

LIVERPOOL ECHOES IN BRAZIL:

A Comparative Approach of *Tropicalia ou Panis et Circensis* and *Sgt. Pepper*

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Abstract – This is a shortened version of the ideas proposed in our masters' dissertation, **Sugar Cane Fields Forever: carnivalization, Sgt. Pepper's, Tropicalia**, presented to the Department of Literature at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil, in 1998. By comparing the LPs **Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band** (1967) and **Tropicalia ou Panis et Circensis** (1968), we have attempted at demonstrating that the Brazilian *avant-garde* pop musicians from the 60s were aware of the manifestations occurring worldwide; in this particular case we tried to show how the Beatles' masterpiece had an impact in the Brazilian music at the time of its launching. By using Mikhail Bakhtin's *carnivalization* theory, we pinpointed three main characteristics found in both records: a) the references to the circularity, indicating the life-and-death wheel (the latter being a *sine qua non* element for revitalizing); b) the mask, or camouflage; c) the dual discourse, or ambivalence. These elements were found considering not only the lyrics and melodies of the songs, but the albums as being *products* that in a certain way knocked down the barriers between *low* and *high* culture. Other issues are also put forward, such as the *conceptual record* title attributed to **Pepper** (also applicable to **Tropicalia**), the cultural and political scenario that allowed

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these works to blossom, and theories such as *Antropophagy*, as proposed by Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade, according to which Brazilian Art reformulates or rather *digests* the information originating from abroad and re-elaborates it by adding a local *spice*.

Explanatory Note

Much has been said and written about *Sgt. Pepper* in the British press and much has been studied about it at universities; for that reason, we consider unnecessary to dip into informative details on that album for a British public which is probably going to be more eager to find out who these “Tropicalia” artists are and what they have accomplished. Thus, *Sgt. Pepper* is naturally going to be mentioned throughout this paper, but always in a comparative perspective with *Tropicalia*, so that the parallel we propose between them is made clear.

Political Background & Musical Scenario

On April 1st 1964 a military dictatorship was implanted in Brazil. It was later found out that the American government financed the coup, which would drag itself for more than twenty years of menaces, tortures and repression to the individual guarantees. The musical scene in Brazil at the time had two mainstreams: the Bossa Nova inaugurated by guitarist, singer and songwriter João Gilberto, who in 1958 launched “Desafinado”, the first “jazz samba” as it was later called in the United States; the other was an echo of the Beatles successful first American tour. The Brazilian teens would soon be captivated by “I wanna hold your hand” and “She loves you”, which encouraged the appearance of several rock bands which would be the basis of a musical movement opposed to Bossa Nova, the *Jovem Guarda* (“Young Guard”). This movement can be considered the Brazilian version of *rock and roll*.

But the songs about the “Girl from Ipanema” or the Portuguese-sung versions of Beatles’ songs would soon prove an inappropriate background for the political scene; since the coup, the military dictatorship grew fiercer, and by 1968 the situation was intolerable. The word had spread that many opponents to the regime had been tortured and killed, and no-one was able to express their ideas freely.

Nevertheless, art continued being an escape in times of intolerance, and music was no exception. If Bossa Nova and Jovem Guarda songs did not put into words and sounds the repressed desires of the youth, it was imperative that a third path be created

for that purpose. A new kind of pop song then arose, much in the same way as Bob Dylan's first outcries; Chico Buarque, an early 20s singer and songwriter, surprisingly not a working class member (but the son of a famous anthropologist, Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda) started writing songs packed with metaphors that denounced the military repression. Just like the American folk star, Chico Buarque did not want to deviate his listeners' attention from the core of his compositions – the lyrics – so he kept things plain: no elaborate arrangements, only an acoustic guitar and his nasal voice. Others followed this trend – Sérgio Ricardo and Geraldo Vandré – and they gained a lot of popularity at the music festivals promoted by TV Channels such as the now extinct Excelsior and Tupi.

By the time *Sgt. Pepper* was released, the Bossa Nova movement had paled, and the two main branches in Brazilian music seemed to be the protest singers represented by Chico Buarque, and the *rock and roll* followers commanded by Roberto Carlos. These were constantly accused of alienation by the former, since the lyrics they spread had no political commitment, despite the terrifying news about tortures and disappearances of left-wing political leaders.

Newcomers Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil¹ – who now figure amongst the first-rate representatives of Brazilian music – had just started their careers singing and writing songs in the style which is now known as *MPB – Música Popular Brasileira* (Brazilian Popular Music). Being from Bahia state, a place where the African culture brought by the slaves is deeply rooted, their style mirrored this influence, and more: Luiz Gonzaga (“The King of *Baião*”, a style typical from the Northeast of Brazil, based on instruments such as the accordion and percussion instruments like the triangle and the “zabumba”, a sort of drum), João Gilberto (who interpreted Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes’ “Desafinado”, the first Bossa Nova song ever, and who created the guitar beat typical of that style by lowering the samba *tempo* and stressing the offbeats), amongst others.

Caetano and Gil – as they are affectionately called by Brazilian fans – noticed that the sectarianism in music would lead nowhere; on the one hand, the *rock and rollers*, on the other, the politically-engaged singers and songwriters. The conflictuous

¹ In 2003, Gilberto Gil was appointed Minister of Culture by President Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, a position he still holds.

atmosphere had reached such a point that a protest march against the presence of the electric guitar in Brazilian music had been summoned by Elis Regina.²

At this point, Gilberto Gil was struck by the Beatles' latest album, *Sgt. Pepper*. The blend of styles, rhythms and cultures which was so clear right from the cover seemed to be an interesting direction for the new Brazilian music, a position that would reconcile the antagonist sectors of MPB and also bring new perspectives to it. Like in the Beatles' song "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite" ("A splendid time is guaranteed for all"), the Tropicalists offered their public "bread" and "fun" – "Panis et circensis" – much in the same way as the Roman emperors entertained the common people and also in the same way as the military government would start building megastructures in order to divert the people's attention from the dungeons.

Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil started to formulate the sketch of what was to become the album *Tropicalia ou Panis et Circensis*. They summoned other musicians to contribute in the project, and the result was predictably a melting pot of various influences.

That was a time when music festivals were organised by TV channels, and many singers and songwriters who are now prominent in the MPB scenario had their first break in those events. Caetano and Gil were no exceptions, and also Chico Buarque, Elis Regina and a handful of the *crème* of Brazilian Popular Music. It was common for those artists to get in touch with other musicians in these occasions, and that is how Gil and Veloso got to know *maestro* Rogério Duprat and with a rock'n'roll band called "Os Mutantes".

These would eventually be invited for the project, and also: Gal Costa, a singer from Bahia who had shared her *debut* album with Caetano Veloso (*Domingo*, 1967); Tom Zé, an experimentalist musician from the North-East;³ Torquato Neto and Capinam, young poets who contributed with some of the lyrics in *Tropicalia ou Panis et Circensis*; Nara Leão, the muse of Bossa Nova; Rita Lee, Arnaldo Baptista and Sérgio Dias, aka "Os Mutantes"; and, of course, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil.

² Elis Regina, who was then a fresh young singer, would climb the steps to stardom in Brazilian music until her tragic death in 1982, due to an overdose of alcohol and cocaine. She is considered the greatest female voice in MPB up to this day.

³ Curiously, one of Sean Lennon's favourite Brazilian singers-songwriters.

Track-by-track comments

“Miserere Nobis”, the opening track, has an almost explicit protest, except for the fact that it is sung in Latin, and not in plain Portuguese. The lyrics make reference to the time of the discoveries, i.e. the XVI Century, subverting the submissive behaviour of the Brazilian natives towards the Portuguese colonisers: “*Já não somos como na chegada, calados e magros esperando o jantar*” – (“We’re not like we were at the time of arrival, quiet and thin waiting for supper”); all the same, the singer previews a better future for those people, based on equality not only of essential items, but also of the superficialities that make the difference between “living” and merely “surviving”: “*Tomara que um dia seja para todos e sempre a mesma cerveja*” – “May there one day be the same beer for everyone”. In another passage, Gil invites his listeners to “spill wine onto the linen that covers the table / wine-wet and blood-stained” (“*Derramemos vinho no linho da mesa / molhada de vinho e manchada de sangue*”), against those who are to blame for all that suffering. In the middle-eight, he makes use of a fragmented morphology by splitting every possible syllable – and also by splitting letters, in order to disclose a shattered “Brazil”, the target of the soldiers’ rifles (“*Fuzil*”) and cannons (“*Canhão*”): “*Bê-rê-a-bra-si-i-lê-sil / Fê-u-fu-z-i-lê-zil / C-a-ca-nê-h-a-o-til-ão*”. Before such brutality, there is little else to do but plead God for mercy: *ora pro nobis, ora pro nobis* (pray for us, pray for us). These claims are suffocated by a wave of cannon shots that go on as the cheerful voice and background music fades.

Although the lyrics have a strong political appeal – which we wouldn’t find in such an open manner in *Sgt. Pepper* – there is a clear resemblance when it comes to the arrangements. The popular and classical elements are put side by side. It is easy, indeed, to make a comparison with *Pepper*: if in the Beatles’ title track there was the rumour of an audience, the noise of an orchestra – especially brass instruments – tuning up, the shouting and clapping of the public, a distorted electric guitar (in other words: a blend of classical/popular, traditional/modern information) – the same can be said of “Miserere Nobis”: the song starts with a church organ, is interrupted by a bike bell (the same sound that would be heard in Queen’s “Bicycle Race”, some years later), a single note on the electric bass and then the acoustic guitar comes in with total strength. The two instrumental intros – of “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” and “Miserere Nobis” – are a preview of the downpour of mixed information about to come. Throughout the song this mixture is confirmed, both in “Pepper” (horns just before the

chorus against the voices of the audience approving of the performance with laughter) as in “Miserere Nobis” (flutes and bassoons *versus* the popular acoustic guitar underlying the song).

The cannon shots at the end of “Miserere Nobis” bridge the gap between tracks one and two; likewise, the voices that call out “Billy Shears” link “Sgt. Pepper” (title track) to “With a little help from my friends”. The suppression of the *banding* (the silent interval that separates the tracks) is one of the innovations of *Pepper* (although it had already been used by Frank Zappa in *Freak Out* one year before), in order to establish a connection between songs. Much has been said about the supposed thematic coherence of *Sgt. Pepper*’s songs; John Lennon denies that possibility:

It was a peak (...) but I don’t care about the whole concept of Pepper. (...) Sgt. Pepper is called the first conceptual album, but it doesn’t go anywhere. All my contributions to the album have absolutely nothing to do with the idea of Sgt. Pepper and his band.⁴

In the case of *Panis et Circensis*, the whole album might perhaps be read as a *manifesto* against repression, since many tracks have a certain amount of “poetic violence” (to use José Celso Martinez Corrêa, ’s words), but we can hardly assert that.

The second track, “Coração Materno” (“Mother Heart”) is not an original composition by any of the members of the so-called *Tropicalist Group*. It was written and interpreted by Vicente Celestino, one of the stars of the previous generation, whose singing style was a bit *démodé* if compared to the new paradigm established by João Gilberto with “Desafinado” and “Chega de Saudade”. Instead of showing off a powerful voice, like in the original version of the song, Caetano Veloso sings it in a cool, “bossa nova” inflection. We could arguably say that the “out of place” impression is the same we feel to hear Indian instruments on an English rock band album (as we do in “Within you, without you”). The lyrics are overtly tragic, and Caetano’s placid voice causes a sense of unsuitability. The song narrates the story of a peasant whose lover asks him to bring her his mother’s heart as a proof of his love. Before she could avoid it, he rushes to the cottage where the old lady lived determined to kill her. The passage is unashamedly soppy:

Chega à choupana o campônio (The peasant arrives at the cottage)

⁴ LENNON, J. *apud* ROBERTSON, J. *The art and music of John Lennon*. New York: Omnibus Press/Citadel, 1993, p. 67.

Encontra a mãezinha ajoelhada a rezar

(Finds his dear mother praying on her knees)

Rasga-lhe o peito o demônio (The demon rips her breast open)

Tombando a velhinha aos pés do altar (And the old lady collapses by the altar)

Tira do peito sangrando da velha mãezinha o pobre coração

(He takes out his old mummy's poor heart from her bleeding chest)

Of course there is an underlying irony to it all; irony and mockery were vital elements to Tropicalism; it has been said that the Liverpoolians have a strong sense of humor as a strategy to overcome the difficulties of living in hard weather and the unfavourable economic conditions. The same could be said of the Brazilians, especially the northeasterners, whose position in the national scene is rather unprivileged. They are at the bottom-end of the social scale, and *ironically*, if the British suffer from the cold, the Brazilian Northeasterners are tortured by the heat and the droughts, being forced to flee to the Southeast (the richest region in the country, where Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo are situated). Naturally, having no job qualifications, they end up living in poor conditions – but let us leave this discussion to the analysis of “Mamãe Coragem”, a song in *Tropicalia* which deals precisely with this social drama.

Resuming the topic of irony, its presence in the Tropicalia movement can be traced back to the 1922 Modern Art Week, a happening in São Paulo City involving the *avant-garde* artists of that time. Amongst others, we can highlight painters Anita Malfatti, Tarsila do Amaral and Di Cavalcanti, poets Manuel Bandeira and Oswald de Andrade, writer Mario de Andrade, and composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, to name but a few. Irony, mockery and the denial of the official discourse – which we have assumed to be *carnavalesque* characteristics in Mikhail Bakhtin's viewpoint – were guidelines to the Modernists in Brazil, especially to Oswald de Andrade. These principles were reformulated by the Tropicalists four decades later.

“Panis et Circensis”, the title track, resumes the image of a sunny, resplandescent Brazil that was presented in “Miserere Nobis”. The lyrics seem to carry a criticism to the members of the *bourgeoisie* who spend their lives in the dining room, leading meaningless existences: “*Mas as pessoas na sala de jantar são ocupadas em nascer e morrer*” (“The people in the dining room are too busy living and dying”). All the same, it is full of “poetic violence”: it denounces the banalization of violence in the lines “*Eu quis fazer de puro aço um luminoso punhal / Para matar o meu amor e matei / Às cinco horas na Avenida Central*” (“I wished to make a luminous dagger from pure

steel to kill my love and I did / at 5 o'clock in Central Avenue"). Even in a moment of violence, the Brazilian sun is referred to: the steel must be "luminous". That makes us think of a song written by Caetano Veloso some twenty years later, "Fora da Ordem" ("Out of Order"), in which he depicts a silver revolver that is poked into a boy's mouth – as the gun mirrors the breathtaking landscape of Rio de Janeiro.

The arrangement of "Panis et Circensis" has drawn our attention for various reasons. Firstly, the simplicity of the melody, made out with only 5 notes – a fact that reminds us of the very well pointed-out comment by Sir George Martin about "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" in the documentary *The Making of Sgt. Pepper* (directed by Alan Benson, 1992). It shows that beautiful songs do not necessarily have to be complex – a lesson taught by the Beatles, who rarely used dissonant chords, which seems to have been learnt by the Tropicalists, especially by the Mutantes, at least in this particular song.

In the second stanza, a familiar trumpet immediately makes us think of "Penny Lane", whose trumpet lines were inspired by J. S. Bach's "Brandenburg Concertos". But there are more references to the Beatles' compositional process and their choice for new sound hues; at 1'55 to 2'00 we hear the music slowing down and being distorted, as if the turntable where the vinyl was being played had suddenly stopped. Some comments apply: firstly, the intention to show the nature of this record as a manufactured product, rather than a musical performance that could be reproduced live – exactly the same idea that underlies *Pepper* as a whole; and when the song re-starts, the bass line is explicitly McCartney-ish – Arnaldo Baptista, who was playing the bass for the Tropicalist group, obviously had a strong influence from Paul McCartney (that line is basically the same as the one played by the beetle on "Baby, you're a rich man").

Finally, when the song finishes, we hear the rumour of people at the table having dinner – those who were mentioned in the song; in the background, the waltz "Blue Danube" by Johann Strauss, which sets this dining room not in a working-class home, but in a *bourgeoisie* ambiance. Besides, the presence of the Austrian composer adds another spice to this melting-pot of influences.

"Lindonéia", the fourth song, makes the same kind of musical rescue that "When I'm 64" does; the same way as the Beatles' track is a 1930s jazz, the tropicalists' is a *bolero*, a style that evokes the same kind of nostalgia in Latin America as big band jazz does in the Anglo-American culture. Again, there is a feeling of unsuitability, because the traditional *bolero* lyrics approach non-corresponded affairs; in the case of

“Lindonéia”, solitude is also the theme, but deep down the song makes a denunciation of the military dictatorship – once again.

The character, “Lindonéia” (an unusual, old-fashioned female name, by the way) looks at herself in the mirror, and is isolated from the world. She “has disappeared” – nobody has seen her in church, at work, anywhere. The lyrics are written in a fragmented way, as if they were the takes of a film, so from the place where she hides we are suddenly transported to the streets, and the close-ups are terrifying: policemen watching (“*policiais vigiando*”), run-over dogs torn to pieces in the streets (“*Despedaçados, atropelados, cachorros mortos nas ruas*”), the sun that shines on the blood-red tropical fruits at the market stalls (“*O sol batendo nas frutas, sangrando*”), reminding us of the brutal reality. The only place where she appears is in the photograph, “on the other side of life”. Not surprisingly, Nara Leão, who sings the song, appears on the cover of *Tropicalia ou Panis et Circensis* not in person, but in a photograph held by Caetano Veloso, as if she was dead. A denunciation of the truculence of the regime, whose opponents vanished under its intolerance.

Lindonéia is not the only solitary figure in this album. Lonely characters are also common in the work of the Beatles, like Eleanor Rigby and the girl depicted in “She’s leaving home”, who flees from home in the search of her love. If this girl is led to such an extreme act motivated by a naïve feeling, there is another girl in *Panis et Circensis*, who epitomises a social phenomenon that has been occurring in Brazil for many decades: the migration of people from the Northeast, as we said the poorest region of the country, to the industrial Southeast, especially to the metropolitan areas of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. They are motivated by the ambition of better life conditions, but not rarely end up in slums.

It is perhaps the case of the girl in “Mamãe Coragem” (“Mother Courage”, which allows a double interpretation if we inverted the words – “Courage, Mother!”). Interestingly, the song starts off with a factory siren which establishes a link with “Parque Industrial” (“Industrial Estate”) and which situates us in the urban and industrial space. The music is undoubtedly northeastern; the rhythm chosen is the *baião*, typical of that region, as we pointed out earlier. We seem to hear the girl on the telephone, tranquilising a longing mother by telling her that things were meant to be like that, and that she had to pursue her dreams:

Mamãe, mamãe não chore (Mummy, mummy, don't cry)

A vida é assim mesmo e eu fui-me embora (Life's just like that, and I'm gone)

Mamãe, mamãe não chore (Mummy, mummy, don't cry)
Eu nunca mais vou voltar por aí (I'll never come back)
Mamãe, mamãe não chore (Mummy, mummy, don't cry)
A vida é assim mesmo e eu quero mesmo é isto aqui
(Life's just like that, and this is what I really want)
Mamãe, mamãe não chore (mummy, mummy, don't cry)

It is indeed very easy to detect a thematic convergence with “She’s leaving home”, written by Paul McCartney. Even the McCartney-ish “cinematic” technique as a lyricist is also clear in “Mamãe Coragem”: the verses are written as if they were takes of a film, having a very strong “visual” appeal: “Wednesday morning at 5 o’clock as the day begins / Silently closing her bedroom door / Leaving the note that she hoped would say more / She goes downstairs to the kitchen / Clutching her handkerchief / Quietly turning the backdoor key / Stepping outside she is free (...)”. The fact that the verbs are in the Present Tense certainly help create this “visual” effect, as if the events were happening right before our eyes; in the Tropicalists’ song, the verbs are also used in that particular tense – very much the dialogue mother and daughter would actually have over the telephone – and thus the same kind of aesthetic effect is accomplished.

In another passage, she insists that she is fine, despite the siren heard at the beginning of the song and of the indirect reference to a big city – probably São Paulo, the biggest in Brazil, with a population of over 10 million inhabitants today (18 million if we include the greater São Paulo); one might ask if there are appropriate dwelling conditions for all those people and the answer is obviously “no”. The reference to a city that is “endless, endless, endless” reinforces the image of a “megalopolis”:

Eu por aqui vou indo muito bem (Over here I'm doing really fine)
De vez em quando eu brinco o carnaval (Now and then I play carnival)
E vou vivendo assim felicidade (And I get by like that – happiness)
Na cidade que eu plantei pra mim (In the city I planted for myself)
E que não tem mais fim (And which is endless)
Não tem mais fim (It is endless)
Não tem mais fim (It is endless)

But an album that intends to be *carnavalesque* could not be so without songs that reflect to some extent collective life; so if on the one hand “Lindonéia” and “Mamãe Coragem” focus on individuals (in the same way as “She’s living home”), on the other hand “Parque Industrial” and “Geléia Geral” are “group” songs. They are probably the most “carnivalised” pieces in the album, in the sense that they blend all sorts of information in a *cannibal* procedure.

The term is deliberate. Oswald de Andrade, a modernist writer and poet, elaborated the “Theory of Cultural Anthropophagy” in the 1920s, based on the rituals that the Tupinambá indians carried out when Brazil was being colonised. According to their culture, the most courageous enemies from rival tribes should be captured and *devoured* so that their power and boldness would be transmitted through their flesh. Thus, if an enemy showed signs of despair at the thought of being killed, his body would not be eaten, for his fear and cowardice would equally be passed onwards. Many travellers had their lives saved because they could not help weeping at the sight of the “moquéim”, a type of barbecue!

Oswald de Andrade, who came from a rich family of coffee-growers in São Paulo State made constant trips to Europe and perceived the huge influence suffered by the Brazilian artists, although the products of this culture were not a mere *simile* of those made in the cultural matrix – particularly in France. In his opinion, Brazilian art should “devour” the information from other cultures and *re-elaborate* it into a new kind of product with a unique identity. Both the Anthropophagy Theory and Tropicalism were aesthetic formulations that attempted at escaping the underdevelopment that should not be applied to the art made in Brazil. At the time of the Tropicalia Movement, Caetano Veloso even declared that Tropicalism was a “Neo-Anthropophagy”.

The lyrics of “Parque Industrial” denounce the progress brought to the country through the multi-national companies, at the expense of almost slave-work. Ironically, they evoke the image of flags (“*Bandeirolas no cordão*”) that joyfully announce the industrial headway (“*avanço industrial*”), which would supposedly redeem us (“*vem trazer nossa redenção*”). Soon the singer makes it clear that all this festive atmosphere is a mask, and that the gentle smiles of flight-attendants displayed on billboards are merely professional: “*Tem garotas-propaganda / Aeromoças e ternura no cartaz*”. The stereotype of the Brazilians as a friendly people is ironically rejected, in the following verses:

Basta olhar na parede (Only by looking on the wall)
Minha alegria num instante se refaz (I instantly recover my joy)
Pois temos o sorriso engarrafado (Because our smile comes in a bottle)
Já vem pronto e tabelado (It comes ready and priced)
É somente requentar e usar (You just have to heat it and use it)
É somente requentar e usar (You just have to heat it and use it)
Porque é made made made (Because it's made made made)
Made in brazil
Porque é made made made (Because it's made made made)

Made in Brazil.

The American influence appears in the chorus, which is sung in English: “Made made made made in Brazil”; besides that, the spelling of Brazil (with a “z”, rather than with an “s”, as it is written in Portuguese) alerts the listeners for the high price to be paid (the loss of identity) for the technological facilities brought along with progress.

“Geléia Geral” (“A General Jam”), written by Gilberto Gil and the poet Torquato Neto is undoubtedly the most “carnivalised” and “tropicalist” song in the album – besides Caetano’s songs “Alegria, alegria” and “Tropicália” (the manifesto song) – both included in his *debut* solo album in 1968 (his first LP was in duet with singer Gal Costa, who also joined the tropicalist group – but that first work is bossa-nova inspired). The three of them might be read as manifestoes that define the guidelines of the movement: basically, an unrestricted blend of aesthetic codes, and the defense of the Brazilian art – an art guided not by imitation, but by a constant re-elaboration of the African, native and European matrices. This historical tone pervades the whole album, since the first track, when Gil mentions the native Indians; the epoch of the great discoveries and the tropical, sunny character of Brazil are also referred to in the song “Las três carabelas” (sung in Spanish and Portuguese) and in this first stanza of “Geléia Geral”:

*Um poeta desfolha a bandeira (A poet unfurls the flag)
E a manhã tropical se inicia (And the tropical morning begins)
Resplendente, candente, fagueira (Bright, burning, tender)
Num calor girassol com alegria (In a joyful sunflower-heat)
Na geléia geral brasileira (In the Brazilian general jam)
Que o Jornal do Brasil anuncia (That the Jornal do Brasil⁵ advertises)
Ê bumba-iê-iê-boi (etc.)*

The chorus, “Ê bumba iê-iê boi” puts side by side one of the deepest-rooted traditions of the Brazilian folklore, the “Bumba-meu-boi”, a kind of dance in which one of the participants is disguised as a bull, and the “yeah yeah” (iê, iê), an input from the mass culture. The remainder of the lyrics also emphasises Brazil as a bright, luminous place, always making reference to the “Eldorado” – the promised land the Europeans were looking for in the XV and XVI Centuries. The reference to “Porto Seguro”, the first piece of land navigator Pedro Álvares Cabral caught sight of on 22 April 1500 reinforces that interpretation.

The next section, headed by “The relics of Brazil” is probably a summary of what the Tropicalia movement is about: the harmonic co-existence of very different phenomena and cultural referentials. These are listed non-linearly, without a narrative or any sort of link; it is just a fragmentary exhibition of images, all Brazilian, all wordly, all tropicalist:

Doce mulata malvada (Sweet and evil-hearted brunette)
Um elepê de Sinatra (An LP by Sinatra)
Maracujá, mês de abril (Passion-fruit, the month of April)
Santo barroco baiano (A baroque saint from Bahia)
Superpoder de paisano (A compatriot's superpower)
Formiplac e céu de anil (Formiplac and aniseed-blue sky)
Três destaques da Portela (Three highlights from Portela)
Carne seca na janela (Dry meat at the window)
Alguém que chora por mim (Somebody who cries for me)
Um carnaval de verdade (A true carnival)
Hospitaleira amizade (Hospitable friendship)
Brutalidade jardim (Brutality, garden)

“Enquanto seu lobo não vem” (“While Mr. Wolf won’t come”) is again marked by a political tone against the military government, right from the title. The same way as John Lennon invited us for a ride in Strawberry Fields Forever (“*Let me take you down 'cause I'm going to Strawberry Field*”), Caetano Veloso invites us for a ride through hard times, in the “United States of Brazil”, a reference to the nation’s official name by the time dictator Getúlio Vargas was the president. Ironically, the author indirectly blames the lack of freedom on Vargas, but deep down this song denounces the regime in force when the it was written. Under such circumstances, it is no surprise that this ride will end up “under the bed” (“*debaixo da cama*”) – by the way, this verse is sung in a high pitched-voice that might be interpreted as being the cry from a scared person.

The monotonous harmony in C reminds us of Lennon’s “Tomorrow Never Knows”. The melody, on the other hand, begins in a very quiet, low tone, and very subtly grows higher and higher, as surreptitiously as an opponent of the regime would weave a plot against it. Deep down, the singer is summoning his listeners to fight the dictatorial government, under the disguise of a soothing tune. The lyrics confirm that analysis:

⁵ One of the main Brazilian newspapers, edited in Rio de Janeiro but with nation-wide circulation.

Vamos passear na floresta escondida, meu amor
Vamos passear na avenida
Vamos passear nas veredas, no alto, meu amor
Há uma cordilheira sob o asfalto (Os clarins da banda militar)
A Estação Primeira de Mangueira passa em ruas largas (Os clarins da banda militar)
Passa por debaixo da Avenida Presidente Vargas (Os clarins da banda militar)
Presidente Vargas (Os clarins da banda militar)
Presidente Vargas (Os clarins da banda militar)
Presidente Vargas (Os clarins da banda militar)
Vamos passear nos Estados Unidos do Brasil
Vamos passear escondidos
Vamos desfilar pela rua onde Mangueira passou
Vamos por debaixo das ruas (Os clarins da banda militar)
Debaixo das bombas, das bandeiras, debaixo das botas (Os clarins da banda militar)
Debaixo das rosas, dos jardins, debaixo da lama (Os clarins da banda militar)
Debaixo da cama (Os clarins da banda militar)
Debaixo da cama (Os clarins da banda militar)...

Let's go for a ride in the hidden forest, my love
Let's go for a ride along the Avenue
Let's go for a ride along the paths, at the heights, my love
There's a chain of mountains beneath the asphalt (The military band's bugles)
The First Station of Mangueira passes on wide streets (The military band's bugles)
It passes under President Vargas Avenue (The military band's bugles)
President Vargas (The military band's bugles)
President Vargas (The military band's bugles)
President Vargas (The military band's bugles)
Let's go for a ride in the United States of Brazil
Let's go for a hide
Let's parade on the street where Mangueira passed
Let's go under the streets (The military band's bugles)
Under the bombs, the flags, under the boots (The military band's bugles)
Under the roses, the gardens, under the mud (The military band's bugles)
Under the bed (The military band's bugles)
Under the bed (The military band's bugles)...

The same way as the style chosen to incite a revolution is a kind of mask, the backing vocals “*Os clarins da banda militar*” (*The military band's bugles*), sung in an almost undistinguishable way show that the military spies were all around, watching for any subversive acts. As Celso Favaretto, a Brazilian professor devoted to the study of Tropicalism highlights, the bugles “limit the borders of the ride”.

“Baby” is a soft ballad with a jazzy bass line, lyrically interpreted by Gal Costa. The sweet bends of the melody and the string arrangement cover up the heavy criticism to the icons of consumerism. She tells her listener what he/she *must* know about: the swimming pool, margarine, gasoline; and what he/she *must* do: eat an ice-cream, learn English – all of them futile priorities, but that assume a character of indispensable actions to survive in the consumerist tropical jungle.

The process of listing elements one might see in an urban ambience had already been explored by Caetano Veloso in the manifesto song “Alegria alegria”(1968) , in which he makes reference, perhaps for the first time ever in a song, to Coca-cola:

Eu tomo uma Coca-cola (I drink a Coca-cola)
Ela pensa em casamento (She thinks of getting married)
E uma canção me consola (A song tranquilises me)
Eu vou... (I go...)

That’s the kind of mechanism used by John Lennon in “Good morning, good morning”, in which he lists what he sees during a stroll around the town. At the same time, he marks the pointlessness of living in such a system, of futility and haste (indicated by the lack of punctuation in the verses):

Nothing to do to save his life call his wife in
Nothing to say but what a day how’s your boy been
Nothing to do it’s up to you
I’ve got nothing to say but it’s O.K.
Going to work don’t want to go feeling low down
Heading for home you start to roam then you’re in town
Everybody knows there’s nothing doing
Everything is closed it’s like a ruin
Everyone you see is half asleep
And you’re on your own you’re in the street

The closing of “Baby” is a reference to “Diana”, by Paul Anka, as Caetano sings, very softly, “Please please stay by me, Diana”.⁶

The following song, “Las Tres Carabellas”, celebrates the union of the Latin-American nations in a humorous way. As Portuguese and Spanish both stemmed from the same linguistic roots, they are very close languages, and the interactions among

⁶By the way, in 2004 Caetano Veloso launched an album – *A foreign sound* – entirely devoted to the North-American, jazzy repertoire.

Brazilians and other Latins are many times done in a hybrid language ironically called “Portuñol” (= Português + Español). Some linguists, like Stephen Fischer, even believe that, as a result of the *Mercosur*, a third language might arise in Latin America in about 300 years’ time, which would be a blend of Portuguese and Spanish.

Knowing that many Latin American countries perished under dictatorial regimes supported (and even sponsored) by the United States of America, it is easy to understand why Gil and Caetano included this song, a composition by A. Algueró & G. Moreau, in the album. It is a collective *and* festive song (thus carnivalesque) that aims at cheering up the Latin peoples and at assuring them of their strength. In order to do that, they re-tell the episode of the discovery joyfully:

Un navegante atrevido (A bold sailor)
Salió de Palos un dia (Left Palos one day)
Iba con três caravelas (He came with three sailing ships)
La Pinta, la Niña y la Santa Maria
Hacia la tierra cubana (As far as the Cuban land)
Con toda su valentia (With all his courage)
Fué con las três caravelas (Off he went with the three sailing ships)
La Pinta, la Niña y la Santa Maria
Muita coisa sucedeu (Lots of things happened)
Daquele tempo pra cá (From those days up to now)
O Brasil aconteceu (Brazil “happened”)
É o maior, que que há (It’s the greatest, what’s up?) (etc.)

The ‘Concrete Poetry’ Movement and its intersection with Tropicalism

In the late 50s, a group of young poets from São Paulo State, brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and their friend Décio Pignatari, influenced by foreign poets like Maiakovski and T.S. Eliot, amongst others, devoted themselves to the creation of a new kind of poetry, which explored the shapes of words and letters and their spacing on the paper: it was the birth of “Concrete Poetry”, one of the most original contributions of Brazilian literature to the world. The same way as John Lennon took lots of ideas for his songs from literary sources, in particular from Lewis Carroll (“I’m the walrus”, for instance), but also from quotidian materials such as newspapers and TV ads (“Good morning, good morning”, “A day in the life”), Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil were aware of what was going on in the literary scene in Brazil. Veloso, in particular, has always been an avid reader, and read most Brazilian classics at an early age, in particular poets Clarice Lispector and João Cabral de Melo Neto, and also the great novelist João Guimarães Rosa, who revolutionised Brazilian literature.

Tropicalism appeared as a multifarious cultural manifestation that not only absorbed influences but also happened concomitant to other trends, such as “Cinema Novo” and “Concrete Poetry”. The song “Batmacumba” epitomises the procedures of “Concrete Poetry” as well as the principles of Tropicalism as a cultural melting-pot; the shape which the verses assume are tributary of “Concrete Poetry”, whereas its title (along with other references) exemplify the juxtaposition of cultural influences (Batman + Macumba, an African-based religion widespread in Brazil).

The minimalist organisation of the song, which grows one syllable shorter in every verse until it becomes a single syllable, “ba”, then growing longer again, is accompanied by the typical “bataque” (drumming) heard at afro-Brazilian religious rituals. “Bat”, which can be interpreted as short for “Bater” (“to hit”) indicates the African drumming, while “ieiê” is the Portuguese spelling of “yeah yeah”. But that is not the only reference to the Beatles. As the song draws to a conclusion, there is an instrumental passage whose harmony is exactly the same as the one heard at the end of “I wanna hold your hand” (the sequence C-E-D-C-E-D-G).

Finally, we can mention another trick of the Concrete Poetry approach, that shapes the poems and words as if they were objects: if we turn the poem from its upright position and regard it horizontally, we will identify a shape that reminds us of a bat, or Batman’s mask:

batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbao
batmacumbaieiê batmacumba
batmacumbaieiê batmacum
batmacumbaieiê batman
batmacumbaieiê bat
batmacumbaieiê ba
batmacumbaieiê
batmacumbaiê
batmacumba
batmacum
batman
bat
ba
bat
batman
batmacum
batmacumba
batmacumbaie
batmacumbaieiê
batmacumbaieiê ba
batmacumbaieiê bat
batmacumbaieiê batman
batmacumbaieiê batmacum
batmacumbaieiê batmacumba
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbao
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá

batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá
batmacumbaieiê
batmacumba ôôôô
batmacumbaieiê batmacumbaobá-á-á

It can be said that “Batmacumba” summarises the aesthetic proposal of tropicalism, via anthropophagy and carnivalization: the juxtaposition of diverse cultural codes which are cannibalised and absorbed. From the African drums to the Beatle-esque ending, from Batman to the Concrete Poetry mode of composition, it’s all there. And of course there is the reference to the afro-Brazilian religious cults, a taboo to the aristocracy, which is put side by side with the Catholic tradition sung in the following and last song of the album, “Hino ao Senhor do Bonfim da Bahia”.

This is a solemn hymn, traditionally sung in the last day of Carnival in the centre of Salvador (capital of Bahia State). The verses are written in a solemn, prayer-like style, and have a very marked collective tone (just like the first track of *Tropicalia ou Panis et Circensis*, “Miserere Nobis”). This album can thus be read as a claim for mercy – obviously against the oppression from the military dictatorship we mentioned before.

<p>Glória a ti, neste dia de glória Glória a ti, redentor que há cem anos</p> <p>Nossos pais conduziste à vitória Pelos mares e campos baianos</p> <p>Refrão: Dessa sagrada colina Mansão da misericórdia Dá-nos a graça divina Da justiça e da concórdia Dá-nos a graça divina Da justiça e da concórdia</p> <p>Glória a ti, nessa altura sagrada És o eterno farol, és o guia És senhor, sentinela avançada És a guarda imortal da Bahia</p> <p>Refrão</p> <p>Aos teus pés que nos deste o direito Aos teus pés que nos deste a verdade A alma exulta num férvido preito A alma em festa da tua cidade</p>	<p>Glory to thee on this glorious day Glory to thee, redeemer who, a hundred years ago Led our parents to victory Through the seas and fields of Bahia</p> <p>Chorus: From this holy hill A mansion of mercy Give us the divine grace Of justice and concord Give us the divine grace Of justice and concord</p> <p>Glory to thee, at these holy heights Thou art the eternal lighthouse, the guide The master, the outentry The immortal guardian of Bahia</p> <p>Chorus</p> <p>At thy feet thou hast given us the right At thy feet thou hast given us the truth The soul exults in a fervorous reverence The festive soul of thy city</p>
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Refrão	Chorus
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This festive atmosphere will succumb to the brutality of the regime: the final chorus is muted by the sirens and bombs (the same that had been heard long ago, at the beginning of the LP), and the joyful singalong becomes a chaos of desperate voices shouting and crying in pain. Little by little, the voices are silenced, until the very last sounds of the track (and of the album as a whole) are heard: the heavy thumps of the bombs – the symbolic denunciation that the military government was killing the Brazilian citizens – a situation that would last for another 16 years.

A very similar procedure is seen in “A day in the life”, the solemn closing to *Sgt. Pepper*. If this song has an individual tone – in opposition to “Hino ao Senhor do Bonfim da Bahia – they both carry heavy, solemn musical arrangements. And they both end dramatically: one with the terrifying sound of bombs, the other with a vertigo, an orchestral crescendo, a “gigantic orgasm” (in Sir George Martin’s words), both indicating annihilation. In the case of *Pepper*, though, a chord in E major can be an indication of hope. After all, Carnival is synonymous with re-birth, life-and-death circularity. In order to establish a brand new paradigm – epitomised by the two albums we analysed – it is necessary to destroy to previous order.

To sum it up, in these pages we wished to highlight the common points between these two breakthrough albums – *Tropicalia ou Panis et Circensis* and *Sgt. Pepper Lonely Hearts Club Band* – but also their peculiarities. Although both can be said to be representative of the “melting-pot” compositional procedure, they are deeply associated with the cultures they stemmed from – namely, Brazilian and British. And if today – almost 40 years later – it is common to see songs that blend the most varied styles, these certainly owe a great deal to those pioneers of popular music who had the courage to push the accepted aesthetic limits of their time, giving birth to new paradigms.

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