

## Dispersion and Dialogue as a Method

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**Abstract:** *This study investigates "dispersion and dialogue as a method" in musical creation, inspired by Ulrich Beck's global-local paradigm. The group "Práticas sonoras de borda" has fostered dialogues among Latin American and Iberian composers, challenging the Eurocentric bias in music education. Inspired by Paulo Freire and Paulo Costa-Lima, this approach emphasizes intuitive, non-hierarchical conversations to reveal new compositional insights. The book "Seminários dispersos em criação musical" documents this methodology, likening "dispersão" to both relaxed focus and seed spreading. This proposal aims to redefine musical perspectives, presenting initial dialogues with five composers and their works, promoting a decolonized, inclusive epistemology in music sound art.*

**Key-words:** *Musical Composition; Decoloniality; Experimental Latin American Music; Dialogue as a Method*

### 1. Introduction – Thinking a Methodology

Think globally, act locally. This phrase, coined by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1986) has become a guiding principle over the last 30 years, yet it remains an enigma. Chosen as the motto for Agenda 21, and repeated in artistic manifestos and classrooms, it challenges us to consider how local action can be implemented in a hyperconnected world full of possibilities, where cultural and knowledge exchanges are still largely determined by unequal power relations.

This political thought, commonly present in discussions about climate, economy, and societies, has also become a constant guide for the research conducted by the group "Border Sound Practices: Ways of Inhabiting Time in the South." This work consolidates actions and thoughts that have been put into practice in various ways for over 15 years, promoting events, publications, and concerts, as well as scientific publications. Over the years, Daniel Quaranta and his

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collaborators have worked to build bridges, communities, and establish channels of dialogue among composers, musicologists, and creators in general from Latin America and Iberian countries.

What has driven and continues to fuel this project is the realization that, in general, the basic bibliographies and repertoire used in undergraduate and graduate courses in composition or sound art in Brazil and other countries primarily reference productions from the axis formed by European and American musical and experimental traditions.

Even the bibliographic, discographic, and artistic productions developed in the form of theses, books, or works by graduate programs are not frequently used in classrooms or entrance exams. The actions of this research, and consequently, the publications, aim to contribute to the construction of an epistemological panorama that more significantly includes the musical and knowledge productions of our peers in Latin America.

At a time when topics such as decoloniality, the appreciation of epistemologies outside the axes of hegemony, and the construction of a network of knowledge and understanding are being debated, the research group saw the need to amplify and bring to the concreteness of a publication the initial results of this set of actions. The book "Dispersed Seminars in Musical Creation, Volume I, First Conversations" presents something that gradually emerged as a methodology: dialogue with composers who move around us and who are also academic researchers or artist-researchers, driven not by a rigidly predetermined agenda, but by seeking the dispersion of a free conversation.

This approach allowed for the emergence of urgent themes, provided valuable insights into the compositional poetics of composers from various styles, and, above all, brought forth the new—what would appear only in the context of that particular dialogue or the dialogues that followed during the editing and reflection on the material.

For the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1996), there is no theory detached from practice. Freire, whose ideas have had a global impact but have been systematically attacked by far-right groups in recent years, advocated for a pedagogical practice that starts from the students' life context and then expands to the surrounding universe and canonized knowledge. In dialogue with this way of conceiving and experiencing education, Brazilian composer and professor Paulo Costa-Lima, in his doctoral thesis on the musical work and pedagogical legacy of Ernst Widmer, a Swiss composer who settled in Brazil, reflects on and expands ideas about a "pedagogy of dialogue and interactivity" (Costa-Lima 1999, 2).

Both Widmer and Costa-Lima present a methodology of dialogue that primarily emerges from the interaction between teacher and student. The work we

present here seeks to establish lines of dialogue among creators and researchers of contemporary Brazilian music, within a context of horizontal listening. These conversations took place in various settings, including classrooms, interviews, and a series of seminars conducted online during the 2020 pandemic. Some of the axes we are interested in exploring include: how much do we really know about the work of our peers? What can we learn from them? Are these voices and knowledge truly present in our study programs? What can we discover from the dialogues and the experience of sharing this knowledge? In other words, our proposal is to question and put into a state of estrangement the axes on which our common sense is based. Finally, there is a dimension of experience exchange that resides in this space-time of conversation. Conversation suggests horizontality, an exchange of experiences. It is necessary to seek a language that does not belittle, diminish, or construct positions of high and low, superior and inferior, large and small. We need a language that allows us a horizontal relationship, a relationship in which you and I can feel the same size, at the same height (Skliar, Larrosa 2005).

The temporal focus, privileging living authors, practically justifies itself. We wanted to hear the voices of these composers firsthand to later “compose” polyphonically from them. As for the geographical focus, as we pointed out, it has a political objective.

As we mentioned, much of our training as composers and/or sound artists, and later as educators, is built on the foundation of Eurocentric thought. In this sense, Eurocentrism does not refer to a geographic location but to the hegemony of a way of thinking (Mignolo 2007, 301). Our project attempts to subvert this way of thinking by proposing new horizons and engaging in dialogue, of course, with the repertoire traditionally accepted in our academies as a standard of power that operates through the naturalization of territorial, racial, cultural, and epistemic hierarchies, enabling the reproduction of relations of domination” (Restrepo, Rojas 2010, 15).

Boaventura Souza Santos defines the Epistemologies of the South as the search for knowledge and criteria of knowledge validation that grant visibility and credibility to cognitive practices that have traditionally remained marginal to a certain notion of center (Santos 2009, 12). We align ourselves with this attempt to seek different answers to an epistemological problem that historically seems obvious to accept as natural. The graphic work of the Uruguayan artist Torres-Garcia, which presents the map of Latin America in an inverted position compared to what we commonly find in official cartography, is a metaphor for this subversion, to which is added the phrase “Distracted we will win”, a one-line poem by Paulo Leminski (Curitiba, 1944-1989).

This methodology of dialogue and dispersion aims to “inhabit an in-between”, not offering itself as a composition manual but not shying away from

presenting and debating compositional tools and solutions. It is not a discourse on music, nor even a compilation of bibliographic anecdotes or program notes, but something born from the intuition that from the freshness of non-hierarchical conversations, living fragments can emerge, from which new conceptions about music and sounds, and of course, new musical works, can arise. It is no coincidence that the word “dispersão” in Portuguese has a double meaning. To be “disperse” is to have relaxed attention without a specific focus, but “dispersar” is also the verb used to talk about seeds that are spread across fields of cultivation. The words of Professor Costa-Lima, when speaking about his own thesis, can be borrowed given the precision with which they describe this desire for a method that is constructed along the way.

(...) it seems that we are faced with a simple and binary opposition, object versus method, something difficult to sustain in practice. It is, in fact, a dynamic process of ongoing negotiation between the possible synthetic anticipations of the object and the methodological solutions envisioned at each moment of the investigation. What we present in this work is, therefore, somewhat akin to a snapshot captured from a complex movement (Costa-Lima 1999, 2).

We will now present the first result of these conversations, with the dual objective of introducing the first five composers and works we discussed, and producing a new layer of reflection on this material.

## 2. Five Brazilian Voices

The first composers brought into dialogue in the dispersed seminars were Jocy de Oliveira (1936), Sílvio Ferraz (1959), Edson Zampronha (1963), Tatiana Katanzarro (1976), and Arthur Kampela (1960), all Brazilian composers. The language, production, and trajectory of each of them are quite diverse. Jocy de Oliveira is the only one among them who does not have an academic or pedagogical aspect to her work, but her presence is justified by her deep and methodical research into languages, as well as her ability to document her journey and transform this documentation into creation.

This trajectory, treated by Jocy in her works as a labyrinth leading to the living and unexpected paths of memory, elucidates her aesthetic and ethical choices. Born in 1936, Jocy began her career as a pianist at a very young age, recording in various countries. Along this journey, she met figures like Luciano Berio, Cathy Berberian, and Igor Stravinsky. At least two works originate from this process: „Bério sem censura”<sup>4</sup> (1912) and *Revisitando Stravinsky*<sup>5</sup> (2010). These are

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAiV6FtSuBY&t=82s> (Last modified 15/08/24)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-0\\_qhgrkIU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-0_qhgrkIU) (Last modified 10/09/24)

multimedia works that can be characterized as music-theater (David 47). In each, Jocy confronts her personal memories, creating from them by blending her own presence with that of actresses and musicians, incorporating documentary material, and making collages. These pieces propose a radical intertextuality with the works of these two composers, whose important pieces she premiered.

In other works, however, the associations occur on a deeper level. In discussing the cinematic opera *Liquid Voices*<sup>6</sup> (2019), which at the time of the conversation was about to be released, Jocy develops the metaphor of a piano found in a shipwreck.

From this problematized piano, the labyrinth of memories leads the composer toward a perhaps foundational recollection of an existence always in rebellion against gender inequalities.

Sílvio Ferraz, besides being a composer, is an experienced professor and one of the most prolific music researchers in Brazil. His publications include articles on temporal structures in Berio or Xenakis, reflections on his own work, and thoughts primarily grounded in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of difference. One of his books, titled "The Book of Sonorities", served as the input for the start of the conversation. In it, Ferraz experiments with a musical writing style that liberates itself from the constraints of academic text to create an autonomous discourse on sounds. These are aphorisms juxtaposed in a non-explicit but intuited order.

In some cases, the aphorisms are merely images, drawings, or sketches from which the composer contemplates form and structure. In the dispersion of the conversation, and spurred by the pandemic context, Sílvio Ferraz introduced another image. It was a criminal law class inside a French prison, reproduced by Michel Foucault in his book "Discipline and Punish". In the photo, a man speaks to prisoners seated in an ascending auditorium, each within a kind of wooden box. (The image was initially brought up to associate with the experience during the 2020 isolation. Classes, seminars, or lectures like that were delivered and received by people inside "square boxes"). From this photo, Sílvio Ferraz began to elaborate on the idea of music as a flow of energy of lines of force in the deleuzian sense of time—understanding these forces as dynamic vectors that traverse, create, or destabilize structures—Tatiana Catanzarro used her participation in the seminars to discuss her works and conceptions regarding musical creation, particularly in relation to the classroom. In the book, we analyze some of his works, observing the influence of the visual and literary aspects that characterize his work. Some of them are *Dream Within a Dream*<sup>7</sup> and his *Étude sur la lumière: couleurs, contours, volumes*<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4\\_8nQ3YyAk&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4_8nQ3YyAk&t=5s) (Last modified 15/08/24)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oz4AGNQIE-0> (Last modified 12/09/24)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9Adn2BppEo> (Last modified 20/09/24)

In turn, the dialogue proposed by Edson Zampronha, when presenting his conception of the production of meaning in music, is with the listener, during the act of listening. Zampronha believes that the composer takes a position alongside the listener when composing, imagining a process of meaning production that, while it may be virtually conceived by the composer, is only completed at the moment the work is heard. The transition between his academic and musical production is based on a conception rooted in semiotics. Some of the works analyzed were: *Modelagens Xa*<sup>9</sup>, *Modelagem Xb*<sup>10</sup>, *Lamento*<sup>11</sup>, among others.

Arthur Kampela, the last of the names presented in this initial endeavor, is a composer in whom there is a strong affinity between musical speech and practice. Kampela gained international recognition as a composer through his works for guitar, the *Percussion Studies*<sup>12</sup>. In these works, he radically explores the rhythmic and sonic possibilities of the guitar, creating extended techniques, new gestures, and the possibilities that the notation of these gestures brings, thus initiating techniques that he would summarize under the name "micrometric modulation" Kampela developed this concept during his Ph.D. at Columbia University in the United States.

### 3. Conclusions

In summarizing some excerpts from the Dispersed Seminars in Musical Creation, our intention was not merely to introduce composers and works that might still be unfamiliar to a new audience for one reason or another. When this material was produced and reworked, we aimed to observe and establish new lines of dialogue between the authors of those discussions. As previously mentioned, the very practice of editing the book was an exercise in creating these lines. Of course, as with any editing process, we sought to adjust and minimize the noise in discourses that were extremely colloquial or lacked fluidity, but our main goal was to produce connections.

It is no surprise, then, that new connections emerged during the preparation of this article. Among them, we could cite the link between Sílvio Ferraz's idea of music as a flow of energy and Edson Zampronha's assertion that logic guarantees nothing about meaning. The concern with structures formed by compartments that do not communicate seems to be a common theme in all the conversations. We are dealing with composers who want to speak, communicate, using music, text, scene, and by creating concepts. These same composers rebel against rigid

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK3k0TOOEFo> (Last modified 20/09/24)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=463O-x65HRg> (Last modified 20/09/24)

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pxr3v5St\\_eE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pxr3v5St_eE) (Last modified 20/09/24)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhdllFIdB3k> (Last modified 20/09/24)

structures, whether they are present in the rigidity of certain academic language, in specialized and conservative criticism, in preconceived and strictly formalist ideas about music, or in the caricatured musical gesture that becomes an “opaque box”.

These are discourses on composition produced in a dynamic that is intrinsic to musical creation itself: they are ideas that explore possibilities of subversion and illusion of the material of time. We find this phenomenon in the intersections of Jocy's memory, in the revival of Renaissance or Baroque concepts and ideas for present use by Edson Zampronha, or in the simultaneous elements of a work by Arthur Kampela.

Finally, given the geopolitical scope of the publication, it is curious to note that none of the Brazilian composers explicitly addressed the theme of nationalism, a topic that practically monopolized debates in concert music in Brazil throughout the 20th century. Additionally, in many contexts, they cited and based their work on theories and repertoire from the so-called Eurocentric axis. However, the Brazilian context and way of thinking and creating are present, for example, when Arthur Kampela talks about creating his first album in the 1980s, where he produced songs that mixed chamber instrumental formations with elements of popular music; when Jocy de Oliveira shares her pioneering role as a female composer in Brazil, or in other fragments of their speeches. Even if in a subtle way, we believe the idea of “anthropophagy” is present in these conversations. This image-idea was forged during the avant-garde period in the second decade of the last century. It was the modernists' proposal to assimilate the techniques, knowledge, and languages of other peoples and countries by “devouring” them and then producing something new and genuine with them. Tatiana Catanzarro speaks more explicitly on this theme in the Seminars when discussing the creation of her work *Griney*.

I took the myths mentioned in Bucolic VI, listened to some composers who worked with these mythological themes, and, above all, listened to Nature. The forest. Then, I appropriated the techniques of the great masters to be able to evoke them in my music, so they could also help me face my challenge. However, this time, I evoked them almost as in an anthropophagic ritual: “Tupi or not tupi”, that's the question, as Oswald de Andrade would say.

The “Tupi” referred to in Oswald de Andrade's paraphrase, one of the founders of the anthropophagic movement<sup>13</sup> is the name of one of the linguistic branches of the indigenous peoples of Brazil and was the language used as a contact language between the Portuguese colonizers and these peoples. Taking it as a subtext and assuming the authorship of this association alone, this article envisions anthropophagy and the exchanges between what is original and the present time, between the global and the

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<sup>13</sup> The quote is part of the Anthropophagic Manifesto, written by Oswald de Andrade and released in 1924. Available at: <https://www.ufrgs.br/cdrom/oandrade/oandrade.pdf>

local, as a possible reading of the compositional poetics openly accessible for our exploration by the five composers mentioned above. Returning to Professor Widmer, “all teaching should preferably start from the present and work backward” (Widmer, as cited in Costa-Lima). In this sense, we revisit the avant-garde movements that emerged a century ago to consider present-day issues brought to the table by living composers who are close to us.

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