

“I Make My Own Time”: Julio Valverde’s Temporal Agency Through Musicking

Yuri Prado

Universidade de São Paulo

yuripradobs@gmail.com

Abstract

Although music’s potential to alter the perception of the passage of time is well known, a better understanding of how it works in practice is still needed. In this regard, studies on temporal agency such as those by Flaherty (2011) and Hitlin and Elder (2007) have become important references, as they seek to identify the parameters on which individuals base themselves in the making of time. Based on an ethnography centred on Julio Valverde, a 79-year-old Brazilian cook and composer, I intend to show how his different forms of musicking are capable of shaping both his own experiences of time and those of the people of his intimate circle. In addition, the article explores issues related to Julio’s aging, examining both his musical flourishing and his unique perspective on the past, present, and future.

KEYWORDS: agency, aging, (auto)biography, musicking.

From locality to temporality

Although issues related to temporality have always been a concern in the field of social sciences (Bergmann 1992; Munn 1992), Dalsgaard and Nielsen (2013) point out that the spatial dimension has occupied the primacy of ethnographic reflection and practice. Recently, however, there have been works interested in the empirical study of how individuals are not only influenced by temporal structures such as the calendar, clock time or the functioning of institutions, but are also capable of exercising temporal agency (1) or what Flaherty (2011: 22) calls “time work,” the “intrapersonal and interpersonal effort directed toward provoking or preventing various temporal experiences”, that is, the ability of individuals to act creatively in moulding their own experience of time or that of others. For Flaherty, it is possible

to better understand temporal agency if we bear in mind that time is a phenomenon with multiple dimensions, which deserve to be observed in detail. Thus, individuals can make a time interval appear longer or shorter (duration); decide how often something happens (frequency), what should precede or follow it (sequence) or when it should happen (timing); set aside time for a certain activity to take place (allocation); and even “steal” the time of others (taking time). For Hitlin and Elder (2007), it is also important to take into account that agency can occur according to different time horizons, such as the most immediate moment (pragmatic agency), the values and habits that guide us (identity agency), and long-term projects (life course agency).

In my post-doctoral research entitled *I Make My Own Time: Ethnography of Intimate Music Making*, developed at the Department of Anthropology of the University of São Paulo, I have studied the musicking and the life story of Julio Valverde, a 79-year-old Brazilian cook and composer. One of my lines of investigation involves examining Julio’s agency in the production of locality (Prado 2022), understood both in terms of the physical space of the Soteropolitano, the restaurant he owns and where he used to create his compositions, and in the sense proposed by Appadurai (1996), for whom locality is a “structure of feeling,” a political project that requires effort to be maintained by the members of a community. At the same time, the dimension of temporality is particularly relevant in my research, since, as revealed by its title—taken from a phrase that Julio repeats frequently and which was even stamped on the wall of his restaurant (Figure 1)—the manipulation of time is a fundamental attribute of Julio Valverde’s way of life. Therefore, it is necessary to study what constitutes the making of his own time by focusing on a central activity in Julio’s life: his musicking, understood here in the sense proposed by Small (1998: 9), which encompasses practices that, at first, they would not be considered as musical but that “contribute to the nature of the event that is a musical performance” (2). Thus, although it is well known that music listening can mold everyday experience (DeNora 2000), including the perception of time, Julio’s case can demonstrate how actions such as managing a restaurant, being a cultural animator, organizing a religious ritual, and cooking are ways of musicking capable of deliberately modifying not only his own temporal experience but that of other people of his intimate circle.



FIGURE 1. Julio Valverde and the phrase “I make my own time” displayed on the wall of the Soteropolitano (frame from the film *Two Brothers*).

Based on interviews and fieldwork carried out during the years 2018 to 2022, I intend to establish on what parameters, time horizons and to what degrees the different ways of musicking by Julio Valverde manage aspects related to temporality. In the last section of the article, following the proposal of the *Aging, Time, and Popular Music* dossier, I will reflect on the implications of aging for Julio’s musicking and, conversely, how his musicking has shaped his vision of past, present, and future.

A slow musical flourishing

Born in Salvador (Bahia) in 1944, Julio Valverde had a childhood marked by constant listening to music, as his mother was a pianist and his father an avid fan of operas. However, the musical experience that most marked Julio in his childhood occurred around the age of six, when he watched for the first time the Carnavalesque parade of the Quebra Flandre block (3), which passed in front of his house in the Tororó neighbourhood:

I never forgot the bugles at both ends of the street playing at dawn, calling the revellers. That is something that marked me, stayed with me. Even today, I still hear the bugles. It’s fantastic. That was the first awakening. Of course, then came the rest, but the awakening to music was that. (Julio Valverde, interview, 25 May 2022).

The episode described by Julio can be considered an example of what Ben Green calls “peak musical experience”. According to the author, such experiences are “especially affecting, important, influential or even pivotal for the individuals involved” (2016: 2). When looked back on retrospectively, they become interpreted as “moments of inspiration, influence, conversion and affirmation” (2016: 2)

capable of both defining a self-knowledge and opening new paths that can go far beyond music (4). In Julio Valverde's case, in addition to guiding a taste for music that would accompany him throughout his life, this peak musical experience allowed him to discover ideal forms of sociability, which would be the basis for his future activity as the owner of the Soteropolitano restaurant:

The arrival of the revellers was a very beautiful thing. For me, it wasn't just about the music. It had to do with the movement, the behaviour of the people, the cordiality... it was people with the goal of coming together for fun, for a moment of happiness. People of all classes and all colours gathered there. There were rich and poor people all imbued with the same goal, which was pleasure. Is there anything more important than that? (Julio Valverde, interview, 25 May 2022).

In his adolescence, Julio participated in the band at the military school, in which, due to an authoritarian teacher who prevented him from playing by ear, he was traumatized by formal music teaching, to the point that until today he vehemently refuses to learn music theory. Later, Julio participated in *serestas*, vocal groups that sing love songs in the streets (Ulhôa 2000), and played percussion during the so-called *festas de largo* [square parties], popular festivities held in Salvador between the months of December and February in honour of Catholic saints and candomblé deities (Regina and Checcucci 2019). Learning the first chords on the guitar, an instrument with which he would fully identify, would only happen around the age of 25, during the period in which he lived in Portugal and worked as a labourer in the construction business:

Back in Salvador I tried to pick up the guitar and holy hell... it was something unimaginable, I couldn't play that thing (...). And in Lisbon there was a guy from Rio who already knew how to play a little. I asked him to teach me how to play the guitar and he taught me a song that had only three chords, "Ela é uma boneca" [Portuguese version of "La Poupée qui fait non", written by Michel Polnareff and Frank Gérald]. I lived at the construction site, and after finishing working, I would pick up the guitar and play until 3 a.m. almost every day (...). At first, I had a lot of difficulty putting the chords together, changing my fingers and playing in rhythm. It took me more than six months to be able to play that song with those three chords. (Julio Valverde, interview, 20 July 2018).

Upon returning to Brazil, Julio bought his first guitar and taught himself to play it. Over the years, he was able to develop his own technique on the instrument and learned the repertoire of Brazilian popular music through magazines sold at newsstands and, later, through Bossa Nova songbooks (5), which Julio calls his "salvation": "I focused on these five books and started playing and memorizing the chords. This made it much easier for me even to compose my own songs" (Julio Valverde, interview, 20 July 2018).

Although Julio's temporal agency would be expressed in an especially intense way years later through his musicking at the Soteropolitano, it was already possible to perceive a certain tension between his way of managing time and that expected by certain instances of his academic and professional life. Julio tells, for example,

that he entered the architecture course at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) in 1967 and only finished it 16 years later, in 1983, at the age of 39. Although certain contingencies in his life may have influenced Julio's comings and goings from college, such as the period he lived in Europe (1968-1970), we can consider, if we take the typology proposed by Flaherty (2011) as a reference, that Julio played with the parameter of duration, extending his university period far beyond what is expected for a degree in architecture, which usually takes around five years. Another example of temporal agency used to occur after moving to São Paulo in 1986, during the period in which he worked as a director at the Environmental Company of the State of São Paulo (CETESB), where, despite having a strict routine, he managed to find ways to make everyday life out of the ordinary:

Sometimes at CETESB, there were days when I didn't go to work. And people would say, "you didn't come!" And I would say, "Yeah, I didn't feel like coming." "But did you have a problem?" "No, I just didn't want to come." "But your attendance record could be affected!" "Let it be affected! I know it can be affected, but so what?" It was never affected [*laughs*]. And I formed a team there, and when we had delivered a job that was necessary, urgent, and it was too exhausting to do that task, I would say: "Oh, guys, tomorrow nobody is coming here." And that was it. Of course, I couldn't do that, because there's this rule that everyone has to be present every day, all day, at that set time. But why not? This is making time. (Julio Valverde, interview, 24 August 2018).

Despite the bureaucratic routine experienced by Julio at CETESB, it was there, in the early 1990s, that an event of great importance took place. Knowing that Julio played the guitar, Lucio Lisboa, his co-worker, invited him to compose a song for the block called Vai Quem Quer, which used to parade during the carnival in the city of Angatuba (180 km away from São Paulo). For Julio, such an invitation was an entry into an unknown territory, as although he had been practising the guitar and singing for over two decades, he had never considered the possibility of venturing into the art of composition:

As I had never composed before, I thought it would be a chance to try and do something. Then I went there to know the block and wrote lyrics and music [for the 1992 Carnival parade]. That's when I discovered that I knew how to compose. And it was a satisfying thing, because I had an audience to listen to my music, which was the block revellers. And every year I made music for the block, for six years. But I thought: "Damn, composer of one song a year! And now what do I do?" (Julio Valverde, interview, 3 August 2018).

This dilemma would only be effectively resolved with the foundation of the Soteropolitano, a place where he could not only put music composition into practice but intensify the making of his own time.

The making of time

As Julio approached the age of fifty, he entered a critical phase of his life. His work as an architect, although well paid, offered almost no professional pleasure, being a source of stress that, according to him, could end up leading to burnout or depression. Julio then decided, in 1995, to join a voluntary resignation program

and found his own restaurant, the Soteropolitano, based on the culinary practice he had developed through gatherings at home with friends over the years. Initially, the purpose of the restaurant was to be a means of subsistence while offering a less stressful work routine compared to the office and involving the pleasurable practice of cooking. However, in a short time, Julio noticed that among his clients there were poetry enthusiasts. With the intention of developing the craft of composing songs, Julio began to ask for poems from his clients so that he could make the melody. Thus, although Lucio Lisboa's invitation was the starting point for the discovery of a hitherto unknown skill and sensibility, it was the foundation of the Soteropolitano that allowed his musical flourishing.

As Ansdell and DeNora (2012) point out, flourishing (as well-being) should not be seen only in terms of "curing" a health problem; it can be seen as our capacity to pursue possibilities, engage in projects, follow through aims and goals, act on our desires, become who we are (Carel 2008, cited by Ansdell and DeNora 2012: 110)—of having a high degree of agency in the world, in short—as well as to relate to other individuals and the environment. Thus, "wellbeing involves our flourishing together, within our sociocultural community" (Ansdell and DeNora 2012: 110). Julio's case is especially revealing of this socio-oriented notion of flourishing, insofar as the affirmation of his identity as a composer, the refinement of his artistic project, the diversification of his musicking, and the intensification of his temporal agency were only possible due to the existence of a complex network formed by the physical space of the restaurant, the client-poets who eventually became his musical partners, and a small but steady audience of close friends and customers:

I found myself here [at the Soteropolitano]. And that led me to have the greatest discovery of my life, which was realizing that I knew how to compose (...). Because it brings a very intense happiness. You have a composed piece, whether it's good or bad, but it's a composition, it's a work. Of course, I have no intention, and never had, of having a successful composition. That never crossed my mind. But the happiness lies in knowing that I did it, I composed it, and being able to present it to people, friends, and those who enjoy it. But first and foremost, I enjoy it. If I enjoy it, that's enough. (Julio Valverde, interview, 3 August 2018).

Although Julio mentions the "intense happiness" that the practice of musical composition brings to him, it is important to emphasize that, contrary to common belief, musical activities are not always entirely pleasurable. For Julio, musical composition is not merely a pastime or a relaxing act with the purpose of forgetting the hardships of daily life; it is often a self-imposed challenge, demanding both energy and time, and leading to mood swings. Furthermore, although his self-taught musical training allows him to find unusual creative paths, it can generate certain difficulties during the composition process:

I started learning to use the harmony of Bossa Nova, incorporating it into the melodies I composed, and that's when things started to improve. It was with great sacrifice, because there were moments when it was very complicated. I didn't know how to find the sound I wanted on the guitar. And I kept searching, searching, searching (...). This practice of searching for what I wanted, what was in my mind but not in my guitar playing, was a very intense and tiring exercise.

I would push myself to the point of exhaustion. The only reason I didn't break the guitar sometimes was that I couldn't afford another one [*laughs*]. (Julio Valverde, interview, 4 April 2019).

The Soteropolitano became Julio's favourite place for composing, even more than his home, where he could often be distracted. Throughout the almost twenty years of my friendship with Julio, I have often seen him working on a new composition or improvising alone on the guitar, not only before the opening time of the restaurant but also allocating time to music during business hours. On these occasions, Julio wouldn't hesitate to take a seat at a table and start developing a musical idea that came to his mind or present one of his compositions to a friend, much to the surprise of occasional customers unaccustomed to witnessing the chef of the establishment engaged in a creative musical pursuit rather than being confined to the kitchen.

One of Julio's staunchly defended principles, to which customers of the Soteropolitano had to adhere, was the long time of elaboration of a dish like *moqueca*, a traditional Bahian fish stew. In his own words, "It's not fast food here, it takes time. Those in a hurry better not come here. I'm not going to speed it up, I'm not going to worry about making things quick." (Julio Valverde, interview, 24 August 2018). His valuing of delay and fruition is not only a behaviour that could be seen as eccentric for those unfamiliar with him: it carries a strong political significance when considering that one of the most malicious stereotypes attributed to Bahians by residents of other Brazilian states is that they are slow or lazy (Aragão and Arruda 2008). As Zanlorenzi (1998) shows, this stereotype has a multidimensional root, encompassing power relations rooted in the slavery period (the elite that sees the popular strata as uneducated and careless at work); racism (Salvador is the capital city with the highest percentage of blacks in Brazil); intolerance towards alternative ways of managing time, such as those practiced in *candomblé*, in which "the world of work is not opposed to the world of parties and leisure" (p. 247, my translation); and the relationship between time, work and capital ("time is money") that permeates the ideology of São Paulo as the "land of work" and the "engine" or "locomotive" that drives Brazil's economic development (Ankava 2019). For Julio, an alleged slowness or delay was not something embarrassing or to be minimized: on the contrary, it became a fundamental element of his identity affirmation as a Bahian migrant in São Paulo. Maintaining this political stance, however, came at a cost, as while it encouraged open-minded customers to embrace a slower pace, appreciate the culinary artistry and foster camaraderie, it occasionally clashed with the time ideology, expectations, and demands of certain customers who are unacquainted with the way the Soteropolitano operated:

Sean Lennon was performing [in São Paulo], and then someone took him and his entire crew to the Soteropolitano. We were playing, as we always did, in the backyard, and they came over and joined our jam session. Then some customers arrived, and people started calling me to go to the kitchen. And I said, "Oh, damn, I didn't open a restaurant to be crowded, don't bother me" [*laughs*]. Because I was in such a good moment making music with those guys (...) and it was a very spontaneous, natural thing, they came in and we started playing. It was really great. In fact, Sean came back the next day, and I had a

book of Bossa Nova, so I played it for him. He was curious and said he was learning to play Bossa Nova and wanted to listen to it. I played for him a long time, and at the end, I gave him my Bossa Nova book as a gift. Then he and his wife sent me a Christmas card (Figure 2). (Julio Valverde, interview, 20 July 2018).



FIGURE 2. Christmas card sent by Sean Lennon and Yuka Honda (Julio Valverde's personal collection).

The temporal agency through the defence of a long duration can also be observed in the process of composing melodies for the poems offered by his clients and friends. The fact that Julio does not depend financially on music for his livelihood contributes significantly to this, as it means he is not bound by financial obligations or pressured to please a wide audience. This does not imply a lack of commitment to completing a composition; the commitment is indeed present, but it is always subject to Julio's unique temporal agency, of which the indefinite extension of duration is a fundamental component:

I embark on composing on any lyrics that someone gives me, and I have to make it. It is a genuine commitment, a challenge, and I fulfil that obligation (...). There is no such thing as "impossible." The impossible is out of all consideration. I have great confidence in my ability to compose, I know what I can do. There are no obstacles, no barriers. If there are obstacles, I overcome them. That gives me strength and a sense of ease (...) [At the same time,] I have no professional commitment, deadline, or anything like that. That [the poetry] is given to me, I enjoy it, and suddenly the thing appears. This is because of the lack of commitment [to a deadline], which is a very good thing. If you have a commitment, then you're screwed! [laughs] (...) And this happens several times: I start the music, stop, and leave it aside. And then, at some point, I don't know when, it comes back to me. So when I say "I make my own time," it means that I will have time in the future to return to what I started. It is an

elastic, vast, infinite time. I don't know if I will have time after death. Who knows? *[laughs]*. (Julio Valverde, interview, 20 July 2018, 24 August 2018, and 15 September 2021).

When I asked Julio about the fact that his first compositions were commissioned by a carnival group—with a scheduled date and time for the parade, therefore—he admitted that he can compose with a deadline in mind, as long as it is sufficiently long: "Carnival was indeed a commitment. But I had a year to do it! *[laughs]*. It's not like [Dorival] Caymmi, who took fifteen [years to compose], but it was a year! A year is a good amount of time, isn't it? *[laughs]*" (Julio Valverde, interview, 20 July 2018).

It is worth noting that a temporal agency in which what is sought is the extension of duration—Julio's preferred battlefield—was severely compromised during the Covid-19 pandemic. After all, the closure of the Soteropolitano due to the lockdown meant that Julio remained at home, being affected by an apparently endless succession of monotonous days that made any possibility of an agency seeking to further extend the duration of things unbearable. The loss of temporal boundaries that he sought to resist or demolish ended up generating a non-time that made his own making of time unfeasible:

Time has changed, it seems to have vanished. It feels like time no longer has a direct influence on our lives, like it no longer matters. It's as if it doesn't exist. Time has stopped, the world has stopped. That's how it feels to me (...) We don't have the ability to comprehend this time, whether it passes or not, whether the past is too present or too distant. And the future is uncertain, so past, present, and future blend together in this confinement, and the notion of time is lost (...) I no longer have time to make my own time (...) In this confinement, I'm hardly doing anything. I have no energy, it's dreadful. It's very difficult to do anything. Playing music is not possible, it's a challenging thing. Composing is out of the question. Listening is difficult. It's very complicated (...) It's contradictory because I have all the time, but I have no time. I feel completely alienated, completely unsure of what to do. (Julio Valverde, interview, 17 September 2020).

Julio's temporal agency through musicking is not only limited to musical composition or performance; as mentioned earlier, the notion of musicking proposed by Small (1998) encompasses other forms of action that contribute to the nature of a musical event. Over time, Julio ensured that the Soteropolitano was not merely a restaurant with the usual functions of preparing and selling meals, turning it into a form of a cultural centre. In addition to hosting activities such as visual art exhibitions and book launches, the Soteropolitano had, before being closed down in 2021 (6), a regular calendar of events in which Julio showcased his facet as a cultural animator, always having music and cooking as key elements.

The first of these events to be highlighted is the *Confraria do Soteropolitano* ("Soteropolitano's Brotherhood"). Created in 2003 by Julio Valverde's friends to help him during a financial crisis of the Soteropolitano, the Confraria was an almost secret event, aiming for fraternization among Julio's friends and the restaurant's long-time customers. Held every first Tuesday of the month, Julio proposed offering culinary creations outside the restaurant's regular menu, allowing him to push the

boundaries of his culinary skills and unleash his creativity in the kitchen. Additionally, in most editions, the Confraria featured a thirty-minute musical performance showcasing new talents and established names from São Paulo's music scene. For the task of recruiting musicians, Julio used to have the help of his son Ricardo Valverde, a respected vibraphonist with a vast network.

In addition to organizing the event and cooking—which, I insist, can be considered acts of musicking, as they are activities directly engaged in the realization of the musical event—a peculiarity of the Confraria was Julio's requirement for absolute silence from the audience during the performances, aiming to enhance the listening experience and allow the music to be fully appreciated. This presentational performance (Turino 2008), in which there is a clear distinction between artist and the audience, contrasted with the participatory nature of other musical performances that took place in the Soteropolitano, where this distinction was attenuated:

When there's music [at the Confraria], I demand absolute silence. This group [of regular attendees] already knows it, so they are faithful to all of that. There have been moments when people even called me a dictator because during a song, in a performance, someone started talking and I interrupted the music and requested him to stop the conversation. Because it's a moment of respect for the music and the musician, so it's crucial that this is taken seriously. And it's great not only for us as listeners, but also for the musician who is performing. It's fantastic. I ask people to turn off their cell phones and always remind them: "be silent à la João Gilberto". (Julio Valverde, interview, 3 June 2020).

The meetings of the Confraria have been documented in minutes which describe the served dish, the artistic event that took place, and the attendees present. These minutes also include commentaries about the group of friends (such as the death of one of the members) or the political situation in Brazil. The fact that the very first edition, in 2003, was recorded in this way (Figure 3) suggests that, besides allocating time for these encounters and deciding when and how often it would be held, there was an awareness that an important event was being created and that it should be continued. This aligns with Hitlin and Elder's (2007) concept of life course agency, related to an individual's intentional planning and shaping of events and experiences over a long-term perspective. Although the minutes are usually made by the comrades—Julio admits having never signed them—his musicking, understood as the act of cooking, providing the space, and organizing the event, was the central element of the Confraria. This event remained active for seventeen years, surpassing the significant milestone of 150 editions, and it was only interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of the physical space of the Soteropolitano.

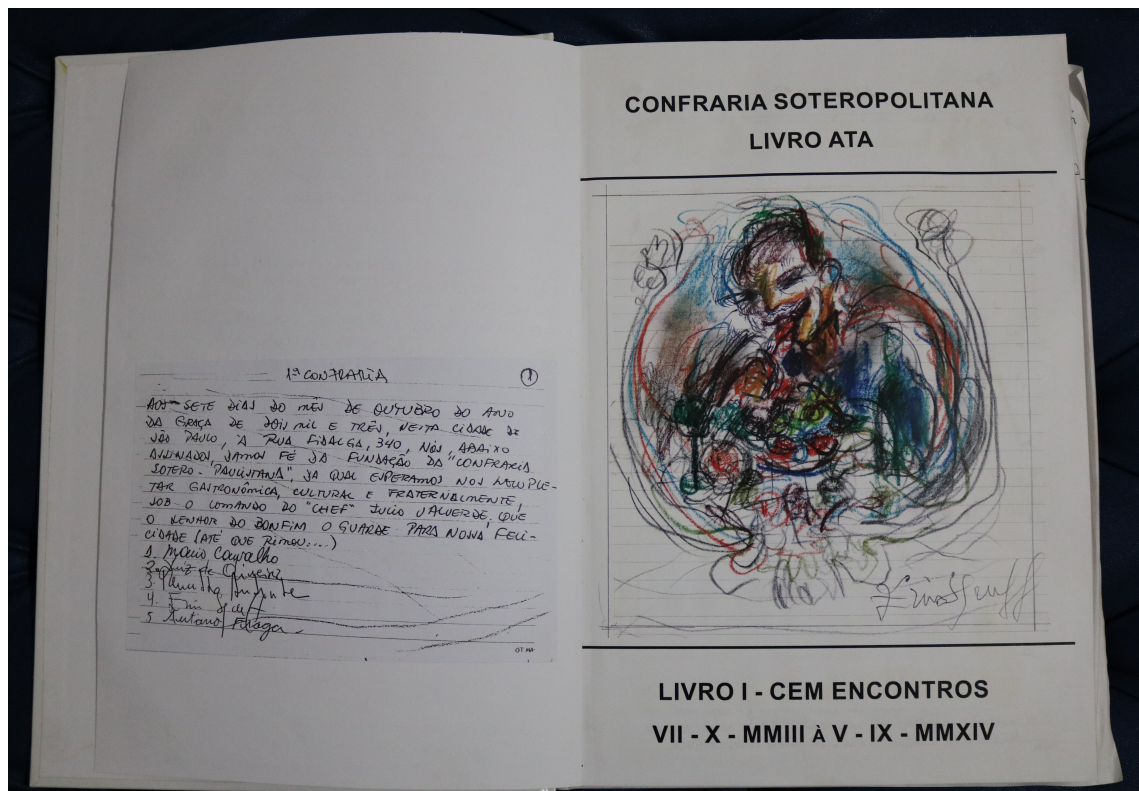


FIGURE 3. Minutes of the first meeting of the Confraria (Julio Valverde's personal collection).

Another significant event at the Soteropolitano is the Saints Cosmas and Damian's caruru, a festive tribute to the Catholic twin saints, the dual orisha Ibeji in Yoruba Candomblé (known as the nkisi Vunji in Bantu Candomblé), and children. During this celebration, Julio Valverde prepares over two hundred meals using traditional ingredients from Bahian cuisine, which are generously offered free of charge to the attendees. As the night unfolds, a *roda de samba* ("samba circle") is held, in which traditional songs from the Afro-Brazilian repertoire are sung accompanied only by percussion instruments (7).

The fact that Julio is a Bahian emigrant who owns a Bahian restaurant in São Paulo puts him in a position of representative of a supposedly authentic Bahian culture (of which the caruru is a part), from which he cannot and does not want to deviate. This might suggest that his agency in the making of this party can be considered an example of what Flaherty (2011: 143) calls "cultural reproduction," in which subjects "seem to act as agents for cultural values rather than self-actualization." Thus, with regard to temporality, Julio is largely guided by the demands of tradition, with no possibility of extending the duration between festivities as he often does with his compositions or hosting them at different frequencies or dates according to his own whims. At the same time, this cultural reproduction may clash with other cultural values, such as the notion that a restaurant should sell meals rather than distribute them. In this perspective, the realization of this celebration can also be seen as a "reactionary agency," through which subjects respond to a current or potential predicament (Flaherty 2011: 144).

It is important to bear in mind that a particular cultural tradition is not an abstract entity that imposes itself on the lives of the members of a social group, but rather relies on the creativity of individuals for its continuity (Ben-Amos 1984: 113). When closely examined, the decision to organize an event like the caruru can be attributed not only to Julio's intention, as a migrant in São Paulo, to honour the culture of his homeland and affirm his Bahian identity, but also to a profound and intimate motive. In 1995, his mother-in-law, Mariá de Almeida, was in the terminal stages of cancer, yet she found the strength to bake a cake for the inauguration of the Soteropolitano. Mariá also suggested that the Soteropolitano should hold an annual caruru in honour of the saints Cosmas and Damian, the saints of her devotion. After her passing in January of the following year, Julio made a promise to celebrate a caruru in her memory, but also as an expression of gratitude to and a plea for protection from the twin saints.

One form of temporal agency regarding the caruru relates to the allocation of time for its realization. When the festival takes place on a day when the restaurant is typically open, Julio suspends the service to fully dedicate himself to the celebration, even if it means losing a day's income. Despite 27 September being the main date of the celebration, its successful realization necessitates several days of extensive preparation. This includes acquiring and preparing enough food to serve over two hundred people, reorganizing the physical space of the restaurant, creating decorations and an altar, among other activities that demand not only a considerable allocation of time but also financial, physical, and emotional efforts from Julio and his family. However, all these endeavours are rewarded by the cathartic experience that the party provides: "my feeling of tiredness disappears because at some point I'm already overwhelmed and, when the party begins, I feel relaxed. It's fantastic for the people who come and for us. It's a happy day" (Julio Valverde, interview, 3 August 2018).

Another form of temporal agency concerns the frequency with which the party is held. In contrast to the Catholic religious promise, which takes the form of a contractual arrangement where devotees ask their patron saints for assistance in overcoming difficulties and pledge to offer a reward upon receiving the requested grace, Julio's promise to Mariá to host the caruru party was not bound by a specified number of repetitions or a fixed end date (8). Since 1996, the party has been held continuously, even during the Covid-19 pandemic, when lockdown measures were in place and meals were exceptionally sold and delivered at home. This highlights the significance of the caruru, especially considering that the Confraria was interrupted during this period. Therefore, Julio's decision to fulfil this promise can also be seen as an example of life-course agency, as it involved a long-term commitment that had implications for his life along with the belief in his ability to accomplish the goal he set out to achieve.

In my experience as a regular at the Soteropolitano, I have noticed that both at the Confraria and the caruru there is an effort by Julio to provoke a certain temporal experience in the attendees. In the first one, through the demand for silent and concentrated contemplation of a musical performance, what is at stake is the promotion of an experience of slowing down what we deemed urgent (such as talking). In the second, the stimulation of physical contact and the profusion of sensorial stimuli (colourful decorations, the caruru dish, the children's sweets, the samba circle) creates the impression that the approximately four-hour duration of

the party passes by extremely quickly. In any case, what stands out is the maintenance, over the years, of a certain sequence of actions in both events, to the point that Julio can clearly speak about their structure:

[In the Confraria], there is a certain *ritual*: I first present the appetizer, give an opening speech, talk about relevant events that occurred in the month, announce the menu, and invite someone to make a presentation (...) Then I serve dinner (...) [In the caruru], we follow a certain *ritual*: we start by serving seven children seated on a rug, each with their own bowl (...) Deborah [Julio’s wife] gives a talk about the party, and after that, I serve the adults. Then we form a circle and sing samba. (Julio Valverde, interview, 3 August 2018, italics mine).

Julio’s use of the word “ritual” to characterize both the Confraria and the caruru is not accidental; after all, as Small (1998: 95) explains, rituals are organized behaviours that allow for the exploration, affirmation, and celebration of ideal human relationships. In this sense, we could equally conjecture that rituals enable the effective realization of ideal temporalities. In Julio’s endeavour to engage others in his envisioned sense of time, some form of structure becomes necessary, which might seem paradoxical, considering Julio’s self-perception as a disorganized person, who values the unpredictable and is averse to routine or patterns. However, it is important to remember that making one’s own time is not just about defying the constraints of schedules, orders, patterns, and hierarchies that regulate our daily lives; perhaps the greatest achievement in shaping time is not only organizing it in a way that creates one’s own temporal universe but doing so in such a way that it can be shared with the people who are part of one’s environment.

Aging and the living of the present

In 2018, during one of our regular conversations, Julio Valverde expressed the idea of writing a memoir that would initially be organized around the streets where he lived. As Julio stated that he was having difficulty allocating time to begin a writing process of this nature, I offered to be his interlocutor in his (auto)biographical process (9). Our conversations, which were recorded in audio and video, become the basis for the book *Eu faço o meu tempo (I Make My Own Time)*, currently in progress. The postdoctoral research, initiated later, was therefore born from the convergence of our interests: Julio’s desire to construct a narrative about himself, and mine studying his life and work, which have always aroused great admiration in me.

When, in one of our first meetings, I asked Julio why he had decided to write a memoir, he responded as follows:

I think the main reason is that I’m going to die. Because my life is coming to an end. So this [the book] is something I can leave for posterity, to record the things that happened to me during this existence (...) The idea didn’t come in 1986, but in that year I became certain that I was mortal, due to the appearance of Halley’s Comet (...) Few people saw it because it was a very small point. As I was in the countryside of Bahia, in the Caatinga, where pollution is very low and the sky was clear, I was able to see it. And that day left a deep impression

on me. At that moment, I said to myself, “I am mortal,” because 76 years later it will pass again, and I won’t be here anymore. Realizing that was something that gave me chills. We know we’re going to die, but that was impactful. The comet told me, “You won’t be here when I come back.” That’s impressive. Maybe that stayed in my subconscious and resurfaced recently. There’s a connection with my age and this thing about death because I’m 74 years old, already in the decline of existence. Of course, I may live longer than I think, but there’s an end, and there may come a time when I no longer have the capacity to think, to remember things. Suddenly, memory fails. It’s already starting to fail, I already forget recent things. So, exercising memory is also an exercise for the mind. (Julio Valverde, interview, 21 September 2018).

Two points stand out in Julio’s statement. The first is that reaching old age has allowed him to have a panoramic view of his past and to acknowledge that his life has had enough stories that deserve to be told and preserved for posterity, a sentiment he probably didn’t have at the age of 48 during the passage of Halley’s Comet. His cultural mediation of memory (Grenier and Valois-Nadeau 2020), however, did not occur only through interlocution and the planned publication of a memoir; as it couldn’t be otherwise, it also ended up manifesting in his compositional practice. In this regard, it is noteworthy that in the few songs in which he wrote the lyrics himself instead of using poems written by friends or clients of the Soteropolitano, he relied on his memories of youth. For example, in “Bumba-meu-boi”, Julio Valverde recalls the amazement he experienced the first time he witnessed—another peak musical experience, therefore—the homonymous cultural manifestation (10):

The first time I saw
The Bumba-meu-boi
It was in the square of Itapuã
Near the water spring in the square of Itapuã
I was really scared of the Bumba-meu-boi
Of the scream of the bull
He danced wildly
And rushed towards us

In “Saveiro”, Julio pays tribute to the boats of the same name, in which he traveled during his vacations in the 1950s:

I’m gonna take the *saveiro*
On the ramp of Mercado Modelo
I’m going to Ilha de Maré, iê, iê, iê, iê
I’m gonna fish with a jereré, iê, iê, iê, iê
I’m going to Ilha de Maré (11)

The remembering—or construction—of a past in the form of a song is still a form of temporal agency, since more than making the past present in the form of patterns of thought and action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 971), such songs are capable, in a sensory way, of transporting Julio himself and his listeners to a nostalgic and idyllic Bahia of the 1950s.

The second notable point in Julio's statement transcribed at the beginning of this section is that it clearly exemplifies an important aspect already highlighted by Godoy-Benesch (2016: 92-93) regarding narratives of old age: a strong concern about the threat of impending death and the reduction of agency due to physical decline. In Julio's case, these concerns would result in a desire not only to retrieve his memories but also to preserve them in the form of a book. However, for him, looking back at the past is not a simple task, as he tends to be more preoccupied with the present, an attitude that, nevertheless, may result in forgetfulness:

I live very much in the present. That might erase the memory of the past a little bit (...) Throughout my whole life, I never worried about recording things. Everything in my life happened without being concerned about that moment and forgetting about it (...) Deborah has an impressive memory. She knows everything that happened on a specific date (...) The last time we went to Bahia, we went to see the place where we got married. She started talking about things and I didn't remember anything. There are times when she talks about things that seem like they didn't happen (...) Maybe that's why I don't hold grudges. I don't have anger about anything. I can have an argument with you now, and shortly after, it's as if it never happened. In fact, for life, it's very good not to hold grudges or hate. At the same time, it makes it difficult to remember things. (Julio Valverde, interview, 22 February 2019, and 15 September 2021).

This focus on the present doesn't only relate to episodes of Julio's personal life; it also has an impact on the preservation of his own work. Despite frequently relying on recordings of his songs on his iPod and jotting down chord diagrams as mnemonic devices, Julio sometimes lacks the motivation to document a new composed song. Additionally, his lack of formal music training hinders him from notating his compositions in sheet music, which has resulted in the forgetting of several of them. However, unlike many people who consider forgetfulness as something negative, for Julio, this doesn't bother him. On the contrary, it can even be beneficial for composition, but for that, once again, a long maturation time is necessary. It is worth transcribing a revealing dialogue we had on this issue:

Julio Valverde: I was supposed to write the harmony, the chords of the music, and record the song. Since I don't know how to write sheet music, that would be the [ideal] process. Sometimes I do it, but I should do it every time (...). There are four or five songs that I've been meaning to do that for over five months. If I take any longer, they will disappear.

Yuri Prado: Haven't you recorded these songs yet?

JV: No. There's still time for me to do it...

YP: You can't afford to lose them, Julio...

JV: Although I have never regretted losing them.

YP: How so?

JV: I have never regretted losing a song that I like.

YP: Are you not sorry?

JV: No. Because at some point, it comes back in another way [*laughs*]. When it comes back, I say, "I know this song." Because I had done it before. But it fits, at certain times, with what I am developing at the moment. Because it gets engraved in my mind. It stays there in some corner and suddenly it appears, not completely, but in parts.

YP: But could you say, “this is from such and such song”?

JV: No. I just know that I had already done it.

YP: But don’t you feel any regret about losing a song?

JV: I don’t. Zero. If it’s lost, it’s lost.

YP: That’s a very different stance from most people who prefer to record their songs...

JV: Recording is good, but I don’t have all this concern about record something. I just make another song. (Julio Valverde, interview, 29 August 2019).

Julio’s words about the significance of the present and his lack of fear of forgetfulness are particularly revealing of his unique perspective on aging. Instead of, due to his old age, feeling anxious or rushed to recover or preserve his work, Julio believes that such an effort would only take away the time and energy needed for what is most important to him, the act of composing. This same stance is evident in Julio’s willingness to engage in new activities, such as learning to play the trumpet and the harmonica, and more recently, practising drawing. For Julio, there always appears to be enough time for his pursuits.

There is yet another admirable aspect related to this focus on the present moment: even being a man who is nearing his eighties, Julio advocates for things to be done in their own time. In the many times we planned to undertake a project together, such as a collaborative composition, producing an album of his compositions, or working on his book, I was surprised by Julio’s request for these actions to be carried out without rush. It’s not that such projects are not important to him, but rather that haste could disturb both the maturation required for their completion and the experience of what is being done in the present. For Julio, making his own time never means speeding up, but rather giving things the right measure of time in which they should be done, even if, from the perspective of what is seen as the “normal” pace of things, it may be perceived as a delay:

My life has always been delayed. I think it’s because I was born with forceps, so everything in my life is like that. I don’t know how my death will be... a delayed death [*laughs*]. Everything for me happens in another time, a postponed time. This always happens to me, in every sense: it was supposed to have happened, but it happens afterwards. (Julio Valverde, interview, 2 February 2019).

Conclusion

Understanding the notion of temporal agency becomes more difficult the further we move away from concrete experiences. This is what Hitlin and Elder (2007: 175) and Flaherty (2011: 6) warn us, also advocating for empirical research that reveals the multiple and peculiar ways in which individuals deal with time in their everyday lives. It is from this perspective that the case of Julio Valverde becomes notably interesting, as it demonstrates that the different forms of musicking—which go beyond, as we have seen, music in its sound form—are powerful tools not only in shaping one’s own time but also that of others. In a broader perspective, I believe that conducting a musical ethnography centred on the individual (Stock 2001; Rice 2003; Ruskin and Rice 2012) with an emphasis on temporality—not only from a chronological standpoint but also from an experiential one—can bring new and

significant contributions to the fields of ethnomusicology and popular music studies.

The case of Julio Valverde is also significant in challenging the common notion that old age is synonymous with decline and the end of life. His life story demonstrates that maturity can be a time for significant changes and discoveries, such as his decision to leave architecture and become a chef, his realization of his talent for composing music, and, above all, his attainment of a high level of excellence in these new pursuits through what Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003: 195) refer to as "vital engagement," an absorbing and meaningful relationship with a specific domain. Moreover, the fact that Julio's musical flourishing coincided with the creation of the Soteropolitano reinforces the importance of social interaction and a stimulating environment for fostering creativity and sustaining motivation; the fact that Julio encountered creative block for the first time during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown is not a coincidence.

Finally, Julio's attitude of living the present intensely challenges the idea that aging is solely a time of nostalgia or excessive concern about the future. Ultimately, it is this focus on the present that can "trick" the future (Ringel 2016) to the utmost degree, the time of existence, as Julio himself pointed out when he began to teach himself the harmonica: "At some point, I will play this thing with more ease. I will have time. Maybe I'll prolong my life a little more that way, won't I?" (Julio Valverde, interview, 4 April 2019).

Notes

(1) Several authors have proposed definitions of agency, but one of the most well-known is that of Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 970): "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations."

(2) A frequent topic of discussion in the FAPESP Thematic Project *Local Musicking: New Pathways for Ethnomusicology*, of which I was a member, revolved around determining the boundaries of what can be considered musicking. Small's suggestion that even activities like ticket sales or cleaning the space where the musical event takes place can be regarded as such complicates the matter. Suzel Ana Reily, the coordinator of the thematic project, offers an insightful interpretation of this concept: "Instead of establishing an inventory of activities that should or should not be included as forms of musicking, I prefer to understand the term as any act that involves human musicality and that, through music and sounds, creates a space for interactions that mobilize people's musical sensations and sensibilities." (Reily 2021: 16).

(3) The term "block" designates a group of people who parade in the streets during Carnival in Brazil, often accompanied by a musical group.

(4) Gabrielsson and Lindström (1993) propose a similar term, "strong experiences in music", which, according to the authors, is less associated with positive feelings than the definitions of "peak experience" proposed by Maslow (1968: 73) and Panzarella (1980: 71) ("moments of highest happiness and fulfillment" and "intense joyous experience", respectively).

(5) The first edition of the *Songbook*, a series of sheet music books edited by Almir Chediak and published by Lumiar Editions, was released in 1988, featuring works by Caetano Veloso.

(6) From 1995 to 2012, the Soteropolitano operated in the Vila Madalena neighbourhood. In 2013, the restaurant moved to the Vila Romana neighbourhood, where it was located until 2020. In 2021, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions on restaurant operations, Julio Valverde started cooking in his own home, selling his dishes on the basis of food delivery format.

(7) For an understanding of the ritual aspects of the caruru held by Julio Valverde and his family at the Soteropolitano, see Prado (2022). I also made a documentary about this celebration, which can be viewed at the following link: <https://lisa.fflch.usp.br/node/12862>

(8) Julio explains that, in Bahia, it is common to place a whole okra in the pot with the caruru dish, and the guest who happens to have it in his/her plate will be obligated to offer a caruru for the next seven years.

(9) The term “(auto)biography,” intentionally written with the prefix in parentheses and widely used by scholars in the field, encompasses the inherent ambiguity in the collaboration between the researcher and the interlocutor for the construction of a narrative of the latter’s life history, as well as the set of techniques, procedures, and strategies employed in this endeavour. As explained by Passeggi and Souza (2017: 16, my translation), “this linguistic device [the parentheses] leaves multiple possibilities of interpretation open: suggesting the use of biographical and autobiographical sources; signalling the sharing between the person who narrates and the researcher who listens; enclosing the self, for some, or putting it in evidence, for others. This alternative of parentheses, now established in Brazil, therefore concerns these economies.”

(10) Bumba-meu-Boi is a popular theatrical, musical, and choreographic representation in which the death and resurrection of a bull are enacted. It is performed in various parts of Brazil, but it is particularly strong in the state of Maranhão. In 2019, The Cultural Complex of Bumba-meu-Boi from Maranhão was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/cultural-complex-of-bumba-meu-boi-from-maranho-01510>).

(11) The videos of “Bumba-meu-boi” and “Saveiro” can be seen, respectively, at the following links: <https://youtu.be/U0ffryV74vY> and https://youtu.be/_AD5t7hhfwE.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses gratitude to Julio Valverde for his friendship and collaboration throughout the research, as well as to the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) for granting the scholarship that made this work possible (grants n. 2019/27545-3 and 2020/14875-2).

References

- Ankava, M. 2019. Malandragem à paulistana: a experiência do malandro na “terra do trabalho”. *Revista de Literatura, História e Memória*, 15 (25): 282-297.
- Ansdell, G. and DeNora, T. 2012. Musical Flourishing: Community Music Therapy, Controversy, and the Cultivation of Well-being. In R. MacDonald, G. Kreutz, and L. Mitchell (Eds.). *Music, Health, and Well-being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 97-112.

- Appadurai, A. 1996. The Production of Locality. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 178-199.
- Aragão, C. O. M. de and Arruda, A. 2008. Bahia, um Brasil evocado em exotismo: alegria, negritude, sabor e movimento nas representações sociais de universitários. *Psicologia em Revista*, 14 (2): 187-202.
- Ben-Amos, D. 1984. The Seven Strands of Tradition: Varieties in Its Meaning in American Folklore Studies. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 21 (2/3): 97-131.
- Bergmann, W. 1992. The Problem of Time in Sociology: An Overview of the Literature on the State of Theory and Research on the 'Sociology of Time', 1900-82. *Time & Society*, 1 (1): 81-134.
- Dalgaard, S. and Nielsen, M. 2013. Introduction: Time and the Field. *Social Analysis*, 57 (1): 1-19.
- DeNora, T. 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Emirbayer, M. and Mische, A. 1998. What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103 (4): 962-1023.
- Flaherty, M. G. 2011. *The Textures of Time: Agency and Temporal Experience*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Gabrielsson, A. and Lindström, S. 1993. On Strong Experiences of Music. *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Musikpsychologie*, 10: 118-139.
- Godoy-Benesch, R. R. 2016. Ageing, Agency, and Autobiography: Challenging Ricoeur's Concept of Narrative Identity. In M. Cerezo Moreno and N. Pascual Soler (Eds.). *Traces of Aging: Old Age and Memory in Contemporary Narrative*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag (pp. 91-110).
- Green, B. 2016. 'I Always Remember That Moment': Peak Music Experiences as Epiphanies. *Sociology*, 50 (2): 333-348.
- Grenier, L. and Valois-Nadeau, F. 2020. Introduction: Thinking Memory with Ageing, and Ageing with Memory. In *A Senior Moment: Cultural Mediations of Memory and Ageing*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag: 7-31
- Hitlin, S. and Elder, G. H, Jr. 2007. Time, Self, and the Curiously Abstract Concept of Agency. *Sociological Theory*, 25 (2): 170-191.
- Maslow, A. H. 1968. *Toward a Psychology of Being*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Munn, N. D. 1992. The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 21 (1): 93-123.
- Nakamura, J., and Csikszentmihalyi, M. 2003. Creativity in Later Life. In R. K. Sawyer et al. (Ed.). *Creativity and Development*. New York: Oxford University Press: 186-216.
- Panzarella, R. 1980. The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Peak Experiences. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 20 (1): 69-85.
- Passeggi, M. C. and Souza, E. C. 2017. O movimento (auto)biográfico no Brasil: esboço de suas configurações no campo educacional. *Investigación Cualitativa*, 2 (1): 6-26.
- Prado, Y. 2022. Two Brothers: Devotion and Bahian Identity in the Caruru of Saints Cosmas and Damian. *GIS – Gesto, Imagem e Som – Revista de Antropologia*, 7 (1), e185831.

- Regina, M. E. and Checcucci, E de S. 2019. Cenário de festas de largo em Salvador: da expressão cultural à padronização. *URBANA: Revista Eletrônica do Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos sobre a Cidade*, 11 (3): 232-258.
- Reily, S. A. 2021. Local Musicking and the Production of Locality. *GIS – Gesto, Imagem e Som – Revista de Antropologia*, 6 (1), e-185341.
- Rice, T. 2003. Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography. *Ethnomusicology*, 47 (2): 151-179.
- Ringel, F. 2016. Can Time Be Tricked? A Theoretical Introduction. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 34 (1): 22–31.
- Ruskin, J. and Rice, T. 2012. The Individual in Musical Ethnography. *Ethnomusicology*, 56 (2): 299-327.
- Small, C. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Stock, J. 2001. Toward an Ethnomusicology of the Individual, or Biographical Writing in Ethnomusicology. *The World of Music*, 43 (1): 5-19.
- Turino, T. 2008. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ulhôa, M. T. de. 2000. Música Romântica in Montes Claros: Inter-Gender Relations in Brazilian Popular Song. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 9 (1): 11-40.
- Zanlorenzi, E. 1998. *O Mito da Preguiça Baiana*. Phd. Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo.