

Bordering sonorities: fruition and rearticulations of pop music and popular music^a

Sonoridades fronteiriças: fruição e rearticulações da música pop e da música popular

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated empirical data from musical listening workshops to analyze the communicational aspects of hybrid musical productions by artists from the global South. The discourse of workshop participants open a premise to consider the mixture of rhythms, instrumentation, timbres, and bodies as the production of situated knowledge about different cultures. Thus, the activities in the workshops represent other community dynamics and new ways of populating the experience of musical fruition. Nomadism (Deleuze and Guattari) and cultural frontiers (Lotman) were used as theoretical concepts to understand the production of some artists and the shared enjoyment of their works in the workshops. This study aimed to analyze how this communicational experience can rearticulate subjectivities in a sense of alterity considering Latin American and decolonial perspectives.

Keywords: Fruition, sound, otherness, cultural frontiers, nomadism.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo retoma dados empíricos coletados em oficinas de escuta musical para analisar aspectos comunicacionais de produções musicais híbridas de artistas do Sul Global. As falas dos participantes das oficinas abrem um pressuposto para considerar a mistura de ritmos, instrumentação, timbres e corpos como produção de saberes situados acerca de diferentes culturas. Assim, as atividades nas oficinas representam outras dinâmicas de comunidade e novas modalidades de povoar a experiência da fruição musical. Nomadismo (Deleuze, Guattari) e fronteiras culturais (Lotman) foram os conceitos teóricos usados para compreender a produção de alguns artistas e a fruição partilhada de suas obras nas oficinas. O objetivo é analisar como essa experiência

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comunicacional possibilita rearticulações de subjetividades num sentido de alteridade, levando em conta perspectivas latino-americanas e decoloniais.

Palavras-chave: fruição; som; alteridade; fronteiras culturais; nomadismo.

¹ Excerpt taken from the podcast *O Som do Vinil*, episode “Estudando o samba – parte 1” (Canal Brasil, 2016), currently this material has been compiled into a book published by Imã Publishing.

THE ARTISTIC TRAJECTORY of Tom Zé is exemplary of the productivity of cultural and semiotic entremeses. On one hand, he references the orality of Brazilian popular cultures, the “provençal poets”¹ (Zé; Gavin, 2016). On the other hand, in the same interview, Tom Zé recalls when he came into contact with globalized rock, being moved after watching a film about Bill Haley. The theme of the mentioned interview refers to the context that influenced tropicalismo, an artistic movement of which Tom Zé is a part, alongside names like Caetano, Gil, Gal Costa, etc. If tropicalismo is marked by mixtures, it is not alone in national historicity and in a way approaches the notion of anthropophagy of the modernist Oswald de Andrade. Much has been said about the tropicalist effervescence, materialized in the album *Tropicália ou panis et circencis* (1968), among other albums of the same period, but what matters here is to notice how artistic movements that bring together sounds through entremeses and unpredictabilities are capable of reconfiguring cultural territories and suggesting a popular in the plural – Gil, for example, was between the borders of the Banda de Pífanos de Caruaru and the album *Sgt. Pepper’s* (1967) by The Beatles. When territorialities become indeterminate, we perceive a popular beyond market issues, a result of phonography and mass media in historicity. It is possible, then, to think of a communicational process situated in the spaces between cultures, with blurred borders, in which subjectivities can be rethought in the act of mobilizing other affects. Of course, the popular presupposes dialogisms, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1987) observed, but in the media scenarios of tastes and demarcated communities, these porous regions are sometimes less visible, to the detriment of the market dimensions (and today algorithmic ones) that resonate in musical fruition.

The sonorities of entwined and musical listening comprehend a communicational phenomenon that raises epistemological questions to be faced. It is about an affective, existential intertwining. The semiotic complexity of the field of popular music, supported by materialities and bodies, reveals territories, temporalities, ways of life, and cultural statements. In a recent study (Carvalho, 2021)², I chose a methodological and empirical approach based on musical listening workshops to understand how certain works enable diverse perspectives and knowledge, as well as articulate entrances and exits of possible identities. In this study, which constitutes a later stage after the end of

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the research, I would like to weave new reflective threads about the emerging experience of entwinedness, from which it is possible to surpass universalisms in search of diversities and other possibilities of community. Music as a product of culture has never been exempt from global issues, such as economy and geopolitics; it is part of communicational flows of the world's memory (Ortiz, 2007). Today, it is being rearticulated in the post-industrial scenario, in which networks and platforms displace the massive dynamic to the era of fragmentations, algorithms, cultural wars, and big tech. It is in the formation of globalized networks that communities begin to establish new bonds and parameters of belonging. In the case of pop music, as noted by Simone Pereira de Sá (2021), there are decisive judgments in the processes of fruition, notably the identitarian ones, therefore notions like “center and periphery will always depend on perspectives or positions – geographic, but above all symbolic – where we situate ourselves in the global order” (Pereira de Sá, 2021, p. 33). And what global scenario is this? It is this front that I intend to explore to construct my argument in favor of a border-crossing popular musical experience.

In a recent study, Achille Mbembe (2020) revisits the bases of global-scale enmity to understand current scenarios in which fractures and divisions position the experience of being in the world. It is a constant state of ethnic, cultural, and geopolitical separation – and global North and South have always been, not only geographical spaces, but articulations of historical inequalities. According to the author, there is a desire for the production of new apartheid, which coincides with an epochal tendency of “communities without foreigners” (Mbembe, 2020, p. 19), perceived not exclusively at the North American or European borders, but in reactionary movements that emerge in the South – as has been happening in India and also in Brazil. The context is one of a neoconservative spectrum that enters into tensions with the emergence of transversal singularities that reposition cultural borders to a point of diverse encounters. It is known that in the case of popular music and dynamics of pop culture, the concept of community requires differentiations between interiority and exteriority, evidently there are narrative disputes in the choices of belonging to this or that musical genre.

The aim here is not to establish similarities between musical communities and resistances to difference, but to bring the experience of cultural borders through music to construct an epistemological confrontation in the field of communication, by identifying in-between flows of communication of alterity. Therefore, music enters this study as a cultural text that enters into border relations and intertextuality (Lotman, 1996, Kristeva, 2012), mobilized by a nomadic artistic profile that seeks to repopulate territories (Deleuze & Guattari,



2008, Deleuze, 2018). Thus, this article aims to answer the following question: how does listening to in-between musical works establish more plural notions about pop music and popular music?

I intend to revisit some fragments from the music listening workshops (Carvalho, 2020) I conducted, but with the aim of exploring how a consolidated musical taste in a given subjectivity is updated and hybridized when confronted with previously unknown works. What results from this point of contact is what can indicate processes of *communication, identities, and communities to come*, between territorializations and deterritorializations, in a Latin American context of ambiguities and specific modes of resistance (Rincón, 2016; Rodríguez & El Gazi, 2007).

CULTURAL BOUNDARIES AND ALTERITY: BUILDING A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL BASIS

Culture is not a stable phenomenon, but rather produced, shared, memory bearer, and subject to updates and ruptures. A key issue in the selection and enjoyment of certain musical genres and artistic preferences is the fact that taste undergoes cultural dynamics, positioned within a certain temporality and its tensions and disputes over visibility and statements. Through the notion of cultural text by the semiotician Yuri Lotman (1996), it is possible to think of the dynamics of circulation and sharing of information organized in a given context, as the notion of text for the author goes beyond the linguistic dimension to encompass any elements produced and understood as language – thus, we can take rhythms, instrumentation, timbres, dances, and other expressions as cultural texts. In short, the cultural text plays a decisive role in the semiosis that will manifest in cultures – and in the memory archives of cultures. In the musical proposal of the group BaianaSystem, for example, there are modes of production of the Jamaican culture sound system (bass, overdubs, and bass lines) and the timbres of the guitar from Bahia, with Luiz Caldas-style phrasing, among other references. When they enter into semiotic relations, these elements are not erased, they remain visible in the unique musical context of BaianaSystem. It is a fit of another order. In these cases, there is an untranslatability that haunts cultural encounters, hence the role of semiosis in the updates of cultures. The notion of border in these encounters does not presuppose a binary³ (interior-exterior), but demonstrates the capacity that culture has to generate semiosis in moments of untranslatability, which occur in contacts with external elements. This cultural dynamic neither redeems nor erases tensions of race, gender, or territories, since it is in the production of

³There is a concept of binarism, as elaborated by Jacques Derrida (2001), that identifies inequalities and power relations in oppositions such as man/woman, white/black, heterosexual/homosexual, among others. It involves understanding the discursive force that constructs inequalities in these oppositions. For example, the role of women is defined by a macho culture, the racial category is elaborated upon eurocentric bases, and so forth. The concept of border, in another sense, brings differences into proximity and tensions manifest in translation processes.

meaning of a given language that these issues gain visibility. The border is a *locus* of tensions and diversities.

The porosity of borders is what I would like to use to think about the emerging musical listening relationships from interstices. If, on the one hand, a certain text refers to an experience already absorbed and formed as musical taste, the contact with cultural texts from other semiospheres activates semioses that can indicate movements, updates, and even ruptures. When we talk about popular music, which in itself can only be thought of as multiplicity, another aspect comes to the fore: its relation to a cultural fabric of mediations (Martín-Barbero, 2001). In the workshop I will discuss later, I brought as an element to be enjoyed a series of artists from different regions of the Global South, whose music has a hybrid profile, which puts into play global and local references, not in opposition, but in semiotic relations not exempt from processes of approximation and differentiation, between resistances and cooptations.

Territories, peoples, and cultures have their borders rethought as spaces of sharing and possibilities of encounters. In his study on modern cinema, Gilles Deleuze (2018) noticed in the work of Glauber Rocha the possibility of mobilization, since the productions of the Brazilian filmmaker worked on popular symbolic axes that were easily understood regionally but also had the possibility of resonating in globalized contexts, notably in territories of the Global South. Instead of dialoguing with common sense and its stereotypes, Glauber did not address an imagined people, of a suspicious nationalism, but contributed to “the invention of a people” (Deleuze, 2018, p. 315) – a *people to come*. That is, for Deleuze, modern cinema established a thought and a perception, a semiotics that gave consistency to a possibility; in Glauber’s case, this possibility would be a popular mobilization in the Global South. It is through this possibility that one intends to think, here, about semiotic and cultural interstices: for their capacity to stimulate ways of thinking.

The profile of artists featured in the initial stage of the workshops comprises a productive dynamic that alternates between globalized references and influences of local sounds, understanding that this art, open to mixtures, can be more inviting to reflection activities. There is a challenge of connecting the reference points of these works in a movement to identify cultures that are in the process of hybridization. In artistic works characterized by strong hybridity, “there is not only one element at issue, but an effective range of determinants” (Vargas, 2007, p. 20). The hybrid, in this work, should not be understood as pacifying ethnic-racial, gender, and even geopolitical issues, but as a process that exposes and questions the historical inequalities of these markers. If globalization presupposes universalisms, in Southern contexts there



are creative tactics to contaminate mainstream narratives and take advantage of them (Rincón, 2016), and in this sense, reposition music, audiovisuals, and arts from other bodies and other cultural contexts. Let's take the variations of the electric guitar in Congolese rumba, for example, which inscribed a circular⁴ dynamic in the phrasing usually used in percussion instruments. Such processes demonstrate that there is also a politicization in the hybridity of musical language.

⁴See Bello et al. (2022).

Even though it is perfectly possible to consider that artistic languages, in general, are formed in the organization of references, such as music, since genres like rock and samba were conceived by various semiotic matrices, this aspect, crucial to understanding creation, ends up getting lost in the processes of fruition when genres align with mediated market issues. For example, we can discuss the whitewashing of rock, in its major mediatic visibility with Elvis, Beatles, and Stones at the center – not for nothing there is a movement to retell the history of rock through other markers: Chuck Berry, Rosetta Tharpe, and Little Richard. However, it is necessary to think beyond the mediatic rock product to observe its less visible cultural elements, such as the prohibition of percussion instruments in North American territory, which reveals artistic resistances in handling instruments like the electric guitar. It is about rescuing the boundary productivity to rethink the mediatic and phonographic sound record. This is what Antônio “Nego” Bispo (2019) proposes as a *counter-colonial* practice: the continuous exercise of producing responses and confrontations. The tracing of a process of border relations, like the almost poetic mention that Deleuze and Guattari (2008) make of *the existential and semiotic dynamics of nomads*, demonstrates that it is necessary to take into account territories, their modes of resistance, the capacity for adaptation, and movements without the constraints of a nation-state that tries at all costs to organize and govern territorialities. In the workshop activities, the act of speaking out expresses the mobility produced in listening, taking into account the repertoires and identities, since the richness of an understanding of interactions of diversities with mediatic contexts lies in the *meaning given to appropriations* (Rodríguez & El Gazi, 2007).

THE WORKSHOPS

The encounter of the pre-selected music with the participants' repertoires is what motivates this work in understanding *the boundaries of a communicational process of encounters*. The choice of artists prioritized works produced in territorialities generally absent from the major global mediatic

markers. By revisiting the workshops from the cited research (Carvalho, 2021), this work expands the discussions to a sense of understanding boundaries as blurred and undetermined spaces, in order to identify new processes of subjectivation from musical fruition⁵. After a documentary survey that sought references in streaming platforms, reports on music and culture, concerts, and even vinyl record fairs, the study defined the main artists to be taken to the exhibition stage of the workshops:

- M.I.A.: daughter of Sri Lankan activists, born in the UK, the artist prioritizes in her work sounds from the Global South, especially rhythms, instrumentation, and dances from African, Asian, and Latin American regions;
- DJ Tudo: multimedia artist whose work consists of partnerships established with music from diverse cultures (maracatu, gnawa, ciranda, riverside communities, etc.), based on travels through Brazil and the world;
- BCUC (Bantu Continua Uhuru Consciousness): South African group that mixes globalized references like soul and punk with indigenous matrices, percussion, and wind instruments;
- Songhoy Blues: band formed in the northern region of Mali. In their work, a style of desert guitar (of African origin) is adopted with references from blues and indie rock, and the songs are mostly sung in the Songhai language;
- KOKOKO!: group formed by four Congolese and one French. The work is marked by the use of instruments made by the band members themselves, from recycled materials (wood, metals, plastics, etc.), the unusual timbres are mixed with electronic bases;
- Chico Science & Nação Zumbi (and manguêbeat): band formed in Recife, their sound proposal was to reposition rhythms from the Northeastern culture (coco, ciranda, maracatu, etc.) in a globalized context and full of influences from genres like rock and hip hop;
- Bomba Estéreo: Colombian band that uses percussion of Afro-diasporic origin with Colombian and Latin American rhythms and genres (such as cumbia).

⁵The use of the term "fruition" suggests a more complex understanding, since the contact of the workshops with the artistic works occurred not only through listening, but also through visual contact with music videos and live performances identified in YouTube archives.

In its own way, each of these works indicate a semiotic mismatch in the large media representations, at least regarding a constant visibility and enunciation in the most recurring media narratives in what we could call common sense. Obviously, these works also participates in consumption



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⁶ In the 1980s, the context of post-punk allowed some European artists to experiment with sounds from the Global South. Artists like David Byrne, Malcom McLaren, and others sought new sonic references, leading many independent labels to release music by artists from the Global South. The aesthetic and cultural diversity of rhythms and genres led to the term “world music” being implemented, both to categorize the non-Western other and to group this cultural variety on the same shelf in record stores.

⁷ While it represents the global circulation of artists from countries like South Korea, K-pop, to a large extent, also rehashes formulas from the MTV era of boy bands and girl bands, with choreographed dances, members representing urban youth profiles (the athlete, the bad boy, etc.), among other aspects, even though its audiences constitute a new type of engagement in digital media culture.

mechanisms; we know that there is a predisposition of globalized capitalism to transform productions of local cultures into new commodities – such as “ethnic music” festivals, the world music⁶ label, and global versions of Latin pop and the recent K-pop⁷. But it is understood that the artists and works used in the workshops are less aligned with these limitations inherited from mass media and resonating in streaming, which gives them a local aspect – that is, it is less a question of recognition by global axes and packaging than a feeling of being faced with regional traditions, a deep fear. Another observed issue is that all these artists, in a way, share an artistic profile of resignifications of global elements in the territories of the Global South, with a strong ethnic, migrant, and diasporic aspect, which makes us travel in listening to timbres, scales, languages, and instrumentations of local cultures – and thus brings the notion of popular and pop to possible multiplicities. It is also necessary to consider that there are market issues intersected in local cultures, as many rhythms and genres are linked to parties, ceremonies, and regional entrepreneurship.

What interests us in these artists is their ability to resonate differentially in the face of a listening experience marked more by the main music genres – and, in digital times, the power of platforms also prioritizes certain music genres, depending on the music streaming platform (Janotti Jr., 2020): we can talk about the relationship of YouTube with funk, Spotify with sertanejo, and so on. It is here that some theories of difference help to understand these smaller communicational and media processes, such as the notion of nomadism as an idea that understands distributive modes of differentiation, here attributed to fruition, community, and thought. Deleuze and Guattari (2008) seek inspiration in nomadic formations to think about mechanisms of margins and minorities, that is, semiotic and material dynamics less aligned with the major markers of subjectivity, an idea that this work brings to musical listening. Another theoretical provocation that motivates us to explore epistemologically the borderline situation of *entremets* deals with a *politics of singularities* (Agamben, 2017), which rethinks identities in a more plural flow of possibilities of fittings and mismatches. For Giorgio Agamben (2017), a coming community should not seek an essence to which to desperately link itself, but as existence allow itself to participate in processes of immanence – a state of *being in itself, or being-so* – an idea that indicates possible experimentations. Experimenting with musical listening is what we seek with the workshops.

The empirical front then takes up some narrative fragments from a work focused on musical listening (Carvalho, 2021). In the cited work, songs by some artists from the Global South were taken to two musical listening workshops, organized at a public high school in São Paulo. The extension project format

meant that the workshops received a diverse audience: high school students, teachers from the courses, former students, and external audience from the school⁸ community (surrounding the educational institution). There were 13 people⁹ enrolled, divided into two groups, one with five participants and the other with eight.

The idea was to work on an expository material before introducing any artists or works. The modality of workshops through video lessons, because of the pandemic, reduced the interaction and proximity with the participating audience a little, but on the other hand, it made it possible to gather rich material – transcriptions of video lessons, chat reports, email exchanges, final papers, and even filling out a form with perceptions about the course at the end of the workshops. Regarding the methodology used, both reception studies and educommunication indicated possible paths, but the interdisciplinary dialogue with Education led the study to the narrative research method as a tool for collecting and organizing the empirical material from the musical listening workshops. This methodological basis contributes not only to the data collection but also allows “thinking about the experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011, p. 119), since in this experiment there was a point of contact in which the researcher, workshop participants, and music/artists coincided. Narrative research is a method generally used in studies in the field of Education, precisely because it offers the research the possibility of a teacher’s report about the activities conducted in the scope of teaching and learning, in which the experienced works are narrated by those who conducted them and the results, in terms of generated knowledge, are analyzed in the end.

The axes worked on as a programmatic content in the musical listening workshops were:

- a) Concept of pop music, musical taste, communities, taste performances, music in the media, phonography, introductory readings on the subject;
- b) Hlobal South, hybridisms, affirmative policies, relations between regional and global;
- c) Listening to a previous list of artists; observation of videos and live performances by these artists; debates; openness to suggestions brought by the participating group;
- d) Research and writing about artists, themes, and works addressed throughout the workshops;
- e) Organization of the material produced on a multimedia page and sharing of this material with the school community (internal and external), in newsletter format;

⁸For reasons defined in the terms of consent for participation in this research, both the institution and the participants will not be identified in this article.

⁹Eleven people identified as female (three of them black women) and two as male (white men). As participants included both students and teachers, ages ranged from 15 to 45 years old, residing in middle and lower class neighborhoods in a municipality on the southern coast of São Paulo. These markers will be indicated in the testimonials.



f) Final reflections, suggestions for future listening and reading.

The following topic gathers some narratives and fragments taken from the mentioned workshops to construct a theoretical and conceptual understanding in two fronts: 1) understanding the communicational processes of *the in-betweens* of popular music; and 2) identifying in cultural borders emerging knowledges that coincide with dynamics of alterity and difference. It is a theoretical-practical movement “between the object, the subject, and the method” (Canevacci, 2021, p. 14), which seeks different temporalities of experience, in which distinct identities relate. Here, cultural borders are a source of knowledge because of the capacity these semiotic spaces have to generate possible encounters. The nomadic practice is perceived in the artistic profile discussed in the workshops and in the thinking projected from a context that brings personal tastes and other musical aesthetic experiences closer together. And, of course, the workshops express a positioning of the teacher/researcher in action in the research, which certainly directed some moments of musical listening, in the sense of generating provocations and reflections. This intervention occurred both in the selection of the songs that opened the activities and in the conduct of stimulating debate questions.

It is precisely in the researcher’s intervention procedures that tensions of another border also manifested themselves: the one established between the researcher and the participating audience, which adds new layers of border knowledge. In this aspect, there is a front that refers to Latin American studies, as shared listening operates in a field of cultural mediations that interfere in the media field (Martín-Barbero, 2001; Rincón, 2016), considering that, by taking the floor, the participating audience exposes differences in gender, race, and social class in front of a media product. Thus, what is at stake is less a unilateral direction than a recognition of agreements and disagreements. The researcher’s position sought to work with what Félix Guattari (1990, p. 24) considers as the “pertinence of interventions” in micropolitical contexts.

BORDERS AND SONIC NOMADISMS: MUSICAL LISTENING WORKSHOPS

Assuming that in media culture, musical genres are keys to reading that indicate identity modalities and belonging, before understanding the rearrangements of interstices, it was necessary for the workshops to start from a consolidated field: our taste performances. The introduction to the workshops, therefore, posed the following question: what music/artists do we like to listen to and why? The initial comments ranged from music genres such as trap,

rock, funk, rap, samba – and also made references to mainstream groups and artists such as Iron Maiden, Metallica, as well as pop divas like Beyoncé –, citations that refer to a very recurrent media scenario in terms of circulation and consumption. There were also some surprises such as more in-depth studies and musical training: “*I participated in a marching and philharmonic band, played the clarinet and then the lyre*” one of the students (a young white woman) recounted. There we had an interesting diversity for the construction of points of contact between each person’s tastes and the previous selection of works mentioned above.

The identity positions alternated between learning certain instruments, preferences built by family and friendship circle memories, and a variety of approaches to canons of media culture. Taking the floor to talk about a personal taste is an exercise in positioning, sharing, and listening – since I speak and then listen to another person talk about their musical preferences. There we were weaving our boundaries, between approaches and distances.

The more expository front rescued part of the historicity of mass music, such as phonography, media culture, axes of recognition of pop music, taste performances, music genres, etc. The content was adapted to a less elaborate and academic explanation model, although some concepts needed to be reinforced – such as the term “massive”, which has its constitution in a specific period of the rise of mass media and the consequent consolidation of pop culture. In short, the introduction aimed to revisit some keys to reading that are more accessible, prioritizing narratives present in spontaneous thought about pop music, obviously added to the sense-making that rests on addresses and consumption practices in the media.

In the second expository stage, there was an introduction to hybridizations, cultural boundaries, and relations between the global North and South amid the processes of globalization. This conceptual front was opened with the reading of the Manguê Manifesto – Caranguejos com cérebro, written by Fred Zero Quatro in 1992, a text that inaugurates the manguêbeat movement – which, it is worth noting, is marked by a predominantly male presence in the bands that compose it. The text was important for two reasons: first, because the regional is thought of in the plural, since in manguêbeat, Recife is redefined as a space for experiments and cultural approximations, in which updates are inscribed in pop music; and second, for illustrating an artistic position of interstice that creates its works on cultural borders, between maracatu and globalized hip hop, for example. The reading was followed by listening and viewing of videos by Chico Science & Nação Zumbi, DJ Dolores, Mundo Livre S/A, Mestre Ambrósio, important names in the Recife movement. The sonic diversity of these works was immediately



interpreted by one of the workshop participants, an adult black woman, as a popular claim. “*This musical revolution, provoked by the effervescence of ideas from a group of friends thirsty for sociocultural change, made Chico Science and Nação Zumbi one of the greatest representations of the working class*”. The author of the comment already knew the group, a different perception from others, who in a first listening reinforced more the regional aspect of the group’s music than its dynamic mixtures. It is known that Chico and the other manguébeat artists were interested in maracatu, ciranda, coco, and a series of alternative possibilities circulating in the globalized world (hip hop, punk, electronic music). What would then be their address as a cultural product, since they dialogue with local music genres, rhythms, and instrumentations? When asked about cultural encounters and their productivity, the answers coincided with the term “creativity”, but what kind of creative mode would that be? I asked.

A participant, a young white woman, then said: creative in the sense of “*valuing cultures and expanding musical knowledge beyond the obvious*”. Valuing cultures and expanding knowledge are terms that function as provocations dear to the field of communication, notably for the communication of cultural borders that this study seeks to explore, but such a statement also ran the risk of considering only artists with a more experimental profile as “creative”. It was necessary, then, to point out that there are different ways of creating, each artist resorts to the materialities that affect them to position themselves in the world and generate meaning.

At first, such semiotic complexity (sonorities, cultures, ways of life) aroused doubts and curiosities, but also suggested a subjective path of alterity in reflections on the songs/artists. In these works, exteriority and interiority become indeterminate and reconstruct the concepts of community. In another words what used to determine circulation and consumption in music genres that presupposed communities (fans) – often antagonistic in disputes over legitimacy and even “good taste” –, with the dynamics of interstices, begins to reveal points of contact and relations with exteriority. This process does not suggest the erasure of differences, nor pacification, but through proximity, tensions can be identified and discussed. What community is this, that is capable of harboring an affective sharing that ranges from the alfaia percussion to hip hop rhymes? For Deleuze and Guattari (2008, p. 47), the nomadic path occurs “between two points, but the between-two has taken on all its consistency, and enjoys both its own autonomy and direction”. It is an experience of experimentation, which is neither easy nor pacifying. And in culture, the processes of actualization pass, above all, through creations that arise from unpredictabilities, as Lotman (2012) would say.

The Sri Lankan artist M.I.A., based in the UK, brought to the workshops the context of migration. In the enunciation of her albums and tracks, issues related to the migratory trajectory of the singer's family resonate, historical and cultural fragments of human displacement in territories. However, it is less about readapting to a new nation-state than about activating political and ethical charges in the interstices of the global North and South. Migration as a phenomenon of global geopolitical chess reverberates in local dynamics, border territories, and subjectivities. Popular music is a privileged semiotic space to perceive the effects of migration. One of the participants, an adult white woman, recalled the experience of studying abroad for a while: *"you will always be treated as an immigrant. So, when I see her music videos, I identify myself"*. Through M.I.A.'s work, we addressed the ethnic prejudices of the globalized world, recent reactionary movements, and how music brings these issues to us and helps us reflect on and confront racism and xenophobia. The thematic approaches of the lyrics, the images of drones watching borders, the technologies used to control people who only wish to exercise their right to move through territories are visual elements of M.I.A.'s videos that suggest the emergence of repopulations and other modalities of sharing spaces.

Another participant – a young white woman – even commented that the music stimulates *"perception about a way we can express ourselves"* when commenting on the singer's choices. M.I.A.'s work activates a radically diverse cultural cartography, which shares cultures and demands from different territorialities – the album *Kala* (2007), for example, brings together recordings made by the singer on her travels¹⁰ to India, Angola, Trinidad and Tobago, and Jamaica, where she recorded with local musicians. The theme of migration resonates in fruition as an enunciation, in which existential issues reside (the act of migrating, its ethics, and its politics in the face of the contemporary world) and hybrid musical language (the dialogues of sonorities); the popular then stands as a polyphonic space, in Bakhtin's terms (1987), carrying the tensions of the globalized world.

"Artists like M.I.A. are necessary points of tension in these times of globalization, her music permeates through her life story, where she brings together different genres, ranging from English punk rock, hip hop, jazz to Hendrix's guitars and funk", wrote one of the participants, an adult white woman, in the final paper we did, which consisted of a text about the experience gained in the workshops. The same author mentioned several times the influence of reggae on British culture, brought by jamaican¹¹ immigrants, mentioning names like Police and UB40. Through her contact with M.I.A., she remembered other artistic references that express in their works cultural encounters, in a process of rescuing an alterity present in media culture,

¹⁰ A segment of the documentary *Matangi/Maya/ M.I.A* compiles fragments from these journeys (M.I.A., 2018).

¹¹ It is necessary to remember that Jamaican immigration to the United Kingdom faced a series of difficulties, especially with the emergence of reactionary movements during the Thatcher era. Initially, white artists were more successful in exploring genres such as reggae. With the Two Tone movement, formed by ska groups, there was a more inclusive scenario, with bands that brought together Jamaican immigrants and children of English workers (Specials, The Selector, etc.). Recently, Brexit has represented new setbacks for the children and grandchildren of the first immigrants.

A

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although sometimes hidden. This is a very rich reflective element that emerges from discussions about cultural borders, borders present in musical works and in the experience of the workshops, where our repertoires were articulated in situations between thoughts and experiences. According to I. Lotman (1996), cultures communicate through border relations, through textual exchanges that cross these porous regions and enable translations and updates. Thinking with Lotman, the sharing of music within the scope of the workshops increased repertoires and knowledge¹², since what was brought also as personal memory went through translational processes, from one person to another.

¹² According to Lotman (2012), for a culture to define itself, it is necessary to have a dialogue with what is exterior to it. Here is a very pertinent example given by the Russian author: "A good teacher drew a small circle on the blackboard. Inside, he wrote 'knowledge'; outside, 'unknown'. And he said to his students: 'Notice how little space knowledge occupies and how little contact it has with the unknown'" (Lotman, 2012, p. 161).

¹³ Listen to the tune *É hoje é hoje* (Selo Mundo Melhor, 2016).

¹⁴ *Rhythmic emancipation – Romperayo vs DJ Tudo e sua gente* (DJ Tudo, 2021).

Another exemplary case occurred in the listening to the work of the artist DJ Tudo. His music and albums bring encounters, partnerships, and recordings with popular musicians from different regions, as the artist usually travels in search of partnerships in Brazil and other countries. Thus, the term DJ is taken from its most recurring use in pop culture – the dance floor artist, who plays records for people to dance to – to reveal an almost anthropological method of musical creation. He has already recorded with the group *Baianas de Coruripe*¹³ (Alagoas), with musicians from the gnawa culture (Morocco), and more recently with the Colombian group *Romperayo*¹⁴, founded by percussionist Pedro Ojeda. This communicational experience, throughout the workshops, inspired reports like this one, made by an adult white woman: "Everyday expressions are very evident in his sound... DJ Tudo is the experience of the popular, jazz, psychedelic, rituals, indigenous, the people of this planet", the popular as shared multiplicities on a global level. Musical listening stimulated a repopulation of subjectivities, a communicational process that, by relinquishing large parameters and canons of the media culture inherited from mass media, valued experimentation of interpretation less anchored in founding assumptions (Agamben, 2017), and this path led to what we can consider as a communication of alterity, with agreements and disagreements.

With each artist presented, the comments first sought to identify recognizable elements, a process of perception that highlighted identity, belonging, and repertoires, but then there was an attempt to understand what escaped them, as if through art, difference invited new knowledge and discoveries. This dynamic sought less to impose preferences or compete for a more legitimized aesthetic as "good taste" than to dialogue about different profiles of a popular culture less frequent in circulation and consumption flows. And, evidently, there were resistances to certain musical styles – at the beginning, one of the participants, a young white man, said he didn't like samba, but that at a samba gathering, he "even would risk himself dancing" –, differences that involve issues of sociability, gender, and social positions that,

although not the main focus of the research, appeared in the discussions and could not be ignored. The global South as a productive locus of popular music then began to offer mediations in the hybridity of blurred territories (García Canclini, 2000; Martín-Barbero, 2001). Not for nothing, the term mediation should be treated in the plural, as Martín-Barbero suggests, as the workshops demonstrated the need to consider ethnic, territorial, and communal elements as keys to reading border music. This perception gradually manifested itself over the course of the activities. One of the participants, a young white woman, understood that through listening, it was possible to “*diminish prejudices and make us see, accept, respect, and celebrate differences through music*”. This conclusion was preceded by debates and occurred only after understanding how music raises questions about historical inequalities and helps us reflect on our social and collective position in the world. I said, many times, that living with diversities is living with tensions necessary for democratic environments. But it was still necessary to deepen what was generated as a communicational process within the limits between the expository content of the workshops and the subjectivity of the participants. In short, it was necessary to identify the semiotic and cultural processes produced in these encounters.

What we understand by the construction of musical identities, whether through the media visibility of certain aesthetics or through the mobility of our formative process, often manifests as a separation in relation to new knowledge. Furthermore, in the predictability expected from a communicational process of maintaining tastes and preferences – today potentiated by algorithmic¹⁵ action –, intertextuality itself is to a large extent reduced. Julia Kristeva (2012, p. 35) observes that the artistic text operates “transformations-productions in progress”, indicating an instability in the creative act. Thus, positioning a given art in the historical process also reveals movements internal to culture. And as obvious as dialogism in music may seem, the expository activities served to provoke perceptions about musical listening, exercising the ability to face a work that is not recurrent in personal repertoires.

The percussion of BCUC, accompanied by an electric bass and a combination of vocals that brings together soul music intonation, rhymed verses, and *punk-style shouts*, mobilized reflections on an Africa beyond media stereotypes, especially because of the group’s ability to resignify globalized genres and rearrange them in a percussive field (bass drums, snare drums, and congas) and indigenous wind instruments. “*I don’t know if the name is drum, I don’t know the name of the instrument, but this group reminds me of Timbalada. They also have very strong percussion*”, said one of the students, a young black woman, referring to the Brazilian percussion group. Through

¹⁵Listening dynamics based on song recommendations on platforms like Spotify. This mechanism relies on a history of searches, clicks, and likes to select which songs/artists are relevant to a given user’s digital footprint. It tends to reinforce personal tastes.



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¹⁶BBC Music (2019). the video of the song *Yinde*¹⁶, recorded during the group's performance at the Glastonbury festival (United Kingdom) in 2019, a question arose that was dear to the workshops: what elements of alterity did this performance bring to the British festival? For an audience that was mostly there to watch headliners like The Killers, The Cure, and Kylie Minogue (among other pop and indie rock names), BCUC functioned as a sonic event from another aesthetic reality. But not only that. One comment, made by the same student, noted that "*many people there [in the audience] were moving randomly, not knowing how to dance*" an observation that identifies a communicational process of intermingling, as the dance occurred as a differential event, in a situation of cultural border – a dance to come. In the gap between globalized pop and the popular music of an African country, a new bodily movement was produced. This is a fruition that affects subjectivities in the sense of exposing a learning context, as the South African group brought instrumentation and rhythms of African origins to the event, knowledge that goes beyond the limits of indie rock and pop. It is possible, then, to consider that BCUC allowed the listening workshops to work on issues of alterity through two important axes: 1) the brazilian popular sphere, by noticing that percussion reflects in our music and in the expressions of african-derived religions; and 2) the globalized dimension, through the video of the show at the Glastonbury festival, which revealed a decolonial sense in the resonance of the sound generating bodily relearnings and aesthetic fruition. Popular is what is lived, as Omar Rincón (2016) will say, which allows us to reflect on the force of a change in visibility regimes.

Listening to the group Songhoy Blues put the desert of Mali on the workshops' radar. The band's sound originates in a place where the African continent meets Arab culture, a desert space traversed by *tuareg* nomads, where the electric guitar is redefined by other cultural bases, such as the use of the *quarter tone*¹⁷ and the sharing of spaces with ancestral instruments like the *ngoni*. In addition to the guitar, we discussed in the meetings the presence of non-official languages (*lingala, songhai*, and others) from african artists, since the continent's national languages reveal a colonial past. It is known that english is one of the requirements for the circulation and recognition of modern pop music in the media – although today k-pop and Latin pop have their spaces in new media and consumption dynamics – which is why the works of Songhoy Blues take on an aspect of historical revision when the band chooses to forgo english to produce their work. Whether in the group's performance¹⁸ in the capital Bamako or in the video for the track *Al hassidi terei*¹⁹ questions about national identity, language, and people were revisited to understand the tensions of hybridized productions, both in the national realm

¹⁷A simple explanation of arabic scales can be found in Klaus M's guitar lesson (2010).

¹⁸KEXP (2020).

¹⁹Transgressive (2014).

of traditions and in global market flows. One of the students – a young black woman – even discovered through web research that the quartet’s name refers to the *Songhai* people (an ancient empire that lived in the region where Mali is located today).

As for KOKOKO!, they use instrumentation elaborated from recycled materials found on the streets of Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo), including string and percussion instruments, combined with a synthesizer. The material dimension brings the singular aspect of the assembly, since the musicians reuse wood, wires, cans, and other fragments discarded by late capitalism. This differential trait is reflected in the timbres, electrified or not, that will echo from string vibrations, scrapes, and percussive attacks, in a tempo that, at times, resembles dance music. There are, therefore, displacements in the episteme of globalized pop, as the sound is no longer produced by traditional instrumentation (bass, guitar, drums, etc.) and the act of recycling decisively raises discussions about consumption in large cities – notably in a capital of the african continent. In the workshops, the material that introduced the group’s work was a snippet of a performance by the band at the Boiler Room²⁰ space, an exhibition that led one of the students, a young black woman, to immediately identify the philosophy of reuse and recycling: according to her, KOKOKO! brought “*an Afrofuturist aesthetic thinking about helping the environment*”. Another comment, from an adult white woman, noticed “*something proletarian*” in the choice of clothing worn by the Congolese group – who wear a type of jumpsuit in their shows and public appearances.

²⁰Boiler Room (2019).

The Colombian band Bomba Estéreo reinforced issues discussed in the reading of the *Mangue Manifesto* of a Latin America that resignifies pop – such as tropicalism, anthropophagy, and artists like Tom Zé, mentioned at the beginning of this text. In the case of the group led by Li Saumet, cumbia and drum culture, elements closely related to the arrival of enslaved people from the African continent, are emphasized. There is a sharing of transversal issues: percussive heritage, the role of the body in regional rhythms, memory, and decoloniality that bring us closer to our Latin American neighbors. In the music video for the track *Internacionales*²¹, for example, there is a certain cosmopolitanism and pop appeal to diversity. The inclusion of fragments of english in the lyrics sung in spanish alludes to a *global-local* link, but also to a region of spanish speakers. Thus, migration reappeared in the workshops through Bomba Estéreo’s work, when one of the accounts, from an adult white woman, associated going to an immigrant store in downtown São Paulo with the meeting in which we talked about the sound of the colombian group: “*We entered a store run by Bolivians and it was really cool, there was music playing*”

²¹Bomba Estéreo (2017).



and then I asked: ‘Miss, what music is this?’, she replied: ‘salsa’”. The episode made the student remember the conversations we had about Latin America, migrations, cultural encounters, and the song *Internacionales*. Perhaps asking about the music, directed at the store clerk, is the example that best illustrates the learning brought by the music listening workshops, as it represents a movement that seeks to understand something previously unknown.

REFLECTIONS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF SHARED LISTENING

Beyond the experience of listening to the pre-selected works, the outcome of the workshops revealed a cartography of modes of musical listening. If modern pop music populates streaming platforms and presents itself as more visible and accessible, it is also from it that participants based themselves to weave readings about artists they did not know. Through narrative research, it was possible to gather a broad material (transcriptions of video calls, chat conversations, and texts elaborated by the students), added to the teacher’s report, which allowed us to think of the workshop experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011) as a collective process. It was possible to notice that axes such as gender, race, and age revealed some reflective triggers. Adults had knowledge about some of the topics addressed, such as the mangubeat movement and mentions of more canonical international artists. Among the younger participants, especially in the words of the women, a more acute perception about the inequalities triggered by the music we listen to was noticeable; one of them brought a link that gathered prejudiced terms used by the British press to refer to the singer M.I.A. From this process, we precisely took the convergent and divergent points perceived by border relations. Thus, we began with accounts like “*what I listen to most in daily life is rock, influenced by my Family*” (young white man) or “*I like all kinds of music, but I have a preference for trap*” (young white woman), which marked positions, and as the meetings progressed, comments emerged about how “*musical constructions become something more complex*” (another participant, young white woman). Although there was an intervention by the researcher, personal and taste references were respected and were part of the discussions – they appeared as examples of proximity, in the sense of resembling something stored in memory files –, something recurring in the expository stages. In a second moment, the group expressed greater confidence in projecting meanings from listening, and from there began to identify political and even geopolitical issues in some works.

The workshops ended with the elaboration of texts written by the participating audience and with the editing of a multimedia page (with images,

playlists, and videos presenting the mentioned artists), a collective work shared with the academic community. One of the collective results occurred in the citations of other artists and bands, beyond the pre-selected list that served as the guiding thread of the debates, such as the indigenous rapper Kunumi MC and the Congolese collective Konono N°1, mentions that result from research and debates brought by the participants. In the issues brought, there was a transversal notion about musical production as multiplicity, modes of production that encompass peoples and territorialities. “*Music has great value for human development, it brings elements of various peoples: europeans, indigenous, africans etc.*”, observed one of the final works, written by a young black woman. This comment positions popular music and pop music as cultural and semiotic spaces where different modalities of being in the world, existential questions, and cosmologies are produced.

In the boundary situations posed in the workshops, it is perceived that the dynamics of stimulating openings to others tastes and to works that were previously unknown allowed for subjective and enunciative repopulations (Guattari, 2019; Lazzarato, 2014). The borders that delimit cultures are also dynamic mechanisms (Lotman, 1996) of alterity. Personal repertoires were important but were redefined *when the other spoke*, something that seems unthinkable today in the dynamics of algorithms that tend to offer us more of the same, an aesthetic closure in our small universes and identities. Another important result was to realize how globalized pop does not operate as an alienating or merely market-driven element (as established by media culture since the mass media), quite the opposite, as it offers keys to reading possible perceptions, which at the limit of meaning are capable of opening up to other possible meanings. This is the unpredictability of culture in the relations between interiority and exteriority thought by Lotman (2012): a cultural system only expands its capacity for knowledge and information by allowing external cultural texts to be translated into its context.

Among the difficulties observed in the workshops, musical diversity always seemed to trigger more positive speeches about cultural plurality, an aspect that reduced the necessary clashes for a *decolonial thinking* movement, which requires understanding a colonial regime of ethnic enmities and constructing responses necessary to confront this structure (Mbembe, 2020; Bispo, 2019). At some moments, it was necessary to make interventions that encouraged the group to address, for example, the reasons why territorialities, bodies, and cultures have been historically erased in media narratives – or sometimes stereotyped. Mentions of regimes of visibility were treated with the aim of understanding how media circulation is also a field of inequalities.



For Deleuze and Guattari (2008), nomadic dynamics are established by relations with territories, but their continuity presupposes a process that “reterritorializes in the very deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p. 44). Thus, what we understand by musical identities, at stake in the music listening workshops, are markers that cease to fulfill a role of stability to function as fits and misfits, the inside and the outside, the in-between, the breaks, the unpredictabilities. Whether in someone’s speech or in listening to a song, there was a negotiation of cultural position and identity, a crossing with subsequent return or not, depending on the affections mobilized. This is why Giorgio Agamben’s (2017) pertinent provocation about the need for a *community that comes* under the bases of alterity, since the exercise of perceiving the other and knowing how to listen are decisive prerequisites for a *truly plural common*. This is what is observed in the semiotics of cultural interstices: a communication that takes advantage of situations of porosity whose richest element is exteriority. In the case of music, this differential and alterity element can be an instrument, a dance, a rhythm, an arrangement, a minority language, a cosmology, an identity position etc. We can take this approach to think about other phenomena of culture. What would it be like, for example, to understand digital media culture through interstices and borders? This path, in my view, is fundamental to reclaim communication processes worthy of our historical time.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This text, within the space limitations of an article, updated a study (Carvalho, 2021) on the communicational experience of shared musical listening in workshops conducted at a high school. Here, I sought to address the communicational processes of cultural borders (Lotman, 1996) explored by some artists and how such works resonate in listening. By relating the personal repertoires of the participants to the pre-selected music for the initial workshop activities, we noticed a process of *nomadic dynamics of fruition*, which for Deleuze and Guattari (2008) establish deterritorializations and reterritorializations. From excerpts of testimonials from participants, it was perceived how works that escape the market paradigms of pop music in the media are initially understood through the main media markers – participants used their repertoires to understand the unknown – and only then opened up to more in-depth analyses. The exercise falls within the field of mediations by realizing how different repertoires interact with media products (Martín-Barbero, 2001; Rincón, 2016), whose richness is manifested in the *ways*

of *generating meanings* (Rodríguez & El Gazi, 2007). This artistic profile, combined with the experience of the workshops, indicates a community to come, shared in the tensions of cultural differences.

The sonic interstices place these recognizable elements in indeterminacy and demand new processes of signification, which coincide with research, openness to exteriority, and a desiring movement for cultural knowledge and information, which we recognize as a communicational path of alterity with ramifications in the sharing and the mechanism of other modes of musical community, with resonances in media environments. For future research, the data collection method of the workshops can deepen questions of gender, age group, race, among other social markers, to extract from the activities new insights about music as a media product. ■

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