

# Cultural labour, Creative industries, organised feminisms and their implications in the shaping of new Brazilian sound art

MODALIDADE: COMUNICAÇÃO

SIMPÓSIO: MÚSICA, GÊNERO, CORPOS E SEXUALIDADES: PROCESSOS, MÉTODOS E PRÁTICAS DE PRODUÇÃO SONORA DOS ARTIVISMOS

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#### Abstract.

This essay proposes to analyse contemporary theories of work looking at issues faced by cultural workers in the field of Sound Art in Brazil. General issues will be highlighted, and underlying factors in those issues that impact feminist artists in specific will be identified. On the last part of the essay, it will be explored how the Feminist organisation Sonora, through their policies and activities, acts on those localized issues. It will be demonstrated how such actions resonate beyond their local, ultimately contributing as one of the driving forces shaping the emerging field of New Brazilian Sound Art.

Keywords: Sound art. Feminist economies. Cultural labour. Creative industries.

Trabalho Cultural, Indústrias Criativas, Feminismos Organisados e suas Implicações na Formação da Nova Arte Sonora Brasileira

#### Resumo.

Este ensaio propõe analisar teorias contemporâneas do trabalho, abordando questões enfrentadas pelos trabalhadores culturais no campo da Arte Sonora no Brasil. Questões gerais serão destacadas e fatores subjacentes às questões que impactam artistas feministas em particular serão identificados. Na última parte do ensaio, será explorado como a organização feminista Sonora, por meio de suas políticas e atividades, atua sobre essas questões localizadas. Será demonstrado como essas ações ressoam além do local, contribuindo, em última instância, como uma das forças motrizes que moldam o campo emergente da Nova Arte Sonora Brasileira.

### Palavras-chave.

Arte Sonora. Economias feministas. Trabalho cultural. Indústrias criativas.



### 1.Introduction

For a number of reasons, the first *International Festival of Experimental Music* (FIME, 2015a) was a ground mark for the Sound Art scene, in particular, its Feminist Artists. Firstly, it was one of the first major events, in an otherwise mostly independent and underground scene, to receive public funding from the Brazilian National Arts Foundation. Secondly, it was an openly feminist stance taken by artists, curators and supporters, positioning as articulated, cohesive actors in the scene.

Many of the female artists involved in FIME were associated with the network *Sonora* – *Music and Feminisms* (2016a). The fact that one of Sonora's founders, Lilian Campesato, had being invited as part of the curatorial team was, on its own, a milestone for this scene, where women had not necessarily been properly accommodated. Her unspoken curatorial statement was loud and clear when choosing the piece "Voltage/The Tension", led by non-binary performers, for the opening night (VOLTAGE/THE TENSION, 2015). It demonstrated a feminist artistic and political stance at once 'deconstructing the stereotype of the place ascribed to women in music' (Neiva, 2019), defying boundaries of *noise* as a genre (good noise = loud noise) and, dislocating the very notion of gender binary.

This essay proposes to analyse contemporary theories of work looking at the field of Sound Art in Brazil. I will highlight the general issues faced by its workers and explore the underlying factors in those issues that impact feminist artists in specific. On the last part of the essay, I will explore how feminist organisations, through their policies and activities, actively contribute to the shaping of the emerging field of New Brazilian Sound Art.

### 2.Industry, economy and work

There are various ways of looking into contemporary Cultural Work. This turn of interest towards culture as an Industry can be grouped into two major strands. The first one is associated with the terms *Creative Industries* and *Creative Economy*, a policy-oriented project kickstarted by the UK in 1998 and also associated at the time with authors such as Richard Florida and John Grey. This strand celebrates culture and creativity as 'an instrument of expansion and growth, and a natural participant of the modern globalisation plan of the westernized, post-industrial capitalist society'. The second strand is also increasingly prominent and comes from 'social theorists like Antonio Negri and Angela McRobbie concerned about the transformations of the experience of work in late modernity (BANKS, et al., 2013). Mark Banks (2017) explains that this view addresses the field as *Cultural* 



*Industries* and *Cultural Work* echoing Marxists notions of labour and class (LUKÁCS, 1971). It is impossible, therefore, to talk about Cultural Work without understanding which underlying notions of "work" and "economy" one refers to when doing so.

Creative Industries, the first strand, can be summarized as the activities, workers and work modes involved in the 'production of goods whose economic value is primarily derived from their aesthetic, expressive or symbolic value' (BANKS, et al., 2013). To reflect on the open relationship that the Creative Industries have with neoliberalism, it is useful to look into the discourse of neoliberal economy. Milton Friedman (1970) advocates 'for the complete separation of civic life and its responsibilities from businesses'. The author explains that 'social responsibility is a private concern of the individual, how he spends his time and wages to alleviate his conscience and fulfil his civic duties are of no concern to his corporation'. He states that corporations, markets and businesses 'are not individuals, public or civic bodies' and therefore their responsibility is solely 'to engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long it engages in open and free competition without fraud' (FRIEDMAN, 1970).

Conducting analyses of viewpoints that resonate with the second strand, we arrive at feminist economists like Wendy Brown, Cristina Carrara, and J.K.Gibson-Graham who since the 2000s are part of the forefront critics of neoliberalism. Brown (2015) draws on Foucault's ideas of *Homo Economicus* to explain how the "neo" part of "neoliberalism" has taken us to 'a new hegemonic system of governance and citizenry that organizes the western nation-states' performing an 'effective colonization of every discourse, ultimately limiting our ability to consider any alternatives'. Furthermore, the Chilean economist Cristina Carrara (CARRARA & MAYORDOMO, 2005) states that the left never recovered from failing to provide 'an alternative, and, in matter fact, it failed to provide a new vision altogether of work'.

To the author 'salaried work (employment) originated from the construction of the concept of Economy, grounded both in capitalism and in socialism' (2015). She believes that the Marxist theory of economy 'never took into consideration the labour to reproduce, sustain and care for the workforce'. In other words, the monetized labour done originally by the male industrial population was only part of the labour necessary to sustain life under the capitalist economy.

The view of Brown and Carrara also dialogue with authors like the economic geographers J.K.Gibson-Graham. The authors draw from feminist practices to study non-capitalist forms of economies that they call 'diverse economies or politics of possibility'. They



propose that the capitalist global economy is a type of 'iceberg economy where only parts of the labour sustaining society are visible and waged' (GIBSON-GRAHAM, 2007).

The work of feminist economists is frequently put under scrutinization on the grounds of gender essentialization, 'lack of rigor or the proposition of concrete, universalized solutions' (GALLAHER, 1996). The above mentioned feminist economists, however, do not claim for a universal solution, like socialism, but invite us to take an imaginative leap in search for multiple non-capitalist views of "economy". Through their feminist standpoint and methodologies (HARDING, 1987) we are invited to critically look at the notions of work-time, under both capitalist and Marxist systems, focusing at their common underlying Androcentric Values.

Criticizing neoliberalism's notions of economy and work is not exclusively a feminist concern as it reaches on the far depths of class, gender and ethnicity aspects of societies. It is important to acknowledge that when we speak of feminist critique, we are not only talking about women as victims and men as perpetrators as women can also be inserted in capitalists and colonial systems of exploitation. I use the feminist critique in this essay as a framework to analyse forms of (cultural) work that are sustained and privileged in the 'hegemonic power and original accumulation of patriarchy and colonialism' (DAVIS, 2018). In other words, the notion of feminist economics that draws attention to the fact that, according to the discussed authors, our entire notion of work, since the 19th century, is driven by an androcentric rationale to which all are subjected to.

# 3. Cultural work, sound arts and experimental music in brazil

It is essential to establish some grounds in this work's context for the use of the terms Sound Art and Experimental Music. The reason for that choice is that although the above fields can at times 'potentially operate to oppose each other' (Bourdieu, 1993), as Canclini (1983) explains: "Latin America's structures are not so rigid and are not so deeply stratified like Eurocentric's clear demarcations of legitimate culture". This is verifiable for the purposes of this research in the online archive *NENDU*. This platform proposes a possible archive of Brazilian Sound Art and is the most inclusive and interdisciplinary cartography available currently as it 'enables the discovery of practitioners based on the categories they associate themselves with' (CHAVES, 2018). By navigating the archive, it becomes clear how the same artists feature in multiple categories under the umbrella "Sound Art".



In the next paragraphs I will highlight the two main groups of issues facing sound artists. The first group looks at issues that affect all sound workers and is related firstly with the fields' potential of insertion in the Creative Industries and public agenda of Cultural Policies in Brazil followed by issues found in the work related to Academia. The second group of issues affects directly the artists that are not privileged by the field's male-centred social and technological dominance.

In the case of Brazil, Creative Industry is defined as 'the productive chain composed by the cycles of creation, production and distribution of goods and services that use creativity and intellectual capital as primary materials'. This definition derives from the *United Nations Conference for Commerce and Development* which grounds its methodologies 'to determine which occupations and industries should be considered creative' (ONU, UNCTAD, 2008) on the United Kingdom's *Department for Culture, Media and Sports*. In Brazil when speaking of Creative Industries, this means a public-private-hybrid investment sector formed by the commerce and industries associations in southern Brazil. The *Rio de Janeiro Federal Association of Industries – FIRJAN –* report on Creative Industries states that its total participation in the national economy was of 2,64% in 2015 (FIRJAN, 2016a).

The conglomerate is comprised of four big groups: Consumption, Culture, Media and Technology, each divided into subcategories. The table below shows the proportion of employees distributed amongst those groups and categories. Worthy of attention is the fact that "Culture" has *the smallest* amount of jobs available in the Creative Industries. Therefore, based on a hybrid model of public and private enterprise, comprising the production and distribution chain of cultural products, the opportunities in the market for the sub-categories of Music and Art - where Sound Art is inserted - are the scarcest ones in the whole of Creative Economy. Therefore one can, in agreement with Banks, Gill and Taylor (2013), be somewhat critical of how the Creative Industries "leach" on the concept of Art and Culture to pass forward its agenda focused on the bigger groups.



CREATIVE INDUSTRIES' MAIN GROUPS		People Employed	
		Groups	Subgroups
1	CONSUMPTION	44%	
	Publicity and Marketing		15%
	Architecture		13%
	Design		10%
	Fashion		6%
2	CULTURE	8%	
	Cultural Expressions:		3%
	Folklore, Artisans, Gastronomy		
	Arts, Heritage, Museums		2%
	Performing Arts		1,5%
	Music		1,5%
3	MEDIA	11%	
	Editorial and Publishing		6%
	Audiovisual		5%
4	TECHNOLOGY	37%	
	Information Technology		19%
	Biotechnology		14%
	R&D		4%
	TOTAL	100%	100%

Table 1 - Number of people employed by the creative industries in Brazil by groups. (FIRJAN, 2016b)

In the case of public funding and national cultural policy, it is important to note that the concept of "culture" can become fragile under certain political climates. *Latin American Cultural Studies* is a useful lens to analyses the transformations of the meaning of "culture" in the transitions of dictatorships to democracy in the late 1980s. According to that lens, the *turn to cultural policy* operates to ensure the broadest possible demarcations of culture (MORAÑA, 2018) through the making of policies for culture, art and heritage. The democratic agenda in Brazil during the first ten years of the young democracy (1988-1998) operated to strengthen the canons of traditional art forms - Cinema, Performing Arts, Music, Visual Arts (GOV.BR, s.d.). Following that period, during the thirteen years of the Worker's Party government (2003-2016), in alignment with the cultural policy turn in Latin America, the Ministry of Education and Culture besides continuing the promotion of traditional art forms, also focused on the struggle to promote and legitimize multi-ethnic and pluri-national identities through popular culture - Regional, Folklore, Afro-Brazilian, Indigenous (COELHO, 2008).

The field of experimental sound does not easily fit into the Creative Industries or National Cultural Policy's main categories and targets. That is one aspect of the legitimization



issues of that sound artists face in their establishment and professionalization as cultural workers. Thanks to current ethnographic research conducted by Tania Neiva it is possible to gain even further insight into the development of the sound artists profession in Brazil by looking into the academic component in the construction of the Sound Art and Experimental Music fields in Brazil.

According to her the connection with the academia confirms the field's close relationship to 'research, interdisciplinary practices and the use of expensive instruments and technology' (Neiva, 2019). The research also points out that the demographics is part of an intellectual, socioeconomic and racial minority class, as only 5% of the Brazilian population has an academic background (OECD, 2015). The academic background hints at a privileged social profile that possibly enables career sustainability, possibly bypassing the precarious working conditions in the field. As pointed by Neiva it is important to observe, however, that 'in the department of *Humanities*, in which "Music" is inserted, the average family income is amongst the lowest of the Brazilian families'. On a detailed analysis therefore the data set demonstrates that amongst the privileged graduates in the country, the ones studying Arts and Music have the lowest income in the higher education institutions. This possibly demonstrates how their connection to the academia is likely to be a condition to the accessibility of technological and cultural capital needed to navigate the field (Neiva, 2019; Bourdieu, 1986).

Another barrier encountered by workers in this field is that there isn't a curriculum in higher education specific for Sound Arts, it is built navigating disciplines mostly from Music, but also Visual Arts and New Media. The Brazilian music higher education guidelines follow in their majority the Conservatory model 'which aims to form musicians, conductors, and composers centred in a canonic repertoire from the Romantic and Classic periods of western music history and Popular Brazilian music' (Neiva, 2019). As other technicist fields, this model of education 'reproduces the patriarchal notions of music and the gendered relationships with instrumentation and genres'. Extensive research and thorough data on this are also found on the work of feminist musicologists Isabel Nogueira, Camila Zerbinatti and historian Joana Maria Pedro in their mapping of the emergence of the field of Music and Gender in Brazil. Their research traces the increasing number of publications, from 1978-2017, focused on women in music and feminist musicology in Brazil (NOGUEIRA, et al., 2018). They call attention to the exponential rise of this numbers from the 2000s on, a fact which is also verified by Neiva (2019) that finds 'women increasingly occupying spaces, especially as composers/improvisers, as we reach the early 2010s'.



Through the analysis above it is acknowledgeable that Sound Art is a field closely related with post-dictatorial Brazil from the early 1990s on, and, that this period was also marked by the rise of feminist musicology in the country. Therefore, although slow and facing numerous issues, the general emergence of Sound Art in Brazil is simultaneous, in specific, with the steep curve of feminist activities in the country on the last twenty years. In the next session, I will explore how the feminist organisation *Sonora* deals in their activities with issues both general to the field and specific to their members, ultimately contributing to the advancement of the emerging field of New Brazilian Sound Art as a whole.

## 4.Organised feminist work and Brazilian sound art

J.K Gibson-Graham (2006) points out that shared characteristics by feminist organisations are 'consciousness-raising groups, non-hierarchy, diverse standpoints and work oriented for local transformation'. The collaborative network *Sonora – Music and Feminisms* started in 2015 and is a self-organized, self-managed, non-hierarchical organisation. Although they are based at the *NuSom - Research Centre on Sonology* in the *University of São Paulo (USP)* the organisation is not funded or affiliated in specific to the University, neither is solely based in that city. Their members reside in several cities in Brazil and internationally where they also promote activities with local clusters and peers. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the activities that take place in São Paulo, where SONORA holds weekly memberbased meetings and regular monthly activities open to all (SONORA, 2016a). Their regular activities are the *Study Group*, the *Voices Series* and the *Vision Series*.

In the *Study Group*, they study and produce feminist historiographies which are '(inter)national but also focused locally'. The sessions comprise reading and listening materials organized collectively to reflect 'the broadest possible repertoire', formed by their works and those of women they study. The careful selection forms an 'intergenerational and inter-genre repertoire of women composers throughout music history, sound art, noise, experimental music, electronic and contemporary music' (SONORA, 2016b). *The Voices and Visions Series* are sessions for the presentation and discussion of their creative and scholarly works. Topics include, not exhaustively: feminisms, representation, racism, gender, motherhood, cultural studies and technology (SONORA, 2016c; SONORA, 2016d).

On the one hand, the work that Sonora does exemplifies several characteristics of feminist organisations as discussed earlier and, also, contributes to the production of feminist musicology and epistemology in the country. On the other hand, they also exemplify a typical



example of unpaid labour, characteristic of being in the margins of the Creative Industries, of public funding and in the centre of the capitalist dismissal of non-androcentric work. In both cases, the evidence shows how much labour is done to ensure legitimacy and grounds for creating new (and adapting old) ways of knowing and practicing Sound Art. The network is not a start point but a result of a long journey of (unwaged) work, and time, invested by artists in their careers.

As it was demonstrated, feminist musicology and gender studies emerge synchronously with the Sound Art field in Brazil. Furthermore, it is important to note an additional simultaneous political occurrence: the increasing need for social justice in the country with the rise of the far right since 2013. All these confluences led to changes in the general climate surrounding Arts and Culture contributing to the politicization of New Brazilian Sound Art. One way of verifying this is by looking at an event with (inter)national relevancy for the field. With feminist curators and artists in the agendas, the displacement of the androcentric bias opened up new space, adding intersectional possibilities. The *FIME: International Festival of Experimental Music of São Paulo* in its 2017 edition had the following curatorial statement from Natacha Maurer:

"It was already important since the first edition in 2015 to strive for gender equality in the festival. In this edition, we will highlight also the presence of Latin America. As an artist and curator, I make a stance against solely Eurocentric references in the scene." (FIME, 2017)

It became clear since the 2010's that the presence of women in the activities of the field started to be seen as one of the conditions for quality, innovation and wider audience participation. Exploring further that shift, intersectionality also led to more ethically-sound funding applications, turning the field more eligible, as well as attractive, for public grants, funds and non-niche-only audiences. The FIME festival took place for three years consecutively since 2015, when it was firstly funded by the *National Arts Organisation - Funarte*. In the following years, it was funded by the *Council of São Paulo* through its local authority's *Cultural Action Program – PROAC* (FIME, 2015a). Besides securing paid work across different sections in the festival - from production to performance - the activities took place on state-run cultural spaces of prestige in the city, such as, *the Contemporary Art Museum of USP - MAC*, *the São Paulo Cultural Centre - CCSP*, *the National Arts Organisation - Funarte*, the *Mario de Andrade Library* (FIME, 2015b).



### 5.Conclusion

The objective of this essay was to analyse notions of work: firstly through the lens of cultural work and secondly, through the lens of feminist critiques of the economy.

Cultural work was looked at through two strands of thought: one that sees the economic production and distribution chain of the *Creative Industries* in alignment with commercial economic growth and entrepreneurism. The other, known as *Cultural Industries/Work*, looks at 'the critical and political aspects of the undertaking of these activities' (BANKS, 2017). Through further exploring the *Creative/Cultural Industries* and *Cultural Policies in Brazil*, were identified struggles for various degrees of legitimization as the main issues facing sound artists in general.

In accordance with the feminist critiques, some of the specific issues that face that group were identified. Those were associated with underlying notions of male hegemony and entitlement to the discourse, techniques, and technologies of the field and its spaces (BROWN, 2015; CARRARA & MAYORDOMO, 2005, GIBSON-GRAHAM, J.K., 2006; NEIVA, 2019; NOGUEIRA, et al., 2018;).

By exploring the work of feminist sound artists and the organisation Sonora I was able to recognise several examples of activities and policies put in place through their feminist labour. Those activities, initially undertaken to act on localized issues advocating for a more inclusive and intersectional field, resulted overall in benefits not only for the feminist workers but for advancements of the field in general. Attention was drawn to the simultaneous emergence of both fields as a niche of interest for research, suggesting that feminist work is one of the driving forces contributing to the shaping of New Brazilian Sound Art.

It is unknown what effects these endeavours will have in the long run, especially considering that they do not provide direct financial sustainability. Nonetheless, feminist organisations are instrumental to the critic of hegemony, creating a sound counterpoint to neoliberalism and androcentric subjects as the universal models of existence.



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