

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29327/5337529.1-1>



Within context: the soundscape of Selvagerias¹

Frederico Sabanay

Lucas Lippi

Taina Scartezini

Where to start? As Anthropology students, we prefer narrative forms and, in the case of *Selvagerias*, our podcast, this narrative has more than one beginning: the beginning of Anthropology as a Science, our first contacts with the discipline and our beginning as a group of producers. This text will tell you a little about these different starting points. Those environments are entangled in a single plot.

Thinking about a context, a moment which explains the emergence of our motivations and how the podcast infected us, we already have some stories. Final

¹ Episodes can be heard through platforms: Apple Podcast, Deezer, Google Podcast, Soundcloud, Spotify; or on our website: <https://selvageriaspodcast.wordpress.com/> ; Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/selvageriaspodcast/>

year of undergrad, unemployment, and national elections. This was 2018 for Tainá Scartezini (Tai), who found in listening to podcasts, and later in making them, a way to express her concerns. It was also a way of continuing to discuss Anthropology. In the second half of 2018, we had our first meeting. Discussions and political upheavals intensified in Brazil, making Lucas Lippi (Lippi) wonder where anthropologists were in these debates. This question, shared with Tai, Beatriz Braga (Bia) and Clarice Sá (Clarice), became the fuel for the production of a podcast.

As a group, we realized that anthropological contributions were rarely found in mainstream media. We felt the need for this presence beyond specialized journals. And if this particular area of Social Sciences provokes us to exercise multiple narrative paths, the history of the discipline has to circulate in different spaces. There is a lot to be told, but mostly too many ways to tell. A podcast, therefore, would be a prime vehicle for experimentation.

A few months of meetings converged with Frederico Sabanay's (Fred) concerns and willingness to take risks in practices that are not widespread in Social Science training. Surrounded by this desire, Fred found in the construction of the soundscape of *Selvagerias* the junction of different interests. In episode 4, for example, where we talk about the end of the world, we mix musical instruments with sounds of the wind and silent environments. The intention was to build a feeling of vacuum, of emptiness, which constantly invaded the lines, mingling with the background noises of the recording. We assumed that sounds produced by different sources—musical instruments, animals and climatic factors—, were useful pieces to compose an auditory experience. Fred brought with him Mateus Bravin (Mat), who was studying Literature and already had a degree in Audiovisual, helping the collective with his experience in editing.

The podcast format, an audio medium available on applications and websites on the Internet, has seen its consumption and production increase a lot since 2018. This form of communication, until that time, was not explored by Anthropology professionals in Brazil. The absence of imposed formats or duration limits for each program gives total creative freedom to those who want to produce: a challenge that is both difficult and stimulating. In addition, the audio media corresponded to our main objective: to be a tool for the discussions of Anthropology to reach a wider audience, beyond the small group of students who are dedicated to studying it.

Encounters, concerns and motivations. The precise atmosphere for humanities students. A scenario in which attacks on this area of scientific knowledge gained strength, the year of 2018 and its environment full of tension, provoked us to give concreteness to our desires. How to begin? This question is not just for the text. It has been chasing us since our first meeting. Where to record? It was necessary to find equipment, suitable places for recording, people to help us with the editing. What to talk about? The number of themes and anthropological studies forced us to choose a path.

For different reasons, we maintained our engagement with *Selvagerias*, even after the pandemic. Each of us has a different perspective on how we fell in love with doing anthropology, on what invited us to study Anthropology, as well as what provoked us to produce a podcast. There are different points of view that sometimes bring us together, sometimes distance us. And this constant movement is what unites us.

How is Anthropology done?



From left to right: Lucas, Beatriz and Tainá. Source: *Selvagerias* Archive.

Graduation in Social Sciences in São Paulo. The corridors of the middle building of the Faculty of Philosophy, Language and Human Sciences (FFLCH-USP) are environments in which many things happen. Snack bars too. Supply of coffees and snacks is essential. Keeping the brain working takes energy. The gray vinyl flooring of the interior corridors, which matches the classroom doors also gray; the long lines at the cafeterias at break times; the trees, gardens and lawns that fill the exterior spaces of the buildings. People, as well as their cigarettes, coffees and food, which gave smell and taste to the conversation circles, are also important components of the scenario that formed us. A mixture of tobacco with Philosophy, coffee with Sociology, vegetarian *kibe* with Anthropology; or any other combination of your choice. A truly varied menu that makes us think.

In Brazil, those who wish to graduate in Anthropology commonly enroll for a Social Sciences course. There are few universities that offer exclusive Anthropology courses. In the case of the University of São Paulo (USP), where we graduated, Anthropology goes hand in hand with Political Science and Sociology. This feature is important, as it demonstrates how we, anthropologists in Brazil, approach our studies.

Generally, when we talk about “Anthropology”, we don’t say “Social Anthropology” or “Cultural Anthropology”, because for us this is implicit. Sociocultural Anthropology studies the aspects that unite and differentiate humanity in collectives, societies, groups, ethnicities or cultures. It is a Science that is linked to the Humanities. Elsewhere, on the other hand, Social Anthropology is taught alongside Archeology and Biological Anthropology with its different branches, such as Physical Anthropology, Medical Anthropology and Evolutionary Anthropology. They also study the humankind, but with a different perspective. The connection with these two areas, Biological Anthropology and Archeology, leads to a greater concern with humanity in its biological aspects as well.

Telling our trajectory as a collective is an example of what sociocultural anthropologists do. Throughout our training, we read a set of similar texts, attended classes with common professors, and ended up making friends with people who share the same references. As a result, our private worldviews begin to merge with our collective ones. Our individual views take on a different shade.

We learn to mix our ideas with other people's. But this does not mean that we have lost what differentiates us as subjects. We share many opinions and agree with many analyses, but we have different preferences, choices, personalities and tastes. But it is the events that led to the formation of *Selvagerias* that matter, if we want to approach this history through Sociocultural Anthropology.

The trajectory of each one is quite different. Lippi, the oldest in the class, had already studied Veterinary Medicine, also at USP, but abandoned the course after a few years. He chose the Social Sciences, as he believed the course would provide a more critical view of the world. His intention was to make social theory the content of movies. He did not want to enter a film course, as he believed that it would be too technical, that he would teach how to handle equipment and write scripts. It was more relevant for Lippi to learn to analyze our society in a more complex and profound way. Well, in that regard, we cannot deny that it was the right choice. Once with movies, now with podcasts, Lippi's initial desire to produce content for a wider audience remains.

Tai, in turn, after taking the entrance exam for Literature, Journalism, Architecture and Civil Engineering (all in one year), discovered that she did not quite know what she wanted. Under the influence of a psychologist and reading a little more about the field, she thought that the Social Sciences were good for thinking. So, with that idea in mind, she left the countryside of Santa Catarina, where she was born and raised, and moved to São Paulo with a suitcase and a gourd, as they say in those regions of the country. She finds it curious how after so many years studying Social Sciences she found herself again in Journalism, a career she gave up on, but which is now part of her daily life.

Fred, the youngest of the group to enter the Social Sciences course, has always been attached to images and sounds, long before entering university. From an early age, he lived in a house full of relatives, he was used to listening to many people at the same time. He learned to play guitar at a young age, together with his brothers, without knowing how to read a sheet music,- perhaps that's why this ended up helping him not to enter a course in Music Composition, due to his lack of erudition. He took the entrance exam for Social Sciences, shortly after the June of 2013 movements, a troubled moment that reinserted the yearning for an incessant political debate in an entire generation of young people. Soon, he rediscov-

ered the act of active listening and attentive observation through the approaches present in the field of Anthropology training.

The *Selvagerias* podcast arises, then, from a meeting between colleagues, a friendship between undergraduate students who found themselves seeking the answer for the following question: but after all, what is the difference between Anthropology and the other Social Sciences?

In the first episode of *Selvagerias*, *O que é antropologia²*? We spoke with Fernanda Arêas Peixoto and Marina Vanzolini, professors at the Department of Anthropology at USP. Throughout the episode, we talk about some definitions for this Science, through which we discuss our training and our profession. According to Fernanda Arêas Peixoto, starting from a definition given by Lévi-Strauss in a conference called *The place of Anthropology in Social Sciences*,

[...] anthropology is the social science of the observed... A science that starts from the native's point of view, whatever he may be, not only to understand him, but so that this other point of view affects our own points of view, our own ways of understanding, expanding and transforming them. Anthropological tools teach us from an early age to exercise a kind of decentering of the gaze...

Reinforcing this dimension of “going towards the other”, we remember that doing Anthropology is moving physically and mentally towards the people with whom we dialogue, to understand how they think and live. For Marina Vanzolini, Anthropology is “a powerful method of knowledge and reflection”. It is a subject that provides us with techniques to reflect on our way of being in the world and of relating to others. Anthropology allows us to overcome prejudices, because it is the Science that prioritizes describing the vision of the people about whom we write.

Moving, experiencing, understanding. If to do Anthropology we needed to go to the people we talked to, to produce *Selvagerias* we also needed to go to a recording studio. After many conversations over coffee, we started looking for places that could provide recording materials.

2 *What is Anthropology?*

How is a podcast made?

Back in 2018, there was a lack of content of Anthropology accessible to the non-academic audience and circulating beyond university borders. This motivated us to produce a science dissemination podcast. Although today there are already some podcasts of the genre, at the time, none had yet been published. Thus, we wanted to circulate this anthropological knowledge in other spaces and, at the same time, express them with other, more didactic and artistic, languages. This is because Anthropology does not escape the elitist context of public higher education in Brazil. Mainly, when we think about the racial and economic aspects, the graduation in Social Sciences at USP, as well as the post-graduation, is still heavily populated by white people from wealthier economic classes. Furthermore, the timid dissemination beyond the specialized public results from the excessive concern of anthropologists with the vocabulary used by the mass media. The concepts and contexts of important information for anthropologists, when reordered or translated into synonyms, can result in misunderstandings, as there are cultural misunderstandings that are not always well clarified in quick explanations. This makes many researchers refuse to give interviews to journalists.

Precisely for this reason, due to the possibility of exploring the different meanings of words, we opted for a more narrative format, instead of the typical “round table” programs, widely used by podcast producers. Narration allowed us to play with sounds in an attempt to create soundscapes that are more fluid to hearing, in addition to exploring description and storytelling, so dear to ethnographic texts. Ethnographies are texts that describe the fieldwork of an anthropologist and the population with which he/she/they lived. While the narrative format multiplies the resources for telling stories, it requires more careful editing work on the audios compared to recorded conversations. Therefore, this choice also requires a technique to deal with specific computer programs, good hearing and redoubled attention. As the intention is to make a mix, an overlapping of sounds that allow us to bring listeners to the narrated environment, the place where we would record also needed to be chosen carefully. The quieter the better.

After all, where to record? The fact that USP was a common destination, where we went more often, made it a more obvious alternative. Strategic decision, because urban mobility in São Paulo, the largest city in Latin America, is always a problem that imposes itself. Traffic interferes with travel, but also because of the noise it causes. We need silence. And on the Butantã *campus*, we would also be in relative isolation from the noise of the city. What do you think of a recording studio? Even better! But where are there studios at USP?

After some closed doors, we found in the Laboratory of Image and Sound in Anthropology (LISA-USP), linked to the Department of Anthropology at FFLCH-USP, a welcoming space. There, we started recording our programs. Located in Colmeia, a set of buildings attached to the USP Residential Complex (CRUSP), LISA is a center for research, documentation and experimentation in Audiovisual Anthropology. In addition to its collection of films, images and sound recordings (available for consultation), the laboratory has the infrastructure and technical support we were looking for.

In this environment we would have another beginning. With the support of Sylvia Caiuby, Ricardo Dionísio and, in particular, Leonardo Fuser, we began our journey. We also received support from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies at the University of São Paulo (PRG-USP) with two scholarships for almost a year. This allowed some of our members to dedicate more time to the podcast activities. It was at this moment that Fred and Mat joined *Selvagerias*.

How to tell a story of Anthropology?

During the four episodes of our first season, we sought to talk about the history of Anthropology, addressing some of its milestones and currents. In the first episode, *O que é Antropologia?*³ We gave some possible definitions for the disciplinary field and pointed out how it relates to our daily lives. In *Selvagerias*, *Barbáries*, *Civilizações*⁴, the second episode, we enter the terrain that anthropologists tend to point out as the beginning of the discipline: the evolutionists. In the third, *Um caldo à brasileira*⁵, we focus on the beginning of Anthropology in

3 What is Anthropology?

4 *Savageries, Barbarism and Civilizations*.

5 *A Brazilian broth*.

Brazil. And in the last episode, *Os fins da Antropologia*⁶, we played with the different meanings of the word “ends”, which can mean both finishes and purposes. We explore a newer strand of the discipline, in addition to commenting on major events of 2020: the environmental crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Looking back, we can say that “a specter haunted the *Selvagerias* podcast” and that specter was Marilyn Strathern. The British anthropologist, born in 1941, is internationally known for her work on forms of kinship and on the Hagen, a native people of Papua New Guinea, a Melanesian island located near Australia. In particular, we were moved by her discussion in *Out of Context: The Persuasive Fictions of Anthropology*. In this book, concerned with the possibility (and ways) of expressing alien concepts with familiar ideas, Strathern questions the effects that anthropological narratives on the origin of the discipline and its procedures have on anthropological practice itself. In summary, the author’s discussion of the *anthropologist as a writer* helped us to think about how we would tell the history of the discipline, the theme of our first season. Realizing that we could take multiple paths, we had to choose a story and a way to tell it, among so many other narrative possibilities. We were dealing, then, with the problem of how to present to a broad audience what anthropologists do and how they work, and what or who they research.

Thus, we also stopped to think about the way we learned the history of Anthropology, throughout our own training, which, in a way, made illegible some authors considered as evolutionists, such as Sir James George Frazer, Edward Burnett Tylor and Lewis Henry Morgan. The reason they turned into ill-regarded authors is usually linked to the eugenics legacy of such works. Eugenics was a current of thought that sought to produce a racial selection based on the idea of “well born”, aiming at human improvement. The bases for these theses were sought, among other references, in anthropological works, although anthropologists did not necessarily agree with this.

However, for Strathern, what made such a diverse set of authors unreadable was not just their legacy, but also the emergence of a new narrative form within Anthropology. Evolutionary anthropologists approached their readers, who were their companions of nationality, class and/or ethnicity, and cast an exotic look at

6 The ends of anthropology.

other peoples and cultures. The exoticism was in the approximation they made of ethnographic examples so different from one another, but placed side by side without context, that is, without showing their particularities. In turn, starting with Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), a Polish anthropologist based in England and one of the creators of the ethnographic method, modern anthropologists prioritized dense ethnographic descriptions of a single people with whom they lived for a long period of time.

Therefore, we wanted to read these authors again, trying new perspectives on the classics of the discipline, but responsibly treating the perverse effects that some of their ideas helped to foster. With surprise and pleasure, we came across a very different Morgan from what we were used to. We found an anthropologist engaged with the agendas of Native American peoples and who developed a lasting friendship with his research partner, the young Seneca Ely Parker, to whom Morgan dedicated the book *League of the Iroquois* and who he even helped by creating connections with dominant white society. These relationships are more reminiscent of contemporary collaborative research projects than of the evolutionary studies of the time.

In any case, due to our concern with building a non-exotic sound narrative, we resort to an ironic aesthetic in order to subvert the meaning usually attributed to certain words. This is expressed in the episode titles, adding a tone of humor to references, whether anthropological or popular. As is the case of *Um caldo à brasileira*⁷, for example, an episode in which we discussed the national miscegenation project. Therefore, we refer to the history of Anthropology in popular terms rather than academic ones.

In this sense, the name of the podcast, *Selvagerias*, makes a double reference: first, to the book *Wild thought*, by Claude Lévi-Strauss, and, second, to the idea of “savagery”. In the 19th century, some authors used the expressions “savagery”, “barbarism” and “civilization” to categorize the supposed stages of human evolution, in that order. However, only Europeans were considered civilized, which denotes the racism of such conceptions. So why use a pejorative term? Well, because savage is also that undisciplined knowledge, which cannot be tamed, and

7 *A Brazilian broth.*

to emphasize this is to recognize the strength present in the knowledge of these “savages”.

Furthermore, *wild thought* is, for the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, a way of thinking based on the sensible, that is, based on the senses and materiality, a very sophisticated and recurrent type of thinking in societies formerly described as “wild”, although not exclusive to them. Thinking about it, a friend of ours, Clarissa Reche, first suggested the name “savagery”, in the singular, but then, at the suggestion of a teacher who supported the podcast project, Fernanda Arêas Peixoto, it was named in the plural as a way of pointing to the fact that there is no such thing as a “savage”, or a “savagery”. In other words, with this name we mean that exoticism is in the eye of the beholder, and not in the way of life of the person seen through this prism.

It was also out of ethical concern that we collectively formulated a tribute to traditional populations, without whom there would be no Anthropology. Thus, inspired by an Australian Anthropology podcast, *The Familiar Strange*, and by Oswald de Andrade’s *Manifesto Antropófago*, we wrote the following excerpt, present in all our episodes:

We would like to honor the traditional populations, originating or brought to this land on which we produce this podcast. Without them none of this would exist: no body, no idea. For *émigrés*, trafficked and tourists in the country of the big snake, this podcast is intended for all the curious, professionals or amateurs.

Oswald appears at another time, by the way. Our vignette, “we are *Selvagerias* and we are only interested in what is not ours”, is an appropriation of an excerpt from the manifesto. It would not be an exaggeration to say that modernism and *tropicália* are two other specters that haunted *Selvagerias*, which brings us to another subject: sounds.

How to experience sounds?



Frederico and Mateus at the editing room, at the Laboratory of Image and Sound in Anthropology (LI SA/USP). Source: *Selvagerias* Archive.

Producing *Selvagerias* made us take on an experimental role. After all, the adventure of creating sound compositions fabricated from diverse layers of sounds and voices was a new experience for us. The creative process involved in the production of *Selvagerias* made us realize that it was necessary to match the sound identity with an anthropological practice. But it took us some time to incorporate that spirit into content creation.

We did not want to assume that we were doing such a big thing right from the start. When we started to attend LISA-USP and understood that we were finally going to make a podcast, we did not want to idealize our results, in the sense that we did not have a fixed format of the programs in mind. We had to face everything that a studio production practice implies: understanding how the equipment works; what would be the best software available for editing; how we must position the microphones. Anyway, we were true amateurs in that universe. We wanted to do something new in relation to what we had contact within the area, and for that, we chose to assume it as an experiment.

By taking on the rehearsal character of the podcast, we seek to include the very process of producing the episodes in our ideas and scripts. Soon, the idea of causing ruptures as a narrative resource arose, interrupting the speech of Tai, Lippi and Bia and showing that the podcast was actually being edited in a studio.

The pilot episode begins with Fred and Mateus meeting in the editing room, talking about reviewing the podcast. When they pressed the computer mouse, the vignette started, and the first episode of *Selvagerias* continues. In all the appearances during the episodes, the editors appeared and disappeared at the sound of the mouse click, accompanying from the “outside” universe of the podcast and the inert environment of the silent studio, contrasting with the arrangements accompanied by soundtracks, conversations and interviews from within the podcast. The creaking recording room door, the coffee sips, the computer keyboard, the mouse grip, exterior elements of the narrative and interiors of the podcast editing and editing process itself. Even *WhatsApp* calls with the podcast participants, already distanced from the moment of recording, appeared in these narrative breaks to collaborate in the assembly of the episode with questions and clarifications. We bet on explaining our creative process, creating a narrative bifurcation: the relationship between the process of making the podcast and the final composition of each episode.

Soon our creative process started to work from bifurcations and intersections. We also wanted to cross sonorities, to bring together diverse sound universes that are not common to be heard together. We had a conscious desire to play with the idea of *bricolage*, as suggested by Lévi-Strauss on his analysis of the mythical plane in Amerindian thought. To grope subjective and abstract aspects that could be present in what we approach in the episodes, we seek to create compositions from a repertoire of elements of the most varied types: sounds of planets, birds, forests and their rivers, electronic synthesis, cellphone notifications. We wanted to prioritize the sensibility of the narrative and to bring the perception of conflict and the coexistence of differences through the composition of varied sound frequencies. We tried to use this resource to help paint shades of drama in the constructed narrative, punctuating tensions, doubts and clairvoyances.

From these intersections, we seek to create sound environments and venture into possible mixtures of sounds from different universes to create the land-

scape of *Selvagerias* itself. In the introduction of each episode, a somewhat metallic and transcendent whisper progressively fades in announcing the homage to the original and rooted traditional populations that inspire us and underlie our motivations to practice Anthropology and produce the podcast. This beginner sound is a sound simulation of frequencies captured from Pluto, the most distant planet in the solar system. The voiceover of Tai, Lippi and Bia was accompanied by a diversity of sounds, drumming, guitar fingerings and synthetizations of vaporwave music and video game tracks, together with the sounds of beings and agents that inhabit the forests. Through this narrative amalgamation, questions and discussions with the interviewed interlocutors were linked.

Elaborating narrative compositions required constant debates about what we were producing. We were concerned with how the displacements and experimentation in the discussions would be carried out, without relaxing the words simply by superimposing layers of random sounds. When carrying out *Selvagerias*, we were faced with the challenge of perceiving the reverberations of what we say, especially when it comes to an area of knowledge dedicated to what affects our own point of view. We realized not only how to produce a podcast on Anthropology, but how to exercise an anthropological practice. The meanings we take in our creations are contaminated by the willingness to know different ways of life and to allow their narratives to assemble arrangements in our head. We allow ourselves to be contaminated by the reverberations of different points of view to create compositions of our own narratives.

When we turned our eyes to our formation, in a few moments of our training we were introduced to the life stories of professionals in the area in depth, as we did in episode 2, *Selvagerias, barbáries, civilizações*⁸, with events from the life of Henry Lewis Morgan, an American anthropologist. In this sense, *Selvagerias* was a way of giving vent to diverse interests, which we could not always explore in our own research. It was also a hobby for those who like to discuss Anthropology even in their spare time. And, who knows, from now on it could be a kick-off in the construction of a scientific culture.

8 *Savageries, Barbaries and Civilizations*

References

ANDRADE, Oswald de. O manifesto antropófago. *In*: TELES, Gilberto Mendonça. *Vanguarda européia e modernismo brasileiro: apresentação e crítica dos principais manifestos vanguardistas*. 3. ed. Petrópolis: Vozes; Brasília: INL, 1976.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *O pensamento selvagem*. Tradução de Tânia Pellegrini. Campinas, SP: Papirus, 1989.

STRATHERN, Marilyn. *Fora de contexto: as ficções persuasivas da antropologia (seguido de comentários e respostas)*. Tradução e revisão técnica Tatiana Lotierzo e Luis Felipe Kojima Hirano. São Paulo, SP: Terceiro Nome, 2013.

Familiar strangers. Acesso em 27/01/2021.



Access the page of the *Selvagerias* podcast here

Frederico Sabanay: graduated in Social Sciences from the University of São Paulo (USP). He holds a degree from the Faculty of Education of the University of São Paulo (FEUSP) and is the sound editor of the *Selvagerias* Podcast. Internship in the Protected Areas Monitoring Program of Instituto Socioambiental (ISA). With roots in the coast of São Paulo and Vale do Ribeira, he researches socio-environmental conflicts associated with extensive monoculture, biodiversity and climate change, in addition to working in the fields of education, audiovisual and ethnomusicology. *E-mail:* frederico.sabanay@usp.br

Lucas Lippi: is a Master's student in Social Anthropology at USP. He is currently doing ethnographic research with caiçaras from São Sebastião (SP) about the arrival of Petrobras in the downtown area. His reflections involve themes such as development, memory and archive. In addition, he is also interested in debates

about the anthropology of science and techniques. Since 2018, together with Tainá Scartezini and Frederico Sabanay, he has produced *Selvagerias*, as he believes it is extremely important to exercise different ways of communicating scientific work to different audiences. *E-mail:* lucas.lippi.silva@usp.br

Tainá Scartezini: a Santa Catarina born based in São Paulo, she holds a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences from USP and a specialist in Scientific Journalism from Labjor/Unicamp. She is currently studying for a master's degree in Social Anthropology, also at USP, where she is researching the carbon credits project developed by the Paiter Suruí. She is interested in interdisciplinary debates between Ethnology, Ecology and Economics, with a focus on climate change and S&T (science and technology). Since 2018, she has produced the *Selvagerias* podcast with fellow undergraduates. She believes in the word and in listening. Contact *email:* taiscartezini@gmail.com