

**CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES IN MUSIC
COMPOSITION: THE CASE OF THE
COMPOSITION MOVEMENT
IN BAHIA-BRAZIL**

*PERSPECTIVAS CULTURAIS EM MÚSICA
CONTEMPORÂNEA: O CASO DO MOVIMENTO
DE COMPOSIÇÃO NA BAHIA*

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*Submetido em 29/04/2020
Aprovado em 29/07/2020*

Abstract

The focus of interest for this article is the musical composition movement in Bahia, in so far as it enables a reflection on the interweaving of composition and cultural perspectives, not as isolated and autonomous domains, but as something inherent to composition. We will identify and reflect on compositional strategies to represent a distance between distinct cultural poles, showing how they organize the musical form and fabric; in other words, the production of meaning. We start with a model example provided by the piece *Uma possível resposta* op. 169 (1988) by the Brazilian composer (born in Switzerland), Ernst Widmer (1927-1990), and then identify similar strategies in other pieces, showing how the idea of establishing a resignifying distance (both narrative and structural), which functions as a matrix of meanings, responds to our interest in the connection between composition and culture, dialogues with the notion of compositionality, and permits a discussion on decolonization strategies present in the concert music produced in Bahia in recent decades.

Keywords: Composition and Culture, Compositionality, Composition Movement in Bahia (Brazil), Composition and Decolonization, Resignifying Distance.

Resumo

O foco de interesse deste artigo é o movimento de composição da Bahia, na medida em que permite refletir sobre o entrelaçamento de composição e perspectivas culturais, não como domínios autônomos e isolados, mas como algo inerente ao próprio compor. Trataremos de identificar e refletir sobre estratégias composicionais para representar uma distância entre polos culturais distintos, mostrando assim como elas organizam a forma e o tecido musical, ou seja, a produção de sentido. Começaremos pelo caso exemplar da obra *Uma possível resposta* op. 169 (1988), do compositor brasileiro (nascido na Suíça) Ernst Widmer (1927-1990), e seguiremos com a identificação de estratégias similares em outras obras, mostrando como a ideia do estabelecimento de uma distância resignificadora (tanto narrativa como estrutural), que funciona como matriz de sentidos, responde ao nosso interesse pela conexão entre composição e cultura, dialoga com o conceito de composição, permitindo ainda uma discussão sobre estratégias de decolonização na música de concerto produzida na Bahia em décadas recentes.

Palavras-chave: Composição e Cultura, Composicionalidade, Movimento de Composição da Bahia, Composição e Decolonização, Distância resignificadora.

Although creativity might seem an obvious topic for the cultural study of music, little attention has been paid to it, certainly within the field of cultural studies.

Toynbee (2003, p. 102)

Above all, why does the historiography of Western art music, which includes historical musicology, music theory, ethnomusicology and popular-music studies, cling to the counterintuitive assumption that music and culture are separate? (...) I wish to suggest that one reason there is resistance to accepting the relatedness of music and culture results from the paradoxical unwillingness to admit to the full range of **cultural work** that music accomplishes (...) Even more than language, music is the key to understanding and to the power that will turn initial encounter into prolonged dominance.

Philip Bohlman (2003, pp. 45-46)

It is therefore clear that there can be no 'method' in history which would remain unaffected by real historical development. And this for reasons more profound than the notions of the 'progress of knowledge', 'new discoveries', and so on, reasons that concern directly the very structure of historical knowledge, and first and foremost the structure of its object, that is the mode of being proper to history. Since the object of historical knowledge is itself a meaningful object, or an object constituted by significations, the development of the historical world is ipso facto the unfolding of a world of significations (...) And since this world of significations is that in which the 'subject' of historical knowledge lives, it is also that through which this subject necessarily grasps, to begin with, the whole of the historical material.

Cornelius Castoriadis (1988, p. 14)

The problem and background

Composition and culture are not disconnected universes. Therefore, it is entirely relevant to talk about composition and its cultural perspectives — the cultural work accomplished by the compositional process. But, as mentioned by Bohlman (2003, p. 45): “It is not easy to talk about music and culture together, and much less define them in ways that draw them together”. Addressing this issue in the field of compositional theory requires acknowledging the full range of cultural work that composition performs, and points to the fact that cultural perspectives in composition arise not only as a consequence of the friction between texts and contexts, but are also part of dimensions that are characteristic of the compositional process. The nature of our research problem involves at least two interrelated efforts: the choice of a conceptual model which permits a discussion of the role of the cultural work in the compositional process, and the identification of analytical situations which demonstrate compositional strategies related to the representation of cultural perspectives. For Reynolds (2002, p. 3), choices made during the compositional process usually lead to the “persuasiveness of the sense of belonging one has in the presence of the work’s elements”. It is worth noting the particular significance that the expression ‘sense of belonging’ acquires in this context, no longer directly denoting a relationship between a person and a group, but one between a person and the elements of a work of art, its structural organization. The double meaning of this expression is already a sign of the challenge which Bohlman describes.

2.

I use the word ‘compositionality’ whenever I refer to the structure of compositional knowledge, the structure of its object, that is, the mode of being specific to composition. In other words, the interaction of five dimensions of the compositional process: the invention of worlds, the capacity of constructing interpretations, the play of identities, the field of choices and the inseparability of theory and practice — Pitombeira (2019), Nogueira (2016), Lima (2012) — and this is the conceptual horizon proposed by this work, in order to reflect upon the problem of cultural perspectives in the composition of music. When a composer creates a work, a world in which this work exists, or perhaps a world made possible by the very existence of this work, is also created. Relationships are thus established: between the work and the world in which it exists, and also between the work and all other existing worlds. The act of composition is an act of interpretation; the activity of musical invention requires the construction of interpretation and critique, and this cannot be properly understood if one operates with two autonomous categories, such as practice and theory. It is much better to consider that acts of composition spring from a non-dissociate continuum of practice and theory — an ongoing process connecting choices and principles, decisions and the reasons for taking them, and acts and values. This fluidity of borders, present in the activity and faculty of invention, also leads to an active interaction between the designer and design, a kind of reciprocity

through which the field of choices is activated by the very process of composition. The play between ideas and acts of composition becomes part of a larger context: the play of identities, or reciprocity. We now find ourselves at the heart of our central interest.

Although these ideas have a broader range of application, in this essay we will be dealing with the case of the composition movement in Bahia, Brazil, taking it as a reference in order to address issues related to postcolonial or decolonized music-making. In other words, we will focus on the manner in which the case presented by this movement illustrates the complex relationship between practices and discourses that circulate internationally, and the local interpretations which transform them, making it possible to speak of compositional gestures and cultural constructions that represent differential marks in the concert music produced in Bahia in recent decades.

3.

I hold the idea presented by Castoriadis (1988, p. 14), “that there can be no ‘method’ in history which would remain unaffected by real historical development”, to be also true in the field of music composition. In composition, methods are deeply affected by compositional experiences and developments. In order to speak of cultural perspectives that inhabit the compositional process, and that characterize the acts of composition as cultural work, my research has proceeded in two directions. The first is a careful consideration of ideas spread over several fields of literature — as the brief presentation of the notion of compositionality indicates. The second is analytical work within a concrete context, a field of compositional experiments taking place in the rich cultural context of the city of Salvador. These experiments are taken as a reference, as an invitation to inductive reasoning, moving from facts and experiences to possible synthesis and generalizations; in other words, they constitute a living laboratory. Combining these two directions revealed that this is not just a laboratory of musical works, but also, in time, a laboratory of concepts and abstracted synthesis that spring from the level of compositional activity, becoming a compositional outcome, in the form of discourse. In fact, the ideas that were gathered around the notion of compositionality have been elaborated as a result of analytical work produced by the interaction with the contemporary repertoire of Bahian composition. There are previous examples of this process, such as the notions of organicity and relativization (or inclusivity) proposed by Ernst Widmer (1927-1990) in 1988 (LIMA, 1999).

4.

The living laboratory in which these ideas were developed was the School of Music at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil. Since its creation in 1954 by the German-born composer Hans-Joachim Koellreutter — as part of an ambitious project developed by the founder of the University, Edgard Santos —, this university context has nurtured a composition movement involving creation, performance, the organization of festivals

and competitions, the preparation of numerous recordings and publications, and, above all, the education of several generations of composers. All this has marked Bahia as a significant reference in the field of composition in Brazil and internationally. The central idea of the Music Seminars of the Federal University of Bahia created in 1954 (later, School of Music) was a bold conception favoring creation and critique as indispensable dimensions of any aspect of music learning.

It should be observed that the 1960s became also a crucial turning point. In fact, under the leadership of Brazilian (Swiss-born) composer Ernst Widmer (1927-1990), the teaching of composition was established as a regular activity from 1963 onwards, using group methodology instead of tutorial instruction. I am convinced that the group perspective made all the difference, because these student composers, several of whom came from distinct cultural contexts in Bahia, decided to work together. With the participation of professors, such as Walter Smetak (1913-1984) and Widmer himself, they created the Group of Composers of Bahia - GCB (1966)² — an incredible horizontally connected pedagogical environment which became nationally recognized from 1969 onwards, starting with its widely commented-on participation in the Festival of Guanabara, in Rio de Janeiro. Suddenly Bahia was seen as a place committed to the education of composers, not just one or two, but many. Over subsequent years, it also came to be seen as a place where a specific experiment was taking place, leading to the composition of music that, during festivals, could clearly be identified as originating from there. Nevertheless, there has never been anything akin to a stylistic homogeneity, and the composers always appeared very distinct from one another³.

Over the following decades, more than two thousand works were composed, and hundreds of these were performed as part of the School of Music's regular activities. Groups dedicated specifically to this repertory have been created, such as *Música Nova* (1970s and 1980s), *Bahia Ensemble* (1990s) and, more recently, the *Camará Ensemble Orchestra*. From 1990 onwards, with the creation of the Graduate Program in Music, more than twenty Doctoral dissertations on composition have been defended and published. In the last ten years, more than thirty national and international composition prizes have been awarded to professors and student composers within this context. In 2013, the *Música de Agora na Bahia – MAB* program won a national competition as a cultural project, the highest sum so far in the area of composition, and developed a huge number of activities between 2014 and 2017, involving the interaction of local, national and international composers and performance groups. Thus we speak of a composition

2 Antonio José Santana Martins (Tom Zé), Carlos Rodrigues de Carvalho, Carmen Mettig Rocha, Fernando Barbosa de Cerqueira, Jamily Oliveira, Lindemberg Rocha Cardoso, Milton Gomes, Nicolau Kokron Yoo, Rinaldo Rossi e Ernst Widmer (founding members). Walter Smetak was included later.

3 It is worth noting the diversity of conceptions, techniques, narratives and sonorities in the production of composers such as Lindemberg Cardoso (1939-1989), Fernando Cerqueira (1941), Jamily Oliveira (1944) and Agnaldo Ribeiro (1943), to name just a few. Nevertheless, their music is frequently given the same label: "Composers of Bahia". This phenomenon also occurs with the new generations, involving the production of Paulo Costa Lima (1954), Wellington Gomes (1960), Alexandre Espinheira (1972) or Paulo Rios Filho (1985) – again, to name just a few.

*movement*⁴, since all the activities that marked the initial years still take place, and will probably continue into the next decades⁵.

5.

In previous work, I put forward the idea that the formation of composers has to be understood as a cultural process. The student composer faces challenges which are similar to those faced by someone entering a new cultural context: for instance, a fascination with the sudden expansion of musical horizons and, simultaneously, a sense of awkwardness with these previously unheard-of worlds. Imaginary constructions⁶ and the sense of belonging are powerful pedagogical strategies (LIMA, 2014), (BARRETO, 2012). This sense of belonging is not only experienced in the presence of the work's elements, or as part of a group that shares the same mode of reception, but also as part of a larger narrative, a cultural movement. This means that one does not learn simply to be a composer but, instead, to be part of a larger narrative, a composer as a member of a movement, as a representative of a cultural context within its dialogue with other movements and contexts, and as someone trying to find their own voice, as a result of this interplay of perspectives and identities. Why would it be any different for practicing composers? Imaginary constructions and a sense of belonging remain indispensable tools for the plausibility of the envisioned paths.

The city of Salvador and its cultural formation

6.

It is certainly no coincidence that this composition movement flourished in such a rich context as the city of Salvador, Bahia. It is impossible to ignore the impact of the city's rich, inherited musical traditions, and the kind of thinking they favor, something that makes the city of Salvador famous for its cultural expressions, especially those related to the African Diaspora — *candomblé*, *samba*, *carnival* (*afoxés*) and *capoeira* — but

4 The creation of the Group of Composers of Bahia (1966) was a musicological landmark. However, fifty years later, the perception of what occurs in Bahia is certainly better addressed by the idea of a movement; a continuous and uninterrupted sequence of activities developed by generations of professors and students of composition. This movement constitutes an exemplary case in Brazil, not only on account of its duration, but also because of the shared perspective which has not precluded diversity or singularity.

5 The strength of the composition movement in Bahia does not only come from the composers and their art of invention, but also from a tradition of interpretations that are passionately dedicated to the same cause. There are countless examples, and to cite but a few: Piero Bastianelli, who premiered hundreds of works by young composers over the decades through the *Conjunto Música Nova* (New Music Ensemble during the 1970s and 80s) and the *Bahia Ensemble* (1990s, coordinated by Ana Margarida Lima), the *UFBA Trio* (1960s and 70s), *Madrigal* from UFBA, *RyokoVeiga*, the *UFBA Percussion Group* (Fernando Santos and Jorge Sacramento), the *Robatto Duo*, *GIMBA Group*, *Chamber Ensemble*, *UFBA Symphonic Orchestra* (with various conductors: Hans Joachim Koellreutter, Ernst Widmer, Piero Bastianelli, Rinaldo Rossi, Carlos Veiga, Erick Vasconcellos, Pino Onnis, Horst Schwebel, Wellington Gomes, and José Maurício Brandão), and the *Symphonic Orchestra of Bahia*, among many others.

6 A remarkable approach and description of imaginary constructions in this context is provided by Nettl (1992, 137-155) in his anthological "Mozart and the Ethnomusicological Study of Western Culture: An Essay in Four Movements."

also, transformations and hybridizations that occurred through interaction with indigenous traditions, resulting in expressions such as *candomblé de caboclo*.

The Portuguese constructed the city of Salvador in 1549 and it was the capital of their colony until 1763. During the first centuries of the colonization of Brazil, Salvador was the main center for decision-making and cultural meetings — indigenous, Portuguese, Jewish, French, Dutch and African people (among others), within the domain of constructing a new society, which although hierarchical, also had a considerable amount of informality, and therefore there was much less apartheidism than would be expected, as Risério observes:

A society given to contacts, exchanges, interpenetrations, transfusions and contagion. With significant communal spaces, from docks to squares and markets to beds. For this reason, black people and those of mixed-race engendered parallel cultural worlds, including *chulas*, *capoeiras*, *calundus*, *quilombos* and *cucumbis*, and were also nourished by the circuit of ideas, techniques and beliefs of an 'erudite culture,' which the elite imported from Europe, and France in particular. (RISÉRIO, 2004, p. 444)

The 20th century found the city of Salvador with its remote Amerindian substratum and Portuguese nature structurally, but as Risério (2004, p. 448) also comments "deeply subverted and transformed, in all its aspects and instances — from language to morals, from sex to esthetics, from family to religions — from the influx of the Bantu, Jeje and Nagô people". The city's setting was especially attractive for the Yoruban people who weaved their relationship networks and maintained extra-European practices. The network of *candomblé* temples, which in the 2005 census was approximately 1,250 houses of prayer, and active participation in carnival through Afro and *afoxé* groups, are two avenues through which this process took place.

As Albuquerque and Fraga Filho observe:

In the slaves' work routines, the Africans and their descendants discovered ethnic differences and recreated cultural identities. For the Brazilian people, all this came directly from Africa but, in fact, the Africans reinvented Africa in America through interaction among themselves and with local inhabitants (ALBUQUERQUE; FRAGA FILHO, 2006, p. 310).

7.

However, the celebration of this rich cultural inheritance should not conduct discourse in the direction of a traditional, essentialist vision of Bahian culture that reverberates within Jorge Amado's novels as their trademark. According to Albergaria there are two extensive fields of theories and studies about Bahia as a cultural context:

In a very simplified — and provocative way, we would have the essentialist theoretical domain, and on the other side, the deconstructionist one (...) The scholars who follow the essentialist orientation do understand that, for the last five hundred years of Bahia, a number of particular traits have been created, making our

land a distinctive place. Baianity would be the ripe fruit of this mixture of cultures (...) In the deconstructionist perspective, Bahia is not something given, seen by the naked eye, but rather a cultural construction, made possible by a thousand-and-one symbolic mediations. In other words, what we have is a model of identity representation that is also laboriously elaborated top-down, outside-inside, and backward-forward⁷ (ALBERGARIA, 2001, p. 114).

With this diversity of positions in mind, we can certainly anticipate a number of questions. How could a movement designed to face the challenge of inventing music, which is capable of dialoguing with international contemporary trends, ignore this cultural wealth? But how to link this kind of wealth with the problems, challenges and constraints proposed by these international contemporary trends? In what ways do the compositional processes that sustain this Afrodescendant cultural expression, adapted to the Brazilian context, manifest themselves in the process of inventing contemporary music in Bahia?

All the above points to the idea of Bahia as a synapse, a place in which there is a secular encounter and negotiation of symbolic representations originating in Europe, Africa and indigenous Brazil. Something that deserves special attention in this regard is the concept of in-betweenness, as applied to Salvador and its cultural life. The experience of in-betweenness involves difference, conflict and friction, the mixing of signifiers, and often the intertwining of contraries⁸. Bahian poet Antonio Brasileiro once wrote a very elucidative verse, which was used as an epigraph by Ernst Widmer: "The truth is just one: many-sided".⁹ In order to be able to take place, the act of creation in Bahia usually also implies a decision to resist.

A specific example of this should be mentioned: it is certainly shocking to discover that two or three baroque angels in the Church of St. Francis (built between 1686 and 1720) in the old center of Salvador, were sculpted with female sexual organs. The architects were Portuguese professionals, but the workers were enslaved workers from Africa. It is easy to imagine that one of these workers was not entirely comfortable with the ideal vision of asexual child angels. I understand this mistake to be a kind of manifesto, preserving the African mentality, against the idea that asexual human figures could be portrayed. The Baroque in Bahia was already a field of friction and conflict, an experience of in-betweenness¹⁰. Could it be any different for modernism or post-modernism?

7 Top-down: meaning that the elites produce and distribute images of Bahia; not only in the bottom-up direction, which the author considers overemphasized by the essentialist position. Outside-inside: images of Bahia are often produced elsewhere (such as Carmen Miranda's outfit) and absorbed locally. Bahia's cultural identity is structurally dependent on the world's political, economic, artistic and technological centers. Backward-forward: the past is not simply what remains as traces, but the result of several re-creations made in present times, which meet specific interests.

8 See Silviano Santiago, *Uma literatura nos trópicos: ensaios sobre a dependência cultural*, 1978.

9 "A verdade é uma só: são muitas". This verse is used by Ernst Widmer in his writings.

10 The canonic example of this situation comes from the poetry of Baroque poet Gregório de Mattos.

8.

In a previous paper, presented at the II National Meeting of the Brazilian Association of Ethnomusicology – ABET, (LIMA, 2005), I have outlined a mapping of possible relations and dialogues involving compositional processes in the so called “contemporary music” and in traditional Afro-Brazilian contexts. A number of horizons were outlined: i) the use of collage and borrowing, which is usually frequent, but tends to remain on the surface; ii) the appropriation/reconstruction of philosophical concepts and attitudes, such as the absorption of non-linearity so characteristic in music that values repetition; iii) the interpenetration of materials, for instance, when a rhythmic pattern and a series intertwine; iv) or the structural molding of principles and systems, when the problem of interaction is placed at the very heart of the germination design of a newly-imagined piece, generating new, systematized environments. All these horizons are rich in information and worthy of further study, but there is something that crosses all of these and will be our focus in this article: the representation of the relation between distinct cultural worlds, and the presence of this distance as an element to construct meanings.

A clash between symphonic thinking and carnival

9.

Sometimes there are comments on how much Widmer was open to influence from his students, but, in fact, this was a trait of his pedagogical practice. For the composer Fernando Cerqueira, who was one of his students during the 1960s, he was particularly influenced by cultural ideas, even including these topics in his production (Lima, 1999). However, it can be confirmed that Widmer’s interest in the relation between the compositional process and cultural aspects of Bahia precede the start of his composition classes in 1963. In 1962, he wrote *Divertimento III – Coco*, op. 22, the first significant step towards a systematic dialogue with material originating from local culture. But, perhaps even more intriguing, is the explanatory note for the piece *Bloco I* op. 27 for a mixed ensemble, dedicated to H. J. Koellreutter, who was leaving, after eight years of intense dedication to the project of creating an innovative pedagogical environment in Bahia:

Just as in a block of granite, quartz, feldspar and mica are fused together; or just like a carnival group, in which people and masks, indeed very distinct, dance among themselves; so one imagines, here, distinct musical events that happen in parallel and that interpenetrate each other. Real development no longer exists: things are fixed. It happens that they are illuminated from different angles, and each one vivifies the other. And so we have ‘music strata’ (structures), in which one no longer searches for the solution of the conflict, but rather for contiguity and the interpenetration of contraries that transform themselves into elements which define form (LIMA, 1999, p. 239).

In this note attached to the score, Widmer is registering the process of transforming the experience of a Bahian cultural expression, the carnival cordon, indeed as they

had at that time, in an idealization of a musical landscape; in other words, criteria for the compositional process. We see that he is really attracted by the contiguity and interpenetration of opposites, understanding this as an alternative to the traditional concept of linear time and real development. This path of creative imagery interferes in the traditional logic of narrative, favoring a random play of signifiers. And all of this would be nothing but the outline of an interesting and promising path, if we did not have the concrete example of the experience formed from the meeting of a carnival group, Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi, and the Symphonic Orchestra of Bahia in 1988, produced by one of the composer's late pieces of work. Indeed, everything indicates that the ideas expressed in 1962, before he had any contact with the students, remained as important references throughout this whole period, certainly influencing various areas of his.

10.

Therefore, this all converged on August 17, 1988, when the piece *De canto em canto II: Possível resposta op. 169* was premiered in the Castro Alves Theater in Salvador, with Ernst Widmer as the conductor. As the title indicates, there is a hidden question that is responsible for the idea of the work, and this question comes from Charles Ives' iconic piece, *The Unanswered question*. More than the motivic-melodic material that Widmer borrows in various citations and references in the first part of the piece, in question is the link with the imagery that he activates — the inability to answer the metaphysical question that has taken up centuries and centuries of Western thinking. In Ives' case, the representation of this inability is transformed into a driving force for a new aesthetic that involves distinct sonorous planes, clashes between tonal and non-tonal organizations, which could even be understood as a declaration, in defense of 20th century music. However, besides the reference to Ives, Widmer also draws on more recent avant-garde resources, dividing the orchestra into small groups, scattering them throughout the auditorium, and thereby investing in spatiality as a form of deconstruction. Despite these resources, the entire initial part sounds a little static, until the carnival group's abrupt and unexpected intervention takes place, entering the auditorium and positioning themselves in a horseshoe around the orchestra, playing with it. At the end of the piece, there is a great apotheosis: the conductor led all of the musicians from the auditorium towards the spacious Castro Alves Theater foyer, where everything was transformed into a major event and celebration, with both groups of musicians playing fragments of what they had just performed on stage. They mixed with the astounded and enraptured audience that had left the concert hall, not really understanding what was happening. Dressed in black, as the conductor, but also wearing colorful necklaces that are typical of candomblé of Bahia, a serious and focused Ernst Widmer also moved around this space, as if he were conducting an imaginary orchestra, with his gaze fixed on the horizon. The 1962 vision had become a reality in 1988.

Decolonization and the experience of in-betweenness

11.

The entire strength of Widmer's work resides precisely in the beauty of the idea being constructed. In fact, the sonorous impact of the piece did not provoke any great enthusiasm. There was criticism in the press about this type of disenchantment (LIMA, 1999, pp. 29-30). Once, when delving into an interpretation of the meaning of this work, I described the event as if it were a meeting between Descartes (a representative of Western metaphysics) and Xangô (the Afro-Bahian mythical force of thunder and justice)¹¹ (Lima, 1999, p. 32). Widmer commented to a local newspaper: "I do not know if there is an answer to Ives' question, but perhaps *Filhos de Gandhi* will provide it." The metaphysical question, represented by Ives' melody for the trumpet, and representing the spectacle of Western civilization, finds a distinct perspective, an African celebration. Two very distinct universes, with their own instruments, traditions, and temporalities intertwine in this piece. And now we arrive at a crucial point of our investigation. This act of imagery and composition produces a compositional strategy that is materialized as a distance that is established between two cultural poles; it resignifies the distance of the entire piece, but, simultaneously and paradoxically, this distance also represents a meeting. The composer, perpetually enamored by paradoxes, was fully aware of this, and insisted that the piece could not be seen as a blend of two groups, and spoke of "mutual respect" and a "pacific pororoca"¹². In planning this encounter between the radically distinct cultural manifestations, Ernst Widmer touches the heart of our cultural condition: the experience of in-betweenness. Within the domain of intellectual life, this was once described as a fundamental dilemma: to know oneself not as European, African or an indigenous Brazilian, and to face the challenge of composing one's own ascendancy¹³.

12.

This issue has had a strong presence in Silvano Santiago's work since 1978, and gains a specific outline precisely through the notion of in-betweenness, for example, highlighting Latin America's path of insertion on the map of Western civilization, which takes place "thanks to the active and destructive movement which deviates from the norm that transfigures the achieved and immutable elements the Europeans exported to the New World" (SANTIAGO, 1978, p. 16). Thus, it draws attention to the situations in which a work of art

is organized through a silent and treacherous meditation by the artist who surprises the original with its limitations, dismantles and rearticulates it, according

11 There is a connection between the Afoxé Filhos de Gandhi and Xangô, being influenced by 'Mestre Didi' in their early years.

12 Pororoca is the name given by indigenous Brazilians to the meeting of the waters of the Amazon with the Atlantic Ocean.

13 See Eneida Leal Cunha (2006, 125), *Estampas do Imaginário*

to a second and reflective view of the theme presented in the metropolis at first hand. (SANTIAGO, 1978, p. 56)

The same vision includes the notion of cultural anthropophagy invented by Oswald de Andrade, as “one of the antidotes proposed by modernism to reverse the colonized guilty conscience, faced with the inevitable incorporation of something which is not their own and is foreign” (CUNHA, 2006, p. 126). Therefore, we are precisely in the field of reflection about decolonization and its impacts on local artistic and cultural creation, with Bahia being a large and secular laboratory of meetings and responses constructed to face these problems and dilemmas.

In fact, the secular condition of cultural resistance in Bahia leads us to observe that the effort of decolonization is much before the political process of constructing a post-colonial reality at the end of the war of independence in 1823. With the social and cultural fabric being quite diversified, we are led to realize that the survival of each cultural gesture in Bahia depended on efforts to co-exist with those from very distinct origins. This condition seems to form the main distinguishing feature of this society: being open to co-existence with distinct logics, its polysemy.

The concept of in-betweenness in Santiago has been related to a series of other concepts that indicate zones of decentralization, marking a flourishing trend in the field of cultural studies, thereby contributing towards weakening the crystalized frameworks of unity, purity and authenticity usually associated with the European canons, such as the notion of interstitial or third space in Bhabha (1998); cultural hybridization in Canciani; contact zone in Pratt; a change of paradigm in Boaventura de Souza Santos (2000), or even the notion of another globalization, from below, presented by Milton Santos (2001). A good topic for reflection emerges from the need to evaluate if there really is a greater balance of power between central and peripheral discourses, or if it is the weakening of the vision of canon, brought by post-modernist winds, the last link of the symbolic chain of syntheses in the teleology of Western culture, which finds an innovative form of legitimization.

Critical thinking and the representation of cultural distance

13.

In principle, it is surprising that a vision that was scribbled down in 1962 about a carnival cordon remained active over the years that separate it from the debut of the piece, *Uma Possível resposta op. 169*, in 1988, but we gradually realize that the ideas of cultural distance, a crossing, and even a paradox (as a result of the clash of distinct logics), occupy an unquestionable centrality in Widmer’s thinking, as he explains:

The distance acquired transformed me into a prophet of the relative. It also helped to release me from certain scruples (...) Continuous relativization is essential in order to grow intellectually in life (...) Suspecting, following the traces

of relations, and transforming them into sonorous forms, from the outskirts until playing in the center, taking the paradoxical to sound, and move, is also most personal desire (Widmer, 1980).

In 1988, he also theorizes about the compositional process (which he considers equivalent to the pedagogical process), citing two laws around which they are structured: the laws of organicity and relativization (or inclusiveness). This takes on a special meaning when we relate the theorization to the composition itself and, especially, the meeting between the Afoxé and the Symphonic Orchestra. Thus, we realize that in Widmer, insofar as he reacts to the Bahian cultural context, the composition makes the theory and the theory molds the composition.

Organicity involves a logical field around operations that stem from the connective “if this, then...” —in other words, derivational work is involved in connecting antecedents and consequences, it is an investment in the construction of the perception of coherence and unity. In addition, another important criterion is also required, the concatenation of sonic ideas has to be perceived as fluid, gradual, and, as a consequence, organic. Widmer created a metaphorical description of the creative act, as having phases such as: conception, bringing it to life, letting it germinate, becoming ripe, blooming and maturing.

On the other hand, the major aspect of relativization seems to be that of an all-encompassing idea, the possibility that distinct logical fields give birth to a whole, an unexpected one, not foreseen from the standpoint of each of the logical systems; and, in this regard, it responds to the connective “and if...”. Relativization (or inclusivity) becomes associated to “turning tables” and a moment of inflection, but this is just the point at which the two fields come together.

It seems reasonable to think of “cultural work”, in the context of artistic processes, as a transformation of some aspect of the way in which a group represents itself. Expectations and a sense of belonging are clearly involved. In order to revisit the concept of ‘cultural construction’, which is close enough to ‘cultural work’, Finnegan observes that,

...It was helpful indeed for challenging universalized concepts of emotions as primeval internal impulses; but the pendulum can swing too far, substituting cultural for biological determinism. We may all nowadays agree in criticizing the traditional model of “culture” as homogeneous external entity and instead stress differentiation and multiplicity (...) Insights from social interactionist and processual traditions help to restore the balance, illuminating the creative roles of individuals as they interact with, and themselves mold cultural expectations. (FINNEGAN, 2003, p. 190)

The challenge we face has to do with thinking of the compositional process as being capable of modeling expectations, and this seems to provide an important connection with the laws proposed by Widmer — organicity and relativization (or inclusivity) —inasmuch as they deal with the implementation of fields assembled by certain musical logics.

And thus, the clash between symphonic thought and carnival should also be understood as a meaningful allegory, representing Widmer’s own trajectory from the Ger-

manic cultural environment of his youth in Switzerland to the cultural diversity of Bahia. The piece deals with the challenge of inventing a world in which the clash between the two distinct cultural environments is portrayed and reflected upon. If the composer had actually been born in Brazil, and moved to Switzerland in his twenties, the piece would probably be very different. The sudden appearance of the afoxé Filhos de Ghandy in the auditorium responds to the intention of interrupting the organic line designed by the material borrowed from Ives' *Unanswered Question*. In the narrative projected by the piece, it is the Afro-Bahian elements and culture that respond to Ives. African ancestrality deconstructs the illusion of teleology staged by the environment of organicity. In doing so, it frees the protagonist of the composition from the false obligation (as a peripheral and colonized context) of responding to the traditional cycles of Western music history, as if a statement were being made: 'another teleology is indeed possible!'

This means that the dimension of inventing a world connects directly with the dimension of building interpretations, or criticality¹⁴. Organicity and relativization are then, in this case, tools for the preparation of this interpretive dimension, dealing with the creation of a distance, a cultural distance absorbed and reproduced by musical narrative. This movement, from the invention of worlds to the level of criticality, continues and is finally involved in the configuration of identities, or reciprocity. Widmer is then allowed to think of himself in a completely different environment, surrounded by members of the afoxé Filhos de Gandhy. As we see, the cycle of compositionality, the mode of being specific to composition, registers the traces of the cultural work accomplished by this piece.

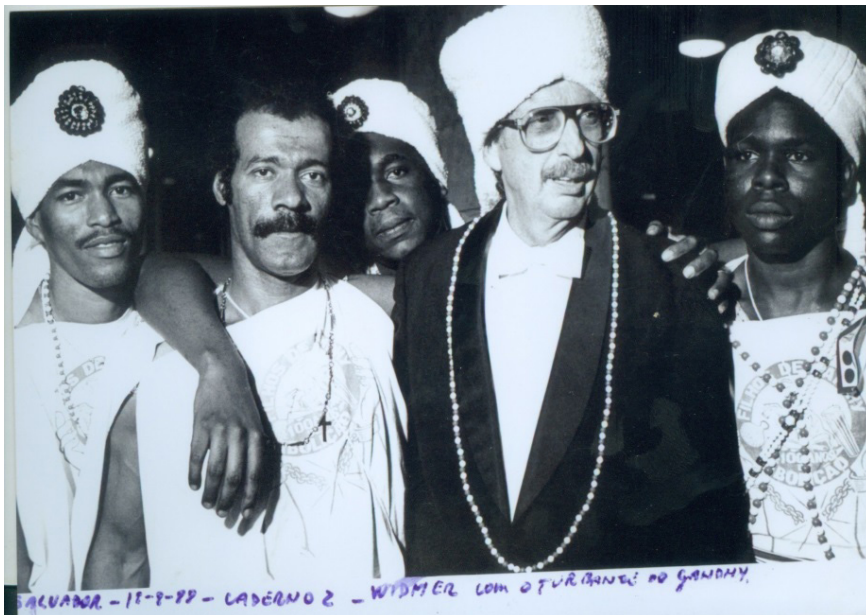


Figure 1: Widmer and members of the afoxé Filhos de Gandhy

14 Another label used to describe this dimension in the compositionality cycle.

Widmer's rendering of this is a huge distortion, projecting the notes of the original melody along six octaves in 'fff', producing reverberations that come from the whole body of the instrument, and depicting something similar to an abyss, in the face of which we (listeners) feel very small, and, therefore, angry (among other affects).

Ex. 2 Three Variations on a theme by Dorival Caymmi

Example 3: Three variations on a theme by Dorival Caymmi – Ernst Widmer

The piece, which remained incomplete for twelve years, was finally presented as a dedication to Lindembergue Cardoso (1939-1989), one of Widmer's first pupils, on the occasion of his death, which was sudden, taking away the composer before he could complete 50 years of life – (LIMA, 1999, pp. 321-323). These intense effects are followed by (and do prepare) a second variation, which is built around the idea of resignation and calmness-- a strange calmness to be sure, leaving the impression that the violence of the first encounter remains there, under the appearances. It swings as a kind of barcarolle, a Bahian barcarolle, projecting Caymmi's original melody with a rhythmic transformation and a persistent bass, 'C1', that sets the tone of the kind of resignation described above.

Example 4: Variation II – Ernst Widmer

15.

A distinct analytical object in the first gesture of the first variation is the C-minor triad that occupies the center of the figure. What is a 'C-minor' chord doing in such a transformation of the original melody, which, incidentally, is in 'E-minor'? How does it

relate to the song? Why does it make sense, aurally, as an expressive and dramatic solution in the middle of this giant wave? The 'G' is part of the original melody, but what justifies its inclusion in a C minor chord? It should be noted that the 'C' and 'E-flat' could be understood as forming that striking interval of a diminished seventh ('C' and 'D-sharp'), that becomes associated in the original song to the death at sea. Therefore, these are precisely the pitches that appear right after the first verse. The chosen procedure is both very simple and, in its simplicity, very bold. It is simple because the pitches are exactly the same as the melody: nothing could be more straightforward. And it is bold because the chord of 'C-minor', not belonging to the harmonic horizon of the original melody, brings new harmonic implications.

When the composer emphasizes this chord, he is pointing at the capillarity between musical contexts. It is as if organicity had been exaggerated, ignoring its own harmonic limits, giving rise to a transformation based on the second of the laws pointed to by Widmer: relativization. The distance between an absent model and variation becomes significant.

This initial gesture demonstrates that the transformation of Caymmi's melody required imagination, an operation that depended on some kind of proposition based on the clause 'and if...': "What would happen if this melodic gesture that behaves like a small wave were transformed into a huge one?" It is this operation that will orient the steps taken in the contour transformation of the original melody, spreading the gesture over the keyboard. Widmer re-interprets the original melody, and proposes a celebration, which is also a critique. The transformation of the motif of the original song [B - E - F# - G - F# - A] into the main idea of the variation involves the following plan:

B6	-	55 st	= E2
E2	-	22 st	= F#0
F#0	+	37 st	= G3
G3	+	23 st	= F#5
F#5	+	15 st	= A6

The image shows two musical staves. The top staff is labeled 'Original melody' and is in treble clef. The bottom staff is labeled 'Main idea of Variation 1' and is in bass clef. Vertical dashed lines connect notes between the two staves. Interval markings are as follows: 15^{ma-1} (from the first note of the variation to the first note of the original melody), 8^{va-1} (from the second note of the variation to the second note of the original melody), +15 st (from the third note of the variation to the third note of the original melody), -55 st (from the fourth note of the variation to the fourth note of the original melody), -22 st (from the fifth note of the variation to the fifth note of the original melody), and +37 st (from the sixth note of the variation to the sixth note of the original melody).

Example 5: Relationship between Variation I and the song 'É doce morrer no mar'

The general contour of the transformation is therefore: [-, -, +, +, +]. The contour of the original melody [-, -, +, +, -, +] is very similar indeed. This means that the composer had a good understanding of the importance of the contour for the expressive result of the gesture and therefore preserved it. The important point here is that the work of imagination/invention is closely intertwined with the heart of the compositional

process, the dimension of interpretation and critique, with whatever procedures may constitute it.

16.

The third and last variation (and miniature) closes the piece precisely with a process that represents a progressive separation from the original song. Each of the three evocations of it is more remote than the previous one. This third variation performs the role of finishing the narrative proposed by the piece, around its absent theme, already an expressive choice that accentuates the idea of loss and death. The choice of '*ppp*' and the use of these extreme regions of the keyboard immediately defines the intended mood. The '*rallentando molto*' and the confluence of the lines of unison to the center of the keyboard give the listener a direction, a sense of the inevitable. But what really gives the passage its tone is the proliferation of altered notes throughout the three enunciations, as a result of inversions of the original song: tonal inversion in the first; real inversion in the second, and a Phrygian transformation and inversion in the third, responsible for the presence of A-sharp. All of this makes the end, the last note, the most dramatic moment of the piece, with the pungent B-sharp. But, ironically, the distance established leads to a very familiar context: the notes D-sharp and B-sharp, that in the original melody represented the big leap of a diminished seventh, associated to the idea of "dying in the sea" (c – d#).



Example 6: Variation III – Ernst Widmer

Imagination and the representation of cultural distance

17.

How are we to understand the relationship between imaginary constructions and cultural identity? The particularities of being in a group? In the case of the *Three Variations*, the work done through imagination has at least two directions: the first is the one evoked by the original song – the fishermen and their community as a metaphor of the cultural context of old Bahia, their shared ancestry filled with oppositions, such as earth/sea, death/life, going away/coming back, sweet/salty and man-boat/nature-mother (the deity Yemanjá); another direction is the context of the modernist tradition through the

critique of representation, the distortion of the original wave-like movement into a huge one with a transformed harmonic horizon. The gesture of Widmer's variation puts these two cultural contexts in a dialogue but also in confrontation and, as mentioned above, establishes a distance between the two poles, declaring them as being both compatible and incompatible — again providing a touch of post-modern perspective. Besides this, the distance between variations and model, between old Bahia and recent developments, also points to the loss of Lindembergue Cardoso, as if a cycle were coming to an end. It reminds us of another important point: narrative as something fundamental to this process of intertwining culture and imagination.

18.

The study of Widmer's production has made it possible to understand how these concerns have led to a systematic solution. It has been possible to demonstrate in a previous work how Widmer prepared what I have called octatonic strategies in several of his last pieces:

The transformations undergone by structure and surface lead at times to diatonic, hexatonic, and twelve-tone environments. These transformations take place as 'internal' processes of the octatonic horizon. Organicism and unity prevail over juxtaposition, eclecticism, or non-sequitur. This system's flexibility facilitates a connection between the supposedly 'autonomous' space of formal music construction and the reverberations of Brazilian cultural contexts. (LIMA, 2001, p. 176)

The octatonic horizon was a way of absorbing diversity within a single system, making it possible to create internal opposing poles and distances, presenting the idea and experience of in-betweenness as a systematic option.

19.

Until now, the trajectory of our thought has taken the concept of cultural work suggested by Bohlman (2003, p. 45) as the starting point, trying to understand how it becomes embedded in the compositional process. The narrative design of Widmer's op. 169, with its clash between symphonic thinking and carnival, made it possible to understand the cultural distance portrayed in this way as part of the interpretive effort of the piece, its critical dimension — in other words, as the play of organicity and relativization, to use concepts proposed by the composer himself. This distance can be understood as a meaningful opposition, touching on the field of expectations, the values connected to the musical experience and the sense of belonging generated by its presence, with all of this connecting the dimensions of compositionality: the invention of worlds, criticality, reciprocity, a field of choices and the intertwining of theory and practice.

The analytical importance of creating such a meaningful distance between distinct poles has also proved important in the next piece to be considered — Widmer's first variation on a theme by Dorival Caymmi. The traditional relationship between theme

and variation was used here as way of establishing a particular interpretation of the initial gesture of the song, transforming it into a vehement response to the loss of Lindemberg Cardoso, one of Widmer's first pupils. A careful disposition of contours has made it possible to simultaneously represent the wavelike behavior of the song and its amplification as a contemporary piano gesture. These poles are intertwined, making a single whole. Creative imagination, this faculty that help us pass from the level of conception to the level of realization, here connects the invention of worlds and the construction of interpretation. Narrative and structural thinking become part of the same process.

20.

In trying to better understand cultural perspectives as part of the compositional process, and using the analytical insights gained from these two pieces, one should observe that criticality, or, in other words, the construction of interpretation through composition, is associated to the construction of a distance between opposing poles, and to the meanings generated by the movements between these poles. In the cases discussed here, this distance originated from the narrative design of the pieces. But, as we can see in the case of the *Variations*, it is also represented in the structural domain, making it possible to understand structure as a derivation or counterpart of narrative, both springing from the resources provided by culture and imagination.

This meaningful distance comments on the cultural condition that surrounds the composition movement in Bahia —in other words, it represents an interpretation of the lived friction and conflict that characterizes the experience of in-betweenness, and thus becomes part of the construction of discourse that resists colonization. In terms of analytical terminology, it points to the notion of markedness, as it appears in the theory of musical narrative: "the asymmetrical valuations of opposed elements in a system", (ALMÉN, 2008, p. 41). But perhaps the most effective connection with the domain of theoretical construction comes from the link with the notions of defamiliarization and denaturalization that these kinds of distances permit, making it possible to think in terms of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, in the context of decolonization.

Therefore, we are constructing the understanding that the representation of a distance-matrix of meaning works in the direction of a denaturalization of the creative environment, where, generally speaking, the violence of the colonial process and its expansionist force, result in the characteristic erasure of alterity — where there are only copies and models of the metropolises and affirmation of precariousness and dependence. A significant amount of international literature on 20th century Latin American composers, describes them as using Webern-like procedures, serial techniques and Stravinsky's sonorities, without being concerned about understanding the distinctive marks which they sought to establish. By way of denaturalization, precisely the opposite path is sought, an affirmative position, which is recognized as a differential value.

The concluding part of this article will expand upon the examples presented so far, analyzing several pieces written by composers who belong to the composition movement in Bahia, encompassing several decades and indicating gestures and processes that display the same features identified and commented upon until now.

The flight (and return) of the hummingbird

21.

The piece *O Vôo do colibri op. 96 (The Flight of the hummingbird)*, for harpsichord and strings, was composed in 1984 by Lindembergue Cardoso (1939-1989), out of his concern for the ecological cause¹⁶. The ecological movement was strong in Brazil at the time, growing along with the political re-democratization of the country after twenty years of military dictatorship.

16 See at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6bKtvrel8k>

O VÔO DO COLIBRI
para cravo e cordas

Lindemberg Cardoso - op. 96

The image displays a page of a musical score for the piece "O Vôo do Colibri" by Lindemberg Cardoso, op. 96. The score is for Cravo (Harp) and strings (Violins, Violas, Violoncelos, Contrabaixos). The tempo is marked as $J=60$. The score is divided into several systems, with some sections marked "a/pont." and "pizz.".

Example 7: O Vôo do colibri op. 96 –Lindemberg Cardoso

This work presents an imaginary blend between the hummingbird and the harpsichord. The result is a kind of musical character, with fleeting gestures that are spread over the keyboard, portraying a figure-background relation with the strings, as the beginning of the piece illustrates (mm. 1-20).

In addition to a bird and harpsichord, this character also features as a soloist in the traditional form of a concerto, bringing together gestures and topics both from the Baroque period (mm. 18-20) and avant-garde 20th century music, producing environments that suggest serialism (with tonal implications) for aleatory music, with extended techniques and cluster harmonies (mm. 20-21). This gives rise to a significant expanded space, with distinct poles that when alternating, produce movement, and ensure a dimensionality for the narrative. In the middle of this, this individual, which is a hummingbird, endeavors to keep up with so much diversity. For example, we see this from c. 18, as the bird character is represented by a rhythmic gesture that suddenly changes in speed (sixteenths and thirty-seconds), bringing in the agile and flitting nature of the soloist, who now appears to be static in front of a flower, and then moving quickly throughout space.

The introduction (mm. 1-8) is constructed by vertical clusters (with the scope of a minor third) that are projected in a wide range of individual melodic lines, bringing together tritones, a perfect fifth and augmented sixth. Refer to the first violin, for example: (F, B, F#, C, A). Eleven pitch-classes are presented, and the last one, (Db, m.8), is saved to round off this introduction, treated as the strange element until now. The introduction establishes the group identity (the strings) as a metaphor of human society, which it will oppose, to follow the identity of the individual/hummingbird, and achieves this through intensification, reminiscent of the initial *tutti* of the concerto form, only in miniature. The playing of tritones and fifths also guides the soloist's discourse, both in its initial slick appearance at c. 9, feigning immobility faced with the expectation created by the *tutti*, as in the above-mentioned c. 18. Silva (2002) performed a detailed analysis of the hybridization of tonal and serial strategies in this work.

The narrative center of the work spins around dialogues, clashes and partnerships between the hummingbird character and the human group represented by the strings, as we see in the section presented in the example above. They are situations of meeting and divergence, which speak to us of both humor and subtlety, and strength, violence, and even the absurd — all set in a concerto and blooming environment, by the diversity of previously mentioned gestures and topics.

Example 8: O Vôo do colibri op. 96, last section– Lindemberg Cardoso

The constant game that develops between the soloist and the orchestra, full of meaning and, as the title subtly advises us, alluding to the survival of this fragile creature amid the violence of human presence, will lead to a kind of epic and ethnic conclusion, with the unmistakable flavor of Bahia. It is an epic ending because it addresses the struggles in the trajectory of an unlikely hero, the hummingbird, and ethnic, because, for the first time in the work it presents unequivocal traits of *candomblé* music. Therefore, it is as if the outcome of the trajectory, and the hero's destiny, were brought to this joyous, dancing community. Faithful to the concerto tradition, the piece conceives a kind of *cadenza* for the harpsichord, projecting gestures of indeterminacy. Following the *cadenza*, which is filled with flourishes and humor, jumping around the whole keyboard and taking the strings to try and frolic in the same way (indeed, the transition of the *cadenza* to the final *tutti* is delightfully subtle, see the first measures of the example); afterwards, the harpsichord returns with a multitude of dots. It makes its own pointillist climax, in contrast and dialogue with the dancing mood of the strings, and the *candomblé* traits they project — an interactive rhythmic environment in 6/8, and timeline of twelve pulses.

The end of the piece is rather unexpected. The harmonic trajectory of the piece favored the presence of clusters almost everywhere but, at the end of the narrative, the last cadence is traditional and authentic, in C- major. This last section, with the tension caused by the ascending chromatic gestures in the strings and its agitated rhythm, creates the expectation of a possible catastrophe. On the other hand, the surprise of the last cadence has a kind of redemptive role, as if the hummingbird could rise from the ashes. These two scenes, the catastrophe and the resurrection, remain in the listener's mind, as part of the strong catharsis proposed by this last section.

What can be said about the idea of a resignifying distance in this work? We should note that the entrance of Afro-Bahian rhythms, soon after the *cadenza*, plays a very similar role to the *Afoxé's* entrance in Widmer's piece — while remembering that *O Vôo do colibri* had been written four years earlier. Faced with the diversity of gestures and contrasting poles that the piece presents and develops, this final section establishes a cut — it is the first time that a rhythmic motor environment prevails —, and this cut highlights the relation between the Baroque timbre of the harpsichord (conveyed by a typical gesture of the aleatory avant-garde) and the ancestral temporality of *candomblé*. Once again, we are faced with a paradox of a distance that simultaneously separates and unites. It is as if the compositional protagonist of the work kept its true identity as a native Bahian until the end of the work, displaying the entire perspective of the previous journey through the topics of Baroque, the concerto form, and 20th century avant-garde tendencies. Thus, the work signals that its end is also a type of arrival in Bahia, but unlike the crossing which Widmer proposed, leaving the German cultural environment for the heat of the tropics, an unknown place, here the feeling is of return and reunion. In fact, the absurdity of returning to a place that one has never left. The entire work appears as a flight of the imagination, with return being an extolled image of Bahia, and its ideal of ancestry.

Ressignifying distance: additional situations

22.

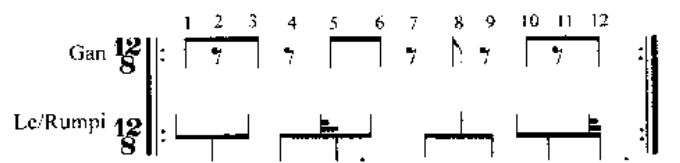
The work *Atotô do L'homme armé* for a mixed ensemble was composed in 1993, as the result of an invitation given to the *Bahia Ensemble* to participate in a national composition event in Rio de Janeiro¹⁷. My interest in both motivic analysis and cultural dialogues led to the decision that the piece's narrative would begin with the construction of a basic hybrid idea, intertwining two archetypes — the medieval melody of the *L'homme armé*, and the Afro-Brazilian rhythmic pattern of the *Alujá*¹⁸. According to Nogueira:

The work syncretizes these two references into a hybrid product, shaped with an adaptation of the *Alujá* rhythm to the melodic outline of the song "*L'Homme armé*." (...) What can be observed is a procedure of fusion of the appropriated elements (the melodic line and the rhythmic pattern), which compromises their identities and displaces them from their original signifying contexts (...); parodic, carnivalized types, set to the ironic satire and humor which characterizes the music of Paulo Lima. In this work, the melodic borrowing is disfigured in a continuous reshaping, which comes together and moves apart from the original outline. In one place, the composer evokes the model, in the other he resets the model in motivic progressions. In yet another place, the model dematerializes completely in scalar structures, which do not even correspond to the original modal context. The *alujáis* also decomposed in frequent metric modulations, implying in multiple reconfigurations of the original asymmetry. (NOGUEIRA, 2016, p.10)

L'Homme Armé



Alujá de Xangô



Initial gesture of Atotô do L'Homme Armé (1993)



Example 9: Atotô do L'Homme armé: references and initial gesture – Paulo Costa Lima

17 Commissioned by the 10th Biennial of Contemporary Brazilian Music.

18 A rhythmic pattern usually associated to Xangô, the orixá (Afro-Bahian deity) of justice and thunder.

But where did the impulse come from for the creation of this work? It certainly marks a change of direction in terms of my trajectory. I believe that one of the roots was the value that Herbert Brün¹⁹ attributed to the role of resignifying old material, by dismantling its redundancy. Another root was Ernst Widmer's vision of artistic creation, from a new summary of native cultural values. This involved

an in-depth study of material, before any attempt to return to them and use them creatively, seeking those relations and innermost aspects of the elements with this development (Lima, 1999, p. 121)

The environment of Atotô is not a crossing or even a return, as we see in Widmer and Lindembergue Cardoso's work. The piece appears to be interested in a feeling of "here and now", supported by the nature of synapse that Bahia holds²⁰. Thus, it is a place of continuous encounter, the experience of in-betweenness, pointing to the possibility of pacific coexistence, but also to a bundle of frictions and conflicts, all leading to a complex dance between distinct mentalities. The two references (medieval Europe and African ancestry) intertwine as a pre-condition for the continuous play of signifiers proposed by the piece. The resignifying distance that takes part in creating the structural material — embedding the seeds of what will appear as the effects of contrast, humor, non sequitur, and strength etc. — reappears on the surface of the work as experiences of approach and distance, familiarity and estrangement.

23.

A more recent example of my own compositional production, which could also be included in this perspective, is the piece *Sete flechas: um batuque concertante* (2015), for piano and orchestra. The title of the piece refers to a spiritual entity of the Brazilian caboclo pantheon: the Caboclo with Seven Arrows. The work had its debut in the Rio de Janeiro Municipal Theater in 2015, at the opening concert of the 21st Biennial of Brazilian Contemporary Music²¹. The entire piece is based on a caboclo song, which is associated to the appearance of this entity, in the context of the ritual.

19 I studied composition with Herbert Brün from 1976-78 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and it was an intense pedagogical experience, involving not only individual orientation but also participation in the group activities that he promoted.

20 Listen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6A4zHvibDw> with Bahia Ensemble with Piero Bastianelli (Conductor).

21 See at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-e9blh0v_o with Aleyson Scopel (piano) and Neojibã Orchestra.

Ex. 8 Seven Arrows - Cantiga

Example 10: Seven arrows: cantiga tradition

A logic is demonstrated in the melody of this song. The initial gesture clearly represents the act of throwing an arrow, not only as a rhythmic construction — observe how the rhythm imitates the initial propulsion of the object — but also in terms of the spatial planning of the melody. If the first event represents throwing the arrow, directly after we are taken to experience of kind of floating in space, as if the arrow were flying towards its goal. At the end of the melodic arch, the feeling of arrival becomes quite clear: the goal has been reached. From the point of view of the imagery of caboclo can-domblé, it is the challenge of materializing a presence; in other words, the presence of a character who has courage, strength and precision as the qualities of their actions. In Bahian imagery, the image of the caboclo is associated to the ideal of liberation from Portuguese rule through the July 2 War, and, in this way, the concept of an emancipated society. The caboclo and cabocla have been revered at every annual celebration since 1823. The work seeks to activate these imageries in a concert hall, making the caboclo and soloist character coincide. At the end of the piece, in a complete trance, it abandons the piano and transforms into a percussionist (making the tam-tam soar), whistling and shouting out greetings from the ritual to the orchestra, which finalizes the work by responding to it. In fact, the piece adopts the idea of the arrow as a metaphor which it is structured around, with this ending being the point of arrival.

A more detailed assessment of the melody will demonstrate that it can be discussed in terms of a cycle of decreasing intervals: it begins with a fourth (5), followed by a major third (4), minor third (3) and major second (2). The whole piece is structured in terms of the logic presented by the melody, extending the cycle in order to obtain a larger structural.

Ex. 9 - Original melody and extended cycle

Thus, the resignifying distance is built into the original melodic material, generating several consequences, which are not only melodic, but also in terms of harmony and texture. The construction of a basic idea, or Grundgestalt, using and expanding the internal logic of the cultural material paves the way for compositional strategies that project the experience of defamiliarization and denaturalization.

24.

The composer Paulo Rios Filho (1985-) has always been extremely interested in cultural issues. He diligently researched the topic of hybridization as the methodological horizon for composition — Rios Filho (2010). Within the domain of this problematization, he discussed and experimented with the idea of the distancing and approach of references, used as the structuring axes of the compositional process. This discussion directly interacts with the idea of resignifying distance and, in the example below, taken from his work *Rossianas III*, we see how he works with an unlikely dialogue, full of humor, impact, lyricism and the absurd, between Reginaldo Rossi's song *Coração em fogo* (Heart on Fire) and his own creational paths.

♩ ~ 54
walking in circles throughout remaining shadows of romantic forces which are present in a brega pop song

Flute
 Clarinet in B \flat
 Tenor Sax

** don't follow the written metrics; try not to establish any other (regular) one; 'sf' can be done on or off the instrument, same for 'f'; 'sf' may be reinforced by a few alleatorical key clicks; be sure you're audible*

** don't follow the written metrics; try not to establish any other (regular) one; 'sf' can be done on or off the instrument, same for 'f'; 'sf' may be reinforced by a few alleatorical key clicks; be sure you're audible*

Example 12: *Rossianas III* – Paulo Rios Filho

The unusual combination between kitsch and the avant-garde allows a transformation of the game of approach and distancing into something quite intense, and to make this game even more interesting, the composer builds the work as a type of transfer on the surface of the song, making the tonal chains (around Bm and F#7), effects and sounds take up the perceptive space. Gradually, things are brought more explicitly to the surface of the song of reference, and sometimes appear, making use of the musicians' singing voices, as in the example below:

The musical score for Example 13, *Rossianas III* by Paulo Rios Filho, is presented for Flute (Fl.), B♭ Clarinet (B. Cl.), and Tenor Saxophone (T. Sx.). The score is divided into two sections: *molto più mosso* and *tempo primo*. The lyrics are "Nes - se'a - mor nes - sa pai". The score includes performance instructions such as "sing (in the most comfortable range): grotesque romantic", "irregular vib.", "mostly air vib. ord.", and "only air". Dynamics range from piano (*p*) to fortissimo (*ff*).

Example 13 – *Rossianas III* – Paulo Rios Filho

In two more recent experiences, one being *Volvere's* work (2017) — which was part of the international *Reinventing Smetak* (DAAD) project, which celebrated the memory of the Bahian composer (born in Switzerland) Walter Smetak (1913-1984) —, Rios adopts an unusual position, something anarchistic and certainly provocative, in relation to the presence of references from local culture. He generated specific rhythmic cells, which he humorously calls "pills of exoticism", with citations from Afro-Bahian rhythms. These should be played by the group's percussionists, wherever an indication of a "pill" appears, always with its own metrics and pace, separate from the rest. The content of these cells is not "thematically" connected to anything else in the piece, nor does it unfold motivically, in an attempt to oppose the customary tendency of constructing organicity. It is as if these pills were a type of cultural placebo, a compositional catch to satisfy an alleged expectation that is part of the game between the centers and the outskirts. Thus, the resignifying distance is established as a type of imitation, and this simulacrum transforms into a source of estrangement and defamiliarization. In other words, making believe that the *Filhos de Gandhi* are coming onto the stage but there are no *Filhos de Gandhi*, and only the stereotyped expectation of seeing them. Thus, there is no Bahia to be reached by crossing the oceans (Widmer) or just returning to after a flight of the imagination (Cardoso). What kind of Bahia is this one, that does not exist? The discourse of the piece still holds to the idea of a place full of surprises, like a capoeira dance and fight, but it seems to reject essentialisms.

25.

The research conducted by Guilherme Bertissolo between 2009 and 2013, under my academic supervision, marks a distinctive solution in terms of constructing a relationship between composition and cultural materials and contexts, in the trajectory of the composition movement in Bahia. We have taken the decision to include a period of fieldwork in the research design – in the case of this particular research, three years of intense, almost daily exchange, within the context of regional capoeira in the tradition of Mestre Bimba. This experience in the field was considered as a way of intertwining creative perspectives, leading to the acknowledgement of compositional acts originating from the context and the visiting composer.

The research was able to raise a considerable number of relevant questions. I would like to emphasize one of these aspects, something that Bertissolo describes as a kind of fascination, the experience of the circle formed by the capoeira players, and the capoeira roda, as a context that has the potential to organize and model a number of possible *cantigas*:

The textures resulting from linking a responsorial design between songs and chorus, in permanent dialogue with the continuous variations of the berimbau, projecting its sound to the infinite, and the regularity of the handclaps and pandeiros... (BERTISSOLO, 2013, p. 197)

In the example below, the rhythm of the handclaps and pandeiro appears in the cello and clarinet. The intervention of the choir, with all the range of its microscopic variations offered by each participant, was associated to the notion of heterophony by the composer. In this way, we are able to see how the capoeira circle, the capoeira roda, may function as a possible methodology for modeling in composition.

Example 14: Capoeira roda model in *Fumebianas* No. 1 – Guilherme Bertissolo

Thus, it is not about bringing capoeira to the auditorium, nor about imagining a place in which these two traditions could meet. What is displaced here is the composer's perspective, the creative setting, and the distance necessary for criticality is built precisely as a consequence of this displacement, in the direction of the field experience and the leap of imagination that interprets the encounter as a potential modeling situation.

26.

Following the same route of displacing the perspective, Alex Pochat makes São Joaquim market, a traditional stronghold and treasure of an enormous diversity of Bahian cultural practices, his focal point. In the first research phase, he immersed himself into the challenge of constructing a soundscape of the market, letting all the sounds that circulate around there — bird song, radios, the noises of things being transported, and the stallholders' chatter in particular — come alive within a piece of acousmatic work. In the second phase, he met the stallholders who had their voices recorded during the first stage, and asked them to interpret what they heard in this recording, Pochat (2017, no page number):

This creative circuit places the subjects face to face with themselves, considering a narrative created from their own spoken word and complementary sounds (...) Thus, the stallholder's interpretative response to the music which s/he is part of, becomes spoken material, which is then analyzed and worked on compositionally: spoken music, producing a spoken interpretation and new, spoken material, producing further spoken music.

The second work, IXI²², received an award and was premiered at the 22nd Biennial of Contemporary Brazilian Music at the Sala Cecília Meireles on October 28, 2017. In this case, the resignifying distance is not constituted by shaping the concepts nurtured by experience, as was the case of immersion in capoeira. It is the surface of these authors' music which unfolds into paths and consequences. The title itself is a sonorous expression (an abbreviation of the series 'oxente', 'ôxi', 'ixi'...), conveyed by its author, with a set of musical subtleties — attack, glissando and noises — which become the main subject of the work. The tension between popular expressions, sound manipulations and the quadraphonic environment, tightens the distance between the poles, and give rise to various meetings and friction.

27.

Vinicius Amaro is interested in the complexities of the rhythmic construction of the gestures played by the Rum, the largest of the drums in a typical Ketucandomblé setting. He has been able to describe complex rhythmic and compositional functions projected in the constructions involving this drum, and this was possible due to his proximity to the context of the *Terreiro do Gantois* community in Salvador.

22 Listen at: <https://soundcloud.com/alexpochat/ixi/s-uLOCs>

In addition, he was attracted by the possibility of a compositional dialogue in the candomblé tradition. The piece *Impulsos* (2017) for flute, clarinet, banjo, guitar, violin, cello and percussion, by Vinicius Amaro, establishes as a compositional problem the possible dialogue between four Afro-Brazilian rhythmic patterns in a single narrative and trajectory. These patterns are not usually associated in the music of the context, but in this piece they are considered materials that generate consequences, and that interact in order to project another kind of imaginary, the one usually associated to contemporary music. In the example below we see part of the climax section of the piece, with three of these rhythmic patterns involved.

Example 15: Modular process of candomblé patterns in *Impulsos* – Vinicius Amaro

Agueré *Daró* *Opanijé*

Example 16: Rhythmic structure of the clefs used in Example 11

What we have here is a distance created by the presence of these rhythmic patterns and, as a consequence, compositional strategies that put them together in the same texture, evoking the pathos of contemporary music.

Concluding remarks

28.

The living laboratory formed by the musical composition movement in Bahia, which has operated continuously from 1954 until the present day, is the longest living Brazilian pedagogical process of musical creation and innovation, with the university as its base, and concert music, within the Western tradition, as the main reference^[1]. The experience of this living composition laboratory examined through the analytical approach presented here enables us to register that it undeniably emerges from the roots of vanguard composition in Western countries. However, it has been creating its own paths to construct meaning, establishing connections between international practices and discourses and alternative local solutions, with the substratum of Bahian cultures as a possible reference horizon – but without reference to the stylistic solutions cultivated by the musical nationalism movement. It is in this context that we register the importance of strategies associated with the creation of a resignifying distance as a matrix of meaning: a way of representing this cultural synapse.

The emphasis here is not, as many may consider, on the question of using material originating from local cultures. Broadly speaking, it is the possibility that the theory of composition – and its long-standing partner, musical analysis – may further the understanding of cultural discourses, in its association with compositional processes; in other words, the cultural work conducted by composition. More specifically, it is evaluating the Composition Movement in Bahia as a case that is able to further our research in this direction. An evaluation of this movement enables us to reflect on the relation between composition and culture and, in particular, on the paths of decolonization which were constructed from this. Thus, above all, decolonization means the radical affirmation of the creative capacity of the processes generated on the outskirts, and not only in the centers that define hegemonic historicity – with innovation being something that needs to be understood as independent of the circuits that deliver information from the north to the south in the world, thereby producing new interpretational perspectives.

To speak succinctly of the relation between the resignifying distance and the compositionality cycle, the most direct way is the vector of reciprocity, an integral part of this cycle. But, first of all, we need to clarify our consensus with Castoriadis' understanding:

What is essential to creation is not 'discovery' but constituting the new: art does not discover, it constitutes; and the relation between what it constitutes and the 'real', an exceedingly complex relation to be sure, is not a relation of verification. And on the social plane, which is our main interest here, the emergence of new institutions and of new ways of living is not a 'discovery' either but an active constitution (CASTORIADIS, 1998, p. 133).

What the idea of compositionality tries to capture is the dynamics related to this process of constitution — a word whose Latin roots refer to a decision. The constitution of art and society, by way of the imaginary, involves the transition of the environment of private and personal objects to the domain of public, social ones — which Castoriadis considers the best definition of sublimation. Reciprocity appears to be a type of peak of this process, a moment in which the design defines the designer; a moment in which what is written on a surface is inscribed in us, as identities. Within reciprocity, the resignifying distance is involved with the contouring of the compositional protagonist's distinctive voice. The voice that emerges following the exercise of invention and critique is distinctive because it refers to dialogue and conflict and, therefore, ruptures between identities and historicity.

Although the most direct way is reciprocity, we cannot forget that the resignifying distance involves an interpretative review and, with this, is directly linked to the field of criticality. If there are distinct poles, there is a diversity of interpretative perspectives and, therefore, the resignifying distance informs us of an increase in the field of choices and, certainly, new possibilities for interaction between practices and theories. It does not seem difficult to imagine that for the place of speech that Bahia represents — as the creation of innovative music — the path of resignifying distance promises increased freedom.

Throughout this essay, we have presented specific solutions for the construction of a resignifying distance by seven Bahian composers of several generations²³ — Widmer (1927-90), Cardoso (1939-89), Costa Lima (1954-), Pochat (1974-), Bertissolo (1984-), Rios Filho (1985-) and Amaro (1988-). In each case, the emergence of a voice that brings a type of cartography; in other words, it maps the relations with the poles of cultural reference, and the imaginary. And, on doing this, it takes an interpretative look at the field of historicity, or rather, the field of possible historicities.

Widmer and the utopia of transfiguration, by **crossing** oceans, the meeting of an afoxé group and symphonic orchestra as a representation of this, where the awareness of various forms of cultural distance — from estrangement to a fusion, and frustration to the final enjoyment —, modulates the discourse, generates expressiveness and opens the way. But Widmer also, from the craft of structural distance, constructed as a mold for narrative distance, puts Dorival Caymmi's (another Bahian) song *É doce morrer no mar*, into perspective. Cardoso and his shrewd hummingbird, a bird threatened by the violence of human society which, at the same time subtly represents the composer's character, a sophisticated **storyteller** (a griot) with the topics of Baroque, the Concerto form and 20th century avant-garde, saving the secret of the roots of its identity until the dramatic finale which, even so, does not appear in a linear fashion: the final conflict is structured between the rhythm of candomblé and several more recent traits (complex harmony, aleatory intervention of the harpsichord, and chromatic intensification) towards a possible tragic destination for the hummingbird until, like a magic trick (or hypnosis), the perfect cadence absorbs all the tension, and sublimates it in a well-resolved

23 All of those who are younger than the author were undergraduate, Master's and/or Doctorate students — and, therefore, I understand every step that they took over time with a little more ownership, and use this criterion for their inclusion in this essay.

catharsis — no longer a trance, but a “hypnosis” of the daily life of our compliance with tonal emotions. Costa Lima and the utopian and ironic vision of Bahia as a dancing co-existence (peaceful?) between two warrior ancestors (Xangô and L’homme *armé*); the (im)possible emancipation of their injustices and inequalities. In a variation, Costa Lima delves into the structural logic of a caboclo song and expands it, planning a narrative that intends to take the soloist (and everyone, through him/her) to the verge of a trance, again like a metaphor of the emancipation that July 2 promises every year in Bahia. Rios Filho and the delicate fusion between kitsch and avant-garde, rejuvenating both. Or the composer who prescribes “pills of exoticism”, creating a distance-simulacrum, and submitting cultural discourse to a well-humored deconstruction. Bertissolo, and the adventure of a change in perspective (which is still a crossing), the field experience as a necessary stage of composition, and the shared reconstruction of categories. Pochat and another aspect of this transfer, seeking the thread of compositional reason in the materiality of the stallholders’ spoken word — without needing to create conceptual categories, recognizing that they already appear in their spoken interventions. And Amaro, looking for compositional principles in the structure of the musical “discourse” of the Rum drum, the leader of the paradigmatic set from the Afro-Bahian ritual. This is a panel of distinct strategies to create a resignifying distance, each generating their own cultural discourses, with a wide variety of opposing poles; and I would say that they are all very Bahian.

Besides these composers, many others could have been the object of this analytical attention, since the cultural question plays a prominent role in the production of the movement in Bahia. In addition to Cardoso with his *Voo do colibri*, both Fernando Cerqueira (1941-) and Jamary Oliveira (1944-2020) — the first generation — have produced work that problematizes the cultural dimension. *As Memórias espirais* (1983) for a mixed ensemble by Fernando Cerqueira, creates a laborious fusion that involves songs from his childhood, *A chegada de Lampião no inferno* (1983) for recitation and brass quintet, and delves into the setting of the sertão, or the delightful *Variantes do pássaro Preto* (1994), for solo flute. With regards to Jamary Oliveira, his invaluable work *Mesma música* for solo piano was the object of my previous comments — (LIMA, 2001, p. 74) — juxtaposing minimalism and rhythmic Afro-Bahian cells. From the most recent generations, for example, the rich and diverse production of Wellington Gomes (1960-) should be mentioned, and, from countless possibilities, his work *Sonhos percutidos* (2007), which designed dialogues between the Symphonic Orchestra and the Cultural Group, Olodum. Further mentions are: Frederico Meireles Dantas (1958-), who focuses on the context of the Philharmonic groups spread all over Bahia, composing works and writing about this important Bahian cultural segment; and Ângelo Castro (1956-), a scholar of Fernando Cerqueira’s work, whose dialogue led to the production of his *Talvez Música* (1994) for the trumpet and orchestra. The same attention could be paid to Alexandre Espinheira’s (1972-) production, and particularly the piece *Pois, em todas as coisas, o demais é inimigo do bom* (2015), for violin, bassoon and percussion, which was premiered by the International Contemporary Ensemble – ICE, in Salvador in 2015. I also mention the compos-

er Natan Ourives (1984-) who, with his work *Diptera* (2015), used combinatoriality and orchestral partitioning to transform quotations from the song *Com qualquer dois mil réis* (Novos Baianos), premiered by the Camará Ensemble during the MAB festival in 2015²⁴.

The case of the composition movement in Bahia, recognized throughout Brazil as an experiment with distinct markers in the area of musical creation, represents an important opportunity for reflection on the inseparability of composition and cultural perspective, which produced the notion of compositionality, with its five domains as a possible conceptual horizon for dialogue and further investigation. We imagine that the idea of a resignifying distance is independent of the presence of reference materials from local cultures and which, therefore, may be used to approach a diverse range of compositions. Clearly, this path requires further investigation.

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