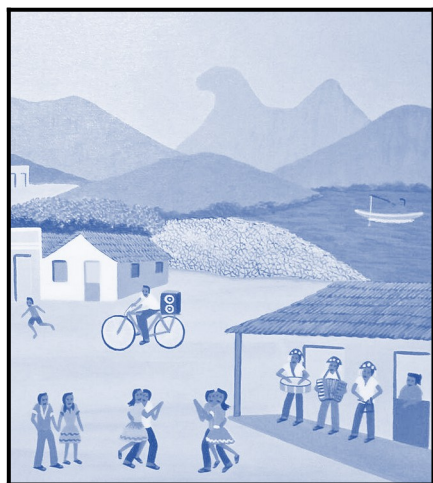




Dry Signals

Soundscapes in Ceará, Brazil

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Original artwork: Manoel Neto
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LISTENING GUIDE

I made the recordings for this installation in 2015, the fourth consecutive year of drought in Ceará, a state in northeastern Brazil. Although the painting, static and reductive, might suggest a timeless ethnographic present in a nameless small city or town, I see this as an interactive acoustic ethnography that layers a stereotyped, normative small-town northeastern Brazilian soundscape with the specific, diverse, and meaningful contexts in which the various sounds were recorded. Touch the screen in different spots to hear the sounds of quotidian life in the semi-arid hinterlands of the Brazilian Northeast.



1. Banabuiú Reservoir at midday
2. Guaramiranga in the late afternoon
3. Cedro Dam at Quixadá at dusk
4. Sunday mass at the Basilica of Canindé
5. Sound system in Canindé
6. Children singing at the Casa Grande Foundation, Nova Olinda
7. Advertisements in downtown Crato
8. Traditional *forró* trio in Juazeiro do Norte

9. Radio broadcasts in Iguatu's main square

1. Banabuiú Reservoir at midday

Recorded July 24, 2015



The Banabuiú Reservoir, which can hold up to 1.7 billion cubic meters of water, was nearly dry at 1.11% of its capacity (approximately 17.8 million m³) in July 2015. The reservoir—the third largest in the Brazilian state of Ceará—last overflowed its spillway in 2009. During my visit, upturned fishing boats rested on the cracked earth. Emaciated cattle and horses grazed areas that were once deep beneath the water's surface. A fisherman named Josélio told me he catches fish such as tilapia and curimbata in good years. This year he was catching much smaller fish, and hardly any.

2. Guaramiranga in the late afternoon

Recorded July 25, 2015



The lush hilltop town of Guaramiranga, which gets its water from wells, had enough reserved water in July to last through October. The wells serving Mulungu, a neighboring town, were expected to run dry by August; nearby Pacoti was to run dry before September. The Ceará state government cut all state funds to Guaramiranga's much-beloved Carnival celebrations earlier this year to redirect the money to drought relief. Birds, construction, and leisure characterize the town's daytime soundscape. On weekends and throughout its annual Carnival festival it transforms into a regional jazz and blues hotspot.

3. Cedro Dam at Quixadá at dusk

Recorded July 23, 2015



The Cedro Dam at Quixadá was the country's first major engineering project and its earliest public work to combat drought. Today, the stone embankment and a nearby rock formation shaped like a broody hen serve as icons of Ceará's Central Sertão and have become regional tourist destinations. The Brazilian Institute for Historical and Artistic Heritage (IPHAN) submitted a proposal to UNESCO earlier this year to include the dam on the list of World Heritage Sites. Until 2011, the embankment provided the backdrop to the annual Meeting of the Rain Prophets, a gathering in which rain prophets, who derive weather forecasts from observable natural patterns, announce predictions for the coming season to farmers and others.

4. Sunday Mass at the Canindé Basilica

Recorded November 22, 2015



Canindé is a major pilgrimage destination for northeastern Catholics. On a hill above the city is a large statue of St. Francis, Canindé's patron saint. In the historic city center is the Basilica of St. Francis of Chagas, where believers leave votive offerings for the saint. It is the biggest Franciscan Sanctuary in Latin America, and the second biggest outside of Italy. The seats were filled at an afternoon mass on an ordinary November Sunday, and a small choir and band led the crowd in uptempo worship. Near the start of mass, they sang "Tu és o rei dos reis" (You are the king of kings), with a funky bass line and shouted requests for everyone to clap along.

5. Sound system, Canindé

Recorded November 22, 2015



This recording was made from the top of the hill in Canindé where the statue of St. Francis overlooks the city. Hundreds of tourists wandered among booths selling religious souvenirs, including keychains, hats, and rosaries. Some posed for photos at the foot of the towering statue, while others milled around near tour buses. A car parked outside a bar blared a live recording of *Aviões do Forró* performing a *forró* cover of “Tá Fazendo Falta,” a year-old *música sertaneja* hit, from a large sound system built into the car’s trunk. A middle-aged man, enjoying some afternoon libations, sang along. Contemporary pop *forró*, often criticized for its vulgar lyrics and commercial motives, hardly seemed incongruous with the lively atmosphere of the pilgrimage site.

6. Casa Grande Foundation, Nova Olinda

Recorded November 27, 2015



The Casa Grande Foundation is a non-profit organization in the town of Nova Olinda. Constructed around a house built at the end of the 17th century, the organization provides extracurricular education to local youth in traditional arts, culture, and history as well as a range of practical and professional skills, including radio broadcasting. Photos of Brazilian celebrities visiting the site hang around the walls of the courtyard. At lunchtime, before a full afternoon of classes and a performance by a visiting music-and-theater troupe, a group of children sang songs they learned at Casa Grande. “Jaraguá,” led by Iago, who sometimes performs as a clown, is a song from *reisado*, a mumming tradition associated with Epiphany.

Saxon Burns

7. Advertisements, Downtown Crato

Recorded November 26, 2015



On a busy Thursday morning, trucks and cars with speakers mounted to their roofs circulated the streets of downtown Crato, where the sounds competed with the rumble of passing vehicles, lively chit-chat, and announcements and radio broadcasts from speakers resting in storefronts. Crato is part of the Cariri microregion, which includes nearby cities Juazeiro do Norte and Barbalha and a few other neighboring smaller towns and cities. One truck announced sales at a supermarket where Coca Cola and rice were selling cheap. In the context of a national economic crisis and atypically blistering 100-degree temperatures, affordable rice and a cold Coke sounded appealing.

8. Forró Trio, Juazeiro do Norte

Recorded November 29, 2015



Ranier Oliveira, a *forró* accordionist, lives in Juazeiro do Norte. Oliveira, who runs a multimedia production company and is studying for a bachelor's degree in music at Juazeiro do Norte's Federal University of Cariri, is an accomplished musician, having played alongside Brazilian greats such as Hermeto Pascoal. "These days, it's easier to find a traditional *forró* trio in Rio de Janeiro than it is here in Cariri," he lamented. Traditional *forró*, which is understood to have its roots in the area surrounding Cariri, is in many ways a radio-era creation of the Rio de Janeiro-based music industry.

9. Radio broadcasts, Iguatu

Recorded November 23, 2015



The word Iguatu is believed to mean “good water” in an extinct indigenous language. The city is the birthplace of *forró* lyricist Humberto Teixeira, who wrote the lyrics to “Asa Branca,” the genre’s greatest classic. A portrait of Teixeira is painted on a wall near the city’s main square. A local music school is named after him, as is a college inaugurated this past May. Speakers, hanging from utility poles in downtown, broadcast the radio into the soundscape. An optimistic reminder to buy tickets for the Mega-Sena lottery offered residents a chance at winning over 200 million reais, approximately US\$50 million.

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