

Unpredictable Coherence: Caetano Veloso Beyond "Ethnic" and Easy-Listening Tunes

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Abstract: Veloso's latest work upholds an aesthetic disposition: an aversion to conservative criticism and consumer expectation that are both obsessed with ethnic/national authenticity and contemptuous toward non-melodic music. The Bahian resumes an attack on what Charles Perrone and Christopher Dunn have named "xenophobic sentiment in Brazil" and "notions about Brazilian song abroad," or "suave bossa nova" (22). Even though *cê* commands three mellow tunes of amorous contemplation and a modal outcry on racism and anti-racism ideology, the disc intertwines the lines of that aesthetic disposition to the sound of weeping guitars while dramatizing romantic trepidations, sexual imperatives, and gender ambiguities.

Introduction

At first glance, chameleon Caetano Veloso's latest disc, *cê*, comes out deceitfully simple, as if it had been recorded at a make-shift garage studio. The naked and piercing notes of the electric guitar as well as the opening lines of the first tune, "outro" ("other"), could suggest he is wearing a new hat altogether: "you won't even recognize me / even when I go right by you." In reality, though, his highly personal 40th compact disc neither runs out of sync with the artist's previous paths nor dwells on predictable rock-and-roll mannerisms. Strictly speaking, no more than two of his 12 brand new composi-

tions included on *cê* may be regarded as “rock” songs. (Even so, we must not despise the quotation marks on “rock,” since Veloso will not incarnate a purist of any stock except for irony or disguise.) In addition, Veloso’s flirting with this type of pop language dates back to forty years ago, basically the onset of the tropicalist movement and his career’s success with the popmarchinha “Alegria, alegria” (a Philips single, in 1967). There is more wavering continuity in other ways too. In the poetics and themes themselves and in many personal and contextual rumors and controversies associated with the new work’s genesis and release in September 2006, this new CD is the typically atypical, or, to confirm the artist’s diversity of adjacent attributes even further, it is unpredictably coherent Caetano Veloso all over again.

Upon offering his much anticipated *cê* for downloading through UOL (Brazil’s AOL), Veloso introduces the work through a two-and-half page personal and professional narrative. He confesses that he did not avoid doing what some other artists have done in terms of revisiting 1980s rock with a new punk criterion. He warns, though, that his rock tunes do not sound like those he hears and enjoys. He also admits that “minhas lágrimas”¹ (“my tears”) and “não me arrependo” (“i don’t regret”) constitute “the rare autobiographical moments” of the project. (For a complete transcription of the narrative, see “Há canções.”) If initially one does not think that *cê*’s release is worth celebrating, one should hold one’s tongue and take a listen twice, three times, or maybe more, depending on how sluggishly one’s horizon of expectation expands. But it pays, and it does help us think more openly about the boundless and daring aesthetics of free-thinking, vanguard art and media controversy in a world where press journalists strive to survive against the challenges of online communication, and where the mainstream recording industry remains too deeply tied to tonal, easy-listening traditions or too dependent on the sales of repetitive, mass-produced banality.

Rock-and-roll has had a significant function in Veloso’s mix-and-match craft since playing and recording with an Argentinean rock group, the Beat Boys, and the legendary, cutting-edge Os Mutantes, in 1967 and 1968. In *Transa* (1972), for example, “You Don’t Know Me” is an outstanding rock piece. An original samba of 1955, “Mora na Filosofia,” by Monsueto Menezes and Arnaldo Passos, becomes an alluring hybrid tune of rock, balad, and samba itself. *Jóia* (1975), whose cover depicts Veloso, his first wife, Andréa (Dedé) Gadelha, and their son Moreno all naked, moves in the opposite direction. It fixes a classic rock tune, such as Lennon and McCartney’s

“Help,” into an enchanting, stylized samba bossa nova frame. *Qualquer coisa*, from the same year, does the same to the Beatles’ title “For No One.”

Muito (1978), *Outras palavras* (1981), *Velô* (1984), *Estrangeiro* (1989) and *Circuladô* (1991), to cite a few, include several rock tunes and pop-rock compositions that defy single genre specificity, and some of them convey extremely poignant messages of social and political criticism. One of these tunes is “Podres poderes,” from *Velô*, which discusses Catholic America’s centuries-old tendency to resort to highly charismatic and demagogic leaders or bloody tyrants, rather than democratic systems of expression and power sharing. Whether or not speaking about Brazilian or Latin American woes, they do employ electric instruments (guitars, electric bass, and keyboards). Eventually, rock itself becomes a theme in a much later song, an ironic and encoded piece honoring the legacy of Raul Seixas, in “Rock’n’Raul,” from *Noites do norte* (2000).

Rocking and Mourning

A few years after “Rock’n’Raul,” the fast tempo mostly marked by Ricardo Dias Gomes’s bass and Marcelo Callados’s drums in *cê*’s “outro” sketches the image of a persona now walking hurriedly and singing on a fixed pace. It is almost like a robot whose human-like emotions compel him (and there are a few gender markers) to open a dialogue with the listener. He thus sets the tone and introduces the whole gathering of songs on the disc. The voice is one that reveals joy and cruelty upon leaving a painful amorous relationship behind. Comparing himself to a bold rattlesnake eager to strike, the persona urges his ex-lover “to look away.” In the meantime, the weeping guitar solo by Pedro Sá (Veloso’s partner on stage since 2000) matches the moving lament lines with which the persona acknowledges how badly he and his lover have hurt one another in the past.

Properly speaking, *cê* insinuates that the CD title itself sets forth a speech act directed toward the persona’s ex-lover. In a pop ballad called “não me arrependo” (“i don’t regret”), the message that comes in the second line goes in straight admonition to that persona’s interlocutor: “*cê não devia me maldizer assim*” (“you shouldn’t curse me like that”). Soon this tune will become the saddest of the disc, but, at the same time, the most reaffirming toward the positive sides of a long-lasting relationship gone astray: “no, nothing in this world will / erase the drawing we have made here / not the biggest of your mistakes, or my mistakes, or my remorse will make it disappear.” Not even

their death “can disprove / what comes to my voice now,” adds the last verse, and the deeply mournful mood is reinforced by Veloso’s extraordinarily powerful falsetto.

Mournful is also the core mood of the track named “waly salomão,” a compelling eulogy to the slow and solemn beat of Marcelo Callado’s drum. It’s a funeral march echoing the poet, songwriter and social activist’s funeral at Rio’s Biblioteca Nacional in May 2003. Salomão, Veloso’s old friend, is one among scores of literary figures who have been present in the baiano’s songbook: from Guimarães Rosa to Gregório de Matos to Luís Vaz de Camões (see a sizeable list in Wisnik 57). In this particular poem, two of the total three stanzas highlight the deceased’s personality traits as well as his art and community work in the slums of Rio de Janeiro, especially the Afro-Reggae of Vigário Geral. In the last stanza, though, the poet turns his eyes inward once again to confess his ongoing melancholy, his “errant serpent’s trail / without wings and without poison / without plumage and without sufficient anger.”

On the Attack

Here and there, though, the songwriter’s poison and anger will be enough to generate verbal and melodic attacks, especially in “rocks,” *cê*’s second rock tune, and, to a lesser degree, in “odeio” (“i hate”), a pop-rock ballad with an exquisite minimalist finish. With a catalogue of apparently unrelated items, the voice in “rocks” recalls that “[you] tattooed a ganesh on your thigh / showed up with your mouth purple from botox / demanding rocks / animal / metal / total / lethal / i paid no mind.” Then he sees himself as an enemy of his interlocutor and shouts repeatedly: “you were too much the rat with me / you were concretely and simply / too much the rat with me.” This particularly accusatory song, with explicit and aggressive heavy-metal overtones, is dedicated to his son Zeca (b. in 1992), who, according to the songwriter, once told his father that his own girlfriend “foi mor rata comigo” (the Portuguese original version of the first verse in the quote above). The angry moral statement fits the father’s music and mood very well, though, while alluding to an animal that steals food and doesn’t play fair with homeowners, one that sneaks in and out of our abodes without our consent.

In “odeio” the arrangement is uniquely charming, following the modern stylistics of an Arnaldo Antunes or Uakti type of tune and accompaniment for a ballet dance production, such as those by the renowned Belo Horizonte Grupo Corpo. In fact, Caetano Veloso’s previous CD recording, *Onqotô*, fea-

tures the soundtrack he had co-written with José Miguel Wisnik for a Corpo dance spectacle in 2005. This poem concocts a collage of scenes not easily construed as a whole, but the opening images, quite impressionistic in nature, display a sequence of yearning and seduction. A little dolphin emerged from “the purple sea” came smiling to the poem’s persona.

The scene may very well be a metaphor that captures the excitement of receiving a special electronic message: “today the sun rose red as a face / venus jasmine-diamond / at last someone’s email came.” Both the dolphin symbolism and the e-mail could have something to do with “a boy that came from arraial do cabo,” the name of a town on the coast of Rio as it appears in the third stanza. After all, the boy is “beautiful as a seraphim / strong and happy like a god, like a devil / he came saying yes / only I, old, am ugly and nobody.” Between those two stanzas, though, there comes one in which “a vast cornucopia of women arrived / all showing their mucus to me / the ocean opened up in the midst of the pleasures / dunes of gold and ivory / it was so, it is so, but this way it’s too much too.” Following this erratically erotic landscape, which one may associate with the sexual fantasies of an aging man, there comes a striking refrain, “i hate you, i hate you, i hate you, i hate.”

The fragmentary, cryptic, and impressionistic characteristics of “odeio” make it almost impossible for the reader/listener to come to grips with an indisputable interpretation of its overall semantics. By any chance does the persona of the poem hate the boy from Arraial do Cabo? Or, is it, perhaps, one of the many women, blonde or black (“dunes of gold and ivory”), who are “showing their mucus” to him? One could guess that the refrain “odeio você” does not apply to either of those females in lust or to that male seraphim, but to the same “cê” of the opening song.

An Open Book

But who knows who is “cê”? What is certainly true is that Caetano Veloso’s private life has been an open book which he shares with fans and friends in various capacities. Apart from his tendency to evoke real-life situations in his long career as songwriter, he has been very candid about issues like romance and sexuality in his four books of prose (*O mundo não é chato* was published in 2004). He has been compared to Bob Dylan, for example, but their differences can be profound precisely in their (un)willingness to discuss their own private lives. The Bahian accedes that the Minnesotan singer-songwriter is “an artist who hides his personality behind the art he is creating. He would never

ever touch his work with explanation or analysis. I am the opposite. I am almost not an artist" (Frere-Jones 90).

In *Tropical Truth*, for example, Veloso discusses his erotic interest in both women and men, while arguing that through his lifetime he has been "engaged much more frequently in heterosexual than homosexual practice" (309). Because of such a past (including two traditional marriages, of about 20 years each [10 years, then, in 1997]), he contends that he could consider himself a heterosexual, as many other artists "vaguely homoerotic" have done (309). But he doesn't, since "clarity of sexual orientation is meaningless except when it manifests itself spontaneously" (309-310).

Loaded with triangular relationship complexities involving homo- and heterosexual connections, the early disputes and ultimate divorce from his second wife (24 years younger than him), Paula Lavigne, have not been outside the merciless and oppressive world of rumors and confabulations about his sexuality. Unequivocally, at nearly 65 years of age, Veloso continues to be a sexual icon as well as a target of multiple obsessions and tabloid-like magazines and blogs that seek stories as provocative as possible in order to sell or entertain their readers' avid curiosities.²

This essay has nothing to attest to, as far as the veracity of Veloso's personal innuendoes is concerned. However, what comes across as an interesting element for an analysis of gender and romance issues in *cê* is that the CD is extra rich in gender-based signals. What matters is how Veloso's poetry builds quite heavily on an antagonism tied up on gender lines. Under the delicate sounds of music that would suit a modern ballet, the refrain and title-phrase "i hate you" engenders a semantic short-circuit while adding the final touch of fragmentation to a sense of divided self exposed through disjointed images of numberless female attractions at his disposal and an unfulfilled homoerotic desire: "the one who i most wanted, if wanting depended on me, / came and did not come."

Previously released compositions by Veloso, such as "Tradição" (*Tropicália* 2, 1993), "Branquinha" (*Estrangeiro*), and "Eu sou neguinha?" (*Caetano*, 1987), evoke his persona's complex sexual self-image. In the first title, the poetic voice extols and flirts with a female friend's boyfriend, "sempre rindo e sempre me olhando." In the second piece he delineates himself as a "macaco complexo" of "sexo equívoco." In the third song, the persona is "totalmente terceiro sexo / totalmente terceiro mundo / terceiro milênio." In *cê*, ambivalence, ambiguity, and a profound sense of fear and sexual misfit go hand in

hand in songs with a prevailing man-to-woman love discourse, such as “odeio” and another two cuts carrying the persona’s love message for one who seems to be the same *mestiça* muse of two songs, “deusa urbana” (“urban goddess”) and “musa híbrida” (“hybrid muse”). Mellow rhythm and delicate arrangements like those of the Tribalistas trio (Marisa Monte, Carlinhos Brown, and Arnaldo Antunes) evoke the supposed bisexual triangular affair: “i am afraid of him, i am afraid of her / the two together where I could not get in.”

The poem sustains a series of contradictory statements, one of which exposes the double fear of falling in love and not falling in love with the woman he calls “the sun’s granddaughter,” a muse of “purple mucus membrane, cock [*sic*, turtledove] colored tit.” In the same mode, the persona confides that “with you I really have to accept it / I really have to not accept it / heterodox sex, lapses of desire / when suddenly i see the sky cave in on us.”

Much less catastrophic—actually utopian, instead—seem to be now the perspectives upon a relationship with the “coppery panther” in that “cross-breeding song,” a song’s reference to itself in “hybrid muse.” An agreeable type of pop-samba based on a fused version of olodum drumming, the composition is all about a rather reified cat of “green eyes and coppery coil” and “bundo lips.” With the Brazilian melting-pot woman that descends from the “dongo, congo, ge, tupi, dutch, Lusitanian, Hebrew, and moor,” the poet wishes to “remake the world.”

Gender and Tongue Statements

Except for the hybrid muse/urban goddess figure, females are not necessarily revered on *cê*. The most blatant expression of a wholesome disappointment in women in general obviously comes from “homem” (“man”). The poem’s persona reaffirms his pride in being a male that is not “jealous of maternity / or of lactation.” He couldn’t care less for “adiposity,” “menstruation,” “sagacity,” “intuition,” “faithfulness” or “dissimulation.” He actually envies nothing in women but their “longevity” and “multiple orgasm.” Here, his markers of maleness, in turn, don’t go beyond “loose skin on muscle” and “thick hair” in his nose, whereas in the opening cut of the disc, “outro,” the persona depicts himself as “feliz e mau como um pau duro / acendendo-se no escuro” (“happy and cruel like a hard on / lighting itself up in the dark”).

Differences in men’s and women’s sexual climax patterns are indeed the only theme of a laconic, jazzy, bossa-novist techno keyboard tune of three verses, 18 words total, “porquê” (“why?”). Embodying a Portuguese man, the

persona expresses himself, with a European Portuguese accent and syntax, an idiom that means nothing to the average Brazilian: “estou-me a vir,” or “i’m coming.” Then he wonders about what goes on in the depths of his female sexual partner’s genitalia, perhaps alluding to the difficulties that some of them may have at reaching orgasm: “and you, how can you keep inside yourself?” *Expresso* writer Inês Pedrosa contends that “out of the spout from a purely ejaculatory song” there comes a verse with a Luis Vaz de Camões type of precision (the original wording of that inquiry): “e tu, como é que te tens por dentro?” With an exhaustive repetition of the phrase “i’m coming,” in a way that might represent ongoing intercourse (a case of musical isomorphism between meaning and form), the voice asks again, “why don’t you come too?” Pedrosa is probably right in her assumption that the dialectal differences between Brazilian and European Portuguese will allow this song to go unscathed in the South American country. However, she expects that the sort of plain sexual language at work in “porquê?,” with a phrase register exclusively heard in bedrooms around Portugal, will undoubtedly bring about “an orgasmic scandal in our prudish country.”

What is a given is that Veloso here continues experimenting with “Camões’ tongue.” In an interview with another *Expresso* writer, Sofia Cerveira, he reiterates his penchant for all languages, but especially Portuguese. He expounds the song as a gesture of affection for the European vernacular use of the reflexive verb “vir,” rather than an opportunity to shock people (Cerveira). Veloso has indeed celebrated this linguistic fascination of his in various ways. One of the best known musical results is that in which he makes the Portuguese tongue itself the explicit and central theme of “Língua.” This extraordinarily complex and jocose Latin-samba-rap from *Velô* encompasses a personal, social, and literary statement on the musicality of the Portuguese language, in general, and of the Brazilian variation of it, in particular.³

Cities, Dreams, and Tears

If only a few (but exceptional) words spurt out in “estou-me a vir,” a total writer’s block occurs in the lyrics of another tune on *cê*. For a while it seems to the persona in “minhas lágrimas” that nothing at all would appear on the white page, as he hovers and tries to write a song on a plane over the city of Los Angeles. This is a travel tune in which the coast of California represents something similar to the image of the old São Francisco river in “O ciúme,” from the album *Caetano*, released twenty years ago, soon after Velsoso’s first

divorce. The persona onboard a boat is wounded by jealousy's "flecha negra" ("black arrow") and watches the sun, villages, and towns move along the riverbanks of Minas, Bahia, Sergipe, and Alagoas. To some fado-like chords of a Portuguese guitar, the communities on those shores mirror the poet's melancholy, as they all seem somnolent and powerless as well as depressed and deprived of some minimal comfort, with "tantas almas esticadas como um curtume" ("so many souls stretched out on the tannery").

Painted in that likewise gloomy scenario, Los Angeles is not alone in Veloso's songbook. In a recent book on Veloso, Guilherme Wisnik argues that the *baiano* has become the Brazilian songwriter with the largest number of tunes evoking different cities, from Salvador to São Paulo, Santo Amaro to Aracaju, London to New York, and the list goes on and on (104). The exterior correlative, in this case, hides no secret: from where the poet sits and thinks in mid-air about his personal life, the largest city of western North America looks dry and desolate, like the desert and dirty sea around it. Los Angeles, Baja California, and surrounding islands reflect from below the plane the low spirits of the poet above them. His is now an inner self devoid of colors, except for that dust-looking hue on the aircraft carpet and for the thick darkness of the Pacific ocean itself. Impotent and pathetic against the intransigent white page, the poem ends by dramatizing, in superb metaphor, the persona's unfulfilled need (and space) to vent or decorate his anguish through figurative language and melodies: "nada serve de chão / onde caíam minhas lágrimas" ("nothing is a floor / where my tears may fall").

In other places and circumstances, however, the poet encounters plenty of ways and means to sketch his discursive lines and musical phrases. In the romantic, sexually undertoned, and minimalist pop ballad "um sonho," poetic and melodic craftsmanship reminds us of Veloso's best tonal gems written between the early 1970s and early 1980s. It suffices to recall the plasticity and sonority of a few contemplative verses of "um sonho" in Portuguese (unfortunately without the same effect in the English translation). First comes a certain cubist combination of sizes, tints, and textures: "lua na folha molhada / brilho azul-branco / olho-água, vermelho da calha nua" (or, "moon on the wet leaf / blue-whiteshined / eye-watered, red like a naked gutter"). Later, there is a mesmerizing image of synesthesia: "tua pele se espalha / ao som de minha mão" ("your skin spreads to the sound of my hand").

An Interpreter of Brazil

Caetano Veloso would not be Caetano Veloso anymore, at 64, if he did not continue to write songs or prose by juxtaposing minor or major elements (and even songs) that conflict one another. That is how he finishes *cê*. Following the most enchanting tonal tune of the disc, “um sonho,” he wraps up his gathering of brand new titles with a modal composition of social and political commentary: the ironic and sardonic rap entitled “o herói” (“the hero”).

It tells in first-person the story of an individual born in a *favela*, who “barely escaped being a bandit” and “always wished for everything that denied / this stained country.” His wish was to “foster racial hatred here / and a clear separation between the races.” While declaring no interest in making himself a sports celebrity or “playing soccer for these rats,” he concedes he once was a mulatto, one of millions, but now he wants to be “100% black, american / south african, anything but the saint / that the breeze in brazil sways and kisses.” Later on in life this character realizes that he can no longer wear that mask, that he is like other Afro-Brazilians whom he disdained. He now assumes the role of a Sérgio Buarque de Holanda’s quintessential Brazilian, the cordial man, and that of a living proof of Brazil’s mythic racial democracy.⁴

Within Veloso’s typical scheme of mixed messages, much like another stylized rap, “Haiti” (with lyrics of his own, and music co-written by him and Gilberto Gil, on *Tropicália 2*), it is never an easy task to pinpoint the side where authorial opinion or sarcasm lies. What is clear, though, is how “o herói” reflects an ongoing dispute in the country regarding affirmative action measures, especially the controversial quota system implemented by some state universities, and, most of all, by Luís Inácio Lula da Silva’s federal government. One of the questions that pops up is, of course, how African and how Indian one has to be in order to qualify for such privileges in a nation so evidently and overwhelmingly mixed in terms of race and ethnicity.

The other issue is whether such measures and mind-sets will contribute to justice or to racial hatred. Part of the irony in “o herói” rests on the tenets of an identity ideology brought somewhat recently into that country where the good and bad sides of its melting pot experiences have not been openly challenged or discussed, but simply propagated among elite thinkers and writers, like Gilberto Freyre, and samba composers, like Ary Barroso. Closing his own life story, Veloso’s song’s fictional storyteller goes back to a sarcastic “state of spiritual glory,” under which he is the hero, but “only god knows how

it hurts." To sum it up, one would construe this new rap's statement as an allegory that profiles the songwriter's denial of Brazil's racial democracy and his understanding of prejudice and injustice against nonwhite people, but, also, his skepticism toward certain imported strategies for eradicating social ills diagnosed as racially motivated evils.

Having lived in Salvador for five years as a musician as well as a philosophy student, Veloso must have witnessed firsthand a variety of abuses toward blacks and mixed-raced individuals, including the violent scenes observed at Jorge Amado's museum in Pelourinho, which are described in "Haiti."⁵

As hundreds of his written pieces and interviews demonstrate, racial relations in Brazil have been of great interest to this serious but unconventional interpreter of a nation which, he thinks, has the power to do better than the United States in the 21st century, especially because of our racial relations model. "I love the United States," he declared at a formal speech he gave at São Paulo's Museu de Arte Moderna in 1993 (Bloch). However, he just doesn't "expect any less from Brazil than to advance much of what has been accomplished there [in the U.S.]" (Bloch).

What Veloso does not perceive as anything positive, as he told *O Globo* journalist Arnaldo Bloch in what appears to have been an exclusive interview, is Brazilians' current obsession with African-American culture. Blacks in Brazil buy it all when it comes to demands claimed by blacks in the United States, but those Brazilians "sometimes end up attacking things that the Brazilian *mestiços* have achieved, obtained, and consummated" (Bloch).

Conclusion

For all the sexual and gender issues here discussed, Veloso's disc as a whole displays a plethora of poetic representations and a pervasive preoccupation with sex and gloom, as well as romance and desire, without leaving aside a marginal regard for Brazilian social and political issues. In ten out of twelve songs, there is an impressionistic, minimalist or otherwise sophisticated sketch of at least one broken heart, a mesmerized lover, or somebody excited by a lustful drive. There must not have been another disc by Veloso with such a high ratio of concerns for Venus matters. Perhaps even more striking is the number of songs evoking non-traditional sexual identities or gender differences (three out of twelve titles). In 1997 Veloso wrote that not being so sure about his own sexual inclination, he would "make a great queer" (*Tropical Truth* 309). Ten years later, maybe for the first time in his artistic career,

Veloso's personal music celebrates maleness, especially by declaring the many reasons why one should be glad not to be female.

In terms of stylistics, *cê* suggests once more that Veloso is definitely not satisfied with the mission of writing nothing but Brazilian "ethnic" or easy-listening romantic tunes. His aesthetic disposition actually reminds us of two inter-related statements made famous by Veloso in two different decades. In the 1960s, he rejected the country's spirit of xenophobia, metonymically reflected in the rejection of the electric guitar, and "folksiness that perpetuated under-development" (*Tropical Truth* 138-39). Approximately 20 years later, he added this closing remark to his impressionistic rock ballad "O estrangeiro" (title track of his 1989 album): "Some may like a soft Brazilian singer. But I've given up all attempts at perfection." The new CD reconfirms both assertions. It does not seek the folksy authenticity of MPB (Brazilian Popular Music), arguably the main reason why tropicalists like him were abhorred in the 1960s. It does not pursue the melodic but frozen amenities of the bossa nova style either, which is an issue between the lines in the second statement.⁶

In a press conference given in December 2006, Veloso declared that a couple of years prior to the recording months of *cê* he had gone through the worst phase of his entire life (see Lichore). The languages of rock and pop were selected for the expression of all that anguish and turbulence, which was also the case when he wrote and recorded *Caetano Veloso* (1971) and *Transa*, during the years of exile in England (1969-1972). For those who can bypass their initial frustration at a new disc by Veloso with no afoxé, samba, xote, or any taste of Bahia or Rio for that matter, except for a homeopathic dose in "musa híbrida," *cê* may indeed prove to be an unusually powerful contemporary work that escapes all labels. The CD reminds us that Veloso has not lost his complex ties with and will to react to time passing in world music. Obviously, he has not resigned himself to any formula for commercial success either, even though he has been bad-mouthed as a sell-out since *Prenda minha* (1998) sold more than one million copies.

This is definitely another one of Veloso's predictably unpredictable discs, which seem never to be made for others to approve or disapprove, but to satisfy his love of singing, his romantic and emotional imperatives, as well as his ethical and intellectual insatiability. In her short but highly elucidating essay, Inês Pedrosa quotes Agostinho da Silva, who had a significant influence over Veloso's education (*Tropical Truth* 54-55, 188, 213): "the only coherence that we can find is that of our being one thing and its opposite at the same

time.” Again and again Veloso proves he is multiple and protean, restless and courageous, even outspoken and merciless when the occasion calls for it. Most of all, *cê* sounds genuine, the believable result of an aesthetic sincerity and a vanguard spirit of innovation without reservation. At its core are real pains and dreams, doubts and frowns at himself, his muses (male and female), and the world beyond all of them, a world of symbolic violence, as well as media harassment and intervention. Within and without *cê*, this is a world where Caetano Veloso partakes in polemics and scandals, while thriving as a serious artist with an acute interest in understanding and explaining human enigmas and social contradictions.

Notes

¹ The transcription of the disc and song titles in small letters is faithful to their appearance on *cê*'s cover and insert. This essay will quote from the English translation verses that accompany the original Portuguese lyrics in that insert. English translations of other quotes from Portuguese originals are my own.

² Veloso certainly resents the harassment from the media, especially when reporters and other opportunists show no respect for any boundaries of personal privacy. In a recent interview with Sofia Cerveira, for instance, he compares his living condition in Rio to that of people on reality shows like *Big Brother* (Cerveira). However, unsanctioned intrusion may happen anywhere, including Salvador, where he was photographed swimming on a beach with a Bahian black model, Denise Assis dos Santos, whose features resemble those of the “panther” in two of the songs on *cê*, “*deusa urbana*” and “*musa híbrida*.” A scandal, with Levis's bombastic reactions and law suit, followed immediately, since *Isto É Gente* published one of these pictures on its cover and claimed, in its main sensationalist article, “O desbunde de Caetano” (see Leon), that Veloso had been wearing nothing but underwear. Further uproar came when the young Bahian woman posed for the adult magazine *Sexy* and commented on her relationship with Veloso. The songwriter protested against the report in a published letter to the magazine (see “Caetano contesta”) and sued *Sexy*, while attempting to prevent the release of the March 2006 issue with Denise Assis' photographic essay (see Pereira).

³ For an analysis of “*Língua*” and further discussion on the role of the Portuguese language and poets (especially Fernando Pessoa) in Veloso's writing, see Borim's “*Roçando a língua de Camões*.”

⁴ Critical literature on Brazil's racial democracy and Holanda's concept of *homem cordial* is very extensive. For an interesting gathering of opinions on these issues see Silviano Santiago's book on Holanda and Octavio Paz, Lund and McNee's volume on Freyre within Latin American studies, and all five articles dedicated to 100 years of Gilberto Freyre in *Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* 4/5, especially the essays by Mary Del Priore and João Cezar de Castro Rocha. For a political and historical approach to Veloso's socially aware music, see Borim's “*Morte e vida Tropicália*.”

⁵ For a convincing analysis of this song and the circumstances of its writing, see Christopher Dunn (193-4).

⁶ According to Wisnik, this statement was originally uttered by Bob Dylan regarding João Gilberto (Wisnik 56). For an enlightening review and contextualization of “*Estrangeiro*” and the citation from Dylan's LP *Bringing It All Back*, see Perrone and Dunn (especially 22-3 and 36).

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