



The sounds of a New World: an essay about shock and invention

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Abstract: In this essay we assume that the relations established between an observer and his object of study are marked by process of *invention*; translations of a group of basic meanings into other, drawing an understandable representation of the object. With this paradigm of *invention* we look at the process of signification outlined by the *shock of conquest* in the Ibero-America; with the multiple symbolic context brutally shaped in juxtaposition, new sonorities and mental images were formed in a cut-inventive procedure of signification. New sound-signs of local musical languages of specifically singularities.

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Introduction

*a descoberta da América, ou melhor,
a dos americanos*
Tzvetan Todorov, 1993.

For the north-american anthropologist Roy Wagner the relations established between a observer and his object of study are marked by *translations* of a group “of basic meanings into the other, and can be said to participate in both meaning systems at the same time” (WANGER, 1981, p. 16-17); thus the observer creates those cultures by his act of *invention*, drawing an “understandable representation of his subject matter” (Wagner, 1981, p.16). Furthermore, the *Shock of Conquest* is seen as a thread that outlines the Ibero-America in confronted cultures that establishes in the New World locals of unstable balance (Gruzinski, 2001). Using the above concepts, linguistic elements of local singularities are understood as the outcome of inventions in a conflicted world.

Regardless of the *power of invention* (Wagner, 2012) of symbolic translations, the process of *signification* is understood as a simultaneous cut by which a “mental representation of the ‘thing’” (BARTHES, 1986, p.42) and the “*relatum*” (BARTHES, 1986, p.47) are established by association; a two-faced “slice of sonority, visuality, etc.” (BARTHES, 1986, p.48). This process of signification occurs in the interior of the

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symbolic context of the multiple cultures involved in the expansionist European project for the New World; the process of *signification* as a relation established “with situational phenomena (the context of speech, ‘the world’) (WAGNER, 1981, p.78), and being part of a system of conventions inventively in chain; the language as the part of the collective aspect of culture.

The brutal juxtaposition of societies and different groups applied to the new sociability the unstoppable necessity of adaptation towards the recognition of the unknown and unpredictable; for Serge Gruzinski, *strange zones* in a disturbance chain (Gruzinski, 2001). We look at these *strange zones* as the outcome of the procedures of symbolic translation, having in the *inventive* paradigm of Wagner the tools to understand the multiple manifestations and sonorities of this new world.

1 Multiple symbolic contexts

The borders of the European enterprise, in the colonial Ibero-America, were outlined by different groups of different ontological regimes and semiotic systems in dialogs of survival necessities. These dialogs were marked by “negotiation (and eventually the conflict)” (GRUZINSKI, 2001, p.47, free translation from the Brazilian edition) between this different societies and symbolic context²; for instance in the Portuguese cologne: *Lisboetas* and *Conimbricenses*, *Botocudos* and *Tupynambás*, *Malês* and *Yorubás*. Even though, sometimes, without the direct dialog these groups designed the particles of a new humanity.

Eduardo Viveiros de Castro analyzing the *incidente das Antilhas* - while the Spanish studied the natives, the locals did, as well, their own investigations (Castro, 2015) - drawn to us an example of the different ontological regimes in *shock*; the Amerindian and the European ethnocentrism, as named by Viveiros de Castro. In the symbolic context shared by the locals the search dimension was the *physical* properties of the European body; “materially similar to indigenous body” (CASTRO, 2015, p.37, free translation from the Brazilian edition). The dimension for the Spanish was the *metaphysical*; “a formally similar soul as their inhabited one” (Ibid, p.37). In other words,

² For Roy Wagner one symbolic context represent a part of the experience, and also something that our experience builds, “it is an environment within which symbolic elements relate to one another, one that is formed by the act of relating them” (WAGNER, 1981, p.35); nevertheless this symbolic context are understood as a “*collective* relation base” (ibid, p.35) that provides a meaning for human existence and human sociality.



as described by Laura de Mello e Souza, *see what wanted to see* (Souza, 1986); “another humanity” (SOUZA, 1986, p.56).

Mello e Souza gives us another example. The theft of “hosts for sacrilegious purpose” (SOUZA, 1999, p.201) by Antonio and Salvador in 1735, nearby the region of Vila do Príncipe. The two *colonos* were sons of a Portuguese man and a former slave woman from Rio de Janeiro, and worked in Minas Gerais as a saddler and a shoemaker. Both believed that the hosts was a relic “better than the holy wood” (SOUZA, 1999, p. 201) and had the power to *seal the body* to any harm, using the hosts as an amulet. Salvador and Antonio were chased and tried by the Inquisition for attempt against the Blessed Sacrament. We look at this conflict between two religious manifestations as the symbolic translation of the *holy*; the hosts in a Catholic rite and the amulet that can *seal the body* in an African root manifestation of faith. For Laura de Mello e Souza this unstable balance of syncretic rites³ indicates the nature of the religiousness of Antonio and Salvador; they shared this meanings with others – a *collective* relation base, as Roy Wagner describe -, but “it doesn’t fit in any pattern of the religious brotherhoods.” (SOUZA, 1999, p.2003) at the time; it was “flexible, receptive to additions and arrangements” (Ibid, p. 2003).

Although this example indicates the symbolic context recognized and shared by Antonio and Salvador in the eighteenth century Minas Gerais, the strategies of understanding and *significating* this local unstable universe are the common threads that runs through the Ibero-America. What unite *Lisboetas* and *Conimbricenses*, *Botocudos* and *Tupynambás*, *Malês* and *Yorubás*, *Basque* and *Spanish*, *Mapuches* and *Poyas*, etc. are the necessities created by the *shock of conquest*, conventionalized in the language by the process of signification, incorporating the local singularities in their way of thinking and weaving new meaning systems.

2 Strange Zones in the musical linguistic field: the cut-inventive process

We look at the musical linguistic field, and their local singularities in Ibero-America, with a similar perspective. Agreeing with Roland Barthes, the concept of *signified* is understood as a mental image of “a thing”, and the *signifier* as the matter

³ For Serge Gruzinski, “in a closer look, many syncretic rites seems to manifestate some kind of ‘unstable balance’, although durable, between several traditions, and not so much defined and easily inventoried”. (GRUZINSKI, 2001, p.46, free translation from de Brazilian edition).



propriety in the *sign* relation (Barthes, 1986). Regardless of the signified-signifier form, the *signification* procedure, as described by Barthes, determinates a simultaneous cut; we look at this cut-process during the *shock of conquest* with the *inventive* paradigm of Wagner. The multiple symbolic contexts that were in conflict dialog (Gruzinski, 2001) in the colonial momentum represents these fields of meanings that, in an unstoppable way, were over-matched by numerous of cut-inventive process of signification creating new possibilities and new meanings; as Wagner describe, “an analogy, or a set of analogies” that “participate in both meaning systems at the same time” (WAGNER, 1981, p.17).

We assume, as the north-american anthropologist, that the “language is an aspect of culture that can be used to represent virtually the whole of cultural life” (WAGNER, 1981, p.83), thus we look at the singularities - or *strange zones* as Gruzinski describe - of the musical linguistics of each part of the Ibero-America as the outcome of the inventively chain of symbolic translation by which the specific groups, that shared the odds of the brutal juxtaposition, created their own way of doing and thinking music (Brandão, 1993).

The cut-inventive process of symbolic translations is understood in a two phase procedure. In the *inventive* momentum, the symbolic elements that were observed establishes a third symbolic element - by the translation of their sign proprieties to an “understandable representation” (Wagner, 1981, p.16) - that participate in both meaning systems. The object can be another meaning system of a culture, or a group, a procedure, ability; the observer, each one of their cultural members. In the *cut* process, described by Barthes, the *understandable representation* formed in the *inventive* momentum establishes in the *signification* procedure the *sign* shape; thus the mental representation that defines the signified - the translated understandable representation; the third symbolic element created - are associated with the matter proprieties of the signifier. In the musical linguistics horizon this cut-inventive process generate a new kind of sonority with a new mental image; a new sound-sign. In other words, the cut-inventive process outlines a third sound-sign element that compounds a nonstop system of signs, the musical language as a *continuum* of cut-inventive process.

Regardless the cut-inventive process, in each region of Ibero-America that was brutally shaped by the *shock of conquest*, this procedure creates a specific system of meanings; a collective relational base (Wagner, 1981) that exclusively depends on the



groups – and their symbolic contexts – that were in dialog. Nevertheless we look at these regional sound-signs in a cut-inventive chain; they are opened to “transformation, to reactivation” (FOUCAULT, 1997, p.32, free translation from the Brazilian edition) and each of the historical and social transformations in these regions creates new possibilities of over-matched cut-inventive process as the “the context of speech” (WAGNER, 1981, p.78) assume new borders and social actors.

Even though this *strange zones* seems to be irrational, when looked with an external meaning system, this sound-signs compounds a local logical one. A symbolic element can be involved in numerous cultural contexts, as these contexts can be articulated and differentiated in certain moment to another, person to another, group to another (Wagner, 1981). However, the establishment of communicative – and so understandable - process express a *shared* system, although the unstoppable cut-inventive runs through the *continuum* of language. Nevertheless, “every limit isn’t nothing else than an arbitrary selection in an undefined moving system” (FOUCAULT, 1997, p.68-69, free translation from de Brazilian edition), so the borders of these local linguistics are marked by their own inventive procedures; more relevant, in our perspective, than collecting *strange zones* is the investigation of the groups and their ontological regimes and semiotic systems that were in involved in the cut-inventive process that provides to these local singularities their own shaped symbolic context. Their own sonorities and mental images.

3 Final considerations, or some sort of conclusion

As the observer create the object of studied by the act of invention, and so, translate this object in a understandable representation – a third sign – and this representation as a mental image in a signification process – whereby with a simultaneous cut defines a sign – the Shock of Conquest provided to Ibero-America the multiple symbolic contexts – and their local strange zones – that in cut-inventive process formed new sound-signs of a New Word. Nevertheless these new sonorities were strictly tied with the local groups that shared the odds of the brutal symbolic juxtaposition.

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