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## **Heitor Villa-Lobos and the Parisian art scene: how to become a Brazilian musician\***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article discusses how the flux of cultural productions between centre and periphery works, taking as an example the field of music production in France and Brazil in the 1920s. The life trajectories of Jean Cocteau, French poet and painter, and Heitor Villa-Lobos, a Brazilian composer, are taken as the main reference points for the discussion. The article concludes that social actors from the periphery tend themselves to accept the opinions and judgements of the social actors from the centre, taking for granted their definitions concerning the criteria that validate their productions.

**Key words:** Heitor Villa-Lobos, Brazilian Music, National Culture, Cultural Flows

In July 1923, the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos arrived in Paris as a complete unknown. Some five years had passed since his first large-scale concert in Brazil; Villa-Lobos journeyed to Europe with the intention of publicizing his musical output.

His entry into the Parisian art world took place through the group of Brazilian modernist painters and writers he had encountered in 1922, immediately before the Modern Art Week in São Paulo. Following his arrival, the composer was invited to a lunch in the studio of the painter Tarsila do Amaral where he met up with, among others, the poet Sérgio Milliet, the pianist João de Souza Lima, the writer Oswald de Andrade and, among the Parisians, the poet Blaise Cendrars, the musician Erik Satie and the poet and painter Jean Cocteau.

After the lunch, the artists became engrossed in a lively conversation which drifted into a discussion on the art of musical improvisation. Villa-Lobos, who had already composed an extensive repertoire of piano solos, then sat down to Tarsila's *Erard* concerto to improvise. Immediately, Jean Cocteau, known for his *boutades* and his playful behaviour, sat underneath the piano on the ground, "so he could hear better." At the end of Villa-Lobos's improvisation, however, Cocteau returned to his chair and launched a ferocious attack on what he had heard: in his opinion, the music presented by the composer was no more than an emulation of the styles of Debussy and Ravel. Villa-Lobos

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immediately began another improvisation; Cocteau, though, remained intransigent, questioning this time whether an improvisation could be made in this way, played to order. The two artists began a heated discussion and came close to exchanging blows.<sup>1</sup>

This encounter can be taken as a defining moment in the twist taken by the personal and artistic career of Villa-Lobos as a result of his stay in Paris: it was only after this trip that he began to focus his efforts on producing a national form of music. The present article attempts to comprehend why this twist occurred at this moment and why Villa-Lobos's artistic project assumed this specific content thereafter.

What the described event marks is a moment where an expectation is shattered: the composer, who expected to become a big success in the French capital, had his art rejected by one of the most important figures from the city's artistic scene. An event such as this is criss-crossed by innumerable social vectors. On one hand, a foreign artist, fresh from the 'periphery,' a recent arrival in the great cultural centre of the period; on the other, a Parisian artist completely established and at home in his setting. More than a purely aesthetic question, therefore, a whole series of cultural contents, legitimacies, representations and hierarchies was at stake.

Hence, in order for us to understand not just this encounter but also Villa-Lobos's stay in Paris, we need to explore carefully the sociohistorical configuration in which both occurred. My intention, though, is not to trace a global 'context' in which these figures were 'immersed.' Such an approach would impoverish the analytic possibilities, since as Bensa argues (1998:46), "context is immanent to practices and makes up part of them." Instead, we shall focus on the practices and relations established between the different social actors involved, determining through empirical research their social properties, aspirations and the moment they were passing through in their life histories.

This analysis will serve as a starting point for us to focus on a broader subject. In fact, the study of the careers of the figures involved allows us to discuss the way in which cultural flows between centre and periphery work, taking as an example the musical scenes of France and Brazil in the 1920s. With the help of this empirical material, we can identify the social practices and mechanisms through which the social positions of these figures were supported and their differences legitimized.

I shall start the article by sketching Heitor Villa-Lobos's career up until his encounter with Cocteau in Paris. Subsequently, I focus on the transformation in his conceptions of Brazilian music and his own work during his stay in the French capital. Finally, I discuss the social mechanisms and practices through which this transformation took place.

### **Heitor Villa-Lobos, a *carioca* composer**

In March 1887, when Heitor Villa-Lobos was born, many things were about to change in his home city, Rio de Janeiro. A weak and aged emperor was the sole guardian of a system of government which had proven to be dysfunctional for a number of years. A little more than two years later, the emperor and his family were banished and Brazil was proclaimed a Republic.

The transition to the new form of government had a pronounced impact on the arts: the imagination linked to liberty and modernity, so widespread in the first years after the proclamation, created a favourable environment for changes in aesthetic alignments. In the field of classical music, some artists took advantage of this opportunity to effect a sweeping restructuration of the country's largest

school of music: less than two months after the end of the Empire, a decree transformed the Imperial Music Conservatory into the National Institute of Music.

This change of name signalled a desire for deeper changes. In fact, until then, the classical music produced in Brazil had circulated exclusively in Court circles. It was in 1841 that Francisco Manuel da Silva “put before the throne” a request for the creation of the Imperial Conservatory, a ‘civilizing environment’ that could place Brazil in the ensemble of the “most cultured nations” (Mello 1947 [1908]:219). Before this, the classical music produced in Brazil was for all intents confined to music for ecclesiastical functions, composed by chapel masters such as Marcos Portugal and Father José Maurício. The Imperial Conservatory, however, never succeeded in consolidating itself as an institution; indeed, it lost its institutional space when it became subordinated to the School of Fine Arts in 1855. The Empire also supported the creation of the Imperial Academy of National Music and Opera by Dom José Amat, a Spanish immigrant who began to implement his project in 1857, attempting to establish a field for the creation of ‘national’ Brazilian operas. In practice, the ‘national’ element of the works presented at the Imperial Academy was almost entirely restricted to the use of the Portuguese language in translated versions of operas such as *Norma* and *La Traviatta* — but since the singers of the main roles of the presentations of the Imperial Academy were almost always foreigners, even the ‘Portuguese’ they sang was incomprehensible to the audience (Azevedo 1938:592). In fact, the pre-eminence of the Italian aesthetic in Brazil during the years of Empire was so accentuated that the debate among critics concerning the first opera by Antônio Carlos Gomes, *A Noite do Castello*, was over the suitability or otherwise of the composer freeing himself from the influence of Verdi to absorb the aesthetic of Rossini and Donizetti. The only big name in Brazilian classical music at the time, Carlos Gomes opened his biggest success, the opera *Il Guarany*, sung in Italian, at the Scala Theatre in Milan (Azevedo 1936:208).

When the composer Leopoldo Miguéz took over the direction of the then National Institute of Music, in 1890, he made a point of imposing a ‘modern’ aesthetic in contrast to the ‘conservatism’ reigning there on his arrival. For Miguéz, ‘modern’ meant the German aesthetic of Wagner and the French aesthetic of Saint-Saëns, while ‘conservatism’ meant the insistence on privileging the Italian *bel canto*; at another level, Wagner, Saint-Saëns, Miguéz and the Republic were the modernity that came to substitute Verdi, the Conservatory and the emperor, a musical echo of the urban and ideological reforms through which the capital of the Republic was passing. Hence, social and political values were attributed to a form of cultural objectification that, at first sight, seems alien to these disputes: musical aesthetics. The ‘updating’ proposed by Miguéz for the Brazilian classical music scene was in equal measure aesthetic and moral.

On the day after his nomination as director of the Institute, Miguéz abolished the Chair of Singing “due to a lack of teachers,” despite the large number of teachers in Italian *bel canto* working there. Qualified piano teachers who belonged to the same aesthetic were replaced or downgraded to lower posts, such as that of accompanist. Miguéz’s actions led to the formation of an opposing group to Rio de Janeiro’s newly constituted musical establishment; as a result of these events, aesthetic debate on classical music in Rio de Janeiro became polarized between Italian music and that of Richard Wagner.

Wagner’s music represented ‘modernity’ in this debate because it was precisely at the peak of the acceptance of the composer in Europe that Miguéz and Alberto Nepomuceno, who would be the next director of the Institute, undertook their training in the renowned European musical centres. Nepomuceno, for example, studied in Berlin and Paris between 1888 and 1895. Over these seven years, he lived through the glorification of the German composer and witnessed the birth of Claude

Debussy's aesthetic 'revolution.' On returning to Brazil, his luggage was filled with the musical scores by these masters (Pereira 1995:109-111).<sup>2</sup>

It was through the contact with these debates that the young Heitor Villa-Lobos acquired his musical training. A member of the generation that followed Miguéz and Nepomuceno, Villa-Lobos viewed the different musical aesthetics in terms of the landscape sketched by his predecessors: the 'antiquity' and 'nobility' of Italian opera, the 'modernity' of Wagner and Saint-Saëns, and the 'revolutionary' aesthetics of Claude Debussy.

Villa-Lobos's contact with classical music began at home. His father Raul, the son of Spanish immigrants, was not born to a family from the local elite. However, he was sponsored by Alberto Brandão, then leader of the majority group in the Fluminense Provincial Assembly and founder of a well-respected secondary college in the town of Vassouras. As a result, Raul managed to complete his secondary school studies, which amounted to a rare privilege in the Second Empire (1840-1889) and even during the First Republic (1889-1930). The education received by him at Vassouras enabled what would have otherwise been unimaginable for a child without a wealthy background: access to a classical education. Raul, though, took advantage to invest in more studies. In parallel to his work as a public employee at the National Library, he wrote a number of didactic books and others on history, as well as translating works into Portuguese. A polymath intellectual, his interests included a passion for classical music: as a member of the Symphonic Club, Raul was a regular opera goer and played chamber music at his home with friends, as well as always playing his cello and clarinet. On various occasions, he took his son Heitor to concerts and even musical salons at Alberto Brandão's house.

Raul's investment in his son's musical training went much further, though. Villa-Lobos recounted that his father adapted a small cello for him, placing a support on a viola, and obliged him to "discern the genre, style, nature and origin of the musical works to which he made [him] listen." Since he had neither built up a wide circle of relations, nor invested in a career yielding higher financial returns, this precocious initiation in classical music was practically the only legacy that Raul left to Heitor; in 1899, when he was 37 years old, he died after contracting smallpox. His son was then sustained by the mother, who earned a living washing napkins for the Colombo Coffee House.<sup>3</sup>

Heitor Villa-Lobos did not conclude his secondary studies. In 1904, however, he enrolled at the National Institute of Music to take cello lessons on an evening course, at the same time as playing in the orchestra of a symphonic society, the Francisco Manuel Club. The evening courses comprised part of the project of teachers from the Institute to maintain and expand the public profile of classical music in Rio de Janeiro soon after the proclamation of the Republic. The creation of these courses was justified, in March 1900, by José Rodrigues Barbosa, a music critic and honorary professor of the Institute, in an official missive in which he stated:

"The creation of evening courses is an essential to professional education, and will help the Institute by training orchestras, providing special teaching for this purpose in the evenings, when student attendance may be higher. As is well know, the Institute's highest attendance on the day courses is almost exclusively composed of female students, and only rarely does one of these women decide to take part in instrumental ensembles. The 'Evening Courses' appeal to a higher number of male students, who will warmly welcome the new professional career laid before them. This will increase the likelihood of forming model-orchestras, performances of the works of the grand masters, and the musical education of the wider public through recitals."

(cited in Pereira 1995:195).

Before 1904 was out, though, the evening courses were suspended by the new director, another composer, Henrique Oswald, with the allegation that they “pose[d] a serious problem for daytime teaching, where all these teachers could be better employed, distributed in fact among almost empty classes, like the ones on the latter course” (cited in Pereira 1995:195). The only record of Villa-Lobos’s name at the National Institute of Music is the listing of his enrolment as a student on the evening course (Pereira 1995:197); after 1904, he is not found on the list of students regularly enrolled at the institution.

There is little empirical evidence existing on Villa-Lobos’s career and activities between 1905 and 1912. His biographers state that he travelled widely throughout Brazil during this period. However, there are few positive facts available concerning these trips. Just two written records, belonging to the archives of the Villa-Lobos Museum, provide evidence of the journeys he undertook: the first mentions a concert in Paranaguá, a port town in Paraná where Villa-Lobos lived and worked between 1907 and 1908s as an attendant at a local business firm, playing music in his free time (Lino n.d.:87); the second refers to a concert in Manaus, where Villa-Lobos went with an artistic company as a cellist accompanying theatre shows. Villa-Lobos’s own accounts, though, are much more extensive. Years later, he would claim to have crossed the whole of Brazil’s interior, including the Amazon and Xingu rivers, on a canoe. Not by chance, these improbable accounts surfaced precisely after Villa-Lobos became a ‘national’ musician. Today it seems more likely that the composer invented these stories to legitimate his claim to be the great ‘national’ musician, one who knew all the musical forms and styles found in his country.

The path trailed by the composer up until then, however, was littered with obstacles. On returning to Rio de Janeiro from Manaus, Villa-Lobos began to earn his living by working as an orchestra musician in symphonic societies, cinemas and cafés. Simultaneously, he hung out with the city’s street musicians, the ‘chorões,’ most of them low-level public employees who played at night at events such as baptisms, marriages and birthdays held at suburban houses. At a time when records and radios were the privilege of the upper classes, Rio’s poor population could only hear music thanks to groups such as the *chorões*.

It is impossible for us to ascertain the intensity and quality of Villa-Lobos’s contact with the popular musicians of his city. On one hand, he lived in the same spaces, occupied the same socioeconomic position and had learnt to play the *chorões* instrument, the guitar, for which he would compose an extensive set of works later; on the other hand, his classical training and work in orchestras separated him from amateur popular musicians.

This other attachment of Villa-Lobos distanced him from popular music during his first years as a composer. Indeed, popular music was highly disparaged in Rio de Janeiro until 1920; after this date, some scholars and folklorists began to valorize it, part of a movement that would turn it into a symbol of Brazilian nationality. But during the 1910s, when a ‘serious’ musician wished to insult a rival, the kinds of accusation used were expressions like ‘*maxixe* composer’ or ‘whistler.’

Villa-Lobos’s first compositions, presented from 1915 onwards in Rio de Janeiro, provide fundamental clues to understanding his attachments and attitudes: musical works such as the first two Symphonies, the symphonic poem *O Naufrágio de Kleonicos*, the opera *Izaht*, the *Danças Características Africanas* and the *Prole do Bebê*. It is at this moment that the musical material itself, combined with the composer’s pronouncements, becomes an ethnographic document indispensable to the analysis. By comprehending the aesthetic elements used in the works, we can draw conclusions concerning the options made by Villa-Lobos throughout his career – since the musical

discourse he emits is intrinsically a social discourse, negotiated in the many social interactions he established at each moment in his life.

The first symphonies by Villa-Lobos, as the composer himself stated to a biographer (Mariz 1949:39), were produced according to the rules postulated by Vincent D'Indy in his *Cours de Composition Musicale*; the aesthetic proposed by D'Indy, adopted by teachers from the National Institute of Music, was directly linked to that of Wagner. Also work sharing the aesthetics promoted by the Institute's teachers was his *Naufração de Kleonicos*, a symphonic poem whose musical language is a clear emulation of the principles of the French post-Romanticism of Saint-Saëns.<sup>4</sup> Taken as a whole, the application of the aesthetic ideas of Wagner, D'Indy and Saint-Saëns served as proof of Villa-Lobos's capacity as a composer vis-à-vis the Rio de Janeiro musical establishment. However, according to Villa-Lobos himself in an interview conducted in 1929, various critics told him that he could not be considered a 'composer' since he had no opera in his repertoire.<sup>5</sup> The reply, given "to provide victorious proof of his capacity to those who denigrated him," was *Izaht*, an opera in four acts in which the composer combined the "sensual lyricism of Puccini" and the "Wagnerian conceptions of leitmotif." As well as replying to the Institute's establishment and to his opponents, the defenders of Italian operas, Villa-Lobos also composed works that using aesthetic elements from Debussy: the scale of full tones, used in his *Danças Características Africanas* (cf. Wisnik 1983:150), and the conception of small children's pieces from the French composer's *Children's Corner*, present in his *Prole do Bebê*, made Villa-Lobos one of the few composers from his period to dare compose 'modern' music like that of Debussy in Brazil. Beyond proving he was capable of composing like Brazilian musicians already firmly enshrined in the music world, Villa-Lobos wanted to show he was ahead of all his peers.

This examination of some of the compositions produced by Villa-Lobos over the 1910s reveals his desire to take a stance in relation to Rio de Janeiro's classical musicians. To be accepted by his peers, he had to abide by the aesthetic rules of the classical music scene in the city. This included moving away from popular music: it is striking that, in the body of work composed by Villa-Lobos during the 1910s, there is an almost complete absence of aesthetic elements linked to popular music, despite the composer's contact with the *chorões*. The classical music written by him had no declared or internationally national element. Detailed research into his archives shows that this rhetoric and project were practically absent from the composer's plans until his trip to Paris in 1923.<sup>6</sup>

From 1915 onwards, Villa-Lobos began to present compositions to the Rio de Janeiro public in chamber music recitals. Only the fifth recital of his works, in 1918, included symphonic works, explained by the difficulty faced by the author in organizing a concert with so many members. Despite the financial failure and the small audiences attending this presentation, Villa-Lobos's works were highly praised, helping him to become more widely known. His efforts to establish himself as a big name in classical music in Rio de Janeiro had yielded their first results.

Hence, in 1919, he was remembered for composing one of the works to be presented at the concert in honour of Epitácio Pessoa, who had returned from Europe after taking part in the Paris Conference as representative of the Brazilian Government. Taking the end of the First World War as their theme, the three works performed at the event were divided between 'War,' composed by Villa-Lobos, 'Victory' by J. Otaviano Gonçalves, a laureate from the National Institute of Music, and 'Peace' by the well-known composer Francisco Braga. The newspapers reported that the work by Villa-Lobos was the most warmly applauded of the three; from this point on, he began to impose himself as one of the big names of the Brazilian music scene. Villa-Lobos also began to receive accolades from European artists passing through Rio de Janeiro, his works being played by the pianist Arthur Rubinstein and the German maestro Felix Weingartner; two symphonies were also

performed for the King of Belgium's visit to the city in September 1920. From a marginal and unknown composer, Villa-Lobos became a familiar name among Rio's high society.

It was at this point that Laurinda Santos Lobo, a rich heiress who hosted the city's most celebrated artistic salons, decided to support concert performances of the composer's works. In April 1921, at one of these concerts in which the fourth act of *Izaht* was played, he also presented some pieces with a 'national' theme for the first time: *A Lenda do Caboclo*, *Viola* and *Sertão no Estio*, works which included an elaboration of the rhythms of popular music. He made his purpose in composing 'national' pieces fully explicit in newspaper interviews. His idea was to "open the art festival with a concert of distinctively Brazilian musical pieces, hoping in the process to call general attention to this aspect of typically national and artistic productions, which should figure in the celebrations for the centenary."<sup>7</sup> Villa-Lobos intended for his works to be used in the festivals celebrating the centenary of Brazil's independence, to be commemorated the following year.

His plans would soon be altered, though. A second concert promoted by Dona Laurinda attracted the attention of the São Paulo modernist artists; in it, Villa-Lobos presented his most aesthetically 'daring' works, such as the *Quartetto Simbolico* and the piece *A Fiandeira* for solo piano, clearly inspired by Debussy's music. Villa-Lobos's 'modernity' – a Debussian 'modernity' – meant he was the only composer invited to present his works at the São Paulo Modern Art Week.<sup>8</sup>

After the Week, friends and admirers of Villa-Lobos began to discuss the idea of him visiting Paris – a step seen as expected for a musician who had become a celebrity in Brazil, a route already taken by so many other artists. Still in 1922, a federal decree granted 40 contos de réis for him to present his own works and those of other Brazilian composers in Europe. Only half of this money was actually released on time, prior to the end of the 1922 financial year; Villa-Lobos's friends and acquaintances completed the amount needed for the trip from their own pockets (Guimarães 1972:231). In June 1923, he boarded ship for Paris.

Villa-Lobos arrived in Paris convinced he would be a success. He left Rio de Janeiro as an avant-garde composer on the city's music scene. In a musical environment divided between defenders of the aesthetics of the Italian *bel canto*, on one hand, and Wagner's German aesthetic or the French aesthetic of Saint-Saëns, on the other, he saw himself as the only one of his peers audacious enough to compose in line with the revolutionary ideas of Debussy. His sureness that he would prove a success is stamped in the famous statement made in an interview given soon after he arrived in the French capital: "I didn't come here to learn, I came to show what I've already achieved." However, his meeting with Cocteau was the first of a series of events that would reveal to him just how mistaken he was.

### **Becoming a Brazilian in Paris**

The above exposition shows us the nature of Villa-Lobos's ambitions and his position within the arts world on his arrival in Paris, in June 1923. In his first encounter with French artists, in Tarsila's studio, he came into conflict with an artist who occupied a position diametrically opposite to his own. While Villa-Lobos was an unknown foreigner and a recent arrival to the city, Jean Cocteau was, by this time, completely integrated within the Parisian artistic circles, having succeeded in imposing himself as the great avant-garde artist of the French capital. We can turn, now, then to the figure of Cocteau: understand who he was, why he disliked the music Villa-Lobos played for him and why his opinion on the latter was important for the Brazilian composer.<sup>9</sup>

Clément Eugène Jean Maurice Cocteau was born two years after Villa-Lobos, on the 5<sup>th</sup> July 1889, in the house of his maternal grandfather, the foreign exchange broker Louis-Eugène Lecomte; this mansion, filled with paintings and art objects, located in the wealthy region of Maisons Laffite, 20km from Paris, was where he spent to his infancy.

Lecomte was an amateur violinist and had been a friend of Rossini – it was on the piano of the great Italian composer, who lived much of his life in Paris, that Jean's mother learnt to play the instrument.

During his adolescence, Cocteau began to frequent the backstage area of the *Comédie Française*. His access to the theatre world was enabled by a friend who had taken a drama course and lived closely with the actors. This contact was fundamental in terms of the young Jean quickly becoming the big young name of French art. In 1908, Edouard de Max, a famous actor from the *Comédie* and Sarah Bernhardt's partner on the boards, a dandy who lived surrounded by young men, began to circulate constantly in Cocteau's company. In April of the same year, the young artist's poems were recited by artists known to the public at a matinée performance at the Théâtre Fémina sponsored by De Max, and the main literary critic of the period, Laurent Tailhade, gave a lecture on the read work. The large number of invitees from the *grand monde* of Parisian art present at the event, the eulogies from the critic and the celebrity status bestowed by the actors to Cocteau's work ensured his immediate earthly glory.

Still in 1908, De Max managed to enrol the young poet in an official session of the *Salon des Poètes*, presided over by the minister of Public Education. After this, Cocteau developed close contacts with some of the big names of French literature, such as Catulle Mendès and Marcel Proust, which in 1913 chose him to write a review of his *Du Côté de chez Swann*. As a result, before reaching his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, he regularly frequented the most inaccessible houses and art salons. Moreover, his spirited presence, grace, charm and youth made him one of the biggest attractions of these salons. One of the participants of these circles said of him: "More spirit, or more poetic grace in conversation would have been impossible [...]. He also had a rare distinction and one of the most beautiful manners in the world. In a word, he was irresistible," (cited in Steegmuller 1973:56).

His passage through this world would turn him into one of Paris's most well-known dandies. Thanks to the wife of the editor of a literary magazine, he had access to the circle which led the artistic avant-garde of Paris in the following years: the Russian ballet company run by the entrepreneur Serge Diaghilev. From the outset, then, Jean Cocteau was linked to the true avant-garde epicentre formed by this company. Presentations of Diaghilev's ballets mobilized all of Paris's high society and art world in an environment of intrigues and privileges to which few had free access. After the second concert, Cocteau was always found backstage as an active participant, a figure whose mere presence already drew in a large public. In 1912, he was the author of the plot for one of Diaghilev's shows, called *Le Dieu Bleu*.

The First World War threw the Parisian art world into disarray by removing critics and artists from the city. Cocteau, however, a frail young man who had been declared unfit for military service in 1910, served for just two stints (interspersed with lengthy periods of leave) as an orderly with an ambulance unit close to the front, a position which probably also benefiting from the influence of a diplomat uncle. By the end of July 1916, he was already back in Paris for good. From then on he occupied a privileged position, as he would say some years later concerning this period: "In Paris the space was free. We occupied it," (cited in Hurard-Viltard 1987:22).



His new circle of contacts during the war included the painter Pablo Picasso and the composer Erik Satie. At the end of August 1916, the three artists met to organize a new show, called *Parade*. Presented by the Diaghilev company, this ballet combined Cocteau's text, set design and costumes by Picasso and the music of Satie. The *Parade* program glorified street, circus and fair music. Along with Satie's music, it was possible to hear street noises, typewriters, a navel siren, a direct and unmediated incorporation of the 'popular' in an 'artistic' production revolutionary for its time.

*Parade* marked an era among the art world. When presented again in 1919 and 1920, it also proved a great public success, allowing Cocteau to claim the show as the origin of various aesthetically revolutionary movements born in the 1920s. Above all, *Parade* marked Cocteau's leading role as a trend-setter in the artistic dynamic of Paris, the period's biggest pole of cultural attraction.

As a result of these events, Cocteau, despite not being a musician, was in a position to launch a new musical movement centred on Erik Satie and his followers. Satie, a composer active before the emergence of Claude Debussy but pushed into the background, was able to be presented by the poet as someone who had safeguarded the true 'French spirit' in his musical compositions. Diametrically opposed to the music of Debussy, Satie's works were clear, simple and precise; stripped down to aesthetic basics, they were not musical pieces that needed to be thought to be understood. They were therefore, according to Cocteau, closer to the "French music of France" (cited in Steegmuller 1973:155). In 1918, the poet published a pamphlet entitled *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*, whose first edition was sold out within a few days.<sup>10</sup> Composed mostly of witty aphorisms, this small work looked to define the new direction to be followed by French 'young art' after the war, and claimed that the musical path was the one set out by Satie and his young followers.<sup>11</sup>

We now have all the components needed to understand what happened at the meeting between Jean Cocteau and Heitor Villa-Lobos. The latter arrived in Paris and was led directly to the heart of the artistic avant-garde, the environment in which Cocteau circulated. However, the Brazilian arrived with a body of work inspired by the aesthetic rules of Claude Debussy, precisely the composer who Cocteau had managed to relegate to an earlier generation when he wrote and published *Le Coq et l'Arlequin* to critical success.<sup>12</sup> In this situation, Villa-Lobos suffered from the fact that the art scene from which he came was out of step, effectively a generation behind. It is worth recalling that when Nepomuceno took the musical scores for Debussy's works to Rio de Janeiro in 1895, these comprised the avant-garde in Europe. Nepomuceno himself considered Wagner to be his great master until his death, forced to fight against the aesthetic of the *bel canto* of the supporters of the Empire, but at the same time lending his support to the emergence of a Debussian avant-garde in the Brazilian capital. However, what was deemed modern in Brazilian avant-garde musical circles failed to keep pace with changes in France; hence Villa-Lobos arrived in Paris already behind the times.

We can imagine Villa-Lobos's deception when, instead of being acclaimed on revealing his 'modern' works to artists from the French avant-garde, he was harshly criticized. In reality, the misunderstanding between Cocteau and Villa-Lobos can be seen as a short-circuit between the conceptions that both harboured as people from extremely different social universes, despite their involvement in the same cultural manifestation – the production of modern and anti-Romantic Western classical music. In Rio de Janeiro, Villa-Lobos was considered daring and avant-gardist because of his use of elements of Debussy's aesthetic; in Paris, this use exposed him to criticism from the main representative of the avant-garde.

This encounter was only the first moment in the lengthy process of change experienced by Villa-Lobos's aesthetic concerns from this point onwards. Throughout the year in which he stayed in

Paris, his work underwent a significant transformation. We can understand this transformation if we follow some of the clues left by Villa-Lobos and people close to him in Paris in 1923.

In the 1920s, lived through what were later called the *années folles* – years in which aesthetic movements such as the cubism of Picasso, the dadaism of Tzara and the surrealism of Breton competed with and succeeded each other at break-neck speed. In this environment, artists valorized the use of elements considered *exotic* in Paris — the painter Tarsila do Amaral recalls, for example, in her memoirs of Paris, the figure of the ‘black prince Tovalu,’ which was “a fetish disputed in all the avant-garde artistic circles” (Amaral 1975:104). Villa-Lobos’s impulsive behaviour among the art world and even his physical bearing helped forge a place for him as a Brazilian composer – Villa-Lobos was certainly exotic for the refined Parisian artists. Here it suffices to cite the words of violinist Andrés Segovia on recalling the day he met the composer:

“Among all the guests that night, the one who most impressed me on entering the hall was Heitor Villa-Lobos. Although short, he was well-proportioned and had a virile bearing. His vigorous head, proudly topped by a wild forest of unruly hair [...]. His gaze shone with a tropical sparkle which quickly turned to flame when he joined the amused conversation around him. [...]

When I finished my presentation, Villa-Lobos came up and said to me in a confidential tone: ‘I also play the violin’ – ‘Marvellous!’ I replied. ‘So you’re capable of composing directly to the instrument.’ Extending his hands, he asked me for the guitar. [...] And when least expected, he struck a chord with such force that I yelled, thinking the guitar had shattered. He burst out laughing and with a giggle said to me: ‘Wait, wait...’ I waited, restraining with difficulty my initial impulse, which was to save my poor instrument from this vehement and alarming display of enthusiasm.”

(cited in Santos 1975:12).

This valorization of the exotic, so pregnant for a foreign artist coming from the faraway Americas,<sup>13</sup> found an echo in all the artistic circles of the French capital. Curiously, it was a Brazilian musician who ended up baptizing one of the most lively focal points of the Parisian artistic avant-garde in the *années folles*: the café *Le Boeuf sur le toit*.

*O Boi no telhado* (The Ox on the roof) was a song written by the samba composer Donga in the 1910s. This samba, along with many other popular Brazilian songs, was heard by the composer Darius Milhaud when he lived in Brazil as part of the French diplomatic mission between 1917 and 1919. Milhaud became one of the components of the Group of Six, the young followers of Satie who were later enthroned in the Parisian musical avant-garde by Jean Cocteau. When he returned to Paris from Rio de Janeiro, Milhaud compiled various compositions he had heard, transcribing them and dressing them in ‘modern’ classical clothing, linked by a recurring musical theme; thus *Le Boeuf sur le toit* was composed, a “fantasy in the form of a rondó on Brazilian themes.” *Le Boeuf* was transformed into a ballet with a text by Cocteau. Milhaud, in line with Cocteau’s aesthetic proposal, claimed that what interested him in these songs was not their exoticism, but “their clarity of shape, their glowing spontaneity, their immediate humour, and their inner intensity:” it was the kind of appropriation that a French avant-garde composer of this period was able to make of Brazilian songs.<sup>14</sup>

However, the project that Milhaud elaborated for using the Brazilian popular music by a Brazilian classical composer was somewhat different. In ‘*Brésil*,’ an article published in the *Revue Musicale* soon after his return from Rio de Janeiro, in 1920, he claimed that the classical musicians of Rio de Janeiro he knew did not valorize the popular music of his country. Shrewdly, Milhaud perceived the prestige enjoyed by French composers in Rio de Janeiro, and the variation in their influence in accordance with the age of the Brazilians:

“It is regrettable that all the compositions of Brazilian composers, from the symphonic works or chamber music of Mr. [Alberto] Nepomuceno and Mr. [Henrique] Oswald to the impressionist sonatas of Mr. [Oswaldo] Guerra or the orchestral works of Mr. Villa-Lobos (a young man of robust temperament, full of audaciousness), are a reflection of the different phases that succeeded each other in Europe from Brahms to Debussy, and that the national element is not expressed in a more lively and original fashion. The influence of Brazilian folklore, so rich in rhythms and with such a unique melodic line, is only rarely felt in the works of Rio’s composers. When a popular theme or a dance rhythm is used in a musical work, this indigenous element is deformed since the author sees it through the lenses of Wagner or Saint-Saëns, if he is sixty or over, or through those of Debussy, if he’s in his thirties.”  
(Milhaud 1920:61).

On the other hand, Milhaud in the same article praised Rio’s popular musicians. According to him,

“[...] it would be desirable for Brazilian musicians to understand the importance of composers of tangos, *maxixes*, sambas and *cateretês* like Tupynamba or the talented [Ernesto] Nazareth. The rhythmic richness, the ever renewed fantasy, the verve, animation and melodic invention of a prodigious imagination, all of which are found in every work of these two masters, make them the glory and joy of Brazilian art.”  
(Milhaud 1920:61).

Reading the writings of the Brazilians who formed the initial circle of contacts of Villa-Lobos in Paris, we can perceive just how much a positive attitude in relation to ‘national’ art production came to be valorized by all of them in the French capital. In a letter sent from Paris to the magazine *Ariel*, for example, the poet Sérgio Milliet asserted:

“It is a big mistake to consider *maxixe* an unimportant musical form. It is part of our soul, and the soul of a race is something extremely serious. What we should cultivate are precisely the spontaneous elements that spring up among our people. We should base our work on their characteristics, the ingenuity, sensuality, melancholy and wit of the popular song in order for us, with these attributes, to arrive at our own, and hence universal, music.”  
(Milliet 1924:215).

Tarsila do Amaral went even further. In a letter written to her parents in April 1923, a few months before the arrival of Villa-Lobos in Paris, she said:

“I feel ever more Brazilian: I want to be the painter of my land. How I thank the fact I spent all my childhood on the farm estate. The memories of this time become increasingly precious to me. I want to use art to be the little peasant girl of São Bernardo, playing with straw dolls, just like in the last painting I’ve been doing [Tarsila provides a sketch of the painting she called *A Caipirinha*]. Don’t think this Brazilian trend in art is frowned upon here. Much the opposite. What people want here is for each one to bring a contribution from his or her own country. That explains the success of the Russian ballets, the Japanese engravings and black music. Paris is fed up with Parisian art.”  
(cited in Amaral 1986:76).

Tarsila states clearly how the worth attributed to ‘national’ Brazilian art was not, in her opinion, confined to Brazilians. According to her, it was the Parisians themselves who wanted to learn about the cultural productions of other nations – which would explain this sudden emphasis on the national element among artists who had previously been converted entirely to the French aesthetic. Indeed, if

we turn to the reviews published on the few concerts of the works of Villa-Lobos directed by him on this first trip to Europe, we can observe that only those works containing some element assimilable to his nationality were praised. A Portuguese critic wrote about one of these concerts:

“[...] scorning the imitation of European Wagnerian or Debussian moulds and appearing in very timely fashion with an exotic aspect, at the moment in which Old World artists, tired of impressionism and cerebralism, are turning to a strong and crude art with a rhythmic backbone, albeit wild and extravagant [the critic is referring to the work of Stravinsky], the young Brazilian composer wisely realized that he should follow his own path and from this, I believe, he should not waver; rather, I think he should develop further the special technique required by his mode of feeling individual and racial.”

(Branco cited in *O Rio Musical* 1920:10).

Thus, when Villa-Lobos arrived in Paris in 1923, a whole series of small contacts and interactions, whose tracks we are pursuing here, worked to convince him slowly but surely of his need to convert, to transform into a composer of national musical works. As a result, he would abandon the attempt to compose according to the aesthetic rules of French composers, so highly valorized in Brazil, in order to try to depict his nation musically, a project especially valorized in France.

One of the first repercussions of Villa-Lobos's stay in Paris can be found in interviews. We can turn to what he stated in the newspaper *A Noite*, on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 1922, before embarking for Europe, where he shows a concern with defending his compositions against those who accused him of having a flimsy classical training:

“The Assyrian eras, the sculptural relics of Korea, the mysticism of India, the altruistic love of the cult of beauty among the Visigoths, the Roman melopeia, the Greek Epopéia, the Gregorian adventures that bequeathed humanity this eternal beauty of the chant, have all strongly influenced certain aspects of my aesthetic.”

(*A Noite*, 9/1/1922).

Now, let's consider the opinion expressed in an interview published in the same newspaper just before his second trip to Europe on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1926, in all terms opposed to the one depicted above:

“It is in the training of a country's arts that the blind indispensable necessity exists to collate the main motifs of its own nature, as all the great nations have done by distinguishing themselves by their own way of being, some of them even succeeding in dominating the universal artistic spirit, suggestively implanting a Beauty which has nothing in common with the Beauty of other peoples with completely opposite temperaments. It's true that in these cases we invariably find a curious phenomenon of conditions and paradoxes. For example, (with no irony intended) in Brazil [...] they eloquently revere all the deeds of ancient Greece and Rome, while disparaging the feats of our primitive savages. [...] This is perhaps what one calls, in modern fashion, snobbery.”

(*A Noite*, 9/1/1926).

It is also easy to detect the changes that took place in his work. Villa-Lobos finally began to make extensive use of the rhythms of popular music in his compositions, drawing inspiration from his experience of them outside the concert halls of Brazil, a source he had not incorporated in his creations beforehand due to the negative value attributed to popular aesthetics by Brazilian classical musicians – one of the most striking features of his work became its rhythmic richness, little exploited previously. Soon after returning from Paris, in 1924, he also researched indigenous songs, visiting the National Museum to listen to phonograms recorded by Roquette Pinto during the

Rondon expedition in 1908 – several of his subsequent compositions used sections of these songs. Debussy's aesthetic was abandoned, and his use of the orchestra began to be inspired by the 'primitive' Stravinsky of *The Rite of Spring*.

Villa-Lobos therefore began to develop a vast series images concerning his nation in his compositions. Over time, he developed his own unmistakable language, creating an original musical synthesis of the contemporary European classical music landscape and Brazilian folkloric and popular music. Scholars such as Gilberto Freyre came to consider that Villa-Lobos had concentrated in himself the essence of national music.

“I would say that, in the case of Villa-Lobos, as a *carioca* [a native of Rio], he seems to have been influenced to a large extent by social impacts, and I would say that in his work these social impacts became socio-musical. This is a topic for a detailed study of what one could call, in line with sociolinguistics, a sociomusicality. [...] We can imagine that, as a sociomusician, he began to absorb sociomusical influences, since an impressionable early age, as a resident of Rio de Janeiro, then Brazil's capital – not abstract sounds, but a merging of social sounds which flowed into him, carioca, providing him with a perspective that was trans-carioca, ultra-carioca, pan-Brazilian. Villa-Lobos was, undoubtedly, a sociomusician, therefore, one of the greatest composers the world has seen, a pan-Brazilian supremo, not just carioca, not just from the south of Brazil, but a pan-Brazilian who succeeded in comprehending the most distant Brazils, from the most distantly gaúcho to the most distantly Amazonian.”

(Freyre 1982:10)

Gilberto Freyre's reading exposes how the actual process that led Villa-Lobos to become a 'national' composer was forgotten by scholars of his work, who preferred to idealize his Brazilian 'essence.' His compositions prior to travelling to Paris were later seen by nationalist-inclined historians as the 'immature' works of an artist who had yet to find his own language and his 'national essence' (see, for example, Mariz 1989:111; Kiefer 1981:47). However, while the originality of the composer's later works is unquestionable, it is also undeniable that the roots of his project clearly contain French ideas concerning Brazil and what a Brazilian musician should be like. After all, the image of Brazil which this 'sociomusician' was capable of synthesizing in his compositions was not just any image, but an image of a wild, exotic, virgin Brazil, the Brazil of nature, Indians and primitive rhythms. In sum, the imaginary Brazil of the Parisians.

### **Defining oneself from a foreign gaze**

After 1923, Jean Cocteau would continue his turbulent artistic career, eventually being elected a member of the *Académie Française* in 1955; his career showed no perceptible change in direction as a result of his encounter with the Brazilian composer. For Villa-Lobos, on the contrary, the face-to-face with Cocteau can be taken as a critical moment at the start of a process of conversion at the end of which he had become a Brazilian artist, composing works of a national character only and making heartfelt pronouncements on his sense of belonging to the nation.

However, this was not an inevitable outcome; in other words, it was not an intrinsic feature of the composer's creative potential. As we have seen, the French composer Darius Milhaud was capable of borrowing from Brazilian music to compose 'French' works, claiming to be attracted by its 'clarity.' Yet Villa-Lobos, on the other hand, a Brazilian, was only able to use the same source music to express the supposed *exoticism* of his native country.

The fact that Villa-Lobos started to compose Brazilian music after 1923 was not due to his discovery of his Brazilian essence; instead, it arose from a process of transformation set in motion by a series of social mechanisms of value attribution. The role of the Modern Art Week in his musical career was exaggerated by his biographers and scholars, who attributed a decisive role to this event in the transformation of Villa-Lobos into a composer concerned with Brazilian music.

Taking an opposite tack, I have tried to show during the course of this article that Villa-Lobos's project to produce a 'Brazilian' music in accordance with the French conception of 'Brazil' was the result of a series of practices linked to various social actors, for example: the opinions of Brazilians living in Paris with Villa-Lobos, the comments made by critics, the reactions of surrounding artists to his attitudes, the imaginary of his country which they transmitted to him.

The overriding question, therefore, is *why* Villa-Lobos paid heed to the definition of Brazil and the role of Brazilian composer which was foisted on him in Europe. We should ask ourselves, therefore: why were the artistic goals subsequently pursued by Villa-Lobos those formulated by European artists – or by Brazilian artists after their contact with Europeans? Why was the French project for a 'Brazilian' art form imposed so easily, as though a natural fact, if aesthetic options are arbitrary and non-natural choices? Finally, how do we explain the greater legitimacy attributed to the view of the French concerning what 'Brazilian' art should be like?

To reply to these questions, we should bear in mind that Villa-Lobos's project was – at least in part – to be accepted and acclaimed by the Parisian musical establishment. Put otherwise: above all else, he accepted the judgment of the Parisians as valid and legitimate. Just like a series of Brazilian artists and intellectuals prior and contemporary to himself, Villa-Lobos recognized and admired French *civilization*. The architect Pereira Passos, for example, built a Rio de Janeiro based on the reforms he had seen in Paris; the Brazilian literati of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century re-enacted in the streets of Rio the Bohemian existence described by the French writer Henri Murger in *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*; <sup>15</sup> Alberto Nepomuceno imported the French admiration for Wagner at the National Institute of Music at the same time as he created the favourable conditions for the emergence of a Debussian avant-garde; the composer Leopoldo Miguéz wrote to a friend who was in Paris, declaring that

“[...] were it not for a host of problems I'm unable to resolve, I would be in Paris at this moment with my wife, enjoying the charms of that terrestrial paradise; listening and seeing everything that is worth being seen and heard there. How beautiful it all is! And how worthless is everything done here! How wise our countrymen are, like my friend [the writer and folklorist] Sant'Anna Nery and others, preferring to live in the homeland of the fine arts and progress, rather than vegetate in this wilderness, in this land of *botocudos* [wooden-lips: Indians]!”  
(cited in Pereira 1995:75).

Villa-Lobos was, in sum, one more participant in this network of relations between France and Brazil. Innumerable practices such as these created, legitimated and naturalized the attribution of a superior value to the aesthetics and definitions of French *civilization*. By accompanying Villa-Lobos's professional career, we can perceive how he and a series of producers of a self-styled 'Brazilian culture' actually absorbed the definitions, opinions and aesthetics of European artists, making themselves into Brazilians via the mirror they provided.

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Paulo Guérios studied the life history of Heitor Villa-Lobos in his master's dissertation, *Lutando por sua Predestinação. Um Estudo Antropológico da Trajetória de Heitor Villa-Lobos*, published by the Getulio Vargas Foundation Press in 2003. He is currently undertaking a study of life histories and memory among descendents of Ukranian immigrants in the State of Paraná.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The history of this encounter was told by Tarsila herself and by Souza Lima in Amaral (1975:104) and Lima (1969:153), respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The ‘modernity’ of the proposal from Miguéz and Nepomuceno was also reflected in the effort to construct a place for classical music in Brazil. A field began to be created with a modicum of consistency, in contrast to the complete precariousness of the life of Brazilian musicians during the Empire. There was a well-established teaching institution, smoothly run and provoking a lively and passionate aesthetic debate. Musicians with a solid training in Europe brought back the most vibrant aesthetic tendencies, and fought to implement them. The idea of arriving at ‘civilization’ through music resurfaced, only this time as a project mixed with the ‘modernity’ of Republican ideas.

<sup>3</sup> The information on Villa-Lobos’s parents and his relationship with them were obtained from primary source research in the archives of the Villa-Lobos, in Rio de Janeiro, and the book by L. Guimarães (1972), the composer’s brother-in-law. This research on Villa-Lobos resulted in my master’s dissertation (Guérios 2003), where the composer’s career is studied in greater detail.

<sup>4</sup> A complete recording of the *Naufrágio de Kleonicos*, conducted by the composer himself, is contained in the archive of the Villa-Lobos Museum. The climax to this work is a fairly well-known extract from the composer’s repertoire, *O Canto do Cisne Negro*, clearly inspired on the song *O Cisne*, by Camille Saint-Saëns: not just the name, but the romantic aesthetic, an accompaniment of arpeggios and the solo instrument, the cello, are the same as Saint-Saëns’s song.

<sup>5</sup> Interview given to the musical critic Suzanne Demarquez, published in the *Revue Musicale* of November 1929 and reproduced in *Guimarães* (1972:149).

<sup>6</sup> Some authors, such as Kiefer (1981:103), cite works such as *Canções Típicas Brasileiras*, supposedly composed in 1919, in an attempt to refute this thesis. However, many works were re-dated by the composer *a posteriori*, including these songs. This is easily proven by various clues scattered throughout the archives concerning Villa-Lobos: for example, *Viola Quebrada*, one of the *Canções*, was based on a theme created by Mário de Andrade and dedicated to Tarsila and Oswald de Andrade, who were not yet a couple in 1919. Furthermore, the program for a Villa-Lobos concert in 1923 contains a list of all his compositions to date, and the absence of numerous works in this list reveals their later re-dating (cf. Guérios 2003:138).

<sup>7</sup> Cutting from an unidentified newspaper, dated 13/6/1921, belonging to the archives of the Museum of Image and Sound, Rio de Janeiro.

<sup>8</sup> The importance of the Modern Art Week in shaping Villa-Lobos’s professional career has been exaggerated by scholars (see, among others, Mariz 1989:111 and Andrade 1991 [1939]:25). This perhaps is due to the fact that it was a landmark on the national art scene, since the artists who made up the country’s art establishment after this event were those involved in the Week. Hence, the significance of the event is projected onto the composer’s career. However, the Week was only important to Villa-Lobos later by making him better known outside of Rio de Janeiro and by marking him as a ‘modernist’ in the eyes of an important Rio music critic, Oscar Guanabara (cf. Guérios 2003:123). Opposite to what is claimed, the Week did not have any influence on Villa-Lobos’s conversion to a ‘Brazilian’ style of music or on his prominence in the national art world.

My argument differs significantly from that defended by one of the most celebrated works on Villa-Lobos and the Modern Art Week: the master’s dissertation *O Coro dos Contrários: A Música em torno da Semana de 22* (1983), by José Miguel Wisnik. Wisnik undertakes a highly sophisticated reading of the topic. Due to lack of space, I can only sketch the general outline of the analysis proposed by the author, given that it would be impossible to enter into a detailed critique of a work as dense and rich in ideas as this (for a slightly more detailed examination, cf. Guérios 2003: 228-230, n. 44). Wisnik developed his work at the start of the 1970s, when Marxist and post-Marxist readings were in vogue in the country’s universities. The analytic procedure Wisnik uses (with extreme consistency) derives from Adorno’s *Sociologie de la Musique*. Through an analysis of the musical substance of the works presented by Villa-Lobos at the Week, Wisnik’s aim is to detect the social significance organically present within it, with the ‘social’ understood as a totality that encompasses individuals. In his words: “I seek to produce a general survey of the technical procedures placed in circulation by these works, so as to define, in the final analysis, the kind of organicity that governs them and the ideological meaning (or meanings) to which they may correspond” (Wisnik 1983:141). This is followed by an attentive aesthetic reading of several works, in the course of which the author encounters elements of a ‘wildness’ characteristic of Villa-Lobos, mixed with the ‘refinement’ of Debussy – a mixture identified in exemplary form in a

section of the *Danças Características Africanas* which is “modally based on the scales of Debussy [in this case, the scale of full tones] and rhythmically based on syncopated swing” (Wisnik 1983:151).

The change that gradually took place in Villa-Lobos’s musical output in the years following the Modern Art Week until 1930, when the composer began to give special emphasis to noise and abandoned the modal techniques of Debussy to adopt ideas lined to the tonal breaks created by Stravinsky, appears to Wisnik as “the eclosion [in the works of Villa-Lobos] of a wild, natural world” that is above all the “projection of his personal or ‘intimate’ impulses” (Wisnik 1983:166), as Mário de Andrade had claimed in an excerpt cited by the author. For Wisnik, though, this did not involve a pure confluence of expectations. The works present both an aesthetic meaning (perceived by the promoters of the Modern Art Week) and an encompassing social meaning: “the forces unleashed in Villa-Lobos’s pieces touch on this field of possibilities, where the refinement in the evolution of the productive forces of a society geared towards a process of continual technical enhancement combines [...] with the emergence of a dense and diversified world of possibilities in nature.” Thus, Villa-Lobos’s post-1922 production, according to Wisnik, as well as occurring

“[...] as an outcome [...] of his complex personality [that is, of the individual Villa-Lobos], also results from a collective coordinate, namely the need to represent the image of a nature brimming with resources, to make evident the nation’s enormous potentiality, to project a positive vision of its possibilities. The problem is complex, but it can be tackled via an idea from Adorno, who argues that talent takes shape in the meeting of certain trends of needs present in a social environment, that shapes it according to its expectations.” (Wisnik 1983:167).

Following Wisnik’s reasoning, the music of Villa-Lobos before 1922 employed techniques from Debussy as a way of releasing a nationalism which had already been present. His music after 1922, though, was supposedly the result of the combination of the individual Villa-Lobos with an encompassing social environment that had ‘shaped’ him according to the need to represent a country turned to the future, with energy to succeed and the potential to explode. It should be noted, though, that the ‘social’ that ‘shaped’ the music of Villa-Lobos is decodified by the author as the modernist ideas themselves! Wisnik takes one of the positions present in a field of aesthetic battles as the whole of ‘Brazilian art’ at that historical moment.

The excerpts subsequently cited by Wisnik explain themselves: quotations from four authors (Mário de Andrade, Ronald de Carvalho, Coelho Netto and a fragment from Andrade Muricy written 35 years later) who see in Villa-Lobos’s music the “gush of water” and the “release of energies” apparently demonstrate that the composer embodied an expectation, his music representing “the country imagined as a potential” (Wisnik 1983:170); Villa-Lobos, in sum, moulded by this ‘social’ which encompasses everyone, ends up being the country itself in the form of music. Wisnik’s analysis, therefore exempts itself from seeing the small interactions that influenced the decisions of Villa-Lobos, enveloping his professional history in modernist ideas; this, in turn, erases Villa-Lobos himself as a social actor, by failing to see the extent to which he worked to manage to influence the directions taken by his career.

<sup>9</sup> The information on the career of Jean Cocteau were taken from two biographies on the artist: the books of Kihm *et al.* (1968) and Steegmuller (1973), as well as Hurard-Viltard (1987).

<sup>10</sup> Cocteau published *Le Coq et l’Arlequin* at his own publishing house, another demonstration of his central position and his direct access to key resources in the makeup of the Parisian art world.

<sup>11</sup> The latter would soon become celebrities: two years later, an article by a musical critic called ‘Les Cinq Russes et les Six Français’ lent renewed legitimacy to the leadership of this group of followers, who were thereafter known as ‘the group of Six.’ These were: Louis Durey, Germaine Tailleferre, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honneger, Francis Poulenc and Georges Auric.

<sup>12</sup> Bourdieu (1977:39) focuses on the question of artistic ‘innovation,’ showing that the circles of the avant-garde who manage to impose their aesthetic visions can only do so by relegating the dominant visions in their artistic field to an aesthetic ‘past.’ In other words, a new artist can only succeed in occupying a position of prestige if they impose an aesthetic vision that conflicts with that of an established artist, relegating it to the past and constructing for him or herself an image of originality and daring.

<sup>13</sup> Latin-American artists from other countries living in Paris experienced the same process suffered by Brazilian artists such as Tarsila and Villa-Lobos. The Cuban writer and musicologist Alejo Carpentier, for example, praised the expression of the exotic in Villa-Lobos, demonstrating just how pregnant the French representation of 'Latin America' was for 'native' artists who went to Europe and found themselves grouped under the same representation. In an article published in the *Gaceta Musical*, July/August 1928, he wrote: "Sunday afternoon. In the studio of Villa-Lobos [...] the admirable pianist Tomás Terán sits at the piano. He prestigiously plays one of Villa-Lobos's *Cirandas* suites... And the formidable voice of America, with its wild rhythms, its primitive melodies, its contrasts and shocks which evoke humanity's childhood, sounds forth in the heat of a summer afternoon, through a music of the utmost refinement and actuality. The enchantment works its effect. The piano hammers – drum sticks? – strike a thousand sonorous vines, transmitting echoes across the virgin continent. And, before the discourse of the palm which thinks like a palm, the fountain of the Saint Michel square, as though ashamed, goes silent for an instant."

<sup>14</sup> Milhaud would appropriate the works he had heard in Brazil at later points too: in 1920, he composed *Saudades do Brasil*; the final movement of his *Scaramouche* (1937) is called *Brazileira*, consisting of a series of variations of the Brazilian tango *Brejeiro*, by Ernesto Nazareth; in 1945, he also composed the three *Danses de Jacaremirim*: *Chorinho*, *Tanguinho* and *Sambinha*.

<sup>15</sup> Concerning the cultural importance of France in Rio de Janeiro during the period in which Villa-Lobos grew up, see Needell (1987).