



Reconsidering Culture, Counterculture, and Nation through a *Tropicália* Lens¹

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Abstract

This case study approaches “culture” from a broad approach, applying various definitions from the compilation by Baldwin et al. (2006) to *Tropicália*, a musical movement that began in the late 1960s in Brazil. The movement was initially booed by audiences and repressed by the military regime, but eventually grew to represent the forces of globalization on the Brazilian music scene. Its reflection of cultural themes and tensions, as well as the role of market economy and state involvement in “culture” constitute it as a prime case study for the understanding of “culture.” The paper considers several types of definitions of culture—such as culture as refinement, as pattern, as process, and as site of struggle—and how each might lead us to look at *Tropicália* in a different light. Beyond this, the understanding of culture presented here should have broader implications for how we understand and how we pragmatically approach any social phenomenon.

In the electric air of the great 1967 III Festival de MPB (Popular Brazilian Music) in Rio de Janeiro, Caetano Veloso prepared to sing his song, “Alegria, Alegria,” backed by the Argentine group, the Beat Boys (Veloso, 2002). The artists were nearly booed off the stage. Such booing was not uncommon during the Brazilian rock festivals, as followers of the *Jovem Guarda* (Young Guard) of Roberto Carlos and his fellow singers of romantic songs, or the MPB fans Chico Buarque, often booed artists from the other camp from the stage (Dunn, 2001a; Napolitano, 2001). Over the next few years, Veloso, his musical companion, Gilberto Gil, and others such as Tom Zé, Gal Costa, José Capinam, Torquato Neto, and the Mutantes, began a “brief-lived” musical experiment called *Tropicália* that played with both the form and function of Brazilian music (Dunn, 2001b; Sá Rego & Perrone, n. d.). In December of 1968, the police under the military regime arrived at the apartments of Veloso and Gil, arrested them, interrogated them, and eventually exiled them to England (Dunn, 2001a). *Tropicália* overcame, however. Both returned to Brazil a few years later and continue to make

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music today—ironically, Gil served as the national Minister of Culture, retiring to continue his music making only in 2007.

Pastemagazine.com (Joynt, 2008), celebrating 40 years of “strategic rupture” through Tropicália, notes that some of the innovations Tropicália promulgated—such as electric guitar, at Tropicália’s time, might have seemed like cultural imperialism, but today “artists across hemispheres. . . swap ethno musical influences” (p. 72). Artists such as David Byrne, Beck, and Paul Simon reference the Tropicalists. Later artists, such as the Paralamas do Sucesso (França, 2003) borrow liberally from African-, Caribbean-, and Latino-themed musical roots, citing (if only in passing) the inspiration of musicians such as Gilberto Gil. In sum, Tropicália has had a lasting impact on contemporary Brazilian music. The birth, suppression, and survival of Tropicália constitute a vital case study not only for the understanding of culture, but of youth culture, counterculture, and cultural conflict.

One might wonder how Tropicália relates to culture and cultural conflict. Maybe the booing of the band was merely a mark of band loyalty, and the arrest, the simple result of the band making some out-of-bounds remark about the military regime. A deeper understanding of both the initial reception and the deportation of the singers gives us some insight.

At the III Festival de MPB, before Veloso even entered the stage, the crowd was already booing furiously (Veloso, 2002), first because the *Argentine* Beat Boys were appearing at a *Brazilian* music festival, second because they were wearing pink plastic clothes rather than the customary tuxedos, and perhaps central, because of its primary mention in so many books that cover the event (e.g. Napolitano, 1991; Perrone, 1989), because the band used, of all things, *electric* guitars. Until this time, Brazilian music had been articulated as merely acoustic, and some festivals had even banned Veloso and his electric guitar altogether (Murphy, 2006). In terms of the arrest, the Tropicália group was notorious of the new bands of the era for its *lack* of an overt political critique of the regime. The Tropicalists’ avoidance of direct political critique brought them into sharp dissension with the “MPB” (Musica Popular Brasileira) movement of the time—artists such as Buarque and Geraldo Vandré. Christopher Dunn (2001a), one of the major writers of the Tropicália movement in the English language, notes that even today, people are not sure why Gil and Veloso were arrested and deported, though he cites Veloso as suggesting that it was because, more than opposing the military regime,



Tropicália undermined the very structures of Brazilian music—a phenomenon Brazilians held dear and close to their hearts as a key expression of national identity—and of social structure itself. In this regard, Tropicália brought itself into conflict both with the contemporary vanguards of popular music and with the military regime.

We now see that the boos of the crowd and the bars of the jail cell were linked not to poor musicianship or political protest (*per se*)—but to definitions of (cultural) taste and discourses of national identity. But does this constitute a *cultural* conflict? In this essay, I take the stance that the answer to this question depends in part on *how one defines culture*, and I suggest that culture is a multivalent term. Further, I contend that in most definitions of the term, the case of Tropicália is one of *culture*, and that, in fact, the complexity of the Tropicália case allows us to explore the variety of definitions of culture now available to us.

Competing Definitions of Culture

In 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, based on an analysis of 150 definitions of culture, offered a summary explanation of culture:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i. e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (p. 181)

This “pattern” approach to culture reigned supreme for years. But as Baldwin et al. (2006) argue in *Redefining Culture*, /culture/ is a “sign, an empty vessel waiting for people—both academicians and everyday communicators—to fill it with meaning” (p. 4). Through a look at the development of the notion of culture, the authors note early definitions of culture relate to one’s sense of “cultivation” (based on the notion of cultivation, from Latin *colere*, to till the ground (p. 5), often translated as an elevated sense of class or of moral and educational development.

Social scientists disavowed this definition as elitist, suggesting that all groups of people had “culture.” In a (synchronic) thematic analysis of the term (sign) /culture/, as found in 313 definitions from several disciplines, Baldwin et al. (2006) show that some anthropologists see “culture” as the mental frameworks that *lead* to artifacts and



behavior and others as the frameworks *and* the artifacts and behavior. Some communication scholars see culture in terms of patterns of symbols and meanings, and many popular writers write of cultures as “groups” of people. Most modern writers seek inclusive definitions that include ethnic co-cultures, cultures of sexual or sexual orientation identities, countercultures, and even organizational cultures.

This more expansive usage of culture turns out to be merely an extension of the Kroeber-and-Kluckhonesque definition to a more diverse set of groups. Many see culture no longer as mental/behavioral/artifactual baggage passed down from generation to generation, but as an ongoing process of communicative co-construction (à la symbolic interactionism). And an increasing number take a critical or postmodern view of culture. For example, Donald and Rattansi (1992) state that culture can no longer be understood simply as religious beliefs or cultural rituals, but as how these are “*produced* through systems of meaning, through structures of power, and through the institutions in which these are deployed” (p. 4). Moon (2002) characterizes culture as a “contested zone in which different groups struggle to define issues in their own interests” (p. 16). In a dialogic essay among five intercultural communication scholars, who list among definitions of culture the notion of culture as “dominant or hegemonic structure” (p. 230), Wenshu Lee offers: “Conceptualizing culture is itself political and should be contextualized/situated with an ethical/moral commitment” (pp. 228-229). Raymond Williams, the cultural studies writer, defined culture as “a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in the institutions and ordinary behavior” (p. 43). O’Sullivan and his colleagues (1983) extended this focus on institutions to include both institutions and the meanings that they socially “produce and reproduce,” including but not limited to reproduction through mass culture: “Culture is now seen as a determining and not just a determined part of social activity, and therefore culture is a significant sphere for the reproduction of power inequalities” (p. 59). (See Appendix for categories of culture definition).

In sum, we can conclude with O’Sullivan et al. (1983) that:

The term culture is multi-discursive; it can be mobilized in a number of different discourses. This means you cannot import a fixed definition into any and every context and expect it to make sense. What you have to do is identify the discursive context itself. . . . What the term refers to (its referent as opposed to its signified) is determined by the term itself in its discursive context, and not the other way around. (p. 57)



It is my contention that *most* modern definitions will apply to Tropicália, and that its analysis via several definitions illustrates its use as a case study to understand modern approaches to culture, counterculture, and youth culture. Moreover, how we view and define culture will have implications for the methods we choose for social research, for interventions we implement in the social sphere, and for the ethics of our communication within and across (counter)cultures.ⁱ

Tropicália, Culture, and Cultural Conflict

Kulture, Kitsch, and Klass

One of the more traditional approaches of culture was as “the moral and social passion for doing good; it is the study and pursuit of perfection and this perfection is the growth and predominance of humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality” (Harrison, 1971, p. 270). By some proponents of Tropicália, such as Celso Favoretto (1979), whose book sings the praises of Tropicália, the movement elevates Brazilian music to new cultural height. Tropicália “imposes, for the critic and the public, a reformulation of a new feeling (*sensibilidade*), displacing, thus, the very position of popular music, which, from an inferior position, would re-clothe itself in dignity” (p. 7).

At the same time, some argue that the Tropicália movement provided a sense of culture clash, in terms of “good taste” in music: Unlike the “serious” musicians—even the serious rock musicians—who did concerts, university halls, and music festivals, the playground of the middle class and elite, Veloso and his colleagues appeared on such shows as the kitschy *Chacrinha*, where the host, a “corpulent clown” appealed most to the popular classes. Dunn (2001a) summarizes: “The tropicalists publicly embraced mass-mediated figures of low-brow culture, which was scandalous for artists originally identified with MPB” (p. 125). In a sense, popular music from the bossa nova on had been associated with the small Brazilian middle and upper classes. Bossa nova symbolized “the beaches, nightclubs, and upscale apartments of Rio de Janeiro; the idyllic image of Rio de Janeiro” (Murphy, 2006, p. 37). The musical forms that grew out of Bossa Nova in the 1960s (McGowan & Pessanha, 1991) had much the same audience. One group of musicians—the *Jovem Guarda* (led by Roberto Carlos, one the Latin singers with the most sales of all time) focused on love songs and everyday life, though the life of a middle-class man. MPB, born in opposition to the regime, did



include lyrics and themes of the poor, but usually from the middle class view and in a voice and language that appealed to university students and elite leftists.

Tropicália was neither of the above. It did include songs of the poor, like Gilberto Gil's "Domingo no Parque" (Sunday in the Park), about two young capoeirists who have a fatal fight over a girl at an amusement park on a Sunday afternoon, or Gil's singing of the Torquato Neto song, "Marginalia II," "a song that explicitly situates Brazil within the context of third-world struggles": "My land has palm trees / where strong winds blow / of hunger and great fear / mostly of death . . . the bomb explodes outside / now I have fear / oh yes, we have bananas / even to give away and sell" (Dunn, 2001a, p. 119). Veloso represents this pastiche in the lyrics of "Tropicália": "The monument is very modern / I have said nothing / about my suit's style / To hell with everything my love / To hell with everything my love / Long live the band da-da-da / Long live Carmen Miranda-da-da" (Schreiner, 2002, p. 171). And Tom Zé, "one of the most experimental members of the Tropicália circle" sings ironically in "Parque Industrial," that "industrial progress / will bring our redemption" (Murphy, 2006, p. 47). The postmodern playfulness and disdain for musical convention clearly did not fit the elite's "culture" of refinement, education, and moral progress.

In terms of the censorship of Tropicália and the exile of its leaders, Veloso (2002) contends that the military saw the movement as anarchic, and Dunn (2001a) concludes that "it was clear that the irreverent performances of the tropicalist group had been alarming to the military authorities, even if the artists' critique of modern Brazil in song lyrics passed largely undetected" (p. 147). If culture, then, refers to "continuities of values and taste which have been traditional in a society" (Martin, 1970, p. 15), then Tropicália violated that notion, both for the listening public and for the governing elite, in the Brazil of the 1960s.

Culture as a Framework of Values, Beliefs, and Action

Tropicália violated *traditional* standards of taste and refinement, contradicting values, customs, and attitudes, but at the same time, it reflected those same values. Veloso, Gil, and others tied the roots of Tropicália to the notions of the 1920s Brazilian poet, Oswald de Andrade of a cultural *cannibalism*, in which Brazil adopts what it wishes or needs from other cultures and makes it uniquely Brazilian (Dunn, 2001a). But what is Brazilian is eclectic, a mixture of several races, several cultures—several



discourses. Thus, it should come as no surprise when Gil begins to incorporate traditional African themes and rhythms into his work (Perrone, 1989), when the Mutantes incorporate sounds of everyday life (tinkling silverware and broken dishes) into their “Pães e Circenses” (Bread and Circuses), or when Caetano and others blend the absurd with the mundane. Veloso (2001) quotes Andrade, speaking of Brazil: “My country suffers from cosmic incompetence” (p. 44), reflecting a notion often cited that Brazil was a country in search of a firm—and affirming—sense of national identity. Tropicália reflected themes deeper than Brazilian tradition: a more traditional and ambivalent national identity, tension between classes, and the eclecticism of a country well adapted to adapting ideas and artifacts from others.

By revealing the tensions of Brazilian identity and society, Tropicália tapped into the *bricolage* identity of Brazil—Black, White, Mulatto, Mestiço, Indigenous, rich, poor, urban, rural. Tropicália blended the “foreign” artifices of electric instruments already adopted by the *Jovem Guarda* with veiled political themes of MPB. It reflected the postmodern themes of playfulness and blurring of genre present in the concrete poetry movement (where the shape and arrangement of the words on the page is as important as the verse and rhythm of the poetry) and the Tropicalist movement in art and drama (Dunn, 2001a). And it added to a growing cultural “revolution” in Brazilian popular culture (Basualdo, 2005).

The challenge both to traditional Brazilian mythologies including the myths of modernist and industrial progressivism and of the so-called “racial democracy” of Brazil (Chidester & Baldwin, in press)—what Joynt (2008), as noted above, calls a “strategic rupture” indicates a proposed change in the acceptable behaviors/norms, beliefs, and values of a culture, and, by change in musical form and structure, in the artifacts as well. Whether this is a change proposed for the culture as a whole—a new direction for Brazil, a new direction—a *linha evolutiva*—for music only (Dunn, 2001a), or simply a new direction for the youth of Brazil is not certain. In terms of the latter, Dunn notes that Veloso and Gil became “exiled leaders of a cultural movement widely regarded as the inaugural moment of a Brazilian counterculture” (p. 172), focused now more on political disillusionment and personal expression. Exhibiting this changed, though not totally new direction, emphasizing things such as racial and sexual minorities and fitting in well with the new sensibilities of *desbunde* (drop out) and *curtição* (trip out; Dunn, 2001b, p. 81), as exemplified by the “Doce Bárbaros” tour



with Gal Costa and Maria Bethânia in 1976, when they sang songs with references to Candomblé. But as a structuralist view looks at culture, we would not be concerned here with the tension between the counterculture and the culture—but rather simply understanding the values or ideas of the culture as framed in the music. That is, we could analyze Tropicália as a lens to a better understanding of “culture.” Authors differ on what “culture” we should look at, however. Some might use it to understand the culture of a large group of people, such as “Brazilian” culture of the 1960s-1970s (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Others would prefer to use it as a window to some smaller culture, such as one defined by sexuality, ethnicity, age cohort (especially applicable here), or some other group identity (Collier, 2003).

In sum, then, Tropicália represents both a continuity and rupture of Brazilian “culture” in the sense of a pattern of beliefs, values, behavior, and so on—that is, the “way of life” that Williams (1981) describes. In terms of continuity, the artists did seek to embrace the Brazilian notions of diversity and eclecticism (that is, cultural cannibalism)—a sense of globalization that has always characterized Brazilian culture and to reflect some elements of everyday life not seen in other popular music forms even of the day (though MPB sought this same goal to a degree). The artists even embraced a sense of nationalism, incorporating, not always with irony, traditional forms of Brazilian music, such as bossa nova. Yet they broke from traditional myths of racial democracy, noting that Brazil did, in fact, have racial inequality (Dunn, 2001a; Sovik, 2004); from the myth of “Order and Progress” even represented on the Brazilian flag, of modernistic, industrial, commercial, capitalistic, and technological advance; from folkloric conceptions of Brazil; and from the need to represent Brazilian national identity in a consistent “national” musical form (Chidester & Baldwin, in press).

Culture as Process

Street (1993) suggests that “culture is a verb”: Culture is an active process of meaning making and contest over definition, including its own definition. This, then, is what I mean by arguing that *Culture is a verb*” (p. 25). If we treat culture as such, then Tropicália becomes relevant once again, as it signifies a turning point in Brazilian music: the full incorporation of “foreign” elements into Brazilian music in a way that still allowed it to be defined as Brazilian. The Tropicalists were not the first or only ones to do this. Bossa nova artists incorporated aspects of American cool jazz into their



unique Brazilian rhythms (McGowan & Pessanha, 1991; Murphy, 2006). Samba had its roots in African music (Alvarenga, 1953). The *Jovem Guarda* received influence from American and British pop. And Milton Nascimento, one of the most famous of all Brazilian artists, borrowed from jazz, American and British pop, indigenous sounds, regional tunes, and Spanish American *nueva canción* (Borges, 1996; Dolores, 2006). The various authors in Perrone and Dunn (2001) highlight the impact of globalization on modern Brazilian music, now infused with elements of reggae, heavy metal, funk, and psychedelica. And Ronsini (2007) examines punk and hip hop countercultures in the South of Brazil. Thus, Tropicália not only represented the tensions that are Brazil, but form part of a special moment that shows that “culture” is in constant flux and negotiation.

In brief, if we see culture as process, then Tropicália, rather than being merely a brief moment in the history of Brazilian music, becomes a message—rather, a set of messages or “codes” that add to the ongoing *linha evolutiva*, or evolutive line, of Brazilian music. It should be seen in reciprocal relationship with other forms of music, other elements of culture, and both previous and following music by the same musicians as an ebb and flow of constantly changing (Brazilian) culture. This may be a more useful way to see “culture,” as Tropicália, more than most other movements, perhaps, in Brazilian music, shows us a concentrated point of *change and flux*. While both earlier and later artists, from Dorival Caymmi to Paralamas do Sucesso, from early *samba* and *fado* to modern techno-pop, have borrowed from other national musical traditions, Tropicália represents a more aggressive and overt process of change, and its very brevity as a formal movement—only a couple of years (Perrone, 1989)—suggests how any single view of Brazilian music and culture will be too simple, as culture always changes.

Culture as Site of Struggle

However, some argue that the ebb and flow of culture is never neutral. First, whereas in many “1st World” countries, music might be about cultural expression or the resistance of the youth against older generations, in Brazil, modern music, regardless of form, exists in tension—either against external forces of “cultural imperialism” (Ortiz, 2002) or the tension between class or ideology. The neo-Classical movement of Villa Lobos was the epitome of an already rising nationalism, reflecting the Brazilian



characteristics of spontaneity and sophistication (Béhague, 1971). Hermano Vianna (1999) called samba “Brazil’s national music” (p. xvii), naming it as “a defining element of *brasilidade* or Brazilian identity” (p. 10), but modern samba was negotiated between the *samba do morro*—the sambas of the poor hillsides, and the *sambas* of Carnaval (Murphy, 2006); and samba itself came to figure in the national politics of creating the multicultural myth of Brazil as a “racial democracy” (Levine, 1984). Bossa nova brought conflicts between those who wanted to usher in elements of American cool Jazz and those who felt this violated the *brasilidade* of bossa nova (Napolitano, 2001). And the rock scene of MPB became rife not only with the politics between the *yêyê* of the *Jovem Guarda* and the leftist-leaning MPB singers who felt that the JG was both “alienated” from the real political issues of its time, but also that it wrongly embraced international musical expressions (de Ulhoa Carvalho, 2005).

Tropicália blended competing visions of the audience: MPB singers saw them as the *povo*—the people, a political force to rise up against an unjust State; the *Jovem Guarda* treated them simply as the *público*—the record-buying public (Napolitano, 2001). Tropicalists blended these two views, to the chagrin of many social critics. Roberto Schwartz, a leftist cultural critic of the time, felt that the blurring “between criticism and social integration” could lead to conformism *or* could raise complex, difficult social questions. But of Tropicália specifically, he chided:

Faced by a tropicalist image, faced by the apparently surrealist nonsense which is the result of the combination we have been describing, the up-to-date spectator will resort to fashionable words, he’ll say Brazil is incredible, it’s the end, it’s the pits, it’s groovy. By means of these expressions, in which enthusiasm and disgust are indistinguishable, he associates himself with the group who have the “sense” of national character (pp. 141-142).

Thus, Schwartz confirms that Tropicália is, ultimately, about national character, about representation of identity, about the current status of “culture” in Brazil in the late 1960s; but he admits that exactly what Tropicália is trying to say about it is unclear.

And what is being said by Tropicália, according to some of the newest views of culture, that see “culture”—not just the artifacts of popular culture, but the “way of life” as integrated with each other and, concurrently, tied to the economic structures. Adorno argues, “The commercial character of culture causes the difference between culture and practical life to disappear” (p. 53), suggesting that we cannot speak of culture without



speaking of the administration of that culture—of the role of economics, state, and enterprise in molding that culture. That is, “different ‘taste cultures’ and communities express their desires through differentiated political influence and market power” (Harvey, 1989, p. 77). Fiske (1992) more clearly links culture to both power and the popular (that is, mass) production of ideology:

The culture of everyday life is a culture of concrete practices which embody and perform differences. These embodied differences are a site of struggle between the measured individuals that constitute social discipline, and the popularity-produced differences that fill and extend the spaces and power of the people. (p. 162)

We clearly see this in the case of Brazilian popular music in general. With the rise of MPB in general, there was a sudden shift in Brazilian record purchases. Formerly, Brazilian purchases were predominantly imports, but in the 1960s, there was a reversal, with Brazilians—even to today, spending 70% of their music dollars on Brazilian artists. This fact leads Liv Sovik (2002) to note that the “consumption of cultural products was equated with political action” (p. 99). Napolitano (2001) outlines the political economy behind the rise of samba as a national and international symbol of Brazil (linked to radio broadcast and to the Good Neighbor policy), behind the link of bossa nova to the television industry, and finally behind the rise of MPB and *Jovem Guarda* music at the hands of TV companies first, as they promoted the festivals that solidified and crystallized the “national” identity of Brazilian rock, then of record companies. As part of this mediation, identities themselves—youth identities, Afro-Brazilian identities, national identities, become a “media spectacle,” an item of popular consumption (Canclini, 1995), and cultures become “hybrid,” postmodern as it were, borrowing fragmented elements from different sectors. Tropicália, as an early and overt form of “globalization” of Brazilian music, promoted the exportation of Brazilian music and incorporation of elements of music from other cultures. But such import- and exportation always exists, according to Canclini, “in unequal conditions between the varied actors and powers that intervene within it” (p. 130). In this sense, in the Velosian (2001) sense of Brazil seeing itself always through the eyes of others, comparing itself against others (see same argument in Stepan, 1991, as it pertains to ideologies of “whitening” in Brazil), but hybridity would represent a form of postcolonialism (Drzewiecka & Halualani, 2006; Hegde & Shome, 2006), of resistance (through



cannibalism) of international influences that would seek to colonize Brazilian music and culture.

Tropicália was definitely an artistic movement, echoing the ideological beliefs of the authors, both in terms of hidden opposition to the government, but also resistance of tired dogmas of Brazilian musical nationalism:

Tropicália addressed the twin disruptions of the abrupt end of the democratic regime and the institution of consumer culture, now part of the past. The terms of the discussion in which it took shape were defined by the opposition of political-cultural values to market values and procedures, Brazilian populist nationalism to foreign influence and domination. The argument about the relationship of these poles was common ground for discourses by the partisans of protest music and the *tropicalistas* (Sovik, 2002, p. 99)

But there was still a profit motive. Veloso stated, “I believe that the necessity of communication with the masses is itself responsible for musical innovations” (in Basualdo, 2005b, p. 21). In this sense, Tropicália blurred or broke down the distinction between the *público* and *povo* (Napolitano, 2001)—that is, between music as “alienated,” in the Marxist sense, from the real problems of everyday life (*alienado*) and socially engaged in active societal change (*engajado*; Harvey, 2002). In the same way, Tropicália challenged other dichotomies and dualisms, such as that between “national” and “international,” class and kitch, tradition and modernity. This, along with their pastiche style, both musically and lyrically, mark Tropicália as a truly postmodern form, evolving in a sea of relatively consistent (and modernistic) music forms such as MPB and *Jovem Guarda*.

In sum, if we see “culture” as a challenge between ideological forces striving, against each other, to determine meaning, then we would look at Tropicalia differently. It would not simply be a “stage” in the “evolution” of culture or music, any more than a straightforward representation of some pattern of thoughts or behaviors of a culture or counterculture. Rather, it would be a challenge—in this case quite deliberate, though not always explicit—against some form of group-held ideology. It would not simply be the values and behaviors even of a countercultural group, but these *in opposition* to some dominant culture group. If we treat culture in a postmodern sense, we now would examine the *bricolage* of musical forms and styles, the blurring of genres, the kitsch and embracing of the commonplace, and the way that Tropicalists use common forms, such



as industrial images, the want-ads, or the glowing moon of an Esso gas station sign, in new discourses. The placement of the signs in these new discourses produce new ideological meanings of progress, of “race,” and of what it means to be Brazilian. And, from a postcolonial lens, we could not understand this new image of Brazil simply as a struggle between forces in Brazil, but as forces *against* colonizing ideologies (both musical form and lyrical content) from countries that are culture and economically “center” in terms of media flow.

Conclusion

In sum, scholars hotly contest what exactly culture is today, as an academic term. Baldwin et al. (2006) argue that how we define culture is very important, as it will impact what we study, how we study it, and what we do with the knowledge. That is, it has implications for our methodological and pragmatic approaches to phenomenon. As we consider Tropicália, if we take a view of culture as elevated morality or artistic form, we would, like Favoretto (1979) or the frequent Internet summaries of the movement or its influences, simply laud the creative virtues of the movement as an elevated sense—the culmination of Brazilian music at its point in time. Such a view, however, treats Tropicália merely as art, and ignoring its attempt at political and cultural rupture would prevent us from examining how well it met these ideological goals. From the structuralist perspective of culture, we would analyze the music or interview the musicians to understand what the music is saying either about a particular counterculture or about Brazilian culture itself at the cusp of 1970 Brazil. What values does it embrace? What behaviors does it promote? If we take a process view, we would see Tropicália more as a moving target, assuming differences within authors and from album to album, song to song, and see how it both influences and is influenced by (in a structuration sense) some cultural or countercultural group. With many social phenomena, the former approach might lead more to quantitative methods and generalizable findings about some culture, or some comparison of values between cultures, and the latter approach would lead to more humanistic and qualitative inquiry. As it pertains to a musical form, however, the methodological approach of analysis might be much the same, but the conclusions one draws and the way one frames them would be different. Critical views, including their offshoots of postmodernism and poststructuralism, would, instead, investigate the ideological tensions between



Tropicália and other musical forms and political ideologies, or even the discursive tensions *within and among* Tropicalists, seeking not a consistent representation of their work, but a fragmented representation that admits the subjectivity of the observer interpreting the work (Conquergood, 1991).

Where structural, process, and critical definitions differ most is perhaps the ethical and pragmatic sense each leads to. Typically, both structural and process definitions seek to observe the phenomenon in its own right, seeking to be value free. Critical approaches would inquire more about how the object of inquiry leads to praxis. In regards to Tropicália, traditional social inquiry would simply contextualize it to understand it, much as we would some other folkloric phenomenon. In this regard, many musicologists analyze the movement to understand its creativity, perhaps even asking how it might inform new creative music styles. The critical cultural scholar would ask broader questions about whether or why Tropicália led to any true social reform, and, moreover, whether rock or other popular music has any efficacy in this regard. Here, we might ask whether Brazilian music *should* resist international forms to remain uniquely Brazilian—or whether any such attempt merely gives in to traditional ideologies of national music and culture and are thus, in their own way, oppressive.

By whatever definition one chooses, we can see that Tropicália, the Brazilian popular music movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, provides an interesting case study for the understanding of culture—even of competing definitions of the term. What is difficult, when one includes popular culture and State influence in one's definition of culture, is finding locations of dialogue. It seems that, over time, Tropicalists found that moment, as the movement was eventually accepted, and the singers returned from exile. In the future, it may fall to the onus of cultural workers (1) to realize the role that mediated representation plays in producing and reproducing both cultural values and cultural identities; (2) to work to make the ideological underpinnings of such representation more apparent, so that people in their everyday lives have increased choices over which ideologies and which identities they accept; and (3) to address with media makers (e.g., musicians, movie producers) and cultural administrators (e.g., government agencies), the options available for negotiating such cultural difficulties as those raised by Tropicália. In the end, while perhaps an obscure case of cultural conflict, the emergence and repression of Tropicália exemplifies the value of a more complex



view of culture that takes into account values, behaviors, but also social structures and symbolic artifacts.

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Appendix

Themes of Definitions of Culture.

A. STRUCTURE/PATTERNS

1. *Whole way of life*: Total accumulation of [element list], lifestyle; “more than the sum of the traits” Note: Place in this category also if the notion of “culture” is simply in terms of general “differences” between groups.
2. *Cognitive structure*: Thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, meanings, attitudes, preferences, values, standards; Expression of unconscious processes, interpretations.
3. *Structure of behavior*: Behavior, “normative glue,” patterns of rules, techniques, dispositions, customs, set of skills, patterns of behavior, habits, actions, concrete practices, ceremonies, rituals.
4. *Structures of signification*: Symbol systems, language, discourse & communication processes, system of transferring of thoughts, feelings, behaviors.
5. *Relational structure*: Relationships to others, orientational system.
6. *Social organization*: Organizational forms, political institutions, legal institutions (e.g., laws, crime & punishment) religion as institution.
7. A “structure” or “abstraction” made by researchers to describe groups of people.

B. FUNCTIONS

1. Provides *guide to and process of learning*, adaptation to the world, survival.
2. **Provides people with a shared sense of identity/belonging, or of difference from other groups.**
3. **Value expression (expressive purpose).**
4. **Stereotyping function (evaluative purpose).**
5. Provides *means of control* over other individuals and groups.

C. PROCESS: Practice, etc., a “verb” as well as a noun [change each to a verb]

1. Of differentiating one group from another.
2. Of *sense-making*, producing group-based meaning, of giving life meaning & form.
3. Of handling “raw materials of life,” of dealing with social world.
4. Of relating to others.
5. Of dominating, structuring power.
6. Of transmission of a way of life.

D. PRODUCT

1. Product of meaningful activity [more broad than representation]: Art, architecture.
2. Product of representation/signification: Artifacts, cultural “texts” mediated and otherwise, etc.

E. REFINEMENT: “cultivation”

1. *Moral Progress*: Stage of development that divides civilized from savage; study of perfection, civilization.
2. *Instruction*: Care given to development of the mind; refinement (e.g., of a person).
3. *Uniquely human efforts* from any of the above categories that distinguish humans from other species.

F. GROUP MEMBERSHIP

1. *Country*
2. *Social variations* among components of contemporary pluralistic society; identity.

G. POWER/IDEOLOGY

1. *Political & ideological dominance*: Dominant or hegemonic culture [Critical definitions].
2. *Fragmentation* of elements [Postmodern definitions].

From:



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ⁱ Our discussion here will not focus on Tropicália in terms of its function or as product, as each of these is inherently covered by discussion of the other areas.