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Documentary Shooting and Samba: Technology and Mediation in Leon Hirszman's *Partido alto*

Albert Elduque

Abstract: *This article addresses the film* Partido alto *(Leon Hirszman, 1976–1982), a Brazilian music documentary that showcases two sessions of* partido-alto*, a traditional, improvisation-based genre. The film highlights a separation between the diegetic music world, which is based on improvisation, and the technical approach to register it. First, it foregrounds the process of recording popular music through the noticeable presence of a microphone that strives to follow each singer's unpredictable interventions. Then, the young professional singer Paulinho da Viola joins in on the performance with nonprofessional singers, working as a mediator between the official music scene and popular traditions. I suggest that, by using cameras and microphones to approximate a popular, nonrecorded form of art, the film raises some crucial issues in the history of samba. In particular, the ways in which cinematic techniques such as the sequence shot and voiceover are employed in the film allows us to reflect on the dichotomy between improvisation and recording, as well as the role of cultural mediators. Paulinho da Viola lies at the centre of these strategies, for he assumes an expert commentator and interviewer role, while also being a participant in the popular community.*

Documenting Samba

In his recent, well-documented book devoted to the origins of samba, historian Lira Neto describes the gradual recognition of this music genre as a national symbol of the Brazilian Republic. Engendered in the suburbs of big cities as the mixture of both African and European music traditions at the end of the nineteenth century, it was first considered a synonym of vagrancy and marginality and its practitioners were prosecuted for immorality. In the 1930s, the cultural policies of Getúlio Vargas's dictatorship enthroned samba as Brazilian national music and official prosecution ended. In practice, however, social inequalities remained intact. Although lyrics were written by marginalised black and mixed-race songwriters from the suburbs, songs were recorded by successful white singers who subsequently became stars. This process of de-Africanisation involved the movement of samba from its suburb origins to popular radio culture intended for the Brazilian masses. For this reason, the history narrated by Neto involves issues of identity, race and social class: "in those comings and goings, along the complicated journey that moved samba away from its condition of marginal genre and turned it into 'the top symbol of Brazilianness', there were also those who came to regret, in different moments, its supposed loss of authenticity—or even to presage its imminent death" (24–5).[1] Then, to paraphrase a well-known song by Nelson Sargento, Neto proceeds with "[s]amba agonises, but it doesn't die. It reinvents itself, orbiting between the ancestral signs of party and agony" (25).

For decades, Brazilian cinema has established a meaningful connection to samba. Early sound comedies played a key role in its dissemination in the 1930s and since then, samba has

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become a recurring topic and a resourceful soundtrack. It has been celebrated in musicals, played in suburban stories, turned into an anthem in engaged films, and repurposed in experimental works. Having a privileged position in many films, it has triggered a wide range of intermedial relationships between cinema and music: lyrics becoming narrative agents, famous singers impersonating themselves, performances interrupting the storyline, and music rhythms defining the film's editing. Since the 1960s, music documentaries have played a significant role here, because they address the complex history of samba and are committed to presenting it as a platform for audiovisual memory. In the 1960s, Cinema Novo filmmakers were especially concerned with the need to record specific singers and practices from the suburbs which were either ignored by the music industry, distorted by market imperatives or endangered by biological aging. Some short films that were produced about old samba artists include *Heitor dos Prazeres* (Antônio Carlos da Fontoura, 1965) and *Conversa de Botequim* (*Bar's Talk*, Luiz Carlos Lacerda, 1970), the latter featuring popular musicians and composers Donga, Pixinguinha and João da Baiana. Five decades later, the filmmaker's aim to record vanishing traditions is still alive today with the wider distribution and acceptance of long music documentaries among big audiences.

In this article, I will analyse a remarkable music documentary focused on suburban samba: *Partido alto* (Leon Hirszman, 1976–1982). Combining statements and performances, the film merges a fleeting joyfulness with an elegiac tone, and in doing so it places itself "between the ancestral signs of party and agony", as Lira Neto would say. Among other things, it brings the production and reproduction conditions of samba to the foreground, and these conditions also determine a film's cinematic approach. Here, the sequence shot and the voiceover play a crucial role, along with the narrative structure which depends on the usual development of a *partido-alto* session, when singers may continuously sing for as long as it takes. Analysing these intermedial relationships will allow me to explore how *Partido alto* reproduces samba; in other words, how it establishes a connection between samba as a popular practice from suburban communities, on the one hand, and the audience of the film, on the other. Throughout the analysis, I will isolate two crucial concepts in this connection, namely the representation of technology and the role of the singer as a mediator, which I will propose as methodological perspectives to approach documentaries on samba in general.

A Shout in the Crowd: *Partido alto* and the Defence of Tradition

Partido alto was produced within the Cinema Novo movement by politically engaged filmmaker Leon Hirszman. Since the late 1950s, Cinema Novo had stood for the legitimation of popular culture and had attempted to marry the films' social and political aims with it, in order to counteract the influential models arriving from Europe and the United States. For filmmakers such as Hirszman, this discourse was moulded by discussions taking place in Popular Culture Centres, which were aligned with the National Students Union and within which prominent intellectuals such as Ferreira Gullar argued for a left-wing cultural programme to unite upper-middle-class intellectuals and lower social strati. Cinema Novo filmmakers, together with Bossa Nova singers, considered samba to be the representation of disengaged voices and promoted the recognition of some suburban songwriters who had been previously marginalised by record labels, such as Cartola and Nelson Cavaquinho. In 1969, Hirszman devoted a homonymous short documentary film to the latter, in which Nelson is shown in his social milieu in the Rio slums, including the streets, the bars and his shabby home; he discusses work and sings some of his creations. Unlike the official songs that made samba

famous in the 1930s, Nelson Cavaquinho's cultural practice was at odds with the music industry and its commodification processes.

Partido alto also aimed to reveal a type of traditional samba that distanced itself from economic success and was rooted to its origins in the shantytown community, and in this case derived from improvisation. According to researcher and composer Nei Lopes, the name "*partido-alto*" designates "a kind of samba sung in the form of a challenge by two or more contestants and which is composed by a coral section (refrain or 'first') and a soloist part with verses which are either improvised or coming from the traditional repertoire, and which can either refer to the refrain's topic or not" (26–7).[2] In 1975, Hirszman presented his project by stating:

> This kind of manifestation of urban, carioca, popular culture, precedes samba, and it has not been much studied or written about. The film we are proposing will foremost aim to recover the popular values which, when expressed in the *partido-alto* by saying, by touching and by dancing, constitute an inexhaustible source of our national memory. ("Partido" 1)

The filmmaker aimed to use direct sound techniques to record and film some traditional *partideiros* (*partido-alto* singers) who were still alive, such as Xangô da Mangueira and Candeia, and trusted experts such as researcher Sérgio Cabral and singer Paulinho da Viola to help him understand the transformations of *partido-alto* and to gain access into Rio de Janeiro's shantytown samba communities.

Partido alto was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and by state-owned film institute Embrafilme (Puccini 287). Equipped with an Eclair 16mm camera (Kodato), the production began in September 1976, and in January 1978 Hirszman wrote to Embrafilme requesting further funding to extend the duration of the short film. By this point, only two parts had been recorded: the filming at Candeia's house with some *partideiros* from Quilombo Samba School, and a meal and a *roda de samba* (a circle to sing samba) in Manacéa's house with Velha Guarda da Portela, a band of traditional singers from the Portela Samba School. Planning to interview singers Ivone Lara, Aniceto do Império Serrano and Clementina de Jesus, Hirszman aimed to complete his documentary, which he described as "a very educational picture about *partido-alto*" ("Ferreira"). Complementary funding was granted sometime later, but in December 1979, Hirszman discarded the idea of a longer feature due to other commitments and returned to his original intention of making a short film, this time focusing solely on singer Candeia, who had died in November 1978 ("Machado Calil").

When the film was released in 1982, it was twenty-five minutes long, featured only material Hirszman had recorded in 1976 and was divided into two distinct sections: Candeia's discussions on *partido-alto* and a social gathering accompanied by singing at Manacéa's house. The film opens with some photos of samba bands, both old and contemporary, and a portrait of the late Candeia with a short dedication to him (Figure 1). This photo of the deceased singer is then replaced by images Hirszman recorded of him alive in 1976. Talking to the camera, Candeia explains from his wheelchair the particularities of *partido-alto* and sings three songs together with some musicians, singers and dancers from the Quilombo Samba School. The second section starts with a community meal in Manacéa's house where young singer Paulinho da Viola interviews some *partideiros* from Velha Guarda da Portela and then joins them singing until dusk (Figure 2). In the film's final minutes, while Paulinho appears playing the *cavaquinho* and singing with the old folks, his voiceover praises *partido-alto* as a "moment of

freedom", thereby challenging the imperatives of the music industry: "Today samba has many compromises that reduce the creativity of the samba singers to the limits imposed by the big entertainment. In *partido* instead everything happens more spontaneously. For this reason, there will always be *partideiros*, and the verse, either improvised or not, will reflect the truths that each one feels in their soul".





Figure 1: Dedication to Candeia at the beginning of *Partido alto* (Leon Hirszman, 1976–1982). Figure 2: Title that introduces the second part of *Partido alto*, set in Manacéa's house. Embrafilme, 1976–1982. Screenshots.

In his defence of *partido-alto* over commercial samba, Hirszman's film was attuned with some discussions taking place in the samba scene during that time, and in which both Candeia and Paulinho da Viola held prominent roles. They belonged to Portela, one of the oldest samba schools in Rio de Janeiro. Despite their name, samba schools were not educational institutions but social centres that organised Carnival parades and fostered a sense of community in the slums. By the 1970s, they gradually became businesses controlled by external agents who aimed to spectacularise the parades and show them in massive stadiums, therefore cutting ties with Portela's original social function. Critical of these developments, both Candeia and Paulinho da Viola left in protest of the school's acquiescence to the commodification of Carnival.

Candeia had joined Portela as a teenager and quickly became a successful songwriter for the Carnival parades. Despite his involvement with Portela, he was not a professional singer and instead was a policeman until 1965, when he was shot five times during an altercation with a lorry driver, which left the lower part of his body paralysed. That event strengthened his ideological commitment to traditional samba (Vargens 53). In 1975, he left Portela and cofounded the Grêmio Recreativo de Arte Negra Escola de Samba Quilombo (Quilombo Samba School Recreational Union of Black Art). It borrows its name from the old settlements of black communities in Brazil, which were composed mainly of former slaves, and aimed to be both a music association and a research centre for Afro-Brazilian art. Two years later, Candeia analysed the evolution of samba schools in his compelling book *Escola de samba: árvore que esqueceu a raiz* (*Samba School: A Tree that Forgot Its Root*), coauthored with Isnard Araújo, in which they also wrote the principles of Quilombo: a defence of tradition and renovation, but without the transformations acquired through commodification. They claimed that in front of the transformation of samba schools "[s]omebody has to shout, and Quilombo is a shout in the crowd" (88).[3]

Paulinho da Viola, a middle-class singer and son of a *choro* guitar player, joined Portela in 1964 and soon became interested in its history and tradition. Having released his first album in 1968, in 1970 he invited Velha Guarda da Portela—a group of experienced singers who had never been part of the music industry—to record their first album *Portela, passado de glória* (*Portela, Past of Glory*). Paulinho was recognised as an innovator of samba and *choro* who despite his consolidation as a professional, well-known artist, was always faithful to the social origins of samba schools. According to Eduardo Granja Coutinho, while Paulinho da Viola's profession as an established artist connected him to the music industry, he also maintained a critical distance, most notably when commercial strategies placed community practices, in which samba had originated, at risk (154). For this reason, when Portela's directorship started to marginalise composers, most notably the people from Velha Guarda, Paulinho left the school to support Candeia's Quilombo (149–55).

Chasing the Next Line: A Cinematic *Partido-Alto*?

In his 2001 article "Partido-alto: a questão da forca" ("*Partido-Alto*: The Issue of Gallows"), Carlos Andreazza discusses the contradiction between *partido-alto*'s spontaneity and its recording for purposes of a later reproduction. While he acknowledges that recording ensures pedagogical interest and the genre's survival, he points out an insurmountable epistemological difference:

> Improvisation doesn't work with reproduction; it is fruit of a moment and it is inscribed in it, with no perspectives beyond the perceptual field defined by the environment where it is born, because it relies on physical stimuli which can't be found in a studio, and neither be photographed without dissipating them. (13)

He proceeds to acknowledge that, while improvisation time is flexible and discourse unpredictable, thereby clashing with technical requirements, the verses of contemporary *rodas de samba* are no longer improvised; rather, they are replaced by familiar songs because they have been previously recorded in album form. He then points out that reproduction undermines improvisation's value, so "instead of setting out the rules for technical reproduction, [*partido-alto*] becomes more and more influenced by it" (13).

Andreazza's reflections are applicable to cinema as well: it has a pedagogical interest but its reproductive quality clashes with *partido-alto*'s improvised essence. However, the relationship between recording devices and improvised music genres is more complex than a binary between an anesthetising recording and a unique, lived experience. Once improvisation is recorded and reproduced on film, it certainly loses its original phenomenology, but it also expands in other directions—it can have an intermedial effect on the aesthetics and the narrative of the film. This is the research track of some film scholars exploring the relationship between jazz and cinema, such as Gilles Mouëllic and Jean-Louis Comolli. For Mouëllic, a jazz-like improvisation can be found in film's acting, framing and editing (201–35). For Comolli, filming music improvisation raises issues about the offscreen space. In his text "L'Œil contrôle, le corps écoute (Filmer le free)" ("The Eye Controls, the Body Listens [To Film the Free]"), Comolli opposes the constraints of the visual approach of the mise en scène with an embodied listening, and links the unforeseeable, improvised performance of the free jazz musician with the invisibility offscreen. He suggests that to film the free involves considering that part of the image that we don't know about, in the same way that we do not know how the musician will develop the improvisation: "Slowness of the images: the invisible is the only

place where cinema runs as fast as music. There, nothing is planned, nothing is framed, nothing is ready" (662). With that in mind, is it possible to think of a cinematic aesthetics for *partido-alto*?

In Hirszman's documentary, film style and narrative are determined by the performer's improvisation. Performances are filmed in long, handheld sequence shots which record the whole dynamics of *partido-alto* without interruption. This allows the frame to encapsulate the flexibility of time and the unpredictability of discourse, which Andreazza points out as crucial differences between improvisation and reproduction. However, the collective nature of *partido-alto* makes things difficult for both image and sound recording. Unlike Comolli's analysis of the filming of free jazz, in *Partido alto* there is no contrast between the framed musician and his unexpected music but rather a 360º space where both image and sound are haunted by unpredictability, and where frame and off frame constantly interchange. Cinematographer Lúcio Kodato recalls that he placed himself in the middle of the *roda de samba*, with a single tip from Paulinho da Viola: that responses to a specific verse may appear from the opposite side of the circle. Both in this section and in Candeia's, many technical imperfections were left in the final cut. According to Paulinho da Viola, some parts of Candeia's talk were discarded due to poor image quality, but despite this the completed film includes rushed framing, unsteady panning, light blinding and some figures interfering in the frame's foreground and these correspond with uneven direct sound recordings (Figures 3 and 4).

In addition, *partido-alto*'s flexibility of time has a decisive effect on the film's general structure. Kodato explains that the crew arrived at Manacéa's house in the morning and he assumed they would be done by 5 p.m. However, the collective singing continued late into the night, which required lights he had brought for good measure, and which are visible within the frame. Interestingly, closing the film with a night scene highlights both its conclusive dimension and its nostalgic tone, placing the documentary, as Lira Neto would say, "between party and agony", an elegy for a kind of samba that was vanishing at that time (Figures 5 and 6).




Figures 3 and 4: A body blocks the view of Candeia and the other musicians in *Partido alto*. Embrafilme. Screenshots.




Figures 5 and 6: Imperfect framing and blinding during the night shooting at Manacéa's house in *Partido alto*. Embrafilme. Screenshots.

Indeed, *Partido alto* becomes an audiovisual improvisation, the result of a real improvisation in Candeia's school and Manacéa's house. We could even say that Hirszman's film is a kind of cinematic *partido-alto*, that it works "as if" it was *partido-alto*. This is an intermedial phenomenon that Irina Rajewsky would classify as an intermedial reference, in which the mechanisms of two media are linked through evocation or imitation, even if their medial difference is insurmountable. The formula for this paradox is the "as if", which she exemplifies with the concept of "writing as if filming":

> Using the media-specific means available to him, the author of a text cannot, for example, "truly" zoom, edit, dissolve images, or make use of the actual techniques and rules of the filmic system; by necessity he remains within his own verbal, i.e., textual, medium. In this inability to pass beyond a single medium, a medial difference—an "intermedial gap"—is revealed, one which a given text intentionally displays or conceals, but which in any case can only ever be bridged in the figurative mode of the "as if". (55)

In an actual *partido-alto* improvisation, different participants take part (including the audience) and the song is created spontaneously. In a film, improvisation may be part of a specific moment in the creative process, but the result is edited, completed and presented to an audience who do not participate in the recorded images and sounds of singing a new verse. The difference between the popular, improvised singing and the documentary filmmaking process is insurmountable, and the "intermedial gap" persists. Following Andreazza's thinking, it is obvious that Hirszman's film, due to its technical and reproductive quality, is not improvised in the same way as *partido-alto*. However, following Rajewsky's ideas, we could suggest that *Partido alto*'s aesthetics and narrative work "as if" they were *partido-alto*.

This may seem a sterile, playful comparison, but thinking in these terms and considering the "intermedial gap" allows us to deepen the film's analysis and better understand its real significance. Indeed, two key ideas emerge from this bridge/gap between song style and film style. The first is the obvious, even obtrusive presence of the recording devices and techniques throughout the film. The microphone enters the image from the lateral, upper and lower margins of the frame, in close-ups and long shots, and sometimes is even positioned in the foreground. Audio technicians, microphones in tripods and some leads are visible (Figures 7 and 8). The cinematography equipment is noticeable through the unsteady framing and artificial lighting (Figures 9 and 10). Here, the technical mediation is responsible for the "as

if" bridge/gap between an improvised singing style and the technical requirements of filmmaking, both in image and sound. Giving technological means such a presence highlights their crucial role as mediators between different creative practices and artistic worlds: there is a contrast between an improvised, suburban, popular way of singing, and cinema, which is a technical, reproductive mode of representation.



Figures 7 and 8 (above): The microphone and the technician appear ostensibly during Candeia's speech. Figures 9 and 10 (below): Appearance of the artificial lighting during the *roda de samba* in *Partido alto*. Embrafilme. Screenshots.

The second idea, which is crucial for the film, is that this technological mediation is full of failures. In other words: there is more of a gap than a bridge. According to Ágnes Pethő, "paradoxically, the more motion pictures engage in inter-art o intermedia 'games,' becoming increasingly 'literary,' 'theatrical' or 'painterly' etc., the more they expose regarding the nature, possibilities and limitations of their own medium" (65–6). In *Partido alto*, the film's engagement with the improvised songs involves making the technical equipment visible, but also showing its shortcomings and imperfections. In a way, the film lays bare a dispute between popular culture and a reproductive art, and in this dispute the latter is challenged by the improvised, ungraspable creative methods of the former. *Partido-alto* (the style) challenges *Partido alto* (the film).

However, what might have been a problem in a classic fictional feature provides a great contribution to a documentary film. Indeed, Hirszman's first goal ("a very educational picture about *partido-alto*") is enriched and even repurposed: the film not only records *partido-alto* as a song style but also as a conflictual relationship between the song style and the documentary

film's audiovisual techniques. And, most crucially, revealing this uneasiness has political undertones which are related to the history of samba. For decades, technical recording propelled white singers into successful stars while confining black and mixed-race songwriters to the margins. Conversely, in Hirszman's film, technical recording devices are put into question by popular singing. For this reason, in front of a history of samba defined by inequalities, this resistance from collective, spontaneous, popular creation can be considered a moment of poetic justice.

The *Sambista* Is Not Required to Be a Member of Academia: The Singer as Mediator

In *Partido alto*, the mediation between the spectator and samba is technological but also human. Both Candeia and Paulino da Viola sing and play with other musicians, so they belong to the music world that the film portrays. At the same time, they introduce the spectator into the world of samba, either with a talk that becomes a kind of lecture, with interviews to the *sambistas* or with a statement in voiceover. They are performers that sing and experts that talk, and as such, they become intermedial figures placed between the music event and the film discourse that follows it.

In his book *O mistério do samba* (*The Mystery of Samba*), anthropologist Hermano Vianna uses the notion of "cultural mediator" as a key figure in the history of this music style. In exploring the ways in which samba shifted from its origins in marginalised communities to its emergence as a Brazilian national symbol, Vianna borrows the concept of "cultural mediator" from French historian Michel Vovelle, who uses it to describe those characters who establish links between erudite and popular worlds (42). In the case of Brazil, since colonial times there had been a "long tradition of relationships between many segments of Brazilian elite (landowners, politicians, aristocrats, writers, etc.) and many manifestations of Afro-Brazilian musicality", which in the 1920s resulted in fruitful interactions between elite intellectuals and composers, on the one hand, and popular singers from the slums, on the other (37). According to Vianna, the nationalisation of samba was the result of that interbreeding of social classes. It should not be approached as a mere commodification of an existing art form, but as a two-way process between distinct social groups which came to define (and not simply instrumentalise) samba. For this reason, cultural mediators, for Vianna, should include those from both privileged and underprivileged backgrounds, along with foreign agents such as French poet Blaise Cendrars.[4]




Figures 11 and 12: Candeia delivers his speech about *partido-alto* in *Partido alto*. Embrafilme. Screenshots.

Here, I am unable to provide an in-depth explanation of the intricacies behind Vianna's argument, yet the notion of cultural mediator is undoubtedly useful for the analysis of film representations of samba, as suggested by Guilherme Carréra in his article about recent documentaries on this topic (21). In fact, Hirszman's *Partido alto* establishes a mediation between its educated public and non-recorded suburban practices, and the discourses by Candeia and Paulinho da Viola play an active role in this cultural process. In the case of Candeia, he makes conversation with a presumed spectator and explains the specificities of *partido-alto* by introducing the fellow singers, dancers and instruments (Figures 11 and 12). From his wheelchair, Candeia acts as a lecturer and master of ceremonies for the film: as he mentions the elements around him, camera and microphone search for them. He talks and sings alternatively, although his first song could be considered part of his teaching discourse as well. The song is called "Testamento de partideiro" ("A *Partideiro*'s Testament"), and includes both a kind of testament in which the singer distributes his legacy, saying, for example, that "I leave my tambourine to my friends", and a claim for the nonacademic nature of the *sambista*: "the *sambista* doesn't need to be a member of academy / he needs to be natural with his poetry, and people will make him immortal". These verses belong to the song performed by Candeia the singer but could also be part of the discourse by Candeia the lecturer. Indeed, the song establishes a crucial idea which is also at samba's core: the transmission of knowledge not through official educative centres, such as universities, but through oral knowledge and singing.[5]

Furthermore, this testament seems to refer, retrospectively, to Candeia's own death, which occurred between the film's production shoot and its theatrical release. In a crucial essay about *Partido alto,* Sérgio Puccini notices that the first shot of the film, in which Candeia sings "Testamento de partideiro", was most likely filmed after the others, because it occurs at night while the others are daytime recordings. However, Hirszman positions it at the film's beginning, probably with an aim to link the notions of legacy and popular immortality to a dedication of the deceased Candeia right before the performance (Puccini 290). This intermedial use of lyrics as narration and discourse can also be found in works on samba, such as João Baptista M. Vargens's biography of Candeia, which enlightens the songs' richness in an effort to tell stories, describe lifestyles and articulate discourses.




Figures 13 and 14: Paulinho da Viola interviews older *sambistas* in Manacéa's house in *Partido alto*. Embrafilme. Screenshots.




Figures 15 and 16: Paulinho da Viola sings in the *roda de samba* with Velha Guarda da Portela in *Partido alto*. Embrafilme. Screenshots.

Paulinho da Viola is also a narrator and performer, but in a different way. While he forms a crucial part of the film's production (Kodato), he never speaks to the camera nor assumes a central role as Candeia does. He appears in the second section as an interviewer to the *sambistas* from Velha Guarda da Portela (Figures 13 and 14) and after a series of statements he joins the singers playing a *cavaquinho* (Figures 15 and 16). Indeed, as film editor Alain Fresnot noticed, the film starts with Candeia, an individual lecturing, and ends with collective singing, which aligns with the film's left-wing ideology and its effort to highlight the community's role in musical creation. In a way, Paulinho provides an opportunity for others to talk, which is coherent with his historical role as a mediator between Velha Guarda da Portela and the music industry. When asked about his role in the history of samba, however, he does not consider himself to be a mediator in Vianna's terms, because he was involved in popular music practices since his early age thanks to his father.

At the end of *Partido alto* the *roda de samba* images are accompanied by Paulinho's voiceover, praising *partido-alto* and attacking the gradual commodification of traditional samba in show business. In his essay, Puccini brilliantly distinguishes this voiceover from the voices of the *sambistas*, which include both Candeia and the people from Velha Guarda da Portela. He insists that the latter are "voices *with* a body", both for their synchronicity with people that we can see and for their connected physical actions such as dancing, clapping and eating (294–5). These are people who were traditionally ignored by recording labels, so the act of singing into the microphone becomes an "appropriation gesture" to make their voices heard (302). Conversely, Paulinho's voiceover "speaks *without* a body" and is "a distanced voice, more formal and well-articulated, which isn't burdened by the lapsus of the colloquial and improvised talks" (297). Most crucially, this voice distances the spectator from the world represented and "will establish a new time perspective in relation to the images we see, pushing them towards the past. Voiceover takes up the narrator's '*now*', and images take up the '*before*', that which *have already happened*, and over these images the narration weaves its comment" (296).

Paulinho da Viola's agency in the film radically changes when he switches from interviewer to voiceover. Although he remains a mediator between suburban samba and spectator, he no longer questions old *sambistas*. Instead he delivers a discourse of his own which is not improvised at all. Indeed, different hand-written versions, most likely drafted by Hirszman himself, can be found in the Arquivo Edgard Leuenroth in the University of Campinas (Hirszman, "Sketched"). This provides a crucial difference to statements by those

interviewed and to Candeia's own contribution as well: while the latter's lecture on *partido-alto* was delivered spontaneously in front of the camera, Paulinho's rehearsed voiceover was drafted on paper. Candeia represents the traditional oral learning in suburban communities with a high rate of illiteracy. By contrast, Paulinho da Viola, even if he never attended university, embodies his voiceover with the intellectual, written discourse on that social and cultural world. Both Candeia and Paulinho lecture to audiences, introduce them to traditional samba and act as mediators. While Candeia speaks from a position belonging to popular culture, Paulinho provides discourse from the safe, authoritative place that the voiceover grants him.

Despite this crucial difference, Paulinho's voice is not completely external to the world he is talking about. According to Arthur Autran, this specific case problematises traditional simplifications about the uses of voiceover in documentary filmmaking. For him, Paulinho's speech is quite personal and seems more of an authorised opinion than a "scientific truth":

> [it] is not somebody delivering "truths" about popular music, but an artist who was educated in that environment […] the locution works as a very coherent link between the object of the film—popular music and its exponents—and the targeted public—urban middle-class which is not used to that form of samba. (216)

Indeed, the complexity of this voiceover reflects Paulinho da Viola's role as a promoter of Velha Guarda da Portela: someone who embraced noncommercial samba and respectfully introduced it to the music industry, thus becoming a mediator between popular culture and the audience, even if, as said before, he does not consider himself to be an external agent in relation to suburban samba practices.

In addition, in *Partido alto* this role is expressed intermedially. At the end of the film, Paulinho becomes a voiceover expert but this is also the moment in which he becomes completely integrated into the music performance, playing the *cavaquinho* and singing together with members of Velha Guarda da Portela. His interviewer role is split into two: as an expert in the voiceover and as a singer on screen, or a subject with discourse and a subject who is filmed. He becomes an intermedial character between the film's discourse (in which he was deeply involved) and popular music performance, which he joins on a level playing field. In contrast with Candeia, whose image and discourse are always part of the samba school, Paulinho is placed in-between. By organising how we see and hear him, *Partido alto* transforms Paulinho da Viola into an intermedial character and expresses his role in the history of Brazilian music with cinematic techniques.

Other Technologies, Other Mediators: Villa-Lobos and *O mistério do samba*

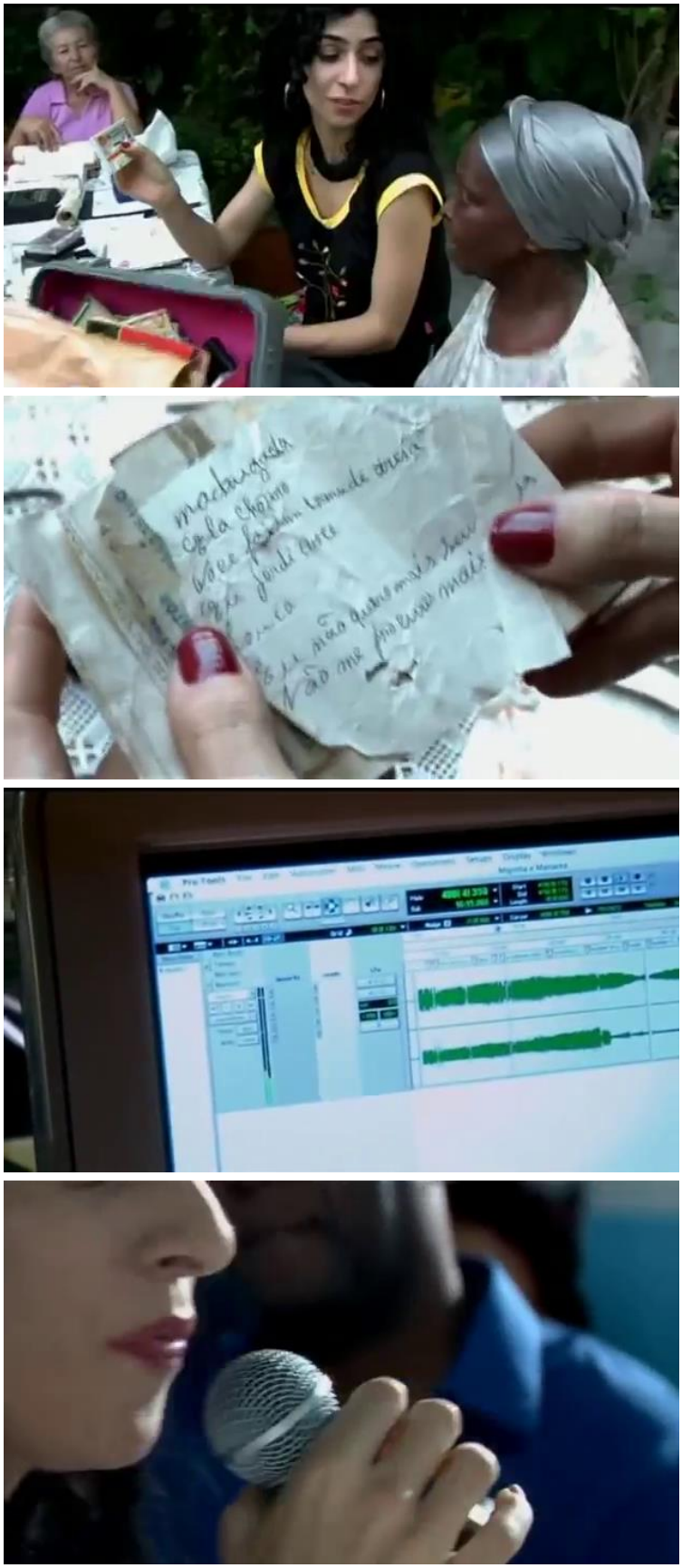
Throughout this article I have often quoted Lira Neto's expression "between the ancestral signs of party and agony", a complex position in which he places samba and which he uses to entitle the book's prologue. Here, he introduces some episodes featuring Heitor Villa-Lobos, the prestigious composer who carried out extensive research on Brazilian music traditions and who oversaw the nationalist cultural programme during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas in the 1930s and 40s. As such, Villa-Lobos helped bridge institutions and suburban culture, pushing marginalised artists onto the official scene; he was a crucial cultural mediator for the nationalisation of samba. One of the most important endeavours in which he was involved was the recording of the album *Native Brazilian Music* (1940), a project of US media company Columbia directed by famous conductor Leopold Stokowski. Taking place on

board of the transatlantic SS *Uruguay*, which was at Rio's docks, this recording belonged to the Good Neighbor Policy, a diplomatic US strategy that aimed to expand its political, economic and cultural influence on Latin American countries. Villa-Lobos approached singers and musicians of different styles (samba, *maracatu*, *choro*, *toadas sertanejas*, etc.) to be recorded by the Columbia crew on the SS *Uruguay*, which resulted in a 17-track album commercialised in the US but not released in Brazil until 1987. Some key names from samba history, such as João da Baiana and Cartola, recorded their voices on that album. Neto points out that the Columbia project also involved filming the music performances on board with the aim to exhibit for US audiences, although there is no proof that this unique film ever materialised (21).

Nearly seventy years later, with the 2008 theatrical release of Brazilian documentary feature *O mistério do samba* (*The Mystery of Samba*), directed by Lula Buarque de Hollanda and Carolina Jabor, this type of recording and the mediator are longstanding concepts in the history of samba. Borrowing its name from the title of Hermano Vianna's book, *O mistério do samba* is nonetheless focused on Velha Guarda da Portela. It derives from the album *Tudo azul* (*All Blue*, 2000), produced by singer Marisa Monte, a pop rock star who carried out an extensive research project of unreleased songs by Velha Guarda and selected eighteen, written between 1942 and 1976, to be sung anew by the band and some guest performers, such as Paulinho da Viola and herself (Frias). Lula Buarque de Hollanda filmed the album's recording and over the years shot new material that resulted in a documentary in 2007. Carolina Jabor joined him as codirector after the filming of the album's recording.

O mistério do samba combines over a decade's worth of material (1998–2007) shot in Portela, involving members of Velha Guarda discussing their work as songwriters and singers. Tracks from *Tudo azul* are played and performed alongside older songs by Velha Guarda and individual works by its members; some are sung a cappella by the interviewees, some are collectively performed or recorded in the studio, while others emerge as unpublished lyrics in crumpled notebooks or even recorded on old cassettes. Songs circulate across personal memories, handwritten papers, tapes and computers, as well as headphones and microphones (Figures 17 to 20). During this process, Marisa Monte guides discussions with the singers, triggers their memories and reflections and sings along with them. In some sequences she speaks with Paulinho da Viola about his experience with Velha Guarda in the 1970s. As argued by Guilherme Carréra in his analysis of the film, both Marisa and Paulinho, as well as successful singer Zeca Pagodinho, function as cultural mediators within the film (13). *O mistério do samba*, to use Lira Neto's words again, is placed "between the ancestral signs of party and agony", and indeed the purpose of the filmmakers was

> to portray a generation who were saying farewell. That generation, which was reaching the end of a life circle, was prolific in terms of music production and represented a lifestyle which doesn't exist anymore: the peaceful, friendly life in the slums, with no urban violence, in which people used to meet together to sing. Many characters from the film died soon after, so it seemed to be the right moment to do that. Our main concern was to capture the soul of the suburb. (Hollanda)



Figures 17–20: Marisa Monte explores unknown songs by Manacéa on cassette, in handwritten notes, on the computer and through song in *O mistério do samba* (*The Mystery of Samba*, Lula Buarque de Hollanda and Carolina Jabor, 2008). Conspiração Filmes, 2008. Screenshots.

Both the project *Native Brazilian Music* and the documentary *O mistério do samba* share an interest in rescuing traditional music forms and registering them, both in image and sound, even if Stokowski's original intentions of filming performances were never realised. That was the central aim of Leon Hirszman's *Partido alto* as well. Most crucially, these three projects are concerned with technological recordings and in them there is a fundamental mediator who bridged popular samba and the music industry. As I have explored throughout this article, both technology and the mediator have been important elements in the history of samba: they represent the transition from oral cultures to voice recording, from collective creation to copyright, from social gatherings to commodification, from suburban communities to mass audiences. Technology and mediators are never innocent or neutral intermediaries between popular culture and the public, and they must be approached critically, considering the variety of agents involved.

Since the times of Cinema Novo, cinema and most notably music documentaries have played a key role in registering forms of samba and presenting them to big audiences. The boom of music documentaries in Brazil in the early 2000s, which is deeply connected with a re-evaluation of Brazilian identity (Heise), must also be approached in this way. Along with *O mistério do samba*, other documentaries on samba have been released, that have gained critical acclaim and popularity. They focus either on historical characters (*Cartola: Música para os olhos* [*Cartola: Music for the Eyes*, Lírio Ferreira and Hilton Lacerda, 2007]), on contemporary artists (Bezerra da Silva in *Onde a coruja dorme* [*Where the Owl Sleeps*, Márcia Derraik and Simplício Neto, 2010]) or on specific samba schools (Mangueira in *O samba que mora em mim* [*The Samba within Me*, Georgia Guerra-Peixe, 2010]), but the issues of class, race and the contrast between popular culture and music industry stand out in all of them.

In this article, I have used an intermedial approach to *Partido alto* to explore how technological and human mediation plays a key role in documenting samba. This mediation is cultural and political, but it is produced with cinematic techniques such as the sequence shot or the voiceover. What technical devices are presented in the film? Are the songs sung by heart or played from old recordings? Are the artists presented alone or together with their fellow people in the slums? Is there an expert or a prestigious artist introducing them? Is this approach fair, or maybe full of paternalistic intentions? How are these technological and human mediations performed? These are questions raised by *Partido alto* which may be useful to approach other documentaries on samba. This approach may indeed shed some light on the ways each film tackles the complex, often ungraspable world of popular music traditions.

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Notes

1 All the translations from Portuguese are mine.

2 Lopes' definition is much longer and includes former meanings of "*partido-alto*" in the past, as well as a list of samba practices that the term "*partido-alto*" includes.

3 For an analysis of the Quilombo project, see Treece.

4 Other authors that have used the concept of mediator after Vianna include Braga (102–78) and Napolitano (23–45).

5 The relationship between samba and daily speech has been further explored by Luiz Tatit (41–4).

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