MUSICAL LISTENING AND NARRATIVES: difference and otherness in communicational processes

ESCUTA MUSICAL E NARRATIVAS: diferença e alteridade nos processos comunicacionais
ESCUCHA MUSICAL Y NARRATIVAS: diferencia y alteridad en los procesos comunicacionales

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ABSTRACT:
The present work aims to think about the practice of listening to music as an invitation to difference. The starting point considers the organization of pop music in the media, its adherence to the aesthetics of the so-called West, to propose reflections on works of a hybrid profile, which the matrix is the Global South. The empirical analysis uses narratives produced in musical listening workshops offered to high school students as an extension activity. The theoretical methodological approach brings closer the experience of narrative research to the semiotic analysis of the songs to rethink the universalization of the dominant recognition regimes in the media, based on other existences and enunciation fields.

KEYWORDS: Musical Listening; Differences; Narratives; Experience; Hybridism.

Introduction

The recognition of a certain musical genre is influenced by mediations that bring together aesthetic rules, media industry interests, and tastes formed in musical communities. These identification relationships have been historically constituted since the advent of phonography and are also reflected in the current globalized scenario of rearticulations of major media groups on streaming platforms. Modern pop music, thus, predominantly expresses models centered on Northern Global aesthetics, since the circulation of music productions on a global level - as well as other media products - is structured on narrative inequalities that express these differences. It is also necessary to consider that the phenomenon of entertainment emerging in the early twentieth century, from which our historical formation inherits, disseminates and establishes the so-called pop culture as an adjustable semiotics "like no other cultural form in media visibility" (Silveira, p. 10, 2013). By making aesthetic models visible in market labels that tend to summarize popular music, universal readings are also created that do not account for the diversity of popular music production. The recognition of aesthetically perceived and read forms as naturally separate is the territorial machine on which social production and

reproduction rest (Deleuze; Guattari, 2014), in movements of containment of flows and flattening of aesthetic multiplicities.

The concept of massive popular music presupposes encounters between midiatized popular culture and sociotechnical environments (Janotti Junior, 2006, p. 4), hence more organized readings emerge in musical genres, which suggest "values, feelings, and thoughts" (Trotta, 2005, p. 182). Therefore, musical genres and the organization of music in the media allow understanding sociabilities and phenomena of circulation and consumption. Beyond a reading that prioritizes musical communities in mediation processes - semiotic and discursive keys guided by the media for building sociabilities based on musical genres - this text starts from a communicational experience of in-betweens, minor processualities, and dialogisms that continue to produce lines of flight and agencements of difference. However, the empirical experiment proposed here takes into account another dynamic: that of virtuality capable of updating singular points (Deleuze, 2018) from sound and, thus, redesigning the territorialities constituted in the historicity of the media.

A dear point to this present work is to understand the mediatization of certain popular cultures within the universalizations of globalization processes and their narrative inequalities. This aspect is not exclusive to the economy or geopolitics but also occurs in the transmission of culture, specifically the circulation of media cultural products. Not surprisingly, the presence of emerging sounds from the Global South, their hybridizations, and more experimental profiles that bring marks of local cultures are categorized by media industries as world music (Vargas; Carvalho; Chiachiri, 2020). Thus, a capture device is created for the other (non-western) by a market regime that generates a global identity (Frith, 2000) reproduced in dominant mediations.

It is necessary to consider, therefore, that this gear of more recurrent circulation and consumption in the media limits perceptions about cultures, their ways of existing, and worldviews. Such organization constructs a discursive field, constitutes a naturalized reality, and begins to touch upon the production of subjectivities (Lazzarato, 2014) and the models of shared musical consumption and enjoyment in globalization processes.

The empirical front of this ongoing work[1], at the interface of the fields of Communication and Education, explores the potential of a musical listening less mediated by dominant paradigms in music listening and narrative production workshops. The starting point is the contact of students with songs and artists whose aesthetics do not correspond to the market delineations of pop music. The idea is to

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[1] This article is part of the doctoral research "Experimentalism and Hybridizations: Difference Agencies in the Communicational Experience of Pop Music", funded by a CAPES scholarship.

explore creative practices for recognizing other singularities, as well as rethinking the established relationships with media products. On another front, it is understood that the deviation from recognition paradigms is inviting for the perception of dimensions of difference and alterity, since if the proposed listening generates a sense of strangeness, it also triggers curiosity towards other affections. Hence, a discovered, produced knowledge[2] ensues. It is in the experimentation of another (aesthetic, existential) paradigm that subjectivity (re)singularizes itself, as Felix Guattari (2006) observed, defending an experience of territorialities and polyphonies. This is a methodological path of knowledge production and sharing that can deepen competencies to be developed, notably in the field of Humanities.

The workshop method

The first model of the workshops was presented to high school students at a technical school in the state of São Paulo, as an extension activity. The experience was conducted in the first semester of 2019 during a special cultural activities day at the school, which included literature and cinema contents.

In its first edition, the workshop lasted for two hours and was conducted based on the following schedule of activities:

a) Introduction to pop music, musical genres, taste performance, and notions of musical communities;

b) Popular music and listening: recognition forms and involvement with the language of popular music;

c) Listening to hybridized songs, notions of local and Global South cultures;

d) Practical activity: narrative descriptions based on listening, with time for research on the internet;

e) Discussion and sharing of the narratives produced about the music.

Among the difficulties encountered, the short time with the students limited the necessary involvement with the theme, and the flattening of the expository content due to the practical activity suggested at the end of the meeting - that is, too much content to be covered in a two-hour period. The next format of the workshop (under development) will have more meetings to enable greater connection and interaction among participants (teacher, students). The workshop will also have a more robust final

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[2] Regarding the field of Humanities, there is a learning path to be worked on that can be read, for example, in Federal Law No. 9,394/1996 - the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law - and its Article 35, which mentions the preparation for citizenship and the improvement of the human being (in the ethical dimension, intellectual autonomy, and critical thinking).

product - text and playlist creation for a thematic blog and space on the school's radio and/or newspaper laboratory are being considered.

However, for the reflections that this article proposes, the focus will be on the first conducted experience, its theoretical and methodological framework, the selected artists for the musical listening activities, and the preliminary results that served as an initial experiment for the ongoing research.

Theoretical Framework

In the empirical stage, musical listening will be considered as a communicational process, in which a media product is brought to the workshops' activities. The experience of the meetings generates a teaching report on the activities developed (Azevedo; Passeggi, 2015), as well as notes on reflections discussed during the meetings. Here, the choice of narrative research as a theoretical basis for the collection and treatment of empirical material is justified by considering such a path capable of accounting for a movement of thinking about experience (Connelly; Clandinin, 2011). A second stage brings the produced reports closer to a semiotic analysis of the songs, whose objective is to understand music in its processuality and smaller elements usually silenced in the most frequent categorizations in the media.

Would it be possible to think of musical enjoyment outside the more stable frameworks of pop music? What aspects of alterity and differences are amplified by the tangential encounter of these works? The theoretical-methodological approach proposes updating discussions about musical genres to, first of all, understand the genre in its dialogical/enunciative (Bakhtin, 2003), intertextual (Kristeva, 1980), and cultural boundary dimensions (Lotman, 1996), since hybridizations and experimentalisms are radical moments of these characteristics (Vargas; Carvalho, 2018) inherent to genres. The proposed analysis sheds light on singularities, lines of flight, and cultural differences, hence the need to rethink the organization of pop music as a universal notion that unevenly summarizes the perception of popular music. Based on emerging aesthetics from the Global South, recognition regimes oscillate in moments of inoperability (AGAMBEN, 2017), thus releasing other notions of reality - which do not merely sum up to musical language but integrate fields of enunciation and existential modalities (GUATTARI, 2006). This work seeks to understand difference as Deleuze (2018) does, who instead of thinking it within a dichotomous game (or manichaean reading) prefers to observe it as an event, a process of updating virtualities in experience. Therefore, it calls for a look at the multiplicities and emerging cultural flows of the intersections of musical

genres, amid hybridizations and experimentalisms of singularities from the Global South, generators of constant updates.

Artists and works

The selection criteria for the works presented in the workshops relate, initially, to the musical language and its aesthetic elements (rhythm, instrumentation, performance, texture, etc.). However, the material dimension of the songs and the ethos of the artists open up an enunciative field that leads listening to different historical, cultural, economic contexts, etc. - that is, here we have materialities that lead to other territorialities. Music invites new perspectives in listening. It is not a matter of constructing a mere semantic opposition in which the hybrid profile is opposed to the market demarcation, but rather to show that the minor processes perceived in sound mixtures are capable of expanding certain notions that were previously seen as static - especially in the mediatization that reaches the common sense in the media memory. The search for artists started with a documentary investigation to identify, in the media environment, songs and albums that present sound experiments and hybridizations. The searches were done on the web, in traditional media, in segmented media, and social networks, as well as in the physical urban space of concerts, record fairs, creative workshops, and cultural events. The list of artists, up to the present moment, includes the following names:

- **DJ Tudo (Alfredo Bello)**, a nomadic artist who travels throughout Brazil and the world to record regional sounds and re-edit them with collages of other instrumental arrangements;

- **Songhoy Blues**, a band from Mali that blends elements of rock, lyrics sung in Songhai, and sound traditions from the north of their country;

- **Mashrou' Leila**, a Lebanese group that references Arabic music from Western pop;

- **DJ Dolores**, who was part of the manguebeat movement, uses electronic production means to fuse Northeastern traditions (instrumentation and rhythms) with synthesizers and samples;

- **Tetine**, a Brazilian duo based in the UK that uses electropunk, funk carioca, and sound art, in transits between pop and artistic installation concepts;

- **M.I.A.**, a British singer of Sri Lankan descent, inserts non-Eurocentric instrumentation, bodies, and images into the context of globalized music genres;

- **Bantu Continua Uhuru Consciousness (BCUC)**, a South African group whose work uses percussion from local cultures, indigenous instrumentation (such as imbombu[3]), and elements of hip hop, blues, and reggae;

- **Joe Strummer & Mescaleros**, a band led by the former Clash vocalist Joe Strummer that brings sounds from countries in the Global South to the British context;

- **KOKOKO!**, a band composed of musicians from Kinshasa (Congo) and a French electronic music producer, whose instrumentation is elaborated from recycled materials, experimenting with global and local sounds.

Since listening as a communicational process touches on elements of difference and alterity, as the suspension (even if temporary) of dominant mediations requires openness to the construction of a new recognition, it is intended to explore, in the interdisciplinary dialogue between Communication and Education constructed in the workshops, the potential of such activities in knowledge production. The use of songs encompasses activities of collective creation, reflection, and research, whose result seeks to expand modalities of subjectivity production in the valorization of other existences, realities, and worldviews - usually on the margins of media narratives.

The Workshops: Some Preliminary Results

The material shared here is part of the first experience of the workshop on listening and producing narratives, offered as an extension activity to a technical school[4] in the public state network of São Paulo (located in the southern zone of the city). During an afternoon, two classes (one first-year and one third-year of high school) experienced the extension activity. This stage of the text describes the empirical field experiment and sheds light on the interactions of the participants, as well as small details recorded in the meetings. The workshop aimed to stimulate creativity for the construction of a collective final product. Its schedule started with a more expositional introduction followed by a moment of immersion in the proposed activity. According to artist and art theorist Fayga Ostrower (1977, p. 9), "perception forms are not free and relationships are not established by chance," so the dynamics of the meetings sought to create favorable conditions for knowledge production. It is a movement of approaching ideas, presenting content and tools, and generating reflections in the search for something new.

In presenting the songs to the students, curiosity and strangeness were the most expressive reactions, followed by curiosity about the presented artists. This latter affect,

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[3] Wind instrument.
[4] For confidentiality reasons, neither the school nor the students will be identified in this text. However, everyone is aware of and agrees with the ongoing research.

produced during the listening, deserves special attention because it tends to generate a movement of opening of the participants to the difference materialized in the sound. There was an initial effort of recognition that sought to associate the sonorities, until then unknown, with recognizable works and songs, among the reactions and conversations (whispers) during the listening. In the activity requested after the more expositional content presentation, the class was divided into pairs for the listening of some more artists (the presentation was based on a previous list - the corpus presented here. Some specific sites/platforms that publish works with a more experimental profile aligned with the Global South were also indicated).

Next, the class was challenged to write a few lines about the listening experience, with the possibility of researching on the internet to enrich the text, especially in deepening cultural matrices. The need to reflect on differences was highlighted - that is, how to deal with the understanding of something we do not know? And furthermore, how to place oneself in the field of alterity and let the unknown present itself with its aesthetics that are not common to our media consumption context?

The first difficulty identified was regarding the lyrics, many of which were sung in other languages, including local languages. When working on the introductory content of the workshop, already thinking about the language barrier that would come during the activity (and this is also provocative for rethinking the tangibility of popular music), it was exposed that music communicates in various semiotic fronts - beyond the lyrics. As a provocation, a series of questions perceived in the works were put into play, such as their material dimension and their cultural and historical load. It was necessary, then, for the ear and the eye to turn to instrumentation, rhythms, images (of the videos presented with the songs), and clothing and accessories on the bodies. Different cultural, historical, and social contexts opened up from the performances. In each artistic ethos, there are couplings that open up other semiotic fronts. For example: we may not understand a local dialect, but we can notice the instruments, the dance or even research a certain culture. It is also possible to perceive the sound and visual elements at play in the artist's performances - because the musical event goes beyond issues centered on the lyrics. To produce the texts, the class could choose which artists to write about and how to construct their reports (a minimum of ten lines was suggested), with the possibility of research, but without giving up subjectivity and critically placing themselves in the text.

The curiosity drove research based on listening and watching music videos of different artists. Participants recoded their imaginaries to better understand the presented profiles. There were no homogeneous perceptions; rather, distinct reflexive

paths were traced to write about the songs. One of the texts elaborated on the work of DJ Dolores, for example, said that the musician's work was an artistic claim for "the Northeast not to suffer anymore." Interestingly, the presented song - and many others in the artist's repertoire - do not have a linear narrative in the lyrics but instead have loose verses cut and mixed with synthesized sounds simulated by samplers and synthesizers. The class was shown the track "Que som é esse?"[5] which, instead of traditional verses and choruses, has only phrases extracted from pre-recorded content (sound cuts - sampling[6]) added to percussion and regional rhythm instruments like the triangle.

The collective KOKOKO!, either for its singularity in instrumentation or for the visual appeal suggested by the band, appeared in many of the produced texts. The group creates its instruments from recycled materials from the trash and, although apparently "rustic," they are electrified and plugged into amplification boxes, combined with the sound of a synthesizer. There are undoubtedly a series of visual elements that catch the eye in the collective's performances and music videos. One of the produced reports even uses the term "exotic," which is the most common feeling when faced with difference in a media scenario so predominantly filled with anglo-american content. However, the following lines of the same text say that the sound of the Congolese group "opens the soul to other tastes present in our world," expressing how music can construct points of connection for a sensory rhizome capable of re-elaborating our relationships with the media. Since it is in media environments that notions of the world are constructed and signified, it can also be argued that this type of listening has the possibility of generating lines of flight that destabilize constituted representations of the world, founded - or, as Gilles Deleuze (2018) writes, behind every thing there is always a difference. In relation to the workshop's activity, the aforementioned report on KOKOKO! also inserts at the end of its reflection the hashtag "#faith," a symbolic resource that inscribes an agency, as it positions the writing in a claim for the future, perhaps the expressed desire that in the future singularities cease to occupy peripheral positions in the grand narratives.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's work (2003), the utterance can be understood as a communicational process composed of a certain load of historicity capable of touching other utterances. Such dialogic relationships, depending on their complexity, generate changes, since dialogism does not presuppose only agreement, but also tensions. DJ Dolores and KOKOKO! have semiotics that inscribe passages, territorial crossings, and

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[5] Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFfiWej8nKs. Acesso em: 30 nov. 2019.
[6] The use of the sampler, a feature that allows DJs to cut and reuse segments of pre-recorded materials (songs, radio and TV contents, games, movies, and any materials containing audio).

nomadisms, and thus differ from more centralized discourses that the market label suggests in pop music, so their listening tends towards a recoding of perceptions. The narratives produced in the workshop demonstrate precisely one of the issues dear to Bakhtin's thought (2003), since writing from emerging utterances of other aesthetics made possible a new sensory experience in the interlocutors of the dialogic process (Bakhtin, 2003). And here sound is thought of as an element produced by actualizations of virtualities as difference not "subjected to the demands of representation" (Deleuze, 2018, p. 349), which, when thought in itself, opens a new modality of thinking.

In the conducted activities, another theoretical confrontation is opened, which rests on the need to review the most recurrent readings on contemporary musical production. Recognition paradigms make up a dominant dynamic in media environments, in which the market factor is transmitted as the main parameter in the historicity of cultural product consumption practices, especially in the entertainment field of traditional and new communication platforms. Hence, the reading of musical genres as finished and rigid forms. It is known that artistic creation, in creating, establishes genres that have discursiveness, and from them, musical communities and sociabilities are formed, which are, in turn, shared. It is in the discursive realm that the musical genre offers an important key to understanding social practices. But the dimension revealed by the corpus delimited in this study is that of the unpredictability of artistic creation, as well as the smaller, singular processualities, sometimes hidden in larger sets. In other words, the scope of a certain musical identity can make it difficult to perceive variants.

The concept of intertextuality developed by Julia Kristeva (1980) - and influenced by Bakhtin's thought (2003) - shows not only relationships between different texts, but also pre-existing historical meanings. If we take genres such as samba or hip hop as an example, we will see that their creation comes from an artistic work that brought together different sounds - the lundu, of African origin, is perceived in samba; Jamaican sound system culture has an influence on hip hop. Through Yuri Lotman's Semiotics of Culture (1996), the complexity of these relationships can be expanded with the concept of semiosphere - a communicational space in which cultural texts transit and inevitably touch each other (affect each other) in permeability relationships that occur in their semiotic borders. For the Russian author, the border region is more a place of contact than separation, since in these places there is at least bilingual communication (Lotman, 1996). Due to the discursivity of the market labels that narrate pop music in the media, it is difficult to perceive the textual richness of musical genres as a result of popular cultural production of encounters and mixes. Genres are in process, not exhausted, since

a given semiotic nucleus can be subjected to experiments that update it - just look at works by artists such as Tom Zé, Beatles, Laurie Anderson, Baco Exu do Blues and The Clash. These updating movements are perceived with greater evidence in works of hybrid profile, due to the constant instability that plays with semiotic interstices, in nomadic practices. The workshops seek to produce knowledge from this state of artistic mobility that tends to frequently open up territorialities, inviting cultural perspectives and points of view.

Giorgio Agamben (2016) discusses an experience in which words fail, referring to a transcendence of the limits of organized thought in dominant significant practices. From this emerges a power that reconfigures realities through the sensory dimension of the experience itself. In one of the narratives developed, the geopolitical perception about the context of circulation and consumption of music, in the midst of the phenomenon of globalization, suggests such an experiment. After a brief analysis of songs by singer M.I.A. and the Malian group Songhoy Blues, the cited report mentions that there is an "immense plurality of music genres not recognized globally, due to the lack of resources and incentives from less developed countries and the world media." Here we see an approach to some of the assumptions defended in the beginning of this text, where we suggest the need to take into account the narrative inequalities that underlie certain practices, reflecting economic, cultural, and political asymmetries of globalization. To think about these inequalities is to push thought to its limit.

How can we rethink the universal capturing power of pop music without considering narrative inequalities? We know that all universalization is problematic because it leaves singularities on the sidelines, creating cultural peripheries. For Felix Guattari (2006), a new social experiment must involve the construction of environments that allow the emergence of new collective forms, in which the singular effectively participates in the act of taking the word. Therefore, when observing the paradigms of recognition of pop music in the media, as a machinic gear that touches the production of subjectivities, a reading of ideological structure is avoided in order to prioritize a process of generative couplings of a "reality and, in particular, an economic reality" (Lazzarato, 2014, p. 48) - that is, the narratives of pop music create realities. Difference as an event that establishes new existential modalities in experience makes possible the production of emerging, alternative subjectivities that, in deviation, consolidate other perceptions about the real (another possible real). M.I.A.[7] uses samples of non-Eurocentric instrumentation, in addition to prioritizing bodies and clothes from regions

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[7] The track Matahdatah scroll 01 broader than a border.
Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJuFdkMOP20. Acesso em: 15 out. 2019.

of the Global South; the Songhoy Blues inserts the ngoni string instrument and lyrics sung in the *songhai* [8] language in the approach it makes with the blues. The cited report, therefore, by perceiving such sound elements and their existential dimension (historicities and realities), organized a critique in the economic sphere that makes it impossible for these cultures to be present in the large universalizing narratives.

There is a hypothesis surrounding this research that considers the space "between" musical genres - hybridizations, mixtures, and experimentalisms - as a semiotic environment rich in alternatives to the regimes of Western media culture, whose power lies in the inoperability of recognition (Agamben, 2017), capable of expanding representations and practices of creation and reflection, one of the reasons for the approach to the field of Education. It is a path of collective construction of knowledge that can revise the most recurrent relationships with media products (in this case, music). Recognizing that there are lines of escape in the face of dominant sign regimes (Deleuze; Guattari, 1995) in media flows must recognize difference as a constant updating of virtualities, cultural approximations that do not cease to participate in the permeability of the artistic text - especially that elaborated in the field of popular music. It is from the variety of aesthetic and existential couplings that music allows us to understand that thinking is also updated in listening. Therefore, confrontations that bring ontology and epistemology closer are demanded, because in musical listening, subjectivity is reconstructed at the same time as it participates in a communicational process that produces knowledge by questioning large media narratives - hence also a decolonial revision, which starts from musical sensoriality to a set of social realities and trajectories (Mbembe, 2005).

Final thoughts

With the improvements to be made in the method used in the workshops, it is possible to expand the reflections and the use of activities, as well as the interaction between the participating people. One possibility is to build a more tangible final product, such as a collective text displayed on the school's bulletin board or a multimedia content that could even include playlists and videos selected by the workshop group. The conclusion of this work also seeks to leave as a theoretical and practical contribution a method for addressing difference and alterity in activities that use music within the scope of Education.

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[8] The track Sekou omarou.
Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3Xkz5wYgGw. Acesso em: 28 jun. 2020.

It is about building a reflection on the narrative inequalities present in our relationship with media environments. A provocation for a thinking less mediated by dominant paradigms. By bringing sound to the center of the debate, especially the richness of popular production spread across different regions, we question the universal capture exercised by media regimes that organize pop music in the great existential ensembles of our time.

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RESUMO:
O presente trabalho visa pensar a prática da escuta musical como convite à diferença. O ponto de partida considera a organização da música pop nas mídias, sua aderência às estéticas do chamado Ocidente, para propor reflexões sobre obras de perfil híbrido, cuja matriz é o Sul Global. A análise empírica usa narrativas construídas em oficinas de escuta musical oferecidas a alunos do ensino médio como atividade de extensão. O caminho teórico metodológico aproxima a experiência de pesquisa narrativa à análise semiótica das canções para repensar a universalização dos regimes de reconhecimento dominantes nas mídias, com base em outras existências e campos de enunciação.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Escuta Musical; Diferenças; Narrativas; Experiencia; Hibridismo.

RESUMEN:
El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo pensar en la práctica de escuchar música como una invitación a la diferencia. El punto de partida considera la organización de la música pop en los medios, su adherencia a la estética del llamado Occidente, para proponer reflexiones sobre obras de perfil híbrido, cuya matriz es el Sur Global. El análisis empírico utiliza narraciones producidas en talleres de escucha musical ofrecidos a estudiantes de secundaria como una actividad de extensión. El enfoque metodológico teórico aproxima la experiencia de la investigación narrativa al análisis semiótico de las canciones para repensar la universalización de los regímenes de reconocimiento dominantes en los medios, basados en otras existencias y campos de enunciación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Escucha Musical; Diferencias; Narrativas; Experiencia; Hibridismo.