

# **“Fire, lights, everything!”: Exploring symbolic capital in the Tecnobrega dance scene**

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The music industry, along with the world of media as a whole, is in a state of transition. What is being sold is not so clear anymore, nor is it obvious what parts of the traditional business will survive. Audiences play a crucial role in these shifts; they’ve become empowered and increased their participation within media industries.

Working towards the premise that audiences can add value to media businesses beyond the act of consumption, this thesis argues that for media industries to benefit from their contributions it is first necessary to locate these audiences as active participants and producers of value.

This thesis studies the dynamics of participatory audiences through the case of Brazil’s Tecnobrega scene (literally ‘cheesy techno’), expanding on a 10-day ethnographic field trip to the capital of Tecnobrega, Belém. This music industry has circumvented mainstream conventions by forgoing copyright and collaborating with ‘pirates’. Tecnobrega’s audiences not only assist in the circulation of content, but through their socializing and fan production, they create and trade symbolic capital that directly affects the popularity, and consequently the perception of value, of various parts of the industry.

The competencies acquired through these types of participation have the potential to overflow into other domains; they can help shift the conceptualization of the public sphere and can, likewise, become paths for the exploration of cultural citizenship and agency within globalization processes.

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## Acknowledgments



*Image 1: Super Pop's grand finale. Photo by Henrik Moltke published under a Creative Commons attribution/non-commercial license.*

*Dedicated to my mother, Dina and my brother, Ruben.  
They are my home.*

Thanks to the Tecnobrega fans, and particularly to the fantastic *equipes* that received me in Belém: Super Amigos, S.Coelho, As Coelhetes and the Equi-psicopatas. Also much thanks to my friend Kevin Driscoll who led me to Holmes Wilson who in turn introduced me to his brilliant girlfriend Giselli Vasconcelos who put me in touch with the journalist turned documentarian Vladimir Cunha who was kind enough to introduce me Bruno Regis who put me in touch with Acácio Canto, my dedicated field 'producer', who, once he had a notebook in hand, efficiently led me to the generous and passionate Tecnobrega audiences. Thanks to all of you.

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## 1-Introduction

The music industry, along with the world of media as a whole, is in a state of transition. What is being sold is not so clear anymore, nor is it obvious what parts of the traditional business will survive. Over the past ten years, the recording industry has proven to be a loss-leader, radically affected by the changes wrought by technological innovation, digital culture and the changing nature of audiences and consumers. The issues the recording industry has faced, particularly shifting roles and decreasing control over the distribution of content, are now becoming part of the reality for television and film as well. The once apparently stable relationships between audiences, producers and distributors are in a state of flux. At the core of these shifts lie questions about where and how value is generated and who retains control over it. Understanding the behaviors and motivations of music audiences can provide insight into the nature of this transformation, perhaps pointing towards ways in which these processes can be experienced as productive growth rather than inevitable downfall.

Working towards the premise that audiences can add value to media businesses beyond the act of consumption, this thesis will argue that in order to benefit from their contributions it is first necessary to locate these audiences as participants within the productive activities of industry. The same energy that audiences invest in the circulation, distribution, and creative appropriation of content is in fact generating new forms of value for media industries.

Through the creation of symbolic capital, audiences abandon their roles as spectators and become full participants of the worlds in which media and culture live. Audiences, in fact, help

create and sustain the network through which content flows. It is for that reason that, rather than placing them at the end of a *value chain*, this thesis argues for a model that sees media moving through a *value network*, a concept that is further explored in chapter two. In such a model, value circulates through multidirectional flows, bringing to light all of the actors' monetary and non-monetary interactions while making apparent the fluid relations between different participants.

I will study the dynamics of participatory audiences through the case of Brazil's Tecnobrega scene (literally 'cheesy techno'). Tecnobrega is part of what anthropologist Hermano Vianna has deemed "the most important development in Brazilian culture in the last decade: the emergence of a direct voice from the periphery speaking loud and clear all around the country (Vianna, "Central").

In the third chapter, I will place these actors involved in the construction of this grassroots music industry in relation to each other, describe their interactions and the monetary and non-monetary transactions that take place within the network. Charting these actions reinforces the notion that there is more than one form of value operating in this industry, and that audiences are much more than spectators, but that through their participation they add value to this business model.

Tecnobrega's unusual music scene was born in the capital of the Amazon, Belém, and it has since turned industry conventions upside down, purposely forgoing revenue from copyright in favor of allowing its music to circulate through the 'pirate' channels favored by local audiences. The result is a vibrant industry with a loyal fan following. In the fourth chapter we'll enter the Tecnobrega *scene*, its history, particularities and approaches. We'll look at how this grassroots



industry built a business model supported by audience practices that, elsewhere, are still considered illegitimate. And how, by refusing to chastise their audience, artists and producers promote active audience engagement.



Image 2: Principe Negro's throne, the 'Electronic Crown'.

With monumental *aparelhagem*s (sounds systems) that evoke retro-futuristic spaceships Tecnobrega parties are all spectacle, movement and passion. But behind the fireworks supporting the performance, is a rich history of local

and foreign, old and new rhythms, of appropriation and evolutions. This is music whose elements originated partly in first world countries, then remixed, enhanced and ultimately reinvented in the South. New rhythms, voices, instruments and textures are added. It is never quite a finished product, even as it is distributed and shared, it continues to morph.

The audiences, whom I will describe in greater detail in chapter five, not only assist in the circulation of content, but through their socializing, they create and trade symbolic capital that directly affects the popularity, and consequently the perception of value, of various parts of the industry. Tecnobrega's commercial success relies as much on the non-monetary contributions of Tecnobrega audiences and fans as it does the market forces that shape the production and distribution of cultural goods. A good part of its revenue, for instance, is drawn from sales

through ‘pirate’ street vendors and of ‘unprofessional’ live recordings. Similarly, as we shall see in the discussion of Tecnobrega *equipas* -- the groups super-fans of the genre organize themselves into -- some members of the Tecnobrega audience see financial rewards for their proselytizing and evangelizing of the culture.

The next section focuses on how content circulates through this intricate web of relations and how Tecnobrega audiences and producers harness both old and new media to promote this circulation. Here we’ll see how Tecnobrega operates as spreadable content, moving across on and off-line environments, attending to its audiences different levels of media literacy and access to technology.

Having described in depth the different notions of value within Tecnobrega as a local phenomenon, in the conclusions, I will briefly explore how this scene relates to ideas of citizenship and global connectivity. Tecnobrega is an empowering force that creates centers out of peripheries; its audiences become agents in the globalization processes. It is, as Ronaldo Lemos notes, a *globoperipheral music* (Lemos “Dominado”), to whose audience and creators we would do little justice if we saw them through a lens of cultural imperialism or exoticization.

## **1.1 Studying Tecnobrega**

As it might be apparent by now, this thesis is the product of *convergence* in more ways than one. First, Tecnobrega itself is the product of *convergence culture*. It exemplifies a model that deals with the tensions and opportunities of the current media environment. The way this industry has



Music scenes, then, are very much part of the cultural identity of their locale. Moreover, in a context of convergence, “fan cultures will be understood as the revitalization of the old folk culture process in response to the content of mass culture” (Jenkins 21). Folk culture is very much alive in Brazil; culture is naturally understood as evolving, so in that sense, Tecnobrega is not the “revitalization”, but rather, the continuation of these processes as they now enter new production and distribution mechanisms.

In second place, this thesis is not only rooted in Henry Jenkins' work on *convergence*, but it is literally based on research I produced for the Convergence Culture Consortium at MIT. During the past two years I've had the opportunity to be part of the Consortium's research team, there-- under the direction of Henry Jenkins and Joshua Green-- we have studied the circulation and appropriation of media, notions of symbolic value and different aspects of fan culture. This thesis is both directly and indirectly informed by such works. The original research, in its white paper form, is primarily directed towards a corporate audience with the objective of finding applicable insights for their particular industries. This iteration of the paper expands on the context from which Tecnobrega emerged and on the notions of symbolic capital. I have also illustrated the case with more ethnographic data, as well as using my concluding chapter to situate this research outside of a tactical perspective. As a thesis, this paper no longer addresses a corporate audience, and my hope is that it be relevant to a broader constituency interested in the current cultural shifts as they relate to the media environment.

Lastly, it reflects my own state of *convergence*, my transmedial/transnational nature. I come from music and film production, I come from Costa Rica and from Chile and, to this project, I come

from the United States and academia. I mention my history, not without some hesitance, but knowing that my gaze, my experiences and background have influenced the way I approach this project. I am not an artist, I don't have the skills to *read* the Tecnobrega scene as a musician would, but because I do work within *art worlds*, that experience gave me clues as to how I should navigate the Tecnobrega scene, particularly when on the field. Due to its ethnographic nature, I'm also certain that those variables influenced the way I was received: as a fellow Latin American who, in spite of coming from a much smaller country than Brazil, had made Tecnobrega relevant within an American university. The convergence of all those aspects opened doors and elicited pride.

This work expands on a 10-day ethnographic field trip to the capital of Tecnobrega, Belém, where I conducted extensive interviews with various members of this industry, focusing primarily on fans. I was very fortunate to quickly connect with *Paraenses* that were thoroughly immersed in the Tecnobrega scene and understood the type of work that I intended to do. I found many of my interviewees before the trip through my local assistant, Acácio Canto. While there are wide socioeconomic gaps between citizens of Belém, it is also a small and interconnected community, making it relatively easy to get in touch and gain access to the Tecnobrega fans. In total, I interviewed 10 fans, one choreographer/researcher and one singer. After my return I conducted a small interview with DJ Claudemir over instant messaging.

Though I have never formally studied Portuguese, with Acácio's aid, I did perform all of the

interviews in a ‘Portuñol-esque’<sup>1</sup> Portuguese. Most interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and, whenever possible, took place at the interviewees’ homes, most of which were in the poorer outskirts of Belém. While this raised some security concerns, it gave me a much better sense of the fans’ environment and made them feel more at ease during our conversations. It also gave me an opportunity to see the importance of Tecnobrega within their spaces: the photographs, clippings, CDs and other forms of ‘official’ or fan produced merchandising that without fault was exhibited in the house or at the very least in their rooms.

I also attended two parties with the most popular sound systems at the time, Principe Negro and Super Pop. Both venues were in Belém’s peripheries in big open spaces where attendance ranged from 2000 to 10000 people. Here I was able to see the Tecnobrega environment in action, but the essence of the scene came out of the interviews, in the fans’ homes, in their retelling of the events. I also walked the streets of Belém, rummaged the street fairs, observed the ‘pirate’ commerce and soaked in the city’s atmosphere.

The majority of the ethnographic data in this paper emerged out of my field notes, photographs<sup>2</sup> and recordings, as well as the audiences’ prolific online production that has allowed me to continue my own participant observation from afar. Today, through social networks and instant messaging, I’m still in touch with a few fans, who, in spite of not reading English, demand to be the first to read the final draft of this thesis. I hope that in spite of interpreting and setting their

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<sup>1</sup> Portuñol is a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese instrumental in helping Latin Americans communicate across borders.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all photographs in this thesis paper were taken by the author.

fandom within theoretical frameworks I have managed to give an honest account of their perception and enjoyment of Tecnobrega.

While this work is very much informed by Jenkins' work and the research we conduct at the Consortium, it is also enriched by recent ethnographic research, specifically Sarah Thornton's *Dance Cultures*. Likewise, in an attempt to understand notions of value (and its creation) from diverse perspectives, as well as to reach broader audiences, I have taken a somewhat interdisciplinary approach in selecting my sources for this paper. As a result, an eclectic mix of authors, who range from management consultants to French theorist Pierre Bourdieu, now strengthen this thesis.

A fundamental source that I would like to highlight is the recently published *Tecnobrega: O Pará reiventando o negocio da música*, by Rolando Lemos and Oona Castro. This is the only extensive research published on this topic and it has proved an invaluable supplement to my rather limited on-site research. Lemos, law professor who directs Creative Commons Brazil, and media researcher, Castro, describe the dynamics that organize this industry. It was this research that revealed the level of organization and the economic weight of this seemingly 'informal' industry.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it didn't sufficiently recognize the audience's role in shaping Tecnobrega and moving it forward. This project has been an opportunity to carry on with the

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<sup>3</sup> There is now a Creative Commons licensed English translation of the book available at: <http://www.overmundo.com.br/banco/the-tecnobrega-business-model-arising-from-belem-do-para>

inquiries they initiated, this time placing the audience at the center of the study.<sup>4</sup>

To do this, we first need to understand the collective nature of the Tecnobrega model; how, when the line between producers and consumers is blurred, new types of productive relationships arise, giving way to more complex and accurate ways of depicting the interactions through which different forms of value are created.

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<sup>4</sup> Given its focus on audience practices, this thesis does not provide an in depth description of the complex relationships between the other industry players, like street vendors or event producers. Lemos and Castro's book, mentioned above, does address the roles of all those players, down to the cars with external loudspeakers that announce the shows.



## 2-Breaking Away From the Value Chain

The creative industries are collective enterprises. While attention tends to be focused on the *artist as the* author of a particular product, sustained creative activity depends on “an established network of cooperative links between participants” (Becker 35). This network is what American sociologist Howard S. Becker calls an *Art World*. Those who participate need not be under the same roof, or even alive at the same time, but eventually the product of their work will help produce art (or popular culture as art in our case) and add value to that piece. As we enter a world of participatory culture, of shifting and fluid roles between ‘producers’ and ‘consumers’, understanding the importance of the collective in artistic creation becomes increasingly relevant

Becker highlights *everyone’s* role in the artistic production, taking into consideration the musician as well as the piano maker, the tuner and beyond, recognizing their labor becomes as part of the community’s “value-creating activity” (Becker 115). He argues that all art forms show signs of cooperation, and as they become routine they generate the patterns of an art world. He considers that curators, collectors and academics in their roles a legitimators, augment the art’s value, so in that sense, just by virtue of writing this thesis I am validating Tecnobrega from academia, adding to its value and thus, even if temporarily, becoming part of the Tecnobrega *world*.

When we move towards a more industrial production model these interdependent connections are more commonly portrayed by a value chain whose origins lay in the manufacturing process

and therefore tend to oversimplify the complex set of relationships that support cultural production. Nevertheless, in both manners of understanding value generation in the creative industries, the audience is almost exclusively portrayed as the end-point of the process, even when Becker refers to ‘serious’ audience members, he only acknowledges their contributions as providing “the material support of money spent and the aesthetic support of understanding and response” (Becker 54).

But with the audience’s increasing desire to participate within the creative industries, we need to expand our conception of the (art) worlds and how different actors behave within them: audiences, those who were once considered the end of the cultural value chain, are now also creators, producers and distributors. We are still coming to terms with the implications of this shift. In many cases, the transition of the audience away from a position of ‘consumption’ has been read as a struggle over control, but inversely it could also be approached positively, bringing forth productive audiences that creators, and the companies behind them, can work with.

It is actually not difficult to imagine an expanded art world, one that does account for these productive audiences, but it is still lacking the analytical capabilities that the value chain tries to supply. It is for these purposes that I suggest an alternative approach to conceptualize these interactions, a *value network*. This concept offers a more flexible and descriptive framework than the value chain. It helps elucidate how audiences create value and how content circulates through dynamic cultural systems, while retaining the fluidity and nuance of an art world.

Using the value chain as a structured starting point, we can see that its analysis struggles to bring to light the complex patterns of value creation and flexible roles present in the Tecnobrega scene.

Namely, it does not account for:

- the value that audiences are creating,
- the complex relationships between actors,
- the scope of monetary and symbolic transactions that surround the Tecnobrega ecosystem,
- or the way many media properties stimulate audience participation.

In a conventional value chain, the entire productive sequence “from raw materials to final consumers” (Saloner, Shepard, & Podolny 128) is represented as a linear series of one-way transactions. Figure 1 illustrates this process, which begins with the producer and ends with the consumption of the good. This particular figure was adapted to convey ‘standard’ media industry operations.

Figure 1: Media (Broadcast) Value Chain (source: Bear Stearns 2007)



A key challenge, particularly when accounting for the activities of the contemporary creative industries, is that such a model overlooks a number of elements, such as non-monetary transactions, and the multidirectional relationships among actors at different parts of the chain.

The links within such a model have fixed dependencies and work towards one predetermined

outcome, generally excluding end users from the production process.

In the US there are many instances where this model breaks down, particularly where broadcast media interconnects with grassroots creativity. One such instance is Lostpedia, the fan created, written and supported online encyclopedia for the Lost television series<sup>5</sup>. Compiling the Lostpedia, audiences use their collective knowledge to make sense of the show's intricate storyline, documenting events in the series, and testing out theories about future plot twists. In spite of not having any official relationship with the program's producers, ABC Studios, Lostpedia has turned into a valuable ancillary product for both fans and ABC. For example, it is a useful tool for new viewers to catch up on the intricacies of the show's plot before diving into new episodes, or for returning fans to remind themselves of what is happening when a new season begins.

Fans adding value through ancillary products is not a new or rare phenomenon. As media scholar Sam Ford has argued, the video collections and archival documents collected by wrestling fans "are often important resources that enable fan proselytizing, both to seek new fans and to deepen the engagement of casual fans with a media property" (Ford *Fandemonium*, 10). Ford's case study of the way the wrestling industry, and particularly World Wrestling Entertainment, capitalized on the evangelism of fans provides a useful precedent for thinking through the value audiences provide which will be discussed in this thesis.

Media scholar Axel Bruns has termed this type of participation "produsage" (a fusion of "use"

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<sup>5</sup> Lostpedia can be found at: [http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Main_Page)

and “produce”) which in itself, “does not yet undermine the industrial production value chain, of course; it merely presents the possibility of having producer/consumer relationships reversed and duplicated to the point where multiple such relationships describe the interconnection between any two nodes in the network” (Bruns 26).

Rather than a traditional value chain, then, a *value network* proves to be a more illuminating analytical tool, making it possible to locate, if not to quantify, the value generated by all of the agents involved in the circulation of media content. The network is a dynamic concept, able to account for greater agency from each of its nodes; a value network retains the basic idea that value increases as products circulate through it, but the paths are not necessarily preordained and value might not be set on the product but on the process of circulation itself<sup>6</sup>, it has the capacity to create a much more accurate depiction of the Tecnobrega world. As author and business consultant Verna Allee suggests, “value networks are complex. They encompass much more than the flow of products, services and revenue of the traditional value chain” (Allee 36). In other words, none of the nodes in a value network necessarily represent the beginning or the end of the generation of value, and, as such, it is possible to locate the multidirectional exchanges between different actors in the network, exchanges that at times reverse the flow that a traditional value chain may depict. In the Tecnobrega network, not all of these exchanges are dependant on monetary gain; much of the network’s impetus, in fact, is generated through the exchange of non-monetary types of value. Given that much of what defines an art world relies on symbolic

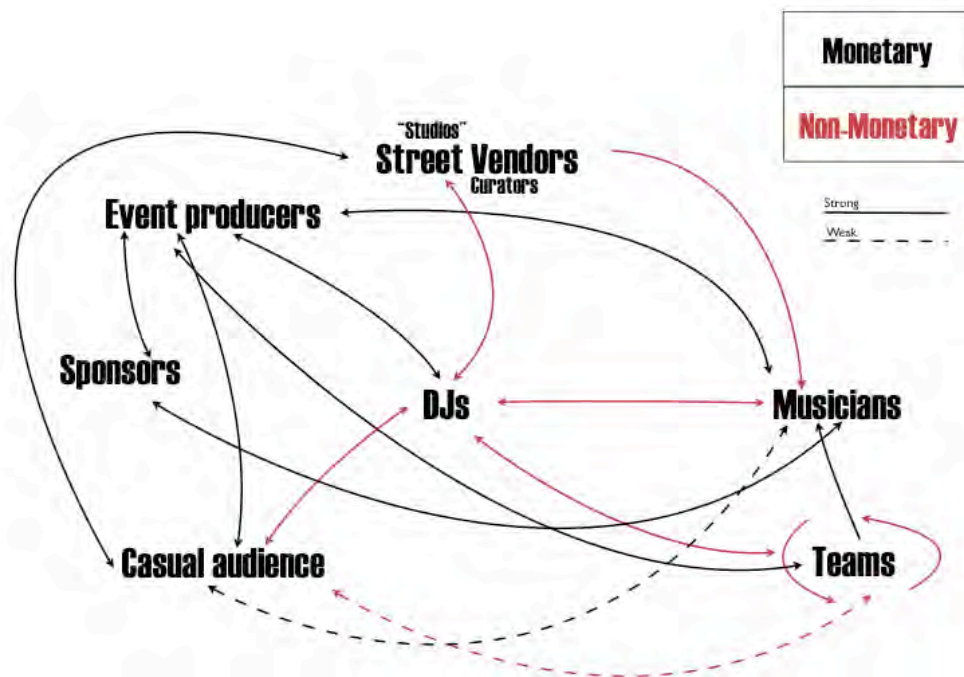
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<sup>6</sup> Granted that this value network that I’m suggesting doesn’t operate in the conventional sense as it does not describe one particular firm’s process as some of the business management literature proposes (BStabell & DFjeldstad; Kothandaraman & Wilson) but it describes the Tecnobrega ecosystem as a whole.

value transactions, this is a much more appropriate tool.

Applying a value network to Tecnobrega provides a way to account for the value generated by the audience. An examination of Tecnobrega reveals two overlapping sub-networks that share many of the same actors (see Figure 2 below). The first involves monetary transactions, bringing to light the commercial potential of Tecnobrega in spite of its refusal to enforce copyright as a means for revenue generation. The second network is comprised of symbolic transactions, exchanges that increase the social and cultural value of Tecnobrega<sup>7</sup> in turn making the monetary transactions that take place within the network more successful.

Figure 2: Value Network for Tecnobrega



<sup>7</sup> These concepts are further developed in chapter 5.

The value network is nothing more than an analytical tool, it does not provide answers on its own, but it does expand and ground the notion of the current creative industries' art worlds, while providing a more nuance and flexible representation of their value generation process, which depicts the actual relationships between producers and audiences, where dependencies aren't fixed and the nodes are dynamic. It is, like many boundaries, an artificial one, but it provides a starting point towards a more insightful understanding of the interactions within an art world.

The next chapters will detail the interactions between different systems of value within the network, pointing to the links between distinct nodes and discussing the way value is created through their interactions.

### 3-Charting the Tecnobrega Value Network

Tecnobrega *lives* in the relationships that are formed around within the scene. It's the interactions between people that energizes this industry and leads to its value creation process. In my field trip, the fans did not try to introduce me to Tecnobrega through the music, but through friends, anecdotes photographs and even food. They provide the elements that build the Tecnobrega world and its value network.

As discussed in the second chapter, two complementary sub-networks comprise the Tecnobrega network: one dedicated to monetary transactions and a second one where symbolic exchanges take place. In the latter sub-network is where symbolic capital circulates. There is a synergistic relationship between them: their combined efforts produce more value than the sum of both sub-networks. Figure 2 above maps the variety of agents in Tecnobrega's network, their relationships and the respective flows of monetary and non-monetary transactions.

We will now look at how different forms of value are dealt with by some of Tecnobrega's key actors:

- DJs
- Musicians
- Audience
- Event producers
- Street vendors



- Sponsors

### 3.1 DJs

The DJs are normally hired by the sound systems owners, who are in turn are hired by the event producers. The fee DJs receive for their shows is the primary monetary transaction in which DJs are involved; nevertheless, they remain at the center of this network because they are its greatest promoters of symbolic capital. They decide who is socially worthy of appearing on the backstage LED screen, or who is privileged enough to join them on the *aparelhagem*.



Image 4: Couple displaying Tecnobrega's intricate dance moves.

These social bonds depend on sustained engagement and development. If it is not adequately cared for, their value will rapidly diminish. DJs are aware of this. In fact, one of the fans interviewed by Lemos and Castro commented that when she stopped going to parties, the DJ called to check on her (Lemos & Castro 118). It was important for the social standing of the DJ that their super-fans continue to attend parties. Both DJs and sound system

promoters capitalize on the audience's desire to

be linked to them and their own ability to raise a fan's visibility. It is for this reason that *Super Pop*, one of Belém's largest sound systems, operates an online radio site where people can

upload their photos to be streamed alongside the music, creating a photomontage which can be watched while listening. Doing so provides ties between the event and the audience that benefit both the sound system promoter and the fans.

### **3.2 Musicians**

Despite being the creators of much of Tecnobrega's content, the most fragile stakeholders in the network are probably the musicians. The popularity of any given song may last between two and three months, resulting in an industry that requires constant production and constant renewal. Concurrently, the demand for live shows (as opposed to sound system parties) has decreased substantially. Given that live shows are the musicians' main source of income, it is not unusual for groups to disband and form new groups to attract the audiences' fleeting attention. In fact, 70% of musicians complement their income with other jobs, many of them also related with the Tecnobrega industry (Lemos & Castro 94).

The exchanges between musicians and audiences occur primarily through monetary transactions when audiences purchase tickets for shows. Nevertheless, through instant messaging or social networks, musicians do try to develop more personal relationships. Given that the CDs and even the MP3s found online don't necessarily have the bands' credit, musicians have opted to include their names in the actual recording, in the hopes that when these tracks are remixed the DJs will play the section that identifies them. They also tend to record songs about the DJs themselves in order to gain their attention and to associate themselves with popular DJs. In spite of these challenges, Tecnobrega bands tend to be grateful towards the system that has granted them a notoriety that they feel they couldn't otherwise have achieved.

### 3.3-Audience

The casual audience doesn't tend to have as many strong relationships with other actors in the network, but they play a key role by sharing the music, attending the parties and purchasing photos and music at these events. Their strongest allegiance is with the DJs, who are careful to support those relationships. For the casual audiences, the teams represent an indicator of the quality and style of a particular party. Depending on which teams are in attendance a party may be 'hip' or not. The teams' participation becomes cultural value for the rest of the audience.

#### 3.3.1-Teams/Equipas

Teams are the most engaged members of the Tecnobrega scene, who both harness and generate the most value within the audience community. They separate themselves from the 'audience' as an undifferentiated mass and create distinct *equipas* – 'teams' of friends who attend Tecnobrega parties together. The teams are very careful in branding themselves. Once a team is formed, their 'brand' identity is immediately created: first, they choose their logo, most of which are derived



Image 5: The Super Friends' (Super Amigos) first team beer bucket.

from popular culture icons: Freddy Krueger, the Playboy Bunny, the Justice League, and then they manufacture a dual-purpose bucket with this logo: first, it's used to carry their beers during the party;

second, it served the purpose of identifying them to the DJ and the rest of the crowd.

While still having a stronger emotional attachment to the DJs, teams do develop relationships with bands, mostly through monetary transactions. Most interestingly, when teams achieve a certain level of status as an ‘institution’ they hire bands to help to write and record songs about them. These ‘theme-songs’ can cost anywhere between \$70 and \$250 and are usually recorded in the musician’s home studio. The teams provide the musician with a theme or rhythm that they think represents them and the band produce the track together. For instance, As Coelhoetes, an all women team, hired the band AR-15 to write their song, which then became incredibly popular at parties, providing a strong boost for both the band and the team. As Coelhoetes came up with the song’s narrative, and in true Tecnobrega style it’s the love story between a *coelhete* (a female bunny) and S.Coelho, their male counterpart.

Sou das Coelhoetes	I am from As Coelhoetes
Meu amor	My love
Te amo tanto	I love you so much
Você nasceu pra mim	You were born for me
Meu S. Coelho	My S. Coelho
I LOVE YOU	I LOVE YOU

These songs provide an interesting example of how specific commodities transit from the monetary to the non-monetary environment. While the original transaction with the musician was strictly monetary, its objective was to produce symbolic capital for the team. Once the team takes the song and gives it to the DJ, it becomes exclusive domain of the non-monetary sub-

network and its initial diffusion depends significantly on the relationship between the DJ and the team being strong enough for him to play their song.

Teams also create symbolic capital for themselves. Most of them live under very limited economic conditions, but belonging to a team, even if the team's sole material possession might be a beer bucket with their logo, already gives them *something*.

### 3.4-Street Vendors

While there are only two “proper” CD stores in Belém (Lemos & Castro 127), there are hundreds of street vendors. The two that appear in the image below were located at the popular Praça da



Image 6: The bleak reality for original CDs in Belém.

Republica during its weekly market. While the “original” (second-hand) CD stand remained painfully empty (in the picture on the left), the pirate stands surrounding it were booming with activity (in the picture on the right). Tecnobrega (Lemos & Castro 129) is the highest seller for street vendors. Given that they bypass labels completely, there is no such thing as an original CD and the object is clearly not this industry’s main commodity. Street vendors then sell them at very low prices (as low as \$2 US), making their profits through volume.

Both DJs and musicians develop strong social relationships with the street vendors encouraging them to feature their music and mixes at their stands or to include them in Tecnobrega collections. There are no monetary exchanges between these actors, but it’s through their strong social bonds that they create the basic distribution infrastructure for Tecnobrega.

### **3.5-Sponsors**

Sponsors play a small role within the Tecnobrega value network. A local grains and pasta company, for instance, might pay for the printing of CD sleeves for the party recordings sold, or local restaurants will advertise on the sides of stands present at the shows. The absence of national and transnational brands is noticeable. Whether this occurs due to a lack of interest in the market or lack of knowledge about the audience is unclear, yet it serves to maintain Tecnobrega’s grassroots feel. Given the relatively few sponsors participating in the Tecnobrega scene, it does provide those who do participate a useful venue to reach their consumers. In return they infuse the industry with much needed cash flow or services.

### **3.6-Event Producers**

According to Lemos and Castro's research, the stakeholder that receives the greatest economic benefit from this industry is the event producer: they perform the largest number of monetary transactions, and are able to generate the steadiest income through Tecnobrega. Their role is also potentially more stable since they are able to offer the novelty that Tecnobrega audiences seem to crave. And as they are not authoring the content, they are not subject to the volatile tastes of the Tecnobrega audience.

As the following table illustrates, symbolic and economic value emerge out of different types of transactions, but it's the co-existence of these different forms of value that energize the Tecnobrega industry. The number of key dependencies between these types of value is particularly notable. The monetary success of DJs, musicians and event producers, for instance, is directly reliant on the types of non-monetary value audiences and fans draw from participating in Tecnobrega.

Table 1

Tecnobrega's monetary and non-monetary transactions

	<b>Monetary transactions</b>	<b>Symbolic transactions</b>
<b>DJs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Receives payment from event producer.</li> <li>-Occasional sponsorship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Recognition of audiences on stage.</li> <li>-Recognition of musicians through their remixes.</li> <li>-Recognition of teams playing their songs.</li> <li>-Developing off-stage social bonds with audiences.</li> <li>-Developing off-stage social bonds with street vendors.</li> </ul>
<b>Musicians</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Income from shows.</li> <li>-Occasional sponsorship.</li> <li>-Selling CDs at shows.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Developing off-stage social bonds with audiences.</li> <li>-Recognition of musicians by including their names in songs.</li> <li>-Developing off-stage social bonds with street vendors.</li> </ul>
<b>Audience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Buying tickets.</li> <li>-Buying CDs.</li> <li>-Hiring musicians to compose music about teams.</li> <li>-Buying Tecnobrega merchandise.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sharing music.</li> <li>-Proselytizing.</li> <li>-Creating teams (and creating teams' identity markers).</li> <li>-Giving DJs their songs.</li> <li>-Developing off-stage social bonds with musicians and DJs.</li> <li>-Documenting their participation.</li> </ul>
<b>Event producers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Buying <i>aparelhagem</i>s.</li> <li>-Hiring bands.</li> <li>-Hiring DJs.</li> <li>-Creating sponsorship agreements.</li> </ul>	<p>Event producers don't trade in symbolic goods, but in order to further their activities in such a small community they are obligated to be in good social standing with their peers.</p>
<b>Street vendors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Occasional sponsorship.</li> <li>-Selling CDs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Curating collections with specific DJs or bands.</li> <li>-Featuring specific DJs or bands.</li> </ul>
<b>Sponsors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Financing specific events or processes in exchange of their brand presence.</li> </ul>	



## 4-Tecnobrega: “Fire, lights, everything!”

This chapter explores what Tecnobrega is, where it comes from, who some of its main actors are, and how it has evolved to embrace and incorporate many of the practices of its audience: those young, enthusiastic *Paraenses*, who go to Tecnobrega parties up to five times each week.

In each interview, partly to break the ice and in hopes that it would uncover some interesting insight, I would ask the fans: “If Tecnobrega were a type of food what would it be?” With the exception of Antonio Paulo, a young lawyer, who equated Tecnobrega with Lasagna, all the respondents recalled one of the many uniquely local dishes from Pará, for Celina it was the Tacacá soup, for Gabi it was Açai<sup>8</sup>. In some cases they would make a distinction between Brega (the musical style that preceded Tecnobrega) as table food, and Tecnobrega as street food. Or they would say Brega had fewer ingredients than Tecnobrega, which was made with a rich mixture of flavors. But it was always part of the local cuisine, something that was essentially theirs.

At the parties, it is possible to see this rich mixture at play. The majority of the music is originally from the region, but invariably, there are a few remixes from American popular music or American songs that were re-recorded with Portuguese lyrics. The underlying rhythm is always Tecnobrega, but there is fusion and appropriation. Every time we heard Britney Spears'

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<sup>8</sup> Yes, the famous miracle berry comes from Pará.

“Gimme More”<sup>9</sup> we were at once dancing to the tune of Antonio Paulo's Lasagna and Celina's Tacacá.

Belém, the city that gave birth to Tecnobrega, is defined by its proximity to the Amazon jungle, which literally surrounds the city. During the second half of the 20th Century, Belém became one of the focal points of federal government policy under the slogan “*integrar para nao entregar*”, integrate as to not hand over. This policy was implemented during the Getulio Vargas regime. Its objectives were to protect the riches of the Amazonia from foreign interests, particularly the United States, and to integrate the region into the political and economical life of the country.



*Image 7: View of the Amazon across the river*

During this period, a series of incentives were created for people wishing to move to the Amazon region and many roads connecting these cities with the rest of the country were built. This policy is widely considered to have

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<sup>9</sup> The Tecnobrega version can be found at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hk8kwHcEFY>

failed, the reasons though, are not as clear; perhaps it was due to lack of infrastructure or inaccurate assessment of the region's resources (Foresta 132). The result was a much slower process of integration, which has, in the past few years, depended more on the use of new technologies than on federal policy<sup>10</sup>.

In a country where the development of creative industries has been tightly linked to cultural policy, Tecnobrega seems to grow almost completely divorced from it. In fact, Belém's relative isolation (from the central government, not the adjoining cities) could have benefited the emergence of Tecnobrega. The freedom garnered by its 'marginal' status possibly allowed Belém to support a legitimate business model supported by what is conventionally seen as an illegitimate structure: 'pirate' distribution networks.<sup>11</sup>

Anthropologist Brian Larkin describes a similar situation in the development of the Nigerian film industry where

“This wandering over the lines that separate the legal from the non-legal has been a common experience for urban Africans, who have been progressively disembedded from the infrastructures linking them to the official world economy and instead have poured energy into developing informal networks—equally global—that facilitate traffic in economic and cultural goods outside the established institutions of world trade” (Larkin 290).

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<sup>10</sup> The current administration, under President Luiz Inacio da Silva, has initiated a new integration policy re-appropriating the old slogan.

<sup>11</sup> The crucial exception has been the uptake of “digital inclusion” incentives, by which the government has facilitated the acquisition of low-cost computers with open-source software, a policy that has significantly increased access to technology nation-wide.

In this context, Larkin argues that piracy operates as a source of social relations and economic networks. This is what Brazilian anthropologist Hermano Vianna, when referring to Tecnobrega, has called a “parallel economy” where even the “dancers clothes are bought from the street vendors” and where “everybody finds their place, in a new value chain, completely separated from the official economy”(Vianna “Paralela”).

Geography, as it has in part generated Belém’s isolation and freedom, has played a role in the development of Tecnobrega, but likewise, Tecnobrega has re-territorialized Belém. By validating its local production, Tecnobrega’s success has rearranged the perceptions of Belém’s poorest neighborhoods. It is there where the genre’s most daring innovations come from. Its fans repeatedly asserted that Tecnobrega had “broken the walls” between classes in Belém.

The international recognition of Tecnobrega and its business model have also placed Belém in the transnational public sphere, no longer because of its natural resources, but due to its creative assets.

#### **4.1 The Roots**

Tecnobrega’s fondness for fusion and appropriation was already present in its predecessor: Brega<sup>12</sup>, a romantic-pop style popularized by the mid-1960s television show *Jovem Guarda*. This program featured young singers heavily influenced by American Rock n’ Roll. Tecnobrega was

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<sup>12</sup> Brega still exists today as its own genre, but Tecnobrega grew out of its 1970s-1980s iteration.

recognized as a genre in the mid-1980s when, pop star Eduardo Dusek released his hit album “Brega-chique, chique-brega”, literally translated as “Tacky-Chic, Chic-Tacky,” an apparent dichotomy that Dusek tried to confront. Tecnobrega translates then as “Tacky (or Cheesy) Techno,” and continues to be a loaded term, while it is used affectionately by the audiences and producers discussed here, those outside the community use it in a mostly derogatory sense.

Table 2

From Cheesy to Cheesy Techno

Brega (1970s-1980s) <sup>13</sup>	Tecnobrega (2000s)
Exaggerated and/or naively romantic textual content.	Same as Brega with the addition of sexually explicit lyrics.
Use of large ensembles, usually employing full string sections, brass instruments, and also relatively new developments in the field of electronic/digital instruments.	Computers, sampling techniques and spectacular <i>mise-en-scènes</i> , have replaced large ensembles.
Influenced by, or merging with, international tendencies resulting in either the development of hybrid musical styles or the adoption of exogenous genres.	Tecnobrega is in constant dialogue with current transnational musical trends. New genres are created regularly.
Brega circulated all over Brazil and was a mainstream trend.	Primarily a local ( <i>Paraense</i> ) grassroots development.

Though Tecnobrega sounds nothing like its predecessor, it maintains many of Brega's defining characteristics, notably the romantic lyrics (See Table 1 above). The greater difference is the primarily electronic beats and remixes living up to the ‘tecno’ part of its name. As a result of its musical and philosophical affiliation with a broader ‘techno’ tradition, Tecnobrega regularly integrates the analog with the digital; likewise, through sampling, it encourages “a free interplay

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<sup>13</sup> These characteristics are identified in Araujo, Samuel M. “Brega: Music and Conflict in Urban Brazil.” *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 9.1 (1988): 50-89.

of ideas” (Savage). Tecnobrega’s creators are following in the footsteps of the young people who founded techno in Detroit where they appropriated “computer technologies to transform themselves from consumers into producers” (Lipsitz *Footsteps in The Dark*, 239) and likewise Tecnobrega “functions as a version of what theorists of the situationist international (...) call “detourment”—a repositioning and revaluing of aesthetic objects by assigning new roles and meanings” (Lipsitz *Footsteps in The Dark*, 241), for instance the revalidation of ‘brega’. Within this context, brega exists beyond the music; it is present in the fashion, humor, pleasures and general worldview of the citizens of the Brazilian North (Fontanella 8).

Nurtured by this reality, Tecnobrega is the evolving product of constant innovation, and by now it can be considered an umbrella term that encapsulates various rhythms and aesthetics: Cyber Tecnobrega, Brega Melody, and Electro Melody to name a few. Still, audiences define all of these styles as being “contagious,” “animated,” and above all, “danceable”.

Tecnobrega, as a tacky form, comes from the periphery<sup>14</sup> of Brazilian culture, and its circulation is relegated to peripheral channels, but through sheer quantity and fan loyalty it is rapidly becoming a significant center. In its multiplicity of subgenres and means of participation Tecnobrega is an example of what cultural anthropologist Grant McCracken calls *plenitude*, a cultural phenomenon where “no potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled, all that can be imagined must someday be” (McCracken 19). Tecnobrega experiments with musical, performative and business boundaries.

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<sup>14</sup> The poor outskirts of Brazilian cities are know as “the periphery”.

In every interview, *motu proprio*, the fans would exalt Tecnobrega's characteristics both as an autochthonous genre as well as a very recent and innovative one. Old and new are not in opposition in Tecnobrega, in fact, its ability to fuse tradition with novelty is one of Tecnobrega's greatest appeals for the *Paraense* audience.

Developed outside of mainstream media, Tecnobrega has innovated in its forms of production, distribution, promotion, and in its relationship with audiences. And, from what could be conceived of as a disadvantageous position, this grassroots industry has addressed many of the challenges that concern the globalized media industry today.

## 4.2 The Tecnobrega Model



*Image 8: The crowd assembling for Principe Negro's party.*

As much as it is a musical genre, Tecnobrega encompasses the community and industry that have grown around it. It became widely known outside Brazil in 2007 when it was featured in Danish documentary *Good Copy, Bad Copy*,<sup>15</sup> and after the initial publication of research conducted by research group ‘Open Business Models-Latin America’<sup>16</sup>. Both of these projects focused on Tecnobrega’s production and distribution mechanisms, emphasizing local artists’ refusal to enforce copyright restrictions on their music. In this model, artists circulate their music through what could be conceived of as a ‘pirate’ network, which they utilize as a promotional mechanism. Tecnobrega has therefore been portrayed as “free music” built on the back of an

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<sup>15</sup> The entire film is available at: <http://www.goodcopybadcopy.net/>

<sup>16</sup> This research would later become the book: *Tecnobrega: o Pará reinventando o negócio da música* by Ronaldo Lemos and Oona Castro released in 2008.



“open business model,”<sup>17</sup> features that highlight the importance of adaptability and innovation in the genre’s success (“Tecno Brega”).

Tecnobrega’s sustained growth over the past few years, speaks to the scene’s organic and collaborative nature. “Innovations last when participants make them the basis of a new mode of cooperation, or incorporate change into their ongoing cooperative activities” (Becker 309). It is not the innovations that have generated the Tecnobrega world, but its collective response to the needs and capabilities of its audiences and creators.

Tecnobrega is an audience-centric industry. It doesn’t impose restrictions upon the audience’s relationship with the content, but enables the sense of control users are increasingly demanding worldwide. Creating audience-centric experiences is something many industries are experimenting with today, forcing a negotiation of monetization, control, audience engagement and satisfaction. The interest in such experience stems from a recognition of the long-term value of legitimizing spaces for audiences to participate on their own terms. Comedy Central’s satirical late night television show *The Colbert Report* harnesses a similar type of appeal. As Colbert explained in his first show:

This show is not about me. No, this program is dedicated to you, the heroes. And who are the heroes? The people who watch this show, average hard-working Americans. You’re not the elites. You’re not the country club crowd. I know for a

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<sup>17</sup> A concept that takes the philosophy behind open source software and applies it to the structure of a business model.

fact my country club would never let you in....You're the folks who say something has to be done. And you're doing something. You're watching TV (qtd in:Burwell & Boler).

It may have been through irony, but these 'heroes' have become loyal fans, and eventually come to be part of what Colbert himself has dubbed the "Colbert Nation". They have both helped him become successful and become part of what he has built. Responding to and encouraging this type of engagement, the program recently launched a website where visitors can watch every episode of the Report, upload their own mashups and interact with each other. As host Stephen Colbert explains to the audience "you'll feel like you have a time machine, a DVR and friends," (The Colbert Report: Mon, Jun 22, 2009).

Colbert's approach emphasizes the audience's opportunity to control content along with the possibility to socialize, themes also observed in Tecnobrega, whose structure and organization challenges some of the conventions of mainstream US recording industry. Within Tecnobrega:

- 'pirates' and street vendors are integrated into its legitimate structure, bypassing 'official' stores and labels almost completely;
- musicians willingly forgo royalties from their recorded music, favoring live concerts as their main source of income;
- albums from musicians and DJs have been replaced by 'pirate' compilations sold on the street, or selections promoted by MP3 blogs;

- CDs are seen primarily as a promotional tool, not considered the industry's main revenue source; and music is produced almost exclusively at home-studios. There are no 'official' labels that work with a variety of artists.

Given the business model Tecnobrega has put in place, at no point is the audience chastised for the way they choose to relate to content. This business model emerged as a response to the way audiences were already behaving. In the same way that Nigerian film production uses "the capital, equipment, personnel, and distribution networks of pirate media" (Larkin 290), Tecnobrega is built upon the structures that were previously available to them. Piracy was already rampant in Belem, the local artists had neither the interest nor the resources to criminalize their potential public -- a public who generally couldn't afford to pay \$15 for an original CD. In response, musicians chose to follow the path of least resistance (and more profitability) by embracing piracy as a promotional tool, refusing to criminalize the 'unauthorized' reproduction of their music. Musicians and DJs formed a natural collaboration with the street vendors and fans that were already either selling or sharing their music. Through these collaborations the bands became better known and were given more opportunities to perform at live shows. This model has proven sustainable, if not for individual artists, who have a relatively short life span, for the industry itself, and the logic under which it is organized has created loyal fans of the Tecnobrega value network as a whole. This lays the groundwork for an egalitarian structure where limitations on participation are not imposed by producers from above, but determined by the preferences and circumstances of audience members themselves.

### 4.3-The Parties and The DJs

This industry's main product is the 'sound system party,' a live music event whose roots lie in street parties with small, homemade sound systems that were the mainstay of Brega music. Tecnobrega events are called parties to differentiate them from the shows, which are executed by the bands. Belém is a city of only about 1.5 million people, yet it hosts approximately 4300 parties and 1700 concerts each month (Lemos & Castro 162). Sound system parties are large spectacles -- smaller venues host events for more than 1000 people, and parties can be several times larger. Yet in spite of this success, Tecnobrega is still typically not present in conventional promotional channels, such as commercial radio and TV.<sup>18</sup>

At the center of the Tecnobrega ecosystem is the DJ, who remixes tracks created by domestic and foreign bands<sup>19</sup> and, to a lesser extent, creates his own pieces. Musically, Tecnobrega is a diverse mix of styles and traditions. The majority of the music is originally from the region, but invariably there are a few remixes from American popular music or songs that were re-recorded with Portuguese lyrics. The underlying rhythm is always Tecnobrega, but there is fusion and appropriation.

The DJs commands the Tecnobrega world atop the *aparelhagem*, their sound system.<sup>20</sup> In

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<sup>18</sup> Calypso, a *Paraense* Brega band is now considered the most popular in all of Brazil. They promoted and their work through the same channels as Tecnobrega.

<sup>19</sup> Sound system parties are a main source of income for the original musicians.

<sup>20</sup> Though literally translated, *aparaelhagem* means "apparatus"

Tecnobrega everything has a name, and while DJs have their stage name<sup>21</sup>, so too do the actual *aparelhagem*s whose names enhance their almost supernatural quality. While I was in Belém, the most popular sound systems were Principe Negro (Black Prince) and Super Pop. The Principe Negro sits upon “The Electronic Crown,” which rises above the crowd and spews fire at the end of the show. Super Pop's “Air Wolf” has similar capabilities, but is bigger and more spectacular, at the end of the show fire comes out of its instruments. When the fire and sparks burst forth, the DJs are magicians.



Image 9: DJ Elison and DJ Junino doing the 'S'.

The size of the *aparelhagem*s is of significant importance to the audience; the bigger a sound system is, the more expensive it is, and that expense is a key way DJs articulate their respect for the Tecnobrega audiences.

*Aparelhagem*s who are more willing to pour money into the spectacle of their sound system are more likely to draw a larger crowd. As Brunna, a 21 year-old fan pointed out: “Tecnobrega has become highly modernized. It has fire, lights, everything! It's a first class event, for the low class, but it's first rate.” These theatrics are very important to some fans, who see “fire and lights” as a particularly

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<sup>21</sup> Each sound system has at least two DJs.

significant marker of the DJs commitment to their audience.

For other fans, however, the most important indicator of a DJ's worth is their exchange of loyalties. Throughout the show, DJs will mention individual fans by name, occasionally displaying their names on the enormous LED screens that are part of their *aparelhagem*s. The DJ's power doesn't only reside in the spectacle they create, but also in their ability to call out to the fans from that higher plane. The most popular DJs are those that are kindest to their fans, the ones that call out their names more often to the audience. It is those 'loyal' DJs that deserve their fans attention.

In Tecnobrega, DJs are not only in charge of producing the spectacle audience want to see and dance to, they are also responsible for opening spaces for audiences to participate in these events. Each DJ has a way encouraging audiences to participate and display their loyalty, usually by acting out the first letter of a DJs *aparelhagem*. For instance, DJs for



Image 10: Tecnobrega fans doing the 'S' for Super Pop.

Tupinambá's shows encourage audiences to "do the 'T'", and for Super Pop's show audiences we're told to "do the 'S'" (see image 10 above) From the moment audiences arrive they are

invited to be part of a Tecnobrega show, to ‘do’ their part in the event.

Encouraging the audience to participate, DJs call attention to Tecnobrega’s ‘producerly’ characteristics. Producerly culture encourages audiences to spread artifacts and texts by creative gaps for audiences to write in their own experiences, not just to consume, but to make something of the media they are engaging with. In such a way, spreadable media “introduces the general guiding principle for transforming cultural commodities into cultural resources: open, loose ends and gaps that allow the viewer to introduce their own background and experiences” (Jenkins, Li, & Domb 66). Tecnobrega sound parties are an incredibly ‘producerly’ environment; with spectacle and regular sites for participation, DJs encourage audiences to contribute to the success of the event - audiences don’t just come to listen, they are invited to generate their own “meaning and pleasure” (Fiske 95) out of their experience with the content. As we saw with the value network and will continue to detail in the following sections, which explore the activities of fans, this participation and meaning generation extends beyond partying and dancing and includes content circulation and production.

## 5-The Audience: Doing Tecnobrega

### 5.1-The Audience's Place

Tecnobrega audiences are composed primarily by working class young people in their 20s, a not unsurprising fact given that 38% of Brazil's population are between the ages of 15 and 29 according to the 2000 census, which reported an increase in the youth demographic.<sup>22</sup> The music and parties serve an important function for the young people growing up in Pará: it puts them on stage, making them visible as members of a vibrant and important local community. As a significant leisure activity for these young people, Tecnobrega becomes a crucial mirror. Cinema, for instance, could be a potential option for entertainment, but it would rarely win over an evening of *aparelhagem*s. Much like the British youth that sociologist Sarah Thornton describes in *Club Cultures* (19), the *Paraenses* feel much more inclined to support their apparatuses than to see a film that almost certainly won't portray them. This radically differs from the case of young people in the United States who are continuously and diversely depicted by their local cinema.

Having said that, there is no such thing as an *average* audience behavior in Tecnobrega: The liberty that this environment affords the audience allows them to engage with Tecnobrega in ways as diverse as mounting a sound system on a motorcycle or baking a cake to celebrate their

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<sup>22</sup> This data can be found at:  
[http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/censo2000/primeiros\\_resultados\\_amostra/tabela\\_brasil.shtm](http://www.ibge.gov.br/home/estatistica/populacao/censo2000/primeiros_resultados_amostra/tabela_brasil.shtm)



anniversary within the fandom (see image 11 below). As London School of Economics social psychologist Sonia Livingstone, argues, there is no one verb to “capture that increasingly important way in which people are engaging with media” (Livingstone 25). Yet despite this diversity, Tecnobrega’s recognition of its audience provides a sense of empowerment that is swiftly embraced.



*Image 11: A cake made by As Coelhetes to celebrate their second year as a Tecnobrega team. Photo courtesy of Brunna Tavares.*

The audience is very much aware of its role as part of Tecnobrega. Yet, how they define and take advantage of that position was not necessarily evident to a foreign newcomer like me, but for the Tecnobrega fans, it is all quite clear:

Brunna and Luiz described a sound system “duel” as the best show they've ever been to<sup>23</sup>. The *aparelhagens* are set in two stages facing each other, in the middle, thousands of Tecnobrega fans.

The sound systems are out-spectacling each other and at the end one of them wins. “But how?” I ask. “Well, the best one wins of course” Brunna explains. -”But how do you know?” I insist.

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<sup>23</sup> Parties usually feature only one sound system, this duel was an extraordinary event and considering Tecnobrega’s spectacularity threshold, it was probably over the top.

-”Well, the crowd decides and the crowd knows”.

-”Oh, I see.”

However, I don’t really see, but what is clear at that moment is how proud Brunna is of the audience’s role within Tecnobrega. They don’t see themselves as consumers but as an integral part of the industry. They are in fact part of what defines Tecnobrega, in the same way that the Grateful Dead fans (Deadheads) came to be part of the whole Grateful Dead *experience*. While the Grateful Dead did operate to a certain extent under traditional copyright norms, they also encouraged their fans to copy and share their music. Their encouragement went far beyond ‘turning a blind eye’ -- during the concerts the arena was purposely divided into sections: seated, dancers and tapers - Grateful Dead fans who made ‘bootleg’ tapes to later share them with other Deadheads (Pattacini 7). This last area was deemed safe for use of equipment and it was where the band could ensure optimal sound for the ‘tapers.’

Today, long after the band ceased to exist in 1995, Grateful Dead ‘bootleggers’ share the music all over the Deadhead communities online, not to drive profit, but to further their relationships and standing within the Deadhead community. As Melissa McCray Pattacini, from the American Studies program at Trinity College noted in her ethnography of Grateful Dead fans, many of them won’t charge for recordings because they believe these ‘bootleg’ tapes should circulate outside of a money-driven economy. As one Deadhead told her, within Grateful Dead fandom “[t]here is no 'industry' and we actively try to destroy anyone's chances of profiting off of Grateful Dead tapes. [These recordings] are a gift from the band” (Pattacini 7).

## 5.2-Social Capital

For many Deadheads then, interaction within the community is as important as the music itself (Pattacini 8). This situation is no unlike that of Tecnobrega, where, when fans described the environment they would rapidly abandon discussions about music to focus solely on social aspects. It could be argued, in fact, that the music is used as the energizing background (and excuse) for the social experience itself. This isn't to suggest fans don't enjoy the music, but as opposed to other music fandoms where participants obsess over every nuance of a song, within Tecnobrega the social aspects of fandom take precedent over any other. The driving motivator for participation within Tecnobrega seems not to be the music itself but the social experience; Tecnobrega audiences use the party environment to connect with each other and gain recognition within the community.

The key commodity, then, appears to be what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes as 'social capital' - a type of credential that comes from significance and participation within a community. As Bourdieu defines it:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition--or in other words, to membership in a group--which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu "Forms", 102).

Social capital is important, he argues, because it provides us with a way to think about the

“structure and functioning of the social world” beyond merely accounting for the types of value traded and recognized by economic theory (Bourdieu “Forms”, 97). Thinking about social capital we can see the way people can be successful within networks that might not necessarily revolve around commodities but which nevertheless reward some people as ‘wealthy’. Social capital provides us with a way to think about the sorts of things that are traded and generated through the circulation of content and attention across the value network. It is another way to think about the value of reputation, attention and social standing.

### **5.2.1-Teams**

Social capital is important to all fans, but it is especially significant to Tecnobrega teams, who by virtue of forming a group they gain access (and collectively create) their own social capital.

Teams are the style leaders within the Tecnobrega community. Emerson, 20, who loves Tecnobrega but doesn't belong to any team, describes teams as “very important to Tecnobrega because they bring the heat to the parties.” They might show up ahead of time with a soundsystem in the back of a car and hold an impromptu party, blasting the music of their favorite DJs. It's with these super fans that DJs test out new music, and promote new dance moves. When it comes to knowing the moves, teams are the ones others look to. They show up at the parties with banners supporting their favorite DJs, or they incorporate them into the designs on their beer buckets, which they parade around the dance floor. They draw attention to, and root for, the DJs they like the best. Luiz, who belongs to one of Belém's oldest *equipes*, S.Coelho, described the teams as “a wonder” for the DJs -- they're the ones who drive excitement and

enthusiasm for a particular DJ. Teams serve the same function as wrestling super fans who draw other audience members into the spectacularity of the event. They are paying the admission not only to be spectators, but to be “an active and vital part of the show” (Ford *Pinning*, 20).

DJ Claudemir, who runs one of the most popular Tecnobrega MP3 blogs, considers these groups to be the most important means of promotion and distribution for Tecnobrega, more so than street vendors. They are the super fans, the greatest proselytizers for the genre and the community. Through activities like promoting Tecnobrega on social networking site, Orkut,<sup>24</sup>



Image 12: Jefferson displays the Psychopath's mini-aparelhagem.

where Brazilians make up 49.8% of the user-base, Teams are integral to promoting parties. They post updates about previous parties, and advertise forthcoming events.

In a city where drugs and violence have become an increasing problem, teams also provide safe spaces, where members treat each other with care and patience. Acácio, my 21-year-old assistant, is a Belém native, but, coming from upper middle-

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<sup>24</sup> Orkut's own statistics show that, as of June 2009, Brazilian users are the single largest group of users the system supports. Statistics are available here: <http://www.orkut.co.in/Main#MembersAll.aspx>, though an Orkut membership is required.

class, he had never hung out in the Tecnobrega circuit. By the end of our interviews he still wasn't sure about the music, but he envied the way that these groups of friends treated each other.

I asked several members what was necessary to have an *equipe*, rather than material, quantifiable conditions, such as a minimum number of associates, or a place to meet, or access to a car for the shows that were far away, all of the teams referred to the importance of their social bonds: solidarity, friendship, passion, trust, constancy. The potential for social capital is what draws these fans into the teams. Based on these values team members develop ongoing relationships with each other and with their environment.

DJs, musicians, and even party organizers explicitly recognize a team's importance through sponsorships, shout-outs or free passes, court teams. Although it is not always possible to track, immaterial social capital can be converted into actual economic gain. As the teams' popularity and status increases they become part of the attraction for the parties and are often offered the opportunity to co-host parties along with the *aparelhagem*s. Brunna's team, *As Coelhoetes*, usually receives 5% of the party's profit when they are asked to co-host. Opportunities like these raise their visibility as well, earning them both economic and social gain.

Team members generally know each other outside of Tecnobrega before becoming a team and the Tecnobrega environment, either justified the institutionalization of their relationship, or it gave them a platform to perform their status as a group. Teams members are soccer teammates turned dance mavens, a motorcycle gang that loves music, a group of neighborhood friends who

compete for women's kisses. Each of these communities of fans, brings their own diverse motivations and has carved a specific place on the Tecnobrega dance floor.

The ways in which these groups distinguish themselves from 'the mass', along with the markers that identify the Tecnobrega scene as a whole, fall under a second type of symbolic currency that is also at play in Tecnobrega's value network: cultural capital.

### **5.3-Cultural Capital**

Bourdieu first talked about cultural capital as an "internalized code" (Bourdieu *Distinction*, 562) with which those who possess it can understand culture. He was referring, though, to the knowledge, the status as well as the artifacts surrounding high-culture; "However, it is possible to observe subspecies of capital operating within less privileged domains." It is in these spaces that "hipness" becomes capital (Thornton 11). This is what Thornton calls "subcultural capital". In spite of finding her distinction helpful, precisely because it deals with youth and popular culture, referring to this currency as 'subcultural' implies two conditions that are not necessarily valid: first, a subaltern position in a cultural hierarchy, which hardly seems appropriate in an era where ubiquitous and diverse forms of popular culture are closely replicating (or continuing) the tradition and processes of folk culture, as Jenkins argues in *Convergence Culture*; second, it suggests a connection with a *subculture*, creating a binary that doesn't exist, or rather ignoring the cultural capital that is created in the multiplicity of *cultures* that exist between (and to the sides) of popular and high culture without necessarily operating as *subcultures*. Indeed,

Tecnobrega would not fit within that categorization, as I will discuss below. Rather I would like to insert cultural capital in a broader framework, where “less privileged domains” also have



Image 13: Side by side: The Psychopath's and Colbert Nation's 'coats of arms'. Above, courtesy of Psychopaths. Below: Designed by Esteban Colberto published under an attribution/share-alike CC license.

access. In essence, cultural capital is only as valuable as each particular *field* makes it out to be, be it privileged or not. Thornton explains this as conferring “status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder” (Thornton 12). The word ‘relevant’ seems key here, as it is only those who are valued by the community (which we could also call the *scene* or *art world* in this case) who can validate a cultural expression.

The teams, and other Tecnobrega audience members, explore and generate cultural capital through many different means. As in the instance of the beer-bucket, the majority of the *equipas* creatively appropriate American popular culture icons to identify themselves, horror film character Freddy Krueger, for instance, ends up in the Psychopaths team's ‘coat of arms’. For those who know the Psychopaths, and more importantly for themselves, Freddy Krueger is not only a foreign character, but also an objectification of their team; it becomes their cultural asset.



Evidently, not all forms of cultural credit need pass through the creation of a team icon; symbolic capital manifests itself in many different forms. One relatively easy way of acquiring ‘proof’ of belonging to the Tecnobrega scene is to buy one of the party photographs printed with a frame around them and the DJ’s logo stamped over the top. Even though, audiences use digital cameras during the concert, partygoers don’t hesitate to pay the rather steep price of US\$ 5 for these ‘official’ pictures. The pictures then get carefully archived in scrapbooks or posted online individually. This ‘photo op’ gives the fans an opportunity to cement the relationships with each other, but also to have a validated link with the DJ, making them an ‘official’ part of the event. These photos are at once the proof of social capital and the objectification of cultural capital.



*Image 14: Printing station for the parties' official photographs.*

Recordings of an evening’s party, often a low-quality, live mix of the event recorded from a soundboard and including crowd-noise, also play a crucial role in the documentation, and thus in the accumulation of cultural capital. Party recordings document the audience’s involvement in the event. The most valuable party recording might include not only the music of that night, but also the DJ calling out your name, cementing you as a key member of the Tecnobrega audience.

It is then cultural capital attained *through* social capital. Only by gaining the DJs recognition can this ‘premium’ presence be obtained.

These audiences consider symbolic forms of capital Tecnobrega’s most important value. Music comes and goes -- an average ‘hit’ song might be around for two or three months. This is a case where the social and cultural ties between audience members are meticulously documented and recorded for prosperity and the content tends to disappear.<sup>25</sup>

Tecnobrega also generates embodied cultural capital, for instance, it is tacky and proud of it! Its



*Image 15: Mobile studio where the evening's shows are recorded. On the side an advertisement for a local sandwich shop.*

tackiness is both a barrier to entry as well as a cultural value. Many of the audience members that I interviewed were where happy to describe Tecnobrega as cheesy and they were proud see beyond its cheesiness, but to also embrace it. There those in Belém that are not able to do that, and from within the

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<sup>25</sup> This is not the case in the mainstream circulation of music, where content is cherished and archived. Nevertheless, CDs, as music receptacles, don't seem to have that luxury. This is a fact the international music industry is well aware of, even if how to respond to it is still not clear. Already in 2006 EMI held a focus group with teenagers, once it was over they offered them free CDs from a big pile. None of the teenagers helped themselves to the CDs. They were interested in sharing their opinion about the music, but not in taking the object. "That was the moment we realised the game was completely up," said a person who was present (Anderson).

Tecnobrega circuit that is seen as a disadvantage. It's their loss if they "don't get it".

In London, the young clubbers interviewed by Sarah Thornton depreciate and differentiate the music they enjoy with expressions like "it's crap, but I like it". This is a way of situating themselves within a particular music scene, just like Tecnobrega does from the moment that it refers to itself as brega.

It is so that, in spite of brega (tackiness) implying "a depreciative value judgment" (Araujo 84) it also opens the door to the Tecnobrega culture. Nevertheless, over-performing this capital is never a good idea, "nothing depletes the capital like trying too hard" (Thornton 12). I suffered my very own cultural *faux-pas* on my second *aparelhagem* show. I attended with some members of the S. Coelho team, they were explaining the event as well as acting as my improvised bodyguards. To thank them I decided to buy a beer bucket for the group. The night before, in a smaller venue, that had been common practice. As soon as the bucket arrived the group began to reprimand me. Apparently the beer was too expensive in this venue and while the night before buying it had been considered proper social conduct, on this evening it was wasteful and even slightly offensive. I was told that only people that come to parties to "rip money"<sup>26</sup> would consider buying such a thing.

Although these social norms seem to be quite strict, Tecnobrega tends to function very similarly to the movement surrounding the Grateful Dead. It is not an environment that goes out of its way

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<sup>26</sup> There is a recurring, unconfirmed, anecdote in Tecnobrega scene where gang members that come to parties to prove their power of acquisition by ripping money in front of the other attendants.

to prove that someone might not belong, but rather it “invites ‘real’ fans and would-be tourists alike to join in the fun” (Herman 17). It is the public opinion, geography and the historically disparaging view of all things *brega* that distances Tecnobrega from the mainstream media coverage, not an internal attempt to remain “under the radar”.

Tecnobrega doesn't *attempt* to remain independent, it just *is*. Its ‘choice’ to not participate of some of mainstream media's channels and conventions is a tactical one, an opportunity to circumvent the lack of infrastructure in Belém while tapping into their local market. Tecnobrega presents a case of *getting around* power structures, not *pushing against* them. So while, like Punk culture, it is likely to “be dismissed by serious people as nonsense or as an irrelevant distraction from the major issues in life” (Hebdige 132) it doesn't actually fit within a definition of *subculture*.

In *Subcultures, The Meaning of Style*, sociologist Dick Hebdige argues that subcultures “express, in the last instance, a fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives” (132). While a tension does surely exist between Belém, as a peripheral city, and the more affluent and populated Brazilian centers, *subculture* alludes to a very different metaphor of space, one that locates its subject in an inferior place. The evolution of Tecnobrega's industry challenge of the *status quo* is not confrontational, it is not looking to change or even critique a reality of industrial practices, but to creatively solve its immediate and very practical problems.

In this sense, and as music sociologist Andy Bennett argues, it might be more productive to think

about these communities set around music scenes in a more fluid manner and not as necessarily defined by either class, gender or race (Bennett 606), but rather as a collective of individual choices that are not determined by a “working class response to feelings of alienation and marginalization” (Wilson & Carrington 70).

If we move away from what could be conceived of as an essentializing gaze of Tecnobrega fans’ participation, we can then more fully understand the wide array contributions they offer the scene as a whole. As important as cultural and social capital are to the success of Tecnobrega, so are the material and technological conditions that allow for its music and promotion to circulate.

## 6-Speeding on the Sound Bike: The circulation of content

Audiences are passionate about sharing the music of Tecnobrega -- it is a solid example of spreadable media<sup>27</sup>: content that the audience appropriate and use it to say something about themselves, content that they share and that circulates in a variety of platforms, in many cases



Image 16: 'Community radio' in Belém.

beyond those for which they were originally intended. Media spread is grassroots distribution, whether on or off-line. This chapter investigates how diverse communications channels are used to spread information and music in the Tecnobrega value network.

The mainstream media doesn't play an especially significant role in the diffusion of Tecnobrega, and this has forced party promoters, content creators, and the community to develop a range of alternatives to ensure that the music and details about the parties will reach the widest audience possible. For instance, there are four types of radio distribution channels the Tecnobrega community utilizes:

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<sup>27</sup> A concept further developed in the Convergence Culture Consortium white paper *If It Doesn't Spread It's Dead: Creating Value in a Spreadable Marketplace*, by Henry Jenkins, Xiaochang Li and Ana Domb.

- Conventional radio stations, depending on the size of the event;
- pirate radios, created when coveted Hertzian waves are high-jacked by DJs or fans for short periods of time;
- online radio stations<sup>28</sup>, which are rapidly increasing in numbers;. As mentioned above, *Super Pop* has its own online radio, as does nearly every relatively popular DJ;
- ‘Community radios,’ which are basically neighborhood-based, closed circuit systems with speakers attached to light posts to play popular music during the day.



*Image 17: A Sound-bike promoting a Tecnobrega party.*

Similarly, in Belém the pre-modern and modern live simultaneously, and the distinctions between off- and online practices are incredibly blurred. Media spreads through whatever channels are available, from social networks, and direct Bluetooth connections,

to radio and burnt CDs. While a party might be announced through instant messaging, people are

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<sup>28</sup> Practices from old media tend to make their way into new media. For instance Radio Amazonia (<http://www.amazoniafm.com>) has a tool for users to “dedicate” songs by clicking on them and essentially emailing a link, but culturally it is read as if it was a live radio dedication.

also likely to find out about it through hand-painted banners hanging across the road, or announcements made through a loudspeaker attached to a bicycle. These diversity of avenues are all equally responsible for Tecnobrega's success.

Increasingly widespread Internet access is changing Brazil's media landscape. According to the Center of Studies on Information and Communication Technologies<sup>29</sup>, 17% of Brazilian households owned a computer in 2005, by 2008 this number had increased to 27%. Internet access within the household has increased from 13% to 20% in the same period. While in 2005 the majority of households with Internet used a dial-up connection (65%), today 58% are using broadband (Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil). As in many other countries, mobile web penetration is ahead of computers per household. By 2008, 70% of the population used cell phones (up from 55% in 2005) and 24% of them were already using them to download music or videos (Comitê Gestor da Internet no Brasil).

People choose the mode of access most relevant to their immediate context and level of literacy. Raimundo, a middle aged taxi driver who heard us talking about the Principe Negro sound-system and confessed his passion for Tecnobrega, doesn't get his music from street vendors or online. He goes to a 'studio' where he can choose from thousands of songs and pays for a custom MP3 collection. This means he can have up to 10 hours of music on one CD; this is a format that fits very well with his long shifts. Because he doesn't have a computer at home, the 'studio' closes the gap between access to technology and literacy, much the same way a scribe would have written a letter in the time before widespread written literacy.

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<sup>29</sup> Government entity dedicated to tracking and promoting digital inclusion in Brazil.



Raimundo also uses his cell phone to receive and share music, as do the other members of the Justice League team. These fans were in fact surprised at my lack of knowledge about mobile downloads - a necessity for someone whose most readily available connection to the Internet has always been via mobile phone. The rest of the respondents I spoke with had access to a private Internet connection, either at home or available at a friend's house. It is also common for middle-to-lower class users to visit Internet cafés, though none of my respondents used these facilities.

Online, Tecnobrega is everywhere and nowhere at the same time, distributed across a variety of sites in ways similar to the “quasi-coherent networked fashion” media scholar Nancy Baym describes when discussing the distribution of Swedish music online (Baym 1). While MP3 blogs are very popular, they are not aggregated anywhere -- a simple keyword search won't necessarily point people to music that is an amalgam of multiple rhythms and styles. Tecnobrega content may be accessible to anyone online, but to fully enjoy it one must be part of the scene, know the latest rhythms, DJs, bands and songs. In the same way that references may be inscribed into texts, they are present in these home-brewed, seemingly disconnected sites navigated and created by Tecnobrega communities. Like the Swedish rock bands described by Baym, “these audiences are creating a form of online social organization in which members move amongst a complex ecosystem of sites, building connections amongst themselves and their sites as they do” (Baym 3).

While buying music on the street is still a popular and effective way of obtaining the latest Tecnobrega hits, downloading songs has become an increasingly common. Because

Tecnobrega's distribution system was built to make use of the infrastructure that was already in place, not only for unauthorized street vendors, but for online file sharing as well, content producers and fans continue to employ many of the same tools they had previously used to share music online. For instance, MP3 blogs will link to documents in file-hosting sites like 4Shared and MediaFire instead of hosting the files themselves, even when their activity is completely legitimate and sanctioned by the rights holders.

Social networks and instant messaging (particularly MSN Messenger, Microsoft's web-based instant messaging service) do provide nerve center of sorts for Tecnobrega. Many users share music via MSN, and DJs regularly publicize their instant messaging addresses so fans can connect with them directly. Orkut, a social network owned by Google and very popular in Brazil, is used mainly to announce events and for fans to proclaim their current favorite DJ or sound system. Artists have started to measure their popularity in terms of MSN contacts or Orkut friends. Orkut has a cap set at 1000 contacts per profile, so DJs have begun to use the number of profiles they have created to keep up with the audience demand. Gabi Amarantos, one of Tecnobrega's musical *divas*, proudly informed me that she currently has four Orkut profiles and over 1000 contacts in her MSN.

It is the desire to communicate and share that has encouraged so many *Paraenses* to make creative use of 'new' and 'old' media. By effectively harnessing the technologies they have, in fact, set the groundwork for the Tecnobrega industry.

## 7-Conclusions

My first interview with Tecnobrega fans was with Brunna and Luiz. We were all very excited and not sure what to expect. I hadn't yet gone to a party and couldn't begin to imagine the *agitação* (energy, vibration) that they were referring to. They couldn't understand why this *gringa*-looking woman wanted to talk about Tecnobrega, which is why they had me do the joint interview. The result was chaotic, enlightening and sweet, just like Tecnobrega. Two hours later we had already watched their teams' videos, seen photos, navigated through their Orkut profiles and I had tried the famous *açaí* berry sauce made by Luiz's mother that very morning. Before we left, Luiz gave me an S. Coelho t-shirt and Brunna gave me one from As Coelhetes, I was now an honorary member of both their teams. We then went to see Principe Negro "do the 'P'" with about 2000 people, but the essence of Tecnobrega had already come out of that interview. Yes, it is about the impressive "lights" and "fire", but more than that, it's about the bonds formed around it. It's a welcoming environment that is generous in offering recognition. It's a *producerly* space defined by much more than shows and the concerts, it includes the street vendors, banners, pirate radios as well as Brunna's mom baking a cake for As Coelhetes.

Giving audiences recognition and space to perform their own identities alongside that of media properties is a way of embracing communities, rather than attempting to create them. Tecnobrega audiences value this recognition and the social bonds that they are building, at times, over the musical content itself. This drives them to document these processes of participation and consumption, both as an archive and as a way of obtaining proof of their social standing within specific communities. It is so, that content becomes ephemeral and, through fan production and

documentation, reception is permanent.

Furthermore, if audience practices that are often deemed illicit, such as file-sharing and remixing, are accepted, so is the value they generate.

Fan production, or simple fan enthusiasm, can then be included into the industry's value generating process, which is no longer seen as a one-way delivery, but as a multidirectional flow that



extends far beyond the original network. This

*Image 18: With Luiz, showing off my new status as part of the S.Coelho team.*

approach is acknowledged by Sam Ford as “a collaborationist stance” which “strengthens the sense that producers and consumers are part of the same community and thus have mutual obligations to take actions which sustain rather than damage that relationship” (*Pinning*, 11).

Recognizing these audiences within an analytical tool such as a value network can provide insights into how value is generated and what roles the different actors play. By overlaying the monetary and non-monetary relations in the network, it is possible to account for different types of value and also identify their interactions. In a value network, as opposed to the fixed dependencies of a value chain, the nodes don't play one exclusive role, for instance an audience

member may be consumer, producer and distributor all at once. This then becomes a representation that more accurately reflects the current participatory media landscape.

The value network highlights the importance of understanding value beyond its economic sense. For instance, it is possible to imagine that if it weren't for the DJs' constant recognition of their audience, the social capital that sustains Tecnobrega would diminish substantially and the now massive parties may lose part of their appeal. In that same manner, if the *equipes* ceased to bring their buckets, banners, t-shirts and songs the parties could also lose some of their "heat". But, in the absence of a mainstream promotion and distribution system, the audience's most important contributions to Tecnobrega are file-sharing and fan proselytizing; without them the genre's content distribution network would certainly collapse. All of the actors involved in the Tecnobrega network operate with diverse motivations, but their transactions all contribute to strengthening the industry as a whole.

But beyond Tecnobrega's use-value as a case study of the productive nature of audiences in an era of convergence culture, it can also help us think about broader questions, such as the role of seemingly marginal cultural expressions within globalization processes and the construction of citizenship. Tecnobrega appropriates, and in a way re-invents, mainstream content received from the North, but it is very much an agent in this dialogue. As music sociologist George Lipsitz argues, "models of cultural imperialism based on binary oppositions between a metropolis and its periphery inadequately describe the poli-lateral relations across countries and cultures that characterize contemporary cultural production" (Lipsitz 16). Tecnobrega engages in a dialogue between centers. Through Tecnobrega, Belém becomes a center. This is what Robert Robertson

would call *glocalization* “by which the global is transformed by local actors and circumstances” (qtd in Condry 98).

But just like cultural capital becomes relevant through the eyes of the beholder, so does Belém through the transnational reception and appropriation of Tecnobrega. Similarly to the Cumbia Villera<sup>30</sup> in Argentina, Kwaito<sup>31</sup> in South Africa and R o de Janeiro’s Funk Carioca<sup>32</sup>, Tecnobrega

emerged out of the creative appropriation of the now inexpensive digital technologies within its reach. And as was the case in those other genres, it entered global music circulation networks, where audiences and DJs from all around the world played, shared and celebrated them. Through Tecnobrega

the *Paraense* audience becomes an



Image 19: Global flows: A UK-based Bollywood site featuring the Tecnobrega version of Britney Spears' "Gimme More". (source: <http://www.bollywoodsargam.co.uk/video/IJjCmaLdAWY/Britney-Spears-Gimme-More-TECNOBREGA.html>)

<sup>30</sup> The Cumbia Villera comes from the slums of Buenos Aires. It appropriates the Columbian Cumbia and increasingly fuse it with electronic beats (Lemos “Dominado”).

<sup>31</sup> Kwaito was born in the outer cities of Johannesburg in the 1990s. It remixes American hip-hop with African music and house beats (Lemos “Dominado”).

<sup>32</sup> Funk Carioca is probably the most well known of these genres, it emerged from the *favelas* in R o de Janeiro in the late 1980s. It creates fusions of traditional Brazilian beats with electronic sounds. It was heavily influenced by Miami Bass (Lemos “Dominado”).

*agent* in the globalized flows of culture.

This is what Ronaldo Lemos calls *globoperipheral music* (Lemos “Dominado”). Though the term is not yet widespread, as a category it is both useful and problematic, or rather it begins to identify the problematic nature of these musics’ international *caché*. Useful because, by categorizing these genres, they are now identifiable, no longer isolated instances of creativity in peripheral cities, but part of a larger phenomenon defined by musical centers that emerge through the use of digital technologies in cities regularly characterized by isolation, poverty or violence. But problematic because it also comes (pre)loaded with a default celebratory stance. Like ‘world music’ it seems to arrive with a tinge of the Putumayo<sup>33</sup> motto attached: “Guaranteed to make you feel good”.

Ethnomusicologist and DJ, Wayne Marshall, highlights these contradictions in this mode of reception when he coins the term ‘global ghattotech’ with which he addresses “the ‘uncomfortably romantic’ dimension in so much of this engagement and activity” (Marshall “Can We Talk”). In an interview with Brazilian journalist Camilo Rocha he referred to this term as describing

“the recent interest in such genres as funk carioca, kuduro, reggaeton, juke, grime, kwaito, etc. — genres identified with the ghettos of the former colonies as well as

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<sup>33</sup> Putumayo is an established ‘world music’ label known for its compilations and presence in airports all over the world. The idea being, that you may very well go to Amsterdam and return with African music. Though it has the ability to introduce lesser-known artists to broad audiences, it decontextualizes them at the same time under the homogenizing label of ‘the exotic’. <http://www.putumayo.com/en/>

with the ghettos of today's post-colonial metropolis (...) When it becomes a surfacy, fashionable pursuit, it gets more problematic, for me, than when it is about finding new sounds in different places and really getting to know them and the social and cultural contexts that shape them — and in the process, learning about one's own place (and, usually, privilege) in the global order” (Marshall “Globalistas”).

In those spaces, in which the Tecnobrega music travels without the rest of the components of its network, it becomes part of other *music scenes*, local and translocal at once, scenes of interconnected “kindred spirits” who interact “with each other through the exchange of recordings, bands, fans and fanzines” no longer determined by geography (Bennett & Peterson 8). Tecnobrega's relationship in the global imaginary with the Creative Commons and Open Source movements, some could argue more than the music itself, has led it to become popularized in ‘hip’, yet equally peripheral music scenes around the world.

This migration into other related yet different spaces responds to Tecnobrega's nature. Tecnobrega is a grassroots scene, but its impetus is lateral rather than upwards as with a bottom-up endeavors, where, by default, a ‘top’ exists. By circumventing many of the established validating systems in the music industry, such as labels and mainstream media, Tecnobrega has effectively refused to incorporate a ‘top’ into its structure. Even when the popularity of bands and teams creates a hierarchy of sorts, it's a fluid one and it tends to be determined by its symbolic capital.



These types of horizontal local/translocal scenes are becoming increasingly common in Brazil. For instance, in the equally peripheral city of Cuiabá in the state of Matto Grosso, a young sociologist, Pablo Capilé, founded Espaço Cubo, a project that has now extended to many other peripheral cities. Espaço Cubo created a credit system based on bartering in which musicians could trade music for food or rehearsal spaces. With the participating bands, they founded a festival, which has now become part of a festival/music distribution circuit called Fora de Eixe (Off-center). Espaço Cubo, and the projects that sprung from it, have become extremely successful in many Brazilian regions, while systematically circumventing its dominant centers, Río de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

Capilé describes this as

“Working for a market that is more compatible with the new musical reality of the country, and that it's supported by locally generated resources, which, when interconnected in a national network, generate a very promising value chain. This is based on barter and solidarity economy, with democratic access and a relationship with public and private entities. It demystifies the idea of the artists that have to build their careers on their own” (qtd in:Costa).

The competencies acquired through these types of participation have the potential to overflow into other domains. In a recent talk, at the Open Video Conference, Ronaldo Lemos argued that these cultural practices may have already initiated a shift in the conceptualization of the Brazilian public sphere, moving through the cultural into the economic and finally the political sphere, changes he maintains will become evident in the upcoming presidential election in October of

2010.

Participating in Tecnobrega or Fora de Eixe, are ways of producing culture, but also, for its participants (audience, creators, producers), it becomes a path in the definition of themselves as a public in their own terms. Anthropologist Nestor García Canclini would argue that this reconceptualization of the public sphere allows them “the right to participate in the remaking of the system, that is, to redefine the very arrangement in which we desire to be included” (Canclini 155).

Participating in Tecnobrega, then, becomes a way of experimenting and building citizenship. “For many men and women, especially youth, the questions specific to citizenship, such as how we inform ourselves and who represents our interests, are answered more often than not through private consumption of commodities and media offerings than through the abstract rules of democracy” (Canclini 5). Tecnobrega provides these spaces along with the sense of collectivity, which is crucial to the construction of a public.

It is so that the study of Tecnobrega, and of cultural consumption as a whole<sup>34</sup>, becomes a rich site not only for thinking about the productive nature of today’s audiences, but it also allows us to think about where and how “a good part of economic, sociopolitical and psychological rationality is organized in all societies” (Canclini 5).

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<sup>34</sup> More so, if we think about consumption as a concept overflowing with diverse verbs, like production, sharing, proselytizing, etc. as I have tried to do in the course of this text.

Behind the fire and lights Tecnobrega nourishes a multiplicity of relationships that go far beyond entertaining. It is an art world that extends past its original mission, reconceptualizing not only the music industry's notions of 'business as usual', but also allowing for a more diverse and honest ways of enacting the idea of citizenship.



*Image 20: As the night comes to an end, the beers buckets find yet another function.*

## Appendix : Audience Interviewee Profiles

All interviewees signed an informed consent form allowing me to record, cite and photograph them. The research process was officially exempt by the Committee on the Use of Humans as Experimental Subjects.

### Luiz



*Image 21: Luiz (second from left to right) with other members of S.Coelho outside a Super Pop party.*

Luiz, 23, works at a store during the day and also studies management. He lives with his mother who takes care of his 4 year-old daughter during the day. His daughter's mother works at the bar next door. They live in an apparently dangerous neighborhood, but they are very much part of the community.

Luiz is a joyful man who is proud of his achievements: a job, studies, a daughter and a car. His room is sparsely decorated and, with the exception of a couple of sports certificates, the walls are bare. The room is dominated by a computer and an enormous boom-box, both of which are used for Tecnobrega.

Tecnobrega is not only his most important means of entertainment, but also the center of his social life and an achievement in its own right. In his neighborhood he is known as the one who *really* is part of the scene, who really knows what is going on.

Luiz is part of the S.Coelho team.

## Brunna



*Image 22: Brunna, second from the left, with As Coelhetes.*

Brunna, 21, is studying in a school that will prepare her for college, but her priority right now is Tecnobrega and As Coelhetes. She co-founded the team and is their president. As one of the few all-girls teams, As Coelhetes has become very popular and Brunna's position comes with a degree of power and responsibility.

Although looking good and going to parties are the main objectives of their team, Brunna also organizes bi-monthly meetings in which they discuss the team's news. It is very important that everybody collaborates "with what they can" during their activities, otherwise they will be expelled.

Brunna, and As Coelhetes, value femininity above all else, even their girls-only motto, this has allowed them to incorporate a couple of gay men into their mix.

She lives close to Luiz but in a slightly poorer part of the neighborhood. Although we went to her house she asked us to wait at a sandwich shop about a block away.

## Emerson



*Image 23: Emerson talking to us right outside his house.*

Emerson, 20, is still in high school, and it's not too clear if and when he will finish. He lives in a poor peripheral neighborhood as well, but unlike Luiz's case, there is very little sense of safety or community. He lives with his mother, grandmother and a few brothers and sisters in a run-down house.

We met Emerson at a Principe Negro party where he was climbing the scaffolding and dancing non-stop. At his mother's house he was quiet and withdrawn. It was only possible to get him to slightly open up once we went to talk on the sidewalk. Every once in a while, his mother would yell something to try to attract his attention, never quite allowing him to feel at ease.

Emerson seems to be very involved in Tecnobrega, going to parties at least five times a week, yet an interview proved to be an utterly inadequate method to access his insights. My being a blond privileged woman didn't help matters either.

He is very proud of his Internet skills though, and I have since had a few conversations with him over instant messaging, which he accesses from a friend's house.

## Jefferson



Image 24: Jefferson in the hear of the Psycho-lair

Jefferson, 18, is studying to be a nurse just like his mother. We met him at a hair salon that belongs to another fellow Psychopath. Though it wasn't his home, it was quite clear that the salon was his favorite "hang-out" place: the Psycho-lair. On the back wall they've hung their banner with all the horror movie characters that they've chosen to represent them. Front and center is Freddy Krueger, the team's main icon.

During our interview the rest of the team joined in, and what started as a

stifled overly formal conversation -- with Jefferson trying to show that he was a responsible boy worthy of being interviewed—ended with the Psychopaths' youngest member displaying his talents as a DJ on their mini-*aparalhagem* on the back of his bike.

Though Jefferson admitted to listening to some rap and hip-hop, nothing replaces Tecnobrega, because that's where he gets to be a part of the Psychopaths.

## Marcio and Henrique: Os Super Amigos



*Image 25 : Marcio (left) and Henrique (center) with a third member of the Super Amigos.*

Marcio (left) and Henrique (center) are both part of the Super Friends. They are both waiters and have had their team for two years now. Out of all of the fans I interviewed they were the only ones that didn't fuse their discussions about

Tecnobrega with other positive parts of their life, like studies or family. For them, Tecnobrega is a means to an end: convincing women to kiss them. The more women that kiss them, the more respect the hope to attain.

While Henrique, 25, was satisfied with participating of the fun, Marcio, 28, was suspicious of other teams and was in fact quite certain that the only reason others were recognized by the DJs was because they offered some kind of monetary payment.

The Super Amigos was, by far, the most modest team I met, with only 4 members and two beer buckets. At the time of the interview they were discussing the possibility of hiring a musician to produce a song about them.



## Antonio Paulo



*Image 26: Antonio Paulo displays part of his Tecnobrega collection.*

Antonio Paulo, 22, recently graduated as a lawyer and he currently works for the municipal government as well as running his own informal import business. He lives with his mother, father, grandmother and sister.

He used to be part of Tecnobrega fan clubs dedicated exclusively to practicing dance moves. He would attend the club three or four times a week as well as going to several parties, but now, he has more responsibilities with his work and has decreased his level of commitment to the scene.

His most important links to Tecnobrega right now are his girlfriend, an active member of As Coelhete, and his passion for collecting objects. His room is covered with different types of collections: toy cars, stickers, action figures and now Tecnobrega merchandising has begun to work its way into Antonio Paulo's room as well. While he also accumulates music, he considers it disposable, and at most, he saves some tracks on his computer.

## Karen



*Image 27: Karen pleasantly shrugs off her mother's concerns.*

Karen, 21, recently graduated college where she majored in advertising. She is not a Tecnobrega super-fan, but rather she takes pleasure in listening to the music and dancing when she is at parties at friends' houses, but she wouldn't go to a sound-system party. She thinks they would be too crowded and dangerous.

Her recent enjoyment of Tecnobrega has become a cause of concern for her mother. Although Karen lives in one of the poorest areas in Belém, her family is slightly better off and her mother considers this music to be inappropriate for her daughter. She regularly scolds her: "Listen to it and dance to it if you must, but please don't sing it".

## Celina



*Image 28: Celina and her dance teacher Marcelo Thiangá. Photo courtesy of Thiangá studios.*

Celina, 44, discovered Tecnobrega through her dance teacher. She is a psychologist and professor at the local university. She was attracted to Tecnobrega because of its romantic lyrics and its intricate moves. Though she has attended a few Tecnobrega concerts, she is still afraid to go the parties. She has thought of asking her neighbors to go with her, but she is concerned that the parties might have too many people and be dangerous.

She expects Tecnobrega to evolve and become more a “refined”, “cleaner” music. Celina is sure that this is the only way for the genre to survive.

## Raimundo



*Image 29: I couldn't interview Raimundo in his house, but his cab is his second home.*

Raimundo, 41, is a taxi driver. He used to be a fan of the old slower Brega music, but he then found himself listening to Tecnobrega as well and now that is all he has in his cab.

Tecnobrega is not about socializing in Raimundo's case, but about the music itself. He regularly buys CDs from the street vendors, downloads it to his cell phone or visits a 'studio' where they'll 'burn' 10 hours of mp3 onto a CD for him.

He used to go to parties, but his wife doesn't like them and he doesn't really know the new complicated dance moves.

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