

Contextual Theory, or Theorizing between the Discursive and the Material

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IN a recent essay on the influence of *brasilidade* on global popular culture and politics, Jason Stanyek suggests that “to improvise is to create worlds, small ones. And every world is merely the fleeting sum of so many coagulated improvisations” (Stanyek 2011). Conversely, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari famously assert that “to improvise is to join with the World, or meld with it” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 311). If we think of music theorizing as a form of improvisation—in Deleuze’s language, as the creation of concepts—then we must take seriously the complex relationship between these claims. On one hand, music theorists invent formal models that account for aspects of musical structure, improvising worlds around a musical work or corpus of works. On the other hand, a mode of theorizing that joins with a world of music-making invites opportunities to discover and invent conceptual affinities between theories and contexts, or between analytic acts and the ways practitioners think. Any sufficiently nuanced music theory should orient toward the latter sense of world-constitution.

In this paper I present an example of music theorizing that orbits around three concepts—*ritmo*, *balanço*, and *circularidade*—invoked by Brazilian musicians to describe aspects of their practice. I will also touch on several cognate themes—*compasso*, *base*, *toque*, *marcação*, *caminho*, *suíngue*, *dançante*, *repica*, *kabila*—that flow through them, and with which each is in certain ways interconnected. All of these words, which will be explained as they occur below, relate to some aspect of how time is expressed or felt in music, how some aspect of music is structured in time, or both. *Ritmo* (see Part 1) and *balanço* (Part 2) are part of the common parlance of practicing musicians across a wide range of Brazilian genres and music-making communities. Each carry across multiple resonances, revealing subtly distinct meanings depending on who is using it and how. *Circularidade* (Part 3) similarly expresses a range of concepts that flow through the discourse of practicing musicians.¹

Thinking about words in this sense amounts to a way into a world of music-making. It amounts to an effort to “[search] out and [analyze] the symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—in terms of which . . . people [represent] themselves to themselves and to one another” (Geertz 1983, 58). How does thinking in terms of certain insider usages allow me to dislodge myself from my own discursive modes, to open up possibilities for plural ways of thinking and understanding? This becomes especially poignant with words that have English cognates—*ritmo* (rhythm), *dançante* (dancing/dance)—or imported words like *suíngue* (swing; cf. Gerischer 2006) that derive from decades of contact with North American

1. José Miguel Wisnik (1989, 78–79) also invokes the term *circularidade*, in a way that relates very closely to how I will be using it. See the last part of this paper, below.

musicians (a history that is, of course, fraught with power imbalances). It has been extremely important for me to shake myself loose of epistemological preconceptions that have formed through my life as a performing musician and scholar. Both performers and scholars tend to generalize their fields of study in order “to create a technical language capable of representing the internal relations of myths, poems, dances, or melodies” (Geertz 1983, 95)—this is how music theory typically progresses, whether in its “professional” practices or in the pragmatic formulations of working musicians.² Geertz’s aim, and mine, is to build a theoretical scaffolding that begins with the discourse of practitioners and its relation to their creative practices as two interpenetrating “modes of expression” (70). But also, as sensitively as possible, to bring music-theoretical and -analytic apparatuses to bear on the objects of my study: ultimately, the sounds made by my interlocutors. My position as an ethnographer is in this way more like what James Clifford describes as “actively situated between powerful systems of meaning” (1986, 2). This is precisely the distinction between world-making and world-merging suggested in the Stanyek and Deleuze and Guattari quotes above.

The musical sounds made by my interlocutors are material realities, products of human activity, histories, and cultural and material contexts. This is the traditional stuff of the best music theory. This essay extends this premise further, following Lawrence Grossberg’s entreaty that we should not “separate the discursive and the material . . . , as if they existed in their own specificity, on separate planes or levels” (2010, 323). The words invoked by practitioners are ontologically bound up in the musical sounds they make—Grossberg, Geertz, and Clifford all make this crucial point, albeit in widely divergent ways.³ My project in this essay is to further develop that discursive-material relation, as an ever-ongoing double movement, each domain taking on new tonalities through the impingements of the other.

I. RITMO

During 2015 and 2016, I spent a total of seven months in Brazil, engaging in fieldwork, taking lessons, playing music, and teaching in Rio de Janeiro, Salvador da Bahia, and Belo

2. Lest this be read as anachronistically structuralist, I should be clear that I am not referring at all to linguistic (or otherwise discursive), mythic, or musical relations in terms of the unifying procedures of an earlier generation of structuralist (or even post-structuralist) scholars. My own philosophical orientation on language production stems from Deleuze and Guattari’s doubled relationship between “machinic assemblages of bodies” and “collective assemblages of enunciation,” the relationship between which they argue constitutes how language operates within communities and how it participates in the formation of acts of individuation. See Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 87–110).

3. Conversely, Kofi Agawu cautions us against overdetermining practitioners’ positioned voices in pursuit of some kind of foundational *difference*; see Agawu (2003, 152–63). Martin Scherzinger (2001) similarly suggests that analytic orientations that begin from without can have fruitful implications for understanding non-Western musical practices just as Western ones. Both Agawu’s and Scherzinger’s positions are driven largely by political imperatives that insist against Othering or exoticizing moves that emphasizes on indigenous knowledge can make if not engaged carefully and thoughtfully. From this perspective, (1) my project here might be seen as an attempt to bring local-knowledge and (nominally) empirically neutral practices into dialogue (understanding, of course, that no position is truly neutral or disinterested, as Haraway (1988), Barad (2006), and others have made patently clear), and (2) I take care throughout this project to reinforce that words and concepts are ways in to creative knowledge productions rather than demarcating forces that foreclose possibilities.

Horizonte (the site of my host university, Universidade Federal Minas Gerais).⁴ My 2015 trip involved fieldwork in and around Rio de Janeiro and teaching, studying, and performing in Belo Horizonte and, briefly, São Paulo. I took percussion lessons with samba and choro musicians, sat in with numerous samba *rodas* (circles), played gigs with many members of Rio's dynamic progressive jazz community (many of whom came up through bassist/composer Itiberê's tutorship), and read historical documents in library and cultural center archives. When I returned in 2016, I spent most of my time in Salvador da Bahia, primarily immersed in private instruction with percussionists from the Gantois Candomblé terreiro and the Balé Folclórico. I also returned to Rio to follow up on my earlier activities. This essay draws primarily upon my experiences in Salvador but refers to my work with musicians in all four cities.

One of my motivating questions during both trips involved examining the connection between samba in its various incarnations and the many characteristic rhythms found in different Candomblé practices in Brazil. While Candomblé's history (with its direct ties to African antecedents) extends further back than that of samba (which is more of a home-grown nexus of Brazilian practices), each has revealed subtle traces of the other's impingement.⁵ In Salvador da Bahia there are many variants of samba—*samba de roda*, *samba duro*, *samba de caboclo*, *samba de chula*, and many more. These are ancestors of more well-known, cosmopolitan samba styles, but each also is a living tradition that has transformed over the course of many decades, including absorbing the influence of those more cosmopolitan styles. Of the many ritmos I worked on, the one shown in Figure 1, a variant of *samba de caboclo* played on a single *atabaque* (a drum associated primarily with Candomblé practice, and which signifies Brazilian music's African antecedents for cultural insiders), invited a great number of questions, as a space where many of my thoughts about rhythm and meter, feel, and polymorphism might be developed.

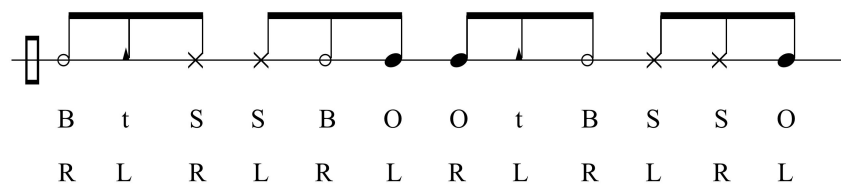


Figure 1. 12-cycle samba de caboclo pattern. B = bass tone; t = near-silent time-keeping stroke; S = slap; O = open tone. R and L refer to alternating left and right hands.

4. These were neither my first nor last trips to Brazil: I was in Rio and São Paulo in 2011 and 2012 and returned for fieldwork in the summer of 2018. In addition, I have played Brazilian music with internationally recognized practitioners for over two decades.

5. See Azevedo (2013) for an extraordinary history of samba that describes the ways in which its historical antecedents and various parallel musical lines have left their traces on contemporary practices. See also Andrade (1972). The most comprehensive published examination of Candomblé practice in Brazil is José Beniste's *As Aguas de Oxalá* (Beniste 2002). For an important examination of Candomblé as a contemporary cultural phenomenon, see Capone (2010).

This somewhat unorthodox samba de caboclo pattern often occurs alongside the well-known “standard pattern” timeline (Figure 2)—the resulting compound texture sonically resembles certain *jongo* practices rather than the Candomblé antecedents that we hear in some ritmos that share its name.⁶ Both strata in Figure 2 articulate a 12-cycle periodic structure parsed saliently into four beats (a 3-cycle, nested into and coextensive with the referential 12-cycle), as shown by the annotations below the staves.

It can also coincide with the samba timeline, in which case it can be referred to, as one of my interlocutors in Salvador suggested, as *samba duro*.⁷ This assemblage is shown in Figure 3. In this context a 12-cycle “triple” and 16-cycle “duple” (or “quadruple”) framework are superimposed upon one another. As with many of these superimposed duple and triple frameworks, the two rhythms in performance are drawn ever so slightly toward one another; that is, the 12-cycle and 16-cycle strata each exerts a kind of gravitational pull on the other that stretches the other out of perfectly isochronous alignment. I will return to this concept in Part 2 below.

Let us return to the standard pattern superimposition (Figure 2). Three muted bass tones, indicated in the figure by open-circle noteheads, outline a 4-cycle periodicity coextensive with the 3-cycle main beats implied by the notational groupings in all three

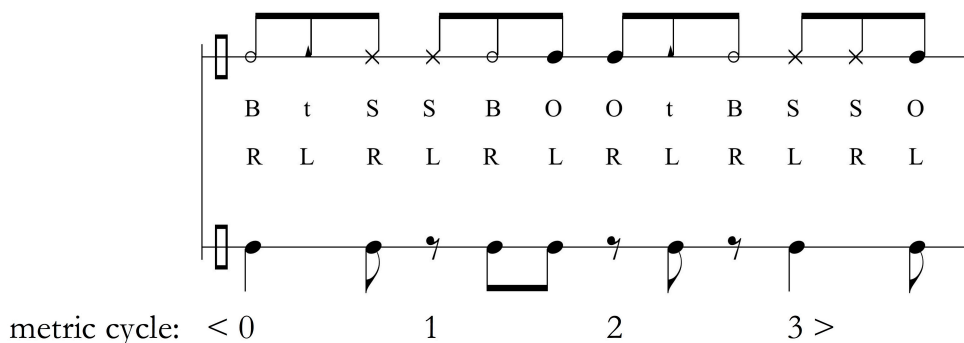


Figure 2. Samba de caboclo with standard pattern timeline.

6. *Jongo* is an Afro-Brazilian community music-dance practice that originated in the farms and cabildos around nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, with many entangled connections to other Afro-Brazilian practices including Candomblé and samba. The city has since expanded to encompass most of the areas where *jongo* is still practiced; I attended *jongo* events under the *viaduto* (viaduct) in Madureira, on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. For more on *jongo*'s historical development see Gandra (1995).

7. All of these terms carry multiple, occasionally contradictory meanings, depending on how they are being used, by whom, and when. Nei Lopes (2005) describes earlier (1930s) depictions of *samba duro* as a form of *samba de partido alto*, but a “vulgar,” “Bahian denomination” (“chula,” “uma denominação baiana”; 22). Venerated samba musician Donga, in an interview with Muniz Sodré, suggests that the *samba de partido alto* of Rio de Janeiro ultimately emerged as the “correct” form of samba (Sodré 1998, 70). Throughout samba's history the divide between the more cosmopolitan samba of Rio de Janeiro's nightclubs and radio stations and the more “African” samba of Bahia and Rio's black community, has remained pronounced and problematic, even as many artists have made continuous, often highly commercially successful inroads toward collapsing that binary.

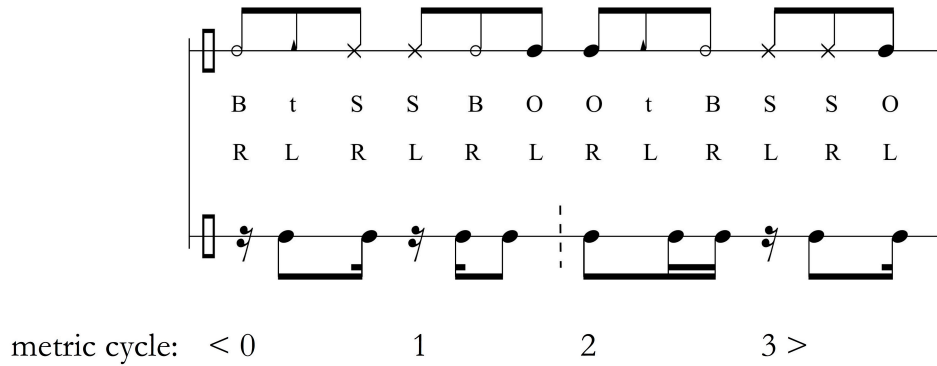


Figure 3. Samba de caboclo with samba timeline.⁸

figures so far. Macambira, one of my teachers in Salvador, described this periodicity as *marcação* (marking), a word that is usually used in conjunction with the *surdo*'s bass tones that mark samba's two-count metric cycle.⁹ I asked him "O que marcam?" (What do they mark?) His answer was "Um outro compasso" (Another *compasso*).

Compasso is a term that can variably mean *beat*, *measure*, or *meter*. For music theorists, the distinction between these terms is rather important. But the Brazilian musicians I worked with seem to float freely between the first two concepts, beat and measure, and between different ways of construing metric cycles. What is significant—what opened a window into an entire ontological framework—is that my teacher did not describe these *marcações* as cross-rhythms or syncopations, or any of a number of other terms that suggest a surface-level phenomenon dependent on a hierarchically prior stable framework—all concepts used frequently and fluently by Brazilian musicians, by the way. He specifically described the periodicity articulated by the bass tones as *another* beat, or *another* meter. When I pressed the question further—"É verdade? Um outro compasso?" ("Really? Another compasso?"), the response was "verdade—são muitos compassos dentro do ritmo" ("There are many compassos within the ritmo"). There are many beats; many isochronous periodicities, articulated or implied, that are expressed through the complex nexus of the ritmo. The 4-cycle bass-tone "outro compasso" is only analytically interesting if we understand that there is another, 3-cycle, metric traversal of the 12-cycle, which is not fully actualized by event onsets but at least virtually present as one of the ritmo's basic organizing principles.¹⁰ The beaming in Figure 2 reflects the 3-cycle. *Compasso* subtends both of these meanings (many beats; many meters); it breaks down the part-whole distinction, foregrounding the irreducibility of the two. Beat, beats, meter,

8. My teacher also rotated the samba timeline to begin on what is shown here as beat 3. This is a property that all timelines share: multiple orientation-perspectives such that more than one timeline location can function as a cycle beginning. See Lehmann (2002) and Stover (2009).

9. The *surdo* is a deep-toned bass drum found across most styles of samba.

10. See Peñalosa (2009) and Stover (2009) for two interpretations of the relation between 3-cycle and 4-cycle (and 2-cycle) traversals of the 12-cycle. I draw upon Deleuze's (1994) concept of virtual and actual in this formulation, where virtual is also very much real in the sense that it has real effects on processes of context-forming.

measure: all shifts in perspective rather than discrete concepts/objects. *Ritmo* here does not mean “rhythm” either as a global term describing the temporal aspects of music or as the surface-level details that dance along a real or virtual metric grid. Rather, ritmo—as employed by the Brazilian musicians I worked with—refers to the array of variably related cyclical rhythmic events that together define a particular *base*, or nexus of co-occurring basic parts that give a musical *type* its identity. In other words, ritmo refers to the basic form of the collective ensemble expression, irreducible to any main element (like a metric framework or timeline), that signals to insiders what type of musical expression is now being played and how one might productively participate. This is crucial in social music contexts, so a musician sitting in will know immediately how to contribute in a positive way.

Some musicians use the word *toque*; in practice *toque* and *ritmo* are synonymous (I heard “toque” more frequently in Rio de Janeiro and “ritmo” in Salvador, but I suspect it is more nuanced than that). Both terms refer to complex constellations of event-strata, irreducible to any single layer. The *toque/ritmo* of carioca (Rio de Janeiro) *roda de samba*’s basic framework includes at least the layers shown in Figure 4: *tamborim* articulating the samba timeline, the *surdo*’s alternating muted (“M”) and open (“O”) tones, the *pandeiro*’s bent (*dobrado*) sixteenth notes, the *cavaquinho*’s *centro*, which one of my interlocutors described as the glue that holds samba together (Thiago Trajano, pers. comm.).¹¹ Figure 4 is a partial transcription of samba artist Beth Carvalho’s 1975 studio recording of “Pandeiro e viola”; Carvalho’s band included many of the most respected samba musicians of the time.¹²

Similarly, Figure 5 shows a Nagô Candomblé ritmo for the orixá Ogum.¹³ This ritmo has a *base* comprised of three interrelated patterns: the timeline as articulated on the *gan* (bell), an embellished version doubled by the support drums *rumpi* and *lê*, and a basic shape from which the improvisatory *rum* parts derive. In both cases the individual strata and the composite are both referred to as *base*: the base or basic part which will be elaborated in performance. Part and whole, once again, fold into one another, just as the very terms *ritmo* and *base* do.

11. The *tamborim* is a small single-headed frame drum, held with one hand and played with a stick or multi-pronged switch. In many samba styles the *tamborim* player endlessly varies the basic timeline pattern shown in Figure 4. *Pandeiro* is an instrument in the tambourine family, also held in one hand and struck with the other hand with a variety of alternating palm/fingertip strokes. *Cavaquinho* is a small four-string guitar that primarily plays a rhythmic accompanimental role in samba, but is also popular as a melodic instrument in *choro* and other styles.

12. See <http://sambaderaiz.org/albuns/beth-carvalho-pandeiro-e-viola/> for a complete list of contributing musicians.

13. Nagô, also known as *ketu* and *ijexá*, is one of three principle streams of Candomblé practice in Brazil, the others being *bantu* and *jeje*. Candomblé refers to a range of syncretic belief systems that draw largely on *yoruba* (in the case of nagô), *kongo* (bantu), and *fon* (jeje) spiritual, ritualistic, linguistic, culinary, and music-dance practices, although all three streams reflect the impingements of complex arrays of cultural practices, including European and indigenous ones. Ogum is the *orixá* (spirit deity) of hunters, metal, and, more recently, drivers.

The image shows a partial transcription of the song "Pandeiro e viola" by Beth Carvalho. It consists of four staves:

- cavaquinho**: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. It features a series of chords, some with grace notes and slurs, indicating a melodic accompaniment.
- tamborim**: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. It shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with accents, typical of the instrument's sound.
- pandeiro**: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with many eighth notes and accents, characteristic of the pandeiro's intricate playing.
- surdo**: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. It shows a simple, steady bass line with a few notes and rests, providing the low-frequency foundation.

 Below the surdo staff, the letters "(M O)" are written, likely indicating specific rhythmic or melodic motifs.

Figure 4. Partial transcription of “Pandeiro e viola” (Beth Carvalho), showing one version of the basic samba ritmo.

The image shows a musical score for the Nagô Candomblé ritmo for Ogum. It consists of three staves:

- rum base**: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern with accents and rests. Above the staff, the letters "S S S O" are written, and below the staff, "M M M M M M O M" are written. Above the first staff, "RH w/ stick" is written.
- rumpi / lé**: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern with accents and rests. Below the staff, the letters "R L R L R L R L R L R L" are written. Above the staff, "LH w/ hand" is written.
- gan**: Treble clef, 2/4 time signature. It features a rhythmic pattern with accents and rests.

 The notation includes various rhythmic symbols such as accents, rests, and specific rhythmic values.

Figure 5. Nagô Candomblé ritmo for Ogum.

“There are many compassos within the ritmo.” This is a problematic statement from the perspective of Western music-cognition studies, which insist that we can only conceive of a single principle entrainment-orientation around which secondary activities orbit. For example, according to these accounts, if we entrain to a four-count traversal of the 12-cycle, then we must hear the 3-count traversal as a dependent cross-rhythm and therefore as not metric. Or, alternately, we can hear the relation between the two strata as composite or resultant rhythms that emerge from the superimposition of two or more periodicities. Most

analytic models, even very sensitive ones (e.g., Peñalosa 2009), assume that a single main beat glues everything together—this beat articulated at least in part by the feet of the dancers, as Kofi Agawu (2003, 73) reminds us. This point is absolutely true, if incompletely so—the dancers in many Cuban styles, for example, do not articulate isochronous main beats; rather, the dancers’ footwork syncopates alongside beats, guided by the latter but in a rich double relationship of determining and determined-by.¹⁴ Similarly, as Barbara Browning has illustrated, samba dancers dance *between* the beats, not on them:

The basic samba step appears to articulate triplets. It requires levity, speed, and dexterity; it also requires accuracy, but not in the sense of hitting the rhythm on the mark. It must locate itself between rhythms. . . . The step is between a triplet set and four sixteenth-notes. (Browning 1995, 12)

More recently, Mari Romarheim Haugen (2014) has used motion-capture and empirical analysis to suggest that this fundamental in-between-ness is a function of samba dance as a gestural pattern rather than one oriented to isochronous metric timepoints. Samba dancers may use beats as their orientation points, but the gestural practice of samba dancing overtly expresses the malleable beat spans that the superimpositions of 12- and 16-cycles engender.

All of this is to say: what happens if we take the words of the practitioners seriously and assume that there *are* multiple beats, and that these might be irreducible to a single main beat? And that, extending this idea, we can potentially entrain to more than one metric periodicity at the same time?¹⁵ A closer examination of the 12-cycle is in order here. Figure 6a shows one iteration of the 12-cycle, represented as twelve unmarked pulses. We can group these pulses into sub-cycles of 3 (Figure 6b), 4 (Figure 6c), 2 (Figure 6d), and 6 (Figure 6e). This is all very well known, of course, as a product of 12’s rich combinatorial nature. What all this suggests is that Macambira’s “muitos compassos” extend, at least potentially, far beyond the 4- and 3-cycle traversals we have engaged thus far.¹⁶ I describe these multiple coextensive metric orientations as a polymorphic or multistable reading of musical meter, borrowing terms from post-phenomenology. The implications of metric polymorphism play out in many ways in Brazilian and other Afro-diasporic musics, for example in improvisational extemporization and in vocal phrasing; again, Deleuze’s conception of virtual and actual presence (and continuously ongoing processes of becoming-actual and becoming-virtual) might be useful in understanding just what these various co-presences can mean perceptually.

14. This paradoxical scenario, where specific events determine larger contexts while also being determined by them, plays out everywhere in Brazilian music (and in much music of or related to the West and Central African diaspora. See Stover (2017) for a more detailed explication of this paradoxical, co-constitutive space.

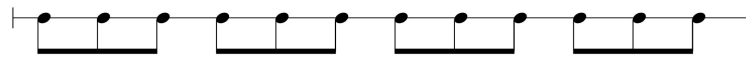
15. I frame this suggestion in phenomenological terms in Stover (2009), and insist that not only can we entrain doubly in this way, but that we must if we are to feel the music in the richly complex way it is intended by practitioners to be felt.

16. See Stover (2009, 128–33) for a more detailed examination of the superimposition of multiple traversals of the 12-cycle beyond the 4-cycle/3-cycle strata.

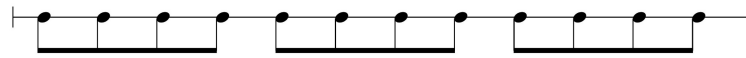
a) unmarked 12-cycle onsets



b) 12-cycle with 3-cycle traversal



c) 12-cycle with 4-cycle traversal



d) 12-cycle with 2-cycle traversal



e) 12-cycle with 6-cycle traversal

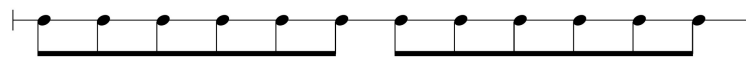


Figure 6. Isochronous traversals of the 12-cycle.

The foregoing examination focuses on plural readings of the 12-cycle. What happens when we superimpose coextensive 12- and 16-cycle strata, as we saw in Figure 3? There are many ways we could analyze this superimposition using conventional music-analytic frameworks. For example, we could analyze this relation as a 16-cycle quadruple framework, traversed by the samba timeline, with a “triplet” superimposition (the 12-cycle) as a nearer-to-surface rhythmic event that “crosses” against it; that is, that is measured alongside it. Or vice versa: we could begin with the 12-cycle triple framework articulated by the *atabaque*, with the samba timeline functioning as a nearer-to-surface 16-cycle quadruplet overlay. In both of these readings a single four-count “main” beat is subdivided into four or three pulses, respectively (Figure 7). We can also fold the two strata into one another to create a single composite structure built around a 4:3 relation of what is notated here as sixteenth notes and eighth-note triplets. This, of course, maps what we already experienced at the metric level

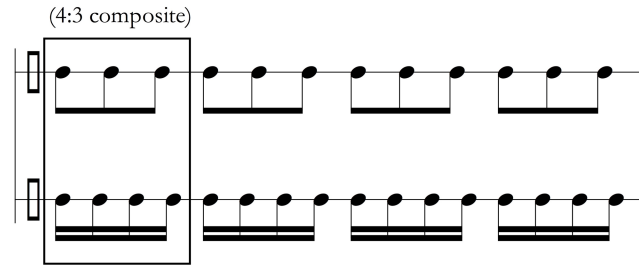


Figure 7. Superimposed 12- and 16-cycle subdivisions of four-beat metric structure.

onto the beat level, as Figure 8 shows. The single composite stratum that results accords with the 2:3 relation that David Locke (cf. 2010) and Eugene Novotney (1998) offer as foundational concepts for the West African music practices they study. It also supports James Burns's (2010) theory of rhythmic interweaving. All of these readings point in different ways toward the irreducible interconnection between layers. We saw this already: in the samba duro example (Figure 3), the 12-cycle and 16-cycle strata need each other, one is not added to the other, they are two of several equal partners that together contribute to the staking-out of samba duro's temporal framework, providing for listeners and dancers its characteristic sound. Importantly, these layers include song and dance, which are fundamental to and constitutive of that framework. Here again we see the conceptual affinity between ritmo and base, as the essential, interdependent, multi-layered structure on which performance practices are built.

With all this in mind, let us return to that term, *marcação* (marking). This is an extremely important word because it reveals something that is not expressed very well in the discourse around timeline music. In the atabaque pattern we have been exploring (Figs. 1–3), the 4-cycle is articulated by the bass tones; another way to put this is that the bass tones *mark* the 4-cycle.

a) parsing of 12-cycle into 3-cycle and 4-cycle



b) subdivision of "main" beat into 3 and 4 parts, reflecting co-extensive 12- and 16-cycles

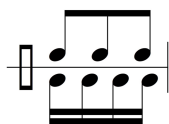


Figure 8. 4:3 superimpositions at the metric and beat levels.

As described above, this is how the surdo’s role—marking the beat in samba—is also characterized.¹⁷ The implication in this language is that the 4-cycle is there whether it is marked or not. It is not latent, or implied, or potential: it is fully present as an experienced phenomenon, inflecting and organizing the performed events around it. This is a critical point. The bass atabaque tones are marking or articulating the 4-cycle, but the 4-cycle is an essential part of the ritmo whether it is articulated by sounded event onsets or not. If this is true (and I believe it is), then it has crucial resonances with at least two aspects of how we think about timelines and the music within which timelines operate.

First, timelines are *also* there whether articulated or not. There are many examples that I could invoke in support of this claim: batá music in Cuban Regla de Ocha practice is one; changüí from Oriente in Cuba is another. In these contexts, the timeline is not *marked*, but it is present as guiding principle, contributing to the structure of other, played, layers.

Second, we should take care to distinguish between a timeline and its sonic articulation—between, for example, a timeline and the bell or claves that express it. For instance, there are many variants to a tamborim pattern in samba, but performed tamborim variants derive from an underlying timeline prototype that, again, is often not overtly articulated.¹⁸ Likewise the clave pattern that Grupo Afrocuba de Matanzas likes to play in *yambú* (Figure 9) is not a different or idiosyncratic clave pattern, it is an ornamented variant of an underlying rumba clave timeline. One important result of rethinking timelines in this way is that we ought to go back and revisit the various lists of timelines that have been catalogued and think carefully about what derives from what.¹⁹ I believe Bertram Lehmann (2002) comes very close with his “syntactic paradigms” that animate the ways in which various timelines unfold, according to certain relatively consistent principles of beat coincidence versus non-

a) yambú clave (from “Pa’ los mayores”)



b) rumba clave prototype



Figure 9. Afrocuba de Matanzas yambú clave, with rumba clave prototype.

17. As can be seen in Figure 4 above, the surdo “marks” each beat 2 in most samba, which could certainly be construed as an “outro compasso” in conversation with the less clearly articulated but structurally salient beat 1. This particular “outro compasso” would be an example of what David Locke calls an “off-beat cycle” (Locke 1982).

18. See Stover (2017) for an analysis of tamborim variations in Cartola’s recording of “Alvorada.”

19. There are many examples, too, of local “one-off” variants added improvisationally to an otherwise steadily repeating timeline articulation, such as an expressive double stroke on a bell to elaborate what would otherwise be a single stroke.

coincidence. To invoke another useful term offered by a key practitioner, Gabi Guedes from the Gantois terreiro in Salvador asks us to have “*respeito pelo caminho da clave*”—*respect for the path of the clave*, which for me also recalls the use in Regla de Ocha of the term *rezes* (roads) in much the same way that I’ve been describing ritmo in Brazilian practice today.²⁰ Exu opens many paths, and there are many ways to follow them.²¹

What is the *caminho da clave*—what is the path (or what are the paths) staked out by the ritmo? I suggest that there are three key themes that together define that path, or that nexus of paths. First is a sense of two different directional implications, loosely related to Victor Zuckerkandl’s (1956, 167–68) away-from and back-to, which I describe as upward (away-from, in terms of syncopations that seem to skip along the metric surface) and downward (back-to, as in realignments with metric phenomena) trajectories, based on preponderances of off-beat or on-beat event-orientations, respectively.²² Second is a non-alignment of this up-down relation with metric cycle beginnings: this can be slightly non-aligned, like the samba timeline (Figure 10) or more pervasively non-aligned, like the standard pattern in its most common rotation (Figure 11).²³ And third is the way these first two themes contribute to a sense of circularity, which is the topic with which this essay will conclude. But first, the Rio de Janeiro-based guitarist Thiago Trajano, who also wrote a fine MA thesis on accompanimental roles in samba and choro (Trajano 2009), suggests that a deep understanding of this notion of up and down (my words) or off-beat and on-beat (his words) is a crucial preliminary step in understanding the microtiming nuances of *suingue*, *dançante*, or *balanço* in Brazilian music. It is to this last concept that I would now like to turn.

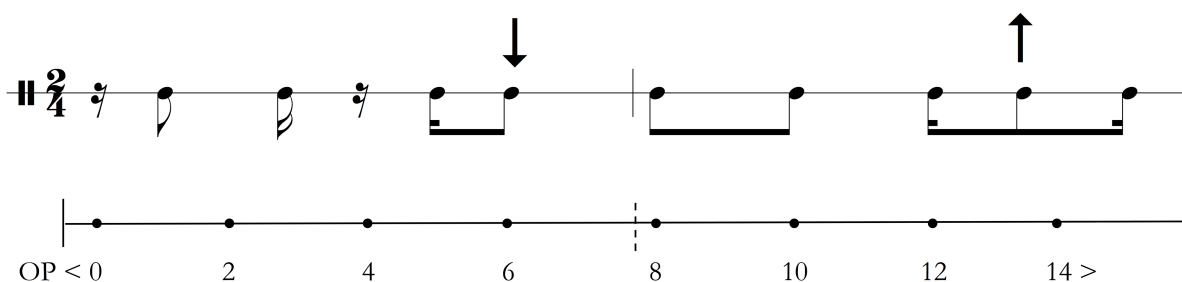


Figure 10. Non-alignments of samba timeline changes of trajectory (indicated by upward and downward arrows) and 16-cycle metric stratum (with felt 2-cycle pulses shown).

20. Guedes said this to a roomful of (mostly young Brazilian) percussionists in a workshop I attended in Salvador da Bahia in May 2016.

21. Exu (Eleguá in Cuba) is the orixá that guards the crossroads, helps (and sometimes hinders) with decision-making, and signifies paradox in many complex forms. In a Candomblé ceremony, Exu is the first orixá to be invoked; an invocation in this context is an invitation for the orixá to come join the proceedings.

22. I apply this concept to timeline music in Stover (2017).

23. Figure 10 shows an eight-count metric cycle rather than the four-count reading (e.g., two measures of 2/4 time) that most readers would expect to find. See Stover (2017) for an analysis that takes both metric interpretations into account, and that explores the phenomenological implications of their perceptual coextension.

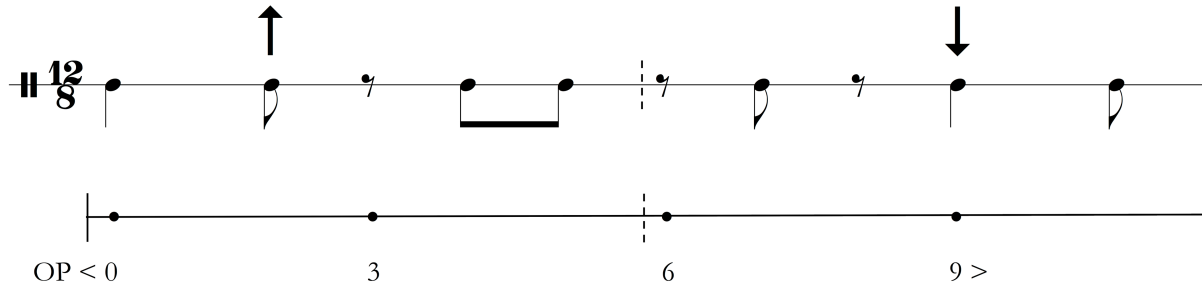


Figure II. Non-alignments of standard pattern timeline changes of trajectory (indicated by upward and downward arrows) and 12-cycle metric stratum.

2. BALANÇO

Balanço is a word that comes to music discourse from capoeira. While it seems to suggest “balance,” it technically refers to an oscillating (self-balancing) *movement*. In the parlance of capoeiristas it refers to how a body, in motion, relates to the ground—balance in this sense is fluid, constantly negotiated between various body parts in response to internal and external stimuli. In other words, balanço is a practice of complex, subtle, graceful negotiation with the performance framework—in capoeira the ground and the lively protean space of the *roda* (the performance circle, formed by the bodies of the participants), but also the metric, rhythmic, and melodic context of the music with which the playing-out of capoeira forms an assemblage.²⁴ Most important, it relates to how a *pair* of bodies interrelate with one another. Capoeira is always played in pairs and involves multiple fluidly changing contact points that engender an ever-changing sense of equilibrium.

Several astonishing points emerge, then, when a term like balanço is translated into a musical setting. First, as I have begun to describe above, balanço is invoked by musicians to refer to the feel of the music—its groove or swing.²⁵ If we take its meaning in capoeira seriously, this means a *processual* relationship in which gravitational balances are constantly

24. One of the best scholarly works on capoeira, which touches on the relationship between music and dance and the generative role of the *roda*, is Lewis (1992). See also Browning (1995).

25. Among the responses provided by a number of musicians to whom I proposed the question of what balanço means were the following: *suingue* (swing), *dançante* (a “dancing” feeling) and “à sensação de ter dançado” (with the sensation of having a dance feel), and *respiração* (breathing). Whatever the preferred term, all of my interlocutors agreed that balanço is (a) absolutely crucial, and (b) ontologically fundamental; practiced and learned from the very beginning rather than added on later to a more quantized, metronomic way of playing. See, for example, Gerischer (2006), describing the related term *suingue baiano*:

Several [of my informants] overtly associated *suingue baiano* with their Afro-Brazilian culture, speaking of their African ancestors, African spirituality, and Candomblé religion as well as of the overwhelming presence of African-Brazilian culture and musical events in their daily lives. All the musicians I interviewed learned percussion by listening. . . . Teachers believe that students need *convivência*—experience—if they are to learn [these rhythms]. (101–2)

Two implications here are that musical *feel* is an index of cultural belonging, and that it is learned through collective, hands-on participation—by listening and doing.

shifting and where relationality to one's environment is being constantly negotiated.

Second, *balanço*, ontologically, involves *motion*—there is no primordial body-in-stasis that then has movement added to it. “O balanço do mar”—the movement-in-equilibrium of the sea—is a metaphor that capoeiristas often invoke to reinforce motion as an a priori constant. From this perspective, we might consider a reading of *ritmo* in music in which the metric framework *is itself already in motion*, rather than a fixed grid against which deviations are measured. As Charles Keil has put it, in a different but not unrelated context, “the matrix is not stable” (Keil and Feld 1994, 106). I will expand on this shortly by describing the 4:3 impingements within main beats as already stretching against one another.

Third, *balanço* involves *relationships* between bodies. In music we might think of these as “musical bodies”: sonic objects and their ecological contexts. Again, this is an ontological claim: bodies in relation are what animate musical contexts. Meter is in this reading a product of these lively, embodied, motional relationships.²⁶

Let me paraphrase these thoughts in the context of musical analysis, responding to a variation of one of the questions that I began this paper with, now recast as “how can a close consideration of the concept of *balanço*, as derived from the discourse of capoeira practice and invoked to describe rhythmic feel across many kinds of Brazilian music, inform our analytic perspective?” *Balanço* in this particular sense is more than swing or groove: it involves fluidly changing, mutually determinant relationships between improvising bodies in motion. Both motion and relationality are ontological features of those bodies' identities; they are not accidental qualities. This is a differential relation that begins with actions. So begins a question that has been asked in various ways of various musical (and other) practices, and is the motivating question behind process philosophy: how can we begin with motion in our construction of analytic identity?²⁷

We might begin by returning to the 4:3 relationship expressed at the beat level when the 12-cycle and 16-cycle are superimposed. In practice, each of these layers engages in subtle processes of pushing and pulling on the other, which is why the specific usage of *balanço* by capoeiristas—as in motion, between bodies affecting and affected by one another—is apt. This is a key factor in imbuing these musics with their characteristic temporal elasticities (see Stover 2009, 236–56). The *result* of these superimpositions and their mutually inflective gravitational pulls is what Christiane Gerischer (2006) calls *suingue baiano*.²⁸ The process of

26. A more nuanced way to say this is that the events, performed by bodies in relations, are themselves in a nexus of relations with the (poly?)metric structure of the music, as well as in dialogue with a musical practice's manifold flux of historical antecedents (for example, with the performance norms of some specific micro-practice(s) of Bahian samba).

27. This, for example, is one of the main questions that animates both Henri Bergson's and Gilles Deleuze's theories of temporal process. See Bergson (1990) and Deleuze (1994).

28. Gerischer's essay is an extremely important empirical contribution that stops short of asking *why* swing is desirable or where it comes from, although she touches on some ontological possibilities in her conclusion (2006, 114–15). It is important to recognize that, while these and other microtiming processes are vital to Bahian musical practices, they are certainly not limited to those performance-practice trajectories.

mutual inflection between layers is what Michael Spiro (describing Cuban musical practices, but the concept holds in Brazilian ones) calls *fix*, a portmanteau of four and six:

Instead of being evenly spaced, certain subdivisions are pushed closer together, which makes the time feel blurry. Half the time you can't even tell if you're in a duple or a triple feel. . . . I call this "averaging" of rhythm between a four and a six feel, "fix" . . . and it is an essential component of learning to swing in these styles. (2006, 38)

The deliberate nature of this was demonstrated to me in Salvador, when my teacher Macambira would carefully stretch a 16-cycle rhythmic gesture until it aligned with the 12-cycle, sometimes taking a very long time to do so (see Figure 13 and supporting text, below).²⁹

Figure 12 is a transcription of the opening moments of "Samba, cachaça e viola," a *samba de chula* performance from São Braz, Santo Amaro, in Bahia. There are a few details to which I would like to draw the reader's attention, all of which reinforce the notion that performed events are always already in motion, always already in-between. First, note how the first *viola*

The musical score for "Samba, cachaça e viola" opening is presented in five staves. The top staff is for the *viola* (treble clef), followed by the *violão* (bass clef). The bottom three staves are for the *marimbula*, *pandeiro*, and *hand claps*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The *viola* part begins with a melodic line of eighth and sixteenth notes. The *violão* part has a bass line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The *marimbula* and *pandeiro* parts are marked with 'x' symbols indicating rhythmic patterns. The *hand claps* part shows a sequence of claps and rests.

Figure 12. Transcription of "Samba, cachaça e viola" opening.

29. Macambira's slow, deliberate morphing of a 16-cycle rhythm gesture into a 12-cycle one reminded me of the liminal friction generated within *Piano Phase* and other early Steve Reich works.

(Brazilian ten-string guitar) figure is stretched: its second onset pulled back in time from where the notation suggests; its third onset anticipating its notated placement. What this sounds like is a gesture stretched *almost* to an isochronous triplet; *almost* into alignment with a virtual 12-cycle metric stratum. The reason I notated it as a sixteenth-eighth-sixteenth, a *fork* (*garfo*) in samba parlance, is because the pattern quickly regularizes as such—from its second iteration in measure 3 it more closely (but not precisely) conforms to a duple, 16-cycle “fork” representation. Second, the hand claps feel like they alternate between an isochronous triplet and a 3-3-2 *tresillo* figure (the second measure notwithstanding), with the third onset of each *tresillo* coinciding with an onset in the viola and *violão* (guitar) parts. Note that each of the notated *x*'s is articulated heterophonically by several clappers, not in precise rhythmic unison with one another—another example of motion as ontologically prior. The notated rhythms are therefore approximations.³⁰ Third, I have notated the *marimbula*'s (a large low-register *kalimba*) first entrance as an eighth note on the “and” of two with a backward-pointing arrow, even though it sounds like this onset occurs a full sixteenth note earlier. This is because this onset represents a very common surdo “call” that invites in the rest of the ensemble—this call is so common in samba that I feel obliged to represent this entrance as such even though it is early enough to easily be represented as a dotted eighth on the “e” of 2.³¹ And fourth, when the pandeiro enters in measure 7, following that *marimbula* call, its onsets are stretched or bent (*dobrado*) like they were in the samba ritmo examined above (Figure 4).

There are a few ways of characterizing microrhythmic flux in African and African-derived music that I increasingly find problematic. These include words like “deviation” and “discrepancy” (cf. Keil and Feld 1994) and concepts like “playing in the cracks” (cf. Chor 2010). The reason I want to push gently against these words and associated concepts is that they assume a fixed prototype from which deviations, etc., might be measured. But in *balanço*, there is no fixed grid, there is only motion and relations. “O balanço do mar”; “The matrix is not stable.” Deviation and discrepancy also suggest that performed onsets represent distortions of an ideal norm, which is metaphysically problematic. A performed event onset is not a deviation from a fixed model: the ideal norm is at best back-formed through analytic scrutiny in an effort to theorize, and to an extent tame—an ethically fraught proposition—a living process. Justin London supports this formulation when he suggests that microtiming “lengthenings and shortenings are not deviations from the norm—they *are* the norm” (2012, 179). This helps explain why so many musicians that I speak with struggle to illuminate just how to achieve a certain swing feel—a certain *balanço*—“that’s just where the notes go!” Similarly, “in the cracks” suggests that there are firm edges around those cracks, when really it is the edges themselves that are bent or folded into one another. Several of my interlocutors invoked the term *dobrado* (bent) to describe the way they phrase their rhythmic onsets. As with this entire conceptual constellation, *dobrado* is an ontological condition, not a mode or

30. The elastic onset-relation of the handclaps articulates another in-between space: between isochronous triplets and their duple counterpart, the pattern, often described in 3+3+2 additive terms, known in Cuban and other contexts as *tresillo*. See Stover (2017) for more on this particular relation.

31. This call is nearly ubiquitous in samba, occurring after a stop-time break to signal the ensemble back in.

accidental property of an ideal, transcendental structure, which is to say that beginning pandeiro players work on it even as they are learning the basics of technique, tone, and style.³²

On the other hand, musician Thiago Trajano describes the process of bending duple toward triple as “melting the subdivision” (pers. comm.). Ethnomusicologist Glaura Lucas in turn describes a process called *repica* in congado music—a constant process of “transforming reality in 2 into reality in 3” (pers. comm., June 2015). Lucas and her interlocutors in the Arturos community in Minas Gerais place great stock in the ritual importance of threes; *repicada*, therefore, has extramusical significance too (and the Arturos’ “reality in 3” has metaphysical implications, as a passage from the material to the spiritual world; see Lucas 2002). Similarly, Macambira refers to “mudando de dois para três” (changing of two into three), and *à kabila* (“like the kabila,” meaning “in the style of samba kabila,” a performance practice associated with Candomblé Angola), the conversation between rumpi and lê that unfolds when triple and duple rhythmic layers each pull the other toward itself, creating a fluid space for improvisational expression that can and does flow freely between the two extremes.³³ Macambira demonstrated this for me many times: playing, for example, an upbeat 16-cycle figure “sempre em cima” (always on top) by stretching it into an increasingly pronounced agogic accent, pulling it ever closer toward the 12-cycle representation shown in the lower right quadrant in Figure 13.

All of this is to say that both perspectives (the back-forming of strata from performed events; the bending of strata into one another) are valuable, and I would argue that neither contradicts the other. In the first case, the performed events, which occur variably across the

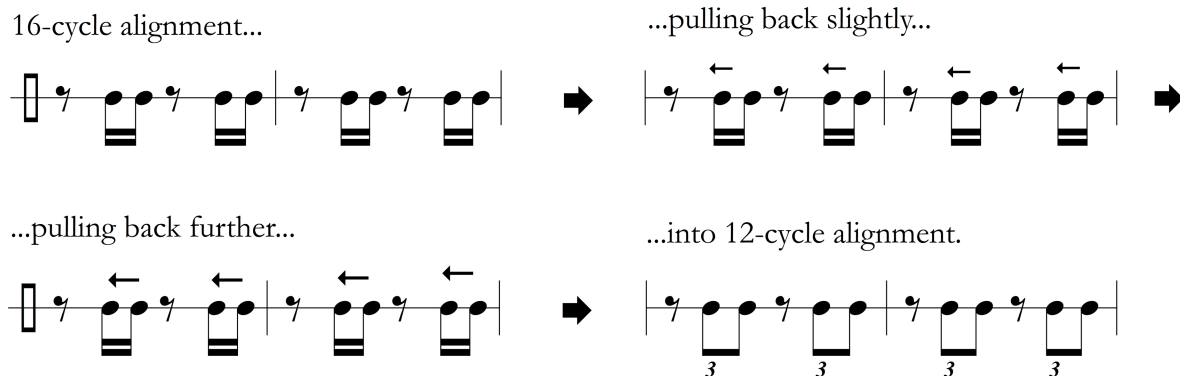


Figure 13. Four stages of a gradual process of bending or melting duple (16-cycle) into triple (12-cycle).

32. In addition to *dobrar* (to bend), I have also heard musicians use *esticar* (to stretch, like a rubber band) and *estender* (to spread, to stretch out, to prolong) to describe what Western music theorists would call microtiming inflections.

33. Neither *repica* nor *kabila* translate well into English, but both refer to the bending of duple into triple, or possibly vice versa. *Repica* has a cognate in *repicar*, which means to sound or toll like a bell, and also to transplant, like a seedling—both of these meanings resonate in the current usage: to resound or reterritorialize in a different reality (“in 3”).

beat span delineated by the superimposition of duple and triple strata, are ontologically prior: performed events are always already participating in the staking out of a liminal space, and quantized metric strata (the 12- and 16-cycles) are back-formed as transcendental concepts for theoretical or pedagogical purposes. In the second case performed events are pulled toward one or the other pole for expressive purposes, sometimes with socio-cultural significations, as we saw in Gerischer's (2006) and Lucas's quotes above. Trajano's "melting" of 2 into 3 works very well in this regard: we experienced a sort of melting phenomenon with the viola rhythm in Figure 12. Both of these concepts/constraints are true—in order to properly comprehend how *balanço* operates in relation to the complex multiplicity of the *ritmo*, we must understand that there are multiple concurrent forces at play, which might seem to contradict one another. (How can defining nodes be drawn via the performed liminal events that flow between them, and also determine/limit the behaviors of those events?) This paradox is essential, however, and one of our first tasks as analysts of this music needs to be to learn to live and function within its paradoxical richness.

3. CIRCULARIDADE

A less challenging paradox is found in circular/cyclical conceptions of metric structure, where each cycle ending functions doubly as a new beginning. Circularity is not a theme specifically addressed by my interlocutors, but as a concept it underlies their discourse in important ways. The way I want to engage circularity builds upon the conceptual spaces developed thus far: the nexus of performed events that together define a *ritmo*, the forces that engender *balanço* or *suíngue* (swing), and the relationship between them.³⁴

Willie Anku famously asserted that "African music is perceived essentially as a circular concept rather than linear" (2000, par. 3). Kofi Agawu (2006, 39–41) has cautioned us to approach this kind of talk with sobriety, not least because we can, if we choose, think of *any* music that involves periodicities as circular on some level. Two questions emerge here: what, specifically, is circular about African (and by extension, Afro-Brazilian) musical time, and why should we think of some musics as essentially circular but not others?

A measure of music goes by, the end of which seems to point to the next beginning, which is a lot like the beginning we just heard. I'm using "measure" here in a very non-technical sense, as in "some span of music that takes up some time, that can be measured proportionally with other spans of music happening before or after it." That is the usual model, which Victor Zuckerkandl (1959) characterized best as away-from; back-to: away from a beginning, then back toward a new beginning, with those trajectories engendered by actual musical events as opposed to some kind of a priori metric code of conduct. We can read Zuckerkandl's model dialectically, or as a Hastian series of temporal projections, or any of a number of other ways; in all cases, an essential relation between the cycle and the events that

34. I provide a detailed analysis of how circularity manifests in Brazilian popular music in a forthcoming essay.

engender it plays a primary role in how we are hearing that beginning-end duality.³⁵

But none of these evince circles. Why not? As anyone who's taken part in or witnessed a Western marriage ceremony has heard, a circle (signified by the wedding ring) has no beginning and no end—it is continuous, unbroken. Clocks problematize this unbrokenness: there's an implicit beginning at or just after 12:00 (reinforced by an “up” bias in Western cognitive thought). But there are many beginnings to the various nested and overlapping cycles the clock unfolds: the first moments of sunrise are a beginning, as is the time one's alarm is set to (as is the time one actually gets up), as is the time one starts work, and so on. So while the structure of the clock's topology tries to stratify time into beginnings and non-beginnings, the things that the clock measures (the day, hour, and minute) have no such a priori beginning-implications. A measure of music, though, even in the loose terms that I'm describing it, does have a beginning—that back-to goes back to something; that something is a new beginning. Western music discourse has a lot of words we can use: cycle, periodicity, meter—but not circle. What would it mean, then, to actually conceive of musical time as, in Anku's words, “essentially circular”?

During my lessons at the Gantois terreiro in Salvador, in my frantic effort to transfer a bit of newly learned information to paper for study later that night (mistrusting my memory, and discouraged by my teachers from recording), I would find myself at times struggling to locate where some played part began in relation to a metric grid. At one point my teacher, Iuri Passos, said something remarkable: “não existe um ciclo, não existe um compasso.” There is no cycle, there is no meter. (*Compasso* used less ambiguously here than in other cases.) And later, “não [há] começa, não [há] compasso”—no beginning, no meter.

Now, once again, we have to parse this carefully. Of course, there is a cycle—a measure of music happens, and then it loops around and happens again. There is a beginning (which we might simply measure based on the first thing heard, but it is often much more complicated than that). These are empirical truths. But again, what if we take seriously the concept behind a statement like cycles and meters and beginnings don't exist? What could possibly be meant by this? Are there performance considerations that might problematize our conception of beginning, which point toward a more circular conception of musical temporality?

Here's what I *don't* think Passos meant: I don't think there are multiple non-coinciding beginning points like Jones (1959), Chernoff (1981), and others have put forth in their transcriptions of African drumming music, where parts drop in wherever the first sounded onset of their pattern begins. This denies too many crucial performance considerations, not

35. See Hasty (1997). Very briefly, Hasty's theory begins with the perception of musical events the temporally unfolding relationships between which engender projections of expectations of continuation. As events occur and various expectation-relations accumulate, we develop an increasingly rich and nuanced sense of how the music might continue to unfold. This process is in every instant either confirmed or denied; if the latter, then that new information (the non-continuation of what was expected to continue) becomes relevant to next expectation-projections.

least Agawu's (1986, 72) important point that silence is a salient something with which a part can begin. But I *do* think this notion suggests a theme that is worth pursuing further. My teacher's words suggest that, on at least one level, insider musicians do not hear or conceive of a cycle in timeline music as a series of discrete events that unfold periodically. Rather, it is a single gestalt that, as I suggested earlier, is divided into two syntactic halves, an upward-directed side and a downward-directed side. These two "sides" come together to form a single temporally extended event that, by the nature of its asymmetry and the maximal individuation of its constituent event onsets (which many theorists have remarked on), allows the performer (or listener) to easily orient at all times to a position within the gestalt, within the cycle as a single extended present. This could account for the virtuosic way that some musicians obscure meter, beat, and timeline with temporally fluid improvisatory gestures while never losing their place in the complex musical fabric.

But there is another way that we might conceptualize this ensemble gestalt, this *ritmo*. Figure 14 shows a transcription of the opening of "Siré de Oxalá" by the celebrated ijexá/afoxé bloco Filhos de Gandhi. The bottom staff shows the *agogô* (double bell) timeline. The next staff up shows the supporting atabaque drums—the *rumpi* and *lê*. These three parts together form the *base* for ijexá. There are a few details to which I would like to draw the reader's attention. First, the *agogô* timeline, like all timelines, I argue, has what we might call two halves, a more syncopated half that I call the upward-directed side, and a straight or downward-directed side.³⁶ These are shown by upward- and downward-pointing arrows respectively, commencing just after the cycle beginning (which is indicated by "1"). Note that there is a second up-down relation articulated by the *agogô*, expressed by its alternating high-low bell tones and suggesting a nested periodicity half the length of that of the timeline. This faster periodicity is outlined overtly by the *rumpi* and *lê* (shown by the horizontal brace above the third staff). This kind of nested cycle occurs frequently in timeline music; viz. the *surdo* part in samba and *tresillo* in some Cuban music forms.

The top system shows the vocal melody or *cantiga*. When the lead singer enters, the stable periodicity of the *agogô*-*rumpi*-*lê* base is disrupted: the vocal phrasing orients toward a new hypermetric downbeat on the "down" side of the *agogô* pattern, indicated by "2" in measure 2 in the figure, and preceded by what is easy to hear as an anacrusis. The voice continues with this orientation, through the choral response, and indeed for the entirety of the performance. As listeners, we have three options in terms of how to process this new information and entrain to the resulting texture. First, we can "flip the clave"—we can shift our perceptual perspective so we hear the new downbeat articulated by the vocal phrasing (that is, shift our orientation so that "2" is now the downbeat). This is easy to do and

36. One iteration of the ijexá timeline is represented by two measures of music in this example. The short *rumpi*-*lê* cycle is represented as one measure. The reader may choose to conceive of these as 2-bar hypermetric and 1-bar metric layers respectively, but it is also okay to simply think of them both as metric; this is another way in which multiple metric construals function in dialogue with one another.

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with five staves. The top staff is for the vocalists (cantores), and the lower four staves represent the percussion instruments: rum, rumpi, lé, and agogô. The notation includes various rhythmic values, rests, and articulation marks. Key annotations include:

- (anacrusis)**: A bracketed annotation above the first two measures of the cantores staff, with a curved arrow pointing to the second measure.
- (short cycle)**: A bracketed annotation above the first two measures of the rum staff.
- (displaced long cycle)**: A bracketed annotation above the first two measures of the rum staff, indicating a phase shift relative to the short cycle.
- (long cycle)**: A bracketed annotation below the first two measures of the agogô staff.

Measure numbers 5, 10, and 15 are indicated at the beginning of their respective systems. The score concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fourth system.

Figure 14. Transcription of “Siré de Oxalá,” from o:II.

cognitively unproblematic.³⁷ Second, we can retroactively interpret what we heard prior to the vocal entry as beginning in the middle of the cycle: after all, we know by now that beginnings don't have to be where some particular layer of musical information begins. In this reading, "1" is retroactively revealed not to have been a downbeat at all. And third, we can hear doubly: we can entrain to the *ritmo* downbeat on the "up" side of the timeline *and* the vocal downbeat on the "down" side (that is, both "1" and "2" compete perceptually for downbeat status), amounting to another case of metric multistability. This suggests two important questions though: how can we do this, and why would we want to?

A partial answer to the first question lies in the role of the support drums' short cycle: both the agogô and vocal orientations align with rumpi-lê short-cycle beginnings. The rumpi-lê short cycle mediates our double hearing. The "why" question is more interesting though and returns us to the quotes I cited above: "there are many compassos"; "there is no compasso." These are really two different ways of making the same point: to say there is no metric frame is to problematize the beginning-orientation that meter suggests, which is really to say that there are multiple co-occurring ways to orient to meter. And that not only *can* we orient multiply, concurrently, but we *should* do so, and we *must* do so to hear as insiders.

The relationship between the agogô timeline and the vocal phrasing in this Filhos de Gandhi performance therefore suggests a double-hearing strategy: hearing two downbeats in dialogue with one another, mediated by the rumpi-lê short cycle. But there's more. The second system of Figure 14 shows the *rum*, the lead drum, which is improvised. In order to understand the role of the rum in ijexá, we need to get out of the score and listen: to the music, and to the words of the practitioners. Three different teachers explained to me that the rum, in ijexá, improvises phrases that point to downbeats—"que aponta pelo 'um'" ("that point to the one"). Figure 15 extracts the rum part from Figure 14, with the ijexá timeline in the lower staff. Annotations show the directed motions of rum gestures, pointing to what are perceived by practitioners as downbeat arrivals. This is clearly hearable in the recording: each gesture-ending arrival receives a slight dynamic accent, often preceded by a crescendo. Recall that the rum part is improvised. The improvisation in this case is not based on an underlying prototype (as is the case with the tamborim part in samba or the support drums in Cuban rumba), but there is a small repertoire of characteristic gestures. The only constraint is to improvise phrases that point toward that next "one."³⁸ Everything is pointing to a downbeat, but that downbeat is on the fourth beat of the timeline, or the second beat of each second notated bar. We now have *three* downbeats!³⁹

37. For more on clave flips see Simpson-Litke and Stover (2019, 75, 99–100).

38. There is an additional constraint, which is that rum improvisations dialogue with the dance choreography in important ways. I thank one of the anonymous reviewers of this essay for reminding me of this additional relational connection. Note that if the reader is uncomfortable with this characterization as another downbeat, we could temper our language and simply refer to it as salient goal of motion. But I do believe that there is strategic analytic value in doing so and ask the reader's indulgence as I continue into more speculative territory.

39. It is important to make a distinction between what I am here positing as rotated downbeats in dialogue with one another and the "multiple non-coinciding beginning points" of Chernoff, Jones, and others that I argued



Figure 15. Directed motions toward perceived downbeat arrivals in rum improvisation.

The reader is encouraged to practice hearing these three downbeat orientations. The *Filhos de Gandhi* excerpt is an excellent way in: we can attend to the beginning accent of the agogô timeline (aligning with a metric beat and the onset of the higher of the two bell tones), then add to this the vocal phrasing with its melodic and harmonic implications, and then finally the third “downbeat” marked by the rum’s arrival points. We can practice shifting our orientation between them, attending variously to different strata. And we can practice engaging all three at once, not as a single composite gestalt but as three co-occurring downbeat orientations that taken together evince circularity in a remarkably convincing way.

I imagine if I stopped there some readers might respond with a question that goes something like: there’s a downbeat on hypermetric beats 1, 3, and 4—is there any situation in ijexá music where beat 2 is also invoked as a downbeat, to complete the circle, as it were? I stumbled upon a highly speculative potential answer to that question in an entirely different context, when I was talking with one of my teachers in Salvador about the porous borders between musical practices in Brazil. One day when we were playing samba together in his basement studio, Macambira started playing the ijexá agogô pattern along with my samba *kabila*. Only it was oriented in the manner shown in the third staff of Figure 16. That is, he oriented his part so the offbeat beginning of the samba timeline (see Figure 4) coincided with the fourth onset of the ijexá agogô part (see Figure 14). Notice the number of onset alignments between the samba and ijexá timelines that result from this superimposition (all circled). In

against above. In the latter case, beginnings are invariably associated with event onsets in a way that I find ontologically untenable, but more importantly that overdetermines (and quite possibly falsifies) the role that event onsets play in metric determination. In the case of my current hypothesis (abetted by my interlocutors’ statements and actions), multiple (rotated) downbeat orientations amount to a conscious or semi-conscious plan to evince a sense of circularity: to retain a global sense of metric or cyclic structure but to erase any clear sense of beginning, so that once enacted the circle spins along unbroken.

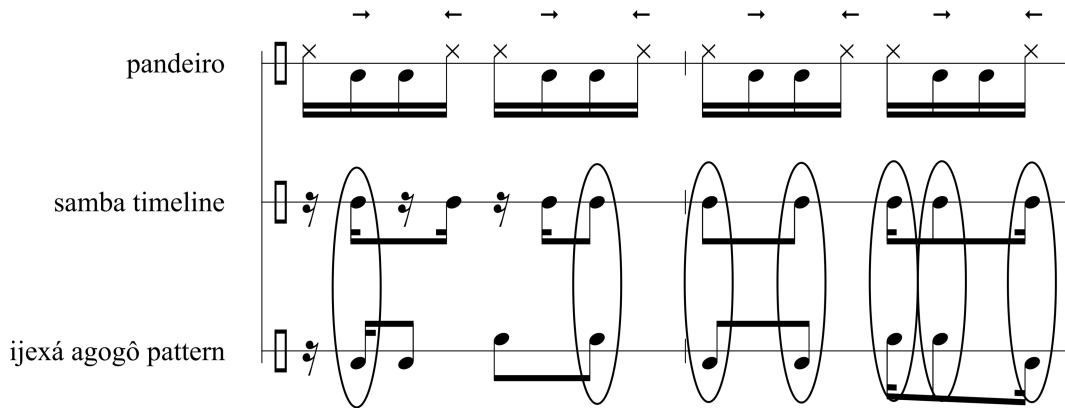


Figure 16. Samba and ijexá timeline superimposed.

other words, by bringing samba into dialogue with ijexá, a more complete circle is drawn—four downbeat orientations, none (presumably) more prior than any other (Figure 17). The beginning accent of the agogô (1) sets things in motion, but the salience of the vocal part (as well as its harmonic and textual orientation) quickly establishes a second entrainment orientation (2) that can easily disrupt the first. And the rum, as the mother drum, communicating with both dancers and the orixás, could easily be said to supplant both previously established orientations (3). And finally, the line of flight that takes us from ijexá to samba (4) reinforces the radical openness of this nexus of musical practices, opening spaces for further arrays of communicative possibilities by subtending genre and foregrounding the essential openness and fluidity of Brazilian musical practice. I repeat that this fourth

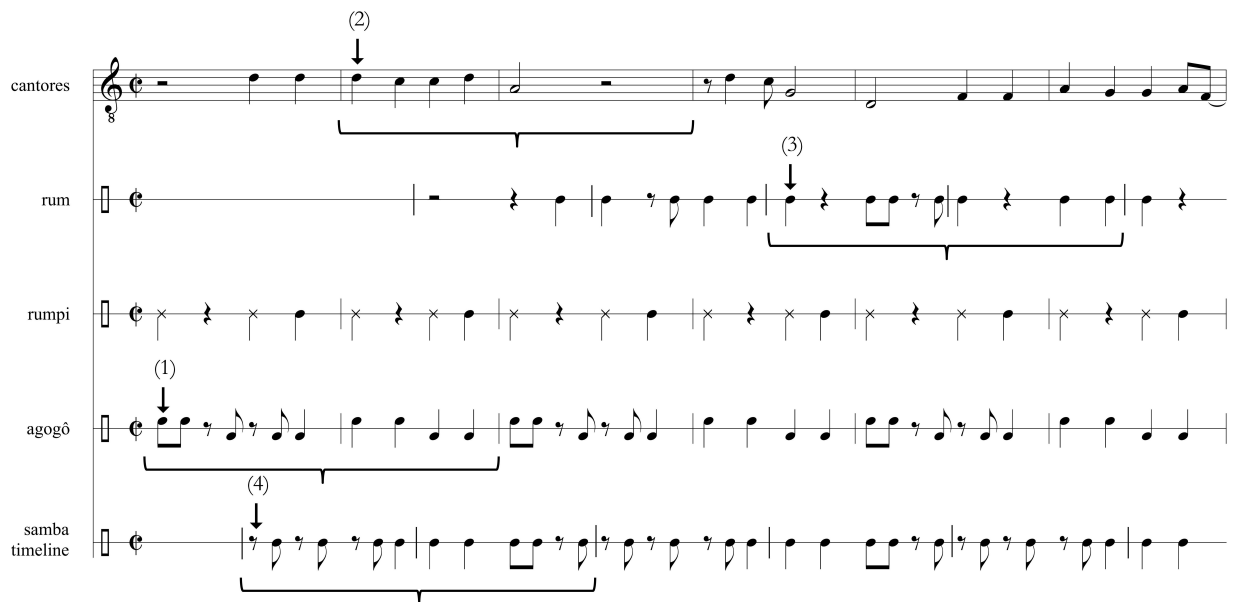


Figure 17. Four “beat ones” in or implied by ijexá ritmo.

downbeat is highly speculative, but of course these are living, evolving practices, and so perhaps all of this (including Macambira's superimposition that stimulated this line of thought) points more toward future performance practices than existing ones.

* * *

In this essay I have engaged a number of intricately interwoven terms and concepts that my interlocutors in Brazil used to describe aspects of their practices. Using these as conceptual entry points, I have suggested some potentially fruitful theoretical methods that might be brought to bear when analytically engaging different Brazilian musics. I specifically mention several kinds of samba, ijexá, and one Candomblé ritmo, but as I have labored to emphasize, these concepts apply across many Brazilian genres,⁴⁰ those genre borders are essentially porous, every performance practice affects every other in mutually transformative ways, and most performers are fluent across numerous practices. It is important to reinforce that the discursive spaces opened up by starting with these words—e.g., the differential semantic proliferations that flow from balanço to suingue, dobrado, repica, kabila, and on and on—are materially grounded; that is, they are essential to actual, lived performance practices, including the very ways in which musicians learn to play different instruments in different contexts. It is also important to clarify what my specific project has been in this essay: to *use* these words and concepts to begin to build a theoretical apparatus through which we can newly understand these performances practices. In doing so, I am determinedly *not* practicing analytic ventriloquism: I am not suggesting that my interlocutors are making the analytical claims that I am making (for example, I am not suggesting that Macambira is reorienting the ijexá timeline to complete the four-downbeat circle). My theoretical apparatus is therefore creative and contingent, and I encourage the reader to imagine ways to take it up differently, to see what *else* it can do.

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40. Possibly including non-nominally "Afro"-Brazilian genres like forró and frevo: the ways in which (urban, black) musical practices have impinged historically on these genres is a subject that needs to be taken up in future research.

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