

Ou não (1973), by Walter Franco: counterculture, experimentalism, and avant-garde in Brazilian Popular Music

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Abstract

An active musician since the 1960s, Walter Franco surprised audiences and critics by interpreting his unusual composition “Cabeça” at the VII International Song Festival (TV Globo, 1972). Faced with the great boos he received, the jury came out in his defense for recognizing his boldness and innovation in that environment that valued lyricism and standardized compositional formulas. In addition to the controversies that surrounded that festival, this paper analyzes Walter Franco’s first album, *Ou não* (Or not), released by the label Continental in 1973. Thus, it seeks to discuss the countercultural and experimental aspects present in the album, as well as its avant-garde character, despite the supposed unfeasibility of the emergence of the avant-garde in the culture industry.

Keywords: Walter Franco; *Ou não* long-playing; Counterculture; Experimentalism; Avant-garde.

Introduction

In 1972, Júlio Medaglia had warned about the “crises of the MPB [Brazilian Popular Music]” in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*. For him, nothing of relevance had emerged in Brazilian popular music after the end of the tropicalist movement in 1968. Only four musicians had been worthy of some reservations on his part: Chico Buarque, for the creativity of lyrics, Caetano Veloso, for the theatricality on stage, Gilberto Gil, for the guitaristic technique, and Egberto Gismonti, for the “serious work”. Apart from them, the innovations by the songwriters amidst the cultural-political effervescence that characterized the second half of the 1960s, driven one way or another by the new demands of the recording industry and of the culture industry as a whole, had categorically been exhausted. The only way that popular music would

have been able to recover its audacity and propose something truly instigating would have been to bet on the “return of the controversy”, which would require study and research by the songwriters: “The fairy tale that nobody can learn samba at school” – allusion to the samba song “Feitio de oração” (“Manner of oration”), by Noel Rosa – “has already delayed the MPB for far too long” (MEDAGLIA, 1972, p. 5).

The somewhat elitist opinion of the maestro, arranger, and one of the most notable supporters of Tropicalism¹, belonged to a tradition of thought that was rapidly spreading. In 1977, for example, Gilberto Vasconcellos would refer to the “years of lead” of the dictatorship (1969-1974) as the cradle of a “culture of depression”. The castrating presence of the censorship, internalized in the syntax of the song itself, would have favored banality. Under the sign of threat, and informed by a counterculture that barely resembled the tropicalist “solar universe”, such “culture of depression” would have declared spurious or square the sphere of politics, seeking to manifest itself through the nonsense, irrational, mystical, and escapist discourse (VASCONCELLOS, 1977, p. 64-72). Previously, the journalist Zuenir Ventura had already coined a famous expression to distinguish the triviality that, in his understanding, proceeded to dominate the arts of the period. In 1971, in the magazine *Visão*, he argued that “the disappearance of the polemic thematic and of the controversy in culture [...], the emergence of false aesthetic values, the hegemony of a mass culture seeking only easy consumerism” would be symptoms, among others, of what he called “The cultural void” (VENTURA, 2000, p. 40-51).

In addition to the consolidating process of the cultural goods market under the “economic miracle” of the dictatorial Médici government (1969-1974), the Institutional Act Number Five (Ato Institucional nº 5 or AI-5), decreed in December of 1968, was, for many, an almost irreversible blow to the entire artistic production. Despite the different nuances of analysis, artists, journalists, and intellectuals ascertained that, with the end of decade of the 1960s, concomitantly came to an end the art considered socially engaged and tributary of the popular-national², along with the formal experiences with refinement of avant-garde. Be that as it may, such pessimistic diagnoses would not refrain them from being surprised by unexpected artistic initiatives conveyed by the mass media of the time. Amongst them, the performance by Walter Franco at the VII International Song Festival (VII FIC) of Globo television network, in 1972. The composer and performer of the composition “Cabeça” (“Head”), going far beyond the

¹ Of the musical Tropicalism, theme addressed from various angles by these and other innumerable authors – such as Schwarz (1978), Favaretto (2007), Callado (1997), Napolitano (2001), Dunn (2009), only to mention a few –, took part Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Tom Zé, Gal Costa, Os Mutantes, Torquato Neto, José Carlos Capinan, Rogério Duprat, among other names.

² In general terms, the popular-national concerns the construction of the national memory through the valorization of folklore and the popular culture. Although it oriented sectors of the right-wing, such manner of thinking nurtured in its various nuances the socially engaged, nationalist and/or revolutionary perspective of a great deal of the left-wing thought and of the artistic production of the 1960s. For a discussion on the subject, see, for example, Renato Ortiz (2006, p. 149-181; 2006b, esp. p. 68-78).

predictability at an event meant for the general public, was facing, according to Gilberto Vasconcellos (1978, p. 28), “the problem of the exhaustion of forms”.

In this article³, I discuss the controversies that marked the referenced festival in order to, thereafter, analyze the first album by Walter Franco, *Ou não (Or not)* (1973), characterized by experimental practices and by countercultural and avant-garde references. Lastly, and keeping strictly to the Brazilian Popular Music from that time of intense political, economic, and sociocultural transformations, I will put forth some contributions to the debate involving the feasibility of avant-garde initiatives emerging in the culture industry.

“Cabeça” at the VII FIC

A student of dramatic arts at the University of São Paulo and composer of soundtracks for plays, the São Paulo city native Walter Franco (1945-2019) participated in all the editions of TV Tupi’s University Festival in the 1960s, having, at the 1968 edition, the song “Não se queima um sonho” (“You don’t burn a dream”) defended by none other than Geraldo Vandré, one of the major icons of the “protest song”. Never recorded and disqualified from the competition, despite the ovation by the public, the song paid tribute to Che Guevara, then recently murdered in Bolivia: “*Seu sonho sem mortalha/ Cercado de solidão/ Eu trago bem guardado/ Na espera e no coração/ Vem, ó!/ Meu companheiro, Che/ Seu sonho quero lhe dar*” (“*Your dream with no shroud/ Surrounded by loneliness/ I bring well-guarded/ In the wait and in the heart/ Oh, come!/ My comrade, Che/ Your dream I shall give you*”) (FRANCO, 2016). “Não se queima um sonho” drew the attention of Rogério Duprat, the arranger of the tropicalists’ manifesto-album *Tropicália ou Panis et circencis* (1968). However, it drew his attention in a negative manner, since, at the time, Duprat gave the following declaration to the newspaper *Folha da Tarde*: “If Guevara were here he wouldn’t like it at all. We need to put an end to all this whining and crying around guerilla fighters, that’s not how we stage a revolution!” (apud NUZZI, 2015, p. 152).

Son of the poet and broadcaster Cid Franco – the first socialist city councilor of São Paulo, whose mandate was revoked soon after the 1964 military coup –, Walter Franco inherited from the family a left-wing political upbringing and the taste for the arts. Immersed in the cultural-political effervescence that characterized the end of the 1960s, his list of interests grew and opened itself up to new values, which, despite being initially driven by Tropicalism, were present amidst the various countercultural practices and experiences that emerged in an idiosyncratic manner on Brazilian soil in the aftermath of 1968 (see, for ex., DUNN, 2016; FAVARETTO, 2019). Among these practices and experiences, eastern spirituality, meditation,

³ I dedicate the article to Walter Franco (*in memoriam*), to whom I had the opportunity to thank personally for the rich conversations and reflections that he trusted me with in more than one occasion.

holistic thought based on the complementary opposites *Yin-Yang*, and other aspects associated with belief systems and non-Western philosophies nurtured curiosities and changes in the mentality and behavior of portions of the youth under the rationality of the authoritarian State. The experimentalism in the arts merged with Walter Franco's subjective turning point around 1972, year in which, at the VII International Song Festival of TV Globo (VII FIC), he would surprise the journalists, the public, and the judges when incorporating the same principle, of Maiakovski, that substantiated Rogério Duprat's criticism: "Without a revolutionary form there is no revolutionary art".



Figure 1 – Walter Franco, in the 1970s. (source: Instituto Moreira Sales, 2019)

In 1972, after promoting two international song festivals (V FIC and VI FIC), one in 1970 and the other in 1971, both politically turbulent and not very successful in terms of public, Globo aspired to restore the prestige that such events had earned in the 1960s. José Bonifácio de Oliveira Sobrinho (Boni) and Walter Clark, then directors of the network, invited an expert on the subject, Solano Ribeiro, to organize and direct the VII FIC, based in Rio de Janeiro, at the gymnasium of the Maracanãzinho, in the months of September and October of 1972. Conceived with basis on the "Globo Standard of quality", and exhibited in Brazil as well as internationally, it

was the first Brazilian festival to be broadcasted in colored TVs, an appliance gradually accessible to the country's middle class. Solano Ribeiro put himself in charge of selecting the competing musicians and assembling the body of judges, which was composed by, just to mention a few names, Nara Leão (escalated president), Rogério Duprat, the poet Décio Pignatari, the businessman and musical producer Guilherme Araújo, and the journalists Sérgio Cabral, Walter Silva and Roberto Freire, also a psychiatrist and founder of the Somaterapia⁴.

Few already known and experienced musicians signed up for the VII FIC: Hermeto Pascoal, the band Os Mutantes, and the duo Baden Powell and Paulo César Pinheiro. Amongst the revelations besides Walter Franco were some names that would achieve prominence in the MPB: Alceu Valença, Fagner, Belchior and Ednardo, Renato Teixeira, Sirlan and Murilo Antunes, Sérgio Sampaio, Raul Seixas, and the singer Maria Alcina, who interpreted the song, by the already famous Jorge Ben, “Fio maravilha” (nickname of a famous Brazilian soccer striker), winner of the national phase sharing the prize with “Diálogo” (“Dialogue”), by Baden Powell and Paulo César Pinheiro – which means that the winning compositions were not by any of the new musicians. Of Walter Franco’s performance there is no footage or audio recording available⁵. His strange composition “Cabeça”, as some critics described it, went on to the elimination rounds of the national phase, which triggered a series of conflicts and built up a tense atmosphere involving the public, the judges, TV Globo’s directors, and the military police that closely monitored the event.

Without instruments, unarmed before the microphone, the composer Walter Franco spoke in pauses the lyrics of his competing composition, “Cabeça” (“*What is it you got in that head, brother?/ What is it you got in that head, or not?*”), while the boos gradually took over Maracanãzinho’s great dome. At a certain point, Franco’s calculated and almost hypnotic movements, having been a student of the dramatic arts, seemed to conduct the unison of the crowd’s soundtrack. And “Cabeça”, a lyric without melody, recited with a background of voices and recorded noises from an electronic synthesizer, would receive more howls after being qualified. At the second performance in the next phase, Walter kept himself mute and static on stage, listening to the irradiation of the tape, coming out victorious when it ended. The rhythmic chorus of insults, only reproduced in soccer fields, showed that at least the just over 4,000 spectators from the first elimination round (an estimated 3,000 in the second), had not remained indifferent. And this in such a hardly exciting festival already represented something rare (ARAÚJO, 1972, p. 83-84).

Incompatible with immediate enjoyment and comprehension, “Cabeça” evidently did not please the public of the festival. Reiterating the above description, by Olívio Tavares de Araújo, the journalist Júlio Hungria, in the weekly *O Pasquim*, added that Walter Franco was the only one

⁴ A contemporary therapeutic process stemmed from the questions raised by libertarian practices and behaviors of the counterculture, the Somaterapia was created with basis on the studies of Wilhelm Reich and on anarchist premises, including also theater and Angolan capoeira techniques.

⁵ Globo Network’s record label Som livre, released at the time two LPs of the VII FIC: one with the greatest hits in the public’s opinion and the other titled *The 12 finalists of the VII Popular Song Festival* (1972). “Cabeça” is registered in the latter, but in the voice of the singer from the state of Minas Gerais Eustáquio Senna and under a less experimental arranging when compared to the recording in Walter Franco’s LP, *Ou não* (1973).

[...] from the whole cast of the International Festival who did something useful, utilizing the machine [the system, the TV, the culture industry] – he gave a performance that, good or bad, doesn't matter, produces effects, makes the public think (after booing): he's just there, with that strange, concrete, astonishing song, modifying, even if through grunt work, the trivial habits of a society (HUNGRIA, 1972, p. 17).

Hungria further compared Walter Franco's performance to the one that the musician Jards Macalé had given at the IV FIC from 1969, competing with his noisy song "Gothan City", whose lyrics, by José Carlos Capinan, alluded to the recrudescence of the military regime after the decree of the AI-5. Walter and Macalé, who, among others, were labeled as the "damned musicians" by the recording industry and the press of the time, for not corresponding to certain aesthetic patterns nor to the dominant taste, were the stars of the biggest boos registered until then at popular music festivals since the provocation by Caetano Veloso saying "É proibido proibir" ("It's forbidden to forbid") at the III FIC, in 1968⁶. As if resuming the provocation a year later, Jards Macalé and the band Os Brazões generated a chaotic and musically aggressive atmosphere at the IV FIC⁷. Whereas in the seventh edition of the event, Walter Franco adopted another tactic when faced with the rejection of the audience, which, nonetheless, perceived his silence and his peaceful posture on stage as a "disrespectful reply" (VARGAS, 2010, p. 205)⁸.

In an interview to the journalist Ana Maria Bahiana, Walter Franco confirmed that it was a moment "of great violence. I knew I was confusing people by launching the yes and the no in an excessively rapid count. People reacted throwing back an extremely powerful negative charge, even when I repeated a positive word such as 'brother'" (*apud* Bahiana, 2006, p. 274-275). Performing a "non-song" in a song festival, the musician contradicted the predictable, reverberating to a certain extent José Celso Martinez Corrêa's slogan, from Teatro Oficina, a famously controversial Brazilian theatre troupe: "Any and every consent between stage and audience is an ideological and aesthetic error" (*apud* SCHWARZ, 1978, p. 85). Even if it referred to the Christian solidarity so abundant in the Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) of the 1960s, the word "brother" ("What is it you've got in that head, brother?") did not cause similar effect or empathy. In a happening à la John Cage in 4'33" (1952) – a conceptual piece in which the pianist, frustrated by expectations in a concert hall, does not perform a single note –, Walter Franco integrated the agitation and the boos into the form of "Cabeça" itself.

Before the last national phase of the VII FIC, censorship agents demanded that TV Globo fire the judge Nara Leão, under the pretext that the singer had given a "subversive

⁶ Segments of Caetano Veloso's participation (accompanied by the band Os Mutantes) and of his provoking discourse at the III FIC (1968) can be seen in the documentary *Tropicália* (MACHADO, 2012).

⁷ To listen to the recording of "Gothan City" at the IV FIC, in which Macalé warned in the chorus "*Beware! There's a bat at the main door/ Beware! There's an abyss at the main door*", see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epz1isKVpTQ>. Accessed on: Feb. 4, 2021.

⁸ Out of curiosity, in the documentary *Walter Franco Muito tudo*, Jards Macalé certifies the interlocation of those iconoclastic initiatives when singing "Gothan City" modifying the chorus: "*Beware! There's a Walter at the main door!/ Beware! There's a Franco at the main door!*" (see BECHARA; SERPA, 2000).

interview” to the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*. Solano Ribeiro deposed the whole body of judges, with the intention, according to him, of provoking a “political situation” (see MELLO, 2003, p. 421-424; BOZZO JUNIOR, 2000). To Décio Pignatari and Rogério Duprat, such a controversial attitude had to do with “Cabeça”, which, if it were up to them and to the majority of the judges, would win the festival (see BECHARA; SERPA, 2000). Indeed, TV Globo was more interested in Maria Alcina. Woman of striking timbre, low tone vocal tessitura, wearing colorful clothes and abusing of extravagant mannerisms in her performance, Alcina infected the audience while defending Jorge Ben’s song, which, right in the middle of the Maracanãzinho – located next to the home stadium of Rio de Janeiro’s and the country’s biggest soccer team, Flamengo –, paid tribute to the Flamengo striker João Batista de Sales, better known as Fio Maravilha⁹. Replaced with a foreign delegation, the deposed judges wrote a manifesto in which they criticized Globo and the censorship, also indicating their decision in favor of Walter Franco. Going up on the stage and taking the microphone to read the manifesto, Roberto Freire – an ex-militant of the political organization *Ação Popular*, and, therefore, targeted by the military – was then dragged by TV Globo’s security guards to a room behind the stage, where he suffered a brutal police beating (see MELLO, 2003, p. 427; 429; FREIRE, 2002, p. 266-267).



Figure 2 – Roberto Freire being dragged from the stage of the VII FIC
(source: MELLO, 2003, p. 429)

⁹ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYucUeksWPA>. Accessed on: Feb. 4, 2021.

In spite of the “Globo Standard of quality”, the VII FIC had a well below-expected audience rating, resulting in some losses for the Globo Network, being also inefficient in terms of the intention of the military regime of, through the festivals, exporting a “good image of Brazil” abroad. Director of the event, Solano Ribeiro observed that the audience, of only four thousand in the elimination rounds, turned up at the Maracanãzinho not as much to appreciate the songs but to enjoy the television spectacle (*apud* SCOVILLE, 2008, p. 63). Although it still functioned as an environment for the demonstration of samples of new talents alongside the record labels and the public, the festivals in that competitive format waned under the intervention of the censorship and the organization of the culture industry. So much so that the seventh and last FIC – regardless of the *Festival Abertura* (“Opening Festival”) carried out by Globo in 1975, of which Walter Franco also participated – is considered the last-ditch of the “era of festivals”.

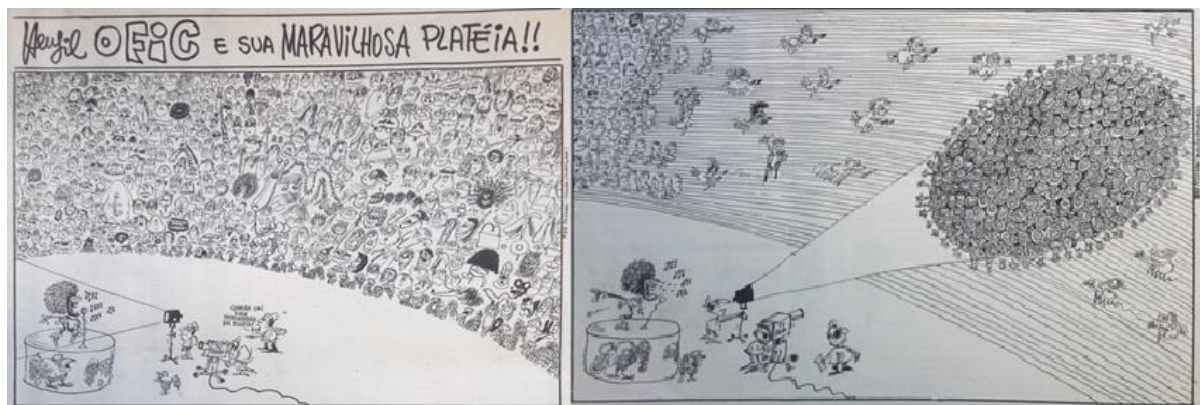


Figure 3 – *The FIC and its wonderful audience!*, comic strip by Henfil in the weekly *O Pasquim* ironizing the audience at the VII FIC (source: HENFIL, 1972)

In an interview given to *O Pasquim* in 1974, André Midani reported that, in the previous year, the label Philips/Phonogram had sold more albums than the entire Brazilian recording industry in 1968. The multinational’s director in Brazil insisted in the distinction between “catalogue musicians” and “marketing musicians”. In other words, producing more elaborated albums, the former guaranteed the status quo of Phonogram in face of the critics and the intellectualized public from the middle class. The latter, on the other hand, less onerous and for commercial purposes, would contemplate the more popular layers of the population. With its cast and segments of consumption guaranteed, to Phonogram it was preferable to keep in its cast Odair José, the “singer of the housekeepers” – pejorative label intended to designate the division of social classes between the fans –, than to invest in a new group of roaring success such as Secos & Molhados. It was more advantageous to bet on an experimental work by the already acclaimed Caetano Veloso, the LP *Araçá azul* (1973), whose sales

bombed, than to hire another tropicalist who was increasingly innovative and aesthetically radical such as Tom Zé – e.g. his LP *Todos os olhos* (1973) – or even a newcomer in the recording industry like Walter Franco¹⁰.

Much of what was not convenient to the multinational record companies in the beginning of the 1970s – moment in which the recording industry reached, therefore, a consolidated stage that was much more integrated, rational, and capitalized– would be picked up by small or medium-sized national record labels. It is by invitation of the journalist Walter Silva, one of the judges of the VII FIC and art director at the label Continental, that Walter Franco releases, in 1972, two simple compacts¹¹, and, in 1973, his first LP, titled *Ou não*.

Ou não

To conceive his debut album, Walter Franco relied on Décio Pignatari for the cover art coordination and on Rogério Duprat for the musical production. The LP *Ou não* (*Or not*) was recorded in the São Paulo studio Eldorado, the same in which Caetano Veloso was recording his album, for Phonogram, the LP *Araçá azul* (1973), whose arrangements were signed by Duprat. As a “post-tropicalist” – term conveyed by the critics to encompass a number musical initiatives that emerged in the post-’68 – it is evident that Walter Franco did not pass unscathed by the movement that, in the end of the 1960s, proposed to revolutionize the MPB. A quintessential tropicalist icon, Caetano Veloso, however, would not pass unscathed by Walter Franco’s “Cabeça”. In both their respective albums, recorded around the same time, in the same studio, and released in February of 1973, one can notice mutual influences and the same experimental radicalism tensioning the mainstream¹².

Beyond the importance of the presence of Rogério Duprat in both albums, such similarities, in great part, come from the fact that Eldorado was the only Brazilian studio that had, in the beginning of 1970s, a mixing console with 16 channels. Handled by the sound engineer Marcus Vinicius – another one who was labelled as “damned” after scoring (and then stifling) his first LP¹³ –, the equipment, if compared to two or four-channel consoles, increased exponentially the possibility of the distribution of voices, offering, thus, new resources for equalizing and mixing the stereo sound.

Walter Franco transported to his album much of the experience that he acquired in theater. As if getting into character while interpreting the compositions, all of them his own creation, he resorts to the most varied intonations and vocal behaviors. Despite the minimalist character, be

¹⁰ All this information is based on the interview given by André Midani (1974) to *O Pasquim*. For two detailed analysis of the workings of the Brazilian recording industry in the 1970s, see Dias (2000) and Morelli (2009).

¹¹ In one of these compacts are the songs “Por um triz” (“By a whisker”) and “Me deixe mudo” (“Let me be mute”). On the other, taking up both the A and B sides, is “Cabeça”, which, like “Me deixe mudo”, has a different arrangement from the one registered in the LP *Ou não*.

¹² For an analysis of the LP *Araçá azul*, see Dietrich, 2003.

¹³ LP *Dédalus*, released by Marcus Vinicius, in 1974, by Continental label.

it in the instrumentation or in the lyrics of the songs, the album presents dense sound textures and, as in the opening track, an aggressive aesthetic treatment. With only two acoustic guitars, a bass guitar, and percussions, “Mixturação” is a song of such curious and suggestive verses just as the title of the LP. Would it be a crisis facing the imponderable? A love disillusion that one wants to overcome? An artist’s impasse during that period of dictatorship? Or would it be a hard and painful childbirth? In an account given to Ayrton Mugnaini Jr., Walter confirmed to have replaced the word *feto* (fetus) with *afeto* (affection) so that the lyrics would not be vetoed by the censorship again (*apud* MUGNAINI JR., 2013, p. 395).

A
 The slow rationale
 The well, the thought
 The eye, the orifice
 The pace, the precipice

B
 I want this roof to fall out
 I want this affection to get out
 I want this roof to fall out
 I want this affection to get out, now (of me)

A
 A red so natural
 On the face and the pall
 With a taste of water and salt
 Blending the good and the evil

A
 O raciocínio lento
 O poço, o pensamento
 O olho, o orifício
 O passo, o precipício

B
 Eu quero que esse teto caia
 Eu quero que esse afeto saia
 Eu quero que esse teto caia
 Eu quero que esse afeto saia, já (de mim)

A
 Um vermelho natural
 No rosto e no lençol
 Com gosto de água e sal
 Misturando o bem e o mal

Oppressions in various levels led the musician to take an interest in Primal Therapy, with which he probably got in contact in experimental theater labs. It is considered a shock therapy and was invented in the 1960s by Arthur Janov, a United Statesian psychologist and psychoanalyst who worked with celebrities such as the couple John Lennon and Yoko Ono. An album that inaugurated Lennon’s solo career after the dissolution of the Beatles, *John*

Lennon/Plastic Ono Band (1971) would be a sort of result from that therapeutic process. The rescue of traumas trapped in the subconscious, including the trauma of childbirth, when one is “expelled” from the maternal womb, would reconnect the patient with the early years of life, conducting him progressively to the catharsis of a “primal scream”. Brought out by Walter Franco into the wide-open years later in his song “Canalha” (“Scoundrel”), in the LP *Vela aberta* (1979), such a scream was already announced in “Mixturação”. In the Section B, the shrilled singing gives the measure of the violence, of the pain, and of the suffocation of something ingrained without having finished being born. Nevertheless, this supposedly truncated “(a)feto”, reinforced by the allusions to blood (“red so natural”) and to the weep (“Water and salt”, that is also the title of the following song), does not keep it from being the hindered song which, in times of curtailment of the freedom of speech, wishes to be hurled out at all cost¹⁴.

In another clear reference to the censorship, but, more than that, a song intimately related to his meditative practice and his teachings of Taoism (STESSUK, 2008, 7-10), Walter Franco plays with the words in “Me deixe mudo” (“Let me be mute”). With pauses of silence, he pronounces them pausingly syllable-by-syllable over an *ostinato* played by the acoustic guitar, which, at first, is nothing but a *pizzicato* here and another one there. Under a ternary, minimalist, and spiral structure, just as a *mantra*, lyric and melody reveal themselves gradually in a game of questions and answers:

Don't ask me
 Don't answer me
 Don't look for me
 And don't hide from me
 Don't say anything
 Know everything
 Stay quiet
 Let me be mute
 Be it in the corner
 Be it in the center
 Miss out
 Stay on top
 Be the reversing
 Be the half
 If it's the beginning
 Be my guest
 Don't ask me
 Don't answer me
 Don't look for me
 And don't hide from me
 Don't say anything
 Know everything
 Stay quiet
 Let me be mute...

¹⁴ In an interview to Charles Gavin, Walter Franco comments in passing on the Primal Therapy. Referring to his LPs *Ou não* (1973) and *Revolver* (1975), he says that “these two albums synthetize that, it is the language of self-knowledge. It's something like that..., until the primal scream. The pursuit of the therapy through the scream, of getting it all out. For you to recover equilibrium at the same time” (*apud* GAVIN, 2014).

Não me pergunte
 Não me responda
 Não me procure
 E não se esconda
 Não diga nada
 Saiba de tudo
 Fique calada
 Me deixe mudo
 Seja no canto
 Seja no centro
 Fique por fora
 Fique por dentro
 Seja o avesso
 Seja a metade
 Se for começo
 Fique à vontade
 Não me pergunte
 Não me responda
 Não me procure
 E não se esconda
 Não diga nada
 Saiba de tudo
 Fique calada
 Me deixe mudo...

One of the most monitored musicians by the censorship of the time, Chico Buarque recorded “Me deixe mudo” in his LP *Sinal fechado (Closed signal)* (Phonogram, 1974). But it was in the voice and arrangement of Walter Franco that the poet Augusto de Campos detected the greatest register of silence until then executed in Brazilian popular music, yet it was “a silence that speaks, and not a common pause” (*apud* BECHARA; SERPA, 2000). Without avoiding, however, more conventional and commercial approaches in that period, Walter is author of the opening theme of the soap opera *Hospital*, broadcasted by TV Tupi in 1971¹⁵.

Whoever looks at the bottom of the well
 Whoever looks at the bottom of the well
 Will have
 Whoever looks at themselves from neck to toe
 Whoever looks at themselves from head to toe
 Will see
 That everything is so simple
 That everything is so clear
 So clear, they'll see
 Whoever goes over the wall
 Whoever goes over the wall
 Will have
 Whoever goes over the world
 Whoever goes over the world
 Will see
 That everything is profound
 That everything is so simple
 So simple, they'll see...

¹⁵ “Tema do hospital” (“Hospital theme”) was recorded in simple compact disc, released by Philips/Phonogram in 1971. To watch the opening of the soap opera *Hospital*, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BP8O3HigoA>. Accessed on: Feb. 10, 2021.

Quem olhar pro fundo do poço
 Quem olhar pro fundo do poço
 Vai ter
 Quem se olhar dos pés ao pescoço
 Quem se olhar dos pés à cabeça
 Vai ver
 Que tudo é tão simples
 Que tudo é tão claro
 Tão claro, vai ver
 Quem passar por cima do muro
 Quem passar por cima do muro
 Vai ter
 Quem passar por cima do mundo
 Quem passar por cima do mundo
 Vai ver
 Que tudo é profundo
 Que tudo é tão simples
 Tão simples, vai ver...

Two years later, under another musical conception in the LP *Ou não*, “Tema do hospital” (“Hospital theme”) becomes “No fundo do poço” (“In the bottom of the well”). Insistently repeating some words, to which he adds echoes and vocal noises, Walter, with a slow and emphatic singing, converts a simple two-chord ballad into an experimental song of somber arrangement. The lyric that before sounded mild, unpretentious, and even childish is steered to the contemplation of the void. In the irregular rhythms of the percussions, in the solos of a banjo that seems more like a *sitar*, and in the continuous and sparse pedals of the acoustic guitar and the cello, similar to what a *tambura* does, are woven idiomatic relations with Indian music. John Lennon comes to mind once again, or, more precisely, the Beatles as latent compasses guiding Walter’s first album, since the incorporation of Indian and Eastern music instruments in countercultural popular music and/or inheritor of the avant-gardes is owed, largely, to the pioneering of the English band¹⁶. In dialogue with the Beatles, and with the tropicalist musicians, Walter Franco accesses values and experiences of the counterculture through the questioning of Western rationality.

The most theatrical track in the LP *Ou não*, “Flexa” simulates a situation of persecution and violence. The tragicomic interpretation chops the singing and the lyrics through silences, noises, and onomatopoeias. In the economic harmony of the acoustic guitar it is possible to foresee the construction of an intertextuality with the song “Oriente” (“Orient”), by Gilberto Gil, confirmed thereafter by the citing of the ambiguous verse “Se oriente, rapaz...” (“Orient yourself, man...”). Mentioning it, Walter Franco suggests, like Gil, both the objective necessity to “orient yourself” amid the adversities and the subjective search for equilibrium in Eastern

¹⁶ The sitar appears, for example, in John Lennon’s and Paul McCartney’s song “Norwegian Wood (This bird has flown)”, of the LP *Rubber Soul* (1965). And the *tambura* in George Harrison’s song “Within you without you”, of the LP *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967).

wisdom¹⁷. In fact, it may be that Walter had envisioned the title of his album in other verses by Gil for “Cultura e civilização” (“Culture and civilization”) (“*A cultura, a civilização/ Elas que se danem/ Ou não*” [“The culture, the civilization/ They can screw themselves/ Or not”]), further considering that a composition such as “Objeto semi-identificado” (“Semi-identified object”) – a collaboration of Gil with Rogério Duarte and Rogério Duprat –, presents an experimental conception to a certain extent similar to the one of the composition “Cabeça”¹⁸.

A construct in which the voices overlap and cross themselves distributed between the channels, “Cabeça”, as registered in the LP *Ou não*, dismisses melody and harmony. Neither there is defined metric or instrumentation in it, although the soundboard, as well as the voice, works here as an instrument. Here are the lyrics as they were conceived (with a translation below):

Que é que tem nessa cabeça irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça ou não
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça saiba irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça saiba ou não
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça saiba que ela pode irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça saiba que ela pode ou não
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça saiba que ela pode explodir irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça saiba que ela pode explodir ou não

What is it you got in that head brother
 What is it you got in that head or not
 What is it you got in that head you know brother
 What is it you got in that head you know or not
 What is it you got in that head you know that it can brother
 What is it you got in that head you know that it can or not
 What is it you got in that head you know that it can explode brother
 What is it you got in that head you know that it can explode or not

In the album’s recording, those lyrics disobey any linearity in its exhibition, although it is possible to hear clearly a guiding phrase (“*Essa cabeça saiba que pode explodir ou não*” [“That head you know that it can explode or not”]). Transcribed again below, with highlights to facilitate the visualization, notice that there is an interposed and incremental correlation between the added complements to the constantly repeated inquiry, resulting in a minimalist poetic structure, inviting to variation:

Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....ou não
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....saiba irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....saiba ou não
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....saiba que ela pode irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....saiba que ela pode ou não
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....saiba que ela pode explodir irmão
 Que é que tem nessa cabeça.....saiba que ela pode explodir ou não

¹⁷ “Se oriente, rapaz...” (“Orient yourself, man...”) is a verse of the song by Gilberto Gil “Oriente” (“Orient”), recorded in his LP *Expresso 2222* (1972). For an analysis of the song, see Diniz (2015).

¹⁸ “Cultura e civilização” (“Culture and civilization”) (Gilberto Gil) and “Objeto semi-identificado” (“Semi-identified object”) (Gilberto Gil, Rogério Duarte e Rogério Duprat) are recorded in the LP *Gilberto Gil* (1969).

What is it you got in that head.....**brother**
 What is it you got in that head.....*or not*
 What is it you got in that head.....**you know brother**
 What is it you got in that head.....*you know or not*
 What is it you got in that head.....**you know that it can brother**
 What is it you got in that head.....*you know that it can or not*
 What is it you got in that head.....**you know that it can explode brother**
 What is it you got in that head.....*you know that it can explode or not*

In the recording, therefore, the Dadaist technique of cutouts and varied combinations joins the guttural sounds, groans, random words, mentions *en passant* of other tracks of the LP *Ou não*, echoes, and silences, but silences that are equivalent to the low frequency noise emitted by the magnetic tape, an essential technology, at the time, to the stereophonic recording. Moreover, there is a dialogical dynamic even when vocal polyphony culminates in a sound mass, as if each intertwined voice projected a psychological state, going from alienation to desperation and from clarity to the nonsense and unintelligible. “Quê é que tem” (“What is you got”) at one point questions and at another insinuates disdain. Yet “Ou não” (“Or not”), by questioning the statement, is also an interjection alerting the eminence of the “explosion of the head”. From the confusion and madness undeniably themed in the phonogram one may equally consider violence and fear of death as possibilities of signification. In any case, in the conclusion of the almost five minutes of track, the normative reality challenges the oneiric voice ensemble: “*Que dia é hoje? Que dia é hoje? 19 de dezembro de 1972. Que horas são? Que horas são? Eu não tenho relógio. Onze e meia, onze e meia e vinte e seis*” (“*What day is it today? What day is it today? December 19, 1972. What time is it? What time is it? I don’t have a watch. Eleven thirty, eleven thirty and twenty and six*”), a dialogue that precedes a sigh of relief.

Starting from the idea of “language of the gap”, employed by Gilberto Vasconcellos (1977) to refer to metaphors, allegories, and other artifices used by Brazilian composers to circumvent the censorship, Roberto Bozzetti proposed a binary typology (without ignoring intersections) from the songs of the post-’68. On the one hand would be the *songs of confrontation*, which, marked by the *plethora of discourse*, “served to uncover the violence and the arbitrariness of the time, but their more immediate effect was silencing the songwriters” and harm, in the author’s understanding, the recording industry. On the other would be the *songs of sneer*, characterized by the influx of counterculture, subjectivity, and by what he called *rarefaction of discourse*. With enigmatic texts and screams in the singing, these would have been “in general witnesses to the terrible state of affairs for the practice of songwriting” (BOZZETTI, 2007, p. 138-141).

As much as the specifically political context was actually impregnated in the very structure and syntax of the songs, as Vasconcellos argued (1997), typologies such as that tend to suggest highly symmetrical links between experimentalism (generally found in those “songs of sneer”),

the censorship, and the repression, as if the first were a direct consequence of the regime's upsurge. The important role that a technological revolution without precedents that the Brazil of the "economic miracle" (1969-1973) was going through is relegated to the background.

Two conditions are essential to experimentalism according to Umberto Eco: the presence of new materials, resulting from scientific research, and a change in method, which implicates denying or subverting key aspects of a tradition (ECO, 2016, p. 224-229). The composition "Cabeça", in this case, or the "anti-song" – according to how the composer defined it in tune with the anti-art situated approximately in the same period (*apud* MÚSICA BRASILEIRA, 1973) –, broke away from pre-established forms and parameters of songs. Exempt from what is elemental to the song, that is, the melody, it prioritizes the sound phenomenon over the pitch of the notes, exemplifying, thus, initiatives defended by Rogério Duprat, Júlio Medaglia, Damiano Cozzella, Gilberto Mendes, among others, in the "Manifesto of the new Brazilian music", published in 1963 in the avant-garde art magazine *Invenção*, created and coordinated, at the time, by Décio Pignatari. Consequently, "Cabeça" referred to the *musique concrète* by Pierre Schaeffer and to the silences, noises, and the "Zen principles of the non-predictable" explored in the works and concerts of John Cage (COHEN, 2002, p. 43), although Walter Franco claimed the source of his ideas to be different: "And they [the concrete poets Décio Pignatari, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos] asked me: 'How did you arrive at these solutions? Did you listen to a lot of John Cage?'. I didn't listen to anything! I arrived here through other paths, the paths of intuition" (*apud* GAVIN, 2014). By working with the word's vast semantic, sound, and visual potential, providing his musical creations with a substantially isomorphic character, Walter was furthermore one of the composers and performances that best re-updated the *verbivocovisual* project of the concrete poetry.

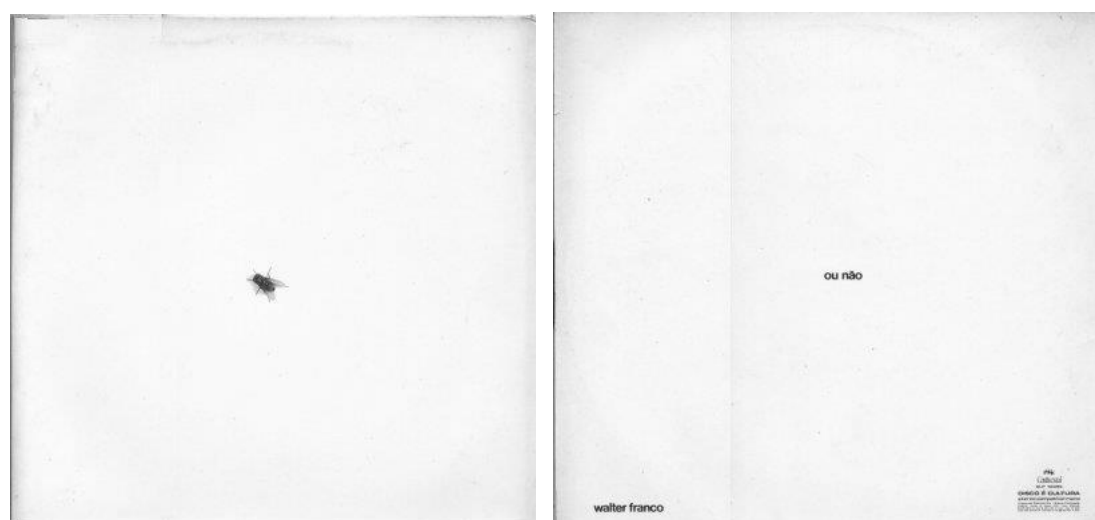


Figure 4 – Front/ back cover of Walter Franco's LP *Ou não*, Continental 1973; the album's cover art is signed by Décio Pignatari (source: personal files)

Instead of his name and face, Walter Franco chose to exhibit a fly on the cover of his album. Reproduced in actual size over a white background, the photo of the insect was taken, according to the musician, at São Paulo city's landfill (*apud* MUGNAINI JR., 2013, p. 397). Coincidentally or not, in that year of 1973 the song by Raul Seixas called “Mosca na sopa” (“Fly in soup”) (LP *Krig-Há Bandolo*) had hit the music charts, which, however, sounded a lot less awkward to the ears of the general public than Walter's “fly album”. The latter, when released, did not exceed the insignificant figure of a couple of hundred copies sold (FRANCO, 2016). In the booklet of the album's first issue there was an envelope; and, inside it, a text extracted from an apocryphal Chinese Encyclopedia, titled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*:

- The animals are divided into:
- (a) those belonging to the Emperor;
 - (b) embalmed ones;
 - (c) trained ones;
 - (d) suckling pigs;
 - (e) mermaids (or sirens);
 - (f) fabled ones;
 - (g) stray dogs;
 - (h) those included in this classification;
 - (i) those that tremble as if they were mad;
 - (j) innumerable ones;
 - (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush;
 - (l) et cetera;
 - (m) those that have just broken the vase;
 - (n) those that from afar resemble flies.

In an order according to the alphabet system, but without and logical criteria, this classification of the universe's animals is mentioned by the Argentinian writer Jorge Luís Borges in the short essay “The analytical language of John Wilkins” (1952). English philosopher from the 17th century, Wilkins forged a system of measurement and a linguist scheme, both of universal pretensions, obviously neglecting that words and things take on a complex plot of representations and meanings in the most various contexts. His ingenious yet speculative scheme drove Borges to equate it to the cataloging of animals in that Chinese Encyclopedia, concluding that, “notoriously, there is no classification in the universe that is not arbitrary and conjectural. The reason is quite simple: we do not know what the universe is” (BORGES, 2007, p. 124).

Not only the Chinese text, but also “The analytical language...”, and perhaps Michel Foucault “The Order of Things” ([1966] 1999), written from the reading of Borges' essay, may have inspired Walter Franco and Décio Pignatari in the elaboration of the cover art. In one way or another, packaging and booklet reinforce the conceptual initiative: words which, articulated as sound and visual signs, generate multiple senses. Biased by the press, *Ou não* ended up becoming a slogan attributed to Caetano Veloso, more often than not accused of letting himself

slip into relativisms and contradictions in his condition as a public *persona* and opinion maker. However, when naming the album, whose title in the back cover contrasts with the ideas of nuisance and filth raised by the fly over the clean background, Walter Franco, profound admirer of *Tao Te Ching: The Book of The Way and its Virtue* (STESSUK, 2008, p. 7), reasserted, in reality, his reservations about the Western Cartesian thought.

Besides synthetizing the silence and the noise that characterize the recorded tracks in the LP, the minimalist packaging goes in the same direction as the album *The Beatles*, or *White Album* (1968). Walter will clearly demonstrate his declared appreciation for the band in his following work, *Revolver* (1975), album that, marked by the more emphatic presence of rock, turns out somewhat more commercially palatable, though not dismissing the experimental language. A tribute is paid to John Lennon on the cover: Walter's white suit, long hair, the hands in the pocket, and the crossing of a street evoke the icon's figure in the cover of *Abbey Road* (1969). Whereas the title, in undeniable reference and reverence to another album by the Beatles, *Revolver* (1966), creates a paronomasia, since in English the word is a noun and a synonym for handgun, and in Portuguese it is verb with a long list of synonyms such as "revise", "disorganize", and "redefine".



Figure 5 – Cover of Walter Franco's LP *Revolver*, Continental, 1975 (source: personal file)

In 1975, in Brazil, the clandestine groups of armed struggle had already been practically annihilated by the military regime; civil society was reclaiming its spirit in increasingly confident

mobilizations for the democratic path and a large part of the countercultural values, practices, and experiences was being diluted in the cultural goods market in its process of consolidation. The so-called “years of lead” (1969-74), demanded, therefore, an assessment. A tropicalist and herald of the counterculture, Gilberto Gil made his in the LP *Refazenda* (1975) – he who, paraphrasing John Lennon in the song “God”, had already announced that “O sonho acabou” (“The dream is over”)¹⁹. Zen and pacifist, although no less aggressive in terms of form and aesthetics, Walter Franco shared of this spirit of the times, proposing, with his *Revolver*, a “reversal” in search of self-knowledge, to, then, “redefine” new paths, be they musical, personal, or collective.

Final remarks: notes on a debate

In studies on the Brazilian artistic-intellectual production of the 20th century, the period from 1920 to 1970 is generally pointed out as an expression of an avant-garde or modernist cycle, largely driven by the Week of Modern Art of '22 and by Mário de Andrade's and Oswald de Andrade's projects. Some historical and sociological aspects would have reached a certain universality in that timeline. Among other authors who dedicated themselves to the subject, Marcos Napolitano detected in the image of the artist-intellectual of the time a convergence of historicities: a rejection of conventional and Eurocentric academicism, an imperative for participation in the political life, and an attempt of “going to the people”, the source and destiny of the modern national art (NAPOLITANO, 2014, p. XVIII). And in the similar understanding of Renato Ortiz and Marcelo Ridenti, both based on Perry Anderson's analysis (1986) of European modernism, the “cycle of the avant-gardes” in Brazilian art and politics emerged thanks to specific socio-historical coordinates, most of all our still embryonic process of industrial revolution – condition that would have generated the common belief in the emancipatory potential of the technological innovations – and the imaginative proximity of social revolution (RIDENTI, 2010, p. 160-164; ORTIZ, 2006, p. 104-110).

In a classic book on European historical avant-gardes from the early 20th century, Peter Bürger comprehends the avant-garde – word derived from military vocabulary, hence its intimate relation to political movements – as a quintessential result of bourgeois society, in which art reaches a certain sphere of autonomization. Self-critical by essence, the avant-garde's protest would be directed exactly against the art-institution as a whole. Its primary targets would be the modernist aesthetics and the consequent scission that modernism would

¹⁹ The song “God”, in which John Lennon states “The dream is over”, is recorded in the LP *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* (1971). Reflecting on the already somewhat exhausted potential of the countercultural experiences that he had lived through during the forced exile in England, Gilberto Gil reproduces the phrase in “O sonho acabou” (“The dream is over”), track of his first album after the exile, LP *Expresso 2222* (1972).

have operated between *art* and *every-day life*, or, as he prefers, between *art* and *vital praxis* (BÜRGER, 2008).

Antithetical terms, therefore, according to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-garde*, Modernism and Avant-garde shared, on the contrary, a fine line in the Brazilian experience. Although we possess “a still undetermined technical present and a still unpredictable political future”, we lack a classic past or an artistic tradition, “mandatory reference for critics of the official academicism”, completely formalized and institutionalized by the State. For Renato Ortiz, such a phenomenon “allowed a ‘free transit’, an approximation between groups inspired by artistic avant-gardes, such as the concretists, and popular music movements” such as Bossa Nova and Tropicalism, (ORTIZ, 2006, p. 104-105), the latter normally considered the point of inflection and of decline of our avant-garde or modernist cycle²⁰.

At a time in which there were significant advances in the technical means of production and of communication, in addition to a high intellectualization of popular music, it was towards the *culture industry* that the tropicalists directed the resumption of the Oswaldian Anthropophagy and the interlocution with concretism, neoconcretism, the new figuration, and other avant-garde trends. In dialogue with the “theater of aggression”, the New Brazilian Cinema, the Jovem Guarda, and with the Bossa Nova legacy, they were further responsible for dynamiting the sound, value, and behavioral universe of the counterculture through their wardrobes, the happenings, and their song material. All this confronted the military authoritarianism and the nationalism on the political right and left, as well as the imperative of political-social participation characteristic, roughly speaking, of MPB. Tensioning, thus, “high and low culture”, the movement would have effected a critique and self-critique of the state of the art in which the mediatized song in Brazil found itself. If, then, for Bürger, only the avant-garde leads the art to self-critique, encouraging the overcoming of stylistic norms and standards and the recognition of previous phases of its development, this would have been, maintaining due proportions as analyzed by José Roberto Zan, the role of Tropicalism in the Brazilian popular song (ZAN, 1996, p. 222-229).

Maintaining due proportions since the historical conception of avant-garde does not admit (in a Marxian terminology) the commodity fetish, for its protest has as its target exactly the art-institution in bourgeois society. That is, avant-garde and culture industry would be inconceivable. In this sense, however, and more suitable to think about the Brazilian case, Andreas Huyssen argues, based on Walter Benjamin, for the existence of an *occult dialectic* between *avant-garde* and *mass culture*, without, nonetheless, confusing them with each other – reasoning, moreover, also present in Umberto Eco when he distinguishes “the experimental

²⁰ See, for example, Marcelo Ridenti (2002), Nicholas Brown (2007), and the dossier “Vanguarda e pós-modernismo” coordinated by Celso Favaretto, Otilia Arantes, Iná Camargo Costa and Walter Cezar Addeo (1983) in *Arte em Revista*, and, in that dossier, in particular the essay “Depois das vanguardas”, by Otilia Arantes (1983).

as a questioning of the previous knowledge" (experimentalism as avant-garde) from the "experimental as laboratory prepared for an industrial product" (ECO, 2016, p. 236). For Huyssen, no other factor so affirmatively determined the revolt of the avant-garde and its denial of the institutionalized artistic tradition than the technology developed throughout the 20th century, utilized beyond mere support and vehicle of dissemination, but as an intrinsic and structuring element of the work of art. Channeled into the cultural industry, technology transformed what the avant-garde was all about: everyday life (HUYSSSEN, 1997, p. 22-40).

For precisely assimilating the massive and providing creative technologies and techniques (such as the minimalist) for the enjoyment of the culture industry, perhaps neo-avant-garde – arising from the post-war European and United Statesian context – may be the more adequate expression both for Tropicalism and for a part of the artistic production of the post-'68. The terminological discussion, however, is still irresolute, taking into account that in Brazil, whose "avant-garde or modernist cycle" was never detached from the national issue and neither was it apart from the culture industry – still incipient until at least the end of the 1960s –, there were no "historical avant-gardes" to speak of "neo" or of "second avant-gardes" (see FREITAS, 2013, p. 36-40). Furthermore, Tropicalism would have been a movement that broke away from the very notion of movement, since, "unlike the aesthetic avant-gardes, which generally postulate a radical rupture with tradition, [...] it adopted an incorporative attitude towards a large portion of the popular musical repertoire" (NAVES, 2004, p. 47-48), including the pre-Bossa Nova romantic repertoire of *boleros* and sambas-canções, set aside by the socially engaged or protest song.

Avant-garde or not, the tropicalist critique or deconstruction of the song – through rock, kitsch, pop art, and inorganic arrangements full of quotes and collages à la Dada – were taken forward by the "70s generation" (NAVES, 2010, p. 95-107; FAVARETTO, 2016). Assuming the aesthetic and political-ideological freedom that Tropicalism whetted in the Brazilian song, such a heterogeneous generation of musicians, under the AI-5 and the restructuring of the culture industry, also resorted to other sources and developed new possibilities. One of its most radical exponents, and for this reason somewhat isolated in his endeavor, Walter Franco opened unlikely breaches, causing a fissure in a circuit already quite hostile to experimental artistic initiatives or to those with some avant-garde pretension. In his first LP and at a festival on TV Globo – the television network that was then conquering and would maintain the hegemony of the mass media –, the composer presented unusual formal treatments to the song conceived up to that moment and added to popular music electroacoustic procedures among other techniques and information absorbed from the avant-garde of contemporary erudite music. Referring to the album *Ou não*, but mainly to Walter Franco's strange and no less genius "Cabeça", for Augusto de Campos "not even the protagonists of Tropicalism had gone so far" (*apud* STESSUK, 2008, p. 1).

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Figure 2 – Roberto Freire being dragged from the stage of the VII FIC. MELLO, Zuza Homem de. *A era dos festivais: uma parábola*. 3rd ed. São Paulo: Ed. 34, 2003, p 429.

Figure 3 – The FIC and its wonderful audience! HENFIL. *O Pasquim*, Rio de Janeiro, n. 170, p. 16, Oct.2 to 7, 1972.

Figure 4 – Front/ back cover of Walter Franco's LP *Ou não*. Continental, 1973.

Figure 5 – Cover of Walter Franco's LP *Revolver*. Continental, 1975.