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Cantos da Floresta (Forest Songs) : exchanging and sharing indigenous music in Brazil

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Introduction

There are around 252 indigenous peoples living in Brazil¹, mainly in the Amazon basin, with a population of almost one million. These peoples speak about 180 languages² belonging to four major linguistic families as well as some isolated languages. This amazing diversity has interested me for almost two decades.

This thesis focuses, in an autobiographical and reflexive way, on the various approaches with which I have sought to relate to this indigenous universe – both as an artist and as a researcher – even though I recognize that any attempt at a comprehensive and deep research on the vast diversity of the music of these peoples is impossible to achieve in a single lifetime.

Living as a musician, arranger, singer and composer in São Paulo, a multicultural city with 20 million inhabitants, contact with the Amazonian indigenous peoples is even more difficult, to start with the long distances involved.

In Brazil, we do not study indigenous life and arts, neither in schools nor in universities, and those who have some interest in the subject will have to research independently or follow specific courses of indigenous anthropology. It is also necessary to overcome the huge wall of prejudices against the natives, who are still seen as primitive and inferior beings, and an obstacle to the development of the country. Breaking with this mentality demands considerable tenacity.

The truth is that we have very little contact with indigenous peoples' music, which perhaps sounds too "odd" to the hurried ears of big city inhabitants. Therefore, due to the lack of knowledge (or lack of interest), there are only a few non-indigenous composers and performers who have focused on indigenous music. Two exceptions were Villa-Lobos who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, made use of indigenous tunes to compose his works, and Marlui Miranda, responsible for creative adaptations of various indigenous songs from all over Brazil. Some popular songwriters, like Caetano Veloso, Egberto Gismonti and Milton Nascimento, were inspired by the native imagery. I made some short references to composers of

¹ According to the 2010 IBGE Census there are 305 peoples, but according to ISA-PIB researches, there are 252 peoples. This difference occurs due to divergences regarding the names of the groups. Sometimes, IBGE counts twice the same people because their names are spelled in different ways or they live in different areas.

² This number can vary depending on the way linguistic professionals work. For IBGE, 274 languages are spoken in Brazil, but many of them are endangered as they are spoken by less than 50 persons. More information at <https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Languages>.

'erudite' music like Edino Krieger, Kilza Setti, Guerra-Peixe and others just to give an idea of the interest in this subject in different historical moments in Brazil. These artists' works constitute the objects of study of the first chapter of this thesis.

As music director of the group Mawaca, for 23 years my focus has been to research and recreate the different ways of making music from different cultures around the world. Mawaca is formed by seven singers and six instrumentalists that interpret songs in over 20 languages. The group has performed in several states in Brazil, and other countries as well, among which Spain, Portugal, Germany, Greece, France, Bolivia and China. My interest in indigenous music began in 1999 when I came across a recording of 'Koitxãngareh', a song of the Paiter Suruí, an indigenous group that I would later work with, during my MA in anthropology. For four years I was responsible for the organization, description, cataloging and digitization of this people's sound archive, recorded by the anthropologist Betty Mindlin during the 1980s and 1990s. The main objective was to give the audio-files back to the Paiter Suruí community in CD format to be used in their schools. This same material was the basis for workshops on transcription and translation of their mythological narratives, held in Rondônia. Some songs from old LPs and CDs, produced by indigenous associations, struck me by the uniqueness of their contours and structures, they are genuine 'gems' that I would revisit in due time.

In 2005, Mawaca was invited by a Jungian psychoanalyst to perform a concert at a congress for "the Brazilian Prehistory psyche". In order to conceive this concert, I studied several rock art images from the archaeological sites of Serra da Capivara, in Piauí and Monte Alegre, in Pará. I was delighted to note that there were very interesting connections between those images that depicted scenes from the daily life of Paleo-indians with indigenous songs that I was listening to. So, I worked on the *Rupestres Sonoros* project, recreating and transforming part of this repertoire into arrangements that mixed indigenous elements with Eastern, European and African elements. The abstract rupestrians turned into scores. For a few months, we read the symbols and images painted on the stones as sound guides. I deepened the researches on archaeology, rock art, relations between music and language, on the occupation of South America, tracing a poetic-scientific path that led us to incorporate, in this project, new musical and aesthetic grammars such as electronic elements, with its loops, effects processors and voice multipliers.

These recordings gave life to a CD and then to a performance that was recorded on a DVD. In 2010, we toured through the Brazilian Amazon, where there was a musical exchange between Mawaca musicians and six indigenous communities: Paiter Suruí, Ikolen-Gavião, Karitiana, Huni-Kuin (also called Kaxinawá), Kambeba and Bayaróá Community. The dynamics of these meetings demanded readiness and flexibility. One day we met them in their villages, played and sang together, and the next day they performed with us in a theater in a nearby town, as our special guests. Only then we could understand this complex universe, reinterpreting indigenous melodies with Mawaca; getting closer, with an affective approach, and seeking to

understand the demands of the people with whom we live. These encounters were filmed in a documentary, produced not as an ethnographic film, but as a record of this transforming experience for both Mawaca and the indigenous groups.

This thesis is a narrative—a monograph if you will—describing and analyzing the trajectory of Mawaca's work with indigenous music, musicking and musicians, which is detailed in the second chapter, including the research process, the conception of concerts, the production of CDs and DVDs and the journey to the Amazon. The question that has been at the centre of my and Mawaca's research is how we can create a meaningful dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous musicians.

The first chapter gives an overview of previous efforts to work with Brazilian indigenous music, while the third chapter is a reflection on the meaning and evaluation of the problems involved in such encounters, exchanging musical ideas with indigenous groups.

After the experience in the Amazon, many questions have emerged, that must be considered subsidiary research questions of this dissertation:

- Has Mawaca, as a non-indigenous group of musicians, been able to successfully play (as seen by indigenous peoples) songs that are part of the rituals of other peoples?
- Which approaches has Mawaca used to transpose indigenous songs to the stage while maintaining respect for native communities?
- Can Mawaca performances throw light on the (musical) culture of indigenous communities looking for a strategy of decolonization?
- How can Mawaca, as non-indigenous, develop musical projects that respect cultural differences, where we take respect to emerge from a deep admiration for indigenous cultures, abilities and musical qualities, and to be affirmed by the indigenous communities themselves.

Of course, these questions are formulated in cryptic and general terms—such as successfully, transpose, stage, respect, throw light, culture, community—that require further elaboration which I hope to have elucidated in the body of this thesis. I have reflected on these issues for years, and they are elaborated in the third chapter of this thesis, having as background the approach of interculturalism (Walsh, Pajuelo and Mignolo) and perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro), which are increasingly gaining ground in the humanities and social sciences. We are in the process of building bridges, dialogues, and paths of intercession so that indigenous peoples are no longer “objects of study” but protagonists of their own history and could come to

"reexist"³.

Other projects and performances reverberated from these experiences, as the concert in São Paulo, for the Guarani Kaiowá with the participation of the Bayaroá Community and Ibã Sales Huni Kuin; the project *Música indígena no palco* (indigenous music on stage) with the Guarani Kaiowá in Mato Grosso do Sul (the state with the highest rate of violence against indigenous populations), and many workshops targeted at teachers and interested individuals, some of them with the collaboration of indigenous musicians. During these courses, I realized that most of the educators I was working with had no idea about the indigenous peoples, showing prejudices and stereotyped views.

The musician became an active researcher; I became an (ethno)musicologist, transposing the scholarly codes and reworking them so that uninitiated people could experience them too. In partnership with musical educator Berenice de Almeida, I wrote two children's books: *A Grande Pedra* (The Big Rock) and *A Floresta Canta* (The Forest Sings) and a reference book with CD for teachers: *Cantos da Floresta* (Forest Songs) supported by a website with educational activities. The entire research process was carried out in collaboration with indigenous people and also included research already done by ethnomusicologists and anthropologists.

All these activities began with the desire to know other musics and have ended up in studies, turned into performances, have returned to research, been transmuted into CDs and DVDs, returned to the stage, have become books and part of workshops. They are in a constant investigative process, because the indigenous universe is infinitely diverse and extremely complex. I have attempted, as a subsidiary of the research question of this thesis, to describe this cyclical and transdisciplinary process as detailed as possible in chapter two, while commenting on its implications in chapter three. By re-creating these indigenous songs that "rested" in sound collections, we are moving them, experiencing them and comprehending them, making them known in a larger circle.

There is much to be done before we reach a level of dignity in relation to the original inhabitants of Brazil. Beginning with awareness of what it is "to be indigenous" in Brazil, in a country where the indigenous rights established in the Constitution are not respected and the difficulties to be respected are immense, with constant setbacks in the most elementary issues.

³ This expression is used by Viveiros de Castro and mixes two ideas: to exist and to resist, a neologism that mixes the words *existir* with *resistir*. <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/185-noticias/noticias-2016/559817-eduardo-viveiros-de-castro-o-que-se-ve-no-brasil-hoje-e-uma-ofensiva-feroz-contra-os-indios>.

My proposal is to shed light on these issues in a poetic, artistic and sensitive way, and thus “to *anthropophagize*” the knowledge, regurgitating it and reinventing it; going up on the stage, producing books, records and videos at the risk of being criticized by those who oppose perspectivism and interculturalism.

Methodology

Being a transdisciplinary⁴ project, this thesis involves many different areas, with artistic research as the main axis, as it is the way I have been working since the beginning of my activities with Mawaca. As Henk Borgdorff affirms: artistic research has the practice as its central part, as well as a ‘practice-infused research’. The “practice permeates the research at every level” (BORGdorFF, 2017: 5).

That is true first of all with regard to the object of the research. Artistic research concerns knowledge and understanding that are embodied and enacted in art works and practices – in compositions, performances, installations, artefacts. Second, practice permeates the methods of research. The research takes place in and through artistic practice, in and through playing and making (which is why some people refer to it as studio-based research). And third, the result of the research is also practice: the research delivers concrete art works and practices that figure in the world of art. Any added discursive outcome is there to support, not to replace, the artistic contribution the research claims to make. Art practice is therefore also the relevant context for the research. As we know, artistic research operates in two contexts: academia and the art world. The value of the research is assessed partly in terms of the relevance of its outcomes for, and within, art practice (BORGdorFF, 2017: 5).

I can say, now, that my artistic research is located in this frontier – practice and research – that passes through the study of Brazilian indigenous musics to archaeology, from pre-arranged songs to improvisation, performance gestures to intellectual reflections, creating a web of knowledges. The practice stimulates the research and vice versa. All creative processes, such as musical practices (that can be just one performance or the production of a CD or DVD) incorporate knowledge that shapes and expands the horizons of the world. It is “artistic knowledge” based on rehearsals, concerts, exchanging experiences, readings and writings. All

⁴ I take transdisciplinary research to differ from interdisciplinary in that it adds an extra level of integration involving non-academic stakeholders, in my case based on musical practice that provides some clues through a subjective approach, indigenous points of view based on informal conversations, education process (giving workshops always give us insights). I have used Edgar Morin’s (1991) concept of transdisciplinarity, focussing not only analyzing reality through different areas of knowledge but establishing relationships between constructed knowledge. Akiko Santos (2008) has also used this concept: “Relating not only disciplinary contents of different areas but also individual, society and nature; body, mind, and emotions. Also known as the theory of complexity the transdisciplinarity suggests overcoming the way of thinking of binarism – subject-object, part-whole, reason-emotion, etc. – in a cartesian way, and proposes to stimulate a way of thinking marked by articulation”. (...) It moves from disciplinarity (classical logic) to transdisciplinarity (the logic of the third term included). Knowledge is conceived as a network of connections (from the arboreal to the rhizomatic concept), which leads to the multidimensionality of knowledge and to the distinction of various levels of reality.

these activities help to rethink the way we make music. Artistic research showed me an interesting way to understand and throw light on the questions I pointed out in this thesis.

The writing of this thesis made me deepen my understanding of the Amerindian perspectivism proposed by the Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro (from the view *of* and not *on* the native) and approximate to the postcolonial approaches conceived by Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo, Peruvian anthropologist Ramón Pajuelo, Uruguayan literary critic Hugo Achúgar and the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, who helped me to think about the latinamerican subaltern condition, the problems caused by the colonization process and possibilities of getting out from European ideas that still bound us.

I also worked with the concepts of hybridism proposed by the Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini when researching the interweaving of musical references and connections that appear in different moments. Additionally, the concepts of rhizome and deterritorialization of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze helped me to think about the rizomatic spaces of creation in an alternative way of production that allows a multiple, non-hierarchical system during my artistic process. Reading Deleuze made me understand that I was not only imitating an indigenous song but also adding external elements from other cultures, creating internal dialogues, mixing them in order to present a 'third way'. Further, the ideas of Homi Bhabha helped me to think about the 'inter', the 'in-between space' of my artistic research that has the interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches dialoguing with indigenous persons, exchanging ideas and not "explaining" them.

Also, cultural theorist Stuart Hall made me think about culture as something not only to enjoy or to study, but as a "critical locus of social action and intervention, where power relations are established and potentially unstable" (HALL, 1992: 215).

I included ideas of the Ecuadorian cultural theorist Catherine Walsh who proposes a decolonial pedagogy with practices of resisting, re-existing and (re-)living that gave me support to the artistic-political-educational projects I was involved in. I also worked with ideas of the Brazilian pedagogue Vera Candau that reflect on the tensions between equality, difference and human rights, education and interculturality. Also, I tried to create an encounter of ethnomusicology with musical practice, working with the ideas of postmodern ethnomusicologist Ramón Pelinski. When talking about projects with indigenous peoples, I consulted the ethnomusicologists Angela Lühning and Rosângela Tugny who helped me to think about a participative ethnomusicology, both of them inspired by the anthropologist José Jorge Carvalho.

In the first chapter, where I analysed different composers and interpreters who used or were inspired by indigenous music, I worked with Béla Bartók's paradigm of how to use traditional material, since he was a

composer and a researcher simultaneously and thought about this interaction. Although Bartók lived in the middle of last century, his ideas are still valid nowadays and can be useful, as a kind of astrolabe, reinforced by musicologist Georgina Born and media theorist David Hesmondhalgh's concepts. These references are presented in the third chapter of this thesis.

After describing other musicians' approaches to indigenous music, I entered in an autobiographical project using strategies of reconstructing personal memories that took more than ten years. This process provoked a self-reflection based on the analysis of my own artistic practice and way of thinking about music. I tried to analyze my own working with the main aspects pointed out by Rubén López Cano and Úrsula San Cristóbal (CANO and CRISTÓBAL PAZO, 2014: 170): poetics of intentions, analytical poetics and writing about the research process using these premises:

- The intentions embodied in my practice.
- Evaluation of the results in relation to the goals of the practice.
- Modes in which the practice is carried out.
- Transformation of the practice.
- Reflection on the musical practice.
- Subjective effects produced during and after practice.

The process of writing this thesis allowed me to reconceptualize and design new actions, to study and experiment, as well as to search for new artistic goals.

During this research interviews with musicians and specialists, recordings, CD booklets, internet information, illustrations and scores have been used.

The process of researching and writing for this thesis was permeated with different approaches, in a rhizomatic web (Deleuze). This transdisciplinary journey passed through 'uprooting and regrounding' concepts (Laine) and 'deterritorialization and reterritorialization' (Deleuze) that deny linear thinking. It was a process of re-working and re-reading that provoked infinitely many reflections. I shall argue that dwelling and mobility, stillness and transformation are not in opposition but depend on each other.

Nota bene: All the musical examples included in this thesis can be accessed on internet and were listed in the audio section of the bibliography and organized in a Googledocs folder called Thesis_MagdaPucci available on <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uwkHqjux3KghuBb9Ax8D73vXmVoeLl16>.