

■ Music and migration: the Gulbenkian Next Future Program

Miguel Magalhães*

The Next Future [*Próximo Futuro*] is a Gulbenkian Program dedicated to contemporary artistic creation and to theoretical production on an axis that includes Africa, South America, the Caribbean, and Europe. Next Future takes place in a natural sequence of the work that has, in recent years, been developed in the Cultural Forum *Estado do Mundo* and in the Gulbenkian programme *Distância e Proximidade*. The work constructed in the last four years has confirmed the certainty that artistic creation (with music occupying a prominent position there in) is one of the areas of human activity that is best suited for sampling social, economic, political and cultural changes, particularly in areas that relate to the mobility of people. As people migrate, their creations and their works do likewise. Constructing a cultural program from assumptions related to migration is a complex task, crucial for the organic development of cities, but not without pitfalls: how not to contribute to the formation of artistic ghettos and how not to turn the stages into mere offices of trivia?

Recent years have been lavish in mutations. At the side of large movements of people and migratory waves between continents - and not dissociated from these - changes have occurred in the technological nature that affect the programming and production of a project with the characteristics of the Next Future program. The dissemination of the internet and the ability to access it for musicians from places so diverse as the slums of Rio, cities like Berlin, London or New York, the *townships* of Johannesburg or the *musseques* of Luanda, in recent decades has altered the entire chain of production and value that used to manage the normal functioning of the music industry in the broadest sense.

Simultaneously, migrant populations have immediate access to the artistic production and creation in their place of origin, never cutting off their provenances and maintaining their networks intact. And the same is true in places from where they have left. These networks maintain a constant flow of information between migratory origin and destination.

Cultural programmers and producers often are directly connected to artists by doing their own, almost techno-ethnographic, research work. The appeal to musical agents, for example, has become less common, while the collapse of the record industry has dramatically increased the number of live performances (a proof of this is the growing number of spectators of live concerts in Portugal, from 3.7 million in 2007 to 4.4 million in 2008).

* Cultural Producer

None of these issues can be separated from the growing importance of the mobility of artists in Europe (and elsewhere), a social and political paradox that Europe both lives and feeds. Issues related to social protection, allocation of work permits or tax treatment of artists wishing to work in Europe is at all contrary to the public discourse, promoting cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

As the manifesto of Next Future states, the programme seeks to fundamentally “*reflect on what is today’s contemporaneity and how it acts in the representation of artistic and cultural production; to contribute to the redefinition of identities, of new flows of markets or people, and of new centralities, in particular the definitive importance that cities acquire in this era of transnationality*”.

The Gulbenkian Próximo Futuro Program¹ is a project with a duration of three years and lasts until the end of 2011. In 2010, starting June 18th, several concerts, shows, film sessions and visual arts installations will be presented, and several research *workshops* will be realised during the year.

Notes

¹ Available at www.gulbenkian.pt/proximofuturo and www.proximofuturo.blogspot.com, accessed on 05.09.2009.