

Sensível: A Study of Social Aesthetics, Group Creativity, and Collective Emotion

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Ph.D. Dissertation

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Prelude to the First Chapter

...to distinguish a mechanic and physiological wink from a subtle and communicative one, it is necessary for a person to feel the marginality, the solitude and longing. It is necessary that one crosses the paths of empathy and humility.

Roberto DaMatta (1991:173)¹

Stiffened from long sleep in the background of scholarly life, the scholar's body yearns to exercise its muscles. Sleepy from long inactivity, it aches to restore its sensibilities. Adrift in the sea of half-lives, it wants to breathe in the pungent odors of social life, to run its palms over the jagged surface of social reality, to hear the wondrous symphonies of social experience, to see the sensuous shapes and colors that fill the windows of consciousness.

Paul Stoller (1997:xi-xii)

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1982. I was about 14 years old and studying the piano at a small conservatory in a neighborhood called Copacabana, with Professor Thereza Rangel. The conservatory was basically a large room preceded by a small waiting lounge; and because of the obvious space limitations, every professor had to teach at different times. There

¹ All translations from cited references in Portuguese in this dissertation are mine.

were, besides the piano teacher, perception and theory professors, voice, percussion, and classic and popular guitar instructors.

One of the guitar instructors was Professor Sérgio de Pinna. I remember that, on several occasions, I got to the conservatory and professor Sérgio was teaching, so I had to wait in the lounge for his session to end so I could start my piano class. Although he had some outstanding students, I remember very clearly that every time he played the guitar (showing a student something: a technique, phrasing, fingering, etc.), something different happened that I could not clearly describe, but I used to think that even a deaf person would still be able to feel it, because it just changed the vibration patterns in the whole room. I don't remember quite why but, at some point during that year, I decided to take some guitar lessons from him. It wasn't really that I wanted to learn the guitar, as a matter of fact I never did, but I think I must have wanted to learn to make music that way, to play the piano with the same feeling that he played the classic guitar.

Besides clearly being a superb musician, Sérgio was a wonderful person, very enthusiastic and sociable. I remember one day, after playing some exercises out of the *Pujol* method for the guitar, probably noticing my lack of concentration, he started to talk, asking me how I felt toward *choro* music. I remember saying that I played one *choro* by Villa-Lobos and some by Ernesto Nazareth on the piano, and he replied that those were nice, but that "real" *choro* was played with a group of friends, never alone. He then asked me to go to the piano and play a piece by Nazareth called *Odeon*. As I played the piece, he started playing it with me. At first I took it as "accompaniment," or "playing together," since as a classic musician I was used to playing chamber music with friends. But very soon I started realizing there was something else going on. The dynamics were

not the same. It seemed as if he was listening more to what I was doing than to his own playing. In chamber music the interactions and responses are previously determined, they are written down, they are, to a certain degree, expected. I was actually playing written music, but he was weaving his commentary in and out of my phrasing, of my pulse, of my mind. It really felt as if he was inside my mind and before I knew my own (predetermined) playing started to be influenced by his. It was a very strange and nice communion experience. As soon as we finished, I remember asking him “how do you do that?” He said something like: “well, this is basically *choro*, it is even nicer with more people because the “conversation” gets more interesting...you have more opinions being thrown in the chat!” I said I would do anything to learn to play music like that and he said that I should start listening to *choro* recordings (long plays by then...or cassettes) and, if possible, attend some *rodas de choro*. Needless to say I had no idea what a *roda de choro* was, but he promptly invited me to go with him to one in the near future.

After that episode, I continued practicing the piano (and the guitar on the side) and forgot about his invitation. But he clearly did not. Not long after that, I was having a piano class and he walked in and invited both Professor Thereza and me to a *roda* that would happen the following weekend in Copacabana, at an apartment in Pompeu Loureiro Street. Up to that point, and from a musical standpoint, my main influences had been classical music and tango. The realm of *choro* was still completely unknown to me. I recall that, for some reason, Professor Thereza and I were very late to the meeting. So late we even considered not going, but then she said Sérgio had mentioned those events could very easily go into the early hours of the next day, so she said it would not hurt to try. I remember getting into the bus at the corner of Barata Ribeiro and Hilário de

Gouveia, where she used to live; it was the end of the afternoon but I cannot remember the day of the week. We got there a little after that and when we told the doorman where we were going he did not even announce us, he said we could just go up. As soon as we stepped out of the elevator we could hear the sound of guitars, flute, mandolin, *cavaquinho*, accordion, and *pandeiro*, as well as other percussion instruments.

I will never really forget the feeling of complete paralysis when the door opened and that sonorous mass could be heard and felt in all its intensity. I recall that together with another friend, also a musician, we had come to the conclusion that we could rate the level of artistry of any performance by the physical impact it made on you, and that the best ones were those that made you almost forget to breathe...this one not only made me forget to breathe, but also left me motionless for a couple of eternal seconds, and with an uncontrollable internal emotion that, to this day, I can barely explain. There it was: the *roda* that Sérgio had mentioned and the energy and expressiveness that were so clear in his way of playing, only multiplied and concentrated; it was disturbing, unbelievable, overwhelming.

The musicians sat in a circular formation (hence *roda*, circle), I remember there were around nine or ten, sitting in the living room playing their instruments. I also recall they all seemed incredibly concentrated, almost possessed. I have very vivid images of the silence around the musicians. There was a long hallway connecting the living room where the music was taking place to the kitchen, which was the place I would later learn you had to go to if you felt like talking to someone while music was being played. That is basically all I can remember about my first *roda*. I do not know whose home that was,

but I remember very clearly that that evening I experienced the world as I had never experienced it before from a sensorial perspective.

I kept attending as many *rodas* as Sérgio and other friends invited me to. I myself only played a couple of times, I was mostly what they call a *social chorão*, in other words, a person who regularly attends the sessions but does not play an instrument. From that evening in 1982, I go to another evening, at the end of 1989, which turned out to be the last *roda* I attended for several years, and that I only remember because, right before leaving to the *roda*, I was “glued” to the TV set following the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was just taking place. This *roda* was at a friend’s house, in a neighborhood in Rio called Santa Teresa. I remember that evening better than the other, but the most striking moment was towards the end, when a clarinet player started the melody of a *choro* by Pixinguinha called “Vou Vivendo” (something like “*I Keep on Living*”), a beautiful slow *choro* by one of the greatest Brazilian composers. As soon as he started, everybody else in the *roda* jumped in and one could feel an unbelievable chemistry amongst the participants, as if all the parts of a previously inexistent entity just came together materializing this inevitable being. Everything felt right. I remember the look of the 7-string guitarist at the clarinet player as he responded to his statements and phrasings with poignant bass lines, the counter-melodies of the mandolin player, the soothing and grooving rhythm of the *cavaquinho* and a couple of 6-string guitars, and the subtleties of the *pandeiro*. It felt, again, inevitable.

That evening came to my mind like a movie in an afternoon in Bloomington, Indiana, in the fall of 2002. I had been invited by the director of the Latin American Popular Music Ensemble (at the Indiana University School of Music), maestro Gerardo

Dirié, to perform as a guest musician with his ensemble, playing the accordion. I was very happy with the invitation and went to the first rehearsal without previous knowledge of what we would be playing. After the introductions, he handed out some of the pieces for us to play. One of the pieces was that very same “Vou Vivendo.” At the beginning of that day I was an archaeologist, by the end of the rehearsal in the afternoon I had decided to become a cultural anthropologist and to study the social dynamics of music groups, starting with that of the *choro* groups, of course.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

That was part of my background, motivation, and “baggage” at the beginning; and it brings me to one of the first questions I had to consider when I decided to tackle the topic: despite never claiming expertise in *choro* and knowing that familiarity does not necessarily implies real knowledge or understanding, I had nevertheless a series of assumptions and maybe romanticized ideas about what such a slice of *Carioca* (meaning, from Rio de Janeiro) reality would represent and mean, in other words, I did have a particular conception of what *choro* was. How, then, could I “get rid” of all those assumptions, so that I did not go to the field trying to verify something that was certainly not the case? Being a moderate Popperian when it comes to science methods, I knew deep inside that one can manage to prove absolutely anything and everything. Was refutation the answer, then? Well, not really. But what is *choro*?

Choro originated in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), in the last third of the 19th century, and was in a sense part of the same pan-American phenomenon that gave origin to the

American *Ragtime*, the Platense (Uruguayan and Argentinean) *Tango*, the Cuban *Danzón*, the Martiniquean *Beguine* (Garcia 1997:61-62), as well as to other local musical traditions. This phenomenon was characterized, among other things, by increased, sometimes massive, urbanization projects and the consequent establishment of centralizing and redistributive urban centers that attracted hundreds of thousands of migrants and immigrants (e.g., Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Havana, Port-au-Prince, New Orleans); by the decline of slavery and the advancement and establishment of capitalism with its new social order and ordering of things and people; and by a very high degree of interaction between populations with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Modern capitalist urban life, in a sense, played a key role in the development of those styles.

First begun as a *Carioca* way and style of rendering European songs (polkas, waltzes, schottisches, and other popularized styles at the time), *choro* developed into a genre of its own by the end of the 19th century. Musically, it is characterized by being primarily an instrumental genre (rarely sung and never danced) oriented by a philosophy of polyphony and polyrhythmy – an indicative of the importance of socialization and multivocality in this sphere (see Garcia 1997; Livingston 1999). Generally in the form of a rondo (AA/BB/A/CC/A), it is usually played in duple meter, being very complex rhythmically with syncopation playing a very important role. It was originally played by trios of guitar, cavaquinho (a 4-stringed small version of a guitar, not much different from the ukulele) and flute, where the guitar was in charge of the bass range, the cavaquinho of the harmonic/rhythmic center, and the flute of the melody.

Today, *choro* groups have grown to include a second guitar (this one with seven strings), a tambourine (called pandeiro), and a mandolin (called bandolim), clarinet and/or saxophone competing with the flute for the melody lines. Nevertheless, the spatial trinity of bass, center, melody is still the organizational principle of the genre. Melodies are characterized by wide leaps and range, fast sixteenth-note passages, chromatic runs, the melodic arpeggiation of the chords, and syncopation using African-derived rhythms (Garcia 1997). Guitars provide both chordal rhythmic accompaniment and bass lines with a high degree of chromaticism, melodiousness, and ornamentation. The center is provided by the cavaquinho's very complex chordal rhythmic accompaniment reinforced by the constant sixteenth beat with intricate accentuations, finger rolls and breaks played by the tambourine (Garcia 1997). The end product is that of a multi-layered structure of "rhythmic and melodic counterpoints" (Livingston 1999).

Socially, the *choro* world is usually experienced by most at the *choro* jam sessions known in Brazil as *rodas de choro* (singular: *roda de choro*). These gatherings are extremely interesting and enlightening from a socio-anthropological perspective: it is where the *choro* ethos is enacted and materialized, the space for performance and for what I call *transcendental creative participation*, where leisure/play is transformed into hard work through the "embodiment of real passion," a passion for the creation of form through discipline, control and emotion/reason, and a "combination of intuition and inspiration with discipline and technique" (Royce 1993:13). The *rodas* are as much about music as they are about socialization, and they can take place in someone's backyard or living room, or even at bars, where food and drinks are always plentiful.

I started making contacts and tracking down people whom I knew from those first incursions in the *choro* world well before June of 2004, when I arrived in Rio de Janeiro to start my ethnography. Thanks to the internet, I was able to save practically that entire chunk of time anthropologists traditionally dedicate to making contacts once they get in the field. I found again several acquaintances from the past, was electronically introduced to new people, and even made new contacts myself by joining *listserves* and *discussion forums* of *choro* musicians in Rio de Janeiro. A crucial help in this regard was a website called *Agenda do Samba e do Choro* (<http://www.samba-choro.com.br/>), a virtual community dedicated exclusively to samba and *choro*; on it one can find news related to those two genres, discussion groups, articles, and even music scores.

All the contacts I made knew in advance that I was coming, and that I was interested in interviewing them and in observing their practices and jam sessions. Those were just my first contacts, since not everybody has access to computers or the internet in Rio. Nevertheless, thanks to the fact that the *choro* subculture in the city of Rio is, to a certain degree, something like a “big family”, or a big network of people spread all over the city, it is possible, through the knowledge of a few key individuals, to have access to practically the entire community of *choro* musicians (amateurs, semi-professionals, and professionals) in the city.

I conducted my fieldwork from June of 2004 through February of 2005, with a brief intermission half way the period. Although I concentrated my ethnography in the city of Rio de Janeiro, I also went to the cities of Brasília (the capital of Brazil) and Goiânia (in the state of Goiás) to interview musicians and observe their practice sessions. My field apparatus consisted basically of a DELL Latitude notebook (model C510); a

Sony portable DAT (digital audio tape) recorder (model TCD-D100); an Audio-Technica stereo microphone (model ATR25); a rarely used 3.2 mega pixels Sony digital camera (model DSC-P32); several pounds of batteries; lots of notebooks, pens and pencils, and, of course, my 80 (reduced) bass green Scandalli accordion. By the end of the fieldwork I had interviewed a total of 57 individuals, had observed unsystematically 18 *rodas de choro* and systematically 3 *rodas de choro*, had taken copious notes, and had over 70 hours of recorded material (between interviews, life-histories, and jam sessions).

I started working the very next day I arrived in Rio, attending jam sessions and scheduling interviews and meetings with musicians. Right from the beginning I had a concern, and this was related to the areas of the city of Rio that I would have to go to in order to have access to the *rodas* and their musicians. *Choro* is, to a certain degree, a suburban² cultural phenomenon, and to this very day there are neighborhoods in the suburbs of Rio that concentrate *choro* musicians or their activities. The problem was that due to the escalating violence in the city, particularly in those areas, and to the fact that some of these sessions end very late in the evening, I was not sure I would be willing to risk my personal safety in order to attend those *rodas*. After a couple of days of deliberation and of following the local news, I decided not to go and to concentrate on the *rodas* happening in the downtown, South, and part of the North zones of the city, since these were attended by musicians from the other neighborhoods anyways. I also attended a *choro* festival in December but this was in Mendes, a city some two hours northwest of Rio.

² In the United States a suburb is a developed district/neighborhood situated in the surroundings of a metropolitan center, usually inhabited by middle or upper class families. In Latin America, more specifically, in Brazil, a suburb is a partially developed neighborhood, distant from the urban center and inhabited by low middle class and lower class working families.

There are several kinds of *rodas*, and several ways to classify them, but here I would like to propose two very basic ways: open *rodas* and closed *rodas* (see table 1). Open *rodas* are gatherings of several *choro* musicians, invited by the hosts of the session or by those already invited, who show up at a specific location and take turns playing; closed *rodas* are those in which the components of the groups are always (or most always) the same, with very little variation – usually the group has a name and some may have professional aspirations –, and the jam sessions are usually restricted to those individuals; these sessions resemble rehearsal practices of chamber musicians. In other words, there is a greater flux of people, styles, and repertoire in the open category and more predictability in the closed one. As I mentioned before, I followed three *rodas* very closely; two of those fall in the open, and one in the closed category.

Open Rodas	Closed Rodas
More diversity in the components of the sessions	Almost always the same group of people
More flow of people and styles	Less flow of people and styles
Towards the extreme end of the creative scale	Creative
Process as product	Process still very important, but product also relevant
Very unpredictable	Somewhat predictable

Table 1 – Comparison of Open and Closed *Rodas*

The selection of the *rodas* to observe systematically was my main concern at the beginning of the fieldwork. I did not want to participate in any of the old formations I had experienced years ago because I thought this could end up being a distraction and making the detachment process a bit more difficult, if even possible at all. I was also not

interested in professional groups, since their purposes create a very different dynamic and performativity. During my electronic inquires while still in the U.S., several people had mentioned the *Escola Portátil de Música* (something like “Portable School of Music”), an educational project developed by local *choro* musicians in Rio de Janeiro whose goal is to instruct students of all ages in the practice and theory of *choro* music and its social conventions.³

This “school” had been created in 2000 by Mauricio Carrilho, Luciana Rabello, Álvaro Carrilho, Celsinho Silva, and Pedro Amorim, all very well know musicians in the Brazilian scenery. Its first name (and still the one through which it is known) was *Oficina de Choro* (*Choro* Workshop) and operated at first in the building of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro’s Music School. In 2004, having been awarded a hefty grant from El Paso (the American-based safe energy corporation), they moved to a beautiful 19th century *casarão* (large house) in a downtown neighborhood called Glória. Besides the headquarters at Glória, they develop projects and workshops in cities all over the country, hence the name *portable*.

Thanks to the grant from El Paso and the support of local organizations, all the students of the *Oficina do Choro* have full scholarships; and although they do not receive any stipends, no one has to pay for classes or for the didactic materials especially developed for this project. In other words, everything is free (this was the situation in 2004). In the case of some students with serious financial difficulties, they even manage to provide them instruments to take home and practice. Students have classes of instrument, theory, and group practice from unarguably some of the best musicians in the country. Anyone can attend the school and, in 2004, they had over 500 students divided

³ <http://www.escolaportatil.com.br/> (Last checked April 10th, 2007)

in two main levels, beginner and advanced. There are classes of guitar (acoustic), flute, *cavaquinho*, *pandeiro* (tambourine), clarinet, sax, and they were planning to offer accordion, piano, trombone, and percussion in 2005.

This is a magnificent project in itself, from the perspective of its purpose and social impact, not only teaching new skills through art, but instilling high levels of creativity in diverse audiences; all free to the students and under the guidance of some of the best musicians in the country. This is also the ideal arena for fieldwork in a cosmopolitan setting like Rio at the beginning of the 21st century. Despite being a typically male (white/mulatto) low middle class phenomenon, because of its social aesthetics and dynamics *choro* tends to break the walls of this setting, being practiced also by rich and poor, by “blacks,” “whites,” “mulattoes,” and all the possible variations within, it is even practiced by Japanese people, French, Danish, American and so on, *choro* became a true cosmopolitan phenomenon.

An interesting point to mention about the Oficina is that it became a real node, a reference, and people attend it every Saturday from early in the morning until around seven in the evening even if not enrolled in classes, just to interact with the students and musicians or to experience the atmosphere. In this regard, this was the best possible place for me to make contacts, because most everyone involved with *choro* in the city, at one time or another would stop by to socialize and play, again despite of their status of professor/student, professional or amateur. The Oficina was instrumental both as a performative sphere and as an especially valuable networking arena. It was in the context of the Oficina that I met the component of all the three groups I followed systematically, as well as 42 of the 57 individuals interviewed. One of the main interests of the Oficina,

besides the teaching of *choro*, is in the professional development of its students. Students are trained with expectations that, if at some point in their lives they decide to become professional musicians, they have the necessary knowledge to do so. There are several groups organized in the context of the school already in activity in the city of Rio.



Image 1 – *Roda* at the Oficina do Choro, December 2004

Since the professional practice of *choro* implies a different set of expectations and dynamics, as I will discuss in the following chapters, I decided not to follow any professional group. I was interested in amateur and semi-professional groups. Those are not simple categories though, since several amateur and semi-professional groups have professional musicians as active participants. What makes a *roda* or group professional or not is more related to the location and purpose of their gatherings, as well as to the way

they are organized and play their repertory, than to the status of their participants. Having in mind time constraints and the frequency with which those groups meet to jam, I decided that following three groups, scheduling and carrying out individual interviews, attending the Oficina every Saturday, and all the other “last minute” *rodas*, was probably more than I could handle. On top of that, as previously mentioned, I visited two other cities, Goiânia and Brasília, and also attended a *Choro* Festival in the city of Mendes, in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Going back to my first question, concerning the purging of our assumptions when it comes to studying “familiar” issues, I think that, put very simply, constant *questioning*, *reflection*, and *problematizing* is the best way to do it, which is nothing more than transforming the familiar in exotic. At some point it struck me that I was entangled in the same phenomenon of creativity I was trying to study. This is because there can only be creativity when there is a questioning mindset, or an attitude that strives to see things (familiar or strange) through different and many times complementary perspectives. It is still not as simple, though, because more often than not we use our theories as invisible force shields and panaceas, and to me this is one of the trickiest parts of socio-cultural studies. In anthropology we go to the field thinking “data collection,” and this implies a very dangerous closing up to realities that almost certainly the theories we studied, the methods we chose, and the questions we are asking do not address. I agree with anthropologist Roberto DaMatta when he says that, “*Nothing can be excluded of the process of understanding of a different social life. But this should be emphasized within a*

perspective according to which the intermediation of the produced knowledge is made through the natives themselves in direct relation with the researcher”⁴ (1991:150).

I really think we have to learn to “listen,” to “see,” to “feel,” to reconsider, and to change; and this requires modesty and humbleness. This awareness and openness to the probability of change on route hit me in the first weeks of fieldwork. I had started my studies with an interest in *modern alienation and resistance* and quickly realized that those topics were beyond (or at least somewhat low in the hierarchical value list of) the internal logic of the system I was trying to study; and the grasping of this logic, its complexities and longings, was to me much more relevant and important than sticking to the ill informed and romanticized ideas I had laid down in my research proposal. So, what do you do? It is like going to a place carrying a bag that you had anticipated would be enough to bring back all the things you would want and need, but suddenly realizing that not only the bag is not big enough, but also that the shapes of the things you are packing are so peculiar that they will not fit anyways. You are at a cross-road; it is easy and convenient to succumb to the temptation to discard as much as you can of whatever you see as extra weight and trim the edges of the odd-shaped things so that they fit in your bag without tearing it apart. Nevertheless, some people, with less fondness towards the cherished and sometimes very expensive bag, just throw it out and try and find new ways to deal with those “things,” ways that are usually found in the context of collection. This is undoubtedly more burdensome, troublesome, inconvenient, and challenging, but I believe it is the only way to real honest (towards the demands of the studied culture) and relevant scientific-generated knowledge.

⁴ For the sake of presentation and representation I chose not to follow the rule of detaching long quotations (longer than 3 or 4 lines) from the text paragraphs (I will italicize them instead). Instead, I will reserve this central space for the “voices from the field”, either mine or those of the people I interviewed.

When discussing the exotic versus the familiar, DaMatta rises a very important point: that any society, and I would also say, any organized social group, is in itself a system with a minimum degree of internal coherence. He also notices that this *“coherence does not imply the suppression or absence of conflicts, contradictions or divergent and differentiated positions [...]. The problem therefore, consists of being able to situate the level, degree, and modality of those divergences and conflicts,”* by learning to “listen” for the motivations and ideologies of the individuals that integrate that given society or group (1991:162-63).

DaMatta thinks that the transformation of the familiar in exotic parallels the journey of a shaman; being a *“drastic movement in which, paradoxically, you never leave the place you are.”* These journeys would be vertical (towards the inside or upward), instead of horizontal (1991:158). From day one in the field, I started exercising this self-imposed, reflective isolation in search for the extraordinary, for the strange, or for a different angle and perspective. Through an enlightening awareness of my ignorance to certain issues, and having the Socratic maxim *“I only know that I don’t know anything”* as my mantra throughout the eight months, I tried to put myself in a constant state of alert concerning my learning to understand the internal logic and coherence of my object of study, a perceptive spiral in which the familiar became exotic and the exotic became familiar in a constant state of change and revelation.

Another issue that worried me since the beginning is reflected, again, in the words of Roberto DaMatta. He says that, the *“base of the fieldwork as a research technique is easy to justify abstractedly. It relates, basically, to a way to search for new data without the intermediation of other consciousnesses”* (1991:146). This mindset is yet another

issue that I really wanted to break free from. As the author himself notices, the direct contact of the researcher and the reality and peoples he/she is studying brings about several problems and dilemmas. In the first place, this non-intermediated relationship with our subjects is, and I do not think anyone would argue, a figment of the academic imagination. We are all humans, after all! We bring so much “baggage” to the field (cultural, theoretical, and methodological) that it is virtually impossible to have a non-intermediated relationship even with oneself as a researcher. Ideally we should go to the field to get in tune, or to be able to vibrate sympathetically with the people and cultural settings we are interested in studying.

In the introduction to her book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Linda T. Smith questions the very notion of research as an eminently colonizing tool, very much despised and feared by indigenous populations outside Western academic and research institutions. I think we can actually apply this colonizing approach to the ways we are trained and use the knowledge we learn and master as part of an academic field. In other words, how do we break with the established ways and traditions? And, is the break necessary? In part yes, this is how science works for some; it is a never ending rebuilding process. The problem is that this requires a great degree of creativity and looking for answers in other areas of knowledge that are not our own, and we are not normally trained to do so in the social sciences. The scientific fields are usually (in their routine, day-to-day activities) highly uncreative.

It is rather obvious that the time of the big divides and of membership to specific research agendas and theoretical schools is gone. But still, researchers often go to the field trying to verify, corroborate, and confirm hypothesis that are sustained by

theoretical and methodological bodies usually largely taken for granted; we even inherit the questions we ask! If it is no longer a matter of being evolutionist, functionalist, or structuralist, we now pretentiously compete over who makes the best “readings” and/or “interpretation” of specific texts or textualized performances and situations, and even entire cultures, “hot” and fashionable interpretations are the postmodern equivalent of revealing puzzling mysteries and of spectacular discoveries. In urban and cosmopolitan studies this is an empirical impossibility. All cultural settings, but more dramatically urban centers, require an open and fluid predisposition to learning, observing, feeling, and understanding. According to Paul Stoller, *“The ‘field’ in anthropology is becoming a dizzying array of cross-cutting transnational spaces that take place in zones of multiple contestation”* (Stoller 1997:93).

This needs to be seriously taken into consideration. Fieldwork is a critical part of an anthropologist’s life. Not because it allows for a non-intermediated relation with his or her subject of study, but because it is the best possible setting for sensibilization and reevaluation to take place. One has two clear choices, either to hide behind the shield of the established concepts, methods, and theories, or be willing to change, because change is bound to happen if one is really interested in cultural understanding. Some critical and cherished concepts in academic circles – such as culture, identity, authenticity, and origin – have to be abandoned or redefined in the context of urban studies. (See Canevacci 2004). According to Canevacci, *“The concept of identity, both in psychological and philosophical and anthropological terms, always represented an axis of Western domination, because it is an instrument that fixes the subject within a very rigid and mono-identifiable elaborative process, of identification and of culture. Such process is*

profoundly disastrous, because it freezes the subject up in a condition and leaves it there forever” (2004:44-45).

The same is true for cultural syncretism and how we approach its complexities, as well as for what Canevacci calls cultural polyphony. He believes that it is necessary for us to develop adequate methods to capture and represent polyphonic contexts, such as all segments of Brazilian society. He states that, if the object under representation is *“multivocal, the method we use to represent it can only be multivocal. It is necessary to learn to pluralize the concepts, the sensations, and the processes of knowledge.”* (2004:46). The new anthropology should challenge monophony and disseminate polyphony, this means that form a monologic register, where the anthropologist’s voice reigns supreme, we go to a polyphonic way of representing, in other words, a diversification of the narrative and registering methods. And in this process of developing new narrative forms, *“the new anthropology becomes performance”* (2004:46-47).

Royce also brings anthropology into the realm of performance, and akin with Canevacci believes that good ethnographers should see themselves as performers, even artists, and their products as much crafted as any kind of artistic performance. In her essay *“The Ethnographer as Artist: The Work of Jerome Mintz,”* she draws upon significant commonalities between art and ethnography, stating that: *“Art and ethnography select, frame, interpret, and intensify; works of art and ethnographies are intentional and coherent; artists and ethnographers have mastered a craft or a technique, and the best of them go beyond craft to present works that have a sense of inevitability and rightness. In the doing of that, they themselves become transparent so that audience and work come together without the presence of an intermediary”* (Royce 1996).

We still have a big dilemma in our hands. Even if we agree that anthropology would indeed greatly benefit from becoming performance, and ethnographers would do a better job by taking or assuming their roles as artists, what kind of performance and artist should we strive for? Because there are as many artistic and performance traditions as there are anthropological ones. A performance in the Brechtian tradition, for instance, calls for posture and attitudes radically different from some kinds of realistic acting. Brecht wanted his actors to actively engage in their roles, not to disappear in them, as some realistic traditions would require.

Canevacci's polyphonic approach is an interesting idea to be explored, but still, what kind of polyphonic writing are we talking about? Tonal? Atonal? How many voices? And furthermore, how do we do it in our usually linear and single-voiced writings? For Canevacci, polyphony is the opposite of synthesis, so, traditional cultural syntheses are forever doomed; each voice heard should be maintained and incorporated in the ethnographic account. This means that consonant harmony – as in order and agreement – becomes necessarily dissonant harmony, full of chromatic, sonorous, and aesthetical variations (2004:47). Multi-individuality and multi-identity come into the picture, conflict and harmony are forever interlocked, and the plural becomes the paradigm of choice.

In late September 2005, I attended a master class at the Indiana University School of Music by the American cellist Laurence Lesser. Addressing the issue of Bach's polyphonic writing in the context of a particular cello suite, he said that even when writing for non-harmonic instruments, Bach was a master of polyphony, and moreover, that when he happened to write entire pieces with a single line, without vertical harmony,

that the harmony was still there, only it should be approached horizontally. For musicians, harmony instantly brings into mind verticality. According to Koellreutter, *“The concept of “harmony” as a “theory of the connection of chords” originated at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th centuries, when the “horizontalism” of the counterpoint increasingly gave room to the “verticalism” of the emission of three or more sounds of different heights and to the proper laws of the chords [...], when the modal system was substituted by the tonal system of major and minor”* (1986:14).

We know how important music parallels and analogies were in Lévi-Strauss’ analysis of myths. This is clear just by looking at the titles and subtitles of his “The Raw and the Cooked.” I agree with Lévi-Strauss’ perspective that in the Western world, from the Renaissance on, music took on the role and place of mythical thought; on the other hand his claim that myths should be read as scores, melodically (from left to right) and harmonically (from top to bottom), as well as his structural analogies of some Amerindian myths to musical forms such as toccatas, sonatas, fugues, and etc., are certainly interesting, but highly normative, simplified, and underproblematized textualized assumptions.

Koellreutter (the great 20th century composer, conductor, and theoretician) is right, but his statement should be understood in the context of Western tonal music analysis, and Lévi-Strauss’ analogies are restricted to baroque, classical, and romantic forms and contents. Lévi-Strauss sees certain cultural spheres as scores that can be read and interpreted in certain structural and universal ways. This might work somewhat in music but is not as simple and straightforward when it comes to culture. Cultures do not

have the structural coherence that musical scores have (in terms of tonality or lack of thereof, form, genre, and so on), at least the ones to which he was alluding.

The main problem is the contextual information that is disregarded, and the transcendental nuances that are lost, just for the sake of structure and unity. Musically speaking, we lose voice, timbre accent, voicing, sonorous dynamic, modulation, rubatos and agogics (see Canevacci 2004; Royce 2004), just to name some. This to me was a critical issue while in the field, and little by little I started seeing this as a matter of equalization and careful combination, of pure artistic and very well informed crafting. If, referring to Lesser's observation, we can allow ourselves to make a parallel between horizontal harmony and history, vertical harmony would imply a different relationship between self and history, where history is not an identifiable and analyzable sequence of events, but an embodied craft, something that possesses our bodies as much as anything else (see Stoller 1997).

To complicate matters a little more, another thing that hit me in the first weeks of fieldwork is that most of the time people do not mean what they say, and also that what they say about certain topics change according to a series of variables: when they say it, where they say it, their moods when saying it, how they perceive you, and the media you are using to document them, just to mention some. So, your understanding of situations and meanings in the field cannot rely exclusively on utterances from "locals" neither solely on your observations and deductions of what "locals" are doing based in the knowledge you slowly build up after "hearing" and "seeing" for a couple of months. This is really a major point: I had assumed that I would have a minimal advantage, going to a place where I knew the language and the slang as well as anyone around, where I knew

the city, how to approach people and establish rapport, where I knew where I would be staying for the entire period. I mean, these are things that usually take a big part out of the traditional one-year period of fieldwork of most first time ethnographers. I started to think that, once one really settles down, masters the language of the “other” (which hardly ever happens in one year), establishes some connections and relationships, and starts to immerse in the culture one happens to be studying, their year is already gone! So, what is this thing that we end up writing and publishing and that ultimately grants us a job? Is it a figment of our classificatory imagination that has nothing or very little to do with the reality we claim authority over? In other words, if I had all those advantages, compared to people who study cultures very distant from their own, and still had a sense that I was not getting ‘to the core of it,’ what in the world can a complete “foreigner” really understand at the end of one year of research? I think this is fascinating, at least from a phenomenological standpoint.

The problem is, again, that we only see what we want to see, what we are prepared to see, what we are expecting to see. Moreover, our academic training overemphasizes the rational, the mind, the so called “objective,” numbing most of our senses and making us very insensitive to people. In a wonderful book called *Sensuous Scholarship*, Paul Stoller writes precisely about this: about the awakening of the scholar’s body for the sensuous dimension of reality through a different approach to experiencing the world (Stoller 1997). Scholarly work presupposes analysis, and the very idea of analysis presupposes the breaking down and reduction of any given entity in smaller, “analyzable,” parts. The problem is that cultural life is really unbreakable; it is one of those things that once you break apart there is no conceivable way to reassemble, and this

is largely due to the multifaceted and organic nature of culture, to the fact that it is already a collection of all sorts of disparate (but yet coherent) things. The issue here is that we have no alternative but to recur to it to a certain degree. A Cartesian and mechanistic vision of the world contributed for the belief that the human phenomenon could be unproblematically analyzed as any machine. From the Renaissance on, the idea of analysis became paradigmatic in Western thought as the best problem solving technique. Analysis and synthesis are supposedly two moments of any given process of understanding. Analysis ends up being all we learn to do, the terrain of the specialists and hyper-specialists. Synthesis, a much less explored path, is the realm of the person who knows the specific as well as the individual...it requires virtuosity and a degree of artistry seldom reached by the analysis and the analysts. So, what to do?

That question will never be answered. But I find it important to always have it in the back of our minds; because it incites reflection. The path I chose was the one suggested by Stoller. I wanted to have an understanding of the hierarchy of the senses in the arena I was studying, since Stoller (together with other authors such as Royce, Taylor, and Sawyer) calls our attention to the fact that embodiment is not necessarily or primarily textual, but that in several situations and places "*the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories*" (1997:54). He believes that social scientists fail to give the appropriate importance to the body (in certain contexts), to the relationship between bodily practices and cultural memory, and to the political power that comes from embodiment (1997:55).

This led me to emphasize the understanding of a complex series of incorporating and embodying practices as well as the means through which collective memories and emotions are evoked and conveyed through the senses, sometimes, as put by Gayl Jones, “*from sentiments so elemental that they are beyond words, beyond the constraints of the text*” (in Stoller 1997:75). Paraphrasing Gayl Jones, when these people play the *choro*, cultural memory and emotions possesses them (in Stoller 1997:75).

It was actually not until the evening of July 10, 2004, at a *roda* in the Oficina, long after classes had finished, and one month into my fieldwork, that it hit me in the head like a lightning bolt. It was already eight in the evening and most students and visitors had long left. There was still a nice *roda* in the main room of the old *casarão* and some people around. This was one of those “open *rodas*” where at the end of every piece some people would join and others would take some time out. I checked my watch and it was 8:30pm, right after counting eighteen people in the room, mostly musicians, but also a couple of spectators such as myself. They had just finished a piece and were entertained sipping a little beer and checking their instruments’ tunings when I noticed Luciana Rabello approaching the *roda*. Luciana is a *cavaquinista* and composer and a member of one of the most traditional *choro* families in Rio.

Now, most of those people, including me, had been there since 9:00am. So by then the energy of the musicians and the *roda* was winding down. But then came Luciana. I do not know exactly what happened, but as she entered the room carrying her *cavaquinho* she did not come alone. Also, I do not know what happened to me that made me, at that precise moment, become aware of something different. It had been there all the time, but only now I seemed to notice it. What was it? Not sure...I just remember that

she felt something else...she felt very powerful, even politically speaking, and that she felt inevitable. The interesting thing is that that moment was crucial, because it rearranged my perceptive capabilities, equalizing them with my surroundings and syntonizing them with the *choro* ethos. I looked around to see if anyone had noticed Luciana's entrance; no one seemed to have. I looked back at her and the expression in her eyes was electrifying, as if she was charged with some weird energy. She then rested the *cavaquinho* case on top of a table, took the *cavaquinho* out, checked the tuning and sat down. To her right was a guitar player called Caçulinha, a 60-plus-year-old *choro* musician who, according to Luciana, was the incarnation of *choro*. As she sat down, she did not say a word. She looked at him with a very subtle smile. He, on his turn, very subtly as well, nodded with his head as if consenting with her – with whatever message she had sent him through that almost imperceptible smile. Nobody else noticed this, since every one else in the room was either chatting, or drinking, or smoking, or all of the above. She then pressed the pick against the *cavaquinho*'s strings, to begin playing a waltz by Pixinguinha called "Sensível." There were two men to my right and when she played the first notes of the piece I overheard one saying: "- *Putz, ouve isso!*" ("- Hush, listen to that!").

In a matter of seconds, of two or three notes, the silence became sepulchral, everybody seemed hypnotized, and yet very conscious of what was happening. She was not yet in the second bar of the piece when Caçulinha joined in with his six-string guitar, and not long after him, another guitar, this one played by Mauricio Carrilho completed what became a trio. Luciana closed her eyes not to open them until the end of the piece. Caçulinha's attention seemed to be on Luciana's breath, and Mauricio appeared to divide

his attention between Luciana and Caçulinha. The three were playing as if they shared the same body. My attention was divided between the players and everybody else in the room. There was obviously a great deal of intersubjective complex communication as well as an astounding degree of emergence (a property of group dynamics I will address later) in the room. The interactional synchrony among the musicians created a multilayered performance that was astoundingly complex and simple at the same time; and the group flow and dynamics could only be understood at the transcendental level of experience.

I looked around and felt in the midst of something extraordinary, something very powerful. I wanted somehow to capture the totality of that experience in my notebook but found myself without the words to do so. There was a small group of three people sitting to my left, they would look at each other now and then and make different facial expressions. Whatever the meaning of those, it was obvious that the group flow that was so clear between the musicians was permeating every single person in that room. The communication now was non-verbal; it was the bodies and the energy emanating from those bodies the ones communicating things. A quote by Paul Stoller came to my mind at this time, when he said that, "*Embodiment is not primarily textual; rather the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories*" (1997:54).

At that moment, it became paramount to me that I commit to the search for a means to access this cultural dimension experienced by the senses and the sensuous body. Looking around, all I could suddenly think about was creativity, unrestrained creativity; cultural aesthetics, all those wonderful cultural patterns that were so clear in that

environment and that people experienced with their senses; collective flow and emotion, something that I could not easily point my finger at, but was clearly binding all those people together, a mix of memories, histories, *saudades*, anxieties, pains, and hopes, but also happiness, incommensurable happiness. This is how it hit me. In my opinion, there is a noticeable lack of anthropological methods to adequately cope with the complexities of socio-cultural, historical, and political subtleties and nuances of cultural/social aesthetics, group creativity, and collective emotions. There are theoretical discussions of each of those topics in different areas of the social sciences. But, then again, what do you do, once you are on the field to deal with that? How do you capture that? How do you translate and express it to your audience back home in your academic writing?

Those were the questions I had in mind in the field after my “awakening” to the transcendental dimension of the *choro* practice in the *in loco*. In short, I had to open my guard, get in the water, and experience the *choro* universe from within, not the other way around. And then, I thought, comes a no less difficult task: how could I transform my lived experience into some sort of anthropological/sociological body of knowledge? Once again, as a start, I found inspiration in Paul Stoller. According to him, “*The most important and difficult lesson that a sensuous scholarship provides is that of humility. No matter how learned we may become, no matter how deeply we have mastered a subject, the world, for the sensuous scholar, remains a wondrous place that stirs the imagination and sparks creativity*” (Stoller 1997:136).

So, I decided to learn, but not from an academic presumptuous perspective, by bringing a set of questions ready to go, or by appealing to the traditional life histories and so on. I would still do those things, but they were really low in the hierarchical value of

actions that I devised as a strategy to cope with those questions. So, what I did is I took the model of the workshop (of the *Choro* Workshop, *Oficina do Choro*) as inspiration and guiding principle and decided to become a pupil. Not an official pupil, more something like a self-taught artist who learns a craft by hanging near to the masters. And this is when Stoller's and DaMatta's advice concerning humility proved a condition *sine qua non*.

I used four main methods in the field: interviews with open and direct (closed) questions, life histories, observations (taking copious notes), and participation as a musician. And I intended for each strategy to complement the other, which implied that I dealt with much of the collected information on the spot, while still in the field, and in a constant re-structuring of my procedures.

It is interesting to notice how things changed radically once I took on the role of musician. For roughly two months I did not even mention to most people I interacted with that I could play an instrument, and I must confess that there was a certain distance from people that always bothered me considerably. It is not that they were rude, on the contrary, but I still could tell they just did not care that much for what I was doing. I would approach people, introduce myself as an anthropologist, explain my intentions and either schedule another meeting or proceed with whatever activity (interview, etc.) we had planned. All people I approached treated me with respect and consideration, but still, I could easily feel that the connection was not complete, that they were not really opening up, not on purpose, but just because that was the nature of the relationship I had established to begin with; something like a doctor-patient relationship. I took me a week or so to notice this. I decided to give it at least a month or so to see if things changed.

When they finally did not, then I started considering turning things around, becoming “one of them,” as much as I could, and providing I was accepted as such. This is when I decided to take on the role of musician.

This is actually a very funny and interesting chapter of my fieldwork. I told some of the people I was interacting with that I played the accordion and asked them whether it was alright for me to bring my instrument next time for the *roda*. I did that with the closed group I was working with, as well as with one of the “open” ones. Without blinking, all of them responded affirmatively and, two months into the fieldwork, I became a *choro* “novice.” This is when a huge qualitative change took place. The first time I brought the instrument to the open *roda* and people saw me arriving with the accordion, they came to me saying: “You play the accordion? I did not know! This is great!” And I would respond that I played a little, although not *choro*, but that I was really looking forward to this experience and that I would love to learn the ways of *choro* from them. Things changed everything for the better in a heartbeat, I just could not believe.

The “distance” I felt before was gone; suddenly people “relaxed” and the nature of their interaction with me changed radically and dramatically. I think they opened their guards the moment they saw me open mine and become very vulnerable because of my new status of player and “apprentice.” By doing this, I entered the core of the phenomenon I was researching and the risk of losing “consciousness” became a real and present danger. On the other hand, this gave me the opportunity to “train” my entire body to really incorporate *choro* at all possible levels, the conscious, the rational, the bodily, the sensible, the sensuous, and so on. It also granted me access to the realm of the

ethnographic detail, this is a key realm in the study of any cultural phenomenon, something often overlooked by social researchers. Talking about the importance of the ethnographic detail, DaMatta said that it is “*capable of modifying an entire argument verbally constructed, and of discovering of how fundamental it is the conscious study of certain anthropological problems*” (1991:201).

By becoming (or attempting to become) a *choro* musician, my own body was now, in a sense, at the center of my ethnographic enterprise, in the same sense that Julie Taylor’s body was the catalyst through which she made sense of the tango world and made it able for non-tango instructed audiences to really grasp the intricacies of part of that fascinating sub-cultural phenomenon (Taylor 1998). The distance of being an outsider only added to the possibility of informed criticisms and a very sharp sociological commentary.

During a period of eight months I met, interacted with, and interviewed a considerable number of people. The phenomenon I was dealing with in 2004 was very different from that described by Alexandre Gonçalves Pinto in the beginning of the 20th century. The city changed, *choro* became a genre of its own, the demographics changed. I met several musicians both professional (people who made a living with music, and would also play *choro* in their free time, taking it very seriously) and amateurs. Retired seniors, school teachers, students, journalists, doctors, lawyers, a chemist, psychologists, an actress, a bank cashier, singers, plastic artists, house makers, dentists, public servants, cab drivers, veterinarians, and even a political advisor. What used to be an exclusive male domain, and still is, to a large degree, now has a 5 to almost 2 ratio of men to women. I saw children of 12 and younger participating in the *rodas* and talked to retired seniors of

almost 80 years old. From a racial and economic perspective, *choro* is still predominantly (but by no means exclusively) a low middle class white/mulatto phenomenon.

In order for anyone to carry research with human subjects, American universities require that your project be approved by a Humans Subject Committee. My application and consent form were approved by the Indiana University Human Subject Committee. I carried with me several copies of my consent form in Portuguese to show potential interviewees the nature and character of my research and their rights as human subjects. They were always fine with my study but I felt since the beginning that they were not very comfortable signing a piece of paper. Ever since I noticed that, I assured all my subjects that they would remain anonymous—although most of them did not really worry about that—and that any potentially compromising material would be destroyed by the end of my studies. In this case, I classify as compromising any interview (or part of an interview) in which a subject makes remarks concerning other people that could be understood by those as offensive or insulting. Throughout the dissertation I have replaced most (but not all) of the real names for fictitious ones.

The following chapters are an attempt to delve into this wonderful dimension of human existence by embracing three spheres of performativity: social aesthetics, group creativity, and collective emotion. Although I emphasized some issues concerning method here, I do not make this distinction in the following sections; I truly think that method, theory, and the case study we choose are inseparable from each other and should be presented accordingly.

The last question here would probably concern the topic of this essay. Why, in the first place, did I choose social aesthetics, group creativity, and collective emotion, and what is the relationship between the three?

Quoting David MacDougall, I believe that “Aesthetics” [in anthropology] *has little to do with notions of beauty or art, but rather with a much wider range of culturally patterned sensory experience. [It relates to the] design of things, the use of clothing and colors, the rules of behavior, the organization of time, styles of speech and gesture, and many rituals of everyday life...*” (1999:5). Taken as such, and in the context of urban and cosmopolitan studies, I believe the concept of social aesthetics to be a powerful contender for the place occupied by the concept of culture. It allows for much more flexibility and fluidity in devising and articulating our classificatory schemes, and is also a powerful tool to approach cultural complexity. The emotional dimension gives us the best possible doorway to investigate the means through which that aesthetics (or culture) is incorporated/embodied and felt through the body, since it constitutes, in the words of Michelle Rosaldo “*thoughts somehow ‘felt’ in flushes, pulses, ‘movements’ of our lives, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin [...] embodied thoughts, seeped with apprehension that ‘I am involved.’*” (1984). This dimension is also critical as an aid in the understanding of the diversity of socio-aesthetical dimensions to which people have subscribed (their degree and hues). Finally, creativity to me is what really sets humans apart from other living beings, it is the ability that all of us have (but not all exercise) to identify existent orders and structures (norms) regulating different spheres of life and to “play” with them. By doing so a person usually identify never before felt differences, associate them with

previous known structures, and create new orders and structures; and the process goes on (or should go on) indefinitely.

My general question is: How do we, as creative beings, subscribe to particular socio-aesthetical principles, embodying and performing them through our sentient bodies? But I can break it apart into narrower ones: What brings us together as social and cultural beings? What makes us cry and laugh? What stirs up our emotions? How do we share emotions with others? What are the implications of this for the ways we chose to behave, socialize, and relate to others? What does it mean to be creative and how does it work in collective situations? Is the experience of beauty in the arts the most responsible for our happiness, as some have suggested? How do we operate according to the aesthetic principles we articulate as social individuals? How do we develop our tastes and what can these tell us about the way we approach the world? How do we create mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion based on our aesthetic principles? How do we operate according to the ‘culturally patterned sensory experiences’ that we anthropologists call aesthetics?

It is not easy to be *sensível* to all these dimensions...it requires *ginga* and *malícia*, and I hope to have incorporated enough of these qualities to be able to navigate through this wonderful sea of human complexity.

Postlude to the First Chapter

...(Music) should enrich the soul; it should teach spirituality by showing a person a portion of himself that he would not discover otherwise. It's easy to rediscover part of yourself, but through art you can be shown part of yourself you never knew existed. That's the real mission of art. The artist has to find something within himself that's universal and which he can put into terms that are communicable to other people. The

magic of it is that art can communicate to a person without his realizing it...enrichment, that's the function of music. (Bill Evans, in Gillespie)

I was coming back from Brasília where I had conducted a very brief part of my fieldwork. Being very sensitive to cityscapes, I had still imprinted very fresh in my mind the strange impressions that the capital of Brazil had produced in me. As much as I like, or better, love, concrete, the way it was conceived and used in Brasília seemed to me grotesque and insensitive; conducive to nothing that had to do with human interaction. It was too straight and full of sharp angles, in sum and sadly, a rectilinear city. The pilot had announced our arrival and the crew prepared for landing, when the guy sitting on my side, by the window, started to say (with a heavy Spanish accent): “What a beautiful thing...what a beautiful thing...” We were landing on Santos Dumont Airport, downtown Rio de Janeiro, and the approaching of the aircraft to that incredibly short runway has to be indeed one of the most beautiful sights a human being can experience. I peeked over his shoulders and saw that gorgeous maze of buildings, the waterline...at some point the roof of the buildings came so close that it seemed we were going to crash...the “sugar loaf” shaped mountains at a distance...the memories, tastes, smells, sounds and contradictory feelings came back in a second...Brasília went into oblivion in a heart beat! I was back to the curvilinear city. De Masi came to mind; he sees the curve as a metaphor of humanism, art, poetry, and emotiveness, everything that advocates the universe of approximation, as opposed to the rationality of the straight line (2003). Rio is a city with endless possibilities, when you get to the end of a curve...there is another one waiting for you.

The place where we landed is literally a few yards from the re-entrance of the Guanabara bay where the Portuguese Royal Family disembarked in 1808, fleeing from the Napoleonic troops, with its entourage of around 17.000 (seventeen thousand) people! (See Nunes 2000) The then small parish grew overnight by almost one third⁵, becoming the only capital of an European Empire in the Americas in history⁶. In a matter of a decade, the city actually duplicated its population (Roedel 2004:23). Now as Lisbon's substitute, Rio underwent sudden and dramatic transformations since it did not have the structure neither the institutions necessary for the proper and effective functioning of a court. The meager scenario of the colonial village saw the establishment of schools (of medicine, navy, war, and commerce), a Royal Press, bookstores, a Botanical Garden, a Fine Arts Academy, the Royal Theatre, and a bank: the *Banco do Brasil* (Motta 2004). But that was not enough, says Marly Motta, "*the urban configuration of the city itself had to be adequate to the function of stage of the Imperial power. With the arrival of the masters of the French Artistic Mission in 1816, neoclassic façades and triumphal arches were projected to give Rio de Janeiro the outlook of an European capital*" (2004:10).

Upon his arrival to the country, D. João VI had opened up the harbors to foreign trade and merchants, something that brought about an economic boom in the early 1800s. After the independence from Portugal in 1822 it increased even more, due to the coffee production and exports starting in the 1830s. Rio's harbor became the most vibrant in the country and the number of foreign ships anchoring in the Guanabara Bay (where the harbor is located) increased exponentially throughout the 19th century. It was actually the third most important harbor of the Americas, right...*and it continues for a long while* ;-)

⁵ According to the census, in 1799 the population of Rio de Janeiro was of 43.376 inhabitants.

⁶ From 1808 through 1821.

Collective Creativity is Organised by: Evan Ifekoya is an artist and educator with an interdisciplinary practice, exploring the "politicisation"™ of culture, society and aesthetics who is interested in finding ways to demystify artistic practices, in a desire to challenge the role of the artist in the process of production. Central to this practice is an exploration into the ways that collaboration might take place. Far more emotion researchers have devoted their careers to studying negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety and sadness. The study of optimism and positive emotions was seen by some as a frivolous pursuit. But the positive psychology movement is changing that. The new discoveries generated by positive psychology hold the promise of improving individual and collective functioning, psychological well-being and physical health. But to harness the power of positive psychology, we need to understand how and why "goodness" matters. Although the discovery that people who think positively and feel good actually live longer is remarkable, it raises more questions than it answers. Exactly how do positive thinking and pleasant feelings help people live longer?