

REPRESENTATION IN THE SOCIOTECHNICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR LEGITIMIZING CONTEMPORARY POPULAR SINGING¹

A REPRESENTATIVIDADE NOS ARRANJOS SOCIOTÉCNICOS DE LEGITIMAÇÃO DO CANTO POPULAR CONTEMPORÂNEO

REPRESENTATION IN THE SOCIOTECHNICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR LEGITIMIZING CONTEMPORARY POPULAR SINGING

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this article focuses on musical artistic arrangements in the circuits of circulation and reception of audiovisual symbolic goods. The purpose is to examine the mediations that affect the mutual intertwining of the adoption of visibility strategies by different profiles of artistic individuals with the taking of positions in relation to issues involving morality and the legitimization of symbolic goods. The analytical emphasis will be on the encounter between Madonna, Anitta, and Pablo Vittar at the concert by the American singer Madonna, which took place on May 4th on Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro. The proposal, ultimately, is to situate this encounter between what I define as visibility/legitimation arrangements.

KEYWORDS: Representation. Popular singing. Madonna show. Rio de Janeiro. Visibility/legitimation arrangements.

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RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo se concentra nos agenciamentos artísticos musicais nos circuitos de circulação e recepção de bens simbólicos audiovisuais. A finalidade é examinar as mediações com incidência no entrelaçamento mútuo da adoção de estratégias de visibilidade por diferentes perfis de individualidades artísticas com a tomada de posição frente a pautas que envolvem moralidades e a legitimação de bens simbólicos. A tônica analítica estará depositada no encontro entre Madonna, Anitta e Pablo Vittar, no show da cantora estadunidense Madonna, ocorrido em 4 de maio de 2024, na praia de Copacabana, no Rio de Janeiro. A proposta, no limite, é situar esse encontro entre o que defino por arranjos de visibilidade/legitimação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Representatividade. Canto popular. Show da Madonna. Rio de Janeiro. Arranjos de visibilidade/legitimação.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo se centra en las agencias artísticas musicales en los circuitos de circulación y recepción de bienes audiovisuales simbólicos. El propósito es examinar las mediaciones que inciden en el entrelazamiento mutuo de la adopción de estrategias de visibilidad por parte de diferentes perfiles de individuos artísticos con la toma de posiciones en relación a cuestiones que involucran moralidades y legitimación de bienes simbólicos. El énfasis analítico estará puesto en el encuentro entre Madonna, Anitta y Pablo Vittar, en el concierto de la cantante estadounidense Madonna, que tuvo lugar el 4 de mayo, en la playa de Copacabana, en Río de Janeiro. La propuesta, en última instancia, es situar este encuentro entre lo que defino como arreglos de visibilidad/legitimación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Representatividad. Canción popular. Espectáculo de Madonna. Río de Janeiro. Acuerdos de visibilidad/legitimación.

Recurring in the Brazilian political scene since the past decade, the polarization between “progressives” and “conservatives”² was once again staged in June 2022 through social media posts, with repercussions in print newspapers and television programs. This episode revealed a new chapter in what some scholars define as the country’s “culture wars” (Festa, 2017). This time, beyond partisan-ideological disputes – and much like what occurs in the religious field – the noisy uproar centered on controversies involving current pop music celebrities in Brazil. During

² The use of the labels “progressive” and “conservative” does not serve an analytical function here, especially since it would be difficult to ideologically categorize the heterogeneous groups that align with either position. In this sense, the use of both terms is solely intended to highlight the polar contrast between the stances.

a concert held on June 12, 2022, in the city of Sorriso, in the state of Mato Grosso, the singer Zé Neto, who performs in a duo with Cristiano, while praising himself for not relying on public funding to support his career, accused the singer Anitta of benefitting from the Rouanet Law – a federal legal mechanism that supports artistic and cultural activities – and of achieving popularity through scandal. In the excerpt below, the singer links the group of “artists” to which he belongs with the economic strength of agribusiness – a sector he claims was responsible for sustaining the country during the pandemic, represented by the prosperity of the audience that attended his performance:

Sorriso, Mato Grosso, one of the states that sustained Brazil during the pandemic. We are artists who don’t depend on the Rouanet Law; our fee is paid by the people. We don’t need to get a tattoo on our “ass” to show whether we’re doing well or not. We simply come here and sing (Zé Neto, 2022, our translation)³.

The episodes referenced by the sertanejo⁴ singer involved both the announcement that Anitta had gotten a tattoo on her anus⁵, and the fact that she reached the number one spot on Spotify’s Global Top 50 between March 24 and 27 of that year. Her song *Envolver* was the most played on the platform globally. Spotify is a digital service that enables users around the world to instantly access a wide and diverse array of songs, podcasts, videos, and other content from various countries and continents. The platform has established itself as one of the leading forums for the visibility and legitimation of symbolic musical audiovisual goods.

Zé Neto’s remarks went viral on social media, particularly on X (formerly Twitter), and many of his digital followers launched a campaign of defamation and insults against Anitta, including death threats directed at her fans. Critics of the singer accused him of “macho attitude,” “fascism,” and disrespect toward other musical genres, even labeling him as “racist.” In response, also on X, Anitta sarcastically quipped: “And here I was thinking I was just getting a tattoo on my tororó.”⁶ In the following days, the exchange of barbs between the artists continued to fuel the controversy. This dispute, however, was magnified due to new allegations involving payments made to sertanejo singers and duos, as well as to artists from other genres, such as *forró* – especially the singer Wesley Safadão. The duo Zé Neto and Cristiano and the singer Gustavo Lima, also from the sertanejo genre, became central figures in the news after being accused of receiving irregular payments from municipal

³ <https://g1.globo.com/ms/mato-grosso-do-sul/noticia/2022/05/22>. Accessed July 4, 2022.

⁴ Sertanejo comes from sertaneja music, being its third movement. Simple songs predominate in this style, and because of the young singers, it is considered “university.”

⁵ See: <https://g1.globo.com/rs/rio-grande-do-sul/noticia/2022/06/02>. Accessed June 10, 2023.

⁶ See: <https://g1.globo.com/pop-arte/musica/noticia/2022/05/29>. Accessed in: July 4, 2022.

governments in various regions of the country – sums allegedly disproportionate to the cities' budgetary conditions. Intervention by public prosecutors from several Brazilian states intensified the debates about the abusive use of “public funds” to pay popular music artists. Rumors even circulated about the possible formation of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) in the National Congress to investigate favoritism toward sertanejo artists and other widely popular performers, whose popularity is often measured by views on platforms like YouTube⁷.

Interviewed on TV Globo's *Fantástico* the Sunday following the revelations, Anitta advocated for ending the controversy and opposed the opening of a “sertanejo CPI.” In her view, it was more important to investigate and punish systemic corruption in the country, refusing to perpetuate any “hate speech” against the artists who had offended her. She emphasized the need to ensure that residents of smaller towns also have access to entertainment, affirming that leisure should be recognized as a right for the entire population:

Those of us in the music industry have always known this existed. [...] “Oh, you charge this much, then I'll take a cut.” I said: “No.” “He'll give you a bit more if you say you received this amount.” I said: “Sweetie, this is my fee. Take it or leave it.” [...] Since our company started from nothing, we always hire auditors because we're afraid of doing something wrong out of ignorance.

[...] I don't wish harm on anyone; I wish for the end of corruption. That's it. Entertainment funding is important, yes. I've done municipal shows for considerable, justifiable fees. There are indeed cities that never had the opportunity to see a show or have access to certain things. Entertainment funding is very important. So, let's not generalize (Anitta, 2022, our translation)⁸.

Although grounded in the convergence of the moral agenda on customs, the controversies briefly recounted here suggest multiple socio-symbolic layers intertwined and synthesized in this episode. Social media platforms stand out in particular because they have been amplified far beyond mere channels for disseminating cultural goods and personal profiles of both famous and anonymous figures. With access to these platforms, uses for the formation and mobilization of public opinion emerged, involving judgments about these very issues arranged in a polarized confrontation between “conservatives” and “progressives.” In this case, they imposed themselves as privileged forums for disputes over the recognition and consecration of artistic personalities. While neither side can be credited with initiating systemic rupture – since both reaffirm entertainment and symbolic goods markets – from

⁷ See: <https://revistaquem.globo.com/QUEM-News/noticia/2022/05/>. Accessed in: June 10, 2023.

⁸ See: <https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/politica/2022/06/05/>. Accessed in: July 4, 2022.

the standpoint of the architecture of values inherent in the digital semiotic clashes between followers/admirers of the sertanejo duo and of Anitta, different biases in representing the customs agenda were at stake in the confrontations.

As I have observed, the exchanges of accusations and insults between followers/admirers of singer Zé Neto and Anitta confirmed the complicity between modes of subjectivation and technique, as they occurred within environments specific to informational socio-technical ecologies. It is worth noting that since the last turn of the century, the hegemony enjoyed by audiovisual media in the public sphere has advanced. This medium, in turn, has interacted with intersections between human bodies and informational devices which, through the ascendancy of cybernetics and digital language over people's experiences and behavioral patterns, promote the execution of protocols of expression and self-reporting at an unprecedented level in human history (Sibilia, 2015; 2016). The complicity established on networks between commodification, content curation, and uses in maximizing such communicational environments developed in tandem with internet connectivity via the proliferation of digital screens, encompassing devices such as mobile phones, PCs, televisions, and notebooks. This enables the exchange of videos, photos, audio, and texts through instant messaging, composing a formidable archive. In such an ecology, thanks to the fusion of subjectivation among citizen, consumers, and activists, the transition occurred from the "spectator" to the status of "user" with expressive agency, owing to the assembly of social networks – Facebook (2004), X (2006), and Instagram (2010) – closely linked with the emergence of video platforms like YouTube (2005) and messaging apps (text, audio, visual, and audiovisual) for mobile phones such as WhatsApp (2010).

Nevertheless, this same space of visibility – constituted by media interaction and paced by the cultural prominence of entertainment – is generated by the continuous and voluminous global flow of musical sounds and audiovisual works, with particular prominence given to the industrialized culture of the United States, where behaviors aligned with lifestyles marked both by hedonism and by the agenda of "liberation of customs" are performed. Such phenomena have raised the possibility of significant changes in the norms of public emotional expression, emphasizing behaviors characterized by informality and the visibility of private and even intimate aspects in the common sphere of experience in highly personalized settings, engaging consumption of goods and services encompassed by the connotations of well-being and quality of life, desire, and intensified bodily exposure (Lipovetsky, 2010).

Taking into account the traits mentioned above, linking changes in moral frameworks with the emphasis on struggles for credibility/legitimation through the visibility of symbolic goods and the consecration of positions in popular music, this article argues that the nexus between representativeness in the public sphere and entertainment stands as an unavoidable aspect of contemporary culture. We under-

stand that entertainment is inseparable from the way social agents perceive and give plasticity to the meaningful chains of their acts. Yet these expressions unfold within temporal and spatial constraints rooted in the distribution of resources (political, economic, and symbolic). This occurs at a stage in the networks of technofunctional interdependencies in which one of their developments is the regulation of human activities according to the zoning of entertainment itself. In this zoning, the recognition of public image exposure for entertainment purposes prevails as a structural component of conduct. This happens insofar as the spatiotemporal recurrence of individuals' actions is understood within the circumstances of their experiences. On the other hand, as actors enabled by knowledge, people are considered to appropriate their lived history creatively. In this sense, individuals not only carry meanings as coercively external objectivities but also live, enact, and reinterpret them when analyzing their attitudes (Farias, 2014, p. 33-74).

In view of the controversies briefly outlined here, I suspect that, on one hand, political, economic, moral, and expressive dimensions intersect within them, which makes them interact with ideological stances, conditions of inscription within collective identity frameworks (class, ethno-racial, gender, sexual orientation, socio-spatial reference, and others), as well as with moral and epistemic barriers, and even with the most diverse cosmological frameworks. On the other hand, the multiplication of their semantics – especially because these versions are often contradictory among themselves – signals the social struggles in which they participate, as well as the perception that the artistic-cultural fact becomes an object of dispute and a trigger of conflicts.

These are situations that confront the conception of social justice, whose emphasis, as deposited by political economy on the theme of redistribution of the means of production and collective product, focusing on the instrumental-cognitive dimension of capitalist society, prioritized class determination and, with it, the figure of workers as the universal subjects of history. The strength lent to the vigor of meaning policies amid waves of social movements – especially those emerging from the 1960s onward, emphasizing the struggle for recognition (Fraser, 2022, p. 205-222; 2019) – highlights the centrality occupied by other social markers in the outbreak and translation of collective conflicts and in the modes of constructing personal and group identities, whether more or less stable. Furthermore, it highlights how the communicative techno-symbolic systemic operability – whose object is the conviction/persuasion mediated by supports connected in networks for the transmission of audio modalities, visuals, and audiovisuals – anticipates the triggering and conduction of conflicts, to the same extent that it impacts the production of patterns of subjectivity.

Already notable is the socio-historical connection established between moral struggles grounded in the issue of identity recognition and the complex functional

division and socio-systemic contributions that channel expressive possibilities in the markets of popular singing in contemporary Brazil. Therefore, I problematize this empiricism in light of the triangulation now established among artistic careers, media convergence in the production/circulation of musical goods, and the flows of opinion dissemination in the socio-technical ecology, but from the perspective of the repercussions in different social planes of the moral agendas related to identity recognition and the extent to which they foster representativeness as a requirement for obtaining visibility and legitimacy in contemporary socio-historical conditions. By representativeness, one understands the expressive competence attributed to individuals who enjoy authorization, and thus legitimate (consented) visibility, to manifest on behalf of or to establish themselves as representatives of groups or even socio-political entities, such as the “Black people” (Hooks, 2019). The authorization is supported by the identification of some physical attribute(s) (skin color, hair texture, phenotype, gestures, style of dress, etc.) and/or related to their positions in the public space that directly link them to the connection between public image conventions, identity proposition, and values attuned to the esteem of the potentially represented. The reverse side involves the continuous, although modulated, performative enactment of the social role of that exemplary, even paradigmatic, character of the propositions that endorse their presentation as a celebrity on digitized pages, particularly on social networks (Ortiz, 2016).

The analytical and reflective objective of this article focuses on musical, and artistic agencies within the circuits of circulation and reception of audiovisual symbolic goods. The purpose is to expand the repertoire of knowledge about mediations involving the mutual interweaving of the adoption of visibility strategies by different profiles of artistic individuals with the taking of positions regarding agendas that involve moralities and the legitimization of symbolic goods. Empirically, the focus will be on the show of the American singer Madonna, which took place on May 4, 2024, on Copacabana beach in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The choice of this episode is due to the artist’s biographical trajectory, whose positions favoring women’s emancipation (performed stances in songs and stage enactments) resonated in the representation politics of other artists in popular singing who emerged worldwide as affirmative icons of identities targeted by rejection and stigmatization.

From this perspective, the analytical emphasis will rest on the encounter among Madonna, Anitta, and Pablo Vittar. The proposal is to situate this encounter within what I define as arrangements of visibility/legitimization. These comprise combinations in which mobile orders are generated through unpremeditated reconciliations, related to elective affinities but within the scope of the historical dynamics in which image commodification unfolds. Bringing together mutual agencies of people, things, and institutions, these unstable spaces consist of interactions that produce qualifications and requalifications of cultural goods. I take arrangements

of visibility/legitimization as figurations of techno-social and functional interdependencies composing socio-technical networks that, as microcosms of symbolization (expression, normatization, and adjudication), by their entertaining nature, neither mirror nor miniaturize a totality that would encompass them. Attentive to the more or less contingent character typical of the precariousness of these micropolitical coagulations, I examine the arrangements of visibility/legitimization as the concrete and immediate plane of socio-historical reality, in which consensuses about prestige are woven and/or names fall into disgrace through cancellation tactics triggered on social media, only to later disappear into the shadow of oblivion.

On the stage of the encounter, the materiality of a ritual of interaction among three artistic profiles

The meeting, in a single situation, of three artistic biographies shaped by their respective profiles is a device adopted strategically to examine the arrangements of visibility/legitimization with their properties, dynamics, and organizational modalities. Thus, throughout this section, without any commitment to conducting an ethnography of the event, nor identifying it as the focal point of the analysis, I employ in the developed argument elements resulting from participant observation during Madonna's show on Copacabana beach. Initially, conceptually, I appropriate what Goffman (2011) defines as an "interaction ritual" to probe the situation experienced there concerning the effects of the encounter among people in adjusting their front stages in the public enactments of personalities. Topics such as competence and bodily dispositions gain prominence, since they are embedded in the sociological ways of dealing with human individual agency entertained by others, converging in the reiteration or not of knowledge, institutions, and orders in the circumstantiality of encounters. However, it must be noted that, due to the interest in situating biographies in socio-historical processes to broaden the explanatory horizon of behaviors, I shift the semantics of the same notion of situation, because here it concerns the unintended effect of a multiple diversity of practices and choices not attributable to particular individuals. This anonymous characteristic leaks beyond the immediacy of the event proper to the interaction ritual, placing it at the core of space-time chains, intertwining historical longevity and synchronicity of events in a complex aggregate of elements. It is from the viewpoint of chains of technical-functional interdependencies that I adopt Tim Ingold's (2015) perspective when, dissatisfied with what he sees as abusive recursion to the idea of materiality observed in some literature, he returns to the conception of matter. He conceives it in the figure of a spider to dispense with the concept of agency, which would correspond to a potential in itself that, when equipped with the right tools, would project itself by operationalizing the

environment according to its purposes, exercising control over materialities. Unlike the agent, like spiders, there would be woven threads; the weave itself would be matter. Finally, always transformational and subject to relational movement, matters consist of the webs they themselves compose.

Above, I suggested the reverberations of socio-historical changes in the heightened emphasis currently given to the theme of representativeness in addressing the visibility/legitimization pairing of artistic profiles in popular music. In this regard, among these changes, I speculate that the growing interference of socio-technical ecologies and social networks plays a role, insofar as they relate both to the fragmentation of the means of phonographic production and to the diversification of the modes of organization and regulation of cultural production and circulation. Although both aspects give rise to shared spaces, the background of the analysis lies in the weaving of this matter, shaped by the synchronicity established between the transformation of transnational record labels into curatorial organizations – which hold control over the definition of the modes of exhibition and circulation of musical goods – and the reconceptualization of the idea of public images of singers and bands (Chou, 2020; Dias, 2012, p. 63-74). I argue that this systemic operability plays a key role in the dynamics of making musical commodities visible, which are now inseparable from media convergence as manifested in the audiovisual format of music videos and their impact on digital video platforms. This, in turn, is the structural reverse side of the performance of artists as celebrities on internet-based social networks. For the purposes pursued here, already considering this corporate strategy, the key point to be observed is how much it contributes to the development of artistic careers aligned with moral struggles for identity recognition, and how much it enhances the issue of representativeness as a key item for legitimizing personal images as inseparable properties of symbolic goods.

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The numbers are imprecise, as there were no ticket sales or turnstiles to count the audience. Even so, the city government of Rio de Janeiro released an estimate that, crowding the sand and spreading across both lanes of Avenida Atlântica, around 1.66 million people were in the audience for the Madonna concert on Copacabana Beach on May 4, 2024. It was reportedly the largest face-to-face audience of the artist's career (Cardoso, 2024).

Centered on a stage of 812 square meters, 24 meters wide and 18 meters high, the event marked the closing of the Celebration Tour, commemorating the singer's forty-year career. The structure included three additional catwalks (one of them extended from the Copacabana Palace Hotel to the stage) and an elevator for the movement and presentation of the artist, dancers, and guests. Sixteen speaker

towers and fifteen LED screens were distributed laterally along the stretch of the beach designated for the event. Fiber-optic cables connected the stage to the transmission towers (Pavão, 2024). This entire complex, powered by 38 generators, is made up of 270 tons of mobilized⁹ equipment. Ninety containers were also used as offices, storage, and dressing room support, accommodating the 200-member team of the American singer, including makeup artists, costume designers, audio, lighting, and video technicians, among others. Complementing the show's atmosphere were panels by visual artist Rita Wainer, displayed along the Copacabana shoreline. Broadcast live on network television and via streaming, most of the show's sponsorship quotas were acquired by Banco Itaú¹⁰. The costs were around R\$60 million, with an additional R\$20 million shared between the governments of the State and the city of Rio de Janeiro. According to the city government, the financial return amounted to approximately R\$300 million. This revenue was largely attributed to high hotel occupancy rates and intense activity in the food and beverage service sectors, especially in Rio's South Zone, not to mention the private transport services.

Highlighted as part of the spectacle, these striking numbers echoed in the press and across the web before and after the event. News articles, reports, photos, and videos focusing on the preparations of both artists and audience members, the installations, and the seaside setting of Copacabana filled printed pages while also circulating as visual flows on TV and smartphone screens (Toledo, 2024). Selfies and posts – including memes – by locals and tourists turned spectators reflected across different interactive contexts, spilling beyond the city, the country, and even the continent¹¹.

All this visibility met the expectations of promoting the city's portfolio, as intended by the Rio de Janeiro city government in partnership with the business sector directly or indirectly involved in the concert. After having received positive global exposure through the hosting of the World Cup (2014) and the Olympic Games (2016), a sequence of scandals involving corruption, the fiscal crisis of the local and state governments, and an intensification of the already chronic episodes undermining public safety, significantly affected the city's prestige in the tourism market. This resulted in a decline in the events calendar and a drop in the number

⁹ CARGA COM 270 toneladas de equipamentos destinados a show de Madonna chega ao Rio. **O Globo**, Rio de Janeiro, 29 abr. 2024. Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/noticia/2024/04/29/equipamentos-destinados-ao-show-da-madonna-chegam-ao-rio.ghtml>. Accessed in: Jan. 31, 2025.

¹⁰ It is worth remembering that, at the time, the singer was taking part in the advertising campaign celebrating the financial institution's 100th anniversary, in an advertising video shown on television and YouTube (Steil; Martini, 2024).

¹¹ Internautas compartilham memes sobre show da Madonna no Brasil. **PODER360**, May 5, 2024. Available at: <https://www.poder360.com.br/midia/internautas-compartilham-memes-sobre-show-da-madonna-no-brasil/>. Accessed in: 31 Jan. 2025.

of visitors from both Brazil and abroad (Pinto, 2019, p. 339-354). The scenario, discursively framed as one of “decline,” worsened during Marcelo Crivella’s administration from 2017 to 2021. A bishop of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a Pentecostal denomination, the former mayor promoted a conservative Christian ideological orientation regarding moral issues, displaying disinterest or even hostility toward proposals that challenged this stance – particularly those related to sexual diversity, gender plurality, and the contestation of patriarchy. This attitude was, at the very least, odd for a city whose event calendar is led by the bohemian libertinism intrinsic to carnival festivities and the multicultural and religious celebrations of New Year’s Eve on the same Copacabana beach (Gomes; Leite, 2019, p. 85-116).

In contrast to his predecessor, and as a proponent of neoliberal governance, which emphasizes the privatization of basic public services (health, education, transportation, etc.) and deregulation aimed at fostering profit-driven entrepreneurship (Sá, 2022, p. 22–26), the current mayor, Eduardo Paes, after the 2020 election results, stressed his administration’s intention to restore the city’s status as the tourism capital of Brazil and South America, as well as a hub for a wide range of events. This aligns with the concentration of 70% of the city’s GDP in the service sector (SMDEIS, 2023), which includes a technical division of labor with high labor intensity. To that end, he made a point of emphasizing that the city would be “open” to the most diverse groups, whether visitors or residents¹². Madonna’s concert in Rio de Janeiro was part of this strategy to reposition the city’s brand in global tourism and event markets. One might even say that the celebration of the singer’s forty-year career aligned perfectly with the conceptual shift intended, as expressed by Mayor Eduardo Paes in the statement mentioned above.

To move forward with the proposition outlined in this text, it is necessary to reflect on the choice of Madonna and her show. After all, although celebrated, she belongs to the senior ranks of international pop stars – a category that today includes much younger names who are more present on digital music platform playlists. However, the aim here is not to trace the biographical path of the young Madonna Louise Veronica Ciccone, originally from Bay City, Michigan, who moved to New York in 1978 intending to pursue a career in contemporary dance but eventually redirected her interests toward music, initially performing as a drummer, guitarist, and vocalist in two rock bands – Breakfast Club and Emmy (Cross, 2017). What matters, rather, is to highlight the typified traits of the singer that proved both convergent and compelling in legitimizing her presence in the interactive situation shared by the three artistic profiles established at the Copacabana show.

¹² Eduardo Paes made this statement at his first press conference as mayor-elect: “Today you are free to reconfirm this city as the city of diversity. It’s such a broad city, which accepts everyone, which embraces everyone” (Lucizano; Carneiro; Sabóia, 2020, our translation).

When Madonna entered the international pop music circuit within the context of Global North societies, significant transformations were unfolding – marked both by pressures to displace rock and roll’s prestige in popular music and by the reconfiguration of the celebrity status of the pop idol. The early 1980s witnessed the impact of the emergence and commercial success of what was then called “new pop,” led by artists like Boy George of the British band Culture Club. The feminized transformation of the androgyny that had shaped the aesthetics of 1970s rock bands intensified the dance-driven sexualization brought forth by artists from New York’s disco music wave. By crossing the markers of sex and gender in the stylization of artistic performances, the new pop generation appeared to undermine the power balance represented by the masculinist aesthetics of rock culture, while simultaneously attracting the attention of increasingly visible social minorities – women and male homosexual subcultures (Sanneh, 2023).

The playful and entertainment-driven dynamics, committed to the commercial profit interests of the music industry (Adorno; Simpson, 1941, p. 17-48; Garofalo, 1987, p. 77-92), when intertwined with the political force of identity, did not oppose only the androcentrism crystallized in rock performances. Within rock itself, the proliferation of subgenres led to a fragmentation of audiences, increasingly configured as kinship lines defined around a totem – at once a unifying and expressive symbol of the values grounding their identity claims. Long-play records became the revered totems of this musical kinship. After all, through the sequence of tracks, a conceptual unity was affirmed, drawing a boundary between what was “inside” and “outside” of each subgenre regarding behavior alignment with a specific cosmology and worldview. In line with what sociological interpreters refer to as an “expressive revolution” – that is, shifts in behavioral norms emphasizing the public display of emotions (Wouters, 2012, pp. 546–570) – the hyperbole of new pop’s lighthearted frivolity challenged the conceptualism and normative seriousness tied to collectivist cohesion. It claimed for itself a disengagement from ideological seriousness in favor of a framework that prioritized pleasure, highlighting individual satisfaction through fleeting and nuanced moments of gratification.

Ultimately, the new pop wave challenged the modernist centrality of moral and intellectual authority held by rock and roll’s avant-garde circles in the realm of popular music. If the aesthetic authority anchored in technical expertise was called into question, the emerging voices of new pop rallied behind promoting lifestyles and means open to reflective selection of knowledge inputs, thus opposing unitary and essentialist understandings of identity. Instead, they embraced change and volatility, as universalist and systemic pretensions were seen as aligned against novelty – viewed as frivolous and fragmented (Kellner, 1993, p. 174-175). What emerged was a new pattern of artistic subjectivity in these stances, hostile to the prestige accumulated by rock – a pattern whose psychogenesis directly intersected

with the spread of audio-images in the wake of mass popular culture's proliferation. The profile of the new pop stars contrasted with that of rock leaders by opposing the tribalization of audiences seen in rock fandoms, aiming instead to promote broad identifications by offering new style options, models, and forms in dialogue with the heterogeneities embedded in the contemporary socio-cultural complex (Kellner, 1993, p. 174-175).

It is quite likely that in Madonna – alongside Michael Jackson – the embodiment of this psychogenesis of new pop's artistic personality became most visible. Over her four-decade career, she stood out for her commitment to aligning the political force of identity with technological and ethno-historical resources, while also promoting a playful scene whose chromatic expression asserts autonomy in the pursuit of pleasure as an inviolable human right. Across her career phases, Madonna consistently deviated from fidelity to aesthetic concepts or from any allegiance to anti-systemic dictates that rejected the maximization of spectacle as a means to financial return. At the same time, her stage persona was marked by irreverent defiance of established powers, challenging hegemonic moralities. This critical and irreverent stance was manifest in her emphasis on identity fluidity as an antidote to barriers to bodily pleasure – especially those imposed on women (Young, 1993, p. 257-287; Guerra; Bittencurt; Cunha, 2018; Mitic, 2015, p. 68-72).

In the Copacabana concert, the novelty was ensured precisely by her encounter with Anitta and Pabllo Vittar. Positioned as non-submissive femininities, both artists paired with Madonna in performances that affirmed, through gestures and costumes, transgression embodied as a key to experimentation in a cabaret filled with elements suitable for the materialization of lustful fantasies. With long black hair and wearing minimal black clothing, Pabllo Vittar simulated oral sex on Madonna, who was on all fours. Incorporating sadomasochistic traits in their notably short and low-cut dresses, Anitta and Madonna, seated back-to-back with legs apart, enacted the domination of a lineup of male dancers – who appeared solely as instruments manipulated to provide pleasure to both performers.

The presence of the two Brazilian singers highlighted the global spread of audiovisual culture in everyday life, centered around U.S.-based entertainment. Madonna's figure resonates both as a kind of artistic paradigm of global popular culture; she stands as an affirmative icon of a pop artistic personality model that operates on both moral and cognitive levels in the self-regulation of the dispositions of her Brazilian counterparts. In their effort to gain audience approval and achieve a persuasive impact in their performances, the expressive façades of Anitta and Vittar's behaviors, within the context of the encounter, were coordinated by the prestige of that pop star. On the other hand, the intertextuality evident in their appearances inflects the deterritorialized intensity of the flows of that same culture, as their personal and collective trajectories, inscribed in their bodies, anchor

them within a dense constellation of signs shaped by singular socio-historical experiences.

Born in São Luís, Maranhão, and having migrated to southeastern Brazil, Vittar (Phabullo Rodrigues da Silva) combines her performances as a singer and dancer with activism for the rights of sexual minorities. Her playful and entertainment-driven practice of carnivalistic inversion softens and blurs the boundaries between masculine and feminine, condensing in a single body both the sparkling hedonistic image of the drag queen – marked by loud (even caricatured) aesthetics – and the marginal scene of travesties and trans women in a country that holds the world record for homicides against LGBTQIAPN+ people. In her music videos, wearing revealing outfits that accentuate and display her body, Vittar performs a repertoire of danceable songs featuring a carefree, youthful, and emotionally fickle female character – driven by sexual desire – moving through public or intimate spaces filled with suggestions of fun and sensuality (Rodrigues, 2020, p. 97-106).

Acclaimed as a singer, songwriter, artistic producer, TV host, actress, dancer, and businesswoman, Larissa de Macedo Machado is the daughter of migrants and was born in the peripheral neighborhood of Honório Gurgel, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Anitta's artistic career was initially associated with a musical genre of Rio's subaltern cultures: funk – a racialized genre that is both stigmatized and targeted by moral persecution and state repression. She adopted a transgressive irreverence to raise and challenge assumptions about women's sexual behavior (Dias, 2019). The provocative performance of the character she enacts – referred to in one song as a *malandra*¹³ (a streetwise woman) – stands out for its boldness in asserting female autonomy, especially through the sexualization of a body that is already hypersexualized due to the racialization of the submissive role historically assigned to Black women in Brazil's social hierarchy (Gonzalez, 2020; Hooks, 2019).

To draw on Stuart Hall's idea (2003, p. 387-404), Anitta and Vittar engage in "politics of representation" – that is, their performances dramatize and translate social problems into the ludic-aesthetic properties encoded in bodily expressions of song and dance. The signs woven into these performances depict the dilemmas and aspirations experienced by individuals situated in conditions of subalternity. Because of the success and wide visibility of their public personas, both singers can be seen – albeit distantly – as embodiments of "dreams of identity": ideal, even utopian projections of self-realization and group belonging. Through their gestures, movements, and sounds – staged as artistic events in and through their bodies – they galvanize historicities shaped as signs that hold communicative power for those whose biographical paths carry stocks of collective knowledge that enable them to recognize themselves in the social divisions and classifications performed

¹³ *Vai Malandra* (Anitta, MC Zaac and Maejor).

and translated in the scenes led by these artists. In the case of both performers, the status of representativity ultimately combines – and also confronts – on the level of taste, the identity fragmentations arising from emancipatory struggles with the ongoing differentiation dynamics of sociotechnical systems of expression within entertainment contexts.

On the occasion of the show, as a ritual, the spectacle wove together behavioral protocols, establishing expectations for the coordination and articulation of episodes. In doing so, it enacted a pedagogy of spatial roles through the establishment of a classificatory hierarchy dividing positions on stage and in the audience. These positions ranged from the extreme visibility of the performers, to the anonymity of the dancers' faces and the physical absence of the technical crew, culminating in the amorphous anonymity of the public. Amid these differentiated role functions to be performed – closely tied to the individualized staging of each singer, made possible by the encounter of the three artistic biographies – the peak of dramatic effect occurred at the moment when Madonna and Vittar embraced while wrapped in the Brazilian flag. As the official symbol of the nation, and an object of constant dispute over the past decade, its green and yellow chromaticism has been appropriated by various self-proclaimed “patriot” factions within Brazil's conservative and far-right ideological spectrum. In this context, it has obeyed the purging vectors inherent to the strategies of the so-called cultural “war,” aimed at a moral cleansing. The targets of this prophylaxis are all voices critical of social class contradictions, as well as demands for recognition and affirmation of fractured collective identities (Rocha, 2020; Farias, 2020, p. 83–105). More than provocative, when celebrated on social media as an act of “reclaiming our flag,” the moment of the embrace between Vittar and Madonna enacted a semiotic operation in which the conversion of the nation (and, within it, the city) away from authoritarian unicity occurred through the celebration of cultural diversity – a horizontal totality expressed as a grammar of respect for difference, through which the normative framework is updated, particularly in terms of the utopian aspirations of human rights.

As expected, Madonna's show provided a formidable range of material for unfolding reactions on social media through posts praising or criticizing the event and its protagonists. Praise and accusations targeted multiple facets. Among the many sources consulted, morality persisted as a tacit point of convergence in both the conciliation and escalation of conflict. At stake was the dispute over the definition of “good” and, therefore, also of “evil.” For many, the spectacle was unparalleled in its expression of freedom, understood as the possibility of self-determination and authentic self-realization. For others, it represented extreme exhibitionism saturated with grotesqueness, exuding a corruption of values – especially Christian ones.

As a manifestation of what I have previously termed visibility/legitimation arrangements – in their contingent and relational nature – the event in Copacabana

points to the complexity of factors entangled in the ongoing classification and qualification of contemporary cultural goods and services. This complexity exceeds the view that social space is determined by the synchronic alignment of peer positions, which in turn guarantees the relative autonomy to self-designate (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 63-202). It also diverges from the proposition that symbolic production fields are necessarily “dominated” due to their subjection to heteronomous injunctions that define their limits, meanings, and directions (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 99-181). In this article, adopting representativity as an analytical key served to examine these forums endowed with the authority to recognize artistic reputations. The goal was to understand how the production of belief relies on heterogeneous and contingent assemblages of institutions, agencies, value systems, and interests that cannot be confined to the well-polished frameworks of fields where elements orbit centers of attraction and repulsion.

The emergence and reiteration of credible certainties within these arrangements appear to unfold throughout the entire sociotechnical fabric, following a dynamic that is both pragmatic and processual. Thus, the strategies adopted by different actors in shaping these competitive arenas come to the fore, particularly in the negotiation of cultural supply and demand. These arrangements may be seen as “markets” with a high degree of reflexivity, formed around both the singularization of cultural goods and the attachment to or detachment from them by intermediaries and end consumers (Callon, 2006; Callon; Méadel; Rabeharisoa, 2002; Callon; Muniesa, 2005). On the other hand, they consist of extended chains of action in which agencies are formed – agencies that may or may not achieve their intended goals. The individuation of these arrangements and their properties are themselves figurations within such long chains, where mutual shaping among multiple properties of the network is continuous. If self-regulation and collective control constitute the defining feature of the synchronicity in each arrangement, this synchronicity is embedded within a historical “figurational dynamic,” referring to the fact that “a later phenomenon derives from a specific sequence of earlier ones” (Elias, 1994). However, such precedence is rearranged by unintended consequences, devoid of any predetermined goal. For the purposes of this text, the dynamic is understood as a structured phenomenon that requires examining the multiple unplanned entanglements. Therefore, the very arrangements of legitimation/visibility of symbolic goods are among such figurations.

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