Gilberto Velho (1945-2012) and Santuza Naves (1952-2012)

Brazilian anthropology lost two of its prominent practitioners during the first months of 2012. Vibrant invited former friends, colleagues and students to write the short tributes that follow.

For whom (and how) the bell tolls?

Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte

Anthropologists have investigated those creative activities that we define as artistic, together with all the complex values, sensitivities and practices they involve since the beginning of the 20th century, when important analyses of the way in which Western music was structured and the way in which it was related to other dimensions of social organization appeared in the work of the German sociologists Georg Simmel and Max Weber.

Common sense suggests that artistic activity gives vent to sentiments and emotions more directly than other areas of human activity. But this is open to discussion, since we have no universally valid definition of what we call emotion, nor indeed art for that matter. The same problem appears in a possible definition of the frontier between cognition and sentiment.

Anthropologists tend to understand artistic experience, as defined by Western culture, in its relation with other areas of maximal intensity of living; in most cultures, it cannot be separated from what we define as ritual, either in its contrite religious form, or in the more playful form of leisure activity. Even though our music has become dissociated from the field of religion, its multiple and immensely varied manifestations continue to affect us profoundly, plumbing our very soul as we say. This was surely the case of the

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1 Luiz Fernando Dias Duarte was one of Gilberto Velho’s doctoral students. He teaches at the Post Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at the National Museum of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. An earlier version of this text was published in Portuguese on May 4, 2012 on the site of Ciência Hoje, (http://cienciahoje.uol.com.br/colums/sentidos-do-mundo/por-quem-e-como-os-sinos-dobram). It was translated by Peter Fry and Oscar Lamont.
Brazilian anthropologists have made an important contribution to the anthropology of music. But through a painful coincidence, the work of three important contributors to this field has been suddenly and cruelly interrupted. Santuza Naves and Gilberto Velho died in April 2012 while Elizabeth Travassos was plunged into a grave state of unconsciousness due to a hospital accident at the end of 2011.

Santuza wrote her master’s thesis on Caetano Veloso and Tropicalia under the supervision of Velho. Elizabeth’s doctorate thesis that was also supervised by Velho examines how modernism in music appropriated local folk traditions, comparing the Brazilian composer Mario de Andrade with the Hungarian Béla Bartók. Velho himself researched the role of art in contemporary urban societies, publishing “Art and society” as far back as 1977 in which authors approached the subject, as they still do today, from historical, sociological and ethnological perspectives.

The social history of artistic phenomena in Western culture provides an essential backdrop for the understanding of the present, just as it is essential also for an anthropological understanding of artistic phenomena in other human cultures—ethnomusicology. The reader who may be interested in recent work in Brazil on this subject might like to consult Vibrant – Virtual Brazilian Anthropology, Vol. 8 (1) where there is a dossier on music and anthropology in Brazil organized by anthropologists Carlos Sandroni, Hermano Vianna and Rafael Bastos.

Various studies, one teacher

Gilberto Velho supervised many theses on musical themes: Hermano Vianna’s work on the world of funk, and samba as a symbol of Brazilian nationality; Pedro Leite Lopes’ on heavy metal; Sandra Costa’s on carioca Hip-Hop and the careers of popular musicians; Caio Dias on Tom Jobim; Mila Burns on Dona Ivone Lara; and Roberta Ceva on forró universitária.

Velho was very much influenced by the North American school of symbolic interaction, especially through the work of his lifetime friend the sociologist Howard S. Becker—also a jazz musician—, who developed the concept of artistic worlds, characterized by the singular lifestyles they cultivate, the development of a sentiment of special communion, together with more
practical rules, ethical dispositions, particular forms of cultivating conflict and competition. Velho examined the contemporary relations of these worlds in Brazil with the phenomenon what Becker had termed deviant behavior, such as the taking of drugs and homosexuality.

The notion of transgression so dear to the artistic vanguard of the West since the era of romanticism has often related to the principal tenets of Western modernity: rationalization, individualism and interiorization. Artistic activity comes to be associated with subjective truth, or authenticity, which may be revealed by the individual artist or collectively, in the expression of a national soul for example.

The writings of Naves and Travassos raise similar questions about the relation between music and nationality, even though their styles are quite different. Both their theses examined the challenge of articulating artistic modernism and national modernization, an interest they continued to pursue. Travassos studied oral tradition and cultural heritage while Naves was interested in Brazilian popular music and counterculture.

As John Donne wrote in 1624, the bell tolls for each and every one of us. The duty of an anthropologist is to understand how the bell tolls, to find meaning in the world of lived experience—even when devastated by the loss of such dear colleagues.

References

I came to Rio de Janeiro in 1990, as a Fulbright professor in the Programa de Antropologia Social at the Museu Nacional, under the wing (as during my first visit in 1976) of Gilberto Velho. By this time, we knew each other well, had read large amounts of each other’s work, and had shared a number of wonderful students.

I worked out of Gilberto’s office in the Museu and at times. When he was busy with students or meetings, he left me free to root around on his table, covered with paper perhaps as much as a foot deep: books, journals, manuscripts, xeroxed copies of manuscripts, letters, photographs, handwritten pages about who knows what or by whom written (if the page was in his handwriting it wasn’t readable).

Some scholars keep their materials in an orderly way. They arrange their books on the shelves alphabetically. Or by subject matter. Or by geographical

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2 Howard S. Becker is an American sociologist who taught at Northwestern University and the University of Washington, and is now retired. He lives and works in San Francisco and is the author of many articles and books, of which the following have been translated into Portuguese in Brazil: Outsiders, Tricks of the Trade and Telling About Society.
area. Or language. The journals sit on the shelves in alphabetical order, the individual numbers of each in numerical order. That kind of arrangement makes it easy to find what you are looking for. But when you need something you don’t know you need, something you aren’t looking for, order is your enemy. It hides the hard to find where you will never look if you follow your standard routine. You have to run across it by accident.

Some people have routines for accelerating the arrival of that kind of accident. My colleague and friend Anselm Strauss (Strauss 1999) would go looking for a book in the library. But, when he had found what he wanted, he made it a practice to turn 180° and look at the shelves on the other side of the aisle. In a library arranged according to some standard bibliographic system—North American libraries use the Dewey Decimal System, which categorizes subjects in a sort of Linnaean system and gives them all numbers—turning 180 degrees almost always confronts you with a subject that has nothing to do with what you came there for: a different part of the world, a different language, a different scholarly subject. You came looking for information on rainfall in Argentina but the opposite wall has books on German philosophy, something like that.

Gilberto’s work table brought this system (or lack of it) into his office. All these materials were arranged, perhaps, by the date they had arrived there. But then he would lend this book to you and that book to someone else, and when you returned them they went into whatever place was convenient, magnifying the disorder. I found many wonderful things there. Some he recommended to me. Others I found by chance, when a word or a name caught my eye. And some of the things had the wonderful, unpredictable quality of changing my life. Not necessarily in large momentous ways, often just in a small way, suggesting a new idea, which led to another idea or a new thought about possible research, or ...

The lack of order facilitated random discoveries. So, one day Gilberto told me to read an article he had just published in Novos Estudos on then-president Collor (Velho 1990). The same issue contained, by chance, Antonio Candido’s brilliant “Quatro esperas” (Candido 1990). I had no idea who Antonio Candido was, but the article followed Gilberto’s so I looked at it, saw that it started out with an analysis of Constantine Cavafy’s brilliant poem “Waiting for the Barbarians” (Cavafis 1982), and started to read it. If I had followed any conventional scholarly procedure to organize what I read in Portuguese during
my 1990 visit, I would never have found this article. But Gilberto’s disorder led me to it. And I was struck by its brilliance, its humanism and all the other qualities Candido is known for.

When I asked Gilberto, naively, if “this guy had written anything else,” his legendary capacity for gentle sarcasm produced a few choice remarks and a list of books. I read everything I could find by Candido, and then decided that it was a scandal that these ideas were not available to Anglophone readers. Which led me to translate a bookful of his essays and see them through to publication (Becker 1995). The ramifications of this unexpected discovery shape my life still.

One side track leads to another. When Gilberto saw, with approval and pleasure, that he had me hooked on Candido, he produced a paper by a colleague in Brasilia who had written her Harvard dissertation on the history of Brazilian anthropology, for which she had interviewed a number of the founders of the field, including Antonio Candido (Peirano 1981). I read Mariza Peirano’s paper (Peirano 1989) on the role of acaso in the occupational choices of this first generation, which focused on the “artimanhas do acaso,” and that idea became the germ of a paper on coincidence which in turn became an important part of my later book Segredos e truques da pesquisa (Becker 2008 [1997]).

Looking at Karina Kuschnir’s evocative drawing of Gilberto’s work table reminds me of the creative disorder that filled his life and thought and work, and of the pleasure, joy and profit it brought to so many, turning us from what convention and familiarity and sheer laziness would otherwise have engaged us in. We were all his students in this great lesson of life.

An afterthought. Many people have asked me, over the years for the story of the carimbo of the capivara that Gilberto used so often and so freely and so
mysteriously. He stamped all sorts of official documents, letters to important officials, etc. with this design and never explained it. I am the only one who can clear up the mystery, because I was there!

When my first wife, Nan, and I came to Brasil in 1976 we prepared for our trip only by going to the Chicago Zoo we lived near where we saw a capybara. The sign said that it came from Brasil. So when we arrived in Rio de Janeiro that was the only thing we knew about the country: *bossa nova* and *capybaras*. And naturally Nan asked Gilberto if there were any capybaras near Rio that we could see (because we didn't know it was a jungle animal). Well, you know Gilberto! He didn't just say no. He said he would make an investigation. And then he started asking everyone we met if they had seen any capybaras on the beach that day, or in Ipanema, etc. Everyone, of course, thought he was crazy and we soon realized it was a joke.

After that, he and I one day decided that we should make it a bigger joke, so we invented the Veneravel Ordem dos Amigos da Capivara. I said we needed to have something “official” that we could use to make the Ordem's existence more “official,” and when I returned to Chicago I found the picture in a book somewhere, and had a rubber stamp made. I think there were three altogether: one for Gilberto, one for me, and there was a third member from the Museu (though the person involved didn't ask to be and maybe didn't even want to be) and I withhold the name to protect the innocent.

And, of course, Gilberto began stamping all sorts of papers, even official ones from the PPGAS, for instance, with the capybara. I don’t know what people thought it meant but we were both amused by the idea.

Of course, we both pretended that it was a very secret organization and sometimes gave people the idea that maybe it was larger than it was! But it was really just the two of us, because I don’t think the third member thought it was funny.

References


The “Emperor”

Mariza Peirano

In 1996 Gilberto who was then President of the National Association of Post Graduate Programs in the Social Sciences (Anpocs) asked me if I would act as liaison for an invitation to Stanley Tambiah to deliver one of the Meetings’ major conferences of that year. Invitation accepted, I became concerned about how these two strong personalities would get along. My mistake. They immediately recognized one another when they met at the Museu Nacional’s inner garden. While Gilberto immediately addressed the guest by his

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3 Mariza Peirano received her doctorate from the University of Harvard and was one of Gilberto Velho’s closest friends and colleagues. She teaches at the University of Brasília.
nickname “Tambi”, to Gilberto’s delight Tambiah named him “The Emperor”. In that old palace, Gilberto’s poise could not be mistaken. During our stay in Caxambu, the title continued to be used when Tambiah explained that, as “a member of the entourage of the Emperor”, he had to follow Gilberto to the bar for a *caipirinha*, or to the empty dining hall at 6 pm for supper. Gilberto was charmed by the treatment and we, the real entourage of both men, had great fun with the good-humored jesting that preponderated in their relationship.

Gilberto listening closely to Tambiah in Hotel Glória crowded hall

Gilberto’s regal and imposing personality has always been known to those who needed to respond to his demands, to the inflexible timetables he valued so highly, to the carefully detailed agendas which sometimes were meticulously defined months in advance, not to mention his impervious and cultivated “incorrectness”. A central figure in the anthropological milieu, where he pioneered the field of urban studies in Brazil, an intellectual with a tremendous breadth of knowledge, he was foremost a teacher/advisor. Add to these responsibilities his vast contribution as member of institutions dedicated to key academic decision-making policies, and his important role in the publishing of anthropological and sociological books.

Perhaps less talked about is the complementary side to Gilberto’s formality. Gilberto was a sweet man. Those who had the privilege to share his company recognized in him the most loyal friend, the fatherly figure to/of his students, the devastated “parent” when difficulties troubled them, his
immediate presence when friends needed assistance, not to mention the 24/7 dedication to his own parents. His cell phone was always at hand, in case of need. But perhaps the most emblematic material object of Gilberto’s anthropological sensitivity appears in his last article, which he finished a week before his death. This piece is both a sociological analysis and a moving personal appraisal of all the women who had been his housekeepers after he left his parents’ home. It is dedicated to Dejanira Oliveira – Deja for those who frequented his house.

We tend to live our craft. Nowadays it is not unusual to find social scientists turn their analytical artistry towards their own biography at a certain point in their careers. In Gilberto’s case, he portrays an acute ethnographer in his own home, a sui-generis patrão, with housekeepers appearing side by side with Alfred Schutz, Georg Simmel, Howard Becker and Erving Goffman, revealing how these different women, one by one, put together fragments of several worlds in “a fascinating bricolage.”

Gilberto could not have known – now I, for that matter, who had the benefit of reading a first draft – that at that moment he was validating an anthropological calling which is always an art of intertwining what we differentiate as personal, political, aesthetic and intellectual spheres.

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**Gilberto Velho, supervisor (1)**

*Karina Kuschnir*

I would like to be able to write that I am without words at this moment. But to be without words would be the opposite of all that I learned with him. Gilberto Velho always had something to say to his friends at the most difficult times. Always at the very moment, never the day after. In the emotion of this loss then, let me put down some thoughts in his honor.

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4 Karina Kuschnir received her MA (1993) and Ph.D. (1998) in Social Anthropology from the National Museum, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, under the supervision of Gilberto Velho. She is assistant professor at the Department of Cultural Anthropology and the Post Graduate Program in Sociology and Anthropology (PPGSA) at the Institute of Philosophy and Social Sciences, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Peter Fry translated the text.
As Celso Castro and Hermano Viana have pointed out, anthropology was not at the center of the universe for Gilberto. It was part of a much wider search for knowledge that included history, art, literature, mathematics and philosophy. And this was not mere rhetoric, but the way he found for keeping things in perspective. This meant that we, his supervisees, might suddenly have to interrupt our research to read the memories of Tarquínio de Souza or carefully study the work of young Turks, even if we were doing fieldwork in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro.

I will not dwell on the importance of his academic life or on his dedication to the life of Brazilian scientific institutions. It is enough to read his long curriculum where he placed a happy photograph taken in the Princesses’ Garden outside his room at the National Museum on the day we carried out the second part of an interview on his life and career for our project on the lives of Brazilian social scientists.

I prefer to remember how we enjoyed his peculiar sense of humor as Peter Fry wrote in a text for the Brazilian Anthropological Association. When he spoke of his youth or the beginning of his career, he would note with enormous seriousness: “but this was in the 13th century”. He would ask new students in the National Museum whether they had learned the Hymn to Anthropology, intoning operatically “be surprised, relativise...” When setting up meetings, he would look in his little black diary, and say: “okay, Tuesday at 8:47”. He would keep us guessing about the rubberstamp of the Venerable Order of the Capybara, hunting down insects with his huge wooden sword, telling us of the time when he was a fencing champion, playing practical jokes, quoting battles during the Byzantine Empire or telling us mysterious stories of how Euclides da Cunha’s brain ended up in the National Museum.

All this was combined with obsessive discipline in his supervisions. He would read chapters of theses on the very afternoon that he received them, or make telephone calls at 7 o’clock in the morning to see if we were working, and set up exams months before they were due to take place. He would keep us to deadlines, he would complain and argue – a lot. But he tried to compensate such rigidity with enormous affection and a desire to see us grow, as Maria Laura Cavalcanti reminded us at the funeral wake. Gilberto took us under his wing at times of difficulty and reveled in our successes. It is true that he resisted change, sometimes ferociously. But he would also frequently
change his mind, accepting and even enjoying the most incredible proposals, such as radically changing a research topic or deciding on the date of a thesis defense with the aid of an astrological map.

Among the many people left behind, it is difficult to distinguish between the hundreds of students, supervisees, colleagues or friends, because for Gilberto such categories were always deliberately confused. “People are complex”, he would say; “we should never freeze identities”. Gilberto loved to bring people together setting up meetings, parties, seminars, conferences, lunches and dinners. At such events we would invariably be expected to wait for the arrival of an “illustrious Hungarian anthropologist” – yet another of his practical jokes. Even when we had seen through it, we enjoyed ourselves wondering who would enshrine the role of the surprise guest. These events led to all kinds of relationships: friendships, professional exchanges, transatlantic trips, supervisions, research, publications, books and even love affairs and marriages.

I end thanking everyone for his or her support. Although nothing can fill this loss, there is some consolation in knowing how many of us feel it.

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**Gilberto Velho – Supervisor (2)**

**Celso Castro and Julia O’Donnell**

It is no easy matter to write a tribute to someone who disappeared so suddenly, leaving behind such a vast and important body of writings. To make matters more complex, the fact that we were both supervised by Gilberto Velho for our masters and doctoral degrees adds an additional emotional weight.

Gilberto Velho was the virtual founder of urban anthropology in Brazil. In 1970 his pioneering masters thesis, *A utopia urbana* (published in 1973), was the starting point for the incipient field of studies of and in cities, in

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5 Celso Castro read for a degree in social sciences at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, where he also completed his master’s and doctorate under the supervision of Gilberto Velho. He is presently director of the Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC/FGV) of the Getulio Vargas Foundation. Julia O’Donnell read for a degree in History at the University of São Paulo and then a master’s and doctorate in Social Anthropology under the supervision of Gilberto Velho. She is presently on the faculty of the CPDOC/FGV. Peter Fry translated the text.
an intellectual context dominated by the anthropology of indigenous societies. Based on fieldwork in a block of tiny apartments in Copacabana, the thesis started with one of the most evident characteristics of the area—its heterogeneity—to research what Gilberto Velho identified as the worldview of a specific social group—the white-collar, middle class. Beginning with a simple question (“why did you come to live in Copacabana?”), he mapped out the meanings attributed to the area by a social segment for whom Copacabana represented an entry point into a new universe. For Gilberto Velho, the city corresponded to “a social map where people are defined by where they live” (p. 80).

The thesis however was not restricted to describing the idiosyncrasies of a “Copacabana ideology” (p. 8). Rather, A utopia urbana gave rise to a line of thought characterized by careful attention to the dynamics of cities as a fruitful way of thinking through such questions as individualism, anonymity, sociability, family relations and the styles of metropolitan life. More than a pioneering piece of research, it transformed cities and their middle classes into a legitimate field of study.

Velho’s work however was not restricted to urban anthropology. In books such as Individualismo e cultura (1981), Subjetividade e sociedade (1986) and Projeto e metamorfose (1994), he became established as a writer on the broader themes of contemporary complex societies. He entered into dialogue with other disciplines and intellectual traditions, incorporating an interdisciplinary perspective, which was, in his view, the most notable calling of the social sciences. Reading through his impressive curriculum or his interviews one can see the importance he attached to a true proximity with such diverse disciplines as literary studies, psychology and psychoanalysis, history and philosophy.

Many generations of students had the privilege of participating in one or many of his anthological courses on urban anthropology or the anthropology of complex societies which he gave regularly in the Post Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at the National Museum. In these courses, students from various fields of study came together to discuss texts ranging from The Bacchae through chapters of a recently defended Masters theses in an intellectual environment quite deliberately marked by academic respect and a delight in intellectual diversity. “Society is complex because individuals are complex”, Velho used to say, so as to draw attention to the dangers of over generalizing and coming to over-simplifying conclusions. That is also why he
became so irritated with students’ disdain for particular authors, supposed theoretical antagonisms, and attempts to pigeonhole texts into “this” or “that” political or ideological lineage. Nothing irritated him more than intellectual pedantry, lack of tolerance for diverse points of view or a disregard for academic decorum.

Notwithstanding his openness for various traditions of thought, Gilberto Velho liked to position himself within an intellectual lineage that included authors such as George Simmel, Robert Park, Everett Hughes and Howard S. Becker, as well as the classical anthropologists, certain writers of fiction and philosophers. Rather than see himself as a loyal follower of a particular school of thought, he preferred to make use of everything he knew that might help him better understand social reality. Whether in his pleasure in following research in progress, his commitment to read the many theses and dissertations which he supervised or the enthusiasm with which he would announce the discovery of a Turkish writer for example, Velho was tireless in his search for new insights into the social world. Adverse to passing fashions, he put the same effort into his recurrent visits to almost forgotten classics, bringing the many anthropologies of different times and places to the attention of his students. Equally impressive was his openness to references that his students brought to him. Indefatigable in his desire to understand the social world, Gilberto Velho was genuinely interested in authors, texts and phenomena which the students brought to him, taking the position that hierarchy is in no way antagonistic to intellectual exchange. In his impressive erudition and a strong passion for his calling, it was clear that anthropology was more than the discipline; for him it was a way of seeing, understanding and being in the world.

These were the values that Gilberto Velho sought to transmit in his classes and to nearly 100 masters and doctoral students. Beyond training students in anthropology, he aimed to form professionals who would be both ethical and sensitive to diversity. Gilberto Velho was therefore a demanding supervisor, calling not only for theoretical rigor, but also punctuality, respect for deadlines, precision in quotations, and no less importantly, clarity of exposition. In exchange, he was ever an available listener and an attentive reader. In this way his role as supervisor was not a complement to teaching and research but rather a fundamental aspect of his calling as an intellectual.

Gilberto Velho was also a public intellectual, much appreciated by his
peers. He occupied many important positions such as the presidency of the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) and of the National Association of Post Graduate Programs in the Social Sciences (ANPOCS), and the vice-presidency of the Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science (SBPC). He was a council member of the National Science Research Council (CNPq), of the National Heritage Institute (IPHAN) and the Federal Cultural Council, apart from having introduced the human sciences into the Brazilian Academy of Sciences. He was a regular participant in Congresses, presenting and debating in all manner of meetings in Brazil and abroad. He had an extraordinary talent for mediation and bringing together people from diverse social circles, always with generosity, politeness and humor. He had been particularly active in promoting contacts between Brazilian and Portuguese intellectuals over the last decade.

The death of Gilberto Velho has left an enormous void for those of us who have had the privilege of knowing him well, but also for all of those who, independently of their academic disciplines, are committed to the study of complex societies.

Anthropological greetings, Gilberto!

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**Santuza Naves and Brazilian Popular Music**

*Fernanda Arêas Peixoto*

Music has always fascinated Brazilian anthropologists as the expansion of ethnomusicology in the country shows. All the same, an anthropological interest in Brazilian popular music is relatively recent. And in this field, Santuza Cambraia Naves’ contribution is crucial. From her master’s dissertation at the National Museum on the music of Caetano Veloso (*Objeto não identificado: a trajetória de Caetano Veloso*, 1988), through her doctoral thesis at the University of São Paulo (USP). She writes on, among other things, the importance of Roger Bastide for the study of Brazilian society and culture. Peter Fry translated the text.

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6 Fernanda Arêas Peixoto, a close friend and colleague of Santuza Naves, is a member of the faculty of the Department of Anthropology of the University of São Paulo (USP). She writes on, among other things, the importance of Roger Bastide for the study of Brazilian society and culture. Peter Fry translated the text.
Institute for Economic and Political Research (IUPERJ) (O violão azul: modernismo e música popular, 1998), up to her more recent writings such as A MPB em discussão (with Tatiana Bacal and Frederico Coelho, 2006) and Canção popular no Brasil (2010), Santuza made an inestimable contribution to the study of this most vigorous branch of Brazilian culture. Apart from her writing, she played a significant role in the Nucleus for Musical Study at the Candido Mendes University, which she coordinated in 2009, and in the Department of Sociology and Politics at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro where she taught.

Working on popular songs in the 1920s and 30s, on the Bossa Nova for the 1950s and on the musical innovations of the 1960s and 70s (Tropicalism, for example) her studies contribute not only to the study of what is conventionally called Popular Brazilian Music (MPB), but also to wider issues of Brazilian culture and counterculture. “Music does not live alone”, she said in an interview, urging for the study of its relationship to other artistic domains and culture as a whole. But we—her friends and professional colleagues—have been left utterly alone without her sunny presence.