



Sound Collage as Political Chronic

SHORT
ESSAY

by [Henrique Souza Lima](#)

The song «Apesar de Você» («In Spite of You») by Brazilian musician and writer Chico Buarque is one of the most iconic protest songs published in the context of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985). Here, sound researcher Henrique Souza Lima presents a sound collage made from clippings of the word «despite» in various instances of Brazilian pop music. In doing so, Souza Lima establishes an intertextual relationship with the renowned song and approaches popular song in general as a platform for critical thinking on the current information war and the ghostly return of ultra-conservatism in Brazil.

During the military dictatorial regime in Brazil, the identity of Brazilian pop music ([MPB](#)) was largely characterized by politicized lyrics. In response to the limiting conditions imposed by censorship, songwriters explored a range of linguistic strategies in order to both fool the censors and communicate

messages against the repressive system (Rezende 2008). By the end of the 1960s, Brazilian pop music incorporated plenty of neologisms, metaphors, analogies, antitheses, and other linguistic resources accompanied by Afro-Brazilian regional musics. Among the local music genres that have been turned into platforms for making protest songs, [Samba](#) was particularly relevant at that time.

One of the most iconic uses of Samba as a platform for protesting during the Brazilian military dictatorship is the case of the song «Apesar de Você» («In Spite of You») written by [Chico Buarque](#). First released in 1970 within an EP record, this song features lyrics from a first-person voice, which constantly refers to a second-person in a complaining manner (Buarque 1979): «Today it's *you* who give the orders / what *you* say is said / and there is no argument / *you* who invented all this (...)» (italics by the author). The voice insistently relates to an antagonistic «you», but this pronoun has no explicit referent. «*You* who invented sadness / Now, do me a favour and disinvent it / *You* are going to pay double for every tear shed from this sorrowing of mine». The climax of this agonistic situation happens in the chorus, which is sung by a collective of voices: «In spite of *you*, tomorrow will be another day». The absence of an explicit referent for the pronoun «you» leaves open the interpretation of who he/she/it is. It took a while for the dictatorial regime to realize that *it* was the referent for that «you». In the end, this was not a simple song depicting a disagreement between lovers.

Becoming an Iconic Phrase

Between its first release and censorship, over 100,000 copies of the EP were sold and the song became an important hymn in the democratic movement. In 1971, army officers stormed Philips' headquarters and destroyed the remaining copies. The military regime censored and removed the record from the market, but the song was already in the Brazilian public consciousness. Eight years after its first release, Buarque re-recorded the song and released it as the 11th track of the album *Chico Buarque* (1978). The song came back with a more sophisticated arrangement and phonographic production.

A little over forty years after the troubled 1970s in Brazil, the chorus of «In Spite of You» has become an iconic phrase within the academic literature on censorship (Jones 2001) and resistance (Foley 2019). In the early 21st century, this chorus is not only circulating in the voice and imagination of the Brazilian public, but it has become an icon circulating in a transnational space. This refrain remains particularly relevant to this day because it mirrors the ghost of the dictatorial regime haunting Brazil in 2019. Considered as a kind of ghost mirror, this chorus would be a centerpiece in a possible Brazilian hauntology.¹

The *Apesar* Sound Collage

If we shift the focus from the pronoun «you» to the preposition «in spite of», other layers of meaning begin to emerge. Instead of gravitating around the oppressive force referred to in the second person, the emphasis on the «in spite of» highlights the position of resistance of the one who speaks. This chorus epitomizes a belief in the future («tomorrow will be...»), but it also affirms an action that is always in the present tense. This action is the marking of a position of resistance within a political context. The preposition therefore highlights a social contrast, and this contrast is the core of my following argument.

As a comment on the relevance of this relational position within the recent Brazilian public sphere, I sampled the word «apesar» (in spite of) in several instances of Brazilian pop music that had significant popularity in the last decades. It resulted in a sound collage made as a stream of samples of the same word sung by several different voices. By displacing this preposition from its original contexts, the sound collage builds a linguistic loop about a particular social position. Resistance is a particular virtuality within the recent memory of Brazilian popular music, a virtuality to which I would like to refer through this linguistic loop (In spite... of in spite of... in spite of...). Moreover, resistance is a virtuality that is relevant now in Brazil, where we are dealing with the ultra-conservative, conspiratorial, misogynist, and racist ghosts of the dictatorial regime on an everyday basis (Fogel 2018).

Will There Be Another Day Tomorrow?

The sound collage was composed in 2017, when it was already possible to smell the meme-driven fascism around the corner (Bravo 2017). Only one year later, the information war and the self-truth regime promoted by the far-right strategists definitively landed in Brazil. As it landed, it mingled with the ghosts of the military dictatorship, resulting in the particular mix of Christian Protestantism, structural racism, misogyny, negationism, anti-communism, and the taste for the most baffling conspiracy theories. The archetypes and narrative plots of this meme-based information war formed a sophisticated disinformation-based propaganda channeled through social media (Banjo 2019). The fact that presidents behave as unqualified digital influencers is a feature of our time, and it is fully operational in the Brazil of early 2020. In such a scenario, we cannot be so sure that «tomorrow will be another day».

The sound collage *Apesar* was created as a modest comment on this particular state of affairs marked by the haunting presence of the undead dictatorial regime. Brazilian structural racism and necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) are undead, or the walking dead. If, on the one hand, the morbid desire for the dictatorial repression is always actualizable in Brazil, on the other, multiple voices within Brazilian culture activate popular song as a platform for

the diffusion of critical thought within the public sphere. Between these two opposite poles, critical thought might build escape routes within this dialectical duality between oppression and resistance.

→ footnotes

1. «Hauntology» is a term coined by the philosopher Jacques Derrida as a fusion between the verb «to haunt» and the noun «Ontology». In contrast to the traditional ontology that thinks of being in terms of self-identical presence, Derrida states that the existence of something is only possible on the basis of a whole series of absences. This brings to the forefront of the critical investigation the concept of «spectre», which relates to the agency of the virtual, that is, that which acts imminently in a given context without physically existing. This conceptual approach was used to critically think about issues related to late capitalism in Derrida (1994) and Fisher (2014).

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