Contemporary Carioca
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Contemporary Carioca: Technologies of Mixing in a Brazilian Music Scene. 
One of the characteristics of the pop music setting I examine in this book is the enduring legacy and influence of musicians who began their careers in the 1960s, especially individuals associated with the Tropicália movement. Caetano Veloso, in particular, has become somewhat of the gold standard for the figure of the Brazilian pop intellectual singer-songwriter; to receive his blessing is a powerful endorsement of one’s work. In 1998 the French government invited him to perform for three nights at the Cité de la Musique in Paris as part of a Carte Blanche series in which the artist is given free rein to develop a show specifically for the venue. Caetano invited the influential concrete poet Augusto de Campos, from São Paulo, to join him for a multimedia presentation of Augusto’s poetry and selected works by Mallarmé and Rimbaud, what he called an “anthropophagic musical manifesto.” For the musical accompaniment, Caetano called on the singer-songwriter Lenine, originally from Recife, Pernambuco, whom he described as offering “the most comprehensive interpretation” of what was

My best quality is being intuitive. I don’t do music. Music is simply the conduit. I deepen the human relationship. Actually, that is the only thing I do.
—Lenine
happening musically in that Northeastern state at the time, despite the fact that Lenine had lived in Rio de Janeiro for twenty years (D. Lopes 1999).1

Subsequently, Lenine became the next Brazilian to receive an invitation to perform at the Cité. The music critic Francis Dordor wrote the introductory program notes to the event. Titled “The Cannibal,” this text (which presumably draws on Lenine’s own discourse) reinforces narratives of Brazilian identity as rooted in mixture and appropriation, in this case also speaking to French readings of Brazilian culture, as Dordor refers to Lévi-Straussian dichotomies of civilization and barbarism (2004). “Long to take shape,” the program notes state, Lenine’s career “can be read as the patient resolution through music of this conflict that is as bitter as it is old.” The “organ” he would develop to take in the eclectic influences of his youth, he writes, “was not the ear, but rather the stomach.” Eating the music of others, he explains to the concert-going public, even more than listening to or producing it, constitutes “a fundamentally Brazilian act, a cultural cannibalism, the definitive form of the mixture.” The luck or the misfortune of Lenine’s generation, Dordor observes, is “to be the guest of honor at the greatest feast ever imagined: that of globalization.” What renders Lenine “unusual and seductive” is his inclination to join his musical mixtures with the “at once urgent and melancholy dream of a less barbaric world.” Noting that his namesake is Lenin (spelled “Lenine” in Portuguese), the critic concludes that “he is forcefully seeking to substitute utopia for the nightmare. Even if it means being a cannibal.”

The cannibal baton is thus passed, at least in this reading (which is, of course, designed to help promote the show), from Tropicalist to twenty-first-century humanist-socialist. Lenine describes his music as MPB, but he likes to think of the P as referring in his case to “planetary,” rather than “popular,” Brazilian music (Gilman 2006). Counting the planets outward from the sun, he told me, we are all “third world,” and his lyrics sometimes refer to astronomical phenomena such as the big bang. He sees himself as a kind of troubadour, a “restless reporter” who is “plugged into the world, but who speaks of his tribe.”2 He is an energetic collaborator who has recorded with most of the central subjects of this book, in addition to many others. He likes “the plurality” that results from collaborating, and from the exercise, as he put it, of having “a small bunch of people around,” especially in the recording studio. He is optimistic about the ability of the human spirit to triumph, through solidarity, over forces that potentially lead to social alienation. In this sense, Lenine may be said to have inherited
some of the spirit of “revolutionary romanticism” that Marcelo Ridenti (2000) identified in the Brazilian left, and of the belief, prevalent among some musicians of the 1960s, that art can and should play a role in promoting the emergence of a more egalitarian social order in the country and the world.

In addition to his own endeavors, Lenine often works as a guest singer for live performances and as a guest recording artist, co-composer, and co-producer. His compositions have been recorded by a variety of musicians in Brazil, including a string quintet (Quinteto da Paraíba), and occasionally by artists abroad. He composed three carnival samba themes for the popular South Zone bloco Suvaco do Cristo. He has also had songs placed on Globo Network telenovelas (prime-time dramas), a coveted avenue for gaining publicity. Other activities include writing music for the São Paulo-based dance company Grupo Corpo for a 2007 work titled “A centelha” (The spark), which they performed in Brazil and abroad. He has won several Sharp Prizes, as well as five Latin Grammy Awards and three Grammy Awards.3

In this chapter I examine aspects of Lenine’s career and several musical examples from his albums, exploring in particular how he incorporates into his work both thematic and sonic references to the Brazilian Northeast, a region known as much for its rich folklore as for its droughts and income inequality. Like Marcos Suzano, Lenine spent his teenage years listening to rock music, but in the 1990s he too trained his ear on Brazilian popular genres and sought ways to adapt the sounds and sentiments of rock and, subsequently, other international influences and technologies to the changing national context. As an artist who identifies strongly with the Northeast and yet is integral to the Rio-based music scene that is the focus of this book, Lenine bridges discursive formulations of cultural regionalism and Rio’s “centripetal” claims to national representation—as well as its “centrifugal” claims to cosmopolitanism.

Writing about Dorival Caymmi, from Bahia, and Luiz Gonzaga, from Pernambuco—two influential musicians who established themselves in Rio de Janeiro in the 1940s—Bryan McCann has observed that northeastern cultural regionalism is generally not in opposition to constructs of national character but rather seeks a special place within that character (2004, 120). Caymmi’s and Gonzaga’s cultural projects, McCann argues, established a link between region and nation by rescuing “the vital folklore” of the Northeast “for the edification of the metropolitan center and,
McCann’s argument pertains to a distinct historical context, but the notion of the cultural “link” between a part and the whole is fundamental to Lenine’s work as well. In this case, however, the nation is itself a part of the larger whole of humanity. Rather than salvaging folklore, Lenine’s music takes the vitality of northeastern culture as axiomatic. His project is not merely sonically to reinscribe the importance of the Northeast to Brazilian national identity; rather, it seeks to universalize sonic representations of a local identity through their integration into the language of pop music. In this sense, it does not “folklorize underdevelopment,” to borrow Caetano Veloso’s words (1977, 21–24), but rather puts comparatively localized musical expressions on equal footing with international trends, conjoining them to Lenine’s humanist vision of cosmopolitan solidarity. The Northeast is thus more than a fixed set of invented traditions; it is a kind of imagined and permeable community that is realized over time through the practices of individual subjects. For Lenine, the city of Recife, his hometown and the capital of Pernambuco, serves as his “lighthouse,” as he put it, during his musical travels.

While Lenine has a very individualistic style of singing and playing guitar and a distinctly personal view of the world that manifests in his music, his career trajectory has also been shaped by his choice of musical partners. His fusion of northeastern traditional forms with electronic and sequenced musical sounds, for example, owes much to Chico Neves, who produced Lenine’s first solo album. Chico related that when they were working on the album, he had a number of disagreements with Lenine because the latter was very ambivalent about “this world of machines.” Lenine’s work, like that of the other figures in this book, is thus the product of an emergent “art world” (Becker 1982), one that rather than being inevitable, took shape in part through negotiations over and experimentation with the way sound can be manipulated in the recording setting.

The Northeast: From Center to Region and Musical Heartbeat

The Northeast encompasses a massive territory consisting of nine states, including Pernambuco and Bahia, and containing about 30 percent of the country’s population. The Portuguese captain Pedro Álvares Cabral landed on the coast of this region in 1500, and the city of Salvador, in Bahia, was the
colony’s first capital. Before attempting to enslave local Amerindian populations, the Portuguese traded with them for Brazil’s first export product, pau Brasil, or brazilwood. Later, male colonists procreated with indigenous women, and then with the African slaves who worked the massive sugarcane, cocoa, tobacco, and cotton estates (fazendas). For about a century and a half, the “Northeast” essentially was “Brazil” (Beserra 2004, 5). As a consequence, certain patterns of social interaction that have come to be seen as characteristic of Brazilian society are associated with the history of the Northeast—notably, paternalism, racial and cultural mixture, and also the vibrancy of traditional popular cultural expressions with roots in early modern and baroque Iberian forms, in popular Catholicism, in African cultures, and, to a lesser degree, in indigenous practices.

Two legendary rebellions took place in the Northeast. Palmares, a great quilombo, or community of runaway slaves, formed in the interior of the region in the seventeenth century and was structured as a neo-African state. Its population is believed to have reached 20,000, and it took years for the Portuguese to destroy it, which they did in 1694. The last leader of Palmares was Zumbi, who escaped during the final battle for Palmares only to be caught and beheaded in 1695. Zumbi has since become a symbol of Afro-Brazilian identity and struggle in Brazil. (Nação Zumbi, formerly Chico Science’s band, takes its name from him.) The second rebellion took place at Canudos, a remote region in the west of Bahia, where thousands of peasant followers of the heretical religious leader Antônio Conselheiro (Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel) assembled from 1893 to 1897 as a folk community independent of the recently proclaimed republic. They resisted centralized efforts to modernize and rationalize the administration of the nation-state. Surprisingly, three military expeditions failed to defeat the community, while the fourth, with 8,000 men and new cannons brought in from Europe, flattened Canudos, a decisive event in the consolidation of modern Brazil. The process by which this area came to be understood as a region rather than the center of modern Brazil really began in the early twentieth century and is directly tied to the southward shift of the economic and political center, and indeed to the nation-building project: as the state promoted industrialization in the Southeast, the Northeast, trapped in underdevelopment and “backwardness,” was left to provide inexpensive labor. The idea that the Northeast was rooted in tradition and nostalgia for the past, one scholar has argued, was in fact fabricated by the local elites in response
to their loss of economic and political space (Albuquerque 2004, 43). The Northeast is less a place than “a topos, a group of references, a collection of characteristics, an archive of images and texts . . . [and] a bundle of recurring memories.” The establishment of a relationship of this “part” to the “whole,” then, is infused with hierarchies of economic power and other forms of social stratification. Moreover, the identity categories of Nordestino (northeasterner), Paulista (native of São Paulo state), and Carioca, for example, speak to mutually constitutive national configurations of power (Beserra 2004, 7).

Larry Crook has argued that the Northeast provides the “musical heartbeat that has helped create and sustain the modern, ever-changing Brazilian nation” (2005, xxii). While Cariocas might wish to claim the same for samba, the folkloric traditions of the Northeast have a special purchase on popular images of “authentic” Brazil. It will be helpful to describe briefly some of the genres from this region that Lenine incorporates into his pop music. Among them is the côco, which usually features a solo singer performing against a choral refrain in call-and-response, accompanied by percussion instruments such as the ganzá (shaker) or pandeiro. Singers often arrange themselves in a circle and clap, while a dancer may enter the ring until he or she chooses a replacement from among the other participants with a touch at the navel, a move known in Brazil as the umbigada. The côco is popularly believed to come from the Africans of Palmares, who are said to have created it as a work song to accompany the breaking of coconuts for food (M. Andrade 1999, 146). In Pernambuco the côco was often sung on sugar plantations. The rhythmic accompaniment typically places stresses on the first, fourth, and seventh sixteenth-note subdivisions of the beat (in 2/4), accenting the pattern of 3 + 3 + 2 that is found in much Brazilian popular music and indeed in much Latin American popular music. However, the overlaying of rhythmic variations can also create a subtle feeling of polyrhythm.

Embolada is similar to côco in its rhythmic structure and its use of call-and-response, but it tends to be more lyrically complex, while it often uses very simple melodies with limited, stepwise motion. Mário de Andrade held that embolada was not a genre at all but simply the “melodic-rhythmic process” utilized by northeastern singers called repentistas in the improvised construction of verses (1999, 199). It features virtuosic, alliterative, often tongue-twisting lyrics following standardized rhyme schemes (such as the décima) delivered in rapid-fire fashion, and wordplay such as the utili-
zation of double entendres or the manipulation of similar-sounding terms that have different meanings. Embolada is typically sung without accompanying dance, and it may take the form of a vocal duel called peleja or desafio, in which the singers playfully (or not so playfully) insult each other. Lenine’s “Jack soul brasileiro” is a good example of this kind of singing updated with funk and rock elements. Embolada and desafio may also be accompanied by the steel-stringed double-course guitar of Portuguese origin called the viola, in which case it is also referred to as cantoria (or cantoria de viola) a broad category of rural styles with links to medieval Iberian traditions of improvised sung poetry. Singers of cantoria (cantadores) once traveled through the Northeast like bards, accompanying their song with a variety of instruments including the rabeca fiddle, the pandeiro, and the viola, or singing unaccompanied (called aboio).

With its doubled steel strings, some of which provide a drone, and simple harmonies centered on tonic and dominant chords, the viola, which is strummed as well as plucked, sounds quite different from the nylon-stringed violão, which, in the samba and bossa nova styles, is plucked in syncopated patterns that may feature comparatively complex harmonies. In cantoria, the viola provides a basic accompaniment; if it contributes melody, it is usually only in between song verses. Lenine’s “O marco marciano” (The martian sign) is a beautiful ballad with viola accompaniment that utilizes the abcbdb rhyme scheme of the traditional sextilha of cantoria, while the melody uses a scale with raised fourth and lowered seventh degrees, customary alterations in the cantoria tradition (Crook 2005, 105). His song “Na pressão” (Under pressure) also begins with an ostinato figure on the viola dinâmica, a variety of the instrument featuring an aluminum resonator and an especially metallic timbre, while “Aboio avoado” (Senseless aboio) is a brief a cappella song modeled after the traditional cattle rancher’s aboio.

Another important musical manifestation of the Northeast is the fife-and-drum ensemble (banda de pífano), which is popular in a variety of festivities in the interior regions. The pífano (alt. pífaro, or pife) is a side-blown cane flute generally played in pairs, with one flute usually taking the lead melodic part while the other plays a harmony. The ensemble includes a shallow two-headed bass drum called a zabumba and a shallow snare drum called a tarol (additional percussion such as a triangle may be added). In Rio de Janeiro, Carlos Malta’s group Pife Muderno performs “rereadings,” in Carlos’s words, of the northeastern fife-and-drum repertoire, some of
which is shared with the accordion-based forró bands. Lenine, who has also sung with Pífe Muderno, utilizes a brief sampled recording of a pífano ensemble in the introduction to his song “Rua da passagem (Trânsito)” (Cross street [Traffic]), while the entire groove of the track is driven by the zabumba and tarol drums found in the banda de pífano country forró style.

The term forró came to be used to refer to a variety of dances associated with the festas juninas in celebration of Saints Anthony, John, and Peter. Again, a precise genre definition is elusive, and there are various subcategories, such as the xote and xamego. However, its typical instrumentation of accordion, triangle, and zabumba bass drum; the often entertaining nature of the lyrics; and the genre’s highly danceable swing make forró easily recognizable. The sixteenth–eighth–sixteenth-note rhythmic figure is also found in forró; tempos tend to be medium to fast. The genre baião, created by the Pernambucan accordionist Luiz Gonzaga in the 1940s, often uses the same instrumentation as forró, but it is usually performed at slightly slower tempos and emphasizes a driving dotted eighth–sixteenth-note rhythmic figure on beat 1 in 2/4.

Perhaps the Pernambucan folk music that attracted the most attention through new pop fusions in the 1990s is the maracatu, of which there are two types. Maracatu nação (nation maracatu), also called maracatu de baque virado (maracatu of the turned-around beat), is the older type and is associated with a variety of Afro-Brazilian religions in Recife and surrounding areas. Singing is accompanied by a double-headed bass drum (alfaia, alt. bombo), snare drums (tarol and caixa de guerra, lit. “war box”), a gonguê, and shakers (usually the metal mineiro, but sometimes the abê, made from a gourd) performing a syncopated rhythm in a medium-slow tempo. Its origins are in the Afro-Brazilian tradition of crowning a king of the Congo or of Angola as an intermediary between the masters and slaves during the colonial era; it became a kind of demonstration of “acoustic power” (Crook 2005, 237). Against the steady groove of the ensemble, the bass drum plays “turned-around” syncopations, often utilizing the typical sixteenth–eighth–sixteenth figure of the cóco.

Maracatu rural (rural maracatu), also known as maracatu de baque solto (maracatu of the loose beat), uses improvised vocal verses, brass accompaniment, and percussion such as the cuica friction drum also found in samba (sometimes called puíta in the Northeast), and rapid snare drumming that some Brazilian pop musicians such as Marcos Suzano have hybridized with the jungle genre from the United Kingdom (which fea-
turers the rapid electronic snare patterns). In the rural style, the energetic snare drumming and brass periodically stop to give way to the vocals. Both genres feature colorful costumes and pageantry and are performed on the street during carnival. Lenine’s “Que baque é esse?” (What is this beat?) makes use of maracatu-like bass drum patterns.

Another lively carnival genre from Recife is the frevo, which took shape in the late nineteenth century and gained national recognition in the 1920s and 1930s. It has a percussive base of a fast march rhythm and characteristically syncopated brass and wind arrangements that derive from the European military and civic band tradition. The driving rhythm of frevo is a blazingly fast repeating eighth-sixteenth-sixteenth-note figure (in 2/4), often played on a pandeiro, while the brass and winds perform offbeat phrases in a kind of interlocking call-and-response. Lenine favors côco/embolada and samba influences in his music, but his song “Leão do norte” (Lion of the north) from the Olho do peixe collaboration with Suzano features a frevo-inspired rhythm.

Lenine, Cantautor

Oswaldo Lenine Macedo Pimentel was born in Recife on 2 February 1959 (the day the Yoruba water goddess Iemanjá is celebrated, he pointed out in our interview). For his stage name, he uses only the name that his father, a member of the Brazilian Communist Party, gave him in tribute to the Russian revolutionary and statesman Vladimir Lenin. He likes to tell a formative story from his early childhood: His mother was a devout Catholic and insisted that he and his sister attend Mass on Sundays when they were young. His atheist father stipulated, however, that once Lenine reached the age of eight he would be allowed to choose between going to church and staying home with him to listen to music on the radio on Sundays. Lenine chose the latter, and this ritual of listening together, he explained, exposed him to an eclectic variety of music as a child. This musical diversity became a “hidden archive” when, as a teenager, he, like Suzano, began listening only to rock, especially Led Zeppelin and other “progressive” rock groups. While at the Pernambuco State Conservatory of Music in the late 1970s, he grew interested in MPB, particularly the Clube da Esquina (Corner Club) post-bossa nova group of musicians centered around the singer-songwriters Milton Nascimento and Lô Borges, who released the seminal Clube da Esquina in 1972, mixing elements of jazz and progressive rock
into well-crafted songs with thoughtful, often moody, lyrics. This group of musicians impressed upon Lenine that it was possible, “technically speaking,” to make a cosmopolitan album in Brazil. (Others made the same claim for bossa nova, or for Tropicália in earlier eras.) Equally important was his rediscovery of the more earthy Jackson do Pandeiro, a musician from Paraíba, just north of Pernambuco, whose musical career spanned the 1950s through the early 1980s; Jackson would become a fundamental reference in Lenine’s music.

Lenine left the conservatory to move to Rio in December 1979 and his career began in 1981 when he performed his song “Prova de fogo” (Proof of fire, composed with Zé Rocha) on an MPB television show for the Globo channel (MPB-81). In 1983 he released an LP with Lula Queiroga titled Baque solto (after the maracatu style). Despite the title of the album, there are few traces of maracatu in the sound, although there is some relatively subtle incorporation of rhythms such as the baião and frevo. The predominant aesthetic could be described as progressive rock-jazz fusion with local “seasoning.” It hardly augured the sound Lenine would cultivate in the 1990s with Marcos Suzano’s percussion and the manipulation of acoustic timbres through filters and other electronic means. After Baque solto, Lenine continued to work as a performer and co-composer, but ten years would pass before he released another album bearing his name: the Olho de peixe collaboration with Marcos Suzano. His first solo album would wait another four years.

Lenine’s vocal timbre is both warm and edgy, alternatively slightly aggressive then gentle. He might sing a pensive ballad like “Paciência” or rap a tongue-twisting rock-embolada shout-out like the aforementioned “Jack soul brasileiro.” In the studio, Lenine likes to “double” his vocal parts (that is, record the same part two or more times), combining them electronically for a full yet intimate vocal sound. He also uses his voice in the studio to produce a variety of percussive aspirations. His guitar-playing utilizes strong plucking and strumming in highly syncopated, funky, sometimes noisy riffs and grooves. He suggested that what he called his “virulent” style of playing guitar developed out of his urge to reproduce percussion and bass articulations on the instrument when accompanying his own compositions. He described exploiting the rhythmic incidentals that he is able to produce with this particular way of playing the instrument: “I discovered that when I would go to record, most people were looking for a certain perfection in the execution. [The guitar] would end up being cold
and would lose some of the sonority. I was going to use the word dirty [to describe my playing], but in truth it’s not dirty—it’s with more frequencies complementing each other.” His way of playing the violão, he elaborated, utilizes a lot of open strings and exploits “the noises of the strings.”

It was a “summation of frequencies,” he said, that you can only get on a “full” guitar, a guitar with “a body” (encorporado). Just as Suzano requires a special microphone to capture the full range of low frequencies on his pandeiro, Lenine places microphones at the bridge and the neck of the instrument to capture what he hears as he bends over while playing. “I experimented with various things,” he said, “and through this process I was able more and more to exploit the keh, kaw, shoo, fff—the little syncopations, the dirty little sounds, that give it swing—the swing of the song.” (These can be compared with the kinds of “participatory discrepancies” that the members of the band Pedro Luís e A Parede sought, described in chapter 3.) His choice of the word virulent to describe his sound suggests that his playing style, like Suzano’s, is comparatively physical, even aggressive.

As a pop musician with an international presence, Lenine is clearly enmeshed in and conscious of markets and commercial trends. He professes to have a good relationship with BMG Brazil, his recording label for over a decade now, and to be an “anachronism” for working in the mass market “but in an artisanal manner” (in Pierre Bourdieu’s terminology, something in between “restricted” and “mass” production, as I elaborate in the following pages). Although he is savvy about managing his career, it is true that he has hardly prioritized marketability in his musical choices. He professes ambivalence about global capitalism, calling it “brutal.” Those in the center, he complained (by which he seems to have meant primarily the United States), did not consider “the possibility that there might exist a mature poetry in Brazil, a mature literature. It’s the third world. And, excuse me, culturally we have been first world for a long time. There is this freshness in all the arts,” he said. And in fact, by the late 1990s, he observed, the world was discovering that Brazilian musicians were “doing it with refinement.” If, before, Brazil was “just exotique, très exotique,” to the first world, now there was more musical and cultural audaciousness, and a solidarity between a lot of people and various tendencies. “I know that what I do has refinement,” Lenine asserted, adding that he was “speaking to the world,” but it was because his music was a reflection of his country, his location, his universe.
Indeed, Lenine referred to his marketing strategy as “pulverizing,” noting that by the late 1990s, there existed a significantly larger audience for world music than just five years before: “It is now possible to go and sell 4,000 albums in France, 12,000 in Germany, 5,000 in Japan, 600 in Belgium—you go adding this up. You pulverize it. . . . I saw one Japanese audience, man, [ages] nineteen to twenty-five, without speaking one word of Portuguese, singing along to my song ‘Vai na ponte, Vai na ponte.’” It was, however, Olho de peixe, his album with Suzano, that “ignited this process” abroad, he recalled. For Lenine, the project grew out of his desire to “synthesize” his music into a stripped-down instrumentation. He had always performed with bands; now he wanted “a diet formulation” of his music. This formulation would be possible, he reasoned, because of the way he already “induced the harmony, the melody, the rhythm, all on the guitar.” His style of playing filled in all the spaces and even provided bass lines.

Then he met Suzano, who showed up on the scene “with that face of a seminarian,” Lenine recalled; loosened the skin of the pandeiro; and “made it like a drum.” He “brought percussion to the front and got the spotlight on him,” calling into question “the function of the drum kit.” Suzano’s pandeiro was “something else,” Lenine reflected, and together the two effected “a marvelous synthesis.” On the first track of Olho de peixe, “Acredite ou não” (Believe it or not), Lenine plays a groove utilizing only three tightly voiced triads (I, IV, and V), while Suzano complements Lenine’s percussive and syncopated guitar playing with driving, steady sixteenth notes on the cymbals of the pandeiro. The predominant feel is a samba-derived duple meter, but Suzano also hints at a rock 4/4 rhythm by accenting a backbeat. The samba aspect is reinforced in the agogó (cowbell) pattern that Suzano adds beginning around two and a half minutes into the song. The percussionist’s offbeat open strokes on the pandeiro head to produce bass tones similar to a kick drum in a rock kit, on the other hand, contribute additional syncopations from the lower-frequency range of the mix. The vocal part itself is highly syncopated, and during an interlude in the song, Lenine sings percussive vocables, further contributing to a richly polyrhythmic texture.

The idea for the song came from the Ripley’s Believe It or Not television program (titled Acredite se quiser in Portuguese), which Lenine and the lyricist Braúlio Tavares liked to watch, and the refrain to the song adapts the opening line of the television show: “Strange! Bizarre! All of this happened, believe it or not.” The lyrics describe a series of local events and practices that Braúlio sarcastically proposed were even more absurd than those on
the television program (pers. comm., 30 August 2008), such as the seats of the sambadrome, where the carnival parades occur, being full of tourists paying ticket prices that average Brazilians can’t afford. The song follows a verse-refrain pattern over the chord vamp, without any B (that is, musically contrasting) section. It develops through the increasing intensity of Lenine’s vocal and Suzano’s rhythmic performances. The latter’s full and driving percussion, with each sixteenth-note subdivision of the pulse methodically articulated, remains perfectly steady, but he adds cymbal crashes, cowbell, woodblock, and increasingly insistent low-frequency strikes. Despite the restrained use of synthesizers and filters to add a hint of “strange” and “bizarre” sonic coloration, the aesthetic privileges acoustic timbres, and Jim Ball’s mix keeps the various sources of sonic information discrete through careful microphone choice and placement, as well as studio equalization, panning, volume control, and use of reverb and echo.

The title song of the album was intended to reflect Lenine’s “planetary vision” and humankind’s connection with the cosmos, he said. The “fish eye” (olho de peixe) is a reference to the Great Red Spot on the planet Jupiter, photographed by Voyager I (the image found on the cover of the album; see figure 7). Lenine’s lyrics express a vague statement about how the routine of the present can make one narrow minded. The mind is “a locker,” and individuals decide what to put in it. The mind has a basement where “instinct and repression” reside, but what, Lenine asks, is in the mind’s attic? The song “O último por do sol” (The last sunset) describes a supernova exploding, leaving Lenine alone on the earth, the last human on the day the sun died. The cosmic dimension of the album, however, was probably largely lost on local musicians. Rather, the predominant impressions they took from Olho de peixe were (according to conversations I have had with local music makers over the years) that (1) the rich texture was created with primarily acoustic guitar (violão) and percussion, especially the pandeiro (voice was a given); (2) the percussionist came to the forefront as a lead instrumentalist; and (3) the acoustic timbres were well recorded and tastefully mixed. (Figure 8 shows Lenine with the recording engineer for this album at Ministereo recording facility in the South Zone.)

Artisanal Production and Real World

In 1997 Lenine released his first solo album, O dia em que faremos contato (The day we make contact, a title inspired by the 1984 science fiction film 2010: The Year We Make Contact), again with Suzano contributing the percus-
sive backbone. Liminha (Arnolpho Lima Filho), a bassist who played with the band Os Mutantes early in his career (1970–74), and who is now one of Brazil’s best-known producers of pop music, provided the main electric bass parts. Chico Neves produced the album and provided electronic programming of loops and effects, as well as additional electric bass parts. Lenine, Suzano, and Chico worked out the arrangements together. In his comments about this album shortly after its release, the ethnomusicologist and journalist Hermano Vianna interpreted it through the lens of the nation and cultural development. “Finally,” he wrote, “Brazil has produced a record of this kind.” It was a watershed mark in the history of MPB, with an “immediate liberating effect on the national musical life” (my emphasis). The first achievement of the album, he went on to explain, was that it

**Figure 7.** Album cover for Lenine and Marcos Suzano’s Olho de peixe. Graphic design by Barrão (Jorge Velloso Borges Leão Teixeira).
updated MPB to the latest technologically savvy trends in music, a central trope of the modernist cultural cannibalism discourse. It was “post-hip-hop, post-techno, post-jungle, post-MIDI, post-sampler, post–personal computer,” while it proposed a Brazilian use for these technologies. By contrast, most recent MPB music, Vianna noted, was “extremely restrained and well behaved in the use of new recording resources,” and this owed perhaps to “shyness,” or maybe to “narcissism,” or even a fear of and prejudice against “the machine” that is characteristic of the “romantic and almost naturalistic songbook spirit” in MPB (referring to a series of published fakebooks covering the repertoire of canonical MPB songwriters).

It was Chico Neves’s “impeccable production (even with all risks taken)” that was able to turn this “technological laziness” into “something of the past.” Chico avoided “the great local studios in which the existence of the most modern equipment” is constrained by “bureaucratic and industrial working methods,” choosing instead to use his personal studio. Lenine’s

FIGURE 8. Lenine and the audio engineer Denilson Campos at the MiniStereo Studio, Rio de Janeiro
album, Vianna thought, was reintegrating other experiences “into MPB’s well-known evolutionary line,” but under a “Northeastern mentality.” Brazil’s chanters, its repentistas and emboladores, he suggested, had always had the habit of “sampling information of different origin” and tying it together into a single improvised line. Lenine was doing this “using the noise mode of our contemporaneous music,” Vianna concluded (2000). We encounter in such comments the allegories of cannibalism, courage (risk taking versus behaving well), contemporaneity, rupture, modernization (versus laziness and backwardness), improvisatory evolution, and freedom (the liberation from industrial working methods).14

Chico Neves (figure 9) emerged as an important independent producer in Brazil in the 1990s, finding success with albums by the rock-pop band Os Paralamas do Sucesso (whose lead singer, Herbert Vianna, is Hermano’s brother) and by Skank, as well as Gabriel O Pensador and Fernanda Abreu, among others. He views his way of working as a craft-oriented mode of
production in direct opposition to what were, at the time of our first inter-
view, the prevailing music industry models. As a producer who relatively 
early in the decade made the transition from working for a multinational 
label (Warner) to making records independently in his home studio, he 
anticipated the declining influence of the artists and repertoire director 
in this setting—and of the big recording studios—as occurred elsewhere. 
Even in 2009, the producer and guitarist Maurício Pacheco, of a younger 
generation than Lenine, related to me how important Chico’s work on O dia em que faremos contato was in that it created a “magic carpet” on which 
Lenine—until then more of a songwriter than an artist with a distinctive 
sound—could fly. Before examining selected tracks from this album, I 
briefly profile Chico.

In my conversation with the producer, the central theme that emerged 
was the subordination of the industrial tools of music—technologies 
such as the Pro Tools digital recording and postproduction system—to his 
agency as a creative artist who carefully chooses which projects he will pro- 
duce. In his view, the sampler and all technologies should be approached 
as the tools of a craftsman rather than as devices of mass production. 
Pierre Bourdieu would probably place him among the “dominated” frac- 
tion of the dominant class who, with relatively modest economic capital, 
seek to make up for this lack with cultural capital. In accordance with this 
fraction’s efforts to accumulate cultural capital, those who are part of it 
tend to favor, in Bourdieu’s framework, more “restricted” rather than mass 
production, and a comparatively high degree of autonomy from market 
forces (Hesmondhalgh 2006, 214; Bourdieu 1984).15 This a compelling way 
to think about this producer’s general outlook but it is not sufficient to ex-
plain his individual becoming, his minor history (or, for that matter, why 
some of his colleagues chose to continue in mass production), and it tells 
us nothing about the music he has made.

Chico moved to Rio at age seventeen and began working as a studio in-
tern at the EMI/Odeon recording label, helping out on the productions of 
major MPB and samba artists. A year later, Liminha, then director of art-
ists and repertoire at Warner Music, invited Chico to work as his assistant. 
From 1979 to 1986, he worked as a producer with Liminha and also began 
to work as an engineer at Liminha’s and Gilberto Gil’s recording facility, 
Nas Nuvens. By 1986, however, Chico had grown increasingly disillusioned 
with the music business. He quit his job at Warner and did not work for 
three years. He “was in a very bad state,” he recalled, no longer able to iden-
tify with the people around him or with “the way that they worked with music,” as he made an “interior journey” to find his own path.

In the process he came back to music after he bought a computer and a sampler and began to do things his own way, he said, “without trying to please anyone, without worrying about money.” As with Suzano’s career trajectory, we observe a process of individual becoming unfolding specifically in relation to emergent digital music technologies as Chico sought a “line of flight” out of an intolerable situation. With Fábio Fonseca, Chico developed much of the electronic programming and looping of the digital samples used on Fernanda Abreu’s first two solo albums (see chapter 4). Then he did the same for selected tracks of Gabriel O Pensador’s debut album. In 1994 he built a small recording studio in his apartment (Estúdio 302, which subsequently moved next door to apartment 304 and was renamed accordingly). Working independently, Chico claimed to have inconvenienced various people by not adhering to the rules of “the system,” by which he meant not conforming to the profit logic and marketing plans he saw as driving the music industry. People who “sell themselves to the system,” he said, are generally unhappy and not doing what they want. Sometimes, he conceded, he had money problems, but he found himself incapable of doing a project in which he lacked some sort of emotional involvement or interest. The recording process should be pleasurable rather than stressful, in his view, and this experience should be reflected in the music. “You need to find a way to make people happy in the studio and then you photograph that in sound.” Chico noted that he spent two years recording Lenine’s album (which is, of course, unusually long for a pop music recording). “I have no obligations to anyone,” he said. He funds projects himself and follows his own schedule, so that he can “remain open to ideas coming when they will.” This requires time, and projects mature and take form in their own way.

Not surprisingly, Chico contrasted his way of working in the studio (which Lenine called “artisanal”) with the kinds of production models he thought tended to be utilized in the sphere of pagode music, singling out the group É o Tchan and “the things that are selling here.” For him, these kinds of commercialized genres were “wrong,” a word choice that reinforces how participants in this music scene have shared ethical views on correct practices. “I don’t make music thinking about getting it on the radio,” he asserted. It was regrettable that people saw albums and artists as “products,” leading naturally to standardization; one recording label that Chico had approached about Lenine’s album wanted to treat him as
if he were a pagode artist. Not categorically against commercial music, Chico believed that within each recording system there had to be space for a variety of musical styles, echoing the position taken by the musicians at the MPB debate. “You can’t pass everyone through the same prism, the same filter,” he observed. Music makers do, of course, often attempt to position their work as art (or craft) rather than commodity for self-aggrandizement, but the case of Chico Neves’s career is indicative of the wider shifts that occurred in the local music scene, as demonstrated by the fact that Chico became a much sought-after producer in the 1990s.

As was the case for many of the other music makers I interviewed, Chico’s distaste for the more commercial aspects of the music business was matched by his optimism about the role of Brazilian music as globalization progressed. Brazilian music was quite rich, he felt, while “things abroad [were] very saturated.” Foreign music makers saw “a cauldron of ideas” in Brazil, and he was confident that the country’s music would become increasingly important in the world. His role in the recording studio was “to contribute to making this music more real.” He correctly assessed that “the scheme of the recording label” as it existed in the mid-1990s was over.16

During pre-production discussions about O dia em que faremos contato, Chico and Lenine discovered that they shared a passion for the English musician Peter Gabriel and his former band Genesis. They decided that they wanted to mix the album at Real World Studios in England, owned by Gabriel and a key site for world music production during the early 1990s. Through Bruno Boulay, a producer and Brazilian music promoter based in France, Chico established contact with Real World, and they were able to do the mixing there. When he arrived at the facility, Chico said, he felt like he had “found his place, his way of working.” It was “all about the music there, not about the money.” One suspects that this was not entirely accurate, but this impression was important to Chico’s narrative of his way of working, and it is noteworthy that as with Marcos Suzano’s sonic epiphany of self-discovery while working with the North American engineer Jim Ball, it was abroad that Chico initially found the mixing space he was seeking.17

Making Contact and Speaking to the World

Lenine composed the opening track to O dia em que faremos contato, “A ponte,” with his fellow Pernambucan Lula Queiroga (with whom Lenine had recorded Baque solto in 1983). The song was intended to express the possibility
of communication across “islands” of difference, he explained. It takes inspiration from the geography of Recife, a city built around a network of canals and waterways, which Lenine imagines as a series of islands linked by bridges, and as representing a setting marked by a paradoxical state between isolation and connection. The geographical metaphor has its parallel in the Internet, an association made sonically explicit at the beginning of the song with a sample of the once-familiar digital noise produced by the initiation of a computer dial-up connection. The bridge, then, is also part of a “web of connecting—the possibility of going and coming.” (The affinity that Lenine and Chico shared for the music of Peter Gabriel, which resulted in their mixing the album at Real World, exemplified the web.)

After eight seconds of the dial-up sound, the track makes a striking cut to a recording of the virtuosic embolada duo Caju e Castanha sampled from the soundtrack to the 1975 documentary Nordeste: Cordel, repente, canção (filmed when Caju and Castanha were twelve and seven years old, respectively). Their contribution to the documentary soundtrack (and to Lenine’s album, via sampling) begins with Caju describing how they got started as musicians, singing in public squares before they were able to afford pandeiros. The sound of the dial-up connection spliced with Caju’s narrative thus serves as a sonic metaphor symbolizing the linking of the traditional folklore and street performance of Pernambuco into new webs of communication.

As Caju speaks during the introduction to the track, a heavily distorted guitar ostinato fades in, joined quickly by a synthesized non-musical sine wave moving through a harmonic series, and percussive bass and guitar ostinatos. Chico Neves programmed loops and the various “effects” that contribute to an urban sound removed from the conventional timbres of the traditional côco. A ganzá enters in the first verse, performing steady but swinging sixteenth notes in duple meter, with the accent on beat 2. An additional syncopated rhythmic pattern performed on knife and plate (used in traditional samba de roda) enters for a brief period. Then, beginning almost two minutes into the track, a sampled snare drum strike on beat 2 of every other measure suggests a rock 4/4 meter until, suddenly, the song breaks to samples of the young Caju and Castanha singing an embolada for a few seconds, and of the French duo Les Fabulous Trobadors, who similarly rap oral poetry, usually in Occitan. The sampled and superimposed recordings of the two duos then cut out as Lenine’s song reenters on the phrase “Nagô, Nagô, na Golden Gate,” while heavily distorted rock
“power chords” (triads with roots and fifths doubled) on electric guitar follow the same rhythmic ostinato as the introductory portion. This change toward a more forceful sound makes sense here, as Lenine is referencing a popular song from the Recife maracatu Nação Porto Rico do Oriente: “Nagô, Nagô! Our queen has been crowned!” the song goes, referring to a West African Yoruba ethnicity (Crook 2005, 145).

Using wordplay, Lenine paints a loose association between the bridges of Recife and San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge. He takes advantage of the fact that Nagô and na Gol- (from the line “na Golden Gate,” meaning “on the Golden Gate”) sound the same in Brazilian pronunciation. “Accept my hemispheric song,” Lenine implores in the lyrics, “my voice on the Voice of America,” a reference to the transnational radio station of the United States government. He also plays on the rhymes of fonte (fountain), horizonte (horizon), and ponte (bridge) in a call-and-response series of indirect questions with chant-like responses, such as “This place is beautiful, but how to get off the island? (On the bridge, on the bridge.)” The bridge, he explains in the lyrics, is a metaphor for where his thoughts go, and it is more important for the act of crossing it than it is for going somewhere in particular. “A ponte” is thus a carefully constructed mixture of elements taken from côco (e.g., call-and-response or question and answer between verse and refrain, characteristic rhythms), from maracatu (Nagô), and the specific references to the urban geography of Recife, as well as cosmopolitan references. It won the Sharp Prize for best song in 1998, while Lenine himself earned the Sharp Prize in the category of best new MPB artist (“MPB Revelação”).

The song “Candeeiro encantado” (Enchanted lamp, composed with Paulo César Pinheiro) was inspired by one of the classics of Brazilian cinema, Glauber Rocha’s 1964 Cinema Novo film, Deus e o Diabo na terra do sol (titled Black God, White Devil in English). Deus e o Diabo, which takes place during a severe drought in the sertão (arid backlands), allegorizes the poverty, fanaticism, and injustice of life in the interior of the Northeast. In the middle of Lenine’s song, Chico inserted the audio from an excerpt of the film when the character Corisco (Othon Bastos), the “blond devil,” hears news of the capture and death of the notorious bandit of the sertão, Lampião (killed and beheaded by police in 1938), and incorporates his spirit, promising to seek vengeance. The outlaw’s name comes from the word for the oil lamps that could be found in homes of the Northeast, while a candeeiro is a gas lamp. Thus the refrain to the song is “É Lamp,
é Lamp, é Lamp, é Lampião / Meu candeeiro encantado” (“It’s Lamp, it’s Lamp, it’s Lampião / My enchanted lamp”), which also happens to play on the English word “lamp.” With references to characters from the film; to the popular Catholicism of the Northeast; to the mandacuru cactus that grows—as northeastern legend has it—where blood has been shed; to Jackson do Pandeiro and Luiz Gonzaga; to the maracatu; to the traditional Afro-Brazilian dance maculelê (performed in a circle with atabaque drums and pairs of sticks that are struck against each other rhythmically); and to the carimbó (a musical genre traditionally performed on drums made of tree trunks), this song is an homage to the Northeast, an area, Lenine protests in the lyrics, that is still not given the respect accorded the more industrialized Southeast of Brazil.

In “Pernambuco falando pelo mundo” (Pernambuco speaking to the world), Lenine takes stock of the emergence of the mangue beat scene by singing a medley of Pernambucan songs. He wanted to express his solidarity with the younger generation, he explained, but also to cite other historical moments that he saw as ideologically similar “in terms of attitude and objective.” The first song he cites in the medley is Luiz Bandeira’s “Voltei, Recife” (I’m back, Recife), a beloved frevo from 1958 with a memorable melody. Lenine sings the first verse about returning to the city out of longing (saudade) and the desire to hear the classic carnival frevo “Vassoura” while parading with the crowds on the streets. He then segues into the song “Frevo ciranda” (1974) by the celebrated Pernambucan composer Capiba (Lourenço da Fonseca Barbosa), thereby referencing yet another traditional genre associated especially (but not only) with the Northeast, the ciranda, a circle dance and song primarily of Portuguese origin in which males and females (often children) separate into two circles. He continues with a citation of Alceu Valença’s “Sol e chuva” (1976). Finally Lenine sings a few lines from the song “Rios, pontes, e overdrives” (1994) by Chico Science and Fred 04, leading figures in the mangue beat scene.

This composite medley, he said, was “a little congratulations” for his hometown at a moment when Recife was enjoying much media attention, but it was also a reminder to younger audiences that the city had a long tradition of great popular music. Recife has suffered from sentiments of self-deprecation, Lenine held, that alternatively cycle through moments in which people celebrate local culture. The main contribution of the mangue beat bands, in his view, was their ability to promote the development of self-esteem among an audience of students who listened almost exclu-
sively to international rock, broadening the public for this music beyond “a ghetto of two hundred people” who previously constituted the audience for local progressive rock bands like Ave Sangria and Flaviola e o Bando do Sol. (Not surprisingly, he contrasted mangue beat with the pagode group É o Tchan, which dominated the airwaves at the time. “I’m speaking about a project that has a different kind of public as its object,” Lenine said. The music has “a concept, a discourse.”)

What Color Is the Groove?

The song “Que baque é esse?” (What is this beat?) also alludes to Recife’s maracatu in a hard-driving, funky groove with a bluesy syncopated horn arrangement contributed by Carlos Malta (soprano, tenor, and baritone saxophone). Suzano plays a maracatu-like rhythm on the zabumba, a hip-hop-inspired rhythm on the pandeiro, and a shuffling backbeat on the snare drum. Lenine provides a harmonic base in characteristically funky acoustic guitar parts, but a distorted electric guitar adds bluesy rock power chords in parts of the track. A couple of minutes into the song, the guitars and voice drop out for a baritone saxophone solo over a hip-hop-samba-backbeat groove. Marcos Suzano plays snare drum with brushes, articulating figures that hint at the sixteenth–eighth–sixteenth note rhythm common in samba, coco, and other Brazilian genres. The sound of the drum is electronically panned from left to right channels and back in the stereo mix, in time with the beat. Another break later in the song features the syncopated, tightly arranged, and deeply funky horns with rock guitar in the background.

The lyrics describe a woman, probably African descended (nega), dancing at the front of a maracatu street procession on a hot, sunny day in early summer. The subject of the song, presumably a male (although not specified), is infatuated with her performance. The word baque refers to the thud or thump of things colliding or collapsing (and, as already described, is used to describe the heavy beat of the bass drums in maracatu). The verb form, baquear, means to fall noisily, or to ruin, to destroy. Lenine plays with these meanings as he sings “Ô Nega, que baque é esse? / Chegou pra me baquear,” meaning, roughly, “Hey black woman, what is this beat? / You showed up to ruin me.” Only one who follows behind the nega dancing to the pulsing of the bombo drum, Lenine sings, is capable of understanding all the “magic” of her dance, and of the crowd losing themselves in fantasy.
The word “nega,” José Jorge de Carvalho observes, appears in countless songs. While its literal translation is “black woman,” it is also a more generalized term of sexual intimacy that harkens back to the patriarchal setting of the colonial era, when relations between an upper-class white man and his wife remained very formal, while white men often had casual relations with black or mulatto mistresses (1994, 23). In this broader usage, nega need not indicate the skin color of a woman. “When a man calls a woman of fair skin nega,” Carvalho writes, “this means she is able to preserve for him . . . something of the sexual mystery attached to the real other.” In “Que baque é esse?” the nega is similarly eroticized, although the lyrics represent the scene as natural to the context of the Afro-Brazilian maracatu. The reference to magic also suggests a kind of bewitching, enhancing a sense of otherness in the imagery. The rhythmic base and all the musical parts of the song were intended to “reinforce the question ‘What is this beat?’” Lenine observed. Neither maracatu nor samba nor exactly hip-hop, the groove was “an innovative polyrhythm” of indeterminacy. Had the musicians played a more straightforward groove, Lenine felt, the song would have been banal. Instead, there was no formula to the song’s “musical path.” The indeterminacy of the rhythm in this song complements the sense of sexual mystery that Carvalho writes is associated with the word nega.

The song “Etnia caduca” (Expired ethnicity) treats the theme of racial mixture. “It’s the chameleon in front of a rainbow / Smearing the eyes of the multitudes with colors,” Lenine sings in the opening lines. A “cauldron mixing rites and races,” the “Miscegenation Mass.” Lenine uses the words race and ethnicity more or less interchangeably in the lyrics, drawing attention to several antiquated racial typologies and derogatory expressions (for example, um mameluco maluco, meaning a crazy mameluco, a term once used to refer to someone with Amerindian and white European parentage). Why should miscegenation be the defining characteristic of Brazilian identity when other countries have also experienced racial and cultural mixture? I asked him when we discussed this song. “In any other place in the world,” Lenine answered, miscegenation is less obvious. “Think about it,” he continued. “We are completing five hundred years of what? Screwing [fidelância]! That’s what colonization was like. They didn’t discover anything. There were already thousands of races, hundreds of indigenous nations.” Thus the mixture of peoples was “more explicit” in Brazil than elsewhere. It was in the libido, in the Brazilian character.
At the same time, with the expression etnia caduca, Lenine meant to say that the idea of ethnicity (actually meaning race here) has “expired” (caduca means “senile” or “failing”). Instead, the constantly changing color of the chameleon in front of the rainbow of global culture, he suggested, might be a more appropriate metaphor for Brazilian identity in the contemporary world. On the listening notes for the CD, he added a different question: “But what color is the chameleon when it is looking in a mirror?” In the context of this song, the metaphor of the chameleon seems to suggest that subjective aspects of self-identification, including how one’s color contributes to one’s racial identity, are in constant tension with externally imposed classifications. In front of a mirror, however, the chameleon is faced with the task of choosing its color based only on cues emanating from it. However we read Lenine’s evocation of this riddle in this context, it certainly reinforces the sense that Brazilian identity is forever unfinished, that becoming is the permanent, quintessential state of being Brazilian (and that Brazilian identity is intensely racialized).

This short song begins with a looped and precisely even sixteenth-note rhythmic ostinato modified electronically with filters so that it is not clear what the sources were. Using different instantiations of this effect on a variety of percussive sounds contributes to the layered texture of the rhythm. In the introduction, the filter cycles through two beats, suggesting a duple meter typical to samba (and creating a sound somewhat like a strong wind whipping through a gully), while other unfiltered percussive elements such as the splash sound articulated every eight beats follow longer cycles or only articulate selected sixteenth notes rather than providing the consistent ostinato. Electric fretless bass and Lenine’s customarily percussive and syncopated acoustic guitar accompaniment fill out the basic groove, while the mix is periodically adorned with odd electronically created or modified effects provided by Chico Neves. Beginning about fifteen seconds into the song, the percussion track fills up with Suzano playing various samba instruments: pandeiro, tamborim, surdo, caixa, and agogô. Later in the song, the guitar and bass drop out for an extended percussion break over which Lenine sings a rhythmic scat. The resulting rhythm is an intensely propulsive rethinking of samba that uses a relatively streamlined instrumentation. “What is the sound of samba in front of a mirror?” this song seems to be asking. It is a layered, electronically manipulated, and emergent samba integrated into these musicians’ musical becomings.
Lenine’s Second Album

For his album Na pressão (Under pressure), Lenine chose to work with the producer Tom Capone, then director of artists and repertoire at Warner Music. By 1999 Tom, who began his career as a rock musician (electric guitar and bass) in Brasília, had become an influential figure in Brazilian popular music production and an important presence in the South Zone scene. Occasionally, he recorded at his home, an impressive space located on a secluded, forested slope near the Barra da Tijuca area of the West Zone. In March 1999 I accompanied the wind instrumentalist Carlos Malta to a recording session there. Carlos had written an arrangement of Lenine and Braúlio Tavares’s carnival theme “O suvaco é a maior diversão” (Suvaco is the most fun, referring to the Suvaco do Cristo South Zone carnival bloco), and it was to be incorporated into the album. My field materials document a discussion about carnival samba that Carlos had with a recording assistant (whom I knew only by his nickname, Tatú) before recording began. They were bemoaning what they perceived as a trend toward simplification of the melodies in samba de enredo (themed samba, the genre most commonly utilized in Carnival). “It’s what’s easiest to sing,” Carlos complained of the newer sambas, as he began intoning, for contrast, the melody and lyrics to Edeor de Paula’s “Os sertões” from 1976, based on Euclides da Cunha’s classic account of the battle of Canudos. By the third word, Tatú was singing along. “Now that is so beautiful,” they agreed. “It was from an era in which the melodic beauty of samba was also valued,” Carlos asserted. Today, he said, the judges who choose the songs for a given carnival samba school reject melodies that they think will be “too difficult for the people [povo] to sing.” How boring this was, Carlos lamented, because those sambas with beautiful melodies are “immortal.”

Tatú began singing, as an example of another unforgettable theme, “Kizomba, a festa da raça” (Kizomba, the festival of the race), which celebrates Zumbi, Palmares, and abolition. “Porra, man, this is beautiful,” Carlos chimed in. Interestingly, these two sambas treat the two major rebellions described above, an indication of these events’ importance in national culture. Carlos went on to mention some of the individuals he felt were great melodists of samba: Cartola, Nelson Cavaquinho, Paulinho da Viola. “All these guys,” he said, “had a very healthy competition [to see] who could write melodies with staying power.” This aspect, Carlos thought, was being “massacred by this thing of simplicity,” whereby pro-
Producers think the melody has to be “popular.” These sambas were popular! he exclaimed, and everyone would sing along.

Carlos’s march-like arrangement of “Suvaco é a maior diversão” for flute, piccolo, alto and tenor saxophone, trumpet, flugelhorn, trombone, bass trombone, euphonium, and tuba was utilized in the song “Rua da passagem (Trânsito),” on which it entered as a mere sixteen seconds of passing music. Co-composed with the São Paulo–based musician Arnaldo Antunes, the track establishes a distinct cinematic soundscape reflecting Arnaldo’s lyrics about a busy intersection where impatient drivers honk at a motorist waiting for a dog to get out of the street. Slow down, the motorist-narrator requests; there’s no need to run over the dog. Respect life. The song begins with the sound of a banda de pífanos, playing a duplê-meter samba-like rhythm, which fades out after about half a minute. Simultaneously, there are sounds of traffic and cattle groaning. Rural and urban, rustic and modern, natural and manufactured collide in a kind of sonic metaphor for a rapidly developing late twentieth-century Brazil. At thirty-nine seconds, Carlos Malta’s arrangement of “O suvaco é a maior diversão” fades into the mix for its quarter minute and then fades out. The calls of street vendors can be heard for a few seconds when, about a minute and a half into the song, an aggressive, driving groove is established on bombo and snare, suggesting a maracatu rural, and complemented by melodic riffs played by Siba, then of the Recife band Mestre Ambrósio, on the unmistakably northeastern rabeca fiddle. Tom Capone doubles Siba’s melody on electric guitar before he leads into a distorted rock guitar solo late in the song. Electric bass propels the rhythm forward with a simple ostinato figure. Five minutes into the track, the music stops and the listener hears nothing but traffic (in stereo, with automobiles passing from one channel to another) for a long forty seconds. Then a programmed electronic beat with unidentifiable distorted sounds enters for the remaining twenty-five seconds of the song, concluding the brief film-like sonic story.

The first song on Na pressão, “Jack soul brasileiro,” also begins with an aural reference to the Northeast, this time with DJ Marcelinho da Lua providing, on vinyl, a few seconds of the start of a maracatu rural with the alfaia drum, and a melodic ostinato plucked on the viola, the steel-string double-course guitar popular in the rural Northeast. The song is a tribute to master of the côco, embolada, and forró, Jackson do Pandeiro. It is a rousing rock-funk-forró-blues mixture in which Lenine incorporates verses and recorded samples from Jackson’s songs “Cantiga do sapo” and
“Chiclete com banana” (1959) into his own verse. Charles Perrone and Christopher Dunn have described how the music and lyrics of “Chiclete com banana” demonstrated Jackson do Pandeiro’s facility with the “inter-regional” mixing of forró with samba from Rio, as well as his use of international pop vocal stylings in the original recording, while subsequent recorded versions of the song inserted it into debates over popular music and globalization (2001, 4). “The country of swing is the country of contradiction,” Lenine sings in his lyrics, as he shouts out to the “king of the groove,” following the percussive “rules of the embolada”: “The dance, the muganga, the dengo / The swing of the mamulengo / The charm of this country.” The word soul, as used here, is a reference both to the North American musical genre and to the “Brazilian soul.” Not only does “Jack soul brasileiro” rhyme with “Jackson do Pandeiro”; it also sounds identical in Portuguese to the phrase “Já que sou brasileiro” (Being that I am Brazilian), another line from the lyrics. The words muganga, dengo, and mamulengo, with probable etymologies in African languages, are part of the lexicon of the Northeast. The mamulengo, for example, is a marionette play popular in Pernambuco.

The poetic ring of the lines “a dança, a muganga, o dengo / a ginga do mamulengo” in their côco/embolada musical setting is tremendously musical, capturing the spirit of the northeastern oral poetry-song. There are also what might be called “Anglicisms”—words that have been appropriated into Brazilian Portuguese speech and orthography from English, such as ringue (ring), suingue (swing), and charme (charm). In the second verse, Lenine deepens the tongue twisting in rhymes, alliterations, and repetitions of one-syllable words. English words appropriated by Portuguese such as funk and rock are mixed with references to Afro-Brazilian culture such as samba and batuque (a generic term for Afro-Brazilian drumming and dance), and to Pernambuco (repique refers to a drum used in samba, but also to the traditional festive ringing of church bells in Pernambuco). The word banguela (meaning a toothless person) is probably another Africanism. Much of the lyrical force of the words in this song thus derives simply from their sound. While the vocal to “Jack soul brasileiro” is grounded in the rhythms of the côco, programmed electronic drum parts suggest a 4/4 rock beat. Lenine adds a zabumba bass drum to his characteristically funky acoustic guitar groove, while Tom Capone plays electric bass.

Lenine takes his penchant for wordplay to an extreme on the song “Meu
amanhã (Intuindo tool)" (My tomorrow [Intuiting the tilde]), which begins as a love song but turns out to be a vehicle for the songwriter to juxtapose words that differ slightly in spelling (similar to “orthographic neighbors”), as well as words that sound similar but differ in meaning (paronomasia).26 “Minha meta, minha metade” (“My goal [or limit], my half”), he sings, also using alliteration. Several of the pairings differ primarily in their dia-critic markings: “Minha diva, meu divã / minha manha, meu amanhã” (“My diva, my divan / my whining, my tomorrow”), fá (as in the solfeggio for the fourth scale degree) and fã (fan), massa (pasta or paste) and maçã (apple), lá (the sixth scale degree in solfeggio, also “there”) and lã (wool), paga (wages) and pagã (pagan), sal (salt) and são (health, soundness, also saint), and Tao (the Chinese word) and tão (meaning “as much as”). One of the most creative of these sets is the line “Nau de Nassau, minha nação,” referring to the ship (nau) of John Maurice of Nassau, governor of Dutch Pernambuco from 1637 to 1644 (before Portugal reclaimed the area), and then “my nation,” an ingenious reference to the importance of the contested Northeast in the formation of the Brazilian nation. Another clever phrase is “Amor em Roma, aroma de romã,” or “Love in Rome, the aroma of pomegranate,” and finally “O que é certo, o que é sertão,” meaning “What is certain, what is sertão,” yet another reference to the Northeast.

The song “Relampiano” (Lightning), co-composed with Paulinho Moska, describes the daily life of a poor family struggling to survive. It does so with a tone of resignation emphasized by the allusion to a well-known phrase attributed to Che Guevara: “One has to harden without ever losing tenderness” (“Hay que endurecerse, sin perder la ternura jamás”). In Lenine’s song, the phrase is adapted as “One has to harden such a frail heart.” (That it is a paraphrase of the popular saying is clear from the fact that the line is sung in Spanish and placed in quotation marks in the printed lyrics.)

The possibility of revolution, however, seems distant, as the subjects of the song have become resigned to their lives: “It is lightning, where is the child?” asks the refrain. Selling candies at the traffic light is the answer. The lyrics describe daily toil as the child hits the streets to work and the mother washes clothes in the father’s absence. A crying baby gets used to “the world outside the shack” and it is this child’s frail heart that must be hardened, for its life “points down a one-way street.” The second verse suggests that even with the passage of time, little has changed except that there is a new man in the household and the mother is pregnant. She is ironing the man’s clothes. The baby soon to be born is “one more mouth
in the shack.” The music features the kinds of chord changes and temporary modulations one might hear in a moderate-tempo choro or a modinha (a sentimental song popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Its winding melody, together with the accordion provided by the Pernambucan forró master Dominguinhos, gives the piece a melancholy serenade-like sound that serves to underscore the sense that the subjects’ poverty has become normal for them, that they are resigned to a daily grind.

The text to this song was adopted for some academic tests in Brazil. For example, the 2005 entrance exam for one university asked test-takers to analyze the song lyrics. Multiple-choice answers suggested that the phrase attributed to Che Guevara might be a criticism of the “romantic” view that “proclaimed the innocence of poor families who freely bear children,” or perhaps that in affirming that “the city grows together with the kid,” the composer “recognizes that state strategies to restrict the movements of children through the streets are working,” or that “the crisis of the family,” poor schools, crime, and poverty are each “another kilogram of flour from the same sack” (a line from the song) of realities that characterize childhood in Brazil. A 2007 sample exam for a social services program at the Universidade Federal Fluminense similarly asked test-takers to contemplate specific lines of the song. “Lacking guarantees of its most basic rights,” one of the possible answers proposes, “the child is obligated to mature and ‘harden.’” The “kilo” in the lyrics, the test imaginatively suggests, “is an allusion to the low birth weight of the child, while ‘flour from the same sack’ compares the child . . . to all the children immersed in this universe of poverty, of abandonment, and of the absence of dignified conditions of living.”

Lenine has described the initial inspiration for the imagery of the song. He and his co-composer, Paulinho Moska, were stopped at a traffic light when a boy selling candies came up to their car. Just then, a bolt of lightning coursed through the sky, and the child said, “Tá relampiano” (“It’s lightning”). The boy then noticed that there was an empty car seat in the rear of the automobile and said, “Where’s the baby?” (“Cadê neném?”). In making a song out of the episode, Lenine and Paulinho turned the child’s question into a social statement about the child himself, and about poverty in Brazil. The impoverished baby grows up fast. The answer to the question “Where’s the baby?” is “Out in the street working.” What is striking about the lyrics to this song, their melancholy musical accompaniment, and the proposed readings in the university exams is the utter lack
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of agency attributed to the personages, especially the mother and child (perhaps the fathers mentioned in the song could be said to have some agency). There is an implied appeal to change those structures, but the individuals restricted by them are portrayed as basically resigned to their situations in life.

“Tubi Tupy” (To be Tupy) offers another allegory of the Brazilian nation in its narrative about the Tupinambá (alt. Tupi or Tupy) indigenous inhabitants as “liberated,” “natural,” “animal,” and “digital” descendants of the big bang, while it makes a textual reference not only to Oswald de Andrade’s modernist “Cannibalist Manifesto” (1928) but also to the band Pedro Luís e A Parede’s 1997 album Astronauta Tupy (Tupy astronaut). The Tupy is a “tropical cannibal” reborn from the brazilwood after which the nation is named (possibly a reference to Oswald’s earlier Brazilwood Manifesto of 1925), a liberated “Tupy astronaut” made out of the remains of exploding stars at the beginning of time. Tubi, a phonetic spelling of the English “to be,” is a reference to Oswald’s line in the manifesto, “Tupi, or not tupi that is the question” (as it appears in the original, a “cannibalization” of Hamlet [O. Andrade 1995, 142]).

Lenine sings the first verse over percussion only: a slow electronically programmed rock-like beat on bass drum and snare (provided by Plínio Profeta) establishing a rather bellicose atmosphere that is heightened by acoustic drums such as the caixa de guerra, referencing the storied aggressiveness of the Tupinambá. C. A. Ferrari, Sidon Silva, and Celso Alvim, percussionists in the band Pedro Luís e A Parede, add surdo, tarol, and hubcap (calota). The percussionist Marco Lobo plays the berimbau musical bow part during instrumental interludes. The berimbau, with a single steel string, a dried hollowed-out gourd resonator, and a very distinctive timbre, is believed to derive from African (Bantu) musical bows and has no links to traditionally Amerindian instruments. Nonetheless, it is often used in Brazilian popular music as a sonic symbol for purportedly “ethnic” or “tribe-like” dimensions of the country (see Galm 2010).

The refrain to the song is an aggressive-sounding chant. “My name is Tupy,” Lenine sings, with his voice doubled several times as if a small tribe were chanting. This line is followed by the name of another indigenous people, the Gaikuru (or Gaykuru). “My name is Perí, of Ceci,” it continues, in a reference to the mid-nineteenth-century nativist novel O Guarani by José de Alencar, a classic of Brazilian literature. In Alencar’s novel, Perí is a “noble savage” figure and the chief of the Goitacá Amerindian
and helps the Portuguese defeat the indigenous tribes of the area. Ceci is a chaste Native American woman who is often identified with the Virgin Mary. “I am the nephew of Caramuru,” Lenine sings in a reference to Diogo Álvares Correia, a shipwrecked Portuguese man who lived among the native populations in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and to whom the Tupinambá gave the name Caramuru. He is said to be the first European to live in Brazil, the mythical initiator of the process of miscegenation. He married the indigenous woman Paraguaçu and later helped found the city of Salvador and establish the first Portuguese government in Brazil.  

The last line of the refrain names “Galdino, Juruna, and Raoni.” Galdino Jesus dos Santos was a Pataxó Indian whom five upper-middle-class youths burned alive while he was sleeping at a bus stop in Brasilia in 1997 (having traveled to the city to commemorate the Day of the Indian). Juruna is an indigenous group in the state of Mato Grosso, in the northern part of the Parque Indígena Xingu. Raoni Metuktire is a well-known leader of the Kayapó tribe, an indigenous people also in Mato Grosso with a reputation as fierce fighters. Raoni became a public figure in the 1980s as he negotiated with the Brazilian government for the protection of indigenous lands and peoples. He also accompanied the British singer-songwriter Sting on a trip to Europe to campaign for indigenous rights. This song was adopted as the main theme for the film Caramuru: A invenção do Brasil (Caramaru: The invention of Brazil), a satirical take on the legend. The sweep and intertextuality of these lyrical and sonic references to historical and contemporary events, personages, and cultural practices is impressive.

Braúlio Tavares described the title track to the album (“Na pressão”), which he co-composed with Lenine, as a kind of a continuation of the song “Acredite ou não,” as if they were “Part[s] I and II” of a portrait of contemporary Brazil. “In this case, however,” he wrote me, “we spoke of the pressure of violence, of terrorism, of shootouts, of crime, etc.” (pers. commun., 30 August 2008). The central image, he explained, is of a witch brooding over a cauldron, but instead of cooking up the typically Brazilian bean dish feijoada, she stirs in dynamite. The song begins with Lenine playing an ostinato on the ten-string viola caipira, using the same minor scale used for the cantoria tradition (and for Lenine and Braúlio’s song “O marco Marciano”), with the raised fourth scale degree. The percussionist Naná Vasconcelos adds accents on the “Turkish drum” (a pitched bass
drum), the West African talking drum, and the wicker caxixi shakers of Brazil. “Keep an eye on the pressure, it’s boiling,” the lyrics begin. “Oil on the pan / Dynamite is the bean cooking in her stew / The witch lit the fire and is stoking it, folks.” The witch “is violence, war,” Braúlio clarified. Into the broth the witch drips the saliva of a “ferocious devil-beast,” stirring up violence throughout Brazil, but the lyrics make no references to specific incidents. Like “Relampiano,” this song does not point toward an activist agenda, although it warns that society reaps what it sows.

Subsequent Work

Lenine released his third solo album, Falange canibal (Cannibal crowd), in 2002. His co-composers for the songs on this album were Paulo César Pinheiro, Lula Queiroga, Dudu Falcão, Bráulio Tavares, and Carlos Rennó, as well as the North American drummer Will Calhoun from the band Living Colour, who toured Brazil with Lenine that year. After several years spent establishing himself abroad, Lenine’s collaborators for this recording comprised an especially cosmopolitan group. Among those from Brazil were the legendary bossa nova-era pianist Eumir Deodato; the literary scholar, composer, and pianist José Miguel Wisnik; the rock guitarist Roberto Frejat; Marcelo Lobato and Xandão from the rock group O Rappa; the electric guitarist Jr Tostoi and members of his group Vulgue Tostoi; Henrique Portugal and Haroldo Ferreti, of the pop-rock band Skank; and members of the old guard of Rio’s legendary Mangueira samba school. Besides Will Calhoun, musicians from abroad included the singer Ani DiFranco; the jazz musician Steve Turre; the New York City-based “Afro-Cuban funk and hip-hop collective” Yerba Buena; the Russian musician Alexander Cheparukhin (formerly of the band Farlanders); Claude Sicre and Ange B. from Les Fabulous Trobadors; and the accordionist Regis Gizavo of Madagascar.

The album, which was nominated for a Latin Grammy in the category of contemporary Brazilian pop, is a tribute to a small bar from the late eighties in the Lapa district of Rio de Janeiro where, in Lenine’s recollection, a variety of artists felt a great sense of liberty to make whatever kind of art they wanted (highlighting again the importance of the trope of creative freedom for the artists in this scene). For Lenine, the name Falange canibal also represented key aspects of his career: the cannibalist aesthetic, and the collaborative process (Carpegianni 2000). The opening track, “Ecos do ão” (Echoes of the ão) showcases Vulgue Tostoi’s art-rock aesthetic. Jr’s
guitar on this track pays homage to Marc Ribot’s guitar playing on Tom Waits’s 1985 Rain Dogs album, and Lenine’s voice is processed in a similar manner to Waits’s on that album, giving it a kind of boxed-up shortwave radio–like sound. The lyrics to this song are again full of wordplay with nearly each line finishing with a word ending in ão (e.g., são, ação, inauguração, civilização, nação). The theme of the lyrics is a utopian vision for ending hunger and “slander” (difamação, an odd word in this context, clearly chosen for its ão) and inaugurating a civilization “as unique as our ão” that would realize “beautiful, free, and luminous” dreams for the nation.

The northeastern influences on Falange canibal are somewhat less obvious than on Lenine’s first two albums, signaling in part the influence of various international personnel on the recording, but also the changed production context after the turn of the millennium, in which it seemed to be less urgent to manifest a resurgent sonic Brazilianness. The mixture is still there; it just doesn’t draw as much attention to itself. In “Nem o sol, nem a lua, nem eu” (Neither the sun, nor the moon, nor I), for example, the electric guitarist Xandão utilizes rhythmic syncopations characteristic of bossa nova, while the text and melody are influenced by the ciranda song and dance. The most unusual sound in this restrained little song is the conch shell performance by Steve Turre. Lenine identifies the song as a “ciranda cyberpunk,” noting that Turre’s “divine conch shells” transport the song to “the sands of a remote beach . . . on Saturn!”

The song “Caribantu” (from Carib [Amerindians] and Bantu, the African ethnicity) joins some thirty musicians from the musical cast of Chico Buarque’s pop opera Cambiá and senior musicians of Rio’s oldest samba school, Mangueira, into a mixture of samba de roda, Candomblé, and maracatu. “No pano da jangada” (On the sail of the raft) is a kind of côco referring to a simple fishing boat of the Northeast and the North, recorded with only Lenine’s voice, along with percussion that he made with his mouth and also by sliding his feet around on sand that he had spread on the studio floor.

“Rosebud (O verbo e a verba)” (Rosebud [the verb and the money]), co-composed with Lenine’s longtime collaborator and fellow Recife native Lula Queiroga, again emphasizes the lyrical possibilities of wordplay, such as in the opening chant of “Dolores, dolores, dolores! Dólares!” where dolores means “woes” in Spanish, while dólares is “dollars.” The lyrics anthropomorphize “the verb” (o verbo) and “the money” (a verba), narrating a strange love story in which the talkative verb (gendered as a masculine
character in the song) seeks the love of “cold and quiet” money (gendered female). With its trumpets and the montuno call-and-response and a refrain sung in Spanish near the end of the song by the members of the group Yerba Buena—“Ai que dolor, que dolor que me da los dólares” (“Oh what pain dollars cause me”)—this song borrows from the son genre of Cuba while expressing a poetic pan–Latin American critique of the economic dominance of the United States.32

In 2004 Lenine released the DVD and CD of the Paris Cité de la Musique Carte Blanche concert, and then in 2006, the live Acústico MTV CD. The In Cité CD won a Latin Grammy Award for best Brazilian contemporary pop album in 2005, while Acústico MTV won the same award in 2007. In Brazil, Lenine won four Tim Prizes (formerly the Sharp Prize) in the categories of best song (“Todas elas juntas num só ser,” co-composed with Carlos Rennó), best pop-rock singer, best pop-rock album (In Cité), and best singer by popular vote. A good portion, although not all, of the repertoire on these albums is taken from the earlier CDs. Lenine was now an acknowledged planetary minstrel, especially popular in France, and his sound on the live album is a polished, technically sophisticated jazzy global pop.33

Conclusions

At a time when the mangue beat bands drew media attention in Brazil and abroad to emergent youth cultures of Recife, Lenine found his voice in the Rio de Janeiro music scene with his mixture of northeastern musical genres, samba, rock, and newer electronic sounds. I have sought to provide details about the specific sounds for which he has become known, to examine several song lyrics from his early solo albums, and to show how his music fits into a longer history of popular musicians from the Northeast who have established links between region and nation, communicating a part to the whole, as described by Bryan McCann. If the Northeast is a topos more than just a geographical location, Lenine helped to augment its presence in international circuits of popular music.

During an interview I conducted in Rio in June 2009 with Maurício Pacheco pertaining to a separate research project, Lenine came up in our conversation. Maurício, who is of a younger generation of musicians to emerge from the South Zone, described how the Pernambucan was a trailblazer in self-management, quickly accruing what Jocelyne Guilbault has referred to as an “assemblage of practices, knowledges, and technologies”
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(2007, 265): “Lenine was the first younger guy, besides the great icons, who was able to enter into the European markets that were opening—the whole WOMAD thing, events where you mix business with shows and music and everything. . . . He went at the right moment and had the intelligence and the characteristics to take advantage of this development. . . . I remember in 1999 he made a tour here that was covered by Mondomix [based in Paris] . . . which was just a little website then, like a blog. These guys filmed his whole tour and Lenine would send [clips] to us. So a few people like me and some of our friends saw this and said, ‘Oh . . . look what is going on. What an interesting site.’ Two years later Mondomix already had an electronic magazine, and today it is . . . an important reference.” It is important, Maurício added, to recognize “people who have not been there quite as long as Caetano [Veloso] and [Gilberto] Gil.” Lenine was as much “a connecting thread” as they, he felt, the kind of person who “pulls the level of the music higher”: “He is a guy who carries the boat. Paulinho Moska once told me, ‘Every time I hear an album of Lenine’s, I sit at home the whole day and think, Porra, how is it that I didn’t have this idea?’ . . . Besides the fact that we could spend hours talking about his compositions, I think he . . . is conscious that he’s not making the music just for himself . . . [that] it reverberates among artists, among the public . . . And I think he knows that he doesn’t always get it right. It took him a long time to find [his voice]. This makes him more human.”

Jocelyne Guilbault’s study of the Trinidadian carnival music scene since the 1990s shows how musical activities there came to be viewed as “cultural capital to be managed as part of a market economy” in contrast with the more nation-building emphasis of earlier times (2007, 264–65). Emergent forms of cultural entrepreneurship, she writes, demonstrate “a profound understanding of the processes, both discursive and material, at work under neoliberalism” (265). At the same time, however, Maurício pointed out that Lenine did not always “get it right,” that his becoming took several years. Indeed, Lenine’s emergence as a singer-songwriter speaking from Pernambuco to the world owes much to his collaborations with Suzano, Chico Neves, and Tom Capone, among others. He had his “ideas about things,” Lenine said, but mostly what he did was “agglutinate,” bring people together to do all his work jointly. “What people take from life is human relations,” he reflected, sounding less like a rational “neoliberal subject” than like a humanist cultural cannibal. More than a set of market-oriented policies imposed from without, neoliberalism is
a “set of cultural meanings and practices related to the constitution of proper personhood, markets and the state that are emergent in a contested cultural field” (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008, 120).

Is there a political project in Lenine’s work? Probably not one that can forcefully agitate for a transformation of class relations, but in terms of transforming the space of music production, Lenine was central to this group project in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1990s. The enemy, for these musicians, was the stifling of creative freedom, whether by xenophobic nationalism or by homogenizing market forces associated with multinational corporations and neoliberal capitalism. Lenine came into Chico Neves’s life precisely at the moment the latter launched his project of “resistance” against the conventional music industry as he knew it, his “line of flight.” Chico, for his part, incorporated technology into Lenine’s sound, giving him his “magic carpet,” as Maurício Pacheco put it.