

UNIVERSITY OF SÃO PAULO
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND ARTS
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ISABELA TALAMINI

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interdependent networks in contemporary music curation**

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**Critical Interculturality as Praxis: the construction of
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requirement for the award of the Specialist
degree in Cultural Project Management

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Dennis de Oliveira

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CRITICAL INTERCULTURALITY AS PRAXIS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF INTERDEPENDENT NETWORKS IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CURATION¹

Isabela Talamini²

Abstract: This study investigates the impacts of algorithmic logics adopted by digital platforms on the visibility and financial sustainability of Brazilian independent artists. Through the trajectory of DJ Ramon Sucesso, the research explores the interaction between algorithms and curatorial practices in the process of positioning funk within the global electronic music circuit. Based on the concepts of critical interculturality and interdependence, the research proposes a decolonial approach that configures the role of curation as a structural foundation for the autonomy and the sustainable circulation of cultural expressions from the Global South in the contemporary music scene.

Keywords: Musical curation, digital platforms, critical interculturality, interdependence, DJ Ramon Sucesso.

Resumen: Este estudio investiga los impactos de las lógicas algorítmicas adoptadas por las plataformas digitales en la visibilidad y la sostenibilidad financiera de los artistas independientes brasileños. A través de la trayectoria de DJ Ramon Sucesso, la investigación explora la interacción entre los algoritmos y las prácticas curatoriales en el proceso de posicionar el funk en el circuito global de la música electrónica. Basado en los conceptos de interculturalidad crítica e interdependencia, el estudio propone un enfoque decolonial que configura el papel de la curaduría como una base estructural para la autonomía y la circulación sostenible de las expresiones culturales del Sur Global en la escena musical contemporánea.

Palabras clave: Curaduría musical, plataformas digitales, interculturalidad crítica, interdependencia, DJ Ramon Sucesso.

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²Isabela Talamini holds a degree in Social Communication from Centro Universitário Belas Artes de São Paulo and is currently a postgraduate student in Cultural Project Management at CELACC, ECA-USP. With experience in music curation and communication strategies, has worked as a Creative Supervisor for Spotify (Brazil) through SOKO/FLAGCX, Music Editor at Red Bull (Brazil) and Napster (Brazil), A&R at KL Produtora, and contributor at VICE Media (Brazil).

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital platforms such as Spotify, TikTok, Deezer, and Apple Music have established themselves as central intermediaries in the distribution and consumption of music, playing a crucial role in artists' visibility. Once the domain of critics and specialized journalists, music curation now operates in a context increasingly shaped by algorithmic systems that, based on consumption metrics, directly determine what becomes popular (Abreu, 2019). This scenario raises questions about the impact of these technologies and the role of curation in the development of peripheral artists and genres, especially those originating from the Global South³.

In the Brazilian context, independent artists face enormous challenges related to the algorithmic logic that governs platforms. As Bonini and Gandini (2019) point out, these systems tend to favor productions with greater commercial appeal, limiting the visibility of music that does not fit into global preferences and the interests of major record labels. The direct consequence of this is the financial sustainability of artists, which highlights the dichotomy of these technologies: while they offer unprecedented opportunities to reach global audiences, they provide a distribution model that does not necessarily guarantee sustainable income.

This article explores these tensions through a theoretical approach based on the concepts of *critical interculturality*, as proposed by Catherine Walsh (2009; 2012; 2019), and *interdependence*, as currently discussed in the field of music (Dryhurst, 2019; Davies, 2019). While critical interculturality proposes a transformative praxis aimed at challenging cultural hierarchies and promoting the legitimacy of marginalized cultural expressions, interdependence advocates for collaborative networks between curators and artists as an alternative strategy to the individualism imposed by digital platforms. Drawing on the case study of DJ Ramon Sucesso, this study investigates how collaborative curatorial practices can operate within and beyond the limitations imposed by algorithms, expanding the visibility of independent artists and proposing more inclusive and sustainable solutions for contemporary music curation.

³ The term "Global South" refers to countries located primarily in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is used to describe a division that is not only geographical, but also socioeconomic and cultural, in contrast to the "Global North," which encompasses economically dominant nations such as Western Europe and the United States.

This research seeks to answer the following questions: How do the algorithms of digital platforms impact the visibility and financial sustainability of independent artists in Brazil? And how can curatorial practices based on critical interculturality and interdependence challenge these dynamics and promote greater equity? By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the field of contemporary music curation by providing a foundation for the development of strategies focused on strengthening independent music. By highlighting the concepts of critical interculturality and interdependence, the study seeks to demonstrate how these practices can create new opportunities for sustainable visibility, challenge the algorithmic logic of digital platforms, and foster collaborative support networks that enhance artistic autonomy.

2. THE POWER OF ALGORITHMS: MUSIC CURATION AND NEW REGIMES OF VISIBILITY

The word curation originates from the Latin term *curatore*, which means “to care for” or “to look after,” and was initially used in the visual arts, later being adopted by other artistic fields. Musical curation, traditionally led by critics, journalists, DJs, and radio programmers — whose selections directly influenced the visibility of artists and genres — shaped music consumption through a subjective process. The rise of streaming platforms, such as Spotify, Deezer, and YouTube Music, significantly transformed this process, which came to be largely influenced by data and algorithms (Noce, 2016).

Expanding beyond artistic choices, curation has become a hybrid process in which algorithms filter and organize information for diverse audiences, in a transformation that reconfigures the dynamics of visibility and the criteria for success in the music industry. Although humans continue to play a relevant role, algorithms have come to govern much of the process, creating both new opportunities and limitations for forms of promotion (Morris, 2020). Bonini and Gandini (2019) describe this shift as a displacement of power, in which streaming platforms have established themselves as the central gatekeepers of the music industry.

The authors use the term “algotoriality” to refer to a combination of algorithms and human curation in music selection. On Spotify, for example, there are three different types of playlists: those created by humans, those created by algorithms, and the “algotorial” ones, which integrate both approaches. This same logic is applied across other platforms. In an

interview for this study, Leonardo Migdaleski (2024), co-founder of the experimental music label LogoLogo, explains that curators select the most promising releases and submit them to distributors, which operate through algorithms to determine their reach. However, performance metrics — such as popularity or financial return — often carry more weight than qualitative criteria, indicating that curators must base their decisions on data that can be quantitatively measured.

This dynamic raises concerns about its impact on music consumption. In 2015, a Pitchfork⁴ article had already observed that playlists have been replacing the listening of full albums. Playlists like *Running*⁵, on Spotify—which aggregates songs according to users’ physical activities—end up favoring familiar and comfortable patterns, thus limiting musical diversity and hindering innovation by reinforcing predictability. Liz Pelly adds to this critique by referring to Spotify as “a giant mood⁶ machine” (Pelly apud Freeman, Gibbs, & Nansen, 2022, p. 4), suggesting that the platform uses emotional monitoring to maximize user engagement, resulting in homogenized curation.

In this context, the landscape of digital platforms becomes a field of tension between innovation and stagnation. On the one hand, it offers independent artists an unprecedented pathway to reach global audiences without the mediation of major record labels; on the other hand, its algorithmic automation tends to reinforce a competitive and isolationist structure, limiting artistic expressions that do not align with the commercial interests of the platforms. Mat Dryhurst questions whether platforms like Spotify fail to democratize culture or, in fact, are extremely effective at promoting a neoliberal, individualistic, and entrepreneurial agenda, while disguising their practices under that very promise (Davies, 2019).

This reflection finds a solid theoretical foundation in the concept of *decoloniality*, as proposed by the Modernity/Coloniality⁷ group, led by thinkers such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, and Catherine Walsh, which offers a fundamental theoretical lens to critically

⁴ HOGAN, Marc. *Up next: how playlists are curating the future of music*. Pitchfork, July 16, 2015. Available at: <https://pitchfork.com/features/article/9686-up-next-how-playlists-are-curating-the-future-of-music/>. Accessed on: May 23, 2024.

⁵ Playlists specifically designed for running activities. They are usually curated based on BPM (beats per minute) to match the running pace.

⁶ In the context of Spotify, the expression *moods* refers to specific emotions that the platform’s playlists aim to capture in order to provide a personalized experience. These playlists categorize songs according to feelings or moments, shaping consumption based on users’ emotional perception.

⁷ The Modernity/Coloniality Group is a network of Latin American scholars formed in the 1990s, which offers a critique of the Western modernity project from the perspective of the colonial consequences it has imposed on the non-European world.

analyze the cultural impacts of these dynamics. Decoloniality proposes a critical reflection on the power structures that emerged during the colonial period, highlighting how these hierarchies continue to shape contemporary cultural practices. According to Mignolo and Walsh (2018), decoloniality is not just a critique, but a praxis aimed at dismantling hegemonic forms of power and creating space for marginalized voices and knowledge, often excluded from global spheres of visibility.

The concept of algorithmic power, discussed by Bonini and Gandini (2019), addresses these tensions on digital platforms. According to the authors, such power produces “global listening agendas” – invisible guidelines that define which songs and artists gain visibility. By shaping music consumption, platforms tend to favor dominant cultural expressions, establishing a regime of visibility that consolidates cultural and numerical hierarchies, reinforcing hegemonic logics. Under a logic of massive data accumulation and targeted consumption based on users’ preferences, the Global South becomes both a source of data extraction and a consumer market. This process perpetuates historical cultural and economic hierarchies, which Lippold and Faustino (2022) characterize as digital colonialism.

In Brazil, one of the largest exporters of music, this process directly affects local practices and knowledge, which are often shaped to meet global demands. Kemp (2019) notes that this can be traced back to terms such as *world music* in the 1960s, a label that grouped non-Western genres in a generic way. Similarly, contemporary labels such as *latin pop* and *afrobeats* simplify cultural diversity to facilitate international consumption, erasing nuances essential to understanding these genres. This reveals how global consumption, driven by digital platforms, homogenizes music production and puts pressure on cultural influence. Brazilian artist Anitta exemplifies⁸ this dynamic by combining elements of funk, reggaeton, pop, and trap to fit into broad categories such as latin pop, attempting to balance local cultural authenticity with international demands in order to cater to both markets.

This phenomenon, however, is not confined to high-profile artists. Terms such as *Spotify-core* and *streambait* illustrate the creation of music specifically designed to appeal to algorithms, prioritizing retention and visibility on digital platforms. Consequently, artistic diversity is often compromised in favor of commercially-driven formulas, further intensifying

⁸ **MAIA, Felipe.** *Funk Generation: Anitta balances risk and banality in pop.* Folha de S. Paulo, 2024. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2024/04/anitta-se-equilibra-entre-risco-e-mesmice-do-pop-em-funk-generation>. Accessed on: October 10, 2024.

cultural homogenization across various levels of the industry (Morris, 2020). A local example of this impact is the funk music production company Love Funk, which releases between 30 and 50 tracks per month and organizes weekly auditions in São Paulo, where emerging artists compete for the opportunity to record their songs⁹. This model, centered around viral success, leads to the commodification of the artists themselves, rendering them disposable within a system where instant success is prioritized over long-term artistic development.

In this context, Migdaleski (2024) highlights that, although digital platforms promise visibility and quick financial gains for independent artists, this promise largely depends on the “skill (or luck)” in achieving virality. In the case of funk, for example, accelerated production and high turnover create an environment of productive chaos, compromising the creative development of the genre. Still, he notes that there is room for originality, especially on TikTok, whose algorithm tends to reward creative and innovative proposals, as long as they are consistent. As an example, Migdaleski cites the trajectory of British artist PinkPantheress, who went viral organically on TikTok, achieving global visibility.

It is worth noting, however, that the artist was quickly signed by Parlophone, a subsidiary of Warner Music, illustrating a recurring pattern: although notoriety can be achieved independently, many artists ultimately turn to the support of major record labels in pursuit of stability, as the financial advances¹⁰ offered by these companies often surpass what independent musicians can generate on their own. This example highlights the gap between visibility and financial sustainability, emphasizing the ongoing tension between artistic independence and the economic pressures that continue to shape the global music industry.

This scenario is particularly evident in the Brazilian music market, where majors from the Global North — Universal, Sony/BMG and Warner Music — still maintain significant control, aligning the local market with their interests. For decades, these record companies dominated the music sector in Brazil. Despite promises of democratization through digitalization, these companies continue to exert influence over digital platforms, preserving and reinforcing the same control structure (Carneiro, 2021). An example is Universal Music

⁹ **MAIA, Felipe.** *Discover the Funk Square, a talent hub that makes hits explode across the country.* Folha de S. Paulo, 20 Jun. 2022. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2022/06/conheca-a-praca-do-funk-reduto-de-talentos-que-faz-hits-estou-rarem-pelo-pais>. Accessed on: 6 Aug. 2024.

¹⁰An advance is a sum of money given to an artist by a record label, publisher, or distributor before generating revenue from their work. It covers production, promotion, and music creation costs, and is recouped through sales, streaming, and licensing after the release, based on contractual agreements.

Group's (UMG) shareholding in Spotify, which accounts for 3.37%¹¹ of the shares, valued at US\$511 million. Although there is no evidence that this financial connection enables Universal to influence the platform's strategies, a study¹² found that more than 80% of the slots in Spotify's popular editorial playlists are filled with artists from major record labels.

The year 2022 marked a milestone for the Brazilian music market, establishing the country as the ninth largest in the world, with a revenue of US\$ 489 million (De Marchi, 2023). This growth was primarily driven by streaming, which accounted for 87.1% of the revenues, totaling R\$ 2.5 billion¹³. The international success of Anitta, who reached the top of the Billboard Global chart that same year, exemplifies how much of this growth remains concentrated in the hands of major record labels. Although 93.5% of the most-streamed songs in Brazil are by national artists, the spotlight is largely on established names already signed to major labels, reflecting these companies' control over the market and the visibility of artists.

Although not a streaming platform, TikTok has emerged as a significant player in the digital music landscape. By 2020, it had already solidified its position as a key launchpad for emerging artists, as evidenced by a study¹⁴ showing that seven of the ten most-streamed songs on Spotify that year had first gone viral on TikTok. Between 2023 and 2024, the platform added 16 million new users, reaching a total of over 98 million in Brazil. As a strategic move to expand its influence in the music market, TikTok launched SoundOn¹⁵, a distribution platform that enables artists to release their music directly on TikTok and other streaming platforms.

By removing the need for agreements with record labels, SoundOn challenges the traditional control that major labels hold over royalties and visibility. In a similar vein, Spotify

¹¹ **INGHAM, Tim.** Universal Music Group sued over its Spotify equity ownership by artist in class action lawsuit. *Music Business Worldwide*, January 5, 2023. Available at: <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/universal-music-group-sued-over-its-spotify-equity-ownership-by-artist-in-class-action-lawsuit/>. Accessed on: August 13, 2024.

¹² **KNIBBE, Julie.** *Is the Spotify Editorial Playlist Landscape Fair to Emerging Artists?*. Music Tomorrow, 2022. Available at: <https://www.music-tomorrow.com/blog/is-spotify-editorial-playlist-landscape-fair-to-emerging-artists>. Accessed on: August 10, 2024.

¹³ **PRO-MÚSICA BRASIL.** *Brazilian Music Market 2023: General Report*. Rio de Janeiro: Pro-Música Brasil, 2023. Available at: <https://pro-musicabr.org.br/>. Accessed on: August 6, 2024.

¹⁴ **Winnin.** *The Impact of TikTok on Online Music Consumption*. Winnin, 2021. Available at: <https://winnin.com/o-impacto-do-tiktok-no-consumo-de-musica-online>. Accessed on: August 6, 2024.

¹⁵ **STASSEN, Murray.** *TikTok Just Launched Its Own Music Distribution Platform, SoundOn*. Music Business Worldwide, March 9, 2022. Available at: <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/tiktok-just-launched-its-own-music-distribution-platform-soundon12/>. Accessed on: August 16, 2024.

has developed its own strategies to circumvent this influence, such as the creation of fake artists¹⁶ in popular playlists. Through this practice, the platform hires musicians to create tracks specifically for playlists, keeping the copyrights and saving on royalties that would otherwise go to established artists (Abreu, 2019). In response, record labels push for platforms to adjust the rules in their favor, as seen in Spotify's decision¹⁷ to withhold royalties for tracks with fewer than one thousand streams within a 12-month period, or in the recent dispute between TikTok and UMG, which resulted in a royalty agreement after the label pulled its catalog from the platform. Despite these attempts at greater independence, platforms continue to bend to the demands of the majors, due to their reliance on the extensive catalogs these companies control, which remain crucial for attracting and retaining users.

In this ongoing conflict between streaming platforms and major record labels, artists are often the most affected, particularly when it comes to compensation. The payment per stream ranges from US\$ 0.003 to US\$ 0.005¹⁸, meaning artists need millions of streams to earn a substantial income. Moreover, the distribution process involves several intermediaries. Companies such as Ditto Music, ONErpm, and Tratore act as intermediaries, responsible for uploading tracks, managing data, and handling payments. Of the total amount paid per stream, around 30% goes directly to the streaming platform. From the remaining amount, a significant portion is allocated to copyright fees, which in Brazil are distributed among entities like ECAD. The remainder is then passed on to the distributor, who shares it with the record label or artist¹⁹. As a result, the final amount that reaches the artist is greatly reduced, due to the multiple intermediaries who take a cut of the payment along the way.

This distribution chain places constant pressure on artists to adapt their strategies, requiring them to produce not only music but also a steady stream of content to engage audiences and sustain both their visibility and income on digital platforms. Spotify's CEO, Daniel Ek, stated that "it is no longer viable to release music every three to four years and

¹⁶ "Fake artists" refer to musicians or bands that are artificially created, without a real identity or public career.

¹⁷ **RICE, Jeff.** *How the Major Labels and Spotify Plan to Erase DIY and Independent Artists and the Distributors That Work For Them.* Medium, January 30, 2024. Available at: <https://medium.com/@JPriceOfMusic/how-the-major-labels-and-spotify-plan-to-erase-diy-and-independent-artists-the-distributors-that-f1373a0d0bee>. Accessed on: September 8, 2024.

¹⁸ Information retrieved from Ditto's official website. Available at: <https://dittomusic.com/pt/blog/how-much-does-spotify-pay-per-stream>. Accessed on: September 8, 2024.

¹⁹ Information retrieved from Tratore's official website. Available at: <https://tratore.wordpress.com/2023/05/15/qual-e-o-caminho-do-dinheiro-no-streaming-de-musica/>. Accessed on: September 8, 2024.

think that will be enough"²⁰; his statement underscores how today's digital environment demands continuous interaction with fans that extends beyond musical production. Migdaleski (2024) argues that Ek's statement captures an unavoidable reality: the contemporary artist must actively promote their work on social media and engage in an ongoing effort to build and maintain connections with their target audience.

Ultimately, this focus on maximizing profitability creates a significant gap between visibility and financial sustainability (De Marchi, 2023), making it difficult for independent artists to turn digital notoriety into lasting income. In addition, extensive data collection and algorithm-driven personalization tend to favor artists with larger streaming volumes, further consolidating the dominance of major industry players and restricting sustainable opportunities for independent musicians. The literature review will explore concepts related to curation, examining how they intersect and operate within this landscape.

3 CRITICAL INTERCULTURALITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE: FRAMEWORKS FOR MUSICAL CURATION

This section examines the application of the concepts of critical interculturality and interdependence within the contemporary music industry, with the aim of exploring the potential of these practices in reshaping power structures and enhancing the sustainability of peripheral artists. Rather than limiting itself to a superficial recognition of cultural diversity, critical interculturality, as presented by Catherine Walsh, aims to radically transform the power structures that sustain the marginalization of peripheral cultures. In this context, the hypothesis explored is that the formal inclusion of cultural expressions alone is insufficient; it is necessary to confront the colonial dynamics that continue to shape the global music market, thereby promoting the sustainability of artists outside hegemonic centers.

Walsh (2019, p. 9) defines critical interculturality as an insurgent practice that aims to "confront and destabilize colonial power dynamics by proposing alternative forms of coexistence based on cultural justice". It is an active resistance to the forms of subjugation imposed by colonial modernity, which challenges established hierarchies and creates new possibilities for sociocultural coexistence. The analysis will seek to understand how critical

²⁰ **INGHAM, Tim.** *Spotify CEO talks COVID-19, artist incomes, and podcasting.* Music Ally, July 30, 2020. Available at: <https://musically.com/2020/07/30/spotify-ceo-talks-covid-19-artist-incomes-and-podcasting-interview/>. Accessed on: September 6, 2024.

interculturality can reposition relations between cultures, promoting a field of cultural justice capable of subverting the logics of domination still present in the cultural industry.

"Interculturality indicates a cultural politics and an oppositional way of thinking, not simply based on recognition or inclusion, but rather oriented toward the transformation of socio-historical structures. It is a politics and a way of thinking that tend toward the construction of an alternative proposal for civilization and society; a politics from and for the confrontation of power, but that also proposes another logic of incorporation." (Walsh, 2019, p. 18)

In the case of Brazilian music, this approach will be explored through the lens of funk, which, while having achieved international projection, often loses its connection to the social and political roots from which it emerged, resulting in superficial representations. Critical interculturality calls for questioning such curatorial practices, demanding a genuine valorization of peripheral cultural expressions. The analysis seeks to investigate the possibility of moving beyond the mere inclusion of these manifestations within the global circuit, aiming to reshape the power relations that govern musical production and circulation, so as to ensure that these cultural expressions maintain their sociopolitical integrity and are recognized on their own terms.

The internationalization of funk, driven by major record labels, has granted global visibility to artists such as Ludmilla and Anitta. However, as Maia (2024a) points out, most funk artists continue to face significant challenges in gaining recognition beyond Brazil. This is partly due to the fact that global music curation, dominated by streaming platforms and major festivals, still follows an Eurocentric logic that limits the access of peripheral artists to international markets. A&R executive Daniel Mansur further emphasizes this by stating, "the world has accepted funk as culture, but it is still difficult for different countries to embrace funk as a musical genre" (*apud* Maia, 2024a, n.p.).

This situation illustrates how funk, a cultural expression deeply tied to issues of race, class, and territory, is at constant risk of being commodified on a global scale, often detached from its original sociopolitical context. As Maia (2023) points out, foreign artists are increasingly incorporating elements of funk into their productions without establishing a connection to the communities and artists who gave rise to the genre. The case of Deize Tigrona, a pioneer of *carioca funk*, is emblematic: her music was *sampled*²¹ by British artist M.I.A., leading to global success. Deize, on the other hand, after a brief moment of visibility,

²¹ In the musical context, a "sample" refers to the use of excerpts from an existing recording in a new music production, with the intention of creating something new, either through sound manipulation or as a compositional element.

faced financial hardships that led her to abandon her music career and take a job as a garbage collector. Nearly 20 years later, the cases of DJ Mandrake and DJ Roca — whose music was sampled by Beyoncé and Kanye West, respectively, without prior authorization or proper credit — show that this dynamic continues to persist.

This process of appropriation without recognition reflects colonial dynamics of cultural subjugation, in which marginalized cultural practices are absorbed into the global market without due credit or compensation to their creators. According to Finn (*apud* Kemp, 2019, p. 47), the Western market assumes ownership of styles and sounds, taking credit for the “discovery” of music and artists, while the communities that originated them receive little or no recognition. This dynamic commodifies cultural productions of resistance, eliminating the potential of art to evoke memories of repression, neutralizing its critical capacity. Hesmondhalgh (*apud* Kemp, 2019, p. 47) suggests that this practice is comparable to the superficial consumption of tourists, who “pass through a culture without really paying serious attention to the meanings of the experiences they ‘consume’”.

While critical interculturality seeks to deconstruct colonial dynamics, interdependence emerges as a complementary alternative, providing new forms of reflection and articulation that seek to combat the centralization of power. Although little systematized in the academic field, the concept has been consolidated in the post-pandemic scenario as a response to the challenges of music in an environment dominated by the centralization of digital platforms. Intellectuals such as Mat Dryhurst (2019) have explored this idea as an alternative to the model of “independence”, which, according to him, has been appropriated by platforms that promote a false autonomy for artists, while control over visibility and monetization remains centralized. Liz Pelly reinforces this criticism by comparing the situation of artists on Spotify with that of Uber drivers: both are presented as independent, but operate under a system that minimizes their margins of control and profit (Davies, 2019).

Dryhurst (2019, n.p.) points out that, paradoxically, “even pop stars, and the streaming services that prioritise them, significantly benefit from those on the margins market-testing ideas so that they don’t have to” — suggesting that innovation often emerges from peripheral networks, where interdependence is strongest and new trends are experimented with before being absorbed by the mainstream. As Meier (2020) notes, neoliberal logic transforms musicians into atomized entrepreneurs, weakening collective organization and making artistic work precarious. In this context, interdependence is investigated as an essential tool for

fostering new forms of musical production that are creative and sustainable, and not just reproductive.

For Dryhurst, the solution lies in the creation of decentralized networks, in which resources and governance are shared, reducing dependence on centralized platforms. According to him, Web3²² offers tools that favor this reorganization. Technologies such as *blockchain*²³ and DAOs²⁴, which facilitate new governance models, promote a more equitable redistribution of profits among the different actors in the music ecosystem (Howard, 2021). Resonate, a blockchain-based streaming cooperative, exemplifies this approach, placing creative and financial control directly in the hands of artists. Bandcamp, while not using decentralized technologies, offers an alternative to the traditional model by allowing the direct sale of music and merchandise, ensuring a fair share of the profits.

During the COVID pandemic, the *Bandcamp Friday* initiative generated over \$40 million²⁵ for musicians by directing 100% of sales to artists on designated days, illustrating the potential of collaborative models. Nevertheless, Brazilian artists operating in peripheral contexts continue to face major obstacles. Barriers such as international payment restrictions and dependence on foreign currencies hinder access for many musicians and consumers in the Global South. These dynamics reflect enduring historical inequalities that still constrain the effectiveness of digital solutions in peripheral regions, making it difficult for these artists to fully integrate into major global platforms.

When discussing the application of DAOs and other digital technologies in Brazil, we are faced with a rapidly evolving landscape. Estimates from Mercado Bitcoin (MB) suggest that the country has the potential to become a global leader in the adoption of digital assets. According to projections²⁶, by 2030, half of the Brazilian population could be engaged with

²² Web3 is a term that refers to technologies such as blockchain, aimed at decentralizing ownership and control of data on the internet. In contrast to centralized platforms, Web3 promotes projects where users themselves manage data and actively participate in development.

²³ Blockchain is a shared and decentralized database that records transactions transparently and securely, without relying on central authorities like banks or governments.

²⁴ DAO (Decentralized Autonomous Organization) is an entity governed by an online community, with rules established through smart contracts recorded on a blockchain, typically managed via tokens. Those who acquire these tokens gain the right to vote directly on important decisions related to the DAO, promoting a decentralized and transparent management model.

²⁵ **CABRA.** *Bandcamp Friday, as Sextas-Feiras \$antas.* Monkeybuzz. Available at: <https://monkeybuzz.com.br/materias/bandcamp-friday-as-sextas-feiras-antas/>. Accessed on: August 6, 2024.

²⁶ **Exame.** *More than Half of the Brazilian Population Will Use Bitcoin and Cryptocurrencies by 2030, Says Research.* Available at: <https://exame.com/future-of-money/mais-da-metade-da-populacao-brasileira-ira-usar-bitcoin-e-criptomoedas-ate-2030-diz-pesquisa>. Accessed on: October 17, 2024

this market, largely driven by the launch of Drex, the Central Bank's official digital currency. While this forecast points to a significant shift in Brazil's digital economy, caution is warranted when evaluating the actual impact of these technologies. Although blockchains and DAOs are often associated with promises of decentralization and autonomy, it is important to critically assess whether, in practice, they might reproduce the same instabilities and inequalities inherent to contemporary capitalism. A clear example is the cryptocurrency market, which has largely become a site of speculation, concentrating power and wealth rather than distributing them more equitably.

This phenomenon reflects what Cassino, Souza and Silveira (2021) address as a colonial view of technology, where digital solutions are presented as universal, disregarding the socioeconomic and cultural realities of the Global South. This suggests that, although these technological solutions are promising, discussions about their true potential for social transformation are still in their early stages. Meier (2023) expands on this reflection, arguing that, although ensuring greater economic equity for artists is an important step, it is still necessary to clearly define the principles and objectives of these new forms of digital organization. He highlights, based on Robin James' critique, that interdependence between artists and platforms, by itself, may not guarantee justice. In some cases, these new networks may, in fact, perpetuate the same oppressive hierarchies and systems of racial and social exploitation that already structure society.

According to Meier (2020), the problem does not lie in collaboration between artists, but rather in the way large corporations use these networks to maintain control over the music market. Major record labels are already exploring the use of blockchain technologies and *NFTs*, such as Sony, for example, launching its own blockchain network called Soneium²⁷, connected to Ethereum. The initiative seeks to integrate Sony products, such as Sony Music and Sony Pictures, with Web3 technology, creating new forms of digital monetization. These initiatives demonstrate that large companies have been exploring these tools not to redistribute power, but to capitalize on new forms of monetization and thus maintain control over cultural distribution and commercialization.

As Cassino, Souza and Silveira (2021) argue, relevant social transformations require more than technical tools; they need democratic mechanisms and new values that profoundly

²⁷ **Exame.** *Sony Will Launch 'Soneium', Its Own Blockchain Network Linked to Ethereum.* Available at: <https://exame.com/future-of-money/sony-vai-lancar-o-soneium-sua-rede-blockchain-propria-ligada-a-ethereum/>. Accessed on: October 17, 2024.

restructure the relationships between the market, technology and society. As the adoption of digital technologies expands the reach of artists and transforms the music market, it is essential that these innovations take into account local realities and needs. The authors suggest that territoriality should be a central principle in this process, so that digital solutions truly promote inclusion and autonomy. Incorporating territoriality means respecting the cultural and socioeconomic dynamics of each context, rooting technological development in values that transcend market interests.

Ultimately, both approaches face inherent limitations when applied separately in the context of music curation. While critical interculturality advocates for a structural transformation to elevate marginalized cultural expressions, it may encounter significant obstacles within a landscape dominated by algorithms and centralized platforms. Interdependence, on the other hand, if not rooted in a critical framework, risks merely perpetuating existing inequalities. This raises the question of how these two perspectives might complement one another in music curation practices: can interdependence, guided by the principles of critical interculturality, help create more equitable and inclusive curation networks?

This theoretical review provides a basis for the next stage of the study, which investigates how the concepts of critical interculturality and interdependence apply in practice. The analysis aims to assess whether these concepts can offer viable alternatives to the challenges posed by digital platforms and contribute to the sustainability of peripheral artists. The relationship between these concepts and the reality of the music market will be examined based on the practical case of DJ Ramon Sucesso, which will allow for a deeper understanding of their transformative potential.

4 CASE STUDY: DJ RAMON SUCESSO

This research employs a qualitative approach through a case study to examine the impact of digital platforms on the visibility and financial sustainability of independent artists. The trajectory of DJ Ramon Sucesso was selected as the object of study due to his current role in the insertion of funk into the global electronic music circuit and the possibility of analyzing, through his experience, the interaction between algorithms and curation. His trajectory illustrates how curatorial practices played an essential role in navigating the algorithmic logics that initially promoted the viralization of his work, helping to consolidate it

as an authentic artistic expression on the international scene. Partnerships between curators of independent labels, platforms and festivals resulted in strategic visibility, challenging the barriers imposed by dominant market standards and suggesting new possibilities for independent artists seeking projection outside conventional niches.

The data collection was based on secondary sources, such as articles, previously published interviews with DJ Ramon Sucesso and other industry professionals, as well as his social media posts. The data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, identifying patterns related to curatorial practices, algorithmic bias, and the challenges faced by independent artists. These themes were contrasted with the concepts of critical interculturality and interdependence to assess the viability of these approaches in supporting the autonomy and sustainable circulation of cultural expressions from the Global South.

4.1 DJ Ramon Sucesso: the role of curation in positioning funk within the global electronic music circuit

The process of legitimizing Brazilian funk as an integral part of electronic music is closely tied to the curatorial practices that have been shaping the global scene. In recent years, the historical and cultural reevaluation²⁸ of electronic music has brought Afro-descendant roots into focus within established genres like *house* and *techno* — roots that have long been overlooked by an industry shaped by Eurocentric narratives. In this context, funk artists and producers have been actively working to claim space on platforms and festivals, challenging the strict boundaries that have historically separated funk from other electronic genres. This movement aims not only to break the exclusion of funk but also to reposition it as an essential contribution to the global electronic scene, reaffirming its cultural and historical significance.

As journalist and researcher GG Albuquerque notes²⁹, much of Brazil's popular electronic music production occurs outside the traditional hubs of the music industry and beyond the reach of the mainstream, making curation a crucial factor in its promotion and circulation. These movements originate from Brazil's peripheries, where genres such as *tecnobrega* and *funk* evolve independently. Thanks to the work of DJs and producers from

²⁸ **BROWN, DeForrest Jr.** *How the Dance Music Industry Failed Black Artists*. Mixmag, October 21, 2020. Available at: <https://mixmag.net/feature/how-the-dance-music-industry-failed-black-artists>. Accessed on: October 31, 2024.

²⁹ **ALBUQUERQUE, GG.** *Por uma história da música eletrônica popular brasileira*. O Volume Morto, November 21, 2022. Available at: <https://volumemorto.com.br/por-uma-historia-da-musica-eletronica-popular-brasileira/>. Accessed on: October 10, 2024.

these scenes, new curatorial approaches are starting to challenge the Eurocentric dominance in electronic music. International festivals like Boiler Room are examples of this shift, showcasing line-ups exclusively made up of peripheral Brazilian artists³⁰, highlighting the growing prominence of these voices on the global stage. Artists like Badsista, who blend elements of house and techno with funk, not only claim these spaces but also redefine the boundaries of the global electronic circuit, introducing peripheral sounds and fostering a curation that decentralizes the EU-NA axis.

It is in this context, of funk's placement within the global electronic music circuit that DJ Ramon Sucesso's career stands out, illustrating the intersection between curation, algorithms and independent production. The 21-year-old artist, Ramon Alves da Silva, born in Baixada Fluminense, Rio de Janeiro, started his career unpretentiously by creating the Irmãos Sucessada channel on YouTube with his brother. In 2021, he began posting videos every Friday on the social network X, which quickly went viral due to their unique aesthetic, characterized by both audio and video distortions caused by the intense bass from the controller. The DJ explained that the idea of 'making the video shake' came from an experiment done by his brother, who would record the sound near the speakers to capture the visual effect of the impact. The public soon joined in, and the videos became known as *Sexta dos Crias*³¹, a name popularized by X users themselves, who began reposting them with this caption (Eduardo; Santana; Silvino, 2024).

What began as a viral phenomenon on social media quickly evolved into a long-term project, extending its reach beyond its initial audience. DJ Ramon Sucesso's visual and sonic aesthetic garnered recognition for its innovation within the funk genre, particularly due to his technical skill, "with Ramon going far beyond what was imagined possible on a two-channel controller" (Ruas, 2024, n.p., own translation). This evolution culminated in the release of the album *Sexta dos Crias*, which marked his transition from a viral sensation on social media to an internationally recognized artist. Released in 2023 in both digital and vinyl formats by the independent São Paulo label Lugar Alto, the album compiled the viral videos Sucesso regularly posted, organizing his most popular segments into a cohesive format designed to reach a global audience (Smith, 2023).

³⁰ **ROCHA, Camilo.** *Electronic music made in the periphery is taking over major festivals. And everyone benefits from it.* Music Non Stop, September 22, 2022. Available at:

<https://musicnonstop.uol.com.br/a-periferia-brasileira-vai-salvar-a-musica-eletronica-mais-uma-vez/>. Accessed on: September 20, 2024.

³¹ "Sexta dos Crias" (translated as "Friday of the Crias"). The term "crias" is a colloquial Brazilian Portuguese word, used to refer to young people from the periphery, particularly those engaged with music and street culture.

When adapting DJ Ramon Sucesso's sound to the physical format, the Lugar Alto label aimed to meet the technical requirements of high-power sound systems used in European clubs, while maintaining the characteristic distorted bass of Sucesso's style. "The guys at the label asked me to create something from scratch. I did it and sent it to them to master, making sure it hit right on the speakers," explained Sucesso (Sucesso *apud* Eduardo; Santana; Silvino, n.p., 2024). Moreover, the artist was encouraged to produce exclusive tracks to avoid copyright issues. The vinyl release saw strong demand in countries like France, Spain, and Portugal. The limited edition of 300 copies, manufactured and distributed by the British record store Honest Jon's, quickly sold out, currently reaching resale values of up to R\$628 on the platform Discogs.

Although the exact cost and source of funding are not known, the average cost for pressing 100 12" vinyl records is about \$1,225³², a significant amount that helped position DJ Ramon Sucesso's work within a specific niche in the international market. This physical release enabled the project to gain prominence in a specialized context, earning positive reviews on prestigious platforms like Pitchfork, which awarded the album a 7.7 rating. The review emphasized how the DJ challenged expectations surrounding carioca funk, describing the album as a work in which sound distortion plays a key creative role. The *beat bolha*, one of the artist's signature elements, was noted as one of the most innovative aspects of the project (Smith, 2023).

The review also highlighted his technical prowess, noting how he manipulates MIDI controllers with precision, transforming them into instruments of musical experimentation — a practice reminiscent of the pioneers of hip hop and dub. By drawing comparisons to major musical innovators, the review framed the album as a significant contribution to the global electronic music scene.

"*Sexta dos Crias* emphasizes baile funk as a living and energetic music; much like the hip-hop pioneers who reverse engineered their parents' turntables, or Jamaican dub pirates constructing ziggurats out of speakers, the defiantly experimental new wave of baile funk artists like Ramon Suceso expand the possibilities of the DJ controller, transforming a musical playback device into a generative instrument all its own." (Smith, 2023)

The success of *Sexta dos Crias* allowed DJ Ramon Sucesso to break through the boundaries of the Brazilian market, securing his representation by the European booking

³² CARONDAWE, Joseph. *The full cost breakdown of pressing a vinyl record*. Vinyl Record Life. Available at: <https://www.vinylrecordlife.com/vinyl-record-pressing-costs/>. Accessed on: November 6, 2024.

agency 3'Hi, which facilitated his participation in international performances. A significant milestone was his performance at Boiler Room during the Primavera Sound festival in Barcelona in May of this year. The artist received immediate acclaim, reaching over 570,000 views³³ on the YouTube broadcast. The debut not only highlighted his talent at one of Europe's largest festivals but also consolidated his relevance on the global stage.

In 2024, the renowned British electronic music platform Resident Advisor featured Sucesso in its special series *The Art of DJing*. In the article, Maia (2024b) notes, "To say that Sucesso's star has risen fast is an understatement; he's the youngest artist ever featured on The Art of DJing by some distance, a section in which Resident Advisor investigates the techniques of the world's greatest DJs." The article delves into his techniques, highlighting his adept use of vocal cuts, the incorporation of elements like *backspin*, and his inventive application of effects.

The article also highlights the way in which Sucesso integrates the visual and the auditory, citing the "shaking" effect that made his videos go viral and how Sucesso keeps alive the tradition of Rio de Janeiro DJs while bringing funk to new audiences — such as the use of *jingles* during his Boiler Room set (Maia, 2024b). A recognition that helped solidify his transition from viral sensation to icon of innovation within the global electronic music scene. As Migdaleski comments:

"Ramon found his niche and committed to it, transitioning from a meme-like figure to a respected DJ, not only in Brazil but also internationally. His European tour this year serves as evidence of this evolution. His earnings have likely quintupled in the span of a year, driven by posts on X and retweets from tastemakers followed by DJs who perform at festivals like Dekmantel." (Migdaleski, 2024)

Finally, DJ Ramon Sucesso's success is not defined by the number of streams or by popularity on digital platforms like Spotify. Unlike many artists who directly rely on these metrics, Sucesso managed to transcend virality and, through the curation of independent labels, platforms, and festivals, converted his visibility into stable financial opportunities. In an interview with Maia (2024b), he shared his goals: "What I want is money in my pocket. I want to buy my mom a house, have my own house, buy a car for my dad, and have my own car as well. That's it. To live off what we've sown". In a post³⁴ made on the X platform on

³³ **Boiler Room.** (July 3, 2024). DJ Ramon Sucesso – Boiler Room x Primavera Sound [Video]. *YouTube*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhAp3o71U48>. Accessed on: October 12, 2024.

³⁴ **DJ Ramon Sucesso.** Available at: <https://twitter.com/djramonsucesso/status/1846542219034914862>. Accessed on: October 16, 2024.

October 16 of this year, Sucesso shared an image of a car and a motorcycle with the caption "All thanks to funk", suggesting a concrete impact from his musical journey.

4.2 Research Findings

The analysis of DJ Ramon Sucesso's case demonstrates that the sustainability of independent artists goes beyond the visibility provided by digital platforms. His consolidation in the international scene was made possible by strategic partnerships between independent labels, platforms, and festivals, through curatorial practices that highlighted the importance of collaborative networks and human curation. In this context, curation acted as an essential tool to overcome the limitations imposed by algorithmic systems and operate outside the logic of global consumption agendas described by Bonini and Gandini (2019).

Based on the concept of critical interculturality discussed by Walsh (2009; 2012; 2019), which differentiates "functional inclusion" from a transformative approach, a reflection arises on curatorial practices that preserve the authenticity of funk, avoiding its dilution into global products devoid of social and political context. As pointed out by Walsh (2009), the new multicultural logic of global capitalism recognizes diversity but manages it in a way that neutralizes its meaning, making it functional to the neoliberal system. In this scenario, the recognition of cultural diversity becomes a strategy of domination, aimed at controlling conflicts and maintaining social stability, serving economic interests and capitalist expansion, rather than promoting true equity.

DJ Ramon Sucesso's career illustrates how curatorial practices can transcend mere "functional inclusion" that superficially integrates funk into the market. Rather, these practices have the potential to generate opportunities for sustainable visibility, wherein prominence is not only a consequence of marketability, but is also deeply intertwined with strategies of survival and cultural preservation for peripheral artists and their expressions. Through these practices, artists gain access to economic opportunities, which are facilitated by a network of interdependent industry agents who play a crucial role in safeguarding the sociocultural context of the artists, ensuring the authenticity of their work. In this sense, the curator's role extends beyond enhancing visibility; it involves implementing concrete actions and providing ongoing support that strengthens the autonomy of artists and their communities, ensuring their culture remains alive and independent, even amidst the pressures of the global market.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that funk—a musical genre intrinsically linked to community dynamics, created by and for the community—cannot be disentangled from the socio-cultural context in which it emerges and is consumed. Its creation is intricately tied to the specific conditions of street sound systems, which function as collective sonic practices. Aesthetic elements, such as the physical resonance and the dominant bass frequencies, are not simply technical choices but foundational characteristics that define the musical language of funk. The decision by the label to adapt the mastering of the album to better suit sophisticated European sound systems prompts a critical reflection: is the placement of funk within global electronic music being shaped by the values and expectations of the European audience, conforming to external norms and standards that could potentially risk diluting its community and cultural origins?

Another key consideration is the economic feasibility of physical production, particularly vinyl pressing, which comes with high production costs. The lack of data on the profit margins of the *Sexta dos Crias* project makes it difficult to assess the financial sustainability of this approach, raising concerns about its scalability for artists and labels with limited resources. Nevertheless, Sucesso's journey illustrates how curatorial practices can help transcend reliance on digital metrics. The support from the independent label and the physical release of the album enabled him to move beyond the transient logic of digital platforms, allowing for the consolidation of a more sustainable career. The establishment of an interdependent network between labels, record stores, booking agents, and journalists played a pivotal role in securing his place within the international festival circuit, helping him navigate cultural and bureaucratic challenges, including language barriers, European audience expectations, and the complex legal and administrative hurdles faced by independent artists performing abroad. This underscores the importance of curation that goes beyond mere promotion, addressing the economic, technological, and cultural obstacles that shape the circulation and recognition of peripheral artists.

The case study demonstrates that interdependence—conceived as a collaborative practice for building interpersonal networks—holds great potential for Brazilian artists and curators. However, applying this concept to decentralized platforms still faces significant challenges. The absence of local blockchain-based initiatives, coupled with the limited impact of platforms developed in the Global North on Brazilian artists, highlights that while digital transformations driven by Web3 suggest a decentralization of power away from large

platforms, incorporating the principle of territoriality is crucial for these new models to effectively alter power dynamics. As Cassino, Souza, and Silveira (2021) argue, true social transformation extends beyond the digital tools themselves; it requires governance structures that respect the specific dynamics and needs of each context. Therefore, these initiatives must account for the unique circumstances of artists from the Global South, as failing to do so inevitably perpetuate the very inequalities they seek to challenge.

Ultimately, it can be concluded that while digital platforms offer initial visibility, insurgent strategies — rooted in a critical approach to interculturality and the creation of interdependent networks — are crucial for the long-term sustainability of independent artists. When integrated into the curatorial process, these strategies can elevate the role of curation, positioning it as a fundamental resource for ongoing support and artistic development.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to explore how curatorial practices can act as a form of resistance against the dominant forces shaping the global music market, going beyond the traditional role of exhibition. Central to this effort are the ideas of critical interculturality and interdependence—concepts that, while connected, still hold tensions and unresolved gaps. While interdependence, as discussed by Dryhurst (2019), offers new opportunities for collaboration and sustainability, its application remains largely confined to the Global North. In contexts like Brazil, where historical inequalities persist, this approach must be constantly questioned and enriched by critical perspectives, such as those of Catherine Walsh (2009; 2012; 2019), which call for a radical change in power dynamics and the colonial structures still embedded in cultural practices.

Brazilian peripheral artists face structural barriers that cannot be overcome solely through the adoption of interdependent networks. Algorithms prioritize dominant global trends, the market subordinates creativity to productivity, and independent artists are forced to compete for limited visibility within an oversaturated landscape. DJ Ramon Sucesso's trajectory illustrates this reality: while viral success brought him temporary notoriety, it was critical and collaborative curatorial practices that enabled the construction of a more sustainable career—one that operates outside the disposable logic of digital platforms. However, this path remains arduous. It demands intentional alliances that move beyond the

simple circulation of cultural products, requiring strategic efforts that also ensure the economic sustainability of artists and their work.

Critical interculturality teaches us that it is not enough to simply connect artists, curators, and platforms; it is necessary to transform the very logic of these connections, subverting hierarchies and fostering more equitable relationships. It is within curatorial practice—when guided by a commitment to cultural justice and collaboration across diverse agents—that we find a promising starting point. While curation alone cannot resolve all structural tensions, it can open cracks in the system: spaces through which peripheral voices can emerge as authentic and legitimate expressions, expanding their visibility and recognition without severing them from the economic sustainability and autonomy of the artists themselves.

Thus, curation emerges as a deliberate practice — one capable not only of breaking with the logic that renders cultural expressions invisible when they fall outside global consumption trends, but also of creating more sustainable opportunities for independent artists. For these initiatives to succeed, however, they must be accompanied by a continuous commitment to reconfiguring power relations, where interdependence and critical interculturality operate in an integrated, dynamic way — not as static models, but as ongoing processes of construction and transformation. Although further research is needed to develop approaches that foster broader and more critical reflection, the adoption of these practices, both locally and globally, offers promising pathways for new paradigms of artistic production and innovation to emerge.

Finally, this study acknowledges that curatorial practice alone is not enough to dismantle the colonial and market-based structures that define the global landscape. However, by opening up new possibilities for dialogue and collaboration, curation can foster cultural expressions that not only resist but flourish on their own terms. DJ Ramon Sucesso's trajectory demonstrates that, in a scenario of rapid technological advances, these approaches can articulate an insurgent curatorial praxis, pointing to a future in which curators not only participate in but actively transform the cultural field, inserting narratives, knowledges, and aesthetics from the Global South as an essential part of shaping a more just global cultural industry.

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