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

Pijpers, J.M.

Publication date
2016

Document Version
Final published version

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Part 3

Expressive Bodies: Testimony, Censorship and the Carrier-Voice in Telmary Diaz and Milton Nascimento
Pickup Note

Affective diaspora and censorship have been the central focus of my analysis of song lyrics in their performative and sonic embedding in the previous two Parts of this study. In Part 1, the lyrical and sonic content of the analyzed songs, as well as the speaking subject and the homeland, were all conceived as narrative bodies. In a context of affective diaspora in which the diasporic experience passes as an affective resonance between bodies, the transgression of traditionally conceived separations between bodies caused the demarcations between the inside and the outside of the nation, the subject and the narration to also become blurred. At the same time, the presence of censorship in both Cuba and Brazil meant that a sustained effort was made to secure the separation between the legitimized inside and the non-legitimized outside of the nation, the national subject and the narration as discourse. From an ambiguous position simultaneously situated on the inside and on the outside of the narration, legitimized discourse and the national territory, the analyzed songs by Carlos Varela and Gilberto Gil managed to give expression to this affectively diasporic experience without being censored.

In Part 2 the simultaneous inside-outside position of the affectively diasporic subject was translated into the ambiguous position of the marginal subject as an exclusively included element in a hegemonic system. The marginal position of Carlos Varela and Jards Macalé led them to recur to sonic forms of expression (rhythmic and melodic) with which they could evoke multiple different articulatory systems at once and thus develop a way of subverting hegemony through what I have called the detuning of the apparent harmonious coherency of its inside realm. Consequently, the main focus of Part 2 was on the auditive quality of marginalized bodies, whose capacity to speak from multiple positions simultaneously was seen to require an equally multiple, strabistic form of listening.

Part 3, which closes this study, focuses on the expressive qualities of songs by the Cuban rapper Telmary Diaz and the Brazilian cantautor Milton Nascimento, and argues that the use of a sonic rather than a semantic form of musical speech allows the songs’ Sonic I’s to testify, in a performative manner, not just to the
experience of affective diaspora but also to the experience of being silenced by censorship. In Movement 7 I analyze Telmary Diaz’s song “Los Revolucionarios,” in which the Cuban idea of the Revolution as a perpetual state of insurgency and heroic resistance against a particular enemy is placed in a direct relationship with the banality and boredom of day-to-day existence in Cuba, which transforms its meaning. This transformation is performatively enacted by the vocal fragmentation of the word “Revolucionarios” in the song, which also points to the fragmentation of the censored and affectively diasporic Sonic I. The absence of a clear point of origin or expressive body in which the Sonic I can locate her enunciation is underscored by the technological multiplication of her voice on the recording. In Movement 8 I analyze Nascimento’s song “Milagre dos peixes,” placing its mumbling performance in the context of a situation of military censorship in which many artists looked for forms of language whose unclear or ambivalent sonic expression could not be censored from a logocentric perspective. I relate this to Giorgio Agamben’s concept of testimony as a language that gives an account of its own incapacity to produce testimony. In the final Movement 9, the songs by Telmary and Nascimento are related to Jacques Derrida’s argument about the inherent impossibility of testimony as direct witnessing. I argue that the particular ways in which both songs relate to censorship in their respective socio-political contexts paradoxically allow them to testify to the very impossibility of testimony through their sonic and performative use of language.
Movement 7
The Unfinished Revolution

At the start of 2006, the Cuban musical project of various musicians who occasionally work together under the name Interactivo won the prestigious Premio del Cubadisco award for the album Goza Pepillo. Apart from praising their instrumental and vocal talent, and the overall quality of the recording, the primary reason for the jury to award the prize to this album was its “innovative sound within the Cuban musical tradition,” the result of an experimental search for new sonorities (Muñoz). The different musical styles that can be distinguished on the album vary from jazz and timba to rap, rock and guaguancó, with no apparent effort made to privilege one style over the others. Also notable is the insertion of foreign influences in the song lyrics; some of the songs contain English fragments or are sung entirely in English, which is still a fairly uncommon feature in Cuban productions.

In his book CONcierto cubano, Joaquin Borges Triana refers to Interactivo’s style as one that “finds its beat in its variety, upheld by the clear rhythmic role of its music.” He then states that it is in the strong rhythmic basis of the Cuban musical tradition that the variety of influences is forged together (Borges Triana 2009: 131). Here, however, the question arises of why exactly this bringing together of different musical influences made Interactivo award-worthy, especially considering the fact that only a few decades earlier the musicians of the topos generation were criticized for foreign rock influences on their music. In other words, what is the new conception of the Cuban musical tradition that is being referred to by the jury and what is its relation to the rhythmic character of the music that expresses it?

58 The Interactivo project at the time of the Goza Pepillo album consisted of Roberto “Robertico” Carcassés, Yusimil López Bridón better known as “Yusa,” William Vivanco, Francis del Rio and Telmary Diaz.

59 My translation of the Spanish: “[...] en la variedad se encuentra su clave, sostenida por el claro protagonismo rítmico de la música.”
Maybe not surprisingly, a good place to look for possible answers is in Interactivo’s music, which frequently reflects on what it means to be Cuban. To characterize Interactivo exclusively as a project that aims to look for new ways to define a Cuban identity, however, would mean to disregard the thematic variety and musical dynamism of their work. Interactivo’s music does not consciously aim to create a new coherent Cuban sound; rather, what it does is represent the sonic worldview of young Cuban musicians who, in their daily lives, are surrounded by all kinds of music, not just from Cuba. Moreover, their songs, in spite of their focus on the private domain, include a particular perspective on political issues related to identity and geography such as the experience of affective diaspora and how this influences one’s conception of being Cuban. The name “Interactivo” can be analyzed in different ways. It can refer to the way in which the musicians cooperate alongside their own personal careers, where the recording studio and the stage become the playground for a dynamic musical encounter between different worlds. But the interactive character of the project can also be found in the way their music enters into dialogue with the different socio-political realities within which their musical careers, separately and together, take place. Thus, the name of their project points to their blurring of separations such as inside and outside, private and public, familiar and foreign at different levels.

In this Movement I will analyze “Los Revolucionarios” by rapper Telmary Diaz, part of Interactivo and better known under her artist name Telmary. The song brings together some of the key issues addressed in the music of Interactivo, which, as noted, revolves in different ways around the question of what it means to be Cuban in an affectively diasporic reality. But although the Sonic I seems to propose, in the song lyrics, a better way of dealing with this Cuban condition, I am more interested in the way in which the narrative structure and the performance of the lyrics give expression to her experience. As shown in the previous Parts, it is not only censorship that keeps artists from referring to certain subjects such as diaspora in their lyrics; it is also difficult to testify to the experience of affective diaspora because it multiplies the location and temporalities from which the subject speaks. Equally important to “what” is being said in songs about this affectively diasporic experience, therefore, is “how” it is being said. In what follows I will therefore focus on how the Sonic I’s experience of fragmentation as an affectively
diasporic subject is being performed in the song. I will do this by looking at the fragmentation of the term “Revolution” in the song’s narrative structure, at the technologically mediated multiplication of the Sonic I’s voice, and at the use of the voice as a way of reproducing this effect of sonic strabism.

Revolution, Perpetuation

Telmary’s “Los Revolucionarios” addresses conflicts between Cubans living in different places all over the world, with Havana and Miami as spatial references that function as synecdoches for Cuba and the United States. The Sonic I describes the rivalry between the two groups (those who remain and those who left) as “old hatreds” for which the original reasons have been forgotten, but that still cause a separation between Cubans. This separation is geographical when it refers to the wave of – mainly wealthy – Cubans that left the island the moment the victory of Castro’s Revolution was a fact, but it is also ideological when it comes to the implications of this geographical separation into two camps, where each side blames the other, either for leaving the homeland in order to secure one’s own well-being or for indirectly supporting a repressive socialist government by staying put without trying to change the situation. Another bone of contention are the properties that were confiscated by the Cuban state from the people who left for Miami after 1959 in order to wait for the Castro government to fall. In some cases these properties were given to poorer Cubans or “the people,” leading Cubans in Miami to accuse Cubans in Havana of having taken what was not rightfully theirs.

The song mentions these struggles as a condition that still marks the Cuban diasporic territory, where people that live in different places are different but also alike, loving and hating each other at the same time, “just like [in] a bad marriage.” The Sonic I contends that it is necessary for “Cubans all over the world [to] unite as brothers” in order to break this condition that is a day-to-day repetition of the same old disputes “that keep their reasons forgotten.” She wonders how much longer this condition will persist and appeals for a search for other ways of being Cuban in this situation of cultural, ideological and geographical separation.
Los Revolucionarios
Day by day, the Revolutionaries

Tenemos que luchar con una suerte de problemas cotidianos
We have to struggle with a variety of daily problems
No me pidas que, digan lo que digan, me quede aquí callada
Don’t ask me that, whatever they say, I stay here and shut up
Sentada, encantada de la vida
Sitting down, being happy
Los cubanos están todos regados por el mundo
Cubans are spread all over the world
Preguntando: por qué de esta maldición de estar todos tan separados
Asking: why this curse of being all so separated
Por viejos odios que mantienen olvidadas las razones
Because of old hatreds that keep the reasons forgotten
Que nos hicieron tan distintos, tan iguales, tan peculiares
That made us so different, so much alike, so peculiar
Me pregunto si mi hijo heredará esa condición que hoy se mantiene
I wonder whether my son will inherit this condition that persists until today
De unos pocos que se odian, que se quieren, que se parecen
Of a few that hate each other, love each other, look like each other
Que son como un matrimonio mal llevado
That are like a bad marriage
Hasta cuándo, vida mía, cruzar mares para verte será una pesadilla
How much longer, my love, crossing seas to see you will be a nightmare
Hasta cuándo tenemos que esperar por la promesa de ese día?
How much longer do we have to wait for the promise of that day?

A diario, los Revolucionarios
Day by day, the Revolutionaries

Vamos buscando otra manera de viajar a tiempo completo
Let’s look for other ways of traveling as a full-time job
A curar esta humanidad, cada en sí
To cure this humanity, every one
No escoge al vuelo un idioma, un grano, un argumento,
Does not pick on the fly a language, a seed, an argument
Una sociedad, una sola edad
One society, one single era
Nosotros juntos somos el pueblo
Together we are the people
Movement 7 - The Unfinished Revolution

Hagase en demasía nuestra voluntad
Let our will be done in excess

Sin ser masividad dispersa, sin conocimiento
Without being a dispersed mass, not knowing

De cuáles diferencias reconciliar
What differences to reconcile

Hasta cuándo tengo que ir y regresar cargando algunos cabos sueltos
How much longer do I have to leave and return carrying loose ends (loose capes)

de mi identidad, hasta cuándo voy luchando,
Of my identity, how much longer

"nosotros, los revorrevolucionarios de verdá, verdá
"We, the authentic, authentic

luchar nos pone en pugna con nuestros objetivos."
Fighting will confront us with our objectives..."

Legalicen la paz, ánímense a amar
give peace a chance, be motivated to love each other

cubanos de todos los países
Cubans of all countries

unios como hermanos
unite as brothers

A diario, los revolucionarios
Day by day, the Revolutionaries

Tenemos que luchar por la
We have to fight for the

promesa de ese día
promise of that day

A diario, los revolucionarios
Day by day, the Revolutionaries

Cubanos de todos los países
Cubans of all countries

unios como hermanos
unite as brothers

[samples contestador] [samples voicemail]
[samples aeropuerto] [samples airport broadcast]
[canto a Obatalá] [chant to Obatalá]

In the lyrics, the word “Revolucionario” occupies a central position. The Revolutionaries referred to in the song are still connected by circumstances that they have mainly come to feel disconnected from, such as their ambiguous involvement in a Revolution that took place half a century earlier but that continues to dominate the discursive construction of Cuban identity all over the world. Therefore, “Revolucionaries” refers not just to the Cubans who are actively engaged with the protection of the current Cuban political system on
the island. Rather, the Sonic I uses the word in a more general fashion, as “los cubanos” spread all over the world, or “cubanos de todos los paises,” ‘Cubans of all countries,’ without specifying whether these Cubans subscribe to the official Revolutionary ideology or not. In this way, “being a Revolutionary” becomes a characteristic that is just as ambiguously fixed as “being Cuban” is in reference to one’s identity and one’s place of birth (or, in the case of second-generation Cuban migrants, the place of birth of one’s parents). To use the word “Revolucionario” for all Cubans, wherever they are and whatever their political convictions, shows, in its clear incongruity, that it is impossible to speak simply of Cubans and to neglect the variety of geographical, political and cultural associations that this term now invokes.

At the same time, using the term “Revolucionarios” to ascribe a single characteristic to this heterogeneous group does seem to indicate that there is a strong common denominator, whether or not those designated actively feel it or carry it out. Having one’s roots in Cuba means to be Cuban, and having been born after the Revolution means that to be a Revolutionary is a condition one will simply have to deal with. By bringing together those in Havana and those in Miami, Revolucionario fragments the metaphor of the rebel who fights for the cause of the Revolution into an image that can just as well mean its opposite. If Revolucionario is such a fragmented metaphor, is it viable to say that it refers to a constant battle for change, or is it more reasonable to assume that it serves to depict the opposite of a rebellious attitude? Being a Revolutionary could then also mean that one adapts oneself passively to the image of the perfect Cuban as it has been prescribed by a nearly unchanged political system during the last 50 years, an image that is radically different from that of the fearless rebel who risks his or her life to fight against a dominating, oppressive power. If, on the other hand, the metaphor does not imply passivity but creates the image of a revolutionary as someone fighting for change, then the question is what dominating power is meant to be battled through this revolution: is it still a fight against a clearly defined common enemy, or is the rebellion now directed towards the very Revolution it came from? In other words, does the metaphor still allow for the image of the struggle against a dominating power from the fringes, or has the Revolution been irretrievably converted into another hegemonic system that is always potentially
subverted from within?

The first stanza of “Los Revolucionarios” speaks to this quandary. The phrase “Tenemos que luchar,” ‘we have to fight,’ affirms the image of the revolutionary as someone involved in a struggle against a dominant power system, ultimately in the form of armed combat. The fight referred to in the song, however, is not exactly a guerrilla war in the jungle of the Cuban highlands against the troops of the Batista army, but a struggle “con una suerte de problemas cotidianos,” ‘with all sorts of everyday problems.’ This can refer both to life as an immigrant in a foreign country and to life in Cuba, where economic hardship and scarcity resulted from the Cuban Revolution and, later, from the imposition of the U.S. embargo and the economic crisis initiated by the fall of the Soviet Union. The initial image of a fight against a common enemy is thus turned into that of an individual struggle with multiple problems encountered in the effort to make it through the day. Hence the use of the words “A diario,” ‘day by day,’ which indicate that it is its repetition on a daily basis that makes this struggle a tedious event. Instead of an insurgence by a group of people fighting for rupture or change in society, this Revolution is split up into thousands of individual struggles that are fought in the intimate setting of the family and the household, leading to nothing but the continuation of the status quo.

Nonetheless, there is another aspect to this fight which appears in the following stanzas: “no me pidas / que me quede aqui callada / sentada, encantada de la vida,” ‘don’t ask me / that I will shut up and stay here / sitting down, being happy.’ When related to the use of the term “Revolucionario” to refer to Cubans as guerrilla fighters, this can indicate the potential involvement of the people – intellectuals, factory workers, farmers, etc. – in the Revolutionary struggle once their need for change has become bigger than their fear of falling in combat. It evokes the urge to help make the change happen instead of staying at home trying to live life as if everything were normal, hoping for others to win the battle in one’s place. In fact, Che Guevara has claimed that the Cuban Revolution was won in this way, with the support of the Cubans living in the mountains and in the

60 Here, one can legitimately pose the question of how different this situation is from daily reality in a neoliberal capitalist society. The main focus of the current analysis, however, is on how the reality described in the song is radically different from the Revolutionary discourse it refers to.
countryside, who, with their knowledge of the local area, served as a source of information and orientation for the rebels, providing more than simply manpower. In his book *La Guerra de Guerrillas* about the fundamentals of guerrilla warfare, Guevara mentions the following three lessons of the Cuban revolution, which, according to him, have changed the nature of opposition on the South American continent: “Popular forces can win the war against an army. [...] It is not always necessary to wait for the perfect conditions for a revolution; the insurrectional spark can create them. [...] In underdeveloped America the terrain for armed struggle has to be the countryside (4).”

Returning to the song’s previous stanzas, however, the struggle that is referred to is not so much a battle of arms as a day-to-day survival. Hence, the sense of urgency that is being expressed here is also of another kind, to which the unwillingness to ‘shut up’ is an important clue. For the Sonic I it is impossible to cope with the daily struggles without being able to make herself heard. She does not want to be a passive victim of circumstances who has to pretend to be simply enjoying life, but wants to be able to speak up when she feels like it. Breaking the silence is thus posited as a possible way out of the day-to-day struggles, an act that can cause a change in the routine. Another option is to simply leave for another place where no silence is being imposed on the Sonic I: “don’t ask me / that I will shut up and stay here.” It is as if a choice is being given: “if you want me to stay, don’t tell me to be silent, for if I am not allowed to speak my mind here, I will do it somewhere else where they let me.”

This sequence implies that the imperative to not speak up is in some way related to the restriction of free movement by someone else. The Sonic I is apparently ordered “to shut up and stay,” which she refuses to accept: “Don’t ask me” to do this. Here, the socio-historical framing of the song interferes with the lyrical content, as one is reminded of the fact that the artist who speaks through the voice of the Sonic I is a young Cuban woman who left Cuba for Canada in order to be less limited in her possibilities of having an artistic career. When the album containing “Los Revolucionarios” came out, in 2005, Cuba was a difficult place

---

61 My translation from Spanish: “Las fuerzas populares pueden ganar una guerra contra el ejército. [...] No siempre hay que esperar a que se den todas las condiciones para la revolución; el foco insurreccional puede crearlas. [...] En la América subdesarrollada el terreno de la lucha armada debe ser fundamentalmente el campo.”
to work as an artist, in terms of speaking one’s mind in song lyrics and traveling to
give concerts. Although censorship had shifted from control over what was being
recorded to control over what was being expressed in public, particularly during
mediated concerts, when it came to travel permissions, artists were rarely granted
visa’s to travel abroad for concerts, probably out of fear that they would stay in
another country where no control could be exercised over what they said. In this
context, the unwillingness of the Sonic I to comply with these requirements re-
fects the struggle of a still relatively marginalized artist against the Revolutionary
authorities, suggesting that this Revolution, just like any hegemonic system – as
explained in Part 2 –, also includes antagonistic forces amongst the elements that
constitute it as a whole.

Although the Sonic I seems to make a connection between free move-
ment and the freedom to speak, this does not mean that the condition in which
she has to “shut up and stay” is a static situation. In contrast, the situation she feels
herself trapped in is one in which she constantly has to make an effort to travel
across separating waters in order to meet up with a non-specified second person,
whom, in the song, she addresses in an affective way: “hasta cuándo, vida mía,
cruzar mares para verte será una pesadilla,” ‘How much longer, my love, crossing
seas to see you will be a nightmare.’ The act of traveling here is not an indication
of freedom, nor does it signify the liberation of the Sonic I from the order to “shut

Almost a decade after the recording of Interactivo’s album, restrictions have
been loosened significantly. Nonetheless, artists are still restricted more than other
groups when it comes to obtaining travel permits, and censorship is also still applied.
One event in particular is worth mentioning here. In September 2013, Interactivo was the
closing act for a concert at the “Anti-Imperial Tribune,” Havana’s open-air theater on the
Malecón, not coincidently situated right next to the Embassy of the United States. The
concert was dedicated to demanding the freedom of Cuba’s “five heroes,” five spies that
were captured and held as prisoners in the United States until the settlement between
the Obama and Castro administrations in 2015. At a certain point during the concert,
Robertico Carcassés left his piano to improvise some verses, accompanied by the au-
dience answering him with a recurring pregón or “chorus.” In the verses, he asked not
only for the liberation of “Los Cinco,” ‘the five,’ but also expressed his desire for other
freedoms, such as the legalization of marihuana, free access to information and the right
to vote for a Cuban president through a different electoral system. The fact that this
performance was captured on live television caused quite a scandal and resulted in the
official suspension of Carcassés from the Cuban music industry. This banishment was
lifted a few days later after a private conversation between Carcassés and representa-
tors of the Cuban Ministry of Culture (Flores, OnCuba).
up and stay.” Rather, it refers to a nightmarish entrapment in what she later calls “viajar a tiempo completo,” ‘traveling as a full-time job,’ a situation of constant upheaval she is not able to escape from. Like the Revolution as a changeless day-to-day struggle, this sort of traveling is not one of progression, but a back-and-forth movement where the crossing of boundaries (seas) does not bring the Sonic I closer to the person she addresses.

In the song, traveling back and forth does not lead to the recuperation of somebody or something lost which will in the end make the life of the Sonic I complete. Instead, traveling is an inherent condition of the fragmented identity of the Sonic I: “hasta cuándo tengo que ir y regresar cargando algunos cabos sueltos / de mi identidad,” ‘How much longer do I have to leave and return carrying loose ends / Of my identity.’ At either end of the trip these “loose ends of [her] identity” have to be carried along, without the possibility of a final destination where the missing links can be tied together. In addition, the Spanish expression “cabos sueltos” for ‘loose ends’ contains the word “cabo,” which means “cape” in the sense of “land’s end.” Taking this into account, the Sonic I does not simply travel back and forth between capes as fixed and clearly identifiable points of departure and arrival, but carries these capes along with her as loose, floating landmarks that represent her nightmarish never-ending travel. There is no prospect of ever reaching a final destination or of ever truly leaving Cuba behind, just like she cannot shake off the condition of being a Revolucionario.

The fact that the inside realm of the nightmare consists of loose ends, or loose capes, signals that being in this nightmare makes it impossible to situate oneself in a fixed place. Traveling is thus the inherent condition of the Sonic I, who finds herself trapped within a realm that is fragmented from the inside – a realm that can be seen as the Cuban diasporic space, which stretches from Cuba to the United States and to Spain; as the insular realm of Cuba, where the national space is also affectively diasporic; and even as the body of the speaking subject, whose identity and discourse are fragmented.

Apart from the instability of ideological and geographic orientation, the song’s lyrics also point to the temporal aspect of what the Sonic I is dealing with: “Hasta cuándo?” ‘How much longer? The question seems to express the boredom of the ever-repeating daily routine, a desperate hope for the day-to-day
struggles to finally stop. In the context of the song, “hasta cuándo” also resonates with “hasta siempre, comandante,” ‘forever, commander,’ the words of Carlos Puebla’s eponymous song from 1965 – only recorded on album in 1968 – which was a tribute to Che Guevara and his famous revolutionary slogan “hasta la victoria siempre.” But now, instead of expressing a belief in the final victory and a never-ending dedication to fighting for it, the Revolutionaries are bored of waiting for a moment that never seems to arrive.

This sense of boredom is also expressed in the sonic support to the lyrics. The melody of the song is initially played on the kettledrum in the introduction, after which there is a break and the rapping starts. Kettledrums are rhythmic devices but they have a particular melodic sound that tends to sing around more than, say, the rather dry thump of a snare drum. For this reason, kettledrums have different settings of tension of the membrane, which defines their tuning and prevents them from being out of tune with the melodies they are supposed to support rhythmically. Nonetheless, they are not used a lot to mark the melody in a piece of music precisely because of their limited harmonic reach. Thus, the use of the kettledrum for the melody of this song causes it to sound rather monotonous, expressing in sound the tediousness about which the Sonic I is complaining. It acts like the sonic translation of the question that keeps being repeated in the lyrics: ‘how much longer?’

As the song progresses, more instruments are added while Telmary starts rapping at a medium fast pace, her dry and slightly harsh voice equally monotonous as the kettledrum as she proceeds through the lyrics. Amongst the instruments, one can distinguish a drumming device that plays the basic metre and also fills the in-between of the square beat with different syncopated motives, and also two electric guitars, one of which adds a distortion to the kettledrum melody by doubling it, with the other one playing hints of higher notes that are not part of the melodic and rhythmic structure but that rather soar above it, later converting into minimalistic rhythmic riffs. But the instrument that stubbornly marks the square beat throughout the entire song without any variation is a cowbell. The regularity of its 1-2-3-4 beat recalls the constant, invariant ticking of a clock. Once again the question of ‘how much longer’ is given expression in a sonic way as the despair of not being able to escape the daily struggles and the nightmarish entrapment.
in a situation that does not change is synthesized in the sound of time ticking by. But instead of only boredom, there does seem to be a particular event that is being awaited: “Hasta cuándo tenemos que esperar por la promesa de ese día?” ‘how much longer do we have to wait for the promise of that day’? Apparently, the Revolution started with a concrete promise that still has not become reality, putting the Revolution – and its ongoing movement – into question and rendering it tedious (a passive waiting rather than an active striving). Importantly, because the content of the promise is never concretized in the song, it literally lacks both a point of departure – the “what” of the promise – and a point of arrival – the establishment of that “what.”

In order to fathom the depth of this reference to waiting for a promise to be made good on, one that apparently needs no further explanation in the song, it should be borne in mind that this idea goes further back in Cuban history than just to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. In his book *Tumbas sin sosiego*, the Cuban historicist and literary critic Rafael Rojas refers to this phenomenon as “la Revolución Inconclusa,” ‘the unfinished revolution,’ which he presents as Cuba’s most prominent political myth ever since the first war of independence in the 19th century (2006: 61). The fact that all the different state forms there have been in Cuba since the first war of independence in 1868 were implemented through revolutionary struggles leads Rojas to conclude that in Cuban history after the 19th century, revolutions rather than institutional power transitions have given access to power (2006: 61-5). Common to all these revolutions is that they claimed their legitimacy by drawing upon the discourse of José Martí, the poet and political thinker who became the voice of Cuba’s war for independence and who is now perceived as the acclaimed father of the homeland and national hero.63

Rojas explains how in Cuba the need for “myth” in the active construction of a national identity in the present and towards the future leads to the appearance of the figure of a messiah, in this case Martí (2006: 66-7). On a deeper level, this

63 José Martí (1853-1895), whose full name was José Julián Martí y Pérez, was a Cuban poet and diplomat who played an important role in Cuba’s wars of independence against Spain (1868-1878 and 1895-1898). Apart from writing poems and political essays, he actively organized the Cuban insurgency against Spanish rule between 1871 and 1895, mainly from exile in Spain, Guatemala, Mexico and the US. Almost directly after returning to Cuba in 1895 he died in combat. See Alfred J. López’s *José Martí: A Revolutionary Life* (2014).
need stems from a sense of lacking a historical background of tradition, culture, past and civilization, as a result of colonialism (Rojas 2006: 54-6). Myth, according to Rojas, opens up the possibility of creating a singular symbol of origin that can remain free from historical analysis. He uses the examples of Martí and the Cuban use of revolutionary discourse to show that this mythical construction disregards differences between historical periods and contexts (Rojas 2006: 66). The unfinished Revolution therefore becomes a notion that, because of its mythical status, brings multiple historical references together in a featureless simultaneity that does not allow for any development.

When the Sonic I asks “how much longer do we have to wait for the promise of that day,” the question can thus refer to the persisting wait for the return of the messiah, or “the apostle” as Martí is often referred to in Cuba. This messiah represents the unity of the people and the freedom gained through victorious revolutionary struggle. In the affectively diasporic context of a song like “Los Revolucionarios,” however, the supposed unity and freedom to be gained is just as ambiguous as the Revolution that is being referred to. In this way, the song lyrics lay bare the ambiguous character of commonplaces in Revolutionary discourse, and indicate how the persisting use of these expressions has only come to augment the ambiguousness of their meanings. In essence, the Revolution is not just a struggle for change and for a completely new and different future, but also an expression of a yearning for past or lost ideals.

Mexican poet and diplomat Octavio Paz, in his book El laberinto de la soledad, characterized this ambiguous character of the revolution in terms of the contrast between rational and mythical ways of thinking and acting. Apart from the rational endeavour to mould society into a new shape in the foreseeable future, every revolution, according to Paz, is based upon the predicament of an “eternal return” through the creation of a mythical reality (59). The question of “hasta cuándo” in the context of the revolution as it is presented in this song is therefore not only a look into the future, but also a backward glance to what has been repeated over and over again.

In “Los Revolucionarios” the use of the word “revolution” expresses the ambiguous character of the term in a sonic way. Towards the end of the song, a wordplay can be heard when the voice of Robertico Carcassés softly sings:
“Revolú-, revolú. Revolú-, revolú.” The repetition of only the first part of the word “revolución” creates a connection with the verb “revolver,” which according to the Larousse Dictionary means “to turn over,” “to stir” or “to turn back.” The first meaning of the word accords with the concept of “revolution” as an insurgency that causes a radical change by turning around existing power relationships. The rhythmical repetition of the curtailed word, however, combined with the relaxed tone of voice in which it is pronounced, suggests a reiterative occurrence that is not radical at all. This performance of the word seems to be more related to revolver in the sense of ‘stirring,’ where a substance is calmly being moved around, preparing it to cook or ensuring that different ingredients are properly mixed, with the final stadium of completion not reached yet. The word revolú is itself an unfinished version of revolución, as if indicating repeated intent to reach some kind of result that does not come; the sonic representation of Rojas’ “la Revolución Inconclusa.”

In El arte de la espera, “The Art of Waiting,” Rojas presents a reading of the Cuban Revolution’s emphasis on movement and disruption that makes it possible to perceive the evocation of an inertia, of a day-to-day routine, as a subversive act:

Times of peace are, for the memory of the Revolution, the dead weight of the past. And underneath that death declared by a totalitarian ideology, underneath those tombstones constructed by the power, lives the oblivion of its subterranean life. A simple retrospective view would provide the insight that, in Cuba’s history, peaceful periods are much longer than those of war, just like the revolutionary periods are less extensive than those of evolution. But in the official memory this almost infinite lapse of normality, this pacifist lentitude [...] has little importance. The power is interested, more than anything, in the allegoric energy of certain scenes, the metaphorical violence of certain passages. (1998: 21)

My translation of the Spanish: “Los tiempos de paz son, para la memoria de la Revolución, el peso muerto del pasado. Y bajo esa muerte decretada por una ideología totalitaria, bajo esas tumbas edificadas por el poder, vive el olvido su vida subterránea. Una simple mirada retrospectiva informaría que, en la historia de Cuba, el tiempo de la paz es mucho más largo que el de las guerras, así como el de las revoluciones es menos...
According to this argument, the Revolution emphasizes the violent and disruptive moments of its history, appealing to the imaginative power of these images. The affective way in which they resonate in the collective national memory can then compensate for the relative small role the Revolution has played in Cuban history if it is compared to the normality of everyday life. More importantly, Revolution's memory of violence serves to cover the times of peace under the cover of amnesia. This is what resonates in “Los Revolucionarios,” when the Sonic I says: “old hatreds that keep the reasons forgotten / that made us so different, so much alike, so peculiar.” What is kept forgotten by the “old hatreds” of the Revolution, according to her, is the fact that the Cuban people cannot be divided into two groups according to a binary logic of being “with” or “against” the Revolution. I will discuss this binary in more detail in the last Movement of this Part, but an important suggestion at this point is that the statement by the Sonic I points to a diversity that characterizes the reality of Cuban culture, where people do not have either one characteristic or the other, but are simultaneously “so different, so much alike, so peculiar.” The peaceful normality that is rendered forgotten by Revolutionary discourse, therefore, is the acceptance of these differences in the normality of a day-to-day existence.

Returning to the sonic wordplay of “revolú-revolú” above in the analysis of “Los Revolucionarios,” the third meaning of the verb revolver, which is “to turn back,” provides an additional interesting insight which suggests that the Revolution is not only subverted by exposing how it has turned into a normality, but also by suggesting that it includes a movement of reversal. As Carcassés rhythmically repeats the unfinished word, the listener gets the impression of a needle stuck on a record. Where a spinning record suggests a circular movement that nonetheless includes progression towards a finish, a hanging needle means that a certain movement infinitely turns back to its starting point. Understood in that way, the meaning of “turning back” in revolver is the constant return to a starting point that does not allow for progress. Furthermore, the progression of a needle

---

extenso que el de la evolución. Pero en el recuerdo oficial poco importa ese lapso casi interminable de normalidad, esa lentitud pacífica [...]. Al poder le interesa, ante todo, la energía alegórica de ciertas escenas, la violencia metafórica de ciertos pasajes.”

173
on a record is spiral, which implies that it spins towards a center. Where “center” automatically generates associations with clearly defined power relations, identity or singularity in terms of a defined origin or destination, the lack of forward movement of the hanging needle can also be read as a resistance to singularity. In its reiterative jump backwards on the record, the needle creates a sonic multiplication of “Revolución,” whose repetition deprives it of the uniqueness it is assigned by Cuban hegemonic discourse. If this multiplication is conceived as a potential decentering of the Revolution’s project as such, it exposes the diverging – individual – projects and interests of the Revolution’s actors. In an earlier sequence of the song, where it appears that there is a sudden error in the recording, Telmary can be heard saying “revorrevorrevolucionarios” as if stuttering the word – albeit in a rapid way. Here, the word is not without a conclusion, but it multiplies its starting point as if various voices have started pronouncing the same word with a minimal interval of time between them.

This stuttering recalls the notion of sonic strabism I introduced at the end of Part 2, where a multiplicity of perspectives are combined in a single, distorted vocal or instrumental expression. In the fragment from “Los Revolucionarios” the sonic strabism consists of an apparently single voice that detunes the singularity of Revolution by uncovering, in a sonic way, the multiplicity it entails. Fragmenting the Revolution by emphasizing its multiple points of departure automatically also multiplies the directions in which it can move as a project. More than a static fragmentation, then, this sonic strabism becomes a fragmentation in movement: a divergence. As the movement progresses, the diverging lines become more and more separated from each other. And if this movement is infinite, as with the unfinished character of the Cuban Revolution charted by Rojas, the diverging lines will eventually move in opposite directions, cancelling out the direction of the movement that gave them their initial impulse. In other words, detuning an unfinished Revolution by multiplying it will ultimately make it disappear.

The act of detuning in “Los Revolucionarios,” however, does not reach this level of radicalism. The strabistic forms of speaking only appear in small fragments that do not completely unsettle the narrative structure of the lyrics or the melodic and rhythmic structure of the song. However, while my analysis has primarily focused on the textual content of the song, the sonic use of the voice and the
different effects that were added in its post-production deserve further attention in order to determine whether they reinforce or problematize the observations I have made so far.

Mediated Enunciation

Similar to the performative elements in the recording of “Let’s play that” by Jards Macalé discussed in Movement 5, the recording of “Los Revolucionarios” is not performative in the sense of featuring an interaction between audience and performer during a live event, but in the sense that the recording makes itself heard as being a recording or, in other words, performs its own condition of being a recording. In my analysis of Macalé’s song this explicit presence of the recording was seen to correspond with the function of the little imperfections in the cantautor’s voice that were not censored in the final mix of the recording. In the current analysis of “Los Revolucionarios” the grain of the recording – to use Barthes’ terminology – is based on the conscious insertion of technical flaws and the imitation thereof by the voice of the performer.

The reason why these technologically reproduced imperfections are of interest here is because they seem to question the function of technology as a medium that allows for an uncorrupted reproduction of the recorded voice, a repetition free of difference. The performance of technological imperfections then suggests that the reproduction of a recorded event also implies a translation, a repetition that is not objective but that is stooled on interpretation. The fact that there are also some fragments in the song in which the voice imitates these technological imperfections asks for some further thoughts on the function of these sonic characteristics in relation to the textual content.

Different types of media reproduce the voice of the Sonic I towards the end of the song. The first sequence of fragments sound like messages on an answering machine, interrupted abruptly by beeps in the middle of sentences and with messages also overlapping. The sound quality is poor and the voice’s timbre is transformed into the less personal, muffled, topped-off and metallic sound so typical of telephone microphones and speakers. The recording is intimate in
the sense that the voice of the Sonic I sounds close to the microphone and the volume is low, suggesting that the ear of the listener should also be close to the hearing device. At the same time, the constant interruption of the messages and the different messages overlapping creates an effect of fragmentation and simultaneousness, multiplying the voice of the Sonic I in a multi-layered sonic space.

In the second sequence of fragments, the voice of the Sonic I is heard through echoing loudspeakers in a large spacious ambience, recalling the sound of a broadcasting device in an airport. The quality of the sound is not as poor as that of the answering machine fragments, but this time it is the echo of the recording that makes it difficult to discern what the Sonic I is saying. Upon an attentive listening it turns out that the fragments of both the answering machine and the airport are snippets from the song’s lyrics. In the airport fragments, the voice of the Sonic I is not interrupted or multiplied. Instead, an effect is added in which the voice moves from the left to the right speaker in the stereo recording. The effect of this is disorienting for the listener as it becomes hard to keep track of where the voice of the Sonic I comes from. Significantly, while the space of enunciation of the Sonic I is constantly shifting, the position of the listener is fixed, with the listener positioned either as a passenger in an airport hall or as a listener to the recording whose perception of the song can be manipulated by sound effects.

Apart from the technological effects, “Los Revolucionarios” is littered with fragments where the Sonic I’s voice fulfills a rhythmic or melodic function by imitating instruments, whispering gibberish or stuttering. These fragments present alternative ways of using the voice that are not necessarily linguistic, or that at least follow different rules of grammar and speech. As with the technologically added effects of the superposed voicemail messages or the left-to-right shifting airport announcements, the vocal sound effects also disorient the listener when trying to identify and locate the speaking subject. What happens when it is difficult to trace the origin from where discourse is put into practice, or when the form of discourse is not linguistically structured, is that the concept of enunciation becomes troubled. In order to understand enunciation’s function when speech becomes strabistic it is first necessary to grasp what this concept actually implies.

Michel Foucault, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, distinguishes three modalities of enunciation that define the position of the speaking subject in
discourse: 1) who speaks, 2) from what position the subject speaks, and 3) the position the subject occupies towards its object. The point he makes that is of interest for this analysis is that discourse is not the space of synthesis of these different modalities where the self-conscious subject chooses his or her position. In contrast, discourse is a “space of exteriority” where the dispersion of the subject is manifested, and where synthesis takes place through discursive practice within an extensive field of possibilities (Foucault 1972: 82-90). Enunciation is thus a performative practice that works on discourse in order to give the speaking subject an orientation in the present in which he or she speaks. But what happens if semantic speech is being detuned by a use of the voice that does not follow the rules of speaking in the sense of meaning transmission? What if the voice is recorded and broadcasted in an interrupted, layered way, its multiplicity disturbing the clarity of a single message? What if a voice is intentionally presented as being recorded within an already recorded song, and the layeredness that this creates within the recording itself? What if the voice is used as a melodic or rhythmic device, detuning its functionality in a linguistic context?

The fact that in “Los Revolucionarios” the intervention of the recording device is made explicit by not filtering out its characteristics – the thin, scratchy sound of the voice on a one-speaker answering machine, or the overwhelming echo of the somewhat nasal voice through an airport speaker-system – makes it clear that the voice does not address the listeners directly, but that it is mediated. The intervention of technology is not flawless, and thus the sonic characteristics that allow for the type of device to be recognized by its particular flaws are like a technological version of Barthes’ grain of the voice. In my discussion of Barthes in Movement 5 the grain represented the unfiltered presence of the mechanism prior to the sonic production of speech or music, which, according to Barthes, was the culturally uncoded body of the cantor, but which, according to Judith Butler, was the omnipersonal citation of “I” in discourse that precedes its materialization in the individual body of the speaker. In the current example of the technological grain, however, the effect is the inverse. The sonic flaws that make audible the device that is the carrier of discourse do not lead back to the discursive position of “I” or the origin of the voice, but precisely to its fragmentation and disorientation through the reproduction of the recording and the added

Movement 7 - The Unfinished Revolution
effects. The voice is speaking from a multiplicity of bodies that are alternated in the overlapping recordings of the answering machine. The voice also speaks from a shifting place of enunciation in the left-to-right shifting of the airport broadcast recording. Ultimately, both effects imply that the voice can occupy any position in relation to the listener, its object, thus rendering all three of Foucault’s premises for enunciation insecure. What is left is discourse and articulation.

No-Man’s Land

In my discussion of hegemony and discourse in Movement 4, I showed how the realm of discourse is not a completely isolated sutured space of meaning within itself, but is constantly subverted by the existence of other discourses. The same elements that constitute one discourse can have a different position and function within another one. What determines the function of each element is articulation, which, according to Laclau and Mouffe, is the performative practice out of which a certain discourse or hegemony is being constructed. As introduced in that same movement, the possibility for articulation is located in what Laclau and Mouffe refer to as a “no man’s land,” the space of absence of a pre-given system of discourse or hegemony. This image reverberates with what is presented above as the impersonal space of the recording where articulation can take place from a sonic position of minimal discursive predetermination.

At another level, this no-man’s land is also represented by the space of the airport and the voicemails. The fleeting space of airports, for example, holds neither origin nor destination but is the representation of a constant “heading towards” between departure and arrival. The people at the airport are like the elements that constitute the realm of a discourse. It is not the location where they are that determines their function (the airport as discourse), but it is the direction of their movements, the articulation of where they came from and where they are heading, that determines the system they belong to. The same argument applies to the voicemails: it is not the fact that a voice and an ear encounter each other in a voicemail that creates the connection between the two. Rather, it is the address of the discourse from a “me” to a “you,” the articulation of a message, that
Movement 7 - The Unfinished Revolution

determines whether the voicemail is the space of encounter of both subjects, or not. If somebody else hears a voicemail left for another person, he or she is situated in a discursive space that is completely alien to him or her, because the space was created for the person who was supposed to receive the message. Returning to what the Sonic I of “Los Revolucionarios” referred to as the nightmare of traveling “as a fulltime job,” the answer machine and the airport are spaces that allow for the sort of perpetual traveling that is not necessarily a physical displacement, but a constant dwelling in the in-between spaces of geographies, bodies and discourses.

Here it becomes interesting to take a closer look at the effect of the voice of the Sonic I. Returning to the part of my analysis where I argued that the Sonic I is entrapped in a realm where she has to endlessly travel around in circles carrying around loose ends rather than fixed origins and destinations, the voice of the Sonic I is now captured inside the realm of technological reproduction in non-places such as voicemails and airports, which undoes the fixity of her origin of enunciation. The voice is thus as fragmented and layered as the condition of the affectively diasporic Cubanness of the Sonic I. In the voicemail recordings, for example, her messages are unfinished, interrupted halfway through her sentences and repeatedly superimposed with other messages. This gives the impression that various messages were recorded, cut into fragments and ordered randomly so that in the end no coherent message can be discerned from them. The airport messages, too, are not giving the usual cues for orientation to the traveling masses, but consist of dispersed fragments from the lyrics that are not specifically directed to anyone. So it is not only the space of enunciation that becomes superfluous, but also the space of reception that is transformed into a discursive no-man’s land.

Several effects of earlier observed peculiarities about the use of the voice in “Los Revolucionarios” come together here. As already mentioned, the voice of the Sonic I is not only distorted through technological intervention, but also imitates and reproduces these distortions, as in the fragmentation of the word “Revolution.” The Sonic I’s stuttering in the verse “We, the authentic, authentic Revorrevorrevolucionarios” indicates that the definition of Revolutionaries is just as fragmented as the people to which the term applies, causing the space of enunciation of this stuttered expression to become shattered across all of Cuba’s
affectively diasporic spaces. The stuttering multiplies the starting point of the word, pronounced by a multitude of voices speaking from different positions. This slightly distorts the rhythm in which the word “Revolutionaries” is being pronounced, which recalls the rhythmic detuning of the “Guillermo Tell” recording discussed in Movement 4, but can also be related to the overlapping messages of the answering machine later in the song.

As also observed before, the repeated singing of “revolú-revolú” as an unfinished word with multiple starting points indicates a divergence or a difference in movement. The shifting position of the Sonic I’s voice over the airport’s broadcasting system, which alludes to the space of the airport as a point of departure to and arrival from different, dispersed destinations, displaces this divergence from the time of enunciation to the space of enunciation.

These observations render perceptible the irony in the emphatic, stretched-out way in which the Sonic I says “nosotros, los Revolucionarios de verdad, verdáá,” putting exaggerated stress on the expression “de verdad,” which means “for real” and which I have translated as “authentic.” The sonic performance of this fragment, rather than convincing the listener that the Revolutionary is a coherent, authentic entity, has the opposite effect, an effect reinforced by all the other sonic elements indicating the fragmentation and multiplicity of the Revolutionary and of the position from which he or she speaks.

Multiplied in Translation

The question of realness or authenticity brings the discussion back to my earlier observation that the explicit technological reproduction of the voice (as opposed to the implicit technological reproduction of the voice in the song as a whole, which, of course, is itself also a mediated recording) constitutes a particular form of translation. Without digging into all the possible connotations of a concept as extensively studied as translation, I do want to include some of its characteristics that can give a better understanding of the explicitly reproduced voice’s performance in “Los Revolucionarios” and its function. As Walter Benjamin points out, the difficulty of translation resides in the fact that it is mostly understood
to operate on the basis of a getting across of information, which, in a work of art, is not at all its most essential aspect (70-1). He also stresses two important differences that come to the surface in translations as traditionally conceived: first, the fact that “the relationship between content and language is quite different in the original and the translation,” and second, that the intentions with which the original text was written are different from those of the translation in the sense that “the intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational” (Benjamin 75-7).

These characteristics do not seem to apply to the mediated representation of the voice in “Los Revolucionarios,” because there is no translator who seeks to faithfully reproduce the original text and who only unwillingly interferes with it. In the case of the song, however, technology is not an objective, neutral medium but is made explicit in its function as an imperfect intermediate between performer and listener. As a result, it becomes possible to perceive the first characteristic of translation mentioned by Benjamin in the presented recordings, which markedly change the relation between content and language. Whereas in the rest of the song the Sonic I produces content in a language that functions according to the chronological structuring of words and sentences, the sonic fragments reproduced through the answering machine and the airport broadcasting system scramble the content by presenting it through interruption and superimposition.

Therefore, although the media that reproduce the voice of the Sonic I are meant to be derivative, meaning that they are supposed to reproduce a message without change, they are not capable of doing this without distortion. This is in keeping with Benjamin’s conclusion where he argues that the task of the translator is one of “re-creation” in the translator’s own language (80). The performative imitation of the mediated voice in “Los Revolucionarios” suggests precisely such an inevitable distortion from which technological intervention is also not exempt.

In other words, a translation is never an exact replica of the original but produces difference. In her book Bakhtin and Beyond Peeren relates this effect of translation to the way in which identities constantly remake themselves by stating that translation “is remade to produce a form of agency situated in-between identity and alterity, self and other, transparency and opacity, domestic and foreign, authentic and false, original and copy” (2007: 154). When related to
the role of technological intervention as translation in “Los Revolucionarios,” this suggests that the performative function of the sonic discourse that is produced in the answering machine and airport broadcast fragments is the articulation of an affectively diasporic identity characterized by a similar in-betweenness.

For Peeren, who also draws on Benjamin, translation should therefore not be seen as a faithful reproduction of the original, but as a creative process that is, in fact, bi-directional:

Translation becomes dialogic, featuring an ongoing, contextualized struggle between the other’s word and the self’s understanding of this word, where neither remains the same and any notion of originality or authenticity is undermined. (2007: 156)

The fragments in “Los Revolucionarios” of the answering machine and the airport broadcast can be seen as translating, in a dialogic sense, the fragmented identity of the Sonic I as an affectively diasporic Revolutionary into a technologically constructed strabism. The place from which the Sonic I speaks is multiplied and this technologically mediated translation also makes it impossible to distinguish between replica and original. This extends to the voice of the Sonic I in the rest of the song, which is exposed as no less recorded and mediated than the answering machine messages and the airport broadcast. Thus, the place of enunciation becomes fully diasporic.

The fact that the Sonic I in “Los Revolucionarios” also imitates technological flaws by using her voice means that the possibility of a strabistic mode of speech is incorporated as a form of sonic strabism. The Sonic I is capable of producing a fragmentation within herself, becoming other to herself to the extent that an original “identity” can no longer be reconstructed. In this way, she is performing her affectively diasporic identity. This strabism is once again rooted in a sonic form of expression that escapes the restrictive synchronism of spoken language, as observed in Movement 6. The sonic language that is thus produced is not translatable in the traditional sense, as it cannot be reduced to its function of transmitting information. However, it does translate in a dialogic way. Consequently, it can only be expressed and interpreted in movement, in
the process of an ongoing mutual redefinition of the differences that are being produced and reproduced in translation.

As a way of capturing this discussion in a sonic way, the song finishes with a fragment of a chant to the deity or *orisha* Obatalá. The chant initially is only heard in the background, but when all instruments but the percussion have faded out, its melody concludes the song. In the Afro-Cuban *santería* religion, which has its roots in Nigerian Yoruba culture, Obatalá is the creator of the earth, lives both in the sky and on the earth, is both man and woman, and represents purity, peace and liberty (Rivero Glean and Chávez Spínola 412). This *orisha* thus represents the harmonious coexistence of the diversity of people on the earth, without reducing them to a single, unified center, as indicated by its double gendering. In the *santería* religion, Obatalá’s color is white, representing the harmonious combination of all possible colors into a whole that nonetheless does not represent a center. In contrast to the Christian habit of praying, which occurs primarily through the word, the act of invoking the *orishas* requires the performance of a combination of rituals that include chant, dance, wardrobe, artefacts and nourishment. Articulation as a coherent form of speech in song and prayer is thus overruled by its performance through rhythm and movement.

When the Sonic I of “Los Revolucionarios” says that she does not want to be asked to “shut up and stay,” her longing for movement can also be understood as a wish to express herself in a way that is not necessarily verbal or linguistic. Censorship, from this perspective, refers to a repression of a subject’s freedom of expression by reducing it to verbal ways of getting information across. A performative form of expression in movement, in which sonic strabism replaces singular, centered content, can therefore also constitute a form of sonic resistance to censorship. In order to better understand how such sonic resistance works, the following Movements will focus on how sonic forms of expression became a strategic way of circumventing but also highlighting censorship during the Brazilian military dictatorship and the Cuban Revolutionary regime.
Movement 8
Mumbled testimonies

By 1973 the harshest years of repression by the military dictatorship in Brazil had been left behind, although censorship and military control on song lyrics continued to be exercised. An important event during this period that has also been documented on video – although large parts of it have been destroyed – was the festival organized by Phono Records (now Universal Music) in São Paulo, May 1973. Of this event, some video material is collected on a DVD that appeared only recently in 2005, which is the visual material I will draw on when referring to the Phono festival.\(^6\) This event brought together all of the artists who had been points of reference for Brazilian music history during the previous two decades: Vinicius de Moraes and Toquinho from the *bossa-nova* era, Erasmo Carlos from the pop-oriented “*yeyê*” movement, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil from the *Tropicália* movement, Jards Macalé, Raul Seixas and Sérgio Sampáio from the *marginais*, among many others.

When Chico Buarque came on stage together with Gil, they started playing the song “Calice,” which Buarque had written together with Gil especially for the occasion of the festival, but which had been forbidden by the censors just before the event. Both musicians decided that, instead of singing the song, they would mumble the lyrics without using the actual words. Thus, on the video, Gil can be heard mumbling to the melody, whilst Buarque interrupts him after every phrase with the title of the song, “Cálice.” As a result, the word that refers to the Holy Grail in the Christian tradition suddenly begins to sound like the Brazilian Portuguese interjection “cale-se,” for ‘shut up.’ In the original lyrics, the Sonic I actually says: “father, take this chalice away from me, filled with red wine of blood.” By evoking, in the same word, both this cup filled with blood and the imperative to shut up, the Sonic I implicitly refers to the violence of censorship, which he rejects by saying “take this chalice away from me.” These words refer

---

\(^6\) “Phono 73, O canto de um povo.” DVD, Universal Music 2005.
to the biblical passage in which Christ prays in the garden of Gethsemane, aware that he is about to be sacrificed and asking God to spare him: “O my Father [...] let this cup pass from me” (Bible: King James Version, Matthew 26. 36-42). Thus, the blood-filled cup in the song refers to a refusal to be sacrificed for the father.

The gradual sonic change in the song from “cálice” to louder interjections of “cale-se,” ‘shut up,’ can be understood in different ways. Related to the observations above, the outcry of “shut up” can be seen to come from the Sonic I, rejecting the father’s – or the authorities’ – imperative to sacrifice himself. The son refusing to be sacrificed for the father’s sake recalls the refusal of William Tell’s son in Part 2, to continue to be the one with the apple on his head. What is significant in the performance of “Cálise,” however, is that the song is written for two voices, with the interjections of “cale-se” by one voice drowning out the lyrics of the other voice that says: “How difficult it is to wake up silent / when the silence of the night despairs me / I want to cry out an inhuman shout / which is a way of being listened to.”

In this way, the voice shouting cale-se imitates the censors that wish to shut up the Sonic I, and, as a result, the cálice fills with the blood that is shed because of this censorship.

At the live performance, Buarque and Gil did not get the chance to sing the lyrics about the chalice. As soon as Buarque started to insert more of the words and verses of the song, his microphone stopped working. He tried various other microphones on stage, but they had all been disconnected by the censors present at the concert. Buarque was therefore literally shut up by the censors and, in a parallel to the story of Christ, was unable to refuse this sacrifice. It can be argued, however, that the obviousness of the censors’ interference only helped Gil’s and Buarque’s performance to become performative, giving more expressive strength to the lyrics precisely by their prohibition.

Although the “Cálise” performance was the moment of the festival when the persisting censorship was most visible, other artists also evoked its silent presence by drawing attention to what was explicitly not being said. As in the case of “Calice,” the absence of certain verbal expressions made the censorship performative. Another salient moment during the festival was the performance

---

66 My translation of the Portuguese: “como é difícil acordar calado / se na calada da noite eu me dano / quero lançar um grito desumano / que é uma maneira de ser escutado.”
by Sergio Sampaio, one of the margináis who, some years earlier – in spite of his marginalized position – had had a small hit with the song “Eu quero é botar meu bloco na rua,” which can be translated as “I want to lead my samba group out into the streets.” In the lyrics, the Sonic I states that he is thought to be passive and afraid of speaking up, but actually wants to “lead [his] samba group out into the streets,” where he says he will sing, scream and swear. As seen in Part 1 of this study, carnival, in the Brazilian context, is often presented as a festivity during which the rules that are set by authorities are inverted in a playful way. Consequentially, it is not surprising that the Sonic I’s wish to rebel against the authorities is expressed through the allusion to a carnivalesque street parade.

Apparently, though, the rebellious aspirations of the Sonic I have led him no further than expressing his desire to go out into the streets, suggesting that he has not actually done this yet. During the live performance, however, towards the end of the song, Sampaio – who sings all the refrain’s lyrics off beat, squeezing them in between the lines of the background singers – repeatedly shouts the words “botar, botar” as he gets up from his stool and walks around, turning his microphone stand until his back is facing the audience. A brusque pelvic movement accompanies every exclamation of “botar,” imitating the sexual act and giving the verb “botar” for “to put” or “to throw” additional connotations of penetration (to put in) and ejaculation (to throw out). Sampaio’s grotesque performance of his desire to “botar” in this way becomes performative, as the audience no longer merely observes the performer but becomes part of the carnival procession, following the performer, who leads the way. The grotesque performance of “fucking the system” becomes a collective act, disguised by the performative of a carnival procession, whereas the lyrics go no further than expressing the desire of a single, abstract Sonic I.

From the fragments of film material that remain it seems the response from the audience to Sampaio’s performance was limited to one person standing up and dancing ecstatically amongst the sitting audience, which is cheering and laughing at him. The hip and arm movements of this man, who wears a red afro hairdress and large earrings, suggest an explicitly performed homosexuality, which draws the attention because of homosexuality’s prohibition under Brazilian
movement of the sexual act on stage is both a transgression in a moral sense, exposing an act that is supposed to be performed in the realm of the private, and in a political one, because it connects sexuality to politics as a system, based on the act of possessing or the role of being possessed. The fact that the singer turns his back to the audience can therefore be recognized not only as a transgression of the normal division between performer and audience, but also as causing confusion about who sings and who listens, who penetrates and who is being submitted to the politically burdened sexual act, who takes to the streets and who is being thrown out? And, ultimately, who silences and who is being shut up?

Apart from Sampaio’s performance, other songs at the festival also expressed alternative ways of resistance to the dominant image of Brazilian culture as the military government’s mass media strategy was marketing it. In the government’s view, everything revolved around the image of Brazil as a country that was moving forward into economic prosperity by actively taking part in the global economy. This cultural image of a prosperous Brazil was being presented as the end product of a harmonious integration of African and indigenous cultures. Carnival, as the ultimate expression of this festive cultural mix, accompanied this strategy, whereas other aspects of Brazilian reality, such as the poverty in the Northeastern regions and the suppression of indigenous groups in the inlands, did not. The Tropicália movement already recognized this problem in the mid-1960s, leading them to integrate music from these marginalized regions, groups and

---

67 For a well-known and often cited study on homosexuality in Brazil’s 20th century, consult Além do carnaval: a homossexualidade masculina no Brasil do século XX by James Naylor Green, Cristina Fino and Cássio Arantes Leite.
traditions into popular music in order to create alternative encounters of sonorities that were also part of Brazilian culture.

Although the 1973 Phono festival was not a Tropicália event, it nonetheless showed a revival of less-celebrated aspects of Brazilian culture at a mainstream musical event. Gal Costa and Maria Bethânia (Caetano Veloso’s sister) sang the song “Oração da Mãe Menininha,” ‘Prayer for Mother Menininha,’ dedicated to an iconic Mãe de Santo or an Afro-Brazilian religious priestess of Bahia, who was a descendant of slaves and an important defender of the African Candomblé tradition in Brazil (Echeverria and Nóbrega 23). The song was performed with the traditional accompaniment of the accordion, faithful to the nordestino tradition, but the women singing were Maria Bethânia, a renowned singer of sentimental and orchestral samba-canção compositions, and Gal Costa, who started her career with the Tropicália moment but who later became the female muse of Brazilian rebellious youth during the marginária era. In addition, there was Jorge Ben, who sang his song “Zumbi,” a reference to Zumbi dos Palmares (1655-1695), who was the leader of the “Palmares” quilombo, an independent community of escaped slaves and other marginalized subjects in Brazilian society at that time (Murphy 56). Raul Seixas performed his rock-song “Loteria da Babilônia,” influenced by both Jerry Lee Lewis and the Beatles, while, during the performance, drawing on his chest the symbol of the Sociedade Alternativa – an anarchic society that he was planning to start together with his friend and co-lyricist Paolo Coelho, among other people, but which was never realized because of interference by the military authorities (De Lima Boscato 59, 153).

Amongst this group of songs exploring alternative musical styles of Brazilian culture, Caetano Veloso’s performance of “A volta da asa branca,” ‘The Return of the White Feather [Pigeon]’ – a song by Luiz Gonzaga, a folk singer from the Brazilian North-East region – stood out as the most remarkable. First of all, Veloso’s appearance was, according to Tropicália habits, provocative: he wore a

---

68 In Brazil, Gal Costa was seen as the face of the so-called desbunde. Desbunde and its verbal use desbundar describe an uninhibited attitude that is closely related to the American hippie lifestyle of the 1960s. It includes the African word “bunda,” which stands for “bum.” According to Caetano Veloso, the reference to the bum is a synecdoche for the entire body in an attitude of completely surrendering to one’s bodily drives (469). Also see my article “Artimanha, the Precise Moment of Being” (2011).
multi-colored, almost clownish outfit which contrasted with the introverted style in which he sang the lyrics. In addition, the song was interrupted regularly for vocal codas, sometimes quite long, that did not allow for the song to progress in an easy-listening, comfortable way. The choice of the song was also noteworthy, as its lyrics describe the return of the “asa branca” or ‘white feather’ pigeon to the Northeast region as a sign that the land was becoming fertile again after a period of drought. The song follows an earlier composition by Luiz Gonzaga called simply “Asa branca,” telling the story of how the bird left the region because of drought and fires. As for Veloso’s performance, the choice of a northeastern song is not only a Tropicália aesthetic statement, but also points to Veloso’s recent return to Brazil after his period of exile.

The vocal intermissions in the song, or the fermatas, are extensive and sometimes even unbearably long fragments of vocal experimentation that are not just non-verbal melodies or imitations of instruments. In these fragments, Veloso explores an extensive register of interbocal, nasal and glottal hums, vocally supported breathing sounds that accompany unintelligible mumbling and growling, and different labial, alveolar, palatal and glottal plosives and clicks, as well as a simultaneous melodic humming. The combination of the vocal chords and the body around them functions as a way to create multiple instruments that can be played simultaneously by a single performer.

I will first compare the sonic use of the voice on Veloso’s experimental 1973 album *Araçá azul* to the non-linguistic use of the voice on Milton Nascimento’s album *Milagre dos peixes*, also from 1973. After that, I will analyze the lyrics of the song “Milagre dos peixes” on Nascimento’s eponymous album, in order to explore how the lyrics manage to testify to the experience of being censored in a situation where censorship attempts to prevent testimony. In doing so, I will compare the conceptualization of testimony by Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman from a trauma-theory perspective with Giorgio Agamben’s approach to the concept from a linguistic-philosophical point of view. Extracting the concept from its embeddedness in a holocaust context and relating it to censorship in the Brazilian context, I will examine in what ways the non-linguistic use of the voice in Nascimento’s song aligns or contrasts with testimony’s performatif or ineffable character as described, respectively, by Laub andFelman and by Agamben.
Experimentalism on the Albums *Araçá azul* and *Milagre dos peixes*

Veloso’s vocal experimentalism in the performance of “A volta da asa branca” during the Phono festival typifies the general content of his album *Araçá azul*, released a few months earlier. For example, on the track “De conversa,” ‘In a conversation,’ Veloso imitates talking sounds without using words, simply interpreting the vocal registers that remind of mumbling conversations, people saluting each other, somebody shouting something, women speaking and laughing in high and loud voices, etcetera. Sometimes small sounds are isolated, such as the sucking of teeth or palatal clicking sounds of the mouth – much used in Latin America as signs of disapproval – and repeated until they become rhythmic or even melodic again. By playing percussion on his own body, beating on his chest, cheeks and legs, Veloso provides a bodily instrumentalization and rhythm (Veloso 485). Veloso also includes gargles, vibratos and whistling. Both in fragments of the CD and during the live performance of “A volta da asa branca,” Veloso’s voice switches between registers including high-pitched nasal oriental prayer, laughs, the almost mechanic jabber of a madman, crying, and so on.

Here, *detuning* returns, discussed in Part 2 as a body’s non-harmonic resonance with itself due to the experience of an internal difference. The above examples of imitations of speech can be considered a detuning of language, as what is expressed is not quite language but still recognizable as something very similar to it. By making language sonic, Veloso not only detunes its function as a vehicle of communication, but also shows how some of the sounds that seem normal in speech sound strange when isolated and repeated mechanically. Detuning is also performed melodically on the album. The track “Gil misterioso” consists entirely of the repeated verse “Gil engendra em Gil rouxinol” which translates as “Gil engenders a nightingale in Gil.” Whereas the nightingale is a well-known metaphor for a good singer, the song features long interruptions of the singing during which a voice and a guitar string detune and harmonize to one another as the voice slowly bends its tone upwards and downwards whilst the guitar string is being slightly pulled up or released to elevate and lower its pitch. Taken together, Veloso’s detunings express an attitude of not wanting to conform to normative
guidelines. On his album, this leads to transgressions of linguistic, melodic and aesthetic norms, but in the overall historical framing of the album, this non-conformism can be related to a rejection of any kind of censorship.

Although *Araçá azul* is an experimental album, it does not only give the impression of being a project with modernizing aspirations when it comes to its musical tone. It sometimes breathes a strongly organic or even tribal atmosphere in the fragments of multilayered voice recordings. The idea for the album was born from Caetano Veloso’s contribution to the soundtrack for the 1971 movie *San Bernardo*, directed by Leon Hirszman, about agricultural life in the Brazilian outback, or *sertão*. The idea for this soundtrack was to add Caetano’s vocal improvisations to one another in four layers of recording, in order to create an organic sound that was not directly music as such, but would function as a background for the images on screen (Veloso 484). Maybe because of this background, the sound that Veloso creates in some of the fragments on *Araçá azul* is less obviously vanguard than, for example, the album *Ou não* by Walter Franco, released a little earlier in 1973. On Franco’s album the vocal and experimentalism is more elaborately manipulated by technological interventions such as added echoes, extreme sound compressions to voices and synthesized instrumental soundscapes.

The second song on Veloso’s album is a composition by a singer-songwriter from a younger generation, Milton Nascimento. According to Veloso, the track is also a dedication to this other artist, who has very little in common with the *Tropicália* movement but who he greatly admires (485-6). Nascimento, only a year later in 1974, would release the album *Milagre dos peixes* (*Miracle of the Fishes*) after the Brazilian censors had rejected its first version. The singer-songwriter was so frustrated by this decision, especially because he considered the lyrics critical in character but in no way explicitly political or aimed directly at the dictatorship, that he substituted most of the song lyrics by vocal sounds. In the final version of the album, only three out of eleven songs have lyrics (José 1).

The vocal sounds on the *Milagre dos peixes* include the singing of open vowels to melodies, mostly in the high-pitched *falsetto* voice which is typical of Nascimento’s singing style. On some occasions, these melodies are put on top

69 Soundscape or “ambience” is the sonic equivalent to landscape, a realm that constitutes an auditive spatial background on a recording that creates depth, as in the different layers of a painting.
of the lyrics, making it harder to distinguish what is being sung. Other vocal performances on the album include the interpretation of animal sounds – monkeys and birds – in various voices, creating the impression of jungle noises being integrated into a melodic and rhythmic structure. Significantly, the compositions on Nascimento’s album are always recognizable as music and are not experimental ways of recreating noises. Another important difference between the albums by Veloso and Nascimento is the fact that Veloso’s project was consciously intended to be experimental and abstract, whereas Nascimento turned to alternative vocal resources when the censors did not allow him to pronounce what was originally in the song lyrics. The censors permitted the second recording of the album because most lyrics were absent, but what possibly also influenced their indulgence was that it had become a rather abstract work of art that was unlikely to resonate with a large audience.

Although the album does not go as far as to integrate bodily sounds like the gargles and growls of Veloso’s *Araçá azul*, it does exude an organic, natural atmosphere in the sense that animal noises are imitated or that some of the outcries of male voices are not polished melodically but expose a grain, in Barthes’ terms (see Movement 5). The sonic presence of nature and the uncontrolled sounds of the body are particularly significant in the context of a censoring military apparatus whose technocratic project was all about technological advancements, the exclusion of marginalized elements in the national musical canon and the reaffirmation of the slogan “order and progress” from the Brazilian flag. This does not mean, however, that technology is completely absent. Especially on the album *Araçá azul*, where Veloso is the only singer on most of the songs, technology was used to record his voice, instrumental tracks and bodily percussion on different channels after which they were added as additional layers in the final mix (Veloso 485-6).

In Movement 7 I focused on the affective diasporic experience of the Sonic I in “Los Revolucionarios” by Telmary, where the technological transformation of her speech expresses her inability to put words to her situation. Her experience of being part of a multiplicity of worlds causes her position of enunciation as a subject to become blurred, leading to what I characterized as a *strabistic* form of speech enunciating from a variety of perspectives at the same time. This strabistic
Movement 8 - Mumbled testimonies

speech allows her to speak both as an insider and as an outsider in relation to the demarcation of Cuban national territory. Her discourse thus subverts the separation between the inside and the outside of the national realm, making it impossible to approach her lyrics from a perspective based upon an inside-outside dichotomy. The Sonic I’s in the projects by Veloso and Nascimento take recourse not to technology but to an image of nature in order to speak strabistically. In Veloso’s case, his situation of having recently returned to Brazil from his exile in the UK can be related to the affectively diasporic experience of Telmary. Even though Veloso was able to return to the homeland, the experience of alienation from this homeland in a society dominated by military rule makes for an ambiguous experience of homecoming. As seen in Part 1, both staying at home and returning to the homeland can produce a similar experience of affective diaspora to when the homeland is physically left behind, as what affectively resonates through these experiences is a sensation of alienation from this homeland.

For Milton Nascimento, who did not leave Brazil but who nevertheless experienced diaspora affectively due to the absence of an entire generation of artistic role models (Veloso and Gil from Tropicalia, Oiticica and Neto from Marginália, and so on), censorship constituted an additional trigger for his disorientation as a speaking subject. The control that the authorities exercised on his speech, deciding what he can and cannot sing, was what led him to record an album mostly consisting of sounds. This, I contend, makes his expressions strabistic in the sense that his position of enunciation cannot be characterized as being part of a dominant discourse or clearly situated outside this discourse. Rather, it captures the intrinsic multiplicity of positions that live within this discourse as a hegemonic system. Translated to the concrete example of Milagre dos peixes: after the censors forbade Nascimento’s lyrics, these lyrics came to represent the opposite of centralized power; the re-recorded version of the album with mostly non-language sounds was allowed to be produced, indicating that

70 In Verdade tropical, Veloso tells of an episode that occurred shortly after his return to Brazil, when he saw a sticker on his brother-in-law’s car that said: “Brasil, ame-o ou deixe-o,” “Brazil, love it or leave it,” a slogan introduced by the military authorities. What shocked Veloso was how this showed him that the love he felt for his homeland was not a legitimized form of love, as it was directed towards a memory of Brazil that no longer corresponded with what it had become or what the military wished it to be (455).
it was considered legitimate by this same centralized power; consequently, the absence of the lyrics does not simply evidence a surrender to censorship but simultaneously stresses the absent presence (or present absence) of the disallowed lyrics. This effect would have been absent had the lyrics simply been adapted, because then it would require one to know the story behind the censorship in order to capture the message behind the new recording. In the end, the Sonic I of Milagre dos peixes speaks – without using words or, better, by explicitly not using words – from a position that challenges the inside-outside dichotomy of the military power structure; his world is not divided into power and its external opposite, but structured as hegemonic, where the possibility of subversion is part of the system.

In his book Conocer desde el sur, Boaventura de Sousa Santos criticizes what he calls “metonymic reason,” which represents the dualistic thought-system of occidental sociology. He explains this dualistic thought system as a way of understanding the world in which all separate elements can only be understood in their relation to a bigger totality. In this system of thought, for example, the South cannot be understood without the North, feminine cannot be understood without masculine, and so on. He furthermore states that this apparently horizontal way of dividing the world into interrelated dualities is based on a belief in hierarchies, where one of both dualities becomes referential for the totality of both: South is modelled with respect to North, femininity is characterized by its differences from masculinity. “Metonymic reason” thus refers to a pars pro toto way of perceiving the world, which “produces a non-existence of what does not fit in its totality,” qualifying these marginalized elements as “invisible, unintelligible or erasable” (Santos 75).\(^{71}\) This explains the acceptance of Milton Nascimento’s re-recorded album by the Brazilian censors, which, from this perspective, constitutes not so much a confirmation of its inclusion in the realm of what was politically acceptable, but an indication of the censors’ perception of it as unintelligible and therefore irrelevant and not worth erasing.

In spite of this, however, the album was not prevented from causing any effect, because, according to Nascimento, “it sold well, in spite of the fuss it

---

\(^{71}\) My translation from Spanish: “la razón metonímica produce la no existencia de lo que no cabe en su totalidad [...] siempre que una entidad dada es descalificada y tornada invisible, ininteligible o descartable.”
caused" (José). This made the album less invisible and erasable than the authorities probably expected. In contrast, Veloso’s album *Araçá Azul* is the album that, in all of Brazil’s musical history, has most often been returned to the stores by angry customers (Veloso 486). While the experimentalism of Veloso’s album was not so different from that of Nascimento’s project, the latter’s vocal experimentalism was a much clearer critical statement. Although the question remains whether its critical message was picked up on by those who did not know about the album’s history of censorship, certain elements did make oblique reference to it. For example, the song “Hoje é dia de ‘El Rey,’” ‘Today is the day of El Rey,’ originally consisted of a dialogue between a father and a son. Of this dialogue, only the initial words of the father in his answers to the son were not censored: “filho meu,” ‘my son.’ On the recording, Nascimento sings the open vowels of what once were the son’s words, after which the voice of another singer, Sirlan, introduces a different rhythmic movement with the words “filho meu” and continues his melody with vowels in a lower voice. In addition, the credits on the album say “lyrics by...” for the songs that were recorded instrumentally, pointing to their erasure (Coan 14-6). Veloso’s album lacks this particular framing, which might have prevented audiences from linking its experimentalism to the issue of censorship, keeping them at an unintended distance.

Cornelia Gräbner, in “Critital Utopias,” proposes a “poetics of absences” in order to address poetic practices that in metonymic reason are marginalized because they are rendered non-existent. Adapting Santos’s “sociology of absences,” which focuses more generally on social practices, both approaches presuppose the analysis of an object not in relationship to a dominant totality that declares them impossible, but on its own specific terms of existence as an alternative social construct or poetic expression (Santos 75; Gräbner 2013: 1-2). From this perspective, the audience’s positive reception of Nascimento’s album can be understood as an acceptance of the object as an alternative social construct.

72 My translation from Portuguese: “O disco vendeu bem, fora a repercussão que causou.”
Testimony as the Inner Ring of Speech’s Dark Margin

In this subsection I will introduce the concept of testimony in order to approach the type of language based on a lack of understandable, identifiable speech used by Veloso and Nascimento. Related to a context of censorship, testimony will be seen to refer to the way in which a marginalized speaker can testify to a speech that is made impossible on the basis of the impossibility of testimony itself. Since testimony has been conceptualized by various theories that refer to the experience of the holocaust, I will invoke the work of Giorgio Agamben and that by Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman in order to extract from them those aspects of the concept that are productive for my analysis of the very different contexts at stake in this study. The experiences from which testimonial speech arises in the songs “Los Revolucionarios” and “Milagre dos peixes” are clearly not in the least comparable to the holocaust, so I will distill from the theories discussed a general notion of testimony as referring to a situation in which there is a certain inaccessibility to language and a witness attempting to give an account of this inaccessibility.

In the theories that refer specifically to the holocaust, testimony is considered impossible because it entails a relation to an unexpressable trauma or even the physical annihilation of the witnessing subject. This causes testimony to be seen as either a performativ act that is out of the witness’s reach, as in Laub and Felman’s theory, or to become a metaphysical concept that reflects on the relation between speech and language in general, as is the case in Agamben’s work. In my use of the concept, the presence of censorship provides a concrete demarcation of the boundaries within which speech is possible in the sense of being allowed and legitimized by the authorities; outside of this demarcation, it is made impossible or at least actively discouraged through the instruments of censorship. What is also important to stress is that in my analyses the illegitimate speech of the Sonic I or the “speaking” subject is based on a conscious choice to make language unintelligible, as a performative act that is within reach of the subject but out of the reach of the censors.

In view of the above statements, it is no surprise that on Nascimento’s album Milagre dos peixes the frame of reference within which the non-semantic
Movement 8 - Mumbled testimonies

or absent lyrics are situated is censorship itself. In other words, censorship required most of the lyrics to be removed, and the album's instrumental character, combined with the singing of vowels and the drowned-out lyrics, expresses precisely what this censorship wished to accomplish. The artist does not aim to change the rules set by the censors, so the line drawn around what is and what is not allowed to be said is not transgressed. Instead, Nascimento's move towards alternative forms of sonic expression that are not necessarily semantic speech makes use of the insufficiencies of a logocentric censoring apparatus. According to Jacques Derrida in Of Grammatology, the concept of logocentrism refers to the limiting way in which the logical – written or spoken – representation of language “limit[s] the internal system of language in general by a bad abstraction” (1997: 44). Nascimento's resistance to censorship, precisely because it does not qualify as logocentric, does not get tangled up in a quarrel about what can and cannot be said, but criticizes and subverts the very foundations upon which this system of censorship is built.

The Sonic I expresses himself from a position that is both the inside and the outside of the dominant (hegemonic) system. Both his inclusion in this system and his exclusion from it are indefinite, unstable. The element that allows for resonance in both realms is the membrane. As discussed in Part 2, the membrane represents a simultaneous separation and connection between different realms, such as discourse and the voice. At the point of contact between the impersonal field of potential speech that is discourse and the personal concretization of discourse into speech through the human voice, the membrane represents a space where the first is neither completely identical to nor completely different from the latter. Importantly, this space of contact is not static, but allows each realm to expand into the other. In the current discussion of Nascimento's project, the membrane constitutes the moving point of contact between intelligible and unintelligible language, but also between forms of expression that are legitimized or prohibited by censorship. The sonic dimension of the project is what creates these dynamics. It is important to emphasize here that “the sonic” is not the same as “sound,” but is in fact the politicized space of sound, where subjectivities and messages are being produced through the accompaniment of timbres, rhythms, melodies and registers (i.e. the tone of a voice that connects it to a specific person, lyrics whose
performance can affirm or contrast with what they state semantically, etc.).

In other words, the membrane operates on the level of the sonic because it resonates in the realms of both semantic speech and its vocal production. The membrane detunes language as something that constitutes the subject’s self-manifestation by subverting the basis upon which the subject pronounces him- or herself as “I.” The form of identity that is challenged suggests the existence of a coherent subject who can be clearly located on the inside of a homeland, a political context, a culture, a body – and who has a language available in order to perform this self-affirmative speech. The detuned speech of the Sonic I, whose identity is less fixed because of the experience of affective diaspora (as discussed in Part 1) or the experience of the marginal subject’s exclusive inclusion in a hegemonic system (as in Part 2), is therefore enunciated simultaneously from an inside and outside perspective, and serves to constitute a subject who is equally fragmented. As noted above, the sonic potentiality of language plays an important part in finding a detuned, strabistic way of speaking.

Because testimony in a context of censorship is primarily about a subject’s attempt to give an account of the fact of being silenced, it implies a form of language that is capable of reflecting its unavailability to its speaker in a regular, linguistic sense. For this reason I wish to explore a possible connection between a detuned, strabistic way of speaking and testimony. But let us first focus on semantically coherent language and its possible unavailability to the speaking subject in his or her attempt to testify. This experience is a focal point in trauma theory, where the witness struggles with the act of giving an account of a traumatic experience. Trauma theory is often related to the holocaust as the most extreme experience of the subject’s loss of its human condition and of a language to testify to this – as Primo Levi put it in *If This Is a Man*: “human eyes would not witness it and survive” (6). As noted above, I want to suggest that certain elements of the concept of testimony as developed in trauma theory can also be used to analyze objects that are situated in radically different contexts.

In Laub and Felman’s book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, the sense of disorientation caused by trauma is argued to be an inevitable characteristic of testimony, both for the listener and for the speaker. Their analyses focus on traumatic experiences, the overwhelming nature
of which makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the witness who has experienced
them to put them into words:

The speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless
continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, not available to its own
speaker. (15, emphasis in text)

Laub and Felman stress the performative nature of testimony, how it is “a dis-
cursive practice […] to accomplish a speech act, rather than to simply formulate
a statement” (5, emphasis in text). They contend that testimony is a necessary
process that the witness – and his or her respondent or psychologist – has to go
through in order to regain some sense of orientation:

The narrator herself does not know any longer who she is, except through her testimony. This knowledge or self-knowledge is neither a given before
the testimony nor a residual substantial knowledge consequential to it.
In itself, this knowledge does not exist, it can only happen through the
testimony. (51, emphasis in text)

An important characteristic of testimony in Laub and Felman’s analysis
is that the subject’s speech is censored by internal, psychological dynamics that
have to be overcome by a performative practice. Structuring a certain narrative
therefore becomes, much like the process of therapy, a way for the narrator or the
patient to re-create a sense of self by reconnecting to a narrative coherence that
is hidden under an obfuscating linguistic surface. What is of particular interest for
the present analysis, however, is not the relief testimony can offer traumatized
subjects as a reconstructing narrative, but testimony as the type of narrative that
can give an account of the fragmented state of an affectively diasporic subject or
of the experience of a censored subject who consciously reproduces his or her
inaccessibility to language. In “Milagre dos peixes” and “Los Revolucionarios” it
is the effort of testifying to these experiences that causes the Sonic I’s language to
become fragmented as well.

Giorgio Agamben’s conceptualization of testimony in relation to
language’s unavailability to the subject provides a helpful insight at this point. He, too, is speaking about the holocaust. In his book *Remnants of Auschwitz* he departs from the distinction between his concept of testimony and Michel Foucault’s concept of the “archive” in order to explain how testimony has to be approached from the perspective of its taking place as an enunciation, instead of focusing on the linguistic content of its statements. As explained in the previous Movement in reference to Foucault, enunciation refers to the place from where the subject speaks and what his or her position is in relation to its object. In short, it addresses “not what is said in discourse but the pure fact that it is said, the event of language as such, which is by definition ephemeral” (Agamben 1999: 138). In relation to Émile Benveniste’s proposal for a study of enunciation, Agamben asks the following question:

> If enunciation, as we know, does not refer to the text of what is uttered but to its taking place, if it is nothing other than language’s pure reference to itself as actual discourse, in what sense is it possible to speak of a “semantics” of enunciation? (1999: 138)

The concept that makes it possible to approach enunciation is the archive as defined by Foucault, which Agamben summarizes as follows:

> As the set of rules that define the event of discourse, the archive is situated between *langue*, as the system of construction of possible sentences – that is, of possibilities of speaking – and the *corpus* that unites the set of what has been said, the things actually uttered or written. The archive is thus the mass of the non-semantic inscribed in every meaningful discourse as a function of its enunciation; it is the dark margin encircling and limiting every concrete act of speech, […] the unsaid or sayable inscribed in everything said by virtue of being enunciated. (1999: 144)

> If these observations are related to my discussion of the Phono festival and Nascimento’s album *Milagre dos peixes*, how can the conscious search for a non-semantic form of speech be theorized? For, this is a form of sonic expression
that, by virtue of its taking place, refers to the absence of a semantic content that was forbidden by the censors. In the case of the festival and the album, the absence of a textual content infuses the event of speech with a signification that can be seen as a semantics of enunciation. The concept of the archive does not offer an appropriate framework for this analysis as it focuses on the relation “between the unsaid and the said,” whereas it is more relevant to focus on the relation between the “sayable and the unsayable,” which Agamben proposes as the basis for his concept of testimony (1999: 145). He explains how this shift in perspective brings back the importance of the speaking subject, who, in the case of the archive, is reduced to an empty space through which discourse takes place. Instead, he argues:

Precisely because testimony is the relation between a possibility of speech and its taking place, it can exist only through a relation to an impossibility of speech – that is, only as contingency, as a capacity not to be. [...] It concerns the subject’s capacity to have or not to have language. The subject is thus the possibility that language does not exist, does not take place – or better, that it takes place only through its possibility of not being there, its contingency. (1999: 145-46, emphasis in text)

Departing from Agamben’s concept of testimony as a way to reflect on the subject’s capacity or incapacity of speech in general, the censorship that the cantautores of the cultural objects discussed in this Part are exposed to narrows the application of testimony to the marginal subject’s contingency in a hegemonic system. Translated to the situation of Nascimento or the Brazilian marginais at the Phono festival, the non-semantic potentiality that surrounds the “speech” of the musicians as it is controlled by the censors is less abstract than Agamben’s idea of the contingency of speech. In fact, their non-spoken language specifically points to particular forbidden words, sentences and expressions defined by the censors as potentially constitutive of critical or inciting discourse against the regime.

In relation to what in the quote from Agamben is described as the archive’s non-semantic, dark margin that encircles any concrete act of speech, I would like to propose conceiving of testimony in a context of censorship as encircled by an
inner ring within this dark margin, in which a specific set of non-spoken words encloses the register of words that are allowed to be spoken. This inner ring is not impermeable, but encloses a language that also has the capacity of not existing. Much like in the discussion of hegemony in Part 2, this language can be strabistic in the sense that it can situate itself on the inside of the hegemonic system and simultaneously resonate outside it. As in Sampaio’s song “Eu quero é botar meu bloco na rua,” the lyrics of a song may semantically comply with the rules set out by state censorship, while, at the same time, its metaphorical content can make it resonate with the space outside of the inner ring. In the case of Nascimento’s album *Milagre dos peixes* the absence of words or the foregrounding of their non-semantic content also resonates with the realm outside the inner ring, as it explicitly marks its presence. The membrane thus represents the affective space of encounter between both worlds, what I have conceptualized as the inner ring of the archive’s dark margin, where strabistic speech resonates in both directions.

The Miracle of the Fish

As one of the few songs on Nascimento’s album that was not censored in its entirety, “Milagre dos peixes” allows for an analysis of its lyrics. As argued above, the fact that the instrumental melodies and vocal experimental sounds on the album are related in concrete terms to censorship makes it possible to analyze them as wordless narratives. What makes the lyrics of this song particularly interesting, however, is that both their content and their narrative structure constitute a reflection on the act of giving testimony through alternative forms of language.

*Milagre dos peixes*  
*Milagre dos peixes*  
Eu vejo esses peixes e vou de coração  
Eu vejo essas matas e vou de coração à natureza  
I see these fish and I dive in, heart first  
I see these plants and I dive in, heart first, into nature
Movement 8 - Mumbled testimonies

Telas falam colorido de crianças coloridas
Screen speak colorful of multi-colored children

De um gênio televisor
Of a genius television

E no andor de nossos novos santos
And in the procession of our new saints

O sinal de velhos tempos:
The signal of old times:

Morte, morte, morte ao amor
Death, death, death to love

Eles não falam do mar e dos peixes
They don’t speak of the sea and the fish

Nem deixam ver a moça, pura canção
Nor do they allow to see the girl, that pure song

Nem ver nascer a flor, nem ver nascer o sol
Nor to see the flower grow, or see the sun rise

E eu apenas sou um a mais, um a mais
And I am just one more, one more

A falar dessa dor, a nossa dor
To speak of this pain, our pain

Desenhando nessas pedras tenho em mim
duas cores
Drawing on those stones, I have in me all the colors

Quando falo coisas reais
When I speak real things

E no silêncio dessa natureza, eu, que amo
And in the silence of this nature, I who love

meus amigos
my friends

Livre, quero poder dizer
Free, I want to be able to say

Eu tenho esses peixes e dou de coração
I have these fish and I give from the heart

Eu tenho essas matas e dou de coração
I have these plants and I give from the heart

The first important element is the song’s title and the allusions it contains. Clearly, “Miracle of the Fish” alludes to the biblical story in which Jesus needs to feed five thousand people with only five loaves and two fish available. Miraculously, he is able to feed everyone in such a way that plenty of food remains afterwards (Bible: King James Version, Matthew 14. 13-21). This topos of abundance created out of apparent scarcity is also present in the song’s title’s alternative allusion to the “milagre económico,” ‘economic miracle,’ as the name for a project initiated by the military regime in the late 1960s. Through a technocratic
programme of economic, social and political reforms, the military authorities set out to make Brazil a relevant player in the globalizing world economy. Their strategy was to stimulate internal productivity and industrialization by all possible means, giving them the excuse to repress any element of resistance that stood in the way of attaining this economic miracle.

In both cases, the miracle that either happens or is pursued requires the people to have faith in the miracle workers, creating a parallel between religious devotion to a prophet and submission to the authorities in a military dictatorship. Accordingly, the Sonic I sings of “our new saints,” portraying the military as a revered cast of authoritarian figures in the age of modernity. They are the “saints” to whom the carnivalesque procession of multi-colored children is dedicated. The way in which this image of a carnival procession is related to the veneration of technological advancement, given that the carnival procession is witnessed by “a genius television,” also evokes what I explained in Part 1 as the carnivalesque celebration of Brazilian modernity and the pre-fabricated image of cultural harmony that it supposedly implies. But instead of being a celebration of harmony, the song characterizes the festivities celebrating the technocrats’ heartless focus on economic growth and productivity as a “death to love.”

The “new saints” of the song also do not allow for images of beauty, such as those of a growing flower, the rising sun or a girl whose beauty the Sonic I describes as “a pure song,” to be seen. The Sonic I mentions pain, which he immediately qualifies as “our pain,” referring to a larger group of people who also suffer because they are not allowed to see the beauty of nature. When the Sonic I then says that he is “just one more” to speak of this pain, this may be seen as a meta-reference to the censorship of Nascimento’s album, about which he complained by arguing that his criticism, as voiced on the recordings, was nothing more than what people on the streets expressed in everyday talk.

But what is this world of sea and fishes that the “new saints” do not speak about and that forms the main theme of the song? Apparently, this world is a place that holds a certain relation to the emotional inner world of the Sonic I. As he accesses this world, he says that he “dives in,” not head first, as would be the conventional way to dive into the water, but “heart first,” which emphasizes the opposition of head and heart as symbolic representations of, respectively,
intellect and feeling, reason and emotion. The submarine world of the fish, or the realm of emotions, is also presented as “nature” standing in opposition to the world of reason and technological advancement (the land world represented by the “genius television”). The lyrics mention that “they,” the “new saints,” “do not speak of the sea and the fish,” suggesting that in their discourse the submarine world is non-existent and censored, just like the other images of natural beauty.

This relates to my comment earlier in this Movement that the subversion of Nascimento’s practically lyricless album resides primarily in its undermining of the logocentric character of censorship. The difference between reason and emotion that comes to the surface in the lyrics of “Milagre dos peixes” is connected to the difference between the restraining world of technocratic, logocentric, metonymic reason and the liberating force of the sonic as that which can make the membrane between worlds expand into the territories of both.

A short digression is necessary here concerning the distinction between “falar” and “dizer,” or ‘speaking’ and ‘saying’ as it emerges from the lyrics of “Milagre dos peixes.” The verb “speaking” is used to refer to the television images that transmit a one-dimensional image of Brazilian culture (telas falam coloridos / de crianças coloridas) and to stress the absence of “the sea and the fish” in the discourse of the “new saints” (eles não falam do mar e dos peixes). The verb falar is also used to refer to the discourse of the Sonic I, where he is “just one more to speak of this pain, our pain.” This speaking only affirms the suffering imposed by censorship; it is incapable of creating an independent universe in which the Sonic I can take refuge from the repressive reality. Such an independent universe is created only when the Sonic I talks about the sea and the fish; here, other forms of expression suddenly appear, such as drawing on stones and speaking real things: “falo coisas reais.” Here, love is not dead because the Sonic I identifies himself as someone who loves his friends. The freedom that is necessary in order to narrate this world is related to the fact that the Sonic I no longer needs to “speak of” something, but is able to “say”: “livre, quero poder dizer.” The verb dizer is different from falar in that it is directly related to the content it pronounces. Falar as a verb refers either to the act of speaking in general, which can be about anything, or, if it is related to a specific subject, it is already “about” something that is summarized. The verb dizer, in contrast, is followed by a direct discourse. It calls
to life and therefore makes the content that is being evoked performative. This is related to the only part in the lyrics where the word *falar* is used in a different way, which is in the grammatically peculiar construction “quando *falo* coisas reais,” ‘when I speak real things.’ The Sonic I does not say he speaks *of* real things, which would be “falar *de* coisas reais,” but constitutes reality as he pronounces it.

These observations give insight into the ways in which the act of sticking to semantic, logocentric speech is related to the limiting character of censorship, and to the way in which it is different from the “miraculous” use of language that can create as it pronounces. The latter is not limiting in nature, but expansive, like the miraculous multiplication of fish in the Biblical narration. This also points to the fact that censorship is present not only when silence is imposed by means of force, but also when forms of expression abide by the rules of dominant discourse and no longer explore their own creative potential.

A concept that elucidates this line of thought is what Gräbner, drawing on Paul Éluard, has called “phantom language,” a discourse that is disconnected from the objective and experienced reality it refers to. In her article “From the Intersection of Pain and Hope,” this concept is explained in relation to neoliberal discourse, of which the key terms that sustain its legitimacy are only interpretable from within its own frames of reference. Gräbner draws on theories by David Harvey and John Holloway in order to explain how terms like “freedom” and “choice” are emphasized in order to mask the class power structures behind the neoliberal agenda, which has led to a situation in which these terms, in a similar way to Santos’ metonymic reason, have become so all-encompassing that they include their own opposites (2012: 64-65).

This phantom language is therefore disconnected from the reality and experience it is trying to frame, causing it to impose a different form of silence than the prohibition of words – as was the case with Nascimento’s album. Instead, phantom language attempts to arrest words within certain borders, outside of which they can no longer signify. Returning to the lyrics of “Milagre dos peixes,” the “new saints” or the technocratic military authorities hide behind a phantom language of “multi-colored children,” whereas they actually proclaim the same “death to love” as their more openly repressive predecessors.

Significantly, Nascimento’s song presents the discourse used by the...
“genius television” as shallow and limiting. It consists of “screens,” surfaces of one-dimensional material that “speak colorfully of multi-colored children.” This seems to refer to a very different dimension of colors than when, later on, the Sonic I, as he constitutes reality by pronouncing it, states that he has within himself “all the colors.” The colored screens displaying multi-colored children are merely a technological manipulation of colors in order to re-create reality. They do not constitute the same abundant resource as the Sonic I, who has in him “all the colors,” from which a new reality emanates and which he can always retreat to in order to bypass censorship.

A new reality is established when the lyrics of the song shift in the end to “I have these fish” instead of “I see these fish,” suggesting that the Sonic I has the world of the fish inside him as a world that consists of a broader spectrum of dimensions and that cannot be controlled by a uni-dimensional, logocentric form of censorship. The freedom that the Sonic I refers to when he says he wants “to be able to say” is a sonic form of freedom, which is a freedom to create and not simply freedom of speech or freedom of expression, which, in neoliberal discourse, is more and more openly tied to its opposite, the repression of marginalized groups.

At the same time, the submarine world of the fish is described by the Sonic I in terms of “the silence of this nature.” The self-evidence of this description comes from the association with the submarine world as a silent place, and from the idea of fish as animals that make no sound. They open their mouths, but no sound is emitted; to our mind, they have no form of speech or communication that makes use of the medium of sound. The song’s image of fish as animals that are silent by nature, but also silenced by censors who “do not speak of [them]” recalls the song “Como los peces,” ‘just like fish,’ by the Cuban singer-songwriter Carlos Varela on his eponymous album from 1995, in which he metaphorically describes the world of the Cubans who silently carry their suffering as the silent world of fish. Cubans are presented as prisoners in the silent world of water that also is their way of escaping to other worlds: “quietly they take off to the sea and leave.”

Fragments of Varela’s song capture its central message: “Las iglesias hablan de la salvación / y la gente reza y pide cosas en silencio / como los peces [...] Los padres ya no quieren hablar de la situación / sobreviven prisioneros y acostumbran a callar / como los peces [...] Las noticias hablan de resignación / y la gente traga y se mira a los ojos / como
of human speech, with the difference that, in Varela’s song, the world of the fish is that of a silent resignation that eventually makes them leave for other places, whereas in Nascimento’s song, the Sonic I takes refuge in the silent world of fish that he accesses with his heart.

Within this silent nature, the Sonic I of “Milagre dos peixes” also gains the possibility to “speak reality,” with the construction of the song suggesting that he creates this possibility through a performative speech act. He adds that he “[draws] on stones” and has within himself “all the colors.” For the second time in the song, colors are used to transmit a message, but this time the message does not hail the “genius television,” but allows the Sonic I to “speak reality.” The message, this time, does not signal a “death to love”; on the contrary, the Sonic I characterizes himself as “I who love my friends.” The Sonic I relates this freedom to the act of speaking, and, consequentially, to creating through the act of speaking: “free, I want to be able to say” (dizer).

The narrative space that is being created is a nature in whose “silence” the Sonic paradoxically wishes to be “free to say.” This draws attention because the performative act of speaking in this parallel world that is being created is a way of speaking that is silent. The ability of the Sonic I to speak about this silent world, where he sees the fish, emerges precisely by entering this world and narrating its silent character by appropriating its silence, as indicated by the shift to “I have these fish.” In a similar way, narrating the experience of being silenced by the censors is to appropriate this silence and make it explicit.

In view of Agamben’s theory of enunciation, Nascimento’s song not only expresses something through what it says in words, but also through the fact that it is being narrated, through its conversion to enunciation, which is the performative dimension of its lyrics. Nonetheless, the performative dimension of the lyrics is not completely independent from their semantic content, because they end up performing what they initially only spoke about. This might be why, at the end

los peces / [...] Los muchachos hablan de desilusión / y en silencio van al mar y se largan / como los peces.” My translation: ‘Churches talk of salvation / and the people pray and ask things in silence / just like fish [...] Parents no longer want to talk about the situation / they survive as prisoners and get used to be silent / just like fish [...] In the news they speak of resignation / and people swallow and look eachother in the eyes / just like fish [...] The youngsters speak of disillusion / and quietly they take off to the sea and leave / just like fish.’

208
of the song, which is the start of the narration’s repetition, the wording changes. Now, the Sonic I does not see the fish, but owns them: “I have these fish.” Could this be related to “the owning of enunciation,” which, according to Foucault, is impossible to achieve for the speaking subject? And could this be the “miracle” of the fish that is hidden in a deeper layer of signification in the song’s title?

I want to suggest that the Sonic I, by multiplying the narration through an infinite conversion to its own meta-narration, is able to pronounce a discourse that is silent and to own an enunciation that cannot be pronounced. Yet, at the same time, this performative of circular self-reference is not a “pure event of its enunciation” in the Foucauldian sense, because it is politicized. The Sonic I, by returning to his own narration, gives an account of his inability to speak, taking us back to what Agamben says about the character of the witness whose authority “consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of an incapacity to speak” (1999: 158).

In the next and final Movement, I will elaborate on testimony as a way of giving expression to the experience of being silenced. By focusing on the ways in which censorship was institutionalized in Cuba and Brazil in the periods during which the analyzed songs were written and performed, I will examine how testimony and censorship dialogue with each other and how they either reinforce or subvert one another. Also, I will discuss Derrida’s conceptualization of testimony as a narrative genre that is always and inevitably in part fictional. In relation to Agamben’s theory of the witness whose limit experience only makes him or her capable of testifying to his or her own incapacity of speech, Derrida’s work makes it possible to conceive of the witness as also a narrative subject. By focusing on the ways in which the Sonic I’s of Telmary’s “Los Revolucionarios” and Nascimento’s “Milagre dos peixes” evoke precisely the characteristics that according to Agamben and Derrida problematize testimony, I will show how testimony can enable alternative forms of speech even when the witness is confronted with censorship.
Movement 9
Testimony and Censorship

Up to this point, the analyses of Telmary’s “Los Revolucionarios” and Nascimento’s “Milagre dos peixes” in, respectively, the Cuban and the Brazilian context, have revealed different forms of narrative locations and temporalities interfering with the testimonies – at multiple levels of enunciation – of the Sonic I and the cantator. In the previous Movement, I focused on Agamben’s notion of an impossible testimony to the limit experience of the subject, translating the extreme situation of the holocaust into the impossible testimony of a subject silenced by censorship. In this Movement, I engage with Jacques Derrida’s conceptualization of testimony, which is also applied to the limit experience of a subject suspended between life and death. Derrida, however, uses this example to expose how an element of fiction is always already inscribed in any testimony that nonetheless “claims to testify in truth to the truth for the truth” (2000: 27). The analyses of this Movement will focus more closely on the inevitably dispersed and decentered character of testimony as a specific form of narration and as a sonic form of discourse. Through Derrida’s theory of testimony, I approach the lyrics of both songs as forms of testimony that emerge from and enter into dialogue with the contexts of censorship in which they were written and recorded.

Both in “Los Revolucionarios” and in “Milagre dos peixes,” testimony gives an account of the speaker’s difficulty to testify. The Sonic I of “Los Revolucionarios” is speaking in the name of “Cubans of all countries” in order to testify to a shared affectively diasporic reality, but ends up producing overlapping and interrupting fragments of multi-layered discourses because she is speaking from a fragmented position of enunciation. In “Milagre dos peixes,” the Sonic I refers to his wish to testify to images of beauty as he sings of images “they” do not allow him to sing about. At the same time, an overlapping recording of his voice drowns out his words. Although in both cases there is no clear, centered discourse, this does not mean that testimony is impossible. On the contrary, I
want to suggest that it is precisely this decentering of discourse that allows for a testimony to the circumstances that censor the Sonic I’s speech. Because in both songs technological intervention plays an important role in the sonic representation of the Sonic I’s voice, I will analyze how this intervention not only allows for a repeatable testimony, but can also produce another kind of testimony that is capable of testifying to the very experience of being censored.

Vocalizing Censorship

Before, I presented the first-person narration through which the Sonic I testifies to an ever-repeating present in Telmary’s “Los Revolucionarios” as a decentered discourse because of the way it plays with the temporality of the enunciation. I argued that the circular character of the Revolution as a process that keeps returning to its own starting point is expressed by the way the singing of “revolú-, revolú-” imitates a needle stuck on a record. Another form of decentering appeared in how the song superimposes different recordings of messages on answering machines. Having one message interrupt the other not only multiplies discourse, but also suggests the fragmentation of the Sonic I as a witness by attesting to different realities and different perspectives in a single recording. Technology is what allows for this fragmented subject to speak, but the emphasis on technology’s limitations simultaneously reveals the problematic side of producing testimony through technology.

Nascimento’s “Milagre dos peixes,” too, presents a situation in which it is difficult to identify a clearly recognizable and centered testifying subject. The layeredness of the Sonic I is again accomplished through technological interventions by recording the voice of the cantautor on different tracks and replaying them simultaneously. The recording of “Milagre dos peixes” uses the Sonic I’s voice to overlay the lyrics and the melody with vowel sounds, making it difficult at times to distinguish the words he is singing. However, technology is not as explicitly represented or imitated as in Telmary’s song.

In Brazilian music of the 1970s, overlapping song lyrics with non-verbal recordings frequently manifests itself as a form of protest against censorship. The
song “A pesar de você,” ‘in spite of you,’ by Chico Buarque is a well-known example. The lyrics of this song, written in 1970, recreate what could be an argument between a Sonic I and his or her very dominant partner, but what, in the context of Brazil’s military rule, can also be read – and is hard not to read – as a protest against a repressive, dictator-like character in spite of whose oppressing presence beautiful things will not perish. A fragment from the second refrain goes as follows: “A pesar de você / amanhã ha de ser outro dia / inda pago pra ver / o jardim florescer / qual você não queria,” ‘in spite of you / tomorrow has to be another day / I would happily pay / to see the garden flourish / that you didn’t want.’ In the refrain of the song, the Sonic I is accompanied by a choir of voices singing the lyrics with him, but towards the song’s end, the choir starts singing a simple “laialaia” over his words, blurring them. The Sonic I finishes the refrain and, after starting the first lines of another one, joins the “laialaia” instead of articulating more lyrics.

The lyrics to “A pesar de você” give an important clue to the function of this wordless joining of voices, which is different from that of the “laialaia” refrains of popular samba songs, designed to make it easier for spectators to sing along. Although this song is not a samba, it does borrow some of its characteristics, such as the “laialaia” singing and its rhythm. In contrast to most samba songs, however, “A pesar de você” emphasizes the presence of its abundant, poetically and argumentatively elaborate lyrics. In an accusatory tone, the Sonic I addresses the authoritative third person in the following way:

Hoje você é quem manda falou, tá falado, não tem discussão
a minha gente hoje anda falando de lado e olhando pra o chão [...]”
como vai proibir quando o galo insistir em cantar [...]”
cuando chegar o momento esse meu sofrimento vou cobrar com juros,
todo esse amor reprimido, esse grito contido,

Today you who rule say it’s said, there’s no discussion
today my people speak sideways looking at the floor [...]
how are you going to forbid when the rooster insists on crowing [...]
when the moment arrives I will have my suffering paid for with insults, I
this oppressed love, this contained scream
Movement 9 - Testimony and Censorship

este samba no escuro [...] | this samba in the dark [...]  
você vai ter que ver | you will have to see  
a manhã renascer, e esbanjar poesia [...] | the morning reviving and poetry spilling [...]  
como vai abafar | how are you going to drown out  
nosso coro cantar na sua frente? | our choir singing in front of you?

Thus, the Sonic I reveals a strong wish to express himself, which will not be suppressed “in spite of” the will of the addressed “you.” The choir singing over these lyrics is not just a reference to a testimony being drowned out by censorship, but exemplifies the fact of testimony taking place in spite of censorship. The song also shows that what cannot be silenced is not necessarily a semantic message; it can also be a samba, a scream or the crow of a rooster.

In the case of Nascimento’s “Milagre dos peixes,” it is not a choir but the Sonic I who drowns out his own words. He does this by singing vowels over the lyrics that do not harmonize with the vowels of the lyrics. For example, the “o” in the word “dor” of the phrase “A falar dessa dor, a nossa dor,” ‘to speak of this pain, our pain,’ is doubled by an “ei” (as in “beijo”). In vowel harmony diagrams applied to Portuguese pronunciation, the “o” sound is located as a medium opened vowel in the back of the mouth, whereas the “ei” is a closed vowel in the front of the mouth (Quicoli 300). Combining these opposite sounds has the effect of making them drown each other out. This effect becomes significant when the lyrics reach the stanzas that specifically refer to censorship – “They don’t speak of the sea and the fish / nor do they allow to see the girl [...]” – where the Sonic I is “just one more to speak of this pain, our pain.” The first time this pain, or “essa dor,” is mentioned, the overlying vowels shout “ei,” so that the word referring to pain can hardly be distinguished.

As in the above example of the “laialaia” singing in “A pesar de você,” or the “Cálice” performance by Chico Buarque (where the microphones were disconnected by the censors, as described in Movement 8), it is through the performative act of silencing – which can either consist of blocking sound altogether or of drowning it out by an excess of noise – that a sonic account is given of censorship. This can be related to Agamben’s statement that “testimony takes place where [...] the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his
own speech” (1999: 120). Whereas Agamben uses this notion to refer to a surviving but unintelligible non-language capturing the ineffable experience of the speaking subject’s death, Nascimento’s song employs a technological blurring of the witness’s speech that, in the end, testifies to the experience of being censored. Crucially, this testimony cannot be censored because it already performs its own being silenced. In fact, the more it performatively silences or drowns out the words of the lyrics, the more powerful the sonic testimony to censorship will be, because censorship is primarily logocentric.

Before focusing more on the operations through which testimony can either reinforce or subvert censorship, it is important to point out that testimony is not only decentered through sonic interventions that detune spoken language, but that narrative elements may also cannibalize it from the inside. Returning first to “Milagre dos peixes” and its narrative structure, it can be observed that its temporality is circular. The end of the song is also a return to the lyrics at the start but, as explained in relation to the hanging needle in “Los Revolucionarios,” this does not imply a full return to the starting point. In the lyrics of “Milagre dos peixes” there is a slight but significant shift in words when the song returns to its opening. Instead of saying “I see those fish,” which is how the song starts, the Sonic I now sings “I have those fish.” Moreover, the fact that the return to the starting motive (and melody) of the song is introduced with the stanza “I want to be able to say:…” indicates that the song here also enters another narrative level. The lyrics can now be read as an indirect discourse that is being pronounced within the space of the narration and no longer in a space that directly addresses the listener. With the return to the start, the Sonic I of this second narrative layer is focalized through the Sonic I of the first level, indicating that what he is giving an account of through this song is not a first-hand testimony. The testimony that he “wish[es] to be able to say” will always introduce an indirect discourse that quotes the wish of the Sonic I, but that does not confirm itself in a way the expression “I am able to say” would.

While at the first narrative level the Sonic I can only testify to his being censored and his wish to testify, within the second narrative layer the Sonic I’s transition from the perception of something (I see those fish) to its appropriation (I have those fish) suggests that he has closed in on the object he was giving an
account of. He therefore constitutes a narrative space in which he is able to create by ‘speaking real things,’ “falo coisas reais,” instead of attempting to re-create them through testimony. At the same time, he is only capable of attaining this constitutive language by creating a different narrative layer and thus fragmenting the Sonic I’s voice. It is within the second narrative layer that speech becomes constitutive as it creates another discursive system with different rules. At the first level, the Sonic I has to comply to the rules of a discourse that is only capable of giving testimony to what he sees and experiences within the narration in an extra-narrative realm. It is in this external space that images are being shown on the one-dimensional “screens” of a “genious television,” whereas the Sonic I is submerged “heart first” in a “silent nature” consisting of images that are virtually absent in the external world: “they don’t speak of the sea and the fish” and “they do not allow to see.”

In the previous Movement, testimony was already presented as a concept that inhabits an in-between realm between what can and cannot be attained through language by the witness, and that therefore cannibalizes itself from the inside in the same way as hegemony does. Derrida, in *Demeure: Fiction and Testimony*, explains how testimony “claims to testify in truth to the truth for the truth” yet nonetheless “always goes hand in hand with at least the possibility of fiction, perjury, and lie” (2000: 27, emphasis in text). His book consists of an intense close reading of Maurice Blanchot’s short story “The Instant of My Death,” an autobiographical narration that recounts Blanchot’s last-minute liberation from a firing squad in the Second World War. For the author, it felt as if he had died although his death did not in fact take place. This event allowed him to pronounce the ultimately impossible testimony of “I died.” Derrida takes this confluence of two contrasting realities (the one in which Blanchot died and the one in which he lived) as the basis for the concept of testimony, which is necessarily an impossible account because it implies a survivor who narrates his own death – or, vice versa, the dead author who nonetheless recounts the story of his survival. The contraction between fact and fiction, truth and lie, within testimony is thus presented by the most radical example of an impossible testimony: a testimony to one’s own death. According to Derrida, because this death has just as much taken place as it is forever in suspension, and because the testimony that testifies to it is both fact
and fiction, the instant of death to which the witness is testifying is always kept in abeyance (2000: 101).

Derrida reaches this conclusion by stressing the importance of “the instant” for juridically legitimized testimony to be made possible:

To testify is always [...] to do it at present – the witness must be present at the stand himself without technical interposition. [...] One must [...] raise one’s hand, speak in the first person and in the present, and one must do this in order to testify to a present, to an indivisible moment. [...] If that to which I testify is divisible, if the moment in which I testify is divisible, if my attestation is divisible [...] it is no longer reliable. (2000: 32-3)

Nonetheless, the indivisible character of the testimony, its witness and the moment of its enunciation, necessary to make the testimony reliable, is subverted by the very conditions under which testimony takes place. This is because testimony always implies a temporal lapse between the instant of attestation and the instant the testimony refers to, but also because the act of spoken testimony always spills over from the actual instant:

Ocular, auditory, tactile, any sensory perception of the witness must be an experience. As such, a constituting synthesis entails time and thus does not limit itself to the instant. [...] The instant one gives testimony, there must also be a temporal sequence – sentences, for example – and, above all, these sentences must promise their own repetition and thus their own quasi-technical reproducibility. [...] But this repetition carries the instant outside of itself. (Derrida 2000: 33, my emphasis)

In both “Los Revolucionarios” and “Milagre dos peixes,” it is precisely the narrative play with repetition that disables a centered discourse. Thus, the movement in circles that, in “Los Revolucionarios,” represents daily life for the Sonic I is directly related to a nightmarish, never-ending journey between two shores that represent her experience of fragmentation. Also, the fact that “Revolution” in this song has become something that is repeated on a day-to-day basis fragments it in
such a way that it can even signify its opposite: a never-ending tedious routine, expressed through the imitation of a hanging needle: “revolú-revolú.” In “Milagre dos peixes,” the return to the start of the song is accompanied by a slight shift in meaning and by the fragmentation of the Sonic I, who focalizes a second narrator’s voice in another narrative layer. In relation to Derrida’s reference to the effect of repetition on the witness’s discourse, both songs let repetition cause the space of enunciation, the central narrative argument or the narrator’s voice, to be “carried outside of itself.”

But it is not only within the narrative that testimony is subverted in these songs. On the enunciative level, too, where the act of narrating the song’s lyrics can be perceived as testimony, technological ways of creating repetitions enlarge the effect of “quasi-technical reproducibility” that Derrida refers to. Their application is even more radical, as they not only “carry the instant outside of itself” but create different overlapping layers of such instants, either by using interrupting answering-machine messages, as in “Los Revolucionarios,” or by having a voice drowned out by its own duplicate, as in “Milagre dos peixes.” As Derrida specifies above, “the witness must be present at the stand himself without technical interposition,” yet in the songs analyzed, it is precisely technological intervention that allows a testimony to experiences of dispersion and censorship to emerge. The affectively diasporic Sonic I in “Los Revolucionarios” enunciates both from Cuba and from the outside diasporic territory when she speaks in the name of “Cubans of all countries.” Likewise, the double track of the Sonic I’s voice in “Milagre dos peixes,” split between semantic discourse and the singing of vowels, allows him to testify both to the colorful world of “the sea and the fish” and to his experience of being censored.

Based on these observations, the conclusion can be drawn that both songs emphasize precisely the elements which, according to Derrida, are counterproductive for producing testimony in a juridical setting. Within this particular form of discourse, the presence of an author, narrator or character would cripple an undivided testimony, whereas in a narrative context the awareness of these different entities actually enhances one’s capacity of expression. Derrida disputes the idea of the undivided subject in juridical discourse in the following way:
No one will dare assume the right, because no one will ever have it, to say that these three I's [of author, narrator and character] are the same [...]. It is a fiction of testimony more than a testimony in which the witness swears to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. (2000: 72, emphasis in text).

He then reiterates his argument about the impossible testimony to an experience of death, which, in the analyses above, I have related to the impossible testimony to the experience of being censored, adding that:

Without the possibility of this fiction, without the spectral virtuality of this simulacrum and as a result of this lie or this fragmentation of the true, no truthful testimony would be possible. (2000: 72, emphasis in text)

The fragmentation of the witness and his or her testimony therefore does not undermine testimony as such, but subverts its juridical legitimization. The question of whether the two songs can produce testimony, then, is dependent on who is listening, and from what perspective. If the listener is willing to perceive the testimony as a narrative, he or she will be more likely to accept that there is a multiplication of voices and narrative layers that can mutually interfere with, interrupt or even drown out one another, but that these interruptions and this layeredness also convey a message and are therefore an integral part of the narrative structure. If the listener, however, is searching for a testimony to affective diaspora or to censorship that can also be applied in court, the songs will not provide it.

Significantly, the juridical requirements of testimony were what laid the foundations for the censorship the cantautores of both songs had to deal with. The fragmented testimony produced through the songs is capable of testifying precisely because censorship, which relies on juridical categories, does not recognize it as such. More importantly, such testimony can also potentially subvert some key principles upon which censorship is built. Therefore, a logical next step in my analysis is a more detailed examination of the way in which censorship operated in the Cuban and Brazilian contexts.
Music and Censorship

Considering that censorship was, to varying degrees, a real condition under which both songs were written, recorded and performed, the cantautores could not produce a clearly articulated social critique, as that would have led to political persecution. In the Cuban and Brazilian contexts I am analyzing, it was not impossible to testify because of a limit experience of life and death, but because of the limitations imposed on the use of language by censorship. Testifying to the taboo subject of diaspora was, then, not a question of being situated between an inside and an outside of language as such, but of being suspended between the alienated experience of the homeland and the presence of a hegemonic, nationalist discourse. When testifying to the experience of being censored, the language of the witness is suspended between, on the one hand, what Derrida calls “fiction” and, on the other, the sonic representation of a drowned-out language. Such an experience is impossible to express within the discursive boundaries that the legal witness has to abide by.

In “What Is Music Censorship?,” the introductory chapter to his book Shoot the Singer, Martin Cloonan poses the question of what exactly music censorship entails. He departs from the basic idea that decisions to prevent musicians from performing made by a specific person or institution constitute censorship, but nuances this definition by stating that contemporary examples not only include political restrictions but also selections made by radio stations on the basis of taste and ethical, moral or religious motivations. Censorship, seen from this perspective, is not only an ideological tool in authoritative societies, but also underlies regulations in supposedly democratic societies where decisions are made about how, when and where musical content dealing with, for example, pornography, drug use or euthanasia may and may not be performed (3-5). As I have emphasized throughout this study, in the contexts of Cuba and Brazil I am looking at, censorship in both the strict and the broader definition occurred.

In post-Revolutionary Cuba, censorship was closely related to the political and educational role that music – and other arts – were assigned. An event that marked an important moment in the definition of Cuba’s cultural politics took place in 1961, when Fidel Castro organized a meeting with a group of what were
referred to as the “intellectuals” of that time. These included theorists such as Roberto Fernandez Retamar and Graziella Pogolotti, but also the marginalized writers José Lezama Lima and Virgilio Piñera (Ramírez 1). The meeting took place at the National Library of Havana and was triggered by a discussion that started after the prohibition of the movie *PM*, directed by Sabá Cabrera Infante. *PM* is an experimental documentary about nocturnal life in the port of Havana, showing marginalized groups drinking, dancing and fighting. The documentary is without commentary and does not take a moralizing stance toward what it exposes to the viewer (Miskulin 83). The two-hour speech by Castro that resulted from the four-day meeting, titled “Palabras a los intelectuales,” was a response to this movie and set out the rules for all artistic production in “Revolutionary Cuba” from that moment on (Ramírez 1).

In his speech, Castro makes jokes about the fact that he has not seen the film in spite of all the attention it has received, and refers to the complaint that the movie has been censored in the following way:

[…there is something that I believe should not be discussed, which is the right established by law to carry out what the Cinematic Institute and the revisionary committee did in this case. Can you even question that right of the government? […] If we reject this right it will mean that the government will not have the right to review movies that will be exhibited to the people. And I think that this is a right that cannot be questioned.]

As he continues, he states the famous words that mark the radicalization of

---

state-controlled censorship in Cuba, but presents it as a specific form of artistic liberty:

[…] su espíritu creador [del artista] tiene […] libertad para expresarse. Es decir, dentro de la Revolución. Esto significa que dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada.

[. . .] the creative spirit [of the artist] has [. . .] the freedom to express itself. That is to say, within the Revolution. This means within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing.

Through his speech, Castro reinforces the notion that the state censors reserve the right to control all cultural production, because of their obligation to protect the Cuban people from being exposed to ideas that distract from the Revolutionary project. Furthermore, he establishes a definition of artistic freedom of expression, which is relative as it can only be legitimized by and within the Revolution. Going a step further than the inside-outside dichotomy that characterizes nationalist discourse, he departs from the radical definition of art being either “within” or “against” the Revolution. That which is not within the Revolution is not simply absent or marginal, nor is it similar to the outside world that borders the outlines of the nation. Instead, all that is not within is necessarily hostile, legitimizing defensive measures from a juridical point of view.

The Cuban Penal Code was updated in 1987, creating “Law 62,” which “defined outlines for social conduct” and “socialist morale” (Gonzáles Monguí 233). This law was in force when all of the songs I have analyzed in this study were written and performed. The guidelines by which censorship of “hostile propaganda” was established can be found under article 103:

**Propaganda Enemiga**

ARTÍCULO 103.1. Incurre en sanción de privación de libertad de uno a ocho años el que:

a) incite contra el orden social, la solidaridad internacional o el Estado socialista, mediante la propaganda oral o escrita o en cualquier otra forma;
b) confeccione, distribuya o posea propaganda del carácter mencionado en el inciso anterior.

2. El que difunda noticias falsas o predicciones maliciosas tendentes a causar alarma o descontento en la población, o desorden público, incurre en sanción de privación de libertad de uno a cuatro años.

3. Si, para la ejecución de los hechos previstos en los apartados anteriores, se utilizan medios de difusión masiva, la sanción es de privación de libertad de diez a quince años.

**Hostile Propaganda**

Article 103.1. Punishable by deprivation of liberty of one to eight years is the person who:

a) incites against social order, international solidarity or the socialist State, using oral, written or any other form of propaganda;

b) assembles, distributes or possesses the aforementioned form of propaganda.

2. The person who distributes untruthful news items or malicious predictions that are prone to cause alarm or discontent in the community or public disorder will be punishable by deprivation of liberty of one to four years.

3. If, for the execution of the described facts in the anterior subsections, media of mass diffusion are used, the punishment will be deprivation of liberty of ten to fifteen years.⁷⁵

Some of the terminology used in article 103.1 draws attention for its susceptibility to broad interpretation, which suggests its broad – if not random – applicability in the execution of the law. As seen above in the quote from Castro, any form of artistic expression that is not “within the Revolution” can be punished.

---

⁷⁵ My translation from Spanish. Although article 103 is published on the official website of the Cuban justice department, www.gacetaoficial.cu, as cited by González Monguí in the study referred to above, this website is, interestingly, unavailable because of a “HTTP 403 Forbidden” error. I have therefore used the citation of this law on the United Nations affiliated CEPAL (Economical Committee for Latin America) website: http://www.cepal.org/oig/doc/cub1987codigopenalley62.pdf
as an “incitement against the socialist State.” Also, the description of “malicious predictions” that “cause discontent” leaves a lot of space for interpretation. Added to this, the punishment’s augmentation in case of the use of mass media under article 103.1.3 is telling, because it confirms the importance that was given to these media in the Revolutionary cultural politics. Especially when taking into account the censorship of music, this article is important because it is through the mass media that music is predominantly distributed.

In Brazil, the formulation of the “Ato Institucional N° 5” or ‘fifth Institutional Act,’ (mostly referred to simply as AI-5) in 1968 was even more radical in the definition of its punishing measures. Apart from the increased killings and disappearances executed by the police and the military from this moment on, it was this Institutional Act through which cultural censorship was tightened (Pereira 12; Napolitano 3). Amongst its articles, AI-5 states:

Art. 10 - Fica suspensa a garantia de habeas corpus, nos casos de crimes políticos, contra a segurança nacional, a ordem econômica e social e a economia popular

Art. 10 The guarantee to habeas corpus will be suspended in the case of political crimes against the national security, the economic and social order, and the popular economy.76

Similar to what we see in the Cuban law, the rather vague descriptions of crimes against “the economic and social order” or the “popular economy” suggest a foundation of arbitrariness upon which these laws can be enforced. The AI-5, by also explicitly suspending habeas corpus, cancels the necessity of motivating an accusation in a court of law, so as not to slow down the process of consolidating a Revolutionary state without internal hostile elements.

The reference to movement in relation to the Revolutionary project is explicitly formulated in the opening considerations of the AI-5, referring back to the AI-2 of 1965. This second Institutional Act declared a state of siege during

---

which, in the name of the Revolution, the military gained significant freedom to define and act against acts of subversion (Pereira 71). As quoted in the AI-5:

[OI] Poder Revolucionário, ao editar o Ato Institucional nº 2, afirmou, categoricamente, que “não se disse que a Revolução foi, mas que é e continuará” e, portanto, o processo revolucionário em desenvolvimento não pode ser detido.

[The] Revolutionary Power, edicting the Institutional Act No 2, affirmed categorically that “it has not been said that the Revolution was, but that it is and that it continues” and hence, the evolving revolutionary process should not be stopped.77

Noteworthy in this passage from the AI-2 is that the guarantee that the Revolution will persist is secured by the speech act that says “it is” and “it continues.” In itself, the performative potential of language stands in close connection to juridical discourse, but the fact that it can be related to the censorship of testimony makes it relevant to this analysis. In the previous section of this Movement, my analysis of “Milagre dos peixes” led to the conclusion that the constitutive power of language in the expression “when I speak real things” was only possible within the narrative realm and belonged to another category than legal testimony. In the Brazilian military legislation, however, the testimony to the existence of the Revolution in the present with the words “it is” and the recognition that it is a process by saying “it continues,” is seen to secure its existence. In this respect, Brazilian law parallels the Cuban legislation, where “malicious predictions” are not only seen as an aberrant testimony – as prolepsis instead of retrospection – but considered capable of producing a future reality in which the Revolution does not continue. From this perspective, the fact that the Sonic I in “Milagre dos peixes” speaks “real things” would be punishable according to Brazilian military law, were it not that this speaking hides behind a second narrative level focalized through another Sonic I, and therefore remains unrecognizable to the law as a

direct challenge to the Revolution.

In “Los Revolucionarios,” testimony is predominantly sonic. Although it is set in a different context than that of military Brazil, its inheritance of Cuban contemporary history also produces a testimony to a continuing Revolution, which can be read in the combination of “day by day, the Revolutionaries” and in the Sonic I’s question of “how much longer?” The song testifies to the Cuban people’s Revolutionary heritage as one of the factors that has made the Revolution “continue” from 1959 until the present of the Sonic I in Telmary’s song. But the Revolutionary reality that this song testifies to is expressed in a monotonous, flat melody, by a cowbell that ticks mechanically like a clock and by the imitation of a hanging needle, all movements that, instead of a forward progression, signify stagnation and boredom. If expressed literally, this testimony could be punishable under Cuban law, but the fact that its insinuations proceed through the sonic construction of the song makes them less palpable for the censors. Also, the exclamation “hasta cuándo” for “how much longer” is interpretable as a question that addresses the persisting hostility amongst Cubans towards different positions in the affectively diasporic situation rather than as a question asking for the end of the Revolution.

Testimony can thus work its way around censorship by staying close to the laws in terms of the basis on which it operates. In a similar fashion to how censorship founds its legitimacy on broadly defined concepts in Cuban and Brazilian law, testimony leaves room for different interpretations of its narrative or sonic discourse in order to attain a relative freedom in what it is capable of expressing. An interpretation of the songs that could point to a punishable fact will not lead to the accusation of the cantautor as responsible for this, because, apart from the fact that his voice is fragmentated into different narrative entities, the interpretation of his sedentary discourse demands a certain complicity of the listener. In “Milagre dos peixes,” for example, the virtual presence of an audience or a listener is performed at the end of the song, where it returns to the melodic structure of the start with only a slight shift in the lyrics. The fact that the lyrics are not finished a second time, while the melody continues with the vocalized vowels, suggests an audience or listeners who already know what is coming and can therefore fill in the blanks – or can decide to do something different. As a
result of this, they become narrators as well, further adding to the fragmentation of the voice that speaks through the song’s lyrics.

The Carrier-Voice

The presence of an audience and the awareness of their role in the interpretation of the song lyrics is a thoroughly politicized characteristic in the Cuban and Brazilian music that is the focus of my analysis. As discussed above, the involvement of the listener is an important factor in getting a prohibited message across without making it explicit enough for the censors to recognize it as such. But what should also be kept in mind is that the environment of state-controlled cultural politics, both in Cuba and Brazil, initially stimulated a younger generation of musicians to write music that was politically engaged and that searched for an articulation, through music, of a national identity that coincided with the image the authorities wished to create. In Cuba, artistic expressions were supposed to support the Revolutionary project of educating the people, as can be deduced from the above quotes from Fidel Castro’s speech. In order to foment a Revolutionary political awareness through music, cantautores were given a platform from which they could reach the maximum amount of Cuban people. In Brazil, too, the cultural politics that the military inherited from their left-wing predecessors were combined with a mass-media strategy of creating a Brazilian national identity, partly through music. The younger generations of musicians in both countries, such as the topos generation in Cuba and the Tropicalistas and margináis in Brazil, were thus brought up in a tradition where it was common practice to reflect, through music, on questions of political and cultural identity. It is then not surprising that, over time, they started to use their music as a platform for a more critical and challenging attitude. This eventually led to the marginalization of both the topos and the Tropicalistas, whereas the margináis movement operated from this position of marginality as its foundational premise.

I want to suggest that where musicians from earlier generations of musicians served as a portavoz or “spokespersons” for the authorities’ national and cultural identity discourses. Instead of the term spokesperson, however, I wish to
introduce the concept of carrier-voice as a more literal translation of portavoz: the younger musicians became carrier-voices of their generation and of marginalized groups. Assigning them the role of carrier-voice emphasizes the function of the voice in this process, where the voice speaks from – or on behalf of – multiple subjects. In “Los Revolucionarios,” the Sonic I speaks in name of “Cubans of all countries” and includes herself in this group by saying, for example, “we have to fight for the promise of that day.” In “Milagre dos peixes” the Sonic I literally says: “I am just one more, one more / to speak of this pain, our pain.”

However, the Sonic I is not simply one more voice that cannot be distinguished from the rest. In “Los Revolucionarios” the voice of the cantautor echoes through the words of the Sonic I when she states “don’t ask me that […] I stay here and shut up,” which, in Movement 7, I connected to Telmary’s own decision to move to Canada. But her status as a musician is also what makes her words heard in Cuba, which is something she does not want to give up. Nonetheless, censorship does not allow her to speak up there. Similarly, in “Milagre dos peixes,” although the Sonic I says he is “just one more” to express his pain, his capacity to create a narrative in which he can “speak real things” is related to his creative work as a cantautor. From this position, he is able to say “I have those fish / and I give from the heart,” converting the biblical story of Jesus multiplying the fish to feed his followers into a metaphor for the way in which the cantautor can share his capacity of speech with others who cannot “speak of the sea and the fish.” He, “who love[s] his friends,” wishes to be able to say “I have those fish” so that he can speak for these friends. Nonetheless, the fact that he “wishes” for this suggests that he has not yet accomplished it, because censorship does not allow him to be “free.”

The idea of the witness giving testimony in the name of those who cannot speak resonates with Agamben’s theory. In reference to one of Primo Levi’s story’s about Hurbinek, a little boy who survived the death-camp in which he was born and who only spoke through “inarticulate sounds” (Agamben 1999: 37), Agamben concludes the following about testimony to the holocaust experience:

What cannot be stated, what cannot be archived is the language in which the author succeeds in bearing witness to his incapacity to speak. In this
language, a language that survives the subjects who spoke it coincides with a speaker who remains beyond it. This is the language of the “dark shadows” that Levi heard growing in Celan’s poetry, like a “background noise”; this is Hurbinek’s non-language (mass-klo, matisklo) that has no place in the libraries of what has been said or in the archive of statements [...] so the complete witness, according to Levi’s paradox, is the one we cannot see, the Muselmann. (1999: 161-62)

In Agamben’s analysis a non-language transcends the subject in order to speak in his or her name for the ineffable experience of the holocaust, while the Sonic I’s in “Los Revolucionarios” and “Milagre dos peixes” recreate this incapacity to speak, which is externally imposed by censorship, through a non-language that also makes the speaking subject less visible.

The complex narrative structures that blur the songs’ central messages and the sonic ways of drowning out the Sonic I’s language do not have to be sought on the abstract level of what Agamben calls a discourse that survives its speaker, but appear as forms of expression that provide censored and marginalized subjects with a language to testify, obliquely, to their experiences. This testimony can be related to the experience of being situated in a hegemonic system where the marginalized musician speaks from a position that is not a clearly recognizable inside or outside space of legitimized discourse, but it can also refer to the affectively diasporic experience in which the subject’s space of enunciation is endlessly shifting between the inside and the outside of the homeland. Consequently, the language that can be resorted to in order to testify is just as multiple and diffuse as the diasporic, marginal subject. This language, which speaks from a simultaneity of different narrative layers and through a confluence of voices, can be considered strabistic, to refer back to the concept I introduced in Movement 6. It is a language that, like strabistic vision, registers and represents two overlapping yet slightly different perspectives in a single – visual, auditive or expressive – frame.

There is an important difference between Agamben’s evocation of Hurbinek as the sole survivor of an ineffable experience and the way I represent the cantautores of the analyzed songs. Hurbinek, for Agamben, “speaks” in the name of an absence, from the unfathomable silence of millions of voices that
have been drowned out forever. In contrast, the cantautores in the analyzed songs, through the voice of the Sonic I in each narration, speak in the name of those who are omnipresent. In Agamben, both the invisible Muselmann and the speechless survivor are dealing with an experience that paralyzes speech. In my analyses, the cantautores as marginalized or affectively diasporic subjects recur to a non-language which makes possible another form of speech that cannot be censored. As the Sonic I of “Milagre dos peixes” expresses it: “I have in me all the colors / when I speak real things / […] in the silence of this nature.” His language is strabistic and testifies to the multiplicity of voices that drown each other out. It testifies to the combination of all the colors that makes a neutral white and it also testifies to a silence that, although it recalls the “background noise” Levi refers to, was born instead from an excess of sound.

To conclude this Movement, I return to the final fragment of “Los Revolucionarios,” the Sonic I’s chant to Obatalá that can be heard as a fading echo when the music stops and only some sparse percussion carries on. The role of the singer or dancer who, in the Nigerian Santería and Candomblé religions in Cuba and Brazil, invokes the orishas is to function as a medium between the world of the spirits and the audience present at the ritual. This is similar to the way the carrier-voice function of Cuban and Brazilian musicians within the Revolutionary project and, later on, from the fringes of society, acts as a medium between two worlds. Benítez-Rojo explains how this intermediary is not simply the owner of a message that he or she conveys to the audience, either through a religious chant or through this example of a dance to the deity Changó:

When the individual dances Changó and incorporates him through the spell of the dance within the group of participants, he places himself in the position of “reader,” of “what is being read” and of “the act of reading” in the invocation of Changó. (176)

First of all, this passage refers to a practice in which the deity is incorporated in the group of listeners through the physical intermediation of the dancer. If

---

78 My translation from the Spanish: “Así, al individuo bailar Changó e incorporarlo a través del trance danzario al grupo de participantes, toma la posición de “lector”, de “leído” y de “lectura” en lo que toca a Changó” (176).
the chant to Obatalá in the final fragment of “Los Revolucionarios” is approached from a similar perspective, but placed in the context of testimony, then the Sonic I does not convey a literal message, but establishes a sonic way of becoming witness, becoming what is being witnessed and becoming the act of witnessing at the same time. With her invocation of the deity who, as discussed in Movement 6, lives both on earth and in the sky, and is both man and woman, the Sonic I is trying to create a space where it would be possible to enunciate a multiple testimony from both the inside and the outside of the homeland; from both the inside and the outside of hegemonic discourse; and both interior and exterior to the language that is legitimized by the censors.

It is at this point that the discourse of the Sonic I of “Los Revolucionarios” becomes merely sonic, appearing as unintelligible speech, without mechanical interference. The final fragment does not give the impression of an involuntary impossibility of speech, as is the case with the examples of impossible testimony Agamben gives, but seems to be a deliberate performance of testimony, a fiction of testimony as Derrida calls it, this time situated on the sonic rather than the semantic level. What it performs is the idea of the voice that remains when there is no longer a single, centered subject behind it who uses speech semantically. In the terms of my analysis, the voice performs the strabistic speech of the fragmented Sonic I whose affectively diasporic experience can only be expressed on the in-between of the homeland and its outside space. Instead of being a carrier-voice that speaks in the name of either the Revolutionary discourse (bounded by the limits of censorship) or the marginal subject (potentially silenced by censorship), the performance of strabistic language by this carrier-voice expresses the wish to make itself independent from the limiting bodies it is supposed to carry.

But this strabistic speech is, as stated above, a performance. The affectively diasporic subject may experience difficulties in expressing him- or herself within a certain limited discourse that is not capable of rendering testimony to the experience of dispersal, but he or she is not truly silenced in the way the exterminated death-camp prisoners and its survivors were. The strabistic language used by Telmary encompasses both the possibility of a non-language and the possibility of speech.

Derrida refers to the testimony of this simultaneously virtual and factual
reality in relation to the impossible confrontation with death:

Perhaps it is the encounter of death, which is only ever an imminence, only ever an instance, only ever a suspension, an anticipation, the encounter of death as anticipation with death itself, with a death that has already arrived according to the inescapable: an encounter between what is going to arrive and what has already arrived. [...] What has arrived has arrived insofar as it announces itself as what must inescapably arrive. Death has just come from the instant it is going to come. [...] What can an unexperienced feeling signify? How would one experience it? (2000: 65)

From this perspective, an experience that is always in abeyance, like death, is experienced in an impossible way from the moment that it is “announced,” from the moment it is testified to in advance, as a prolepsis. What is impossible, then, is either the experience or the language that testifies to it, and it is this impossibility that Telmary performs through the unintelligible sounds at the end of “Los Revolucionarios.” But if her language is understood not in terms of an impossible intent to testify to an impossible experience through semantic language, but rather as a sonic performance of a simultaneous becoming witness, becoming what is being witnessed and becoming the act of witnessing, as suggested above, then the impossibility and the possibility of speech or experience become equally possible. The performance of strabistic speech requires no preference for one perspective over the other; both are equally present and possible. The affectively diasporic subject is just as alienated from the homeland as he or she belongs to it. The language of the silenced witness, then, is both attainable and unattainable. The performance of strabistic language is a performance of the witnessing to this fact. In that way, it represents also a strabistic way of reading or a strabistic way of listening that does not censor its fragmented, detuned content.
Fermata

Throughout this final Part the difficulties of expressing oneself in a context of *affective diaspora* and censorship have been the focal point. In my analyses of the songs “Los Revolucionarios” by Telmary and “Milagre dos peixes” by Nascimento, semantic language proved incapable of testifying to the experiences of the Sonic I’s, leading the *cantautores* to turn instead to sonic ways of expression. Through the technological multiplication of the Sonic I’s recorded voice in different overlapping layers and through an experimental use of the voice, the sonic dimension of the two songs manages to give expression to, respectively, an experience of fragmentation and an incapacity to speak freely without being censored.

In Movement 7, I argued that the Sonic I of “Los Revolucionarios” speaks from the perspective of a Cuban and a Revolutionary while reflecting on the unnecessary hatreds between Cubans in different countries, who remain connected by a shared experience of being a Revolutionary. At the same time, the Revolution is depicted in this song as a repetitive, tedious day-to-day routine that has come to signify its own opposite. Both representations of Cuban and Revolutionary identity are thus fragmented, either by geographical dispersion or because of the contradictions that the idea of Revolution entails. The fragmentation of the Sonic I’s testimony is underlined by the use of recording techniques that multiply her voice. Layering these recordings so that they overlap or interrupt each other, however, also creates a difficulty when it comes to understanding what the Sonic I is saying. Her testimony, therefore, becomes sonic instead of semantically coherent and centered.

Movement 8 focuses on the song “Milagre dos peixes” on Nascimento’s eponymous album, where the sonic use of the voice is presented as a way of testifying to the experience of being censored. Testimony is presented as a form of discourse through which the witness testifies to its own incapacity of speech. At the same time, on its second narrative level, the song also suggests the ability to speak as that which gives the Sonic I the potential to create an alternative reality. This narrative potential of testimony, which also creates the possibility
of fiction and which subverts the juridical, legitimized function of testimony, is presented in Movement 9 as effecting not only a subversion of the mechanisms of censorship, but as also creating a sonic or strabistic language that stimulates other ways of reading or listening. By focusing on the characteristics of testimony and its interactions with censorship in Cuba and Brazil during the period in which the songs were written and performed, I direct attention to the function of the voice of the cantautor as not only speaking through a narrative Sonic I, but as a vehicle that allows a speaking in the name of a larger group of people. This function of the carrier-voice, which can either be a vehicle of state propaganda or a way of representing marginalized groups, causes it to be censored. Testimony, from this point of view, refers to the way in which the cantautor searches for a way to use the voice to speak from a multiplicity of discourses in order to perform a type of sonic, strabistic language situated neither fully within nor fully outside the hegemonic system but on its edge.

There is a circular movement inscribed in the act of giving testimony. The subject who testifies to his or her own situation will inevitably end up speaking either in the name of a legitimized, dominant discourse, or in the name of those who are incapable of testifying. At the same time, speaking in the name of a larger totality will always encounter the physical limitations of the listener’s ear or of the speaker’s voice, both of which do not necessarily have the capacity to speak or to listen strabistically within a linguistic, semantic framework. This suggestion echoes the reference made to Stuart Hall’s work in Movement 1, where the diasporic return to the supposedly original homeland inevitably led back to the diasporic space where the image of the imaginary homeland was initially born. The imagining of the homeland by the affectively diasporic subject will inevitably be tied to the consciousness of being separated from it, which will always make the image multiple; a space that is both inside and outside, like the Möbius strip. At the same time, the act of imagining is always censored by the image of the homeland, which means that the affectively diasporic subject can only speak strabistically of his or her experience of fragmentation through the act, the performance, of imagining. Because creating a new image of a supposed affectively diasporic homeland will inevitably be expressed or perceived as either a re-appropriation or a loss of the original homeland.
Translating these observations about the affectively diasporic subject to the censored witness, the strabistic language of the Sonic I of Telmary’s “Los Revolucionarios” is only capable of re-creating the fragmented, dispersed experience of being Cuban and being a Revolutionary by having technological interventions multiply her voice or by performing, in the final fragment of the song, an unintelligible form of language. At the same time, if the strabistic language of the Sonic I in Nascimento’s “Milagre dos peixes” testifies to the fact of being censored, it cannot be read or understood without also being censored in a certain way. Just like the affectively diasporic homeland that can only exist through an act of imagining that consists of a constant transgression of the limit between an inside and an outside realm without being defined by either, the testimony of the affectively diasporic subject in a context of censorship can only take place in – and can only be read through – the process of its performance: its simultaneous becoming witness, becoming what is being witnessed and becoming the act of witnessing.