Sonic resistance: Diaspora, marginality and censorship in Cuban and Brazilian popular music

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Part 2

Auditive Bodies: Carlos Varela, Jards Macalé and the Detuning of Hegemony
Pickup Note

In the first part of this study the analysis of songs by Carlos Varela and Gilberto Gil focused primarily on the narrative quality of the lyrics and their sonic embedding, as well as on the ways in which these narratives related to the experience of the affectively diasporic subject. By proposing music as an affective form of expression, I argued that the analyzed songs’ narratives are not exclusively structured according to a linear progression of melody and lyrics, but are rendered multidirectional by a harmony between notes or the presence of different narrative layers, creating a space of resonance in which different bodies can touch and change each other. This affective character relates to the experience of diaspora, in which both the diasporic subject and the homeland can be perceived as bodies that are not separated from what surrounds them, but resonate with other bodies. From this perspective, the subject that has not left his or her country can nonetheless feel disoriented and alienated when confronted with an outside world, either through the diaspora of others, as in the song “Árboles raros,” or through the prospect of having to leaving the country, as in “Aquele abraço.” This suggests that diaspora also changes the homeland by blurring the boundaries that separate it from the outside world.

In this second part I introduce Laclau and Mouffe’s concept of hegemony as a way of shifting the focus from the affectively diasporic subject in a global context to the marginal subject in a hegemonic system. Such a system can characterize anything from the socio-political context of the nation-state to the context of a particular musical performance. The analyses in the following Movements focus mainly on the auditive dimensions of the musical event as the vocal performance of the cantautor in a recorded song or the interaction between performer and audience during a live performance. In either case, it is the sonic dimension of musical expression that, I will argue, gives the marginal subject the potential to subvert the fixity of an apparently closed, self-affirmative hegemonic system. More specifically, this potential lies in the possibility of coming to occupy alternative discursive positions that are still part of the hegemonic system but
that do not necessarily accord with the parameters constituting its inside territory. In the songs and performances discussed in the following Movements, such alternative positions are made expressive through moments of rhythmic chaos or melodic disharmony, leading me to introduce the concept of *detuning*.

In order to visualize the ambiguous exterior interiority of marginal elements in a system of hegemonic articulation and of the marginal subject in a hegemonic socio-political context, I will, in addition, introduce the concept of the *membrane* to indicate the realm of simultaneous separation and connection that appears in situations where the inside and the outside of a system can no longer be clearly defined. The membrane encapsulates the position of the marginal subject without placing it outside the hegemonic articulatory system. Rather, it allows the marginal subject, through sonic mediation, to reshape and potentially expand his or her own boundaries, and thus to cause a change within the hegemonic system. It is precisely this stretching of boundaries from a marginal position that links the marginal subject of Part 2 to the affectively diasporic subject of Part 1. However, whereas in Part 1 the focus was mainly on the *affective resonance* between bodies as mutually impinging yet separated physical or geographical realms, here I am concerned with the way the sonic membrane allows for a conflation of realms normally separated according to the parameters imposed by the authorities.

The first Movement of this second Part will focus on the song “Guillermo Tell” by the Cuban cantautor Carlos Varela, with rhythm central to the analysis of a recorded live performance. The relation between marginality and hegemony is explored through the lyrics’ narrative argument in which the subordinated son wants to take over the leading role of his father. This narrative argument not only alludes to Cuba’s socio-political context at the time but is also taken up in the dynamics between audience and performer during the live performance. The function of the song’s *refrain*, which I connect to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s use of this concept, is approached as a sonic way of transgressing the usual separation between author and audience, and is related to the way in which marginality can subvert hegemony through rhythm.

In Movements 5 my analysis of “Let’s play that” by the Brazilian musician Jards Macalé will allow me to introduce the concept of detuning not only as a
form of harmonic dissonance, but also as a way of performatively expressing the non-harmonious encounter of realms that legitimized discourse perceives as separate. The image used in the song to express this transgressive encounter is that of a crazy, cross-eyed angel. Macalé's deliberately unpolished studio recording of the song is related to Roland Barthes' concept of the grain as the element through which the physical presence of the performer questions the separation between the performance of a song and its performative character as conceptualized by Judith Butler. I approach the blurred separation between these realms, which I relate to the inclusive exclusion of marginal subjects in a hegemonic system, through the concept of the membrane.

In the final Movement of this second Part I use the work of Chela Sandoval and Jeroen de Kloet to look at what detuning does to hegemony and censorship. I will focus in particular on the Cuban and Brazilian contexts in which these apparently exclusive manifestations of power overlap. I present detuning as the circumvention of a system that upholds the separation between both hegemony and censorship, emphasizing the playful character of detuning and the way in which its subversive potential also lies in its temporal layeredness. Here, Bryan Hulse's theory of temporality in music will be read together with Giorgio Agamben's concept of play. Finally, as a way of approaching the multiple character of detuning without reducing it to a single – and thus reductive – perspective, I propose a strabistic mode of reading or listening that takes the form of validating a simultaneous multiplicity of perspectives.
Movement 4
Rhythmic Subversion of Hegemony

When approaching music as a narrative, it is important to keep in mind that the
song cannot be analyzed through its textual content alone, but that the sonic
content of its rhyme, rhythm, melody and the voice of the singer also play a
decisive role in its narration. Whereas a song's textual content can lead a separate
life from the melody and the voice of the singer, its rhythm is an element that tra-
verses the textual and the sonic realm, creating their irrefutable interconnection.
Thus, if a song is considered as a narration that is being read on various sensory
levels by its listener, the possible slowness or fastness of a “reading” is heavily
dependent on the pace dictated by the song’s performance. Nonetheless, pace
is not an absolute value, as it may depend on the particular performance of the
song, on the mood of the performer or on a particular type of interaction between
audience and performer. Especially in the latter case, during a live performance,
the active participation of the audience can change the way in which a song is
performed. An important question that results from this suggestion is what such
audience interference means for the question of authorship: who is in charge of
the performance – who is the narrator?\footnote{For more on the implications of musical performance for questions regarding
the narrative structure of music (focalization, authorship, position of the narrator), see
Vincent Meelberg’s \textit{New Sounds, New Stories}.}

Because the notion of authorship is an important element in Cuban \textit{trova}
music, I will focus on the relation between the author/singer and the reader/
listener in the context of a live performance through the analysis of a song that
marked a turning point in the post-Revolutionary \textit{trova} tradition: “Guillermo Tell”
by Carlos Varela. Specifically, I will explore the mutual interference of different
narrative levels that are usually considered separately: the fabula told in the lyrics,
the song’s narrative construction and the event of its performance. The socio-po-
itical context of late 1980s and early 1990s Cuba in which the live performance
was recorded is seen to influence all three levels. At this time, as noted in the
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Opening Sequence to this study, the difficulties that the Revolutionary authorities were experiencing in securing their position during a period of economic crisis in which the younger generations of Cubans also became more detached from the Revolutionary ideals created a situation in which hegemonic operations had to secure the centralized power of the state. My analysis addresses the possibility of interfering, from a marginalized position, with a discourse that is enunciated by an authoritative figure that can be either the state authorities, the performer as the author of the song or the subject of a narration. I will start by identifying the different narrative entities in the song and their interrelationships, which I will later place in a dialogue with my analysis of the extranarrative event of the performance.

Guillermo Tell  William Tell

Guillermo Tell no comprendió a su hijo
Que un día se aburrió de la manzana en la cabeza
Echó a correr, y el padre lo maldijo
Pues cómo entonces iba a probar su destreza?

William Tell did not understand his son
Who one day got bored with the apple on his head
He ran off, and the father cursed him
Because how was he going to show his mastery?

Guillermo Tell, tu hijo creció
Quiere tirar la flecha
Le toca a él probar su valor
Usando tu ballesta

William Tell, your son grew up
He wants to shoot the arrow
Now it’s his time to show what he is worth
Using your crossbow

Guillermo Tell no comprendió el empeño
Pues quién se iba arriesgar al tiro de esa flecha?
Y se asustó cuando dijo el pequeño
Ahora le toca al padre la manzana en la cabeza

William Tell did not understand the plan
Because who was going to risk himself for this shot?
And it scared him when the little boy said
That now it’s the father’s turn to put the apple on his head

Guillermo Tell, tu hijo creció

William Tell, your son grew up
Quiere tirar la flecha  He wants to shoot the arrow
Le toca a él probar su valor  Now it’s his time to show what he is worth
Usando tu ballesta  Using your crossbow

A Guillermo Tell no le gustó la idea  William Tell did not like the idea
Y se negó a ponerse la manzana en la cabeza  And refused to put the apple on his head
Diciendo que no era que no creyera  Saying that it was not his lack of belief,
Pero qué iba a pasar si sale mal la flecha  But what would happen if the arrow was shot badly?

Guillermo Tell, tu hijo creció  William Tell, your son grew up
Quiere tirar la flecha  He wants to shoot the arrow
Le toca a él probar su valor  Now it’s his time to show what he is worth
Usando tu ballesta  Using your crossbow

Guillermo Tell, no comprendió a su hijo  William Tell did not understand his son
Que un día se aburrió de la manzana en la cabeza  Who one day got bored with the apple on his head

Of the Father and the Son

Four different narrative entities can be distinguished in the song. The most visible of these, and the only one whose name is mentioned, is William Tell. Second, there is the son, the object of the narrative argument aspiring to become its subject, giving him a prominent role in the way the narrative develops. The boy “ran off,” disturbing the established pattern because he “grew up” and now aspires to “shoot the arrow”: “now it’s the father’s turn to put the apple on his head.” The third entity is the Sonic I, the voice that narrates the stanzas but also the one speaking to William Tell in the refrain. The fourth entity, the narration’s addressee, is only present on the outside – the extradiegesis – of the song-as-narration. It comprises those to whom the Sonic I speaks in the stanzas and among whom the Sonic I stands when he addresses William Tell in the refrain. In the recorded
live performance, this addressee can be heard taking on an active role in the song-as-performance.

A telling detail related to the lyrics is that the facts of the story are presented in a language full of expressions and images closely related to the key values of Cuban Revolutionary ideology. The fact that, in addition, the song tells a story that inverts a well-known popular myth already raises the suspicion that the song's author, or the “Sonic I” who sings for this author, does not identify with the ideological interpretative framework within which he places the narration. The early-medieval tale of William Tell was originally about a Swiss rebel who is punished because he refuses to pay his respects to an Austrian nobleman. Because Tell is famous for his mastery of the crossbow, his captors tell him that he will be granted his freedom if he is able to shoot an apple off his son's head. The fact that a Cuban cantautor embeds in his song the myth of a Swiss national hero who represents the struggle for the independence of a nation associates it with the history of the Cuban Revolution. That revolution also took on mythical proportions: it became the heroic story of bearded rebels who, supported by the people, came from the mountains to overthrow a military regime that was better equipped and had an army that greatly outnumbered the rebels.

On a deeper level, the topic of the father and his son can be seen to draw upon the imagery of the Cuban Revolution in which “the youth,” ‘los jóvenes’ are supposed to submit to the will of a state headed by a paternalistic central figure in the construction of a utopian “new” society. The slogan that young Cuban scouts use until the present day, “seremos como el Che”, ‘we will be like Che’ makes reference to the young militant idol who was willing to sacrifice himself for the Revolution and who eventually died fighting for the socialist cause. This reference to Che, whose martyrdom has granted him eternal youth in the Cuban Revolutionary discourse, links the image of “the son” to the willingness to (possibly) be sacrificed for the father’s struggle, and explains how the character of William Tell’s son is used in this song as a metaphorical reference to the Revolutionary ideal of “the youth.”

At the time Varela wrote and performed his song, the younger generations of Cubans did not experience the same unconditional dedication to the Revolution as their parents might have felt when the Batista government had only
recently been overthrown. They were starting to question the way things were instead of simply sacrificing their own desire to lead a “normal” life for a struggle – supposedly “against the imperialist enemy” – that was no longer theirs. The conflict between the father and the son in the song, illustrated by the potential inversion of their established roles, thus reflects the way in which the generations of Cubans that grew up or were born after the installation of the Revolutionary state – those who did not experience the struggle against the terrors of the preceding dictatorship – lived in a situation of mutual misunderstanding with the older generations that actively participated in the construction of a new society. This image of “newness,” by which the Revolutionary discourse up until the present day paradoxically posits its eternal youth, is contested by the Sonic I in the refrain: “William Tell, your son grew up.” In this way, the song’s Sonic I confronts the father figure with the new Oedipal reality he is unwilling to accept: his offspring is no longer the object submitting to his mastery, but has become a subject ready to take his place.

The Cuban youth’s alienation from the older generation is presented literally in the image of the son who “runs off,” away from his father, the authoritative parent. The author’s choice for this particular expression of the son “running off,” followed by the father, who “cursed him,” also evokes the event of the Mariel boatlift as referred to in the Opening Sequence of this study. The Mariel boatlift represents a painful moment in Cuban history, because it was marked by so-called “actos de repudio” or ‘acts of disavowal.’ As soon as it became known that certain people were about to leave for the U.S., they were cut off from water and electricity, and people from their neighborhood would gather in front of their houses to scream Revolutionary slogans or insults and throw eggs. Sometimes crowds would even physically attack the people as they were heading towards Mariel. This was accompanied by official speeches in which Fidel Castro referred to these people as “escoria,” ‘scum’ and “gusanos,” which reinvokes the image of “worms” Fidel Castro had used in the early years of the Revolution to refer to

48 Obviously, not all Cubans shared this enthusiasm, as the restructuring of Cuban society after the Revolution according to the new national-socialist guidelines also meant that many wealthy Cubans were deprived of their property. This was one of the reasons why a large group of people left the country shortly before and after the Revolutionary coup in 1959 for Miami, to await the overthrow of Fidel Castro.
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those who fed on the rotten elements of society (Castro 1961: 1).\footnote{For further reading on the impact of the Mariel episode on social life in Cuba, see Roberto Bach's article “Socialist Construction and Cuban Emigration: Explorations into Mariel.”}

The distance between father and son in the song can thus be related to a historical act of geographical separation from the homeland – perhaps the most powerful and traumatic way in which distance can be experienced. The fact that the Mariel exodus aroused the anger of Fidel Castro is reflected in the resentment of William Tell, who is left wondering how to “show his mastery” without his son to support him. In other words, how to defend the cause of the people’s Revolution when the very people are taking off to the enemy’s land?

The expression “your son grew up” also indicates a conflict between different temporal experiences. The father is confronted with the fact that ‘time has passed him by’ and the sudden distance from his son also makes him aware of the speed at which time is actually moving. This awareness is followed by the introduction of the possibility of the inverted action, where the son would be the one shooting the arrow while the father has the apple on his head. Fast-moving time causes the son to be distanced from his father, who “does not understand [him]” and who is “scared” by the idea of inverting the established roles. Paradoxically, the son also moves closer to the father by aspiring to take over his role; he even wants to use his crossbow. Thus, perhaps the conflict between the different temporal experiences is not as radical as William Tell fears, as the son’s request for an exchange of roles does not imply a change in these roles themselves or a change in the enacted scenario. In the song, the reason why the son is rebelling is that he became “bored” and no longer wants to adjust to his father’s rhythm and repetition of action, which he feels he has outgrown. The son wants to actively take control of the events instead of being a mere prop.

Similar to the rebellious act of the son towards his father, which threatens to remove the boundary between them, the borders between traditionally separated realms are also transgressed at other levels of the song, both narrative and performative. At the level of narration the song starts by evoking the heroic third-person protagonist of a classic tale, usually considered unapproachable. But the almost sacred distance that is to be kept from this authoritative father figure is transgressed when the Sonic I suddenly switches to the second person and
addresses William Tell directly, at the same diegetic level. Where the Sonic I is an invisible narrator in the third-person narration of the stanzas, in the refrain he assumes a second-person address as he explains the new situation which William Tell “do[es] not understand.” Standing in for the son, he admonishes the father to accept the fact that it is now the son’s time “to show what he is worth.” Thus, the Sonic I assumes an authoritative, fatherly register every time the refrain sets in, telling the protagonist to hand over his crossbow to his son.

In the narrative construction of “Guillermo Tell,” the changing position of the Sonic I in terms of how the narrative is focalized already reflects the change of roles that William Tell’s son aspires to, a change of roles that is also sought by the younger Cuban generations, who feel ready to take control of Cuba and no longer want to passively subject themselves to the rules of the Revolutionary project as it was constructed by “their fathers.”

The Sonic We

Whereas so far I have focused on how the textual message of “Guillermo Tell” invokes the social and political context of late 1980s and early 1990s Cuba, I now want to move to the sonic content of the song and its performance during a concert. This leads me to address the effects of the interaction between performer and audience on the song’s narrative content. I will ask whether the audience can also assume the role of narrator in the song’s performance, and, if so, where this leaves the cantautor. The dynamics between performer and audience will be related to the Cuban socio-political situation through the concept of hegemony. Music’s auditive dimension, in particular rhythm, will serve to explain how the supposedly fixed dynamics of hegemony can be challenged at the level of the sonic.

What happens when we listen to the recorded live performance of “Guillermo Tell” as if we were reading a narrative? What does the presence of the audience do to the narrative construction? When the song is performed in front of a live audience, the narration takes place in a space that is physically close to the listener. In this particular narration, when the Sonic I switches to the second
person in the refrain, the narrative also makes a move towards the listener. At first, the third-person narration is something that is told to the listener as a passive entity that exceeds the audience present at the moment of the live performance’s recording. However, when the Sonic I directs himself towards the protagonist, William Tell, he gives the listeners the possibility of ‘watching over his shoulder’ as he speaks, or even to join him as he addresses the authoritative father figure. At the level of the narration, the Sonic I thus potentially becomes a collective entity, a Sonic We, that includes the audience as an external focalizer with an active role. This is the multiple voice that can be heard on the recording, where the audience sings along with Varela for almost the entire song. More than just singing along, the audience members can be heard to respond to the lyrics by clapping, screaming, whistling and cheering, to the extent that sometimes Varela’s voice almost blends with the collective voice.

Significantly, on the recording Varela’s voice is relatively soft and remains so throughout the song, even in the passages where the audience screams. This quiet performance is especially telling in a political climate where almost all discourses are delivered in a highly excited register of loud – predominantly masculine – voices that allow no interruption or disavowal. In contrast to the public speeches by Fidel Castro, where the audience was not allowed to interrupt by clapping but had to show its silent approval by waving small paper Cuban flags, Varela’s subdued performance gives the dominant voice to the audience, assigning them an active role in the process of narration.\textsuperscript{50} Crucially, this effects a similar reversal of roles to the one advocated in the lyrics between William Tell and his son. Transgressing the distance between audience and performer, as well as between the youth and the authoritative father figure, the performer allows the audience to address the father directly, as “you.” Thus, what is audible on the recording is not just a Sonic I telling William Tell that the tale has changed, but the collective voice of the Cuban youth, forged into a Sonic We, telling Fidel Castro, the father of the Revolution, that they have outgrown their role as enabling the perpetuation of a struggle that is no longer theirs.

\textsuperscript{50} I use the term “performance” because the soft singing is intentional. It is not a question of lack of vocal power, as Varela’s voice does allow him to switch to other registers; he even screams in some songs. In this case the soft performance serves to underscore the lyrics’ content.
Refrain and Performativity

The fact that it is in the refrain of the song that certain divisions between traditionally separated authoritative roles are destabilized invokes Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “the refrain,” which they present in *A Thousand Plateaus* as the content of music that “is essentially territorial, territorializing or reterritorializing” (331). According to Deleuze and Guattari, this construction of a territory implies that the directional force of music as a creative process is being encapsulated within a repetitive pattern – as in a bird song that literally marks a territory or in the deteriorating move of turning “music into a ditty” that moves in circles within its own closed realm of signification, of cause and effect (334):

The refrain is rhythm and melody that have been territorialized because they have become expressive – and have become expressive because they are territorializing. We are not going in circles. What we wish to say is that there is a self-movement of expressive qualities. (Deleuze and Guattari 349)

The refrain, understood in this way, appears in Varela’s song as the circular movement within the repeating tale of William Tell, which, time and again in the moment of its narration, confirms the father’s mastery. In other words, its repetitiveness is the self-movement that makes the father’s authority “expressive” by reconfirming its own content; the tale itself becomes refrain. The son’s rebellion, which causes a crack to appear in the self-confirmative repetitiveness of the tale, is thus an act of deterritorialization of this refrain. However, because it is the song’s own refrain that challenges William Tell’s authority, in this inversion of the classic tale it is also the refrain that deterritorializes.

The same goes for the performance, where a deterritorialization of the narration takes place in the part of the song where the diegetic roles change and where the narrative seems to open up. Musically speaking, there is no significant difference in melody, motive or rhythm when the refrain sets in, and the fact that the performance of the song is a repeatable formula that is being recognized, memorized, and duplicated by the audience in the moment of the performance...
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makes it possible to consider the entire song as a refrain. Even though the voice of the audience at times almost drowns out that of the performer, this does not cause a crack in the so-called self-movement of the song but rather reaffirms its “expressive qualities,” as Deleuze and Guattari would say. But if considering a song as a performance depends on it being memorized and acquiring a citational quality (as explained in reference to Bal in Movement 1), how can the emotional response of the audience in this recording of “Guillermo Tell” be understood as performative or, in other words, as a moment in which the musical content of the narrative opens up and allows the young Cubans in the audience to become the rebellious son stepping up against his father?

Within Cuban politics, performance as citationality takes shape in the almost mechanical repetition of the Revolutionary paternalistic discourse, which not only defines the content of speeches, announcements and hymns, but resonates in all forms of speech that are part of the public space. Performance is thus what, to a certain extent, defines the public function of every Cuban: the role of “the good son” one has to play “out there,” outside of the private sphere of the home. To give an example, referring to someone as “una persona humilde,” ‘a humble person,’ as a way of expressing appreciation, is a way to value him or her according to the Revolutionary ideal of someone who is willing to sacrifice himself for the so-called “good cause,” just like the son of William Tell. Yet this is not what all Cubans imply when they use the word humilde, indicating that the sonic content of the word can become detached from its ideological function.

According to Slavoj Žižek in his book Looking Awry, it is precisely the “dumb repetition” of language that empties it of its ideological content (214). He gives the example of the song “Lily Marleen,” which was popular amongst German soldiers in the 1940s. The song’s popularity, however, also extended to the soldiers of the allied forces, leading to its eventual prohibition by the Nazi censors. What matters for my argument here is that the song caused all these different effects while the lyrics never changed. According to Žižek, this explains how simple repetition can isolate a textual context from its original – ideological – function (216). The effect that music adds to this is that of the sonic dimension, of the way the expression sounds, the way it is embedded in a certain rhythm and melody, or the way in which it becomes associated with the person who sings
Eventually, the sonic aspect can become more important than the linguistic content of what is being said or sung. This leads to the conclusion that the performance of certain prescribed and remembered formulas as a citational act does not preclude the possibility of a simultaneous performative act that may fulfill the opposite function of the performance through which it is brought to the fore. When the audience sings along to the lyrics of Varela’s song, therefore, it is still possible for them to make this act of citation performative in a way that subverts the traditional separation between a passive audience and an active performer. This performativity is attained at the level of the sonic.

Hegemony

The question remains, however, what the singing along of the audience means for the narrative structure of “Guillermo Tell” as a recorded performance. Although there is a performative element in the way the audience sings along with the lyrics, this does not mean that the cantautor is completely overruled as their author. Nor is the singing along of the lyrics based on an empty repetition that reduces them to their sonic aspect, to meaningless sounds. I want to relate the nuanced manner in which the recorded performance of “Guillermo Tell” connects performance and performativity, with neither fully displacing the other, to a broader question concerning hegemony: how can an act inscribed within a predetermined set of norms begin to negotiate with hegemonic power by changing these norms through the act itself?

In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, written together with Laclau and Žižek, Butler pinpoints the similarities between performativity and hegemony by stating that both relate to the ways in which power is negotiated in a (social) system (2000: 20). Although the audience in the recording of “Guillermo Tell” occupies a marginal position in both the song’s narrative structure and the political context within which it is performed, its performative act of singing along with the lyrics creates a realm where interference with an established power structure becomes possible and where performance does not simply stand in opposition to performativity. Singing along is thus not only a citational act in which power relations
are being reaffirmed, but can enable the event of the performance to become performative by transgressing the boundaries within which this performance is supposed to take place. At the same time, it shows that performativity will always be dependent on and structured by a certain degree of performance, a certain level of citationality that envelops any event within a normative framework – or, in other words, a territorializing refrain.

This can be related to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s characterization of hegemony in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, where they observe that:

>a hegemonic formation also embraces what opposes it, insofar as the opposing force accepts the system of basic articulations of that formation as something it negates, but the place of the negation is defined by the internal parameters of the formation itself. (139, emphasis in text)

This explains why, for example, any counter-Revolutionary discourse in Cuba, in spite of its effort to emphasize its distance to Revolutionary ideology, remains tied to this very ideology as an opposing, negating force circulating within the same discursive formation. An important question that now presents itself is that of subversion: is subversion possible in hegemonic or performative contexts that include both affirmative and counter-affirmative elements within the same field of possibilities? In order to answer this question, it is helpful to trace the different steps Laclau and Mouffe take as they re-conceptualize hegemony by approaching it through post-colonial and post-Marxist theories.

Their first statement is that the theoretical field around hegemony is dominated by “articulation” as its primordial category: “We will call *articulation* any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe 105, emphasis in text). Thus, Laclau and Mouffe develop a theoretical context for hegemony that no longer departs from a social context consisting of different – fixed – social classes between which the claim to political legitimacy can be exchanged and negotiated. Instead, they argue that this stable class context is an ideological construct that does not exist: “there is no sutured space peculiar to ‘society,’ since the social itself has no essence” (96). They emphasize how the transitory character of hegemony

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as articulation is based upon the instability of the very system called “the social,” the integral elements of which are inherently multiple and non-essential; these elements are merely fixed within a particular social context according to “the establishment of a certain order” (98).

Laclau and Mouffe continue by stating that the totality structured through hegemonic formation can be characterized as a discourse, as a system the coherence of which is based upon what Foucault calls “regularity in dispersion” (105). Within the interior of this discursive system, all integrating elements occupy a specific position, but these positions are never completely fixed. The theory of discourse will always imply that it is limited by other discourses in which the same elements can have different positions:

If we accept [...] that a discursive totality never exists in the form of a simply given and delimited positivity, the relational logic will be incomplete and pierced by contingency. [...] A no-man’s-land thus emerges, making the articulatory practice possible. (Laclau and Mouffe 111, emphasis in text)

A connection can be made between this image of a discourse that is always potentially subverted by contingency and the notion of affective diaspora I presented in Part 1 of this study. There, I showed how this contingency means that the homeland can no longer be perceived as completely separated from the outside world. The affectively diasporic space of the homeland is not only surrounded by different discursive spaces, but is also affected by them, converting the fixed image of the geographically located homeland to a discursive space that is constantly articulated anew. In the recorded live performance of Varela’s “Guillermo Tell,” contingency is located in the performative realm: The Sonic I interferes with the narrative subject, the audience interferes with the performer and the socio-political circumstances interfere with the event of the live performance at the time of the recording. This contingency allows marginal actors to interfere with that from which they were excluded according to the hegemonic articulation. Thus, the Cuban situated in the homeland can also be seen as a diasporic subject, located within the diasporic realm of Cuban identity; the performer can become part of a
collective Sonic We that includes the audience; and the event of the performance can be converted into a performative critique of the Revolutionary authorities.

Nonetheless, the fact that elements can be articulated according to alternative hegemonic parameters does not necessarily mean that the “original” hegemonic context is actually being changed or subverted. It merely shows that the hegemonic framework within which any articulation takes place is never absolute, or, in the words of Laclau and Mouffe, is never a sutured space. The elements that constitute one particular discourse are constantly confronted with the possibility of alternative ways of becoming:

For the same reason that the social cannot be reduced to the interiority of a fixed system of differences, pure exteriority is also impossible. In order to be totally external to each other, the entities would have to be totally internal with regard to themselves: that is, to have a fully constituted identity which is not subverted by any exterior. (Laclau and Mouffe 111, emphasis in text)

This observation brings me to the particular role of marginality when it comes to subversion within a hegemonic context. Subversion, from this perspective, mobilizes the multiple potentialities of difference that hide within every single element constituting a hegemonic system. The presence of these potentialities is marginal in the sense that, although they are not necessarily present in a recognizable way, they are nevertheless there. Marginality, then, consists of the potentiality of establishing relations among elements according to a variety of criteria, subverting the supposed fixity of the criteria that establish hegemony’s inside territory. Because it is this potentiality for difference that constitutes the articulatory character of hegemony, marginality is an integral part of every hegemonic system.

Marginal Rhythm

If the Cuban musicians of the *topos* generation are perceived through the lens of the view of hegemony explained above, their marginality does not indicate their
complete exclusion from the hegemonic articulatory practices that are mainly constructed according to Revolutionary discourse. Rather, these marginal musicians are both separated from and connected to the hegemonic system. They use the same images and language of Revolutionary discourse, yet they are, on occasion, able to reframe these discursive elements by reorganizing them according to alternative criteria of relation.

Such a reframing, however, does not necessarily change the elements that make up the hegemonic system. At the first diegetic level of “Guillermo Tell,” for example, the son wants to be the one to shoot the arrow, but does not seek to liberate himself from the obligation of having to show what he is worth. What is advocated is a reversal of positions, not a changing of the structure of the event itself. Similarly, the audience turns the voice of the Sonic I into a Sonic We in order to address William Tell, but it does not break free from the metaphor of the story to directly shout a message at the Revolutionary authorities or Fidel Castro. Even if the audience was to address the political authorities directly, its demand for the young to take the place of the old does not change the essence of the relation between the elements that constitute the hegemonic system. This demand could therefore be quite easily incorporated in what Laclau and Mouffe call “the internal parameters of the formation itself.” In this case, therefore, it seems that language is not enough to contest hegemony. But language is not the only level of the song at which a reorganization of hegemonic elements takes place; the song also reframes through its sonic qualities, including its use of rhythm.

In the recorded live performance of “Guillermo Tell,” rhythm subverts the limits established by hegemonic articulation, where power is separated from subordination, father from son, artist from audience, performance from performativity. The audience, after numerous moments of cheering and applauding suddenly starts clapping in a way that apparently aims to mark the beat. At first, this clapping is hardly distinguishable, in the background, and seems to come from the back of the theater. Because the physical distance causes it to be out of sync with the momentum of the actual beat of the song, the clapping falls behind and seems to slow the song down. However, as the audience gradually takes up the clapping, the sound swells. It moves closer to the stage and to the microphones that catch the sound, and the beat of the clapping accelerates. There
are some moments of rhythmic chaos where the rhythm of the song that is being performed on stage does not coincide with the clapping in the audience, but this does not mean that the rhythm of the performed song is completely overruled. Rather, the metre of the song serves as a nodal point around which the rhythmic distortion takes place, whereas the difference in perceived rhythms indicates the multiplicity of possible rhythmic interpretations.

The rhythmic distortion taking place at this level can be linked to the temporal distortion at the level of the narrative, in which, as discussed earlier, the father is confronted with his son’s temporality as different to his own. The father and the son live in the same era, but they perceive its temporality differently. The son is ready for time to move on, with him now taking the lead instead of his father. The father wants time to stay the same; he is stuck in a past where his son is there to support him. The conflict of perceptions this triggers – which, as noted before, does not amount to a rejection of the system itself – can also be heard in the recorded live performance at the rhythmic level: the audience is not aiming to distort the rhythm of the song as it has been devised by the artist, but is following this rhythm from another point of listening, introducing it to variation.51

The audience’s distortion of the rhythmic structure of the song underlines how subversive elements are part of a hegemonic system: the overall metric structure of the song includes multiple possible interpretations of its rhythm, some of which are actualized when the performer is joined by the audience to form a Sonic We.

The people in the audience, in other words, come to act as the floating signifiers within a hegemonic system that Laclau and Mouffe consider to be necessary for any articulatory practice to take place. If these floating elements were not present, “the principle of repetition would dominate every practice within this system and there would be nothing to hegemonize” (Laclau and Mouffe 134). Perceived in this way, rhythm as a sonic aspect of the recorded performance of “Guillermo Tell” makes these floating signifiers audible as they prevent the song from becoming merely a territorializing, self-repetitive refrain. Rhythm, as explained in Movement 3 with reference to Deleuze and Guattari, constitutes the moment of chaos in which different milieus are constantly moving into one

51 Here, I considered the expression “point of listening” to be more appropriate than “point of view” as the event described is predominantly sonic in character.
another. It is the sonic manifestation of a movement that blurs the separation between milieus as different blocks of spacetime. As Laclau and Mouffe explain, “[hegemony’s] effects always emerge from a surplus of meaning which results from an operation of displacement,” preventing a self-affirmative, sutured discursive space from being established (141).

My analysis of “Guillermo Tell” has underlined that a hegemonic system never completely manages to secure its inside realm. In the song, this is demonstrated by the multiplicities inherent in the song’s narration and, more prominently, its rhythmic performance. At the same time, my analysis has also suggested that the subversion of hegemony does not rely on a complete transgression and replacement of its articulatory system. Rather, the subversion of hegemony occurs through the destabilization of the apparently absolute value of hegemony’s inside and outside realms when marginal elements make themselves heard. In this particular recorded performance, this happens most insistently through a sonic operation that takes the form of rhythmic interference. Rhythm, however, is not the only sonic operation capable of making marginal elements perceptible. In the following Movement, I focus on the song “Let’s play that” by the Brazilian cantautor Jards Macalé in which the interference with hegemony is melodic and the surplus of meaning contained within the floating signifiers that form part of any hegemonic articulatory system is expressed through what I call detuning.
Movement 5  
The Cross-Eyed Angel

Jard’s Macalé’s song “Let’s play that,” from his 1973 album Aprender a nadar, is considered to be an emblematic song of the Brazilian marginália scene and of its diasporic space. With lyrics by the poet Torquato Neto and put to music and interpreted by Macalé, the song compresses the essence of the marginália philosophy, in which marginality is not a passive status of victimhood, but an attitude of resistance that finds agency precisely in the adoption of a discourse closely related to categories of social disqualification that gave no access to a legitimized discourse: rebellion, madness, poverty and violence. The way in which “Let’s play that” presents this marginália philosophy invites a detailed analysis of both its lyrics and its performance.

Similar to Varela’s “Guillermo Tell,” three diegetic levels can be distinguished in “Let’s play that” as a musical narrative. The first two diegetic levels are analyzed in this Movement. The first level consists of the realm of the narration as such, the intradiegesis where the interaction between the Sonic I and the figure of an angel takes place. Here I will introduce the concept of detuning, not only as melodic dissonance but also as social and political subversion. At the second diegetic level the artist as a narrator becomes audible. His audible presence interferes and intertwines with the narration’s intradiegesis. In this part of the analysis I will use Barthes’ concept of the grain as pointing to the performative physical presence of the performer, and introduce the concept of the membrane as an indefinite separation between realms that makes it possible for each to expand into the other. This expansion is explained as a sonic effect.

The third diegetic level, analyzed in Movement 6, includes the presence of the listener or the analyst and his or her way of understanding the detuning of the recorded song. The difference with the recorded live performance of “Guillermo Tell” discussed in the previous Movement is that in this case the audience is confined to the listener, who cannot interfere with the performance of the event in a
direct way. Movement 6 will also explore in more detail the effects of detuning, which the current Movement introduces as a melodic form of sonic interference with hegemony.

Be Marginal, Be a Hero

An important reference for understanding the lyrics of “Let’s play that” is a work by the artist Hélio Oiticica that visually captures marginália’s strategy of resistance in one image. The work, entitled “Seja Marginal, Seja Herói,” shows an image of the outlaw Cara de Cavalo, Oiticica’s friend from the favelas of Rio, lying on the ground after having been shot by the police in October 1964 (Figure 1). The story of Cara de Cavalo had become exemplary of the ongoing violent conflict between the police and the outlaws from the favelas. Responsible for the death of a policeman, Cara de Cavalo was chased down by an official death squadron, literally called “Esquadrão da Morte,” that is said to have fired more than a hundred shots when liquidating him.52

Figure 1: Hélio Oiticica’s “Seja Marginal, Seja Herói” (1968). Source: http://memoriasdada-ditadura.org.br/obras/seja-marginal-seja-heroi-1968-de-helio-oiticica/.

52 Also see my article “Artimanha, the Precise Moment of Being” (2011). For further reading on Cara de Cavalo, the Esquadrão da Morte and drug trafficking in Brazilian favelas in the 1960s, see Otavio Ribeiro’s Barra Pesada.
Although the image of Cara de Cavalo lying dead in the street reappeared multiple times in various creations by Oiticica dedicated to him, the most famous frame was the picture of the corpse accompanied by the words: “Seja marginal, seja herói,” ‘Be marginal, be a hero.’ Here, Oiticica shows how his idea of marginality as resistance, or marginála, refers to the heroism of daring to defy institutionalized borders, either at the level of social codes or aesthetic attitude (Coelho 143). Taking the prominence of the dead body into account, the presented heroism can also be said to be about daring to not-exist, or to cease to exist as a consequence of a self-chosen marginality. The corpse of Cara de Cavalo is the physical representation of this non-existence. If, then, marginal resistance has recourse to the ability to be – or to become – invisible, the very tools of repression that the authorities resort to when trying to force potentially dangerous groups into oblivion are turned against them. The double character of this image, which represents both absence and presence, both the death and the victory of a marginal figure, highlights the ambiguous role marginal elements play in a hegemonic system.

As noted, Macalé’s song expresses this idea of marginality at various narrative levels. I will start by analyzing the first level, that of the song’s fabula, in order to show how Oiticica’s example of the marginal hero is captured in the image of a particular kind of angel. The narration is presented through the eyes of a first-person focalizer, the Sonic I, who is also the protagonist of the story and who tells about his encounter with a strange angel at the moment of his birth. Apart from the fact that the story is apparently being told to someone, there is no direct interaction with an audience.

Let’s play that  Let’s Play That

Quando eu nasci   When I was born
Um anjo louco   A mad angel
Um anjo solto   An angel out of control
Um anjo muito torto   A cross-eyed angel
Veio ler a minha mão   Came to read my hand
Não era um anjo barroco   It was not a baroque angel
Era um anjo muito solto  
Doido, doido  
Com asas de avião  
E eis que o anjo me disse  
Apertando minha mão  
Entre sorriso de dentes  
Vai, bicho desafinar  
O coro dos contentes

It was an angel out of control
Disturbed, disturbed
With wings of an airplane
And so the angel told me
Squeezing my hand
Grinning
Come on, man, and detune
The choir of the satisfied

Let’s play that Let’s play that

The song starts with the announcement of the birth of the protagonist, which coincides with the visit of an angel who comes to read his hand. With the words “when I was born,” the protagonist not only announces the start of the narration, but also evokes the moment in which he came to life and first acquired the ability to pronounce himself an “I.” The protagonist’s claim to the status of narrator of the story thus coincides with his coming into existence. The angel, seemingly disqualified from any possible claim to legitimized discourse because of its madness, also gains a position in the narrative structure as the song ends with the angel’s words.

The madness ascribed to the angel and the marginalized status of this figure in the narration evokes Michel Foucault’s book *Madness and Civilization*. There, Foucault evokes the history of madness as both a social and a clinical (dis)qualification in order to analyze its ambiguous position as a category on the outside of society – but not quite. Starting his study in the early Middle Ages, when lepers were banned from cities and had to establish themselves in so-called “cities of the damned,” Foucault argues how, a few centuries later, after leprosy had disappeared from Europe, this world outside the city walls still represented the realm of the “non-human,” outside of what was considered to be “community.” By that time, the category of the leper was projected onto other marginalized groups that could not – or would not – comply with the existing norms of labor and social community, and were consequently excluded from society. These groups
Movement 5 - The Cross-Eyed Angel

included the poor, criminals and the mad.

Foucault also recognizes a certain fascination of the early medieval church with leprosy, which was seen to testify to the scornful presence of God. Therefore, rather than being completely banned, lepers were kept at a “sacred distance” in a religious construction which implicated “social exclusion but spiritual reintegration” (Foucault 1989: 8). This same ambiguous separation was, in a later era, applied to the poor, criminals and madmen, with the establishment of prisons and asylums. By creating places where these socially disqualified people could be put away, “civilization” found a way of including them in a non-inclusive manner. This group of people therefore preserved a possibility of religious salvation without being able to unduly disturb public life (Foucault 1989: 1-5). Hence, these marginalized subjects represented an in-between category Foucault calls “the interior of the exterior, and inversely” (1989: 9). This in-between category recalls the ambiguous position of marginal elements in a hegemonic system described in Movement 4.

In Macalé’s song, the inclusive exclusion of the madman is radicalized metaphorically by the figure of the angel. The angel, a character in the narration told by the Sonic I, is part of an apparently chronological account of events that took place right after the protagonist’s birth. From the start of the song, the angel embodies the opposite of normality. Far from being a conventional baroque angel, the Sonic I describes it as “mad,” “cross-eyed” and “out of control.” This angel can therefore be related to Butler’s concept of the “constitutive outside” as the necessary negativity against which a naturalized “normality” defines itself. 53 Explained in terms of the performativity that Butler sees as constituting normatively gendered bodies, this constitutive outside is “the unspeakable, the unviable, the nonnarrativizable that secures and, hence, fails to secure the very borders of materiality” (1993: 188). Again, this evokes the way hegemony, in the previous Movement, was said to be incapable of creating a stable inside realm.

What is striking about Macalé’s song, however, is that the angel, despite being seen as mad, eventually does get to speak. By reading the latter’s hand, moreover, the angel disrupts the chronological narrative with an act that is

53 Whereas the example refers to madness as the constitutive outside of sanity, Butler uses this concept in relation to heterosexuality’s positioning of homosexuality.
associated with fortune-telling, with the prediction of the future. The Sonic I’s life is thus anachronistically reinterpreted through the eyes of the mad angel and the words of the angel are invested with a certain visionary authority, also because they are the last words that are spoken.

Notably, as in Varela’s “Guillermo Tell,” the refrain which in Macalé’s song consists of the verse “Let’s play that” is the part in which the deterritorialization of the dominant, legitimizing discourse by the mad angel takes place. In Varela’s song, the refrain allowed the Sonic I (from the edge of the narrative) and the audience (from outside it) to address William Tell, standing in for the Cuban authorities, whereas in “Let’s play that” the voice of the mad angel comes from within the narration to call for the subversion of coherent, legitimized discourse. The refrain tells the Sonic I – and, by implication, the listeners – to “play that,” and therefore to act out the destabilization the refrain is about.

But what is the specific role and function of the angel in the song? From the moment of its appearance, it claims the focus of the narration for itself. The opposite of a baroque angel – a divine entity believed to be a God-sent messenger –, this angel is mad, cross-eyed and out of control. As such, it does not seem to be trustworthy or divine. The description of the angel as “torto,” ‘cross-eyed,’ is an allusion to “Poema de sete faces,” written in 1930 by the Brazilian poet and novelist Carlos Drummond de Andrade, where the lyrical subject is told by a cross-eyed angel that he should be different from the rest. Tellingly, the poem revolves around the lyrical subject’s struggle with the carnal temptation that this angel from the shadows lures him into (Drummond de Andrade 11-12). The cross-eyedness or strabism of the angel is thus not only a symptom of its non-divine status, but also represents its closeness to the human body, its status as anything but an ethereal entity. This makes it less surprising that the cross-eyed angel from Torquato Neto’s later poem predicts the narrator’s future by reading his hand rather than delivering a message from God. As an angel that belongs to the shadows, it seems fitting that it engages in a profane act based upon the reading of the human body.

The poem starts with the words “Quando nasci, um anjo torto / desses que vivem na sombra / disse: vai, Carlos, ser gauche na vida,” which can be translated as: When I was born, a cross-eyed angel / like those that live in the shade / said: go, Carlos, be contrarious in life. (Drummond de Andrade 11-12).
In his article on the function of the angel as a prominent figure in postmodernist popular culture, Brian McHale has pointed out that angels should not only be seen as messengers, but also as markers for the existence of another world (49). This observation makes it possible to avoid categorizing the angel in Macalé's song as either a divine or diabolic entity, and to view it instead as the most radical form of otherness humans can be confronted with. In the words of McHale, angels are “figures of ontological plurality – of the plurality of worlds” (50). McHale considers the angel to be a symptom of postmodernism because it exemplifies postmodernism's emphasis on the multiplicity of realities, points of view and associations (49).

Although the angel in the 1930s poem by Drummond de Andrade dates from an era in which modernity and modernization, with their penchant for homogenization, were being glorified in Brazil, it does relate to a multiplication of worlds in the sense of Brazil’s insertion into a global economy during the first presidential term of Getulio Vargas (1934-1945), the emergence of new working classes because of industrialization and the explosive urbanization that led to a growing variety of cultures and classes within the microcosms of the larger cities. The Christ statue that was constructed on the Corcovado hilltop in Rio de Janeiro in the 1930s was the symbol that crowned Brazil’s insertion into the modern world. Observing the present-day urban landscape of Rio de Janeiro, where self-constructed favelas cover hills that emerge like islands from a sea of residential houses and large buildings, the open-armed Christ, who lovingly embraces all these contrasting elements within the legitimized inside territory of the city, recalls Foucault’s account of the ambiguous exclusive inclusion of non-normative groups.

The image of the Christ statue leads me back to the image of Cara de Cavalo in Oiticica’s representation of marginal heroism described at the start of this Movement. The image of the bullet-ridden corpse lying on the ground with widespread arms, its feet pointing towards the upper corner of the frame, is like a crucifix turned upside down – like a reflection of the Christ on the Corcovado in a pool of water on the muddy streets in the favelas, the shadow of Brazil’s announcer of modernity and Christian salvation. This body, which became the icon of marginália, can be considered to represent the kind of plurality of
worlds that for McHale characterizes postmodernism. It signals the possibility of an alternative point of view, which in the previous Movement I related to the presence of unstable marginal elements in a hegemonic articulatory system and to the moment of rhythmic chaos audible on the recorded live performance of “Guillermo Tell.” In the current analysis, the presence of alternate points of view on the margins, inside-outside the hegemonic system, appears in the image, itself multiplied across different poems, a song and an artwork, of a cross-eyed angel or upturned Christ.

Detuning the Choir of the Satisfied

The angel visits the Sonic I of “Let’s play that” at the moment of his birth, with “wings of an airplane” that are a playful allusion to Brazil’s modernization project and that also mirror the widespread arms of the Christ statue, as well as Oiticica’s image of Cara de Cavalo. The angel is cross-eyed because its point of view is radically different from the legitimized, clear-eyed and apparently undistorted hegemonic view governing Brazilian society; cross-eyed also because all that it perceives carries within itself a multiplicity caused by the overlapping of different perspectives, focal points and readings. Consequently, it is not surprising that the angel’s message, as it reads the hand of the Sonic I, refers to detuning as an act of rebellion through multiplication.

The concept of detuning is based on the proliferation of worlds, perspectives or, in music, tones. However, detuning implies more than just producing multiplicity, as the presence of multiple viewpoints does not mean they all exert influence or are capable of disturbing the normative perspective. The mere existence of favelas in Rio de Janeiro does not change life in the rest of the city, just like in music the simultaneous emission of different tones does not necessarily cause dissonance. Instead, the disturbance occurs when different realms overlap: when the people from the favelas come to the city or when within one musical note there is an irregular resonance of slightly different tones. In music theory, detuning is mostly explained in terms of “dissonant intervals” that refer to a sense of listener discomfort if the tonal distance between simultaneously emitted notes
Movement 5 - The Cross-Eyed Angel

does not fit the mathematical ratios that define the clear separation of notes. The disturbing resonation perceived is caused by the failure to make two or more simultaneously played notes sound as one or to form a harmonious whole from different, separate notes. The perception of detuning is culturally defined and can therefore not be explained by physics (Gauldin 16-7).

The metaphor of the “choir of the satisfied” used in Macalé’s song helps to explain the concept of detuning. A choir is a key example of musical harmonic multiplicity: multiple voices that produce multiple melodies (except when all voices sing unisonously), which makes up a harmonious piece of music. To achieve harmony, all voices need to adapt to the same metric and melodic structure. Of course there will be a multiplicity of melodies and rhythmic structures, but they are all part of the same mathematical model in which rhythm and its counterpoint, melody and its harmony, are in balance with each other. In other words, as long as the sonorous voices are identical to themselves, the choir can be harmonious or, in the terms of “Let’s play that,” satisfied. The opposite of this would be when all metric and melodic elements and all voices are radically different, without a balanced structure, which would produce noise. However, in a situation where there are voices that do reproduce the overall structure but that sit slightly on the in-between of different notes or melodies, dissonance occurs within the harmonious whole. In that case, detuning results in a similar unsettling simultaneousness of multiple unstable – marginal – elements in a hegemonic system as occurred during Carlos Varela’s recorded live performance due to the rhythmic interference of the audience.

Detuning thus appears as another sonic way in which marginal elements...
can gain expressive qualities within the articulatory practices of a hegemonic system in Laclau and Mouffe’s sense. It is through the distortion of the harmony that marginalized voices – normally silenced by the harmonious choir of the satisfied – can make themselves heard, without necessarily aiming to create a new harmony. When, in “Let’s play that,” the angel tells the Sonic I to detune, the imperative is not to stop the music produced by this satisfied choir or to sing another song, but to join in the refrain and play with it: “Let’s play that.”

The Grain

The second diegetic level of Macalé’s song is where the physical presence of the performer interferes with the song, which no longer is merely a poem with a certain rhythm and melody, but also has a timbre, volume and ‘feel’ of its own, which is difficult to express or analyze in technical terms. Roland Barthes pinpoints this struggle related to the analysis of music in his article “The Grain of the Voice,” where he contends that musical criticism tends to remain confined to the use of the adjective, which leads to a highly subjective way of translating into words what happens in music. He proposes a change in the way in which the object is perceived by focusing, in sung music, on the bodily manifestation of the voice – “the grain of the voice” – in its “dual production of language and music” (179-81). He also states that he is not so much interested in the technical aspects of sung music, because this dimension of music is culturally “coded” and therefore predefined. Instead, he is looking for something “[that] is there, manifest and stubborn, […] beyond (or before) the meaning of the words” (180-81). The difficulty Barthes experiences is that most sung music, especially in recordings, has been polished to such an extent in its aim for a perfect rendering of the notes that the body that is behind the music becomes imperceptible: “never the tongue, the glottis, the teeth, the mucous membranes, the nose” (183).

When listening to various songs on Macalé’s album Aprender a nadar, his mumbling way of singing some of the lyrics not only forces the listener to come closer to the speakers in order to distinguish what he is saying, but also makes it necessary for the recording devices to be put closer to the performer, with less
possibility of drowning out small imperfections in the recording. The ear of the listener is positioned so close to the performer’s body that some bodily noises cannot be censored or smoothed. Macalé can be heard as he breathes, swallows, prevents himself from drooling, and at certain moments there is even the sound of his nails scratching the strings of his guitar. The grain that Barthes refers to is therefore abundantly present throughout the album. However, the emphasis on its presence raises the suspicion that this is a strategy on the part of the performer, which already makes the grain coded – and therefore, according to Barthes, culturally (pre)determined.

Because of the mumbling way in which the lyrics are sung, which is sometimes so extreme that the instrumental background seems to drown out the singer’s voice, the Sonic I that is being presented almost disappears. The performance of the song therefore creates uncertainty with regard to who occupies the central position in the story’s narration: the Sonic I or the singer. Although the Sonic I is still the one telling the story, the way the song is sung does not allow him to lay claim to the legitimacy of his own discourse, at least in terms of its semantic content. The mumbling presentation makes the lyrics of the song and its narrator less important than the voice singing it.

At the same time, the mumbling also acquires narrative meaning. Because it is most intense at the beginning of the song, where the Sonic I introduces his birth, it draws attention to the voice’s influence on how the Sonic I constitutes itself through discourse. Whereas the birth of the Sonic I – literally effectuated by the enunciation of “I” – might suppose to be an event that clearly defines a circumscribed identity for the subject, the voice that enunciates seems to subvert the firmness of this speech act. The voice of the Sonic I, understood in this way, could again be seen to point to the marginal elements that prevent a coherently delimited inside realm – in this case of identity – from emerging.

According to Barthes, “the voice is not personal: it expresses nothing of the cantor, of his soul; it is not original […] and at the same time it is individual: it has us hear a body which has no civil identity, no ‘personality,’ but which is nevertheless a separate body” (182). What can thus be distinguished behind the textual content of the song – or, rather, what is draped around it – is a mumuring body that is material, physical and in the world, but that at the same time is not
culturally coded and without essence or identity. The relationship that the listener has to this body, this grain, is one of an evaluation that exceeds culture, a process Barthes describes as follows:

If I perceive the ‘grain’ in a piece of music and accord this ‘grain’ a theoretical value (the emergence of text in the work), I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual – I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic – but in no way ‘subjective’ (it is not the psychological ‘subject’ in me who is listening; the climactic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce – to express – that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it). The evaluation will be made outside any law, outplaying not only the law of culture, but equally that of anticulture [...]. (188)

I want to suggest that the Sonic I of “Let’s play that” does not consist solely of this non-subjective body that represents the grain of the language it produces, because, as noted above, the way in which the cantautor’s body interferes with the language of the song also establishes a dialogue between performance and lyrics. When the Sonic I mumbles the event of his birth, this gives expression to the way in which his presence as a subject in a society constructed as a hegemonic system is marginal, as an entity lacking a clear, proper voice. Later in the song, when the angel reads the Sonic I’s hand in the stanzas “vai, bicho, desafinar o coro dos contentes,” ‘come on, man, and detune / The choir of the satisfied,’ it is the angel who is speaking and the sonic register of the singer changes to a loud, shrieking, at times screaming voice in a high, off-tune pitch. In both vocal registers, therefore, the use of the voice is coded because the registers serve the purpose of expressing – or rather, creating – the bodies that are part of the narrative.

In her analysis of performative gender in Bodies That Matter Butler emphasizes that the power behind any apparently deliberate discursive act is based on its citational character, its tendency to fall back on a “chain of binding conventions.” She takes as an example the pronunciation of “I” to show that the subject is not the one who “stands behind discourse and executes its volition or will through discourse,” but that there is “first a discourse which precedes and
enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will” (1993: 225). In accordance with Barthes, who recognizes in the grain of the voice a characteristic of the speaking or singing body that is not personal, Butler characterizes this pronunciation of ‘I’ as “a citation of the place of the ‘I’ in speech, where that place has a certain priority and anonymity with respect to the life it animates” (1993: 226).

The application of Butler’s and Barthes’ observations to the analysis of music and lyrics suggests that performance as a deliberate citation of a musical score or a social norm is always already subverted by a performativity that precedes this citation and even the subject who produces it. An important difference between the two points of view, however, is that for Barthes the impersonal dimension that lies beyond language’s meaning is located in the body and is therefore not reducible to cultural norms, whereas for Butler all language originates in discourses that are historical and political, and is therefore prior to its possible materialization of and in the body.

The body, in both cases, is the nodal point where discourse is either constituted or deconstructed as it is enunciated: a no-man’s land between acts of creating and unmaking through language, yet always within language’s reach. The body therefore never completely dissolves into nothing – as shown above with respect to “Let’s play that,” the grain of the voice can also be coded – nor does it completely constitute itself through discourse without this discourse to some extent being cannibalized by the body it produces. The body can be seen as the material representation of a hegemonic articulatory system that is always potentially cannibalizing itself by contingency. The angel in “Let’s play that” then comes to represent this potential cannibalization, subversion or detuning when his cross-eyed reading of the Sonic I’s hand – as an extension of the body – lays bare the inherent multiplicity of possible alternative articulations that, however dormant, are present in the body itself.
The Membrane

Within the sutured space of a social system that can be understood as a “choir of the satisfied,” the body does not stand out from the bigger mass as long as it adapts to the internal rules of hegemonic discourse or musical harmony. When the body claims its role in discourse or harmony as a separate entity, two situations can arise: either discourse becomes activated through its enunciation, making the speaking subject appear to itself as it says “I” and thus causing a slight interference within the same voice between the speaking and the spoken “I”; or, alternatively, the body that produces discourse is “grained” and therefore independent of its semantic production, causing the voice of the “I” speaking through language to interfere with the purely sonic entity that speaks through its body. In both cases, detuning is what takes place when the body experiences an internal difference that makes it resonate in a non-harmonious way with itself. In the definition of detuning given earlier, cultural preconceptions of what is harmonic and what is not were seen to form the hegemonizing context, which, in this discussion, is captured in the image of the body. Translated to language, detuning occurs when a perceived multiplicity within an enunciation cannot be reduced to the realm that is supposed to represent the speaking body. From a hegemonic point of view, the body constitutes a physical presence with a specific function within the systematic whole. If this body is – potentially – multiple, it can no longer be seen as merely singular (individual) or plural (group).

This is where I want to introduce the concept of the membrane. Within a hegemonic system, as explained earlier, it is impossible to establish a sutured space of signification without eliminating the possibility of articulation, which is the core characteristic of a hegemonic system. This means that the elements that make up a hegemonic system, or rather, the enunciating bodies that constitute a discursive realm, can never be completely self-identical, as this would take away their capacity of pronouncing “I” as an affirmation of their existence. After all, pronouncing “I” as a reaffirmation of one’s subjectivity already implies an inherent multiplication in which the subject can reflect upon itself. As discussed through the theories of Barthes and Butler, the performative speech act of saying “I” implies a non-subjective voice that, by citation, pronounces its particular
Movement 5 - The Cross-Eyed Angel

position in a discursive whole. Conversely, the discursive system needs a voice in order to give the position of “I” in discourse a physical allocation. The body therefore emerges where sound and language, grain and discourse meet and materialize. The membrane designates this ambiguous space of contact, where one term (sound, grain) is neither identical with nor completely external to the other (language, discourse).

In the *Oxford English Dictionary* a membrane is defined as “a thin sheet of tissue [...] usually serving to cover or line an organ or part, or two separate or connected parts.” It is thus given a double function of separation or connection and placed both inside (lining an organ) and outside (covering it). In addition, the etymology of the word provided by the same dictionary emphasizes the physicality of the membrane, as its Latin origin, *membrāna*, means “flesh,” whereas the provenance from *membranus* or “parchment” refers to the membrane as an organic and palpable bodily tissue that does not form an impenetrable barrier between two things or between the inside and the outside of a thing, but that is part of both realms.  

Related to Barthes’ theory of the grain, the membrane can represent the physical manifestation of the “separate” body that transmits the grain in music, but that nevertheless does not attain a full “civil identity” in discourse and is therefore not so clearly different from other bodies as to constitute a subjective identity. In the same vein, the performative body that Butler perceives as able to enunciate “I” in order to reaffirm its presence in the material world may be considered encapsulated by a membrane that binds the abstract system of discursive possibilities to a delimited physical entity in a relationship of mutual dependency. In both cases, the membrane – as a stretchable tissue – explains how it is possible for voice and discourse to reach deeply into each other’s realm without dissolving.

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56  This conceptualization of the membrane comes close to the way Jacques Derrida, in *The Truth in Painting*, uses the concept of the *frame* in relation to Kant’s idea of the *parergon*. Kant’s *parergon* is defined as a “hybrid of outside and inside” which, according to Derrida, escapes definition because it can be either exteriority or interiority or “the surface between the two limits.” The difference with the concept of the membrane as I use it, however, is that the membrane is organic and related to a performative act, a moment in time, whereas Derrida, through Kant, ponders the possibility of establishing a “limit between work and absence of work” in a more static and definite sense (1994: 63-4).
My analysis in this Movement of the sonic aspects of “Let’s play that” has shown the usefulness of the membrane for conceptualizing a detuned sonic realm in which the body is present without completely becoming part of the larger discursive system within which it is situated. In relation to the hegemonic system, the potential for marginal elements to subvert this system was based upon the possibility of alternative criteria of articulation that these elements represented. Here, I have explained how the inherent multiplicity of the subject may be revealed, on the one hand, through foregrounding the body as a pure voice or grain that is (largely) independent of discourse, and, on the other, through emphasizing the ambiguous position of “I” in discourse. The next Movement will focus on how such operations of detuning are received by raising the question of how to listen to detuned music or, in other words, how to “read” detuned narratives.
Movement 6
Strabistic Readings of Detuning

Where my analysis of the first and second diegetic levels of “Let’s play that” has focused on the textual and auditive narration of the song respectively, my approach to the third diegetic level of the song is primarily concerned with the way in which the sonic content of the performance promotes interaction with the audience, in this case the listener to the recording. Because the earlier discussion has emphasized the importance of the body in the musical performance as narration, a logical next question now presents itself: what exactly does this body do? The sonic aspect of the performance is the element that fills the space between the performer and the audience. It is the space where bodies can affectively resonate, touch and change each other. Sound allows the body to act, to affect, to detune.

An important starting point for the analysis of musical performances by marginal artists is the assumption that the bodily presence of the marginal performer is part of a deliberate act of detuning. If this assumption is made, then the body is not pre-discursive, nor does it transcend discourse. Instead, the performer’s body moves between the both realms, actively detuning itself. This is why the concept of detuning – a verb that refers to active subversion – is more productive than the passive musical concept of “dissonant interval” referred to in Movement 5.

This Movement asks how detuning allows the marginal subject to subvert hegemony and how detuning can be “read” through an analysis of music’s auditive dimension. What the theories by Chela Sandoval, Jeroen de Kloet, Bryan Hulse and Giorgio Agamben that are introduced in this Movement have in common is that they all address the simultaneousness of, respectively, different power systems, tonalities and temporalities. Detuning constitutes a non-harmo-

nious overlapping, an encounter that consists neither of plain opposition nor of a merging. The socio-political contexts in which the Cuban and Brazilian musicians under discussion made their music are presented as realms in which co-optive power operations that seek to attain hegemony and the coercive power...
operations of censorship meet. At the level of a song’s performance a similar
encounter between different, conflicting dimensions, diachronic and synchronic,
is staged. In-between these dimensions is where the membrane represents the
ambivalent space of separation-connection and where detuning expresses this
non-harmonious simultaneousness.

What I will propose in this Movement is that, in order to understand how
detuning operates, it is necessary to perceive its multiplicity without censoring it
from a singular perspective. I propose strabism as the most suitable concept be-
cause its derivation from cross-eyedness implies a simultaneousness of different
perspectives. Translated to the auditive dimension, strabistic listening is attuned
to detuning as the performance of a similar simultaneousness. In addition, my
approach in this Movement, in which discussions of hegemony and censorship
are combined with theorizations of temporality in music and play, can also be
perceived as a form of analytical strabism.

Between Coercion and Co-Option

In music, when detuning occurs, the minimal differences at the boundaries of
a tone cause the membrane to vibrate in a disturbing way, causing a maximum
level of intensity between what is on either side of it. The resonance is no longer
harmonious and an overload of impulses ensues that cannot be translated in an
orderly fashion. The Oxford English Dictionary calls this phenomenon “beat,”
defining it as “a throbbing or undulating effect taking place in rapid succession
when two notes not quite of the same pitch sound together.” The throbbing effect
occurs because

the combined note alternates rapidly between the minimum of sound
produced by the minimal interference of their vibrations, and the full
effect produced by the coincidence of their vibrations.
(Oxford English Dictionary)

This is why a detuned signal always gives the impression of being louder than
it is, and why its sound is abrasive to the ear. Relating this to society’s exclusive inclusion of the marginal subject, who is present in it but also separated from it as if by a membrane, detuning provides a way of acting through this membrane to disturb the status quo of power relations. Detuning is capable of producing beat only because the multiply produced tones are not separated but partially overlap each other. In a similar way, marginality can only detune because it is neither completely separated from nor identical with the power system it resists. Therefore, the relation between hegemony and censorship needs to be scrutinized here.

In her book *Methodology of the Oppressed* Chela Sandoval refers to the hegemonic form of power structures in society as being typical of a postmodernism in which the traditional top-down models of domination and subordination have been replaced by “a globalized, flattened but mobile, gridlike terrain” (73). Within this gridlike totality, movements that advocate social change have shifted from talking about “oppositional actors” in a vertical top-down structure to formulating horizontal alternatives that describe oppositional movements occurring from ‘margin to center,’ ‘inside to outside,’ that describe life in the ‘interstices’ or ‘borderlands,’ or that center the experiences of ‘travel,’ ‘diaspora’ [or] ‘immigration’ [...] on the grid.’ (Sandoval 73)

According to Sandoval, approaching the discourses of these oppositional movements from either an oppositional or supportive point of view becomes a painstaking, exacting attempt to find ways to speak about, to, or against any positionality across flattened social distances in a necessary transcoding, but the failure or success of any such effort only painfully leads to a greater apartheid: the radicalization, genderization, sexualization of theoretical domains. (73; emphasis in text)

It is important to observe at this point that both the Cuban *topos* and the Brazilian *margináis* share a reality in which postmodernism as Sandoval defines
it is only partly present. Although in Cuba and Brazil the authoritative regimes invested a lot of effort in attaining hegemony by asserting a subtle form of control over political, social and cultural discourse, their ways of exercising power were still fairly centered and top-down. Censorship is an important factor here because it is the oppressive force that, by marking the boundaries of what is allowed and what is not, gives meaning to the idea of detuning. It also makes it possible to refer to the subversive character of the lyrics that are analyzed in this study without implying that their content diametrically opposes itself to centralized power. If the situation in Cuba and Brazil was postmodernist in Sandoval’s sense, any subversive act through artistic forms of expression would be qualified as what Fredric Jameson calls “pastiche,” or “a radical difference […] which is composed of separate pieces, but whose aggregate is, in sum, meaningless,” implying that “the human ability to organize and unite in a great dissident and oppositional ‘collective project’ has been shattered” (85). The subversive acts of sonic resistance that are referred to throughout this study, however, are neither meaningless due to a complete immersion in the hegemonic system, nor do they operate in full opposition against the censoring apparatus. Instead, the situation is more complex and requires a more strabistic reading.

In his book *China with a Cut* Jeroen de Kloet addresses the difficult subject of how to understand censorship in relation to hegemony through an analysis of Chinese rock music. He refers to the strategy of the Chinese socialist state to co-opt artists into its system, which diminishes the necessity of constant state-control, but stimulates an attitude of auto-censorship (de Kloet 182). This strategy resembles the Cuban Revolutionary discourse about the self-critical “new man” and the institutionalization of *trova* music as described in my Opening Sequence. De Kloet relates the strategy to the Gramscian idea of hegemony, in which “coercive control – manifested through direct force or its threat” makes way for “consensual control, in which individuals ‘voluntarily’ assimilate the view of the state” (182). Explaining how the auto-censorship of Chinese rock musicians is often related to Gramsci’s idea of a “velvet prison,” de Kloet critiques this analogy in three ways, stating that
Movement 6 - Strabistic Readings of Detuning

It is violent, as it imprisons artists in a position of compliance with the authorities. It is paternalistic, as the subtext reads that true artists ought to resist any cooperation with state institutions. And it is over politicized, as it reduces complex cultural realities to a stereotypical dichotomy of artist vs. the state [...]. (182)

The above observations are important for the current discussion because they point to some important aspects of the Cuban and Brazilian contexts discussed in this study. First of all, the Gramscian consensual control de Kloet describes may have been the final aim of the Cuban and Brazilian authorities in their efforts to include artists in the project of constructing a national identity able to secure their dominance, but the truth is that coercive control was very present in both political systems (as it is, to an extent, in China). Of course, the level of threat and violence was more extreme in the case of the Brazilian military dictatorship, but in Cuba political prosecution and political forms of bullying were and are applied in relation to artistic forms of expression considered (potentially) subversive. In Movement 9 I will go into more detail about the particular ways censorship was applied in Cuba and Brazil.

De Kloet’s critique of the analogy of the velvet prison highlights that, in perceiving songs by Brazilian and Cuban cantautores as either fully in opposition to or fully in cooperation with their respective political contexts would mean to perform the analysis according to the same criteria as those of the imposed forms of censorship. Thus, the mumbled discourse in Macalé’s “Let’s play that” is not solely an act of subverting hegemonic power from a marginal position, but also expresses a wish to have the freedom to “play” in a position of relative invisibility. Here, detuning is not about the dichotomous construction of an “oppositional collective project” in the words of Jameson, but about creating room for alternative forms of sonic articulation and reception.

As de Kloet states in reference to Chinese rock music,

the relationship between state and rock [...] is neither that of full compliance, nor that of plain opposition. It is necessary to release [...] artists from the discursive construction of the velvet prison, and to search for
understandings that interrogate the political by highlighting the tactics used by bands, companies, and state-owned publishers within the system, in order to circumvent the system. (182-83)

I propose that, in the Cuban and Brazilian songs analyzed, detuning appears as one of these circumventory tactics. Just like the affectively diasporic character of the Caribbean archipelago replaces continental discourses by a more fluid, insularized narrative, detuning is capable of translating hegemonic discourse, from within, into alternative, non-linear and sonic articulatory practices. And just as insularization subverted the static character of continental discourse, detuning also operates through movement. Again, movement not only implies a horizontal progression, but also a vertical resonance, which, in this analysis, is related to the auditive characteristics of the analyzed songs instead of to their narrative structures. Movement refers to the temporality in music. Not to its metric structure or to its notation on a note bar, but to its physical manifestation, to the fact that music takes place in time as a performance. The expression “playing” music therefore refers to something more than just reproducing in sound what is noted in a musical score. Instead, it refers to music’s capacity to detune, to produce imperfections that situate the performance in time and that play with the temporality of the musical event.

Play and Temporality

In his article “Thinking Musical Difference; Music Theory as Minor Science,” Brian Hulse draws on Deleuze’s concepts of repetition and difference in music to show how they are not necessarily opposed. He explains how repetition in music is a rhythmic event, rather than metrical:

False or empty repetition is repetition of the identical, which is what occurs in the notion of units of time being identical to one another in the measure of time as in meter. Real repetition is rhythmic, which always involves inequalities […]. (28)
Such inequalities, according to Hulse, are at the foundation of music’s “mutant” function, through which it can be perceived “diagonally.” Ordinary approaches to music are only capable of focusing on its vertical and horizontal functions, referring to, respectively, its simultaneous harmonic combinations and its melodic unfolding in time (Hulse 30-1). As he proceeds to explain how this diagonal quality of music expresses the impossibility of analyzing music’s expressivity “without reducing [it] to traditional modes of recognition,” Hulse quotes Peter Hallward’s assertion that “[whereas] repetition names an identifiable difference, […] what repeats is not identity, but difference, pure difference” (31-2). To analyze this unidentifiable difference in music, it is necessary “to connect with it intuitively – which can be done directly, immediately” (Hulse 31).

A link can be made here with Barthes’ approach to the grain of the voice, in which a direct, physical connection with the body of performer is the key to a successful evaluation. Through this link it becomes clear that the ungraspable difference in music is situated in the body of the performer and that of the audience: the imperfection of repetition manifests itself in the enunciation in the present, where the body and its situation in space-time form an unstable context that is different every time. To take the parallel one step further, when it comes to detuning as a deliberate grain, as a non-coincidental difference introduced musically, the body is the realm where this strategy of sonic resistance against hegemonic classification can be “played,” to put it in the words of Macalé’s mad angel.

It thus becomes clear that “Let’s play that” is not only an invitation on behalf of the performer to detune in the sense of musical, discursive or political subversion. The angel’s cry for detuning is also an invitation to the listener – or the academic – to join the game and connect to the present moment in which the detuning takes place and schemes of evaluation are being undone. The concept of playing thus represents a radical form of the subject’s connection to the present moment of becoming.

Hulse explains this characteristic of the present as the realm of becoming through the theories of both Gilles Deleuze and Christopher Hasty, who, according to Hulse, agree that the present is an unstable, ever-moving construct of multiple temporalities. Its intelligibility is not predetermined, but based upon a
process of constant “redrawing” (Hulse 37). He explains the present’s multiplicity as follows:

Past and future relate fundamentally to the present to the point where the present itself becomes inseparable from a presence of a past and a presence of a future incorporated within it. [...] What interests Hasty and Deleuze is how multiple events, both past and yet to come, constitute coextensive dimensions of a present becoming. (Hulse 37)

The implication of such a perception of the present is that the instant of the “now” is split between its value as a diachronic passing through time, moving immediately from one instant to the other, and its synchronic character of being a virtual image of future and past present moments that coalesce within its actual presence. Hulse translates this image to music by explaining how the duration of a tone “expands backward, into the past” as one listens to it, but, during the act of listening, the tone “simultaneously extends forward, into the future – as a potential image which may be repeated” (39).

Hulse’s explanation is based on the emission of a single note, the inherent multiplicity of which is based on its simultaneous backward and forward expansion into a virtual past and future. If detuning is introduced into this image, the single note becomes multiple within itself, without the appearance of a second separate note with its own past and future. Instead, the detuned note lays bare an inherent multiplicity – or layeredness – in the present, but, what is more important, it also opens up a new spectrum of potential virtual pasts and futures that all coexist as they resonate disturbingly in the present. Detuning, perceived in this way, allows the performing body to escape the chain of causal relations that confine it to mere cause and effect, and to enter a multiple present that is no longer tied to a singular past and future, but that sits at the nodal point of numerous possible pasts and futures.

Detuning, as a concept denoting a playful interaction of the human body with its situatedness in time, can also be related to Giorgio Agamben’s theory of “play.” In his study Infancy and History: On the Destruction of Experience Agamben theorizes play by placing it in a counterposed but complementary
relation with “rite.” He explains how the function of rite is “to adjust the contradiction between mythic past and present, annulling the interval separating them and reabsorbing all events into the synchronic structure” (Agamben, 2007: 83). In contrast, play [...] tends to break the connection between past and present, and to break down and crumble the whole structure into events. If ritual is therefore a machine for transforming diachrony into synchrony, play, conversely, is a machine for transforming synchrony into diachrony. (Agamben 2007: 83)

Agamben further explains that pure diachrony and pure synchrony are impossible to attain within human experience, which is why history as the manifestation of the human experience of time is based on a continuous passing between diachrony and synchrony. For this reason, he states, ritual and play are never completely separated from one another, but should be seen as parts of the same machine. The function of ritual and play is to assure the continuous process of exchange between the dead and the living, between synchrony and diachrony (2007: 83-5).

Societies in which all play has been transformed into ritual and where, in the words of Agamben, “the diachronic interval between past and present would have been totally transcended,” would culminate in an impossible situation where people would live an eternal present (2007: 86). Nationalist discourses and censorship in Cuba and Brazil are an example of how play can be transformed into ritual. Specific cultural or linguistic forms of expression can only be acted out according to strict ritual guidelines within a highly politicized context, yet such ritualization is never complete because it has little control over what happens outside of the public sphere and, more importantly, it can never determine the intentions of the people performing the ritual. Both in Cuba and Brazil, certain prescribed formulas derived from political discourse may be enunciated with a certain ironic tone of voice or in situations that change the content of what is being said.

Various examples of this can be given, until the present day. In Cuba, during the so-called apagones, or power outages, which occur frequently due
to technical issues or as part of the government’s strategy to save energy, the first moment of sudden darkness and silence is often followed by a voice shouting, ironically, “viva Fidel!” echoing through open windows and neighboring stairways. When visiting Rio de Janeiro, I once heard my taxi driver mumbling “ordem e progresso,” – the words on the Brazilian flag that mean ‘order and progress’ – while we were stuck in a chaotic traffic jam in the city center. These moments of enunciation allow diachrony to interfere with what is meant to sustain pure synchrony. Detuning can therefore signify the inevitable room for play that allows marginal artists to disturb the static, eternal present and to enter a multi-layered, progressive present. The angel’s call for detuning through the act of playing in Macalé’s “Let’s play that” thus announces a way of preventing the world from being tangled up in synchrony, where all behavior is determined by ritual preconfiguration.

Detuning, then, is an event that shifts playfully between diachrony and synchrony. As seen in Movement 5 detuning causes the body to oscillate between its synchronic situatedness in discourse on the one hand (Butler) and its diachronic independence of politics and individuality (Barthes) on the other. Censorship’s aim is either to classify the body synchronically as ally or enemy, insider or outsider, for or against, or to discharge the marginal body as representing pure diachrony, as a harmless, empty package that can only create an ephemeral effect in the pure present. Detuning, however, resists such censorship because it lays bare the unstable function of the body as what Agamben calls the larva, the threatening in-between being or unstable signifier that, like the baby or the ghost, cannot be classified as either ancestor or adult:

[…]. Just as death does not immediately produce ancestors, but ghosts, so birth does not immediately produce men and women, but babies, […] a dead-living or a half-alive person. […] The dead person is not the ancestor: this is the meaning of the ghost. The ancestor is not the living man: this is the function of the child. (Agamben 2007: 92-3)

Detuning creates bodies that oscillate between diachrony and synchrony, bodies that can be marginal but that do not cease to distort the membranes that separate
Movement 6 - Strabistic Readings of Detuning

them from – but also connect them to – the so-called legitimate inside space of society.

These larval bodies are like the corpse of Cara de Cavalo, which, through Oiticica’s manifesto, continued to have a disturbing presence in the world of the living in spite of the fact that it already belonged to the realm of the dead, or like the angel in “Let’s play that,” who visits the newly born protagonist – this other larval being – in order to incite him to assume a role in society that is not defined by ritually prescribed norms, but based on play(fulness). Similar to larvae from the insect world, these intermediate beings are both separated from and connected to the outside world through the membrane that envelops them. It is perhaps no coincidence that the image of the larvae also connects with Castro’s insult of gusanos leveled at the people he considered to be traitors of the Revolution, as observed in Movement 4.

The reason why larval beings are conceived of as threatening, especially in hegemonic state forms that aim for a ritual way of structuring society, is that they create events that can disrupt the supposed order of things. Such events, however, would not be disturbing if they were purely diachronic, because then they would vanish into air the very moment they occurred without having a real impact, as in Jameson’s perception of postmodern art. Instead, the events created by larval beings do have some ritual value, some synchronic function, derived, for example, from the rules that structure theatrical or musical performance. At the same time, in spite of the fact that a musical event is bound to structural repetition and predictability – as discussed in the analysis of Varela’s performance of “Guillermo Tell” – this does not stop an event from taking place. What is more, the fact that a playful event can be born from ritual means that it can leave a trace of diachrony within a synchronic whole. It is therefore not just an ephemeral event, but creates an affective potential because it causes a change in the context where it occurs and in the bodies it touches: it becomes, in other words, performative.

For this reason, an analytical approach of the sonic dimensions of a performance runs the risk of censoring the event by fitting it into a synchronic chain of cause and effect, undoing its political impact by discharging it as an event that has no links to the past and that will disappear in the future, according to Agamben’s theory. This is why Hulse suggests that the only way to perform real
musical analysis is to approach it diagonally by respecting both its synchronic and
diachronic functions. This two-dimensional approach, however, is only effective
when it concerns tuned music – or at least music that aims to be in tune. The real
challenge presents itself in the analytical approach to detuning, when the inherent
multiplicity of the diagonally moving present event adds a third dimension to the
model. Because of this third dimension, the image multiplies, shifts at the borders
and becomes blurry.

**Strabism as an Analytical Approach**

The approach to detuning that I want to propose through my reading of “Let’s
play that” follows the example given by the angel in the song: what detuning
requires is a cross-eyed reading. In undertaking such a reading, the listener (or
analyst) approaches the event from the same cross-eyed perspective as the an-
gel’s, adapting to the multiplicity of the image. The effect is like putting on the
glasses provided to watch stereoscopic – or 3D – cinema: in doing this, the blurry
image on the flat screen, which, without 3D glasses, gives the impression that one
is actually cross-eyed, is filtered into separate pieces of information for each eye
through the glasses, after which the brain can make its own reconstruction of the
image as being an event with simultaneous sources of input from slightly different
dimensions. This is how the effect of depth is created (Beardsley & Devernay
11-2).\(^{57}\) The brain is permitted to make its reconstruction of two slightly different
versions of the same image – the combined input of the left and the right eye –
which, when combined, situate an image three-dimensionally in space. What is of
particular interest to this analysis about 3D-cinema is that, for it to work, the effect
of cross-eyedness has to be simulated on the screen.

The function of the screen as the visual medium that transmits the in-
hherent multiplicity of the image resembles that of the membrane, conceived
metaphorically as the sonic realm that represents the simultaneous connection
and separation of a marginal element in a hegemonic system. It is the connection

\(^{57}\) For further reading on the subject, *Foundations of the Stereoscopic Cinema* by
Lenny Lipton is a somewhat outdated but comprehensive study on the mechanics of
stereoscopic or 3D cinema.
Movement 6 - Strabistic Readings of Detuning

between the screen and the membrane that creates the link between cross-eyedness and detuning. The blurry scenery that emerges when multiple versions of a different image are projected on a flat screen is like the disturbed resonance of the membrane when its input consists of simultaneous tones that only differ slightly. In both cases, the medium is too limited to capture the multiplicity, the multi-dimensionality of the input it receives. At the same time, if – in the case of music – the membrane is the only medium that a marginal artist possesses to transport his or her signal, detuning is what makes it possible to pass on this message with all its dimensions intact. The only difficulty, then, is how to listen to this apparently disturbed input. Or, to return to the parallel I have made with the screen, how to read a blurry image. In the cinema, putting on 3D glasses allows viewers to do this. In the sonic domain, a similar mode of listening has to be developed. I want to propose cross-eyedness, or, in medical terms, strabism, as such a mode: auditive strabism can synthesize multiple tones as they reach listeners in detuned fashion, allowing them to perceive their three-dimensional content.

As I have argued in this final Movement of Part 2, the detuning performance of “Let’s play that” is not merely a representation of the angel’s madness, but allows the body of the performer to allow the subversion of hegemony to reach across the limits of the event of the performance. The “play” of the performer consists in the act of “detuning of the choir of the satisfied,” which is no longer only an act of subversion in the Brazilian socio-political context in which the song was originally recorded, but also plays with the listeners of the recording until the present day. The recording is therefore not a mere performance dramatizing the textual content of the lyrics; it is also performative because its synchronic function gives it the ability to affect bodies located, spatially and temporally, outside of its own context. The inherent multiplicity of the marginal body not only detunes the harmony of the musical event, but also obliges the listener – or the analyst – to adapt to this multiplicity in order to “read” its playful performance. Any attempt to read this detuning narrative in a two-dimensional realm, however, means censoring a multi-dimensional expression in order to adapt it to the order of a hegemonic system where all elements are fixed in their specific place and function.
A way of reading detuned music without censoring it is by adapting to the multiplicity of the medium itself, which I contend can be achieved by developing a strabistic mode of listening and analyzing. In the different analyses of this study, the strabistic character of my approach lies in the fact that I look closely at what happens in a song’s lyrics, in its sonic dimension and in its performance, not as separate elements, but in terms of the simultaneousness of music’s narrative, auditive and expressive qualities. I allow these qualities to resonate with each other, while also paying attention to moments of detuning in which, for example, the performance counters what the lyrics express or the sonic dimension interferes with the performative one. It is at such moments that the object resists a univocal interpretation and that the possibility of simultaneous different readings or listenings causes the analysis itself to remain in movement, fluctuating and resonating.
Fermata

In Part 2 of this study, the sonic content of a musical recording and of the recorded live performance of a song has emerged as the realm where the subversion of hegemony by marginal elements is made possible. Within a hegemonic articulatory system, where all integrating elements are part of an apparently sutured space of meaning, alternative articulations that could potentially subvert this order are always present, although this presence is never reaffirmed by the self-repetitive movements that delineate the system’s inside realm. Marginality, as designating the potentially subversive elements that are contingently part of any hegemonic system, is both separated from and connected to the hegemonic center, in the manner of a membrane.

In my analyses of the songs “Guillermo Tell” – recorded during a live performance in Cuba – and “Let’s play that” – captured on a deliberately unpolished recording in Brazil – the hegemonic context constitutes the unwritten rules that structure the events of live performance and studio recording. The subversion of these hegemonic systems cannot be accomplished through the modes of expression that coincide with the self-affirmativeness of hegemony’s inside parameters, which structure its language, its hierarchy, its metric structure and its melodic harmony. Subversion, instead, resides in the sonic realm of the membrane that, because of its double inside-outside position, has the capacity of retaining the multiple potentialities of its elements. This multiplicity expresses itself in the two songs as, respectively, moments of rhythmic chaos and moments of melodic disharmony or detuning.

Likening the act of properly listening to marginal sonic expressions that are inherently multiple (without dismissing them as noise) to trying to read a blurry image, I have proposed a strabistic mode of listening that takes up the simulation of strabism in 3D cinema and the image of the cross-eyed angel in “Let’s play that.” Because strabism consists of a simultaneousness of multiple perspectives, the two-dimensional character of the membrane as a screen or eardrum can be overcome in order to perceive the three-dimensionality of the rhythmically
chaotic or melodically detuned song.

In the Movements of the third and final part of this study, my analysis moves from the auditive characteristics of musical detuning to the expressive function of strabism in relation to censorship. Through an analysis of songs by the Cuban rapper Telmary Diaz and the Brazilian cantautor Milton Nascimento, I suggest that semantic language, if it departs from the idea of a centered subject with a single space of enunciation and if it is subject to the limitations imposed by censorship, cannot give expression to the full experience of the affectively diasporic subject. Sonic aspects of musical expression, however, are seen as capable of speaking strabistically in the sense of enunciating from different perspectives simultaneously. I introduce testimony (approached through the theories of Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida) as a concept that highlights the impossibility of giving an account of an experience in language that fully represents the experience and avoids fictionalizing it. Simultaneously, however, testimony can testify to its own limitations on a metadiscursive level, allowing the subject to give voice to his or her incapacity of speech. In relation to the context of affective diaspora and censorship in which the analyzed songs were written and performed, I propose to use the concept of the carrier-voice to refer to a voice that is able to speak from a multiplicity of perspectives or that can recur to a bodily, sonic form of language. As such, the carrier-voice can express what censorship does not allow it to express in semantic language with a clearly identifiable single speaker. I argue that this sonic way of speaking is capable of testifying to the experience of being censored precisely by drawing on the limitations that censorship imposes.