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Performing the Intermedial across Brazilian Cinema

Editorial

Tamara Courage and Albert Elduque



Figure 1: ***Passages: Travelling in and out of Film through Brazilian Geography*** **(Lúcia Nagib and Samuel Paiva, University of Reading, 2019). Screenshot.**

Since the beginning, it has always been the song. Among the different arts that developed in Brazil during the twentieth century, music (particularly popular song) has been a dominant and reputable force within the country and internationally. In the introduction to his book *O século da canção* (*The Century of Song*), music academic Luiz Tatit highlights the importance of the whole social spectrum in the shaping of Brazilian popular song, the global prestige it gained despite the lack of a Portuguese language influence on the international scene, and its overwhelming heterogeneity, which inhibits definitions and classifications (11–2). Since colonial times, song has been the expression of the cultural formation of Brazil, made up of a mixture of indigenous, Iberian and African rhythms, as well as their hybridisation with foreign genres such as jazz and rock. From Bossa Nova to *baião*, Tropicália and Manguebeat, songs have expressed the ethnic, social and political contradictions of the country, they have

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accompanied the lives of Brazilians of every social class, and have even shaped Brazil's image for people abroad.

Song's importance has influenced other arts produced in the country, including cinema. In the introduction to the collection *Nas trilhas do cinema brasileiro* (*On the Tracks of Brazilian Cinema*), Rafael de Luna Freire suggests that:

> Maybe the strongest feature of what we generally (and in a rather carefree way) call Brazilian cinema might lie in the multiplicity of what we "hear" rather than in what we "see" on the screen. After all, it is always important to highlight the appeal to national music at the most varied moments and circumstances in the history of Brazilian cinema, with a wide range of different objectives (popular identification, commercial viability, political projects, aesthetic affinity, etc.). (10; our trans.)

Indeed, the presence of Brazilian popular song on the national screens has been one of its most defining trends through the decades. Music was an important theme in countless musical comedies and *chanchadas* in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, including *Alô, alô Carnaval!* (*Hello, Hello, Carnival!*, Adhemar Gonzaga, 1936), *Aviso aos navegantes* (*Calling All Sailors*, Watson Macedo, 1950), *Carnaval Atlântida* (*Atlântida Carnival*, José Carlos Burle and Carlos Manga, 1952) and *De vento em popa* (*It's Full Steam Ahead*, Carlos Manga, 1957), which dealt with the vicissitudes experienced by artists and performance companies and included many musical numbers. In the mid-1950s, some cinema trends that evoked Italian Neorealism appeared in the country, including a realist movement in Rio de Janeiro and the Bahia New Wave, which eventually led to the politically engaged Cinema Novo in the early 1960s. Championed by filmmakers such as Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Glauber Rocha and Leon Hirszman, these movements distanced themselves from the Carnival-inspired celebratory *chanchadas* and instead considered the political significance of Brazilian popular music traditions both in feature films and in documentaries.

Produced as part of the realist movement in Rio de Janeiro, Nelson Pereira dos Santos's film *Rio, Zona Norte* (*Rio, Northern Zone*, 1957) is a clear example of its political commitment because it merged harsh social criticism with a sensibility for daily life in an effort to shed light on unscrupulous yet common business practices in Brazilian popular music. The narrative involves Espírito da Luz (Spirit of Light), played by Grande Otelo, a black samba composer from the slums who is cheated by a smart, middle-class agent who forces him to renounce the authorship of his song as a condition for receiving payment. At the time, Grande Otelo was a well-known actor and singer from *chanchadas*, and his character was inspired by a real samba singer and composer, Zé Kéti, who had already contributed to Nelson's debut movie *Rio 40 graus* (*Rio, 40 Degrees*, 1955) as an actor, a member of the crew and with his successful song "A voz do morro" ("The Voice from the Slums"). Espírito da Luz is, therefore, a character that falls somewhere in between the old *chanchadas* (Grande Otelo) and the real world of samba (Zé Kéti), and his cinematic name becomes synonymous with the fleeting nature of both popular song and the moving images on the screen.

Zé Kéti was by no means the only artist from the popular song industry who also worked in film productions. From Vicente Celestino to Gilberto Gil, from Milton Nascimento to Chico Science, many composers, musicians and singers have contributed to filmmaking and these professional bonds constitute an enduring feature of the relationship between Brazilian cinema and popular songs throughout the twentieth century. Some artists even appeared on screen in cameo performances, such as *baião* legend Luiz Gonzaga in *Hoje o galo sou eu* (*Today I Am*

the Rooster, Aloisio T. de Carvalho, 1958) and samba singer Riachão in a *A grande feira* (*The Great Fair*, Roberto Pires, 1961), not to mention those who became film icons on their own account, like Carmen Miranda. Caetano Veloso may be the most complex and prolific example in this regard: he worked as a film critic, composed soundtracks, wrote songs about cinema, was an actor in films directed by Júlio Bressane and Carlos Diegues, among others, directed the experimental film *O cinema falado* (*Cinema Falado*, 1986) and his songs have been used in numerous films.[1] Throughout the decades, these collaborations have continued, with remarkable episodes such as the relationship between Árido Movie and Manguebeat in the cinema in Pernambuco during the 1990s.

In his blistering essay on the film soundtrack in Brazil, critic João Máximo stresses the overwhelming presence of pre-existing songs in national cinema and is critical of their prevalence over original themes. He establishes a difference between popular artists who composed soundtracks, such as Tom Jobim for Paulo César Saraceni's *Porto das Caixas* (1962) and *A casa assassinada* (*The Murdered House*, 1971), and those who simply provided songs for others to arrange, like Zé Kéti in *Rio 40 graus* and *Rio, Zona Norte*, Milton Nascimento in *Os deuses e os mortos* (*Of Gods and the Undead*, Ruy Guerra, 1970) and Jorge Ben in *Xica da Silva* (Carlos Diegues, 1976). Overall, his critique distinguishes composers and arrangers from popular singers and suggests that cinema through the years has sold its soul to commercial success with its inclusion of big music soundtrack hits (117–58).[2] Despite an impassioned argument, Máximo's criteria undermines the value of pre-existing songs, as well as the fascinating conflicts that often arise between different media within a film. His conception of the film as a singular entity, with a particular syntax into which the composed music should fit, doesn't allow room for the contamination of cinema with other languages. Or rather, Máximo is diametrically opposed to the kind of blending that intermediality stands for.

Intermediality as a theoretical and methodological perspective champions impurity. Overall, it is concerned with the interaction, contamination, and mixture between different media, breaking down existing barriers that currently exclude hybrid forms of artistic expression, which also inevitably exposes the limits of media specificity. Hybrid forms such as tableau vivant, sound art, the use of screens within a theatre play and multimedia installations are acknowledged as intermedia phenomena. Others, such as opera and comic books, are languages that mix different forms of expression in an intermedial way, even if we perceive them as distinctive media forms. Cinema belongs to this last group because it originated within a space that brought together literature, popular theatre, dancing, music, painting, sculpture and even architecture, both for the design of the shot and to encapsulate the global experience for the spectator. As discussed by Ágnes Pethő:

> the mediality of cinema is always "constructed" of intermedial relations, interactions, of media reflecting, rewriting each other on the screen. These media involved in intricate interplays are however, most of the times, not registered in the spectator as distinctive constituents, but are integrated in the general "universe" that we perceive in a film. (64)

For her, the cinematic medium only reveals itself with reflexive techniques, when it is "placed as if 'en abyme,' as medium within the medium" (65).

Musical performance constitutes a privileged space of its own to reflect on intermediality. It brings in not only music, but a mixture which may include literature, theatre, dancing and even painting and architecture, if we consider the visual design of the stage. Music

performance calls for all these artistic practices and articulates them. Then, when it is filmed by a camera and recorded with microphones to be exhibited on a screen, new layers of meaning are added: the ways in which a musical performance is filmed and edited can introduce radical changes in its features, as well as provide the spectator with images of the audience, achieving a more complete picture of the ways in which the performance develops in time and space, and constitutes a communication act between an artist and the public.

Intermediality is therefore a suitable perspective to think about performance. In addition, this relationship works the other way round, because performance as a concept is really attuned to the notion of intermediality. Two key thinkers in intermedial studies, Ágnes Pethő and Irina Rajewsky have highlighted the polysemy of the concept of intermediality as well as the variety of perspectives from which it can be approached. Pethő highlights the "performative, active aspect of intermediality" and argues that "[i]ntermediality is seen, more often than not, as something that actively 'does,' 'performs' something, and not merely 'is'" (42). Rajewsky highlights that intermediality can be understood as medial transposition, media combination and intermedial references, and includes some performance works throughout her analysis. Intermediality, then, is not something to be created, but something to be performed, something that develops in time, like theatre, music and cinema. For this reason, we cannot talk of intermediality as a stable quality or a goal to be achieved. Instead, we should approach it as a performance: at a specific place, at a specific moment in which an interaction between different media is produced. Within this experimental space, all kinds of crosspollination can occur: a medium interacts with, imitates, encloses, approaches, or discusses another medium. The intermedial is not created; rather, it is performed.

Performing the intermedial is therefore a way to approach films themselves by focusing on specific sequences, but also when considering an encompassing media environment in which one specific media is connected with procedures and even commercial rules from a larger media landscape and artistic scene. Film industry is not impervious to radio, television, theatre, visual arts, videogames, or the Internet, including new media. For this reason, performing the intermedial provides a platform to define and research a specific intermedial process within a work of art. Intermediality thus provides us with a new perspective on film that is not delimited by a singular focus, to explore the ways in which research is conducted in academia: not only considering the film text, but also paintings, novels, songs, music albums and theatre plays.

This *Alphaville* issue is concerned with the performance of the intermedial in Brazilian cinema through music. It is an output of the project "Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method" (IntermIdia Project), a shared endeavour by the University of Reading and the Federal University of São Carlos which was developed between 2015 and 2019, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the UK and the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) in Brazil.[3] The project explored the ways in which Brazilian cinema has consistently made connections with other media at specific historical moments. It included research on silent film prologues, *chanchadas*, the impact of Tropicália visual arts in cinema, and recent music documentaries, among other topics. It involved the conferences "Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema" (São Carlos, November 2016) and "The Moving Form of Film: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method" (Reading, November 2017) and three impact events: the season "Tropicália and Beyond: Dialogues in Brazilian Film History" at London's Tate Modern (November 2017), the season and course "Contemporary Brazilian Music Film Season" held at Reading Film Theatre (January–March 2018) and the restaging of Brazilian

film prologues from the 1920s at the Museum of Image and Sound in São Paulo (June 2018) and at the University of Reading (December 2018). It also included the production of the film *Passages: Travelling in and out of Film through Brazilian Geography*, which screened internationally in 2019 at the Rotterdam Film Festival and the São Paulo International Film Festival, as well as a wide range of publications, including two edited collections and the dossier "Intermediality in Brazilian Cinema" for the film journal *Screen*.

"Performing the Intermedial across Brazilian Cinema" brings together articles on the intermedial dimension of Brazilian cinema explored through music performances. These articles are organised chronologically, although we do not aim to draft a linear, evolutionary paradigm. Instead, the chronological format has been chosen to provide clarity for those readers who are not familiar with Brazilian cinema, although the issue can be accessed at any given point and read from all directions. In the first article, "Building an Integrated History of Musical Numbers in Brazilian *Chanchadas*", Flávia Cesarino Costa examines the intermedial connections between Brazilian cinema and other arts in the specific case of *chanchadas*, which were musical comedies from the 1930s, 40s and 50s. By conducting extensive research on archival sources, she unveils a whole set of relationships between *teatro de revista*, radio, recording industry, Carnival and cinema, which allowed commercial bonds and facilitated the circulation of specific professionals across different media. Cesarino Costa presents a cartography of that situation and explains that the aesthetic results of such connections can be analysed within musical numbers. For this reason, she highlights two performances from the film *Tudo azul* (*It's All Right*, Moacyr Fenelon, 1951), that originated outside the film and featured important artists from other media (radio and popular theatre). Her aim is to displace cinema from being the exclusive object of focus and to contribute to Charles Musser's criticism of a "cinema-centric position", which he aims to counteract with an integrated history of stage and screen (3).

Cesarino Costa's article presents two possible perspectives to study intermediality in film: the effects of other media on the film itself and the displacement of cinema as the central reflection point in film studies, in an attempt to consider it as part of a wider medial and artistic landscape. These two perspectives are further explored in the next two pieces of the dossier. The first is the video essay "*Chanchadas* and Intermediality: On the Musical Numbers of *Aviso aos navegantes* (Watson Macedo, 1950)", coauthored by Cesarino Costa and John Gibbs, in which *chanchadas* and their connections with other media are again the topic of focus, but now employing editing tools to facilitate a close audiovisual reading. By focusing on the film *Aviso aos navegantes*, Cesarino Costa and Gibbs explore the ways in which intermedial interferences in *chanchadas* are never effaced. This method clashes with Hollywood cinema, in which both the technical procedures and the displacement that intermedial connections make visible are always concealed by an intended sense of spontaneity. On the contrary, in Brazilian *chanchadas* these connections are always obvious, and the video essay points them out in a fluid narration paralleled by scenes from the film and the production history that lies behind the images.

The second perspective for the study of filmic intermediality, displacing cinema as the central object of reflection, is brought to a new level by Suzana Reck Miranda's "Background Musicians and Their (In)Visibilities". She also studies the connections between Brazilian music and cinema from the 1930s, 40s and 50s, but shifts her focus to background musicians who used to perform in films but also in radio, popular theatre and casinos. Some of these musicians availed of opportunities to work as background musicians in Hollywood musicals, which made them famous in their home country regardless of their expertise or achievements:

featuring in a Hollywood film was enough to enhance their star status in Brazilian film magazines, even if their agency in Hollywood films was residual. Reck Miranda's article focuses on three of these musicians (Russo do Pandeiro, Russinho and Gringo do Pandeiro) and follows their trajectories from Rio de Janeiro's casinos to nightclubs across the USA and musical films produced in Hollywood and in Mexico. Her research is intermedial in the sense that it is placed in between different media, which allows her to unveil a complex international circulation of these professionals with revealing political undertones concerning nationality and race, and to explore the constitution of what she coins "a secondary star system" in Brazilian film culture. The result is an original portrait of the representation of Brazilian music and musicians in Hollywood during the Good Neighbor Policy.

Bringing the "Other" and his/her music to the screen was something that was commonplace of Hollywood's attitude toward Latino artists during these years, but it also lies at the core of the cinematic representation of Brazilian music as a whole. Brazilian music traditions result from harsh historical episodes including colonisation, migration and slavery, and so the representation of such traditions often entails debates surrounding identity, class and race. Realist waves and Cinema Novo in the 1950s, 60s and 70s vindicated the importance of the samba singer-songwriter from the slums, and aimed both to highlight the social relevance of samba as a community practice and to denounce its commodification by the music industry. In his article "Documentary Shooting and Samba: Technology and Mediation in Leon Hirszman's *Partido alto*", Albert Elduque explores how *partido-alto*, or a popular variety of samba based on improvisation, is represented in the documentary film *Partido alto* (1976–1982). While Reck Miranda focuses mainly on Brazilian musicians working abroad and how their unique circumstances effected Brazilian film culture, Elduque explores the framing, editing and voice of a film on suburban artists. By doing so, he analyses the influence of improvised music on the film's mise en scène, and the ways in which this influence achieves a political dimension which chimes with the inequalities that lie behind the history of samba.

The presence of the popular musician in a specific film is a topic of interest throughout this *Alphaville* issue, both in feature films and documentaries, and both in popular *chanchadas* from the 1930s, 40s and 50s and in politically engaged documentaries such as *Partido alto*. As the following two articles highlight, this dialogue between music and cinema persists today. Marcela Amaral's "Realistic Intermediality and the Historiography of the Present" focuses on Beto Brant's *O invasor* (*The Trespasser*, 2001), a film produced in São Paulo in which the differences between social strati, as well as their progressive intermingling, are expressed through the use of different music genres. Amaral analyses specific scenes in which music provides a context for its characters and influences the visuals of the film, most notably in a sequence featuring hip-hop singer Sabotage, a nonactor who provides his own music for the film and also produces a documentary effect which Amaral calls a "realism of confrontation". By highlighting an intermedial relationship between film and music, she argues for the emergence of a new kind of realism. Amaral's view of music performance in Brazilian film compels us to examine the contents of other articles in this issue through another lens, such as the aforementioned texts on *chanchadas*, in which the presence of specific radio singers, casino musicians and vaudeville performers also creates a documentary effect in the incorporation of other media to the film.

The relationship between music, cinema and reality is also the main concern of *Passages: Travelling in and out of Film through Brazilian Geography* (Lúcia Nagib and Samuel Paiva, 2019), a recent documentary film produced within the IntermIdia Project following research on films produced in São Paulo and Recife from the mid-1990s onwards.

In his article “Cinema and Its Intermedial Passages to Reality: The Case of the Árido Movie”, Paiva describes the film’s production process by attending to its conceptual underpinnings, which are based on Walter Benjamin’s crucial work *The Arcades Project*. He focuses on some films by Árido Movie, a cinema movement in Recife which had a strong relationship with Manguebeat, a contemporary local music movement which brought together Brazilian traditions and foreign influences. Paiva explores both the circulation of professionals across different media and the intermedial topics which are central to the films’ narratives and aesthetics, most notably in the film *Baile perfumado* (*Perfumed Ball*, Paulo Caldas and Lírio Ferreira, 1996). His article also champions practice as research to make academic production more accessible to a general audience.

Finally, in his text “Vincent Moon in(-between) Brazil: An Aural Approach to Intermediality”, Matheus Araújo de Siqueira returns to the crucial issue of the foreigner’s view of Brazilian music which was central to Reck Miranda’s text. However, for this article Araújo de Siqueira focuses on a different kind of production which is more attuned to contemporary trends and formats: short documentaries by French filmmaker Vincent Moon who devotes part of his series *Petites Planètes* (*Small Planets*, Vincent Moon and Priscilla Telmon, 2009–) to Brazilian singers. Araújo de Siqueira spotlights the intermedial privileging of sound and music that supports the filmmaker’s efforts to experiment with a different visual approach through a prioritisation of the actual experience over a concrete, comprehensible narrative. He examines this method by establishing comparisons with French documentary *Saravah* (Pierre Barouh, 1972) and by using concepts such as Greg Hainge’s “accompaniment”, Gilles Deleuze’s “diagram” and Ágnes Pethő’s “in-betweenness” to stress the predominance of music over image in these films. In this case, intermediality is understood as a methodology which prioritises the process over the final result, a kind of imperfection which was also visible in 1950s *chanchadas* such as *Aviso aos navegantes*, politically charged documentaries like *Partido alto*, and also fiction films about social clashes, for example *O invasor*.

In addition to the articles and the audiovisual essay, this issue also includes both a podcast with the editors and some of the authors (Cesarino Costa, Amaral and Araújo de Siqueira), and four interviews with individuals from disparate backgrounds and professions but who have played a crucial role in the production of and reflection on Brazilian music and its relationship to cinema: singer and songwriter Paulinho da Viola, music scholar Luiz Tatit, film programmer Cristian Pascual and filmmaker Lula Buarque de Hollanda. First, Paulinho da Viola, one of the most important names in the history of samba, provides an account of his contribution to Leon Hirszman’s *Partido alto*, as well as some reflections on the relationship between traditional community practices surrounding Carnival and the media. Second, Professor Luiz Tatit of the University of São Paulo, who specialises in semiotics and musicology, explores the reasons why Brazilian music became crucial for national identity and analyses the ways in which samba, Bossa Nova and Tropicália are considered major movements that help define Brazilian culture. Cristian Pascual, as the general director of the International Music Documentary Film Festival (In-Edit), provides his view as a foreigner who programmes Brazilian music documentaries that are exhibited abroad with films from other countries, and explores the specificities of the Brazilian edition of In-Edit, thereby unveiling issues of identity from a practical and comparative point of view which correlates with Luiz Tatit’s theoretical reflections. Finally, Lula Buarque de Hollanda, a filmmaker who codirected the film *O mistério do samba* (*The Mystery of Samba*, Lula Buarque de Hollanda and Carolina Jabor, 2008), reflects on his work and on the recent wave of Brazilian music documentaries.

Brazil is chosen as a special case for performances of intermediality, although similar experiences can obviously be found in other countries. As the articles and interviews express, these intermedial connections reveal not only a whole set of artistic and aesthetic connections, but also profound questions surrounding identity issues, social class, and race. Even in the most playful examples, intermediality in Brazilian cinema is never performed as a purely aesthetical distraction or pleasure, but as a process which unearths professional dynamics, political stances, social commitments and the heritage of historical processes such as colonialism, migration and slavery. As researchers on the topic of performing the intermedial, we aim to bring to the fore social and political dynamics to better understand Brazilian cinema, but also to rethink the ways in which a commitment with reality can be articulated through the interaction between different media and artistic practices.

Notes

1 For a detailed account of the contributions of Brazilian singers to cinema, see Gavina. Veloso's contributions to cinema are listed in Ramos.

2 For a critical comment on this text, see Maia.

3 We thank the AHRC and FAPESP for their support of the IntermIdia Project.

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Tamara Courage recently completed a postdoc at the University of Reading for the project *Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method*. Here, she expanded on the notion of intermediality in world cinema by investigating how it is used as a strategic tool in contemporary Chinese independent cinema to highlight issues regarding marginalised citizens who have been impacted by major socioeconomic transformations since the death of Communist leader Mao Zedong. Her current research interests examine the filmmaker’s role in imagining and representing realities for the historically peripheral subject through diverse and original modes of interventions that include performance, self-portraits, re-enactment and participatory methods.

Albert Elduque has recently completed a postdoc at the University of Reading, where he was part of the project *Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method*. His PhD dissertation, presented in Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona) in 2014, dealt with the concepts of hunger, consumption and vomit in modern political cinema. His current research is on contemporary Brazilian films on music, focusing on the representation of the musical traditions of the country in recent fictions and documentaries. He is coeditor of the journal *Comparative Cinema*, published by Pompeu Fabra University.