de peixe* album: *Logo parecia que assim sempre fora: Breves inspirações livremente deliradas* (Immediately it seemed as if it had always been that way: Brief inspirations freely made delirious, 2009), sixteen years after the recording was first released. Each poem in the collection is inspired by the title of one of the songs from *Olho de peixe*. The last of them, in a chapter titled "Mais," comprises verses that begin and end with *mais além*, or "yonder," taken from the final track of *Olho de peixe*. Here is the poem in an English translation:

Yonder, without a doubt, lies the ever after.
I am repeating myself, most probably.
But some poetry is bound to repeat itself,
given that passion is often renewed.
Some sensations, namely delights,
will always visit upon us from time to time.
With these visitations will come verses, seminal sighs.
Beautiful melodies will always be welcome.
I shall always try to be genuine.
For you, I shall forever chase the idea that lies yonder
—Pedro Luís, trans. Vladimir Freire

Now, what of cannibals? The theme has been present throughout this book in song lyrics and in subjects' discourse about mixture. It even made it into an album title for Lenine's *Falange canibal*. In fact, the couple of years before and after the turn of the millennium (coinciding with Fernando Henrique Cardoso's second term in office) seem to have represented some-

thing of an apex in lyrics that evoke cannibalism.¹ In this context, allusions to anthropophagy playfully postulate a kind of “cannibal mind” in the national unconscious, “masticating, digesting, and rewriting the outsider” (Budasz 2005, 15). At the same time, they propose that there is an embodied aspect to identity and becoming. What scholars often overlook is how metaphors of ingesting the Other have become a popular talking point in international interpretations of Brazilian music, part of the *brand*. Anthropophagy does not necessarily or only indicate a radical postcolonial method for appropriation and modernization; it has been inserted into world music market-speak, and as a kind of explanatory shorthand, it appeals to journalists.

This does not make it any less interesting to think about the cannibalist gesture. “Similar to incest, aggression, the nuclear family, and other phenomena of universal human import,” Lindenbaum writes, cannibalism “appears to be a concept on which to exercise certain theoretical programs” (2004, 480; see also Brown and Tuzin 1983, 2–3). Rather than enter into debates over such theoretical programs, I have focused on the specific practices that musicians describe as anthropophagic. In closing, however, I return to a line of thought that Sara Castro-Klarén proposed in her genealogy of Oswald de Andrade’s “Cannibalist Manifesto” of 1928. Whereas Oswald conceptualized history dialectically (with a revolutionary matriarchy as the final stage in a teleological progression, in Castro-Klarén’s reading), it turns out that the anthropophagic reason of actual Tupi peoples is non-dialectical, at least in the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s elaboration of it, upon which Castro-Klarén draws.² Viveiros de Castro studied ritual cannibalism among the Araweté people, who are of the Tupi-Guaraní ethnicity. The Araweté do not “struggle to conjure away difference” in a Euclidean dialectic (as in the Gê ethnicity famously studied by Lévi-Strauss), or in a Lacanian model of the mirror function (Viveiros de Castro 1992, 4).³ They demonstrate “a passion for exteriority which . . . inscribes Becoming” into “the very heart” of their society (1992, 3). Thus, “the Tupí-Guaraní method of constructing the person,” Viveiros de Castro suggests, “has nothing to do with some mirror chamber of reflections and inversion between the Self and the Other that tends towards symmetry and stability” (4). They break the mirror, Castro claims; they destroy representation (270). They are “a society with a dynamic that dissolves those spatial metaphors so common in sociological discourse: interior, exterior, center, margins, boundaries, limen, etc.” (270). The Tupi-Guaraní construct the

person through continual deformation. “Ego and enemy, living and dead, man and god, are interwoven, before or beyond representation, metaphorical substitution and complementary opposition” (270). Becoming is “prior to Being and unsubmitive to it” (270). Likewise, Moska’s photographs are not reflections; they are de- and re-formations.

Oswald’s famous redeployment of Hamlet’s existential question as “Tupi, or not Tupi,” Castro-Klarén concludes, was “not just a clever bilingual pun,” or even “another banal instance of transculturation” (2000, 302). Rather, it posited a momentous epistemological challenge that reveals, when interpreted within a fuller genealogy, a potential alternative to the “narcissistic geometry of representation,” that is, a “topological torsion of other-becoming” (Viveiros de Castro 1992, 254). “Your presence enters through the seven holes in my head,” Caetano Veloso sang, and then Fernanda Abreu sang again. “It’s white, green, red, blue, and yellow. It’s black.” What color is the chameleon on a mirror? What if the chameleon is a mirror-shattering cannibal?