

**REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSICAL SCRAPERS:  
THE DISJUNCTURE BETWEEN SIMPLE AND COMPLEX IN  
THE STUDY OF A PERCUSSION INSTRUMENT**

**by**

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*for*

**Li Sin**

*and*

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## Foreword

Some years ago, while walking through the main entrance of the Institute of Arts in São Paulo, I met Victor Gabriel, a friend who teaches at the same institution. We had the kind of short conversation that occurs between two persons hurrying in different directions. Since Victor knew about my work with musical scrapers I made a brief reference to it, saying:

“No princípio Deus Raspou.”  
“In the beginning, God Rasped.”

The biblical allusion was an attempt to establish a relationship between creation and the act of scraping. Victor’s response was a revelation to me:

“*É por isso que o mundo é quase perfeito.*”  
“That is why the world is almost perfect.”

His reply seemed to encapsulate the idea that a world created through the act of scraping is intrinsically imperfect. It is a fact that many words meaning to rasp or to scrape communicate this idea of incompleteness. For instance, in Brazil, the expression *passou raspando* is used when the ball just misses the goal in a game of soccer, or to describe the student who barely passes his or her academic year. Both phrases can be used in a similar way in English (e.g. to scrape through an examination).

I already knew that scrapers were generally seen in this way, but the idea of perceiving them as *naturally* imperfect intrigued me to such an extent that it became the primary focus of this work. My dissertation is an attempt to discuss the perception of the ‘almostness’ of musical scrapers, and by extension, the ways in which the diverse range of musical scrapers worldwide are uniformly represented as musically limited, defective and essentially the same.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Nature of the Work**

My research on musical scrapers, which began in 1982, has revealed a great diversity of instrument types and a complexity of performance techniques associated with them. Paradoxically, this contrasts with the general perception of the scraper as a simple instrument. In addition, I have been consistently surprised by, and interested in, people's reactions to my focus on these instruments. This dissertation sets out to examine the representation of percussion instruments in general and of musical scrapers in particular.

This disparity between the complexity and diversity of scrapers and people's perceptions of them gives rise to broader theoretical questions related to the construction of knowledge. Far from being inconsequential, such representations, I argue, are the main reason for the generally held perception of percussion instruments and musical practices related to them, as defective and excessively simple.

According to Rabinow, "problems of representation are central,... and are the loci of cultural imagination. Representations... serve as means for making sense of life worlds" (1986:257). I use the term 'representation' to mean resemblance, similarity, likeness, metaphor, image, and allegory<sup>1</sup> - representation constructed by several means resulting in specific meanings and concepts.

This dissertation is the result of my own experiences with music, percussion and, more specifically, musical scrapers or rasps, a specific family of percussion instruments. To my knowledge, there has been no substantial or specific research work in the field of musical scrapers. Over the past sixteen years, I have gathered archival material on scrapers as a global phenomenon. The work I have done is only an introduction to an area of research that percussionist and composer Dimas Sedécias once named 'Recology', alluding to the fact that I was compulsively dedicated to, and interested in, the particular study of the *reco-reco*. The name *reco-reco* (pronounced hecko-hecko) identifies specific musical scrapers in Brazil, and also serves as a generic term to identify the whole family of these instruments in that country, regardless of the existence of other terms used to describe them in distinct local contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed by Clifford "allegory emphasizes the fact that realistic portraits... are extended metaphors, patterns of associations that point to coherent... additional meanings." (1986:100)

This dissertation considers collective and individual representations of musical scrapers, observing how such representations are articulated in distinct cultural contexts. It argues that the several meanings, images and metaphors attached to them, condemn them to being regarded as not 'real' musical instruments. Since there has been a great deal of misinformation about musical scrapers and because this may be the first text of this kind, I will cover certain aspects of these instruments in detail.

### **Scrapers: Definition and Classification**

Scrapers are a specific family of percussion instruments, whose fundamental characteristic is a notched, corrugated, sometimes stippled surface, on which sticks or other objects are rubbed, producing a particular sonority. Although this appears to be a relatively comprehensive definition of such instruments, it has specific limitations because definition itself is a way of representing things. Although this work does not aim to discuss how we define and classify musical instruments, it must be said that such practices are culturally based. The problem of how different cultures classify their instruments and define how music reflects the musical thoughts of different societies, is extensively discussed by Margaret J. Kartomi in her book entitled *On Concepts and Classification of Musical Instruments* (1990).

“... the schemes that we habitually use affect the way we perceive the world and understand it. In the case of musical instruments this includes the way in which we create and respond to music itself. For example, a Western composer who adheres to the traditional European classification of instruments into strings, winds, and percussion writes and orchestrates in a very different style from, say, a contemporary composer who habitually thinks of instruments as comprising categories based on their timbres. Similarly a listener, performer, or analyst adhering to the former classification would perceive and appreciate certain musical works differently from a listener, performer, or analyst who had the latter classification in mind. Human beings obtain aesthetic satisfaction from the act of classifying...” (1990:3-4)

Kartomi discusses this problem in relation to ethnomusicology itself:

“Why do ethnomusicologists, who normally insist on using indigenous terms and concepts wherever possible, content themselves with the use of European schemes when they classify a non-European or nonmainstream European

group of instruments?” (1990:6-7)

The importance of such a discussion to this work is that by defining their instruments in distinct ways, people attach different meanings and significance to them. Thus, defining ‘scrapers’ only in Western terms can be, at least, mistaken. As Kartomi observes:

“Sometimes... an organology assumes a somewhat ahistorical, positivist character, especially when it has focused primarily on morphological and acoustic characters” (1990:xvii).

For instance, in an article on Brazilian scrapers entitled *Instrumentos de Raspar no Brazil - Documentação* (Di Stasi 1993), I was guilty of wrongly defining these instruments. Although it was my intention to refer to specific local names of a variety of instruments found throughout Brazil, my use of the term ‘raspadores’ (literally, scrapers in Portuguese) to define this ‘family’ of instruments was based on Western musicological classifications, which in this case, had no relation at all to the way Brazilians refer to this group of instruments. In this case, the term *reco-reco*, which is popularly used to identify these ‘distinct’ local instruments, should have been used.

Kartomi observes that:

“Clearly we need to become more conscious of the ways in which people think in different cultures as well as how they organize and explain ideas... Folk, or traditionally transmitted, taxonomies have more to recommend them than the average Western musician or musicologist might expect. Certainly they tend to be more in tune with the manner in which people think and behave than some of the classification systems promulgated by scientists and philosophers in societies characterized by literary transmission.” (1990:xvii)

In this sense, Kartomi also observes how, in different cultures, classification of instruments and ensembles is related to several factors that are not normally considered in Western schemes. For instance, among the Mandailing from North Sumatra,

“classification of ensembles is based on concepts that are related to cosmological thought, kinship groupings, components of the family, social organization, and even village or town planning. Instrumental groupings made within some... other societies... may be linked to a set of origin myths... The classifications singled out as key schemes in a society tend to be related to basic cultural concepts.” (1990:212)

“... West African peoples such as the Dan in the Ivory Coast and neighboring Liberia (where they are known as the Gio) and the Kpelle of Liberia adhere to a human-centered concept of instruments... The Dan’s concept of the unity of instruments and their owners, inventors, and makers, whether human or nonhuman, is intricately expressed in a series of myths about the origin of instruments... To the Dan or Gio, human beings are not the exclusive owners of the instruments that they play, nor consequently of music itself.” (1990:241-242)

In my view, although the ways in which various cultures define and categorise scrapers need to be studied further for a better understanding of representational practices related to them, the definition of scrapers established at the beginning of this section serves the purpose of this text, which must be seen as a preliminary study.

Thus, throughout this text, the term ‘scraper’ is used to refer to this particular ‘family’ of instruments, although I am cognisant of the fact that, eventually, they are not perceived as being a ‘family’ at all. In other words, most people from local traditions, for instance, in Brazil, are not aware of the parallels that exist between their instruments and other similar instruments that are used, even in surrounding areas that are close to their own localities. In this text, the use of the term ‘scraper’ mainly refers to the representation of these instruments worldwide, bearing in mind the definition established at the beginning of this section. At the same time, being aware of this conceptual problem, I use local names in every possible instance, not only out of respect for traditional definitions, but also in an attempt to construct my discussion by considering the various ways people conceive of their cultures, organise their ideas about musical instruments and music, and perceive, understand, create, and react to music differently.

## **Methods and Source Materials**

### **Literature**

Since there is no body of literature concerning musical scrapers, from the very beginning my work has been based on the collection of scattered references. In spite of the superficial character of most of these references, each one of them is essential to the construction of this text, as well as to a preliminary understanding of how these musical instruments are used, performed and perceived. Taken as a whole, they represent substantial data concerning the uses of these instruments worldwide.

Existing literature that contains specific references to scrapers includes: John Santos’

article entitled *The Making of a Guiro - The Unsung Thriller of Latin Rhythm* (1985), Norman Weinberg's article entitled *The Indigenous Use of Rasps and Ratchets and its Influence Upon Western Art Music* (1990), Samuel Marti's chapter on the Aztec *omichicahuaztli* in his book *Instrumentos Musicales Precortesianos* (1955), Frederick Starr's article *Notched Bones from Mexico* (1898), Hermann Beyer's article *Un Instrumento Musical de los Antiguos Mexicanos*; my own articles *Instrumentos de Raspar no Brazil - Documentação* (Di Stasi 1993) and *Brazilian People and Their Musical Scrapers* (Stasi 1996), and Guilherme Santos Neves' article entitled *Casaca - Instrumento Musical Indígena* (1954). Another very significant text is Fernando Ortiz' chapter entitled *Los Instrumentos Frotativos* in his book *Los Instrumentos de la Musica Afrocaribana* (1952). This is the only text I have found that deals with musical scrapers as a world phenomenon. Besides a series of descriptions of distinct musical scrapers worldwide, Ortiz is also concerned with their origins in magic.

Since musical scrapers are generally omitted from the indices of books, further alluding to their apparent insignificance, extensive work has been done to compile references found in general texts such as percussion manuals and handbooks, encyclopedias of musical instruments, musicological works, and magazines specialising in percussion. Similar work has been done with recordings, since the use of scrapers is seldom indicated on them.

Due to the absence of specific data concerning musical scrapers, alternative investigative strategies had to be implemented for the purposes of this study. In Brazil, there was only one solution to the problem. Since references to several of these instruments were gathered through passing conversations or found in short folk music texts, recordings, pictures and books, it was necessary, after finding out about a specific instrument used by a particular group, in a particular festival or region, to visit the place personally, in order to observe performance practices and the contexts in which these instruments were used. Personal communications were essential to the process of 'discovering' these instruments. Invariably, once in an area, many other groups and instruments would appear. This lack of information concerning folk traditions is illustrated by the following extract from a previous article of mine:

"Until 1993 I was certain that scrapers were not very common in the state of Minas Gerais... [a] state of the Southeast region. One day, accompanied by a colleague, ethnomusicologist Alberto Ikeda, I was visited by Matusalém

Silvério, a person from Minas interested in the traditional manifestations of his city, Perdões. I was extremely surprised when he showed me some photos of dozens of people playing long scrapers. He told me that the photographs were of a *catopé* group. It became clear that, if I wanted to see and know more about rasps in Brazil, I would have to go in person to many of those places, since there was not sufficient published information available.” (1996:29)

Since knowledge about these musical traditions is rare, it was always necessary to find someone belonging to those traditions in order to conduct the research.

### **The field - its creation and delimitation**

My discussion focuses mainly on specific instruments such as the Brazilian *reco-reco*, the Cuban *güiro*, and the Dominican *güira*. I also make passing reference to the Japanese instrument called *kokiriko*.

I do not refer to specific types of musical scrapers, such as those instruments generically denominated ‘ratchets’,<sup>2</sup> because they are not illustrative of the specific ways in which conventional scrapers are normally played, i.e. with a stick or object, held in the performer's hand that is rubbed against its surface. Also, I do not consider specific friction mouth bows such as the *chimizambi* (Zimbabwe) (Tracey, n.d.(b)), the *Chisambi* (Mozambique) (Tracey, n.d.), and the *chitende* (Zimbabwe) (Tracey, 1948), whose sounds are produced by scraping the serrations of the bow and using the mouth to resonate harmonics. In my opinion, the way in which the scraping is commonly presented in such contexts, makes it seem secondary to other musical elements such as harmonic and melodic structures.

The construction of the research ‘field’ was based on my own experiences with the instruments, through my work as a performer-composer, researcher and percussion lecturer. My interest in scrapers has naturally elicited reactions from people. In sixteen years, only one person has accepted my interest in these instruments in a natural way. This is an interesting fact in itself, showing how difficult it is for people to conceive of scrapers as deserving of serious consideration. Such reactions were invariably stronger when I showed the instrument and then went on to say that I was also writing a PhD

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<sup>2</sup> The *ratchet* is a kind of ‘mechanical’ scraper (Weinberg 1990) which consists of a series of wooden blades attached to a V-shaped frame. At the top of this structure there is a cogwheel with a handle which, when revolved by the performer's hand, produces sounds caused by the striking of the edges of the individual pieces of wood against the teeth of the cogwheel.

dissertation on it. An attitude of condescension for what I do has always prevailed in such situations.

My discussion focuses on the use of the scraper in both classical and popular music performance practices. As a classical musician, several activities and experiences have served to develop my discussion of musical representation in this specific context. Firstly, as a performer with the São Paulo State University Percussion Ensemble (Grupo PIAP) for eleven years, I was exposed to a very wide repertoire. This included some works making use of musical scrapers, which enabled me to observe the ways in which different composers wrote for these instruments, their solutions to notational problems (or the absence of such solutions), problems related to performing techniques, etc.

Concerning the performance of my piece *33 Samra Zabobra* by Grupo PIAP in New York in 1987, I have used two music reviews published in local newspapers in my discussion about authenticity, displacement, exoticism, and other issues related to musical practices of contemporary Western music.

My work with percussionist Edson Gianesi in *Duo Experimental*, between 1988 and 1992, dedicated mainly to *reco-recos*, was vital to this research, representing a laboratory where new ideas, techniques and performance practices were discussed and developed.

As a lecturer I have conducted numerous master-classes on scrapers for both lay people and music specialists in cultural associations and percussion and music departments in several universities and music schools in Brazil, the United States, Cuba, South Africa and the Dominican Republic. These conferences confirmed my view that generally, classical percussionists lack basic knowledge about these instruments, as well as confirming that they are represented in a number of different ways, as I had already established through my work. In addition, I also became aware of other distinct perceptions and representations of the instrument, through contact and discussion with the audience.

Workshops have posed challenges as far as verbalising the broad relevance of scrapers has been concerned. Where words have failed, I have had to rely on my performance abilities to express their musical richness. It is here that common representations, such as the supposed sound limitation and the non-musicality of scrapers, can be radically called into question and invariably, the response to the performances of my original works has



been extremely positive. Listening and seeing such performances has drastically influenced peoples' perceptions and understanding.

### **Field research**

In my research I have attempted to discuss scrapers 'globally'. Field research was first conducted in Brazil. Between December 1990 and August 1993 I visited the City of Serra in the State of Espírito Santo to see the *Bandas de Congo* and their scraper called *casaco* (see Figure 2), and the city of Conceição da Barra to see the *Jongo das Barreiras* and their instrument called *canzá*; the cities of Perdões and Oliveria in the State of Minas Gerais to see *catopé* groups and the instrument called *ganzá* or *ganzal* (see Figure 4); the city of Catalão in the State of Goiás, to see *reco-recos* used in groups such as *Moçambiques*, *Congadas* and *Marinheiros*; the city of Cuiabá, capital of the State of Mato Grosso, to see the instrument called *ganzá* used in *Cururu*, *Siriri*, and the *Dança de São Gonçalo*; the village of Mussuca in Laranjeiras, State of Sergipe, to see the *querequexé* used in the *Dança de São Gonçalo*; the village of Carapicuíba in the State of São Paulo, to see the instrument called *reque* in the *Dança de Santa Cruz* (see Figure 3); the village of Chã de Esconso and the city of Itaquitinga in the State of Pernambuco, to see the instrument called *baje* used in *Cavalo Marinho*; the city of Caruaru, to visit luthier Tavares da Gaita; the city of Rio de Janeiro in the State of Rio de Janeiro to visit several cultural institutions such as the Museu Villa-Lobos; the city of Mogi das Cruzes in the State of São Paulo, to see *reco-recos* used in groups of *Congadas*; the city of São Paulo in the State of São Paulo, to visit several music manufacturers companies, institutions and musicians related with the metal *reco-reco* with springs used in *samba* music (see Figure 24), as well as the luthier Nadir Rovari (see Figure 1).

The bulk of my work with Brazilian groups has been with the *Bandas de Congos* and the instrument called *casaco* (see Figure 2). Contrasting with the work in all the other regions and groups, which I was only able to visit once or twice, my work with the *Banda de Congo Konshaça* included six trips that also took place at times when festivals were not being celebrated. I have performed with this group, participating in several celebrations of the festival of *São Benedito*.

I also conducted two field research trips to Mexico (1994 and 1995), mainly working with the bone scrapers called *omichicahuaztli* used among Aztecs and a similar instrument from the Zapotec culture (see Figure 6). I visited cultural institutions in Guatemala in 1995, looking for more data concerning scrapers in that country. Research

work in Haiti was hampered by problems concerning time and language, but I was able to compensate for this to some extent when I met members of the Haitian group *Boukman Esperyans* in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in March 1998. This meeting enabled me to learn more about the Haitian instrument *grage* (see Figure 7).

Between September 1993 and December 1995 I visited several museums and institutions related to indigenous peoples' music in the United States, and observed the use of several musical scrapers in areas such as Arizona (e.g. Hopis) (see Figure 9) and California. I visited the Dominican Republic in 1995 and again in 1998, to study the instrument called *güira* (see Figures 16, 17, 18, 19, and 23). These trips included interviews with percussionists and lay people, the acquisition of specific literature concerning the *merengue* and other Dominican musical forms using such an instrument, commercial and original recordings, visits to instrument makers, lessons on the instrument, etc. I also travelled to Cuba in 1998, to meet and interview musicians about their gourd scraper called *güiro* (see Figure 12).

During my studies in South Africa I had the opportunity to visit Mozambique twice. There I observed the *reco-reco* used in styles of popular music such as the *marrabenta*, and also performed my original pieces for scrapers twice.

## **The History of my Involvement with Musical Scrapers**

### **Beginnings**

My interest in musical scrapers began in 1982 when I received a bamboo *reco-reco* from my uncle Nadir Rovari and composed a solo piece for the instrument. During that time I also had the chance to see a solo performance on the *reco-reco* by a member of the Angolan Dance Company in São Paulo. That inspiring and unique experience also stimulated my interest in the instrument.

My formal musical education was intrinsically related to the performance of a Western contemporary percussion repertoire, which tended not to consider differences generally established between conventional and unorthodox musical instruments. This reality informed the creation of my piece, composed in 1983, entitled *Estudos-Quatro Pequenas Peças para Reco-reco Solo* (Studies - Four Short Pieces for Solo Reco-reco), which featured elements which are conventionally found in a more classical and traditional repertoire. For instance, a fixed and regular form, repetition and development of themes,

use of melodies; use of staccato, legato and a series of other types of attacks and strokes; and also the general approach to the instrument and the performance itself, which was conventional. However, it is a fact that most people would not conceive a solo performance on this instrument as being something classical or traditional. Track 1 on the accompanying CD presents the fourth piece of *Estudos*, where melodic elements are used.

During the same period, composer-flutist Michael Colquhoun was creating *Das Guiro*, another solo piece for a scraper instrument. In this case, the instrument used was a *guiro*, a gourd scraper normally used in *salsa* and other Cuban derived musical styles. Generally, I consider *Estudos* to be the antithesis of *Das Guiro*, a work which is a harsh critique of Western music. In *Das Guiro*, Colquhoun extensively criticises the conventional approach towards the instrument used in *Estudos*. *Das Guiro* also anticipated the discussion of several important issues concerning scrapers and representation, as they are articulated in Western music tradition. These issues will be discussed in Chapter Six.

### **33 Samra Zabobra**

Two years after the creation of *Estudos*, I started to work on other pieces for *reco-reco*, but it was only in 1987 that another composition made me think about scrapers in a different way - the piece *33 Samra Zabobra*. My percussion teacher John Boudler, the director of Grupo PIAP, invited me to compose a piece to be included in a programme for the group's US tour in 1987.

This ensemble piece, besides using conventional ways of playing scrapers, i.e. rasping a given object onto the notched surface of another object, introduced others techniques such as the mixing of scraping and drumming, and a new technique used to play the *ratchet*. This consisted of using the fingers of the hand that holds the instrument to keep all the 'tongues' (blades), except one, away from the cogwheel's surface. This enabled the performer to play specific rhythmically controlled phrases on the instrument. Normally, this is not possible, since the natural characteristic of the instrument is the mixing of irregular strokes produced by the different uncontrolled 'tongues' resulting in a full roll sound.

In one section, *33 Samra Zabobra* requires the performers to leave the performance area to look for any kind of object that can be used as a scraper. This can be any object that,

based on its form, reminds the performers of the notched surface of the musical instrument, and can be used to produce a rasping sound, for instance, walls, curtains, air conditioners, chairs, floors, and so on. These different levels of analogy between a specific subject (scraper as a musical instrument) and other subjects that do not refer directly to it (e.g. chairs, human bodies, speed bumps, crickets, etc.), are based on each performer's notion of the instrument and scraping. This is one of the most fundamental processes through which we make sense of such instruments. It is this transposition, this transformation - the reflection of the musical scraper in the 'non-musical scraper', and vice-versa, that is, in my view, one of the central reasons for the establishment of concepts and images concerning these instruments. In this sense, visual aspects and form, as will be discussed in Chapter One, are essential to understanding both my personal notion and peoples' general perceptions of the instrument. In this sense, my own work and experimentation with scrapers served to create an insight into canons that might exist elsewhere regarding these instruments.

A direct consequence of *33 Samra Zabobra* was that it created the need for specific instruments to be produced in order to perform the piece. It seems a contradiction to say that in Brazil, a country where scrapers are widespread and abundant, it was hard to find the right instruments to perform the piece. The main reason for this was that the piece was conceived for performance using specific instruments produced by Rovari. These instruments were significantly different from most scrapers found in Brazil. They were made of bamboo and had a greater diameter than other conventional instruments (see Figure 1). This resulted in specific levels of sound quality and volume, which were necessary for the performance of the piece.

During our tour, some of the instruments were sold, and other musicians were able to appreciate his work. As a consequence, Rovari's production gradually increased. In 1988, for instance, he was exhibiting and selling his instruments at the First National Convention of Percussion in São Paulo.

### **Luthier Nadir Rovari**

Nadir Rovari was the most important influence on the development of my work with musical rasps. Over a period of seven years, from 1983 to 1990, we spurred each other on. His production increased as my interest in different aspects of these musical instruments from around the world grew.

When he gave me my first *reco-reco*, we had no idea that something serious would develop from that. During those seven years, it became evident that we could not make use of all the instruments produced by him. Some instruments did not have a good sound. In this way, it is interesting to note that a sense of the 'right' sound concerning these instruments was gradually developing. Daily contact with the material (bamboo), meant that nuances of sound became more acute. It was not just a question of which technique to use to cut the bamboo, or which model to create, but something that was intrinsically related to the characteristics of the bamboo itself. In the beginning Rovari believed that having a good quality of sound from a given piece of bamboo would enable him to create more instruments of similar quality from the same pole. However, this appeared not to be true, since different parts of the same piece of bamboo could emit completely distinct sounds. After years of experience, there was a specific sound that we came to look for, the so-called 'nasal' (or 'cracked') sound, which seemed to make the entire body of the instrument vibrate with full sound. Concerning this sense of sonority of scrapers, I wrote:

“During this period [1983 to 1990] he developed much of his technique of instrument building and sense of sonority for musical scrapers - a preference for a less-hard and 'nasal' sound that, may seem to be incompatible with scrapers. I later realized that several traditional groups have similar preferences. They achieve the sonority by making longitudinal splits in the body of a bamboo instrument. Nadir Rovari worked mainly with bamboo and was reluctant to use sophisticated machinery. He believed that sound quality and timbre would be changed by mechanical uniformity. His handcarving was based on the use of a small saw and knife.” (1996:27)

To this day I wonder if it was mere coincidence that, after several years of making and playing scrapers, my uncle and I developed a 'personal' sense of how a good bamboo scraper should sound, and that, unbeknown to us, this specific preference was shared by several Brazilian folk ensembles.

### **Notions of sound on scrapers**

The concept of good and bad sounds relates to the context in which such sounds are used. A good example of this is the way in which musicians from different musical traditions conceive and produce 'good' sounds on the timpani, the most well established percussion instrument in the tradition of Western art music. If we observe, for instance, French and American techniques, it becomes clear that they are, in fact, opposed to each other. They approach the instrument differently to obtain a good sound. For instance, which type of stick to use, specific ways of attacking the head of the instrument, which region to strike,

etc. If we consider that such a reality exists for the timpani, an instrument for which a technique has been developed by Western art musicians over hundreds of years, what could we say about scrapers, which have been generally misused by this same tradition? The answer is not to be found in the Western art tradition but within the different popular traditions that use these instruments. In other words, people from these popular traditions have developed a sense of sound and taste concerning scrapers, within specific cultural contexts.

At the same time, in my case, this notion of sound quality *was* related to conventional Western musical practices. Although it is true that this background did blur the distinctions between good and bad sounds, it is also true to say that this education gave preference to specific ways of producing sound in a given instrument, and this influenced the way I worked with scrapers initially. Salzman observes that:

“In spite of technological, social, and esthetic upheaval, contemporary musical ideals are still communicated in the context of a musical life whose structure, means, and institutions are largely derived from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries... This is true of our concert and operatic institutions, of our instruments..., and of instrumental technique... as well as most of our artistic and esthetic notions and assumptions about what music is and what it ought to do - all these things reached their full development between 1700 and 1900 and have been bequeathed to us surprisingly intact.” (1974:2)

In this sense, in conventional Western percussion music one is normally asked to look for the ‘fullest’ sound in the instrument played. The body, or specific parts of an instrument vibrates in different ways, for instance, the vibration of a timpani’s head, depending on where the head is attacked, results in different sound qualities. Based on this concept, one learns how to hold the instrument called *clave* (originally, two round pieces of wood which are struck together) in order to obtain a full sound from the instrument. This process applies to all instruments used in this tradition. In this way, I was always looking for a full, fundamental sound, accompanied by clearly articulated playing. This differed from several folk musical traditions I became aware of later. While there was a similar preference concerning timbric qualities, (the so-called ‘nasal’ sound), they did not share the same notion of technique and the ways in which sounds are technically produced and performed.

### **Edson Giansesi and the creation of Duo Experimental**

After returning from the US tour, the Grupo PIAP had several performances in the state of São Paulo. Also, in 1987, I started teaching at the Institute of the Arts of the São Paulo State University. In 1998 I offered a complementary percussion class for students of other specialisations (composers, other instrument players, etc.), and had the chance to meet Edson Giansesi, a composition student. During this programme Giansesi became more interested in percussion and was later admitted into the percussion programme.

Giansesi had several qualities I considered important for work with scrapers. In addition, he had an open mind regarding new works and experimentation. For this reason I invited him to work with me in the creation of a duo for scrapers and drums, in spite of the fact that he was a beginner among other mature percussionists with good technique. As I was already scheduled to perform a premiere of a piece, we started work on this project immediately.

The work of the *Duo Experimental* served to establish countless ideas, concepts and techniques concerning scrapers, that would gradually be developed and refined in the following years. Our activities mainly consisted of meetings and long rehearsals, where we would create and experiment with different musical ideas with scrapers.

Giansesi responded with creativity and sensitivity to the questions and problems posed by the original nature of the work we were involved in. Working specifically with scrapers was a new situation, even to myself, despite my previous experience. Giansesi, far from being a mere complement to my ideas, became the co-author of several pieces, and also created and developed his own scraping techniques.

*Baru* was the first piece to be composed by the Duo in 1988. In this piece we took an idea from the last part of *33 Samra Zabobra* - the section that called for scraping and drumming with congas, and applied it to bongos. This technique consists of holding the *reco-reco* in one hand and a plastic stick in the other. With the hand holding the stick the performer is able to scrape the *reco-reco* and strike the drum simultaneously. In this way it is also possible to hit the drum with the front part of the bamboo instrument the performer holds in the other hand. Even though we were using plastic sticks, the sound characteristics of both instruments matched quite naturally. An extremely wide range of

timbres and dynamics was offered, without any extreme or unnatural effort to produce them. Besides the technique already used in *33 Samra Zabobra*, we created another one that consisted of having the bamboo *reco-reco* perpendicularly in contact with the head of the bongo. By producing a continuous counted roll with the stick over the notched surface of the scraper, the percussionist is able to hit the head of the bongo each time he plays a down stroke.

*Haneman*, composed in 1989, mixed scrapers with several other timbres (e.g. slit drum, bamboo flute) in quite a delicate manner. *Uma Parte do Vento* (1990), a trio performed with wind instruments played by Wilson 'Foca' Neves, introduced another technique - the playing of a tambourine with scrapers. This technique was explored further in 1995, in a piece called *Eleven*. The piece *Retornar* (1991), based on the same trio, included breathing control techniques borrowed from Yoga, which were used in conjunction with the sounds of scrapers and other instruments.

Edson and I also attempted to establish a specific musical notation system for the *reco-reco*. Overall, at the end of this period, we realised that we were left with more questions than answers. We had laid the foundations for a notational system, but it had become necessary to limit ourselves to some specific basic points, regardless of other elements that had not yet been fully developed. We selected some basic elements such as strokes, ways of attacking the instrument and sound considerations and wrote the first *Method for Reco-Reco* in 1991.

The activities of *Duo Experimental* continued until 1992. We performed with the *Grupo PIAP* at festivals throughout the country. At a concert of *Grupo PIAP* in the *Radio e Televisão Cultura (RTC)*, *33 Samra Zabobra* was recorded for a television programme directed by conductor Jamil Maluf. He also included a short talk and a demonstration of some scraper techniques and ideas in the programme. In 1990 I organised a concert, called *Raspadores* (scrapers in Portuguese). It was the first concert to focus on scrapers and was recorded by RTC and presented twice on the radio that year. Unfortunately, that first scraper concert, entirely based on my uncle's creations, was destined to be his last. Up to then, he had constructed several hundred instruments and had produced every bamboo scraper we used. He passed away suddenly during a short tour of *Grupo PIAP*, and his loss resulted in new directions in my work.



## **After Rovari**

My experiences with Rovari have affected me in many remarkable ways. As I have written elsewhere:

“At an early age Rovari ran away from home to work with a circus that was performing in his village, becoming a clown. Just as he was drawn away from the life he once knew by the magical and ludicrous qualities of the circus, my own life has been radically changed by my interest in musical scrapers... Spending all those years together led me to a singular way of relating with scrapers, which has been extended to different areas of study and levels of involvement. After he left I continued what he had started, creating a center dedicated to the study of rasps, which is named RECO-Centro de Estudos de Raspadores... Naturally, it seems that I have inherited my uncle’s love for scrapers...” (1996:27, 34)

After Rovari’s death, I began to look for scrapers in Brazil, visiting festivals and traditional groups that made use of them throughout the country. I also wrote letters to cultural institutions in other countries, aiming to acquire more information about these instruments as they are used in other musical traditions worldwide. Generally, I failed in this enterprise because the letters were largely unanswered. In 1993 I wrote a short article (Di Stasi, 1993) describing these instruments, showing the material they were made from, and the places and musical manifestations in which they were found. I also developed a collection of recordings featuring these instruments. At the same time, I started to collect other related material, for instance, popular Brazilian expressions using the verbs to rasp and to scrape, and the context in which these words were used. I also collected material concerning the sound producing apparatus of insects, which resembled the ways in which musical scrapers are constructed and played.

Considering this historical background, and the ways in which my previous work has attempted to comprehend scrapers differently, this dissertation looks at how general perceptions and representations of these instruments, which are in opposition to my own experience of them, are constructed. In this way, my text refers to this disjuncture between the simple (the way scrapers are generally perceived) and the complex (the ‘reality’). The dissertation establishes a theoretical explanation regarding this disjuncture, observing how people normally perceive them as defective, and how such notions have been constantly recreated.

## **Organisation of the Dissertation**

In Chapter One I discuss theories of Representation and the ways in which music can also be seen as a representational art. This is followed by a description of the principal modes of representation as they apply to musical scrapers: simple form, sound limitation, resemblance with non-musical objects, noise, the erotic, etc.

Chapter Two focuses on how percussion is conceived as the original, the origin of music, and the world itself; and the ways in which percussion is 'Naturalized'. This results in a perception of percussion as primitive, connected with ritual contexts, related to basic physical activities and the production of Stone Age tools. I also look at how such notions of the primitive concerning percussion are articulated today.

Chapter Three deals with representations of scrapers as they are found in discourses on Latin Music and so-called World Percussion. I look at how percussion in general is exoticised, mystified, and commodified for global consumption.

Chapter Four considers two case studies where specific scrapers are used in 'local' realities, i.e. in the Dominican Republic and Cuba, focusing on the ambiguity of such representations.

Chapter Five considers how contemporary Western art music makes nonrepresentational understanding of musical scrapers possible, and how this understanding can be subject to change.

Chapter Six includes a discussion on representation based on the first two works written for scrapers, i.e. *Das Guiro* and *Estudos*, and considers the possibility of an individual aesthetic of musical scrapers.

## Chapter I

### ON REPRESENTATION

#### **Introduction**

In order to unpack the disparity between my perception of musical scrapers as complex and diverse, and general perceptions of them as simple and musically defective, it is necessary to briefly discuss relevant theories of representation as they have evolved over the last few decades.

Representation refers to the way in which we make sense of our world, the way we ‘see’ things, describe, attach value, associate images, and give meaning to them; the way they serve to symbolise other things. In the past few decades, studies of representation have been central to cultural studies. My own understanding of the term has been constructed from basic concepts presented by authors such as Stuart Hall (1997), Michel Foucault (1970), Edward Said (1979) and Richard Leppert (1993). To consider the way in which representation exists and is articulated, as well as the way in which it is used throughout this text, it is necessary to enter into a rudimentary discussion about some of the concepts established by constructionists, structuralists, and post-structuralists.

As Hall puts it:

“Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people.” (1997:15)

The constructionist approach explains how representation of meaning through language works. Here language must be understood as any system that makes use of signs that stand for, or symbolise, real or imaginary things. When a sound, an image, a word, etc., communicates ideas and symbolises concepts, constructionists say that it is functioning as a sign within language. This process of communicating and establishing meaning depends on how the sign serves to represent specific concepts within a system of codes, conventions and cultural agreements. This process is based on notions of difference. Hall observes that:

“The simplest way of marking difference is, of course, by means of a binary opposition... Similarly, the meaning of a concept or word is often defined in relation to its direct opposite.” (ibid.31)

Although such oppositions are significantly reductionist and over-simplified, they are essential to an understanding of how *primary* images concerning scrapers are established. Scrapers are generally defined in relation to elements that represent their opposite (e.g. simple/complex).

A fundamental aspect of representation as considered by Foucault, is the way in which it is intrinsically related to specific historical moments.

“Things meant something and were ‘true’, he argued, *only within a specific historical context.*” (Hall 1997:46)

Foucault’s concept extends beyond verbal representation to discourse. The concept of discourse includes anything that is said, written or communicated through different signs about a specific subject in a particular time/space.

“Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic or practice: a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic...” (ibid.6)

Foucault says “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse” (ibid.45).

“This idea that physical things and actions exist, but they only take on meaning and become objects of knowledge within discourse, is at the heart of the *constructionist* theory of meaning and representation. Foucault argues that since we can only have a knowledge of things if they have a meaning, it is discourse - not the things-in-themselves - which produces knowledge.” (Hall 1997:45)

For Foucault, discourse defines how we talk about things, our conduct in relation to the topic. At the same time, discourse “‘rules out’, limits and restricts other ways of talking, of conducting ourselves in relation to the topic or constructing knowledge about it” (ibid.44). As Storey defines it,

“Discourse is the means by which institutions wield their power through a process of definition and exclusion” (1993: 92).

Fundamentally, as Foucault puts it, discourses appear “across a range of texts” (Hall 1997:44) and do not simply refer to a specific author, statement, or text. Also,

“... whenever these discursive events ‘refer to the same object, share the same style and... support a strategy... a common... pattern’..., then they are said by Foucault to belong to the same discursive formation.” (ibid)

Foucault’s main concern was the relation between power and knowledge, “how discourses are always rooted in power” (Storey 1993:92), how ‘truth’ is established through discourse, and, moreover, how authority is intrinsic to the process of establishing what things ‘are’. In this sense, he observes how this knowledge serves to regulate conduct of others. As Hall observed:

“Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to *make itself true*” (1997:49).

Foucault’s concepts represented a further step in the study of representation, a significant shift of interest in meaning.

Other concepts, as established by authors such as Edward Said, are also relevant to this text, giving a political dimension to the discussion. As Storey puts it,

“Said demonstrates Foucault’s claim that the ‘truth’ of a discourse depends less on what is said and more on who is saying it and when and where it is said... Tarzan stories and other imperial myths... [tell] us nothing about the colonized, but a great deal about the colonizers.” (1993:93-94)

Said’s work shows how knowledge about the ‘Other’ is constructed and how scholarship and fiction are brought together in the process, how they interrelate.

Let me consider now, how these concepts apply to my own discussion of representation of percussion in general, and musical scrapers in particular. Firstly, it is fundamental to ask how these musical instruments are commonly represented. What do they refer to, what values are attached to them, what images are associated with them, what meanings are given to them, and what do they symbolise? In my work I have considered signs i.e. words, facial expressions, gestures, etc., that communicate ideas about these instruments in different cultural contexts. As I commented before, primary ideas and images about scrapers refer to notions of binary opposition. For instance, the term ‘noise’, that is often

applied to percussion and scrapers in particular, is normally defined in relation to its direct opposite, i.e. music. Thus, throughout my text, other binary oppositions that *underlie* discourses on the musical scraper are considered, for instance, simple and complex, harmonic/melodic and rhythmic, nature and culture, primitive and modern, etc. Although common notions about percussion and scrapers rely on these binary oppositions, in order to understand representation more fully it is necessary to consider how these images are clustered and how they are culturally determined in time and space. Binary oppositions, though essential, allow us only a preliminary understanding of representation.

I use Hall's concept of systems of representation to demonstrate how distinct meanings about scrapers are interrelated, clustered and arranged through principles of similarity and difference. These perceptions and associations depend on the different cultural contexts considered. Furthermore, individual members of a culture have the capacity to overcome such interpretations and may even create others.

Regarding the poetics and politics of representation, I consider Foucault's theory that discourses define how we talk about things, as well as our conduct in relation to a topic, and I observe how constructed knowledge about scrapers limits the ways in which these instruments are seen. I refer to a wide range of references about musical scrapers and draw from a series of texts, statements, authors, and different social and historical contexts, looking at a common pattern shared by these 'different' discourses. In this sense, as Foucault sees it, these texts belong to the same discursive formation. A set of general ideas and concepts about these instruments exists and provides specific ways in which to talk about them, to imagine them and to react to them.

Specific elements necessary for the construction of discourse underlie the text. For instance, I present a number of subjects that personify the attributes of scrapers in different social contexts, e.g. the primitive, the non-musician, the percussionist. Through a description of musical practices in the Western art music tradition and within institutions such as music schools, and percussion departments, I observe how these instruments are perceived and used. Finally, following my discussion on how my own work is based on referentiality and how other people's perceptions of these instruments have changed after my lectures on them, I consider how new discourses on scrapers appear and can change the 'truth', at least partially.

Said's discussion of how pure and political knowledge are normally conceived as oppositional can be extended to how music is commonly imagined as non-representational, having an autonomous existence, and thus lacking any relation to the political. Here, we must consider that one of the main problems in the study of music has been the assumption that it has an autonomous existence, separated from social matters. In their book *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (1987), Leppert and McClary observe that:

“historically, music has been viewed by Western culture by means of an unproblematized paradigm which assumes music's non-representational character as the *sine qua non* from which all further study proceeds... The essays in *Music and society* raise a series of complementary questions, foremost among which is that of autonomy itself: the notion that music shapes itself in accordance with self-contained, abstract principles that are unrelated to the outside social world.” (1987:xiii, xii)

Musicology has only recently started to change its methods through the influence of more politically and socially grounded analysis, as well as through methods and approaches borrowed from ethnomusicology. For instance, my discussion on Latin music in Chapter Three considers how stereotypes about Latin people applied to them mainly in the United States, connect to scholarly work, how politics is reflected in the way in which Latin music is perceived and how political domination relates to the cultural arena. For instance, specific texts discussed here say nothing about instruments and music in Brazil, but seem to say more about the ways in which those who write them imagine the 'Other'.

### **Leppert and Visuality**

So far I have discussed general aspects of representation. In this section I look more specifically at how representations of musical scrapers are constructed, what elements participate in this construction and how they are articulated in different cultural contexts. To this end, it is necessary to discuss other theoretical approaches specifically related to musical representation.

Several concepts, as presented by Richard Leppert in his book *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (1993), which focuses on musical

representation in visual art, have been fundamental to the construction of my text. What interests me in Leppert's work is his attention to the ways in which music connects to the body, how social meanings of music are shaped by *both* hearing and seeing, and the relation between sonorities and musical instruments (their construction and image) and social status. As will be demonstrated, motion and physicality underlie associations commonly made with scrapers.

“Whatever else music is ‘about,’ it is *inevitably* about the body; music’s aural and visual presence constitutes both a relation to and a representation of the body... My concern with vision focuses on the physicality of music making itself (the sight of the body’s labors to produce sound)...” (Leppert 1993:xx).

“Music... connects to the *visible* human body, not only as the receiver of sound but also as its agent or producer. The human embodiment of music is central to any understanding of music’s socio-cultural agency. The semantic content of music - its discursive ‘argument’ - is never solely about its sound and the act of hearing. It is instead about the complex relations between sound and hearing as these are registered and as they mediate the entire experience of being. That experience is physical; intellectual, in the broad meaning of the word; and spiritual, though hardly restricted to the religious or the mystical. But it is especially to be understood as the result of mediations between the ear and the eye.” (1993:18)

Such mediations are fundamental to Leppert’s study, and to my own. Representations are established through them, via, for instance, musical practices such as performance. Leppert considers the importance of visual experience in music based on the ironic fact that sounds produced in performance invariably disappear after being produced by the performer.

“Precisely because musical sound is abstract, intangible, and ethereal - lost as soon as it is gained - the visual experience of its production is crucial to both musicians and audience alike for locating and communicating the place of music and musical sound within society and culture.” (1993:xx-xxi)

He observes that visual aspects are as central to meaning in musical performance as they are in other performing arts such as dance and theater. This is obvious in musical theater, where the music is isolated from the audience’s view. When people hear a musical performance, they also witness



“how the performers look and gesture, how they are costumed, how they interact with their instruments and with one another.” (1993:xxii)

Thus, it is fundamental to consider how listeners experience music through both sight and sound and how instrument, body, and sound are simultaneously articulated to be perceived and conceived by the listener. As Leppert says:

“... the musical event is perceived as a socialized activity. Visual representation in effect encapsulates more or less all of the embodied activity, not as a ‘disinterested’ record of events, but as a coherent and discursive, commonly dialectical, vision of the varied relations within whose context sound occurs and hence, I shall argue, sound means.” (1993:xxii)

Leppert also refers to the ways in which musical instruments are perceived in relation to the material used in their making, the degree of work applied to their construction, and the relation between expensive instruments and power and status. For instance, in referring to musical instruments in Holland during the seventeenth century he says:

“Expensive musical instruments made with precious or rare materials (exotic woods, ivory, silver), were clear signs of excess wealth.” (1993:8)

Leppert also considers how musical perfection is embodied in the act of producing elaborate musical instruments. For instance, he observes that when the viewer of the elaborate *viola da gamba* manufactured by Joachim Tielke sees this instrument, *without hearing it played*, the natural response would be to assume that the actual sound of the instrument is equally excellent. In this way “*a musical sight occupies equal ground with musical sonority*” (1993:45) [italics are mine]. Prestige, intrinsically related to power, is achieved by using specific materials in the construction of an instrument, as well as by the degree of work applied to its construction. Instruments of lesser status lack this sophistication.

In analysing Western European music from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, Leppert observes how music has served as a means to maintain the power of hegemonic groups (i.e. the Roman Catholic church, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie). Moreover, music had the role of defining these groups and stabilising their position in society. Music preserved levels of prestige that were intrinsically related to sonority, which was also hierarchised. For instance, sonorities regarded as non-musical were labeled as noise. Leppert considers the moment when music was separated from ‘noise’, when art was

separated from life, as a turning point in the way in which music existed in society. Once this was established, categorising music

“into amateur and professional varieties,... by separating art from craft, and especially by self-consciously articulating and valorizing music along class lines” (1993:44)

became common practice. Leppert argues that

“people do not employ sounds arbitrarily, haphazardly, or unintentionally.” (ibid.15)

In this sense, musical instruments and the sonorities produced by them are intrinsically involved in a system of hierarchy, carrying “a semantic and discursive charge” (ibid.15). Let me consider now how Leppert’s concepts apply to my own discussion of the representation of musical scrapers.

### **Form, simplicity, and sound limitation**

My first consideration refers to the form of the musical scraper. My research has shown that general representations of the musical scraper are strongly related not only to its particular sound qualities, but also to its form. Here, auditory and visual experiences are also mediated. Generally, an impression of the sound of scrapers is brought about simply by the act of looking at it, or even imagining the act of rasping, without actually hearing any sound.

Form is an essential element which, when perceived by people, brings about a series of correlated images, meanings and concepts. It has a significant influence on people’s perceptions of musical scrapers as being excessively limited in terms of musical potential. This common understanding can be summarized by generic expressions such as “it looks simple”, “what can you possibly play with that?”<sup>3</sup> or the instrument “is just a piece of wood with grooves.”<sup>4</sup> In this way, representations of these musical instruments occur in the spheres of both non-auditory and auditory experience.

As Leppert observes, a musical performance is an “embodied activity”. In certain circumstances, when people hear the musical scraper, they see how the instrument is

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<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation, Durban, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Interview, Natalie Rungan, 19/09/1996.

played. In Leppert's words, they witness how the performers "look and gesture" and "how they interact with their instruments" (1993:xxii). In my experience, even when a performance is not witnessed, people are able to imagine the specific body movements used to produce sound on scrapers. These reactions, from which I developed my studies on representation, mainly concern the instrument's form. These common perceptions are based on specific assumptions, such as that the instrument's shape limits its sound potential, or that performance on these instruments is unsophisticated, given the limited number of movements typically associated with sound production (e.g. up and down strokes with the instrument held in a vertical position).

From this basic element, i.e. the form, a series of representations is established. What do they refer to? Firstly, and most importantly, they refer to the notion that if an instrument has such a form, i.e. a notched surface that is rasped to produce sound it will, almost invariably, produce a sound that is not necessarily musical, beautiful, or worthy of attention. As Leppert has observed, "a musical sight occupies equal ground with musical sonority" (1993:45). These common reactions to the musical scraper refer to the same principle discussed by Leppert when he refers to the relation between the image of perfection of the *viola da gamba* and its supposed perfection in terms of sound. But here, relations established between the musical scraper's image and its sound, instead of being that of perfection, are of imperfection, musical limitation and deficiency. People relate simple form to simple sound. Thus, it becomes almost impossible to imagine that such an instrument can be considered as musical on a level with other instruments.

Another important fact related to the general perception of musical scrapers is that people are not aware of the existence of a diversity of instrument types, and a complexity of musical sounds inherent in these instruments. It is commonly assumed that all musical scrapers sound similar, as if their main characteristic, i.e. a notched or stippled surface that is rasped with an object, has condemned them to be excessively limited in terms of sound qualities. Through my work I have shown that the perception of the sound qualities of the instrument have been obscured by the general understanding of musical scrapers as *a single notched object rasped in only one way*. This *generalised* perception of musical scrapers, regardless of differences in shape, technique, social context and time, is well exemplified by the way in which some authors use the term 'scraper', fluctuating from one example to another as if they all represented the same thing. In Chapter Two, I argue that this concept cannot be understood without considering notions of what is described as 'The Generalised Primitive'. In this context, so-called primitive peoples and scrapers

from distinct cultural contexts are generalised and inadequately related by authors such as Karl Geiringer and Curt Sachs.

It is fundamental to observe that attention is *predominantly* given to the elementary form of the scraper, i.e. its notched surface, *regardless* of significant differences in timbre qualities and other formal aspects (consistently neglected) and diverse playing techniques. In this sense, it is interesting to consider that although we do see violins and cellos, trombones and trumpets, and guitars and banjos as members of specific families of musical instruments, we are capable of distinguishing their sound differences. Even if we cannot accomplish such distinction satisfactorily, we do participate in an environment in which, one way or another, this understanding can be more easily achieved. I argue that the same is not true of percussion instruments and musical scrapers. Generally, perceptions of musical scrapers are a direct result of a lack of knowledge and this aural ignorance and inattentiveness are consistently supported and instigated by agents discussed in this text: scholarly authorities, percussion books and magazines, performers, composers, manufacturers, etc.

My concerts and lecture-demonstrations on musical scrapers have been a remarkable example of how attitudes and perceptions can change when people are invited to really listen and understand what is being played. After that, they generally make more musical sense of sounds played on scrapers and their notion of the instrument as limited in terms of sound potential is significantly affected. This is confirmed in the following comment in an interview with people who attended a demonstration: “if you hear with attention, with someone showing it, the idea of simplicity changes.”<sup>5</sup> This is further discussed in Chapter Five. At the same time, several other examples also serve to illustrate the diversity of sounds of musical scrapers. The most striking case concerns the *güira*, an instrument used in a number of musical styles in the Dominican Republic, which is extensively discussed in Chapter Four.

### **Visual associations with regard to functional objects**

The resemblance between scrapers and functional objects also affects the way in which people conceive them. In this section I refer to two specific instances concerning this perception and consider how these musical instruments resemble functional objects in modern times. In Chapter Two, I extend my discussion to the resemblance between

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<sup>5</sup> Brown Forbay and Natalie Rungan - 19/09/1996

scrapers as tools used in Stone Age times, and scrapers as musical instruments. I look at how these different realities interrelate, affecting notions about the musical scraper, as well as general percussion.

To start, let me consider further the idea of instrument construction. Musical scrapers are made using ordinary materials such as springs, oil cans, bamboo, pieces of wood and gourds. At the same time, their fundamental characteristic is a notched surface that appears not only unsophisticated and rudimentary in form, but is also commonly found in everyday objects. In this sense, notions of commonality are essential to understand how these instruments are imagined. In other words, besides featuring a relatively 'simple' form, it appears that not much work is required in their construction, and that anyone can make them. This opposes any idea of specialisation in construction or playing, thus leading to the idea that it is easy to play and is not really a musical instrument. What emphasises this relationship between the musical and the ordinary, is the fact that some functional objects have actually been transformed into musical instruments. Examples of this are the washboard, the 'fanta' bottle, and the saw used in specific musical traditions. The washboard, and its modern version, the rub-board, worn as a vest and scraped with metallic devices such as bottle openers (see Figure 8), have been respectively used in African-American musics such as blues in the 1930s and *zydeco* in the United States. The fanta bottle has been used in several localities such as Kenya and Mexico. Similarly, the saw has been used in musics in the Bahamas and Sierra Leone.

This raises some important issues concerning representation. For instance, in the case of the so-called washboard bands (small combos using washboards in the 1930s), we refer to a specific context in which the informal character of these groups, as well as the novelty instrumentation they normally featured, served to maintain specific stereotypes about blacks in the United States. Concerning this fact, David Evans, on the sleeve notes of the recording *Good Time Blues* (1991), writes:

“The humor, spontaneity, unorthodox instrumentation, and general upbeat flavor of this music probably helped to confirm the stereotypes that many whites held about the natural rhythm, cheerful outlook, and absurdity of black people.” (1991:8)

Evans observes that

“The special quality of these groups [washboard or jug bands]... comes from the unorthodox and improvised instruments that are heard alongside... more legitimate instruments” (ibid.5).

Also, Evans considers that the existence and diffusion of these small, improvised groups was probably related to the economic conditions of the Depression. In this sense, it is interesting to note how the use of scrapers such as the washboard, appears to be intrinsically related to specific socioeconomic conditions. For instance, activities of the group *Hoosier Hot Shots*, between 1934 and 1942, seem to corroborate Evans’ observation that specific styles of music, musical instruments, as well as performance practices, were related to the American Depression. However, this group was made up of whites only. As Douglas B. Green writes, they were the “Kings of jukeboxes in the 1930s and 1940s” (in *Hoosier Hot Shots*, 1992:3). The group’s instrumentation, besides other ‘legitimate’ instruments, included a “washboard and an array of bells, whistles, and horns” (ibid.6). Paul ‘Hezzie’ Trietsch, who played these instruments, also played the slide whistle, which was used as a solo instrument. Otto ‘Gabe’ Ward (clarinet, saxophone, fifes) says:

“What [producer] Art Satherley wanted on record was our visualness; he was trying to get that through. And he succeeded with us, because we were about the only people who could make people laugh after only four bars of music!” (ibid.3)

Doubtless, the use of the washboard makes direct reference to both the visual aspect of such novelty instrumentation and the potential that the group had to make people laugh in a particular historical context. Green says

“It *was* funny, and Depression-wracked America reached eagerly for laughs.” (ibid)

Although washboard bands and the *Hoosier Hot Shots* were active during the same historical period, the specific realities in which they existed were significantly different. Washboard or jug bands were basically pick-up groups formed by black musicians who were

“generally accustomed to performing solo... [and] worked circuits of cities and towns [of the South].” (*Good Time Blues* CD, 1991:5)

*Hoosier Hot Shots*, on the other hand, had a producer, were nationally recognised through specific numbers played on jukeboxes, and also appeared in films. However, regardless of these differences, it is interesting to consider how their use of the washboard *is* related to characteristics of humour, improvisation, informality and novelty. Overall, the overlapping images of a household item converted to a musical instrument are significantly retained in people's minds, constantly reminding us of the mediation between the musical and the non-musical, as well as the meanings they evoke.

Track 2 on the accompanying CD illustrates the use of the washboard in blues. Track 3 illustrates the use of the modern rub-board in *zydeco* tradition, track 4 illustrates the use of the fanta bottle by the group *Abana Ba Nasery* from Kenya, and track 6 illustrates the use of the saw in the music of the Bahamas.

In looking at the instrument called *güira*, which resembles a cheese-grater, I consider how these two images of a musical instrument and a kitchen device overlap. What is striking about the *güira* is that, regardless of *any* musical context, it actually *looks like* a cheese-grater. A person does not have to hear the instrument played to establish an analogy with the kitchen device. Form *alone* makes the analogy possible and performance, body movements, etc., as discussed by Leppert, are, at least, overshadowed by this. In fact, a person ignorant of the existence of the *güira* as a musical instrument would normally not establish any relation between it and any musical device. In another situation, a friend thought my *reco-reco* with springs was an electrical heater. Thus, sight occupies a higher position than sonority in the determination of representation.

Common notions concerning this relationship between the instrument and a kitchen device are generally pejorative. On the other hand, for those who are familiar with the musical instrument, i.e. Dominican people, such a relationship is established differently, due to the fact that this instrument is a symbol of Dominican national identity. This is further discussed in Chapter Four.

#### *From the kitchen to the living room: pianos as furniture*

The analogy between scrapers and functional objects is generally depreciative. Not counting specific instances to the contrary in the Dominican Republic, it is extremely rare that a relationship between scrapers and objects such as cheese-graters is established in a positive way. Because the instrument's form makes reference to a kitchen device, most people invalidate its musical character. In this section, I discuss this idea further. I have

deliberately established a contrasting analysis between the musical scraper and the piano, due to their obvious differences. The piano is the antithesis of the scraper. My intention, in exploring this theme, is to focus on how pianos have been used as status symbols, as well as furniture. My intention is to trace a parallel between pianos and musical scrapers, in spite of the fact that their qualities appear to be in opposition to each other.

Consider how musical instruments can be seen as furniture. It is difficult to imagine a scraper being used as a piece of furniture in one's living room. If it were, what meaning would be attached to it? It is unlikely to be one of elegance and status. Pianos, on the other hand, do represent such qualities, and this communicates to us much about what musical instruments really mean. Once again, Leppert's study of instrument construction and status explains this relation between scrapers and pianos. Representations of pianos strongly oppose representations of scrapers, referring, as they do, to a distinct reality concerning the uses of musical instruments in society. Musician and piano technician Alan Ader, highlights these contrasts further with his insightful description of the use of pianos as furniture, as well as symbols of bourgeois sophistication. (Personal interview, February 1997, California)

According to Ader, the *first* piece of furniture his parents acquired for their house was a piano (rather than a sofa, table or bed) and this piano was intended to signify something else:

“In their minds, I think, to have a home you have to have a piano in it. Not just to impress your friends... but because that was a sign of, you know, a fire place, a heart that gives you warmth, but that also stands for something.” (Interview, February 1997)

Ader identifies size as an important element of piano manufacturing and consumption:

“As a piano technician I often service grand pianos that are wider, their width is greater than their length... Why are these pianos made? I mean, even a medium size vertical piano has a larger soundboard area, longer strings... Because, people say, interior decorators would say: a piano, a grand piano would look great over in that corner...” (ibid)

He continues:

“There is a whole class of piano, what we call ‘PSOs - Piano Shaped Objects’. You look at it and you think it is a piano, but not really, it is almost



exclusively a piece of furniture. Not just a piece of furniture *and* an instrument, which all pianos are...” (ibid)

He also comments on how this reality is observed in advertising, and that it is a symbol of bourgeois sophistication:

“There is a great consciousness in my professional organization of the use of pianos in advertising in movies...you see the great big house and there is a grand piano prominently displayed. That is important as an expression of status, but also, not just ‘I have the money for this’, but it implies some kind of cultural sophistication... [In fact], bourgeois is exactly the word, because you don’t know if the sophistication is really there, all you know is the piano is there, or at least, the outside of the piano, you don’t even know if it is a playable instrument when you see it in that context. Those of us whose lives are really tied to the piano are happy to see the image of a piano almost anywhere, because it is an image that is fading. You talk about perceptions and the scraper! Even the piano was established as it is, for many years you wouldn’t see it anywhere, movies or advertising, and it wasn’t being reinforced as something desirable, as something that belongs somehow...” (ibid)

The issue of size also seems to be related to one’s capacity to perceive and consider certain objects as musical instruments. In this sense, the musical scraper might sometimes be perceived as defective due to its small size. However, this statement would not necessarily apply to other musical instruments having similar proportions; thus this perception is not dependent on size alone. Underestimation of an instrument’s capacity occurs when specific elements work *together* (e.g. size and form), to bring about the idea of something deficient and limited.

It would seem to be a futile exercise to establish an imaginary inversion of the sizes of both instruments. Probably, a tiny piano would be seen as a toy,<sup>6</sup> an object that already exists in the industrial market (e.g. miniature pianos, keyboards, etc.) However, a ‘big’ scraper would not, *in itself*, instil the idea of something more valuable or sophisticated than a normal sized one. After all, it would simply be a bigger producer of noise.

While miniature pianos symbolise aspirations of musicianship in the development of an interest in music in children, scrapers (and also miniatures, used in thousands of school music classes) are simply used to develop a sense of sonority and rhythm. This

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<sup>6</sup> John Cage has composed for such instruments.

development of a sense of rhythm involving percussion instruments is seen as an initial, primitive stage in the evolution towards more serious musical practices involving melodic instruments such as the piano, etc.

However, the supposed limitations of the scraper have, on occasion, been transcended. For instance, a recording made by Walter and Lisa Lekis in Curaçao (Caribbean Folk Music, n.d.), probably one of the few recordings of this type, features a piano and a *güiro* performing a waltz. This interesting meeting is presented on track 7 of the accompanying CD.

### **Noise and the non-musical**

Concepts of what is musical vary between societies, the non-musical being the fundamental principle used to define what is musical. Leppert's notion that noise has nothing to do with the musical serves as the basis for my discussion of the non-musical aspect of the musical scraper. Music is seen as something separate "from 'noise' (or sound in general)" (1993:44). We set up an opposition between music and noise and the latter has consistently been associated with the musical scraper by authors of historical texts described below, as well as by lay people. A brief search through common music dictionaries yielded the surprising fact that, in the ten dictionaries consulted, only two included the term 'noise'. This is symptomatic of the general perception, in both popular and scholarly discourses, that 'noise' is the opposite of music. "This is not music, it is noise!" is a common comment with reference to percussion. The material collected for this work effectively demonstrates that musical scrapers are commonly seen as noise-makers, resulting in the notion that they are not 'real' musical instruments. At the same time, sounds produced on scrapers are sometimes perceived, for instance, as being similar to sounds produced by frogs. In my work several situations have arisen when I have produced *specific* strokes on musical scrapers and people have associated the sound with that of frogs. Theories of resemblance in music, such as those proposed by Robinson (*Music as a Representational Art*, 1994), refer to representation mainly in terms of sound. Robinson focuses her discussion on specific musical pieces by Western composers who attempt to depict sounds of, for instance, birds, in their musical works. Robinson recognises that:

"we cannot explain musical representation in terms of simple resemblance between sounds." (1994:175)

and says that:

“a resemblance theory of representation in music would require that if a piece of music represents some object, person or event, then it must resemble or ‘sound like’ that object, person or event.” (1994:178)

However, this theory seems inadequate for, as Robinson herself observes, one of the few examples that effectively supports this theory is the musical cuckoo call, usually represented by a descending minor third in the musical pieces analysed by her. Despite the fact that I focus my discussion on visual associations in musical meaning, some important representations of scrapers are not based on form. Robinson’s example illustrates this. Also, scrapers as used among the Hopi people do function as producers of ‘frog’ sounds. In this context, this animal is associated with water and serves as a means to summon rain in an arid region. This concept is underscored in the images depicted on the instruments in Figure 9, i.e. clouds, lightning and the frog.

A historical source referring to the perception of scrapers as noisy and non-musical, is found in John G. Bourke’s book *Snake-dance of the Moquis* (1984). Bourke, a military officer who participated in campaigns against Native Americans in the late 1800’s, describes the Hopi Snake Dance, where musical scrapers are used. Emory Sekaquaptewa, in the forward of Bourke’s book, describes how Americans saw this dance as a vestige of “satanical worship”, a “revolting religious rite” and how:

“perhaps with equal impact, the snake dance of these far-off Indians in remote Arizona struck a note of fascination and promised an exciting pioneer adventure on the last frontier in America, the West.” (1984:xiii-xiv)

Bourke’s text, referring to the musical scraper, says:

“A squaw showed us a musical instrument made of a pumpkin hollowed out. Across an opening in the rind had been fixed a stick with serrated edges, and the symphony with which our hostess regaled us was played by running a second stick along these indentations; a sheep’s shoulder-blade was used in the more pathetic passages. In general arrangement it was not unlike the horse-fiddle of the American schoolboy, which, in the hands of an energetic and conscientious performer, can destroy the peace of a whole neighborhood.” (1984:324)

Here, it is interesting to consider Bourke's perception of the sound quality produced by these 'instruments' he describes: they can *destroy peace*. Such a 'destructive' characteristic has been consistently noted in discourses about these instruments, which produce a type of sound that is often perceived as unpleasant and distasteful. Sachs, the eminent musicologist, has described its sound as "disagreeable and not musical" (1940:43), an instrument made for non-musical purposes. Further, by presenting scrapers as one of the oldest instruments on earth (as well as 'bull-roarers', clay drums, and bone flutes), often connected with 'non-musical' and ritual practices with supernatural implications, the image of these instruments as non-musical is perpetuated.

"Their sound was not intended to give pleasure; on the contrary, its object was to induce fear and terror." (Geiringer 1945:54)

It is interesting to note that authors such as Geiringer have no real evidences to support such affirmations. He also describes how:

"early Stone Age man learned how to cut teeth in a bone and produce a rasping noise by rubbing it against a rough surface." (ibid)

In another text, he repeats himself, giving special attention to the uncertain use of the word 'scraper':

"During the early Stone Age (Palaeolithic era) man learned how to cut notches in a bone and to produce rasping noises by rubbing such a 'scraper' with a stick." (1978:29)

In addition, Paetkau, in the book *The Growth of Instruments and Instrumental Music* (1962) says:

"the quality of sound emitted hardly qualifies them [scrapers] as musical instruments; rather, they serve to underscore rhythmic patterns, often in a ritual context." (1962:92)

We see that both Geiringer and Paetkau (and others) establish an opposition between sounds that are musical - those used for purely aesthetic purposes, and sounds that are not musical - those that refer to ritual practices and are used in functional ways. Bourdieu's concept of the category of taste also refers to this opposition. As Storey describes it:

“... for Bourdieu the category of ‘taste’ functions as a marker of ‘class’ (using the word in a double sense to mean both a socio-economic category and a particular level of quality). At the pinnacle of the hierarchy of taste is the ‘pure’ aesthetic gaze - an historical invention - with its emphasis on form over function. The ‘popular aesthetic’ reverses this emphasis, subordinating form to function.” (1993:188)

This opposition is intrinsically related to conventional ways of conceiving percussion in general and musical scrapers. This is further discussed in Chapter Two, where notions of primitiveness, physicality, and ritual music, serve to establish percussion as non-musical.

### **The erotic**

Musical scrapers, due to particular characteristics embodied in their performance and physical qualities, are often linked with ideas of the phallic and sexuality. These ideas serve to illustrate how individual concepts concerning representation interrelate and overlap in various ways. These associations depend on the cultural context, referring, for instance, to the type of material they are made from (e.g. bone in Aztec and Cheyenne cultures), the straightness and form of the material (e.g. bamboo), and the movement used in performance as well as in sexual acts (i.e. friction backwards and forwards). At the same time, the notion of these instruments as devices used in funeral rituals is also connected with the notion of the erotic. For instance, Fernando Ortiz described how, by rasping the notched bone or the vertebra of a zoomorphic instrument such as the Chinese *yu*, the musician could revive the spirit of a dead animal or person.

Phallic notions of musical scrapers in popular discourses are never explicit. In my research I found formal interviews were quite ineffective in unpacking these notions and for this reason I avoided this approach. Instead I tried to observe people’s responses in non-formal social situations where inhibitions tended to be transcended. Where explanations are not explicit, jokes are an important way of grasping obscure ‘messages’ about the relationship between scrapers and phallic forms. These ‘messages’ appear spontaneously, embedded in physical movements and gestures that ‘transform’ the musical instrument into a phallus. I have seen people in Brazil using instruments such as the *reco-reco* and *casaco* in Brazil to effect this transfiguration. Such acts are normally performed by musicians using scrapers to simulate male genitalia. What makes the *casaco* a perfect object for this ‘metamorphosis’ is its anthropomorphic form - a ‘body’ (with no arms or legs) and a ‘head’ - which bears a remarkable resemblance to the sexual organ.

I am aware that any stick, pole, club or bar can be used effectively to construct the analogy described. However, scrapers seem to be ideal objects to represent sexual practices because of the type of movement and the act of friction involved in their performance.

Leppert (1993) observes how the depiction of body movements in specific paintings relates to power, knowledge, identity, *and* sexuality (its confinement or 'disclosure'). Analysing such representations, he says:

“The semiotics of musical imagery develop not only from instruments employed as props but also from the representation of gestures and other expressive qualities of the human body as these relate to musical activity.”  
(1993:155)

The type of performance movements discussed here (the friction movement in the musical scraper) and its correlated meanings (sexual practices) is a perfect example, as presented by Leppert, of how social meanings are not shaped by hearing alone, but also by visual aspects of musical performance. Among all other percussion instruments, scrapers are unique for the movements (forward and backward, if the instrument is held in a horizontal position) involved in their performance.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the rubbing, rasping movement of the stick on the ridged or stippled surface of the instrument further equates the musical scraper with the phallus.

It is difficult to observe how these resemblances affect musical performance itself, and what the limits of such representations would be; but it is easy to observe that such correlations are established. Otherwise, descriptions of phallic simulations performed by people and their satiric statements about how scraping the musical instrument is the same as rubbing a phallus, would not make sense. Let me consider now, some texts that make reference to the erotic aspect of musical scrapers.

Gordon Peters, in his book entitled *The Drummer: Man - A Treatise of Percussion* (1975), refers to the notion of the erotic and funeral rituals presented by Fernando Ortiz. Peters makes use of a description by Curt Sachs of how musical scrapers are used in these rituals:

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<sup>7</sup> An exception to this generalisation is friction drums such as the Brazilian *cuica*.

“Since bone had a phallic significance in many early cultures, bone scrapers were associated both with erotic rituals and funeral ceremonies, for the latter were not an expression of mourning but a magic rite insuring life and rebirth. In ancient Mexico and Michoacan, for example, slaves scraped the bones of men and deer at the funeral of the king before they themselves were put to death. These lugubrious bone scrapers also arouse love. This is the case with the Cheyenne Indians.” (1975:98)

James Blades, an eminent English percussionist whose book *Percussion Instruments and their History* is used as a classic percussion text, also points out that the bone scraper has been closely associated with erotic rituals in which these instruments “possessed the power to arouse love.” He also quotes Sachs’ narration of a Cheyenne story:

“Once there was a very beautiful girl in the camp, and all the young men wanted to marry her, but she would have none of them. The Dog Soldiers and the Kit Fox Soldiers had a dance, and each young man tried to do his best, but the girl would look at none of them. Then it came the turn of the Himoweyuhkis, and they felt discouraged, because they thought they could do no better than the other societies had done. But a man who possessed spiritual power spoke to them, saying, ‘That girl will be here to see you dance, and she will fall in love with one of you, and he will get her. Now go and bring me the horn of an elk - a yearling - one that has no prongs on it, and the shank-bone of an antelope.’ The young men brought him what he asked for. He carved the elk-horn in the shape of a snake, and on it cut forty-five notches. Then he made from the shank-bone of the antelope an implement to rub over the horns; and this device was used in the dance. The girl was there to see the dance, and fell in love with and married one of the young men.” (1970:41)

And Karl Geiringer, in his book *Musical Instruments: Their History in Western Culture from the Stone Age to the Present Day*, says that:

“The toothed bone became the instrument of the love-spell, as it still is found to-day among countless primitive peoples” (1945:55).

Probably, one of the most remarkable accounts of the erotic and the magic involving scrapers, is Artaud’s description of the use of rasp sticks among the Tarahumara Indians, in his book titled *The Peyote Dance* (1976). I have selected some excerpts from the sections entitled ‘A Primeval Race’, ‘The Race of Lost Men’ and ‘The Peyote Dance’ respectively. The description follows:

“The Tarahumara... worship a transcendent principle of Nature which is Male and Female... The whole life of the Tarahumara revolves around the erotic Peyote rite. The root of the Peyote plant is hermaphroditic. It has, as we know, the shape of the male and female sexual organs combined. It is in this rite that the whole secret of these savage Indians resides. To me, its force seemed to be symbolized by the rasping stick, a piece of curved wood covered with notches which, for whole nights, the Peyote sorcerers rhythmically scrape with little sticks. But the strangest part is the way in which these sorcerers are recruited. One day, an Indian will feel *called* to handle the rasp. He goes to a sacred hiding place in the mountains, where for thousands of years there has lain an incredible collection of rasps which other sorcerers have buried. They are made of wood, the wood of warm soil, it is said. The Tarahumara will spend three years living on this plantation of rasps and, at the end of the third year, he returns - the possessor of the essential rite... It is there, they say, that the Invisible Master of Peyote speaks to him with his nine advisers, and that he passes the secret on to him. And he emerges with the rasping stick properly macerated... Carved out of the wood of a tree that grew in warm soil, gray as iron ore, it carries notches on its length and signs at its two extremities, four triangles with one point for the Male Principle and two points for the Female of Nature, made divine. One notch for every year the sorcerer was alive after he had acquired the right to handle the rasp and had become a master capable of performing those acts of exorcism which pull Elements apart... [T]he Peyote sorcerers seem truly to have gained something at the end of their three years of retreats in the forest...” (1976:5,6,7,55,56)

As discussed previously, connection between the erotic and scrapers is to be found in both scholarly work and the popular domain. Let me consider now, how these notions can be located in a context that is considerably different from the examples already cited. I refer to the work of Brazilian instrument maker Tavares da Gaita, a former cobbler, musician and composer who has lived in Caruaru, Pernambuco since 1944. I visited him in January 1993 after hearing about him through musician Sergio Veloso, during a visit to the region. Tavares’ nickname denotes the instrument that has made him famous in the region where he lives - the *gaita* (harmonica).

He told me that many of the forms of the instruments made by him are inspired by dreams and everyday life. In this sense, many of the forms presented in these instruments refer to male and female bodies, the erotic, and the genitalia. These instruments are generally made from several types of wood. Although he produces different types of instruments, and his musical life is particularly related with the harmonica, it was surprising to note that most of the instruments made by him were scrapers. Although it



was not possible to study Tavares' work further, this story serves to demonstrate how images of the body and genitalia overlap and are frequently called to mind.

### *Language*

So far, my discussion has focused on the visual aspect of scrapers. However, there are other modes of perception of musical scrapers that do not relate to Leppert's analysis of the visual. They refer, for instance, to the associations established with specific actions as embodied and expressed in nouns and verbs in different languages, for instance, to scrape, to rasp, to grind, and to grate. At a certain level, since language is also related to mental images of things, this relates to some of the modes of perception previously described. On the other hand, the use of specific words enables the establishment of a series of other relationships that are not quite as evident. In this sense, etymology also unveils a series of correlations between the act of scraping and sexual practice. It is my view that the meanings of words and expressions used in everyday discourses can also inform us about common perceptions and understanding of musical scrapers. Thus, since the theme of sexuality reappears throughout the research undertaken, information referring to the use of certain nouns and verbs that are somehow related to the musical scraper has been gathered.

Stycer (1993) has discussed what is called *frotteurismo* in Brazil, observing women's reactions to the compulsive behaviour of disturbed men who spend several hours a day rubbing their bodies in public places for sexual excitement. To rub (*esfregar* in Portuguese, *frotter* in French) is defined in the following way by The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary:

“To subject (a surface or substance) to the action of something (as the hand, a cloth, etc.) moving over it, or backwards and forwards upon it, with a certain amount of pressure and friction.” (1936:1762)

Doubtless, this definition could be applied without much reserve, to both subjects analysed and compared here, i.e. the playing of the musical scraper and sexual practices, in spite of the different functions and purposes involved in each case. Similar notions and perceptions of friction, rubbing, and scraping acts in everyday life are evident in popular discourses. In 1993 I submitted a simple questionnaire to a group of students who had participated in one of my seminars about musical scrapers. Three questions were asked: (1) what does the word rasp/scrape remind you of? (2) mark words from a given list

(friction, affection, lightness, roughness, comfort, discomfort) that refer to the verb 'to rasp', and (3) mark types of acts which remind you of the act of rasping: walking, thinking, talking, eating, ploughing, grating, having sex, washing clothes, stealing, and cutting. More than two thirds of people interrogated correlated the act of rasping with having sex.

I would like to discuss the aspect of language by looking at the way people from the Dominican Republic use the verb *raspar* (to rasp). Although *raspar* in current Spanish usage carries various meanings, Dominicans use this term to refer to the act of having sex. *Raspar* can be defined as "the most vulgar way of talking about sexual intercourse."<sup>8</sup> While such connotations can be found in Brazil at the hidden level already discussed, I was surprised by the way Dominicans reacted to my use of the words *raspar* and *raspador* (scraper). My statements occasioned much laughter among friends and interlocutors alike. Clearly, although I was there to study *raspadores*, my use of the term was not considered appropriate in that specific context because of the way the Dominicans use it.

For instance, my interview on *Radio Viva* in Santo Domingo (1995) had to be carefully engineered by producer and presenter Jose Guerrero. The little time I spent becoming acquainted with the radio personnel before the live interview was sufficient for me to realise that my use of the terms *raspar* and *raspador* was completely inappropriate and embarrassing. I was asked not to use those words, since they referred specifically to sexual practices. Guerrero would prepare the audience and make them understand that this was a serious work and that I was there to study the *güira*, one of the most important instruments in the country, before he finally mentioned the word *raspador* on the 'air'. Otherwise, everyone would be embarrassed. In the Dominican Republic, *guayar* or *rayar* are appropriate terms used in expressions such as *guayar el coco* (to grate the coconut) or *rayar la yuca* (to grate manioc). At the same time, *tocar* is a more appropriate term to refer to the performance of the *güira*, i.e. *tocar la güira* (to play the *güira*), and *tocando la güira* (playing the *güira*).

In conclusion, the binary oppositions discussed in this text, i.e. music/non-music (noise), modern/primitive, etc., that have been used to define what the musical scraper 'is', illustrate the way in which the West has established itself as superior, central, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Xochitl Ricart, Durban, 25/4/97.

'rest' as marginal. As authors such as Said and Foucault have pointed out, 'truth' must be understood in relation to *who* claims it. Said has demonstrated how knowledge about the 'Other' is constructed, how representation participates in this construction, and how it relies on institutions and traditions. Representation is "intertwined... with a great many other things besides the 'truth,' which is itself a representation" (1978:272). Similarly, general discourses on scrapers are rooted in culture, present in language, and related to the political. These discourses define the West, its contrasting features (modernity, autonomous music, pure sounds, aesthetic gaze, etc.), and its relationship to the 'Other'. In Chapter Two I look at how notions of primitiveness are assigned to percussion in general, showing how the representation of the primitive, as well as other elements, tells us more about the supposed superiority of the West, than about scrapers and the people who make use of them.

## Chapter II

### FROM THE BEAT OF THE WORLD TO WORLD BEAT (I): DISCOURSES ON THE ORIGIN AND PRIMITIVENESS OF PERCUSSION AND THE MUSICAL SCRAPER

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on discourses on the origins of music and the nature of percussion in general. I look at how notions of the primordial concerning percussion have enhanced the perception of percussion as a primitive music form. This discussion also forms the basis for an examination of other aspects of representation considered in chapters three and four.

Following the argument that knowledge is historically and culturally constructed, and rooted in particular cultural contexts, it must be observed that most of the texts and discourses presented concerning the origins of music and percussion are ethnocentric. In other words, they are essentially an evaluation of the music of the 'Other' (i.e. Stone Age people, primitives, percussion) based on Western musical values. Central to this discussion is the premise that rhythm is not considered 'musical' in the way that melody and harmony are.

Another important concept to be used here is that of 'naturalisation'. Generally speaking, in most texts analysed here, percussion and rhythm are represented on one of three distinct levels. Firstly, they are seen as analogous to natural forces such as volcanoes, thunderstorms, and other natural elements (they already exist in the big-bang, heart beat, breathing, etc.). Secondly, they are seen as a development of motor impulses related to animal behavior, and thirdly, as a by-product of the actions of the first hominids (e.g. the repetitive rhythm performed in the making of tools) and primitive societies.

Hall describes 'naturalisation' as:

“a representational strategy designed to *fix* 'difference', and thus *secure it forever*.” (1997:245)

I use his definition and insight in the construction of my discussion of how notions of percussion and musical scrapers as noise-makers and non-musical devices persist today.

Most of these concepts are associated with musical practices among so-called primitive people. Thus, I discuss several of these texts looking at specific definitions and ways in which percussion and scrapers are depicted.

For the purposes of this work, I found Torgovnick's book *Gone Primitive* (1990) useful, firstly for her descriptions and definitions of the primitive, and secondly, for the way in which she makes reference to notions of primitivism today. This is central to my discussion of how percussion has been commonly perceived i.e. that primitives and percussion are Others of the same kind.

Ideas of primitiveness in relation to percussion are presented by different authors, as well as in popular culture. For instance, the movie 'George of the Jungle' features apes playing drums in the jungle, a common correlation in popular imagination. The primitive lives in a kind of natural state; by extension, percussion is also perceived as natural. They are both simple and, invariably, refer to notions of physicality. The concept of percussion as primitive, simple and limited, refers to classical Evolutionist notions of progress established in the mid-nineteenth century, i.e. things inevitably develop from the simple to the complex. In this sense, the so-called primitive world, where percussion first appeared, represents the bottom of a linear scheme of progress that ultimately culminates in our civilized world. Regardless of the fact that percussion has been highly 'domesticated' throughout this century, widespread notions of its innate primitiveness are constantly recreated.

### **The First Beat - Origins and the Naturalisation of Percussion**

"Planet Drum...

In the beginning was the noise... Mysterious forces came together and space, matter, and time began. The Big Bang, a birth in chaos and din, was beat one."

(Hart and Lieberman, 1991:10-11)

Our concepts of origins have a profound effect on the ways we perceive music and its history. Since it is impossible to know how things started, we inevitably have to speculate about how things really were in the remote past. Curt Sachs pointed out how "the origin of music has... been a favorite object of guess and conjecture", observing that:

"Questions of origin fascinate the laymen no less than historians. To see the Mississippi, the Nile, the Danube in all their quiet majesty is an unforgettable

experience; but it is still more exciting to find their sources and watch the new-born streamlets trickle from under the rocks.” (1962:33)

However, theories about the past are so vague, and this past is so remote and inaccessible, that it allows us to use our imagination freely in order to determine the sources of music. This is made evident by the fact that, despite lack of evidence, writers on percussion consistently make a correlation between percussion and other elements of the natural order. This ambiguous tension between facts and imagination affects the ways in which percussion is seen as primal and intrinsically related to the first acts of humankind. I do not intend to deny the possibility of such a relationship. What concerns me though, is how such relations affect contemporary notions of percussion instruments as exotic, primitive, and musically defective.

This idea of percussion as primal is emphasised by the fact that, for its specific qualities (e.g. timbre and performance practices), percussion resembles natural sounds, as well as sounds and movements produced in everyday actions such as scraping and striking. An example of such a relationship would be scrapers used as tools in the Stone Age. They refer to specific movements, and forms of objects that are a by-product of the actions of the first hominid. In this way, scrapers are associated with the more ‘primitive’ stages in the development of humankind.

The term rhythm is itself correlated with a vast range of other concepts that are not exclusively musical. Williams, for instance, says:

“An instinctive rhythm is rooted in the heart of nature: breathing, walking, the act of procreation and the heart beat.” (1967:33)

In addition, Andrade establishes that rhythm is something natural, something that already belongs to mankind, regardless of history and culture:

“... os elementos formais da música, o Som e o Ritmo, são tão velhos como o homem. Este os possui em si mesmo, porque os movimentos do coração, o ato de respirar já são elementos rítmicos, o passo já organiza um ritmo, as mãos percutindo já podem determinar todos os elementos do ritmo.” (1976:13)

“The formal elements of music, i.e. sound and rhythm, are as old as man. Man has rhythm in himself, because the heart’s movements and the act of

breathing are themselves rhythmic elements. His footsteps have a natural rhythm, and rhythm can be determined by striking the hands.”

Since its sounds and practices have an analogous existence in nature, as well as in daily actions, the result is that percussion, which is intrinsically related to rhythm, is, at a certain level, seen as beyond human interference, beyond culture. Although there is nothing wrong with these analogies in themselves, the result is that, in many ways, percussion assumes a non-musical character. Comparisons could be drawn with Stuart Hall's discussion of naturalisation in terms of racial difference. He gives us a very clear definition of the term, as well as its implications:

“The logic behind naturalization is simple. If the differences between blacks and whites are ‘cultural’, then they are open to modification and change. But if they are ‘natural’ - as the slave-holders believed - then they are beyond history, permanent and fixed. ‘Naturalization’ is therefore a representational strategy designed to *fix* ‘difference’, and thus *secure it forever*.” (1997:245)

The similarity between the sounds of percussion, its physical qualities, and volcanoes, lightning, animals, etc., positions percussion as something inevitably natural, beyond history. In investigating the literature dealing specifically with percussion, no other book seems to represent the process of naturalisation better than Mickey Hart and Fredric Lieberman's *Planet Drum* (1991). It must be said that Hart is not an academic, having no reason to use a substantive method of writing. The book is speculative and written for popular consumption. However, Lieberman, who is co-author of *Planet Drum*, is an ethnomusicologist and scholar. The title of the book itself is significant, for the text is not just a collection of images and ideas involving different drums from various cultures and times. Essentially, its main purpose is to emphasise how these drums are, in one way or another, related to ‘universal spiritual values’, cosmologies, and to ritual practices of various peoples around the world.

Hart and Lieberman first situate percussion in the primeval and physical, as the following passage demonstrates:

“This is a story about the discovery, somewhere in the mists of time, that we... could master and manipulate noise to create our own rhythms. This is a story about drums and drumming, and about the *primal* [italics are mine] experience of *percussion*. You don't simply play a drum, you *beat* it, you *strike* it, you *pound* it, the vibration, contraction, and expansion of the

membrane giving off a roar that contains an echo of that other roar, fifteen to twenty billions years ago, when the universe... exploded.” (1991:10)

Thus, Lieberman draws an analogy between percussion and planet earth itself, comparing the crashing of gigantic meteorites onto its surface to a gong vibrating. The ‘nature’ of percussion, as conceived by Hart and Lieberman, can also be illustrated by their perception of the big-bang as the first percussive beat, and how they use this idea to communicate notions of universality and mysticism. They establish a link between that very first sound - the big bang - and its infinite revivification in present time, each time we beat, strike, or pound a drum. By doing so, they establish an imaginary thread which serves to link present and past. Percussion becomes timeless, spaceless. Through the act of playing a drum, one is able to access percussion’s universal existence. Here, percussion, as well as the primitive discussed in the last section of this chapter, exists in a kind of “eternal present that mirrors the past of our civilization” (Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*, as discussed by Torgovnick 1990:46).

It is interesting to note how similar strategies that locate percussion in the natural world have been explored at several levels, making percussion appear pre-cultural. For instance, Andrade establishes so-called primitive music as something unconscious and natural, setting it in opposition to music that is consciously organised and understood. He affirms that:

“Os primitivos são gente que se desenvolve em ‘estado natural’, por assim dizer... O corpo é, para os primitivos, uma espécie de primeira consciência... Ora, o ritmo interessa muito mais ao corpo que o som... As próprias grandes civilizações da Antiguidade ou extra-européias se utilizaram de instrumentos que, na maioria infinita dos casos, são meras estilizações do ruído. Por mais sonoros que sejam... no geral baseiam-se na percussão.” (1976:16-17)

“We can say that primitives are people that develop in a natural state... For them, the body is a type of first consciousness... Rhythm concerns the body more than sound does... Even the great Classical civilizations, or non-European ones, used instruments that, in the majority of cases, were just stylized noise. Regardless of their sonority... they were based on principles of percussion.”

Certainly, Andrade’s description opposes Hart and Lieberman’s approach in many ways. Hart, himself a famous drummer, attempts to demonstrate the value of percussion and the fundamental role it has played in his own life. This is well illustrated by another of his



books entitled *Drumming at the Edge of Magic: A Journey into the Spirit of Percussion* (1990). However, regardless of these differences, both texts refer to nature and the body as innate aspects of percussion practices.

### **Nature, Animals, and Percussion**

In order to demonstrate how these representations are constructed, I draw on James Blades' book *Percussion Instruments and their History* (1970), in which he makes associations between nature and percussion. It is important to note that this book is a salient instructional text among percussionists and percussion students. The book starts with a section entitled 'Origins of Percussion'. Blades' description follows:

“The timpanist in full evening dress, performing with aplomb upon a group of foot-tuned kettledrums of burnished copper, reminds us of instruments much simpler, yet vital to the throb of life when the world was in its infancy. Forsyth... says: ‘The first and lowest type of music is the purely rhythmical...’ Granet... believes... that ‘The first crocodile created the harmony of the world when it drummed on its hollow belly with its tail.’ (Why not the spider drumming on its web to attract its mate - or the male cicada, the drummer of the insect orchestra?). Yet, other authorities say that the first musical impulses felt by any creatures of earth were those experienced by insects and birds.” (1970:33)

Although Blades points out that no animal could achieve the rhythmic awareness and control that humans do, he and other authors he comments on, are clearly fascinated with what is believed to be the very first source of percussion making, i.e. the drumming of insects, crocodiles, birds, and spiders. In addition, Hart and Lieberman, who relate percussion to the big-bang and other natural forces such as meteorites beating the planet ('a gong'), in their concept of a planetary percussion, also make reference to animals and rhythm-making.

“Early humans no doubt were awed and terrified by the wild percussive noise of nature - the volcanoes, the thunderstorms - and early percussion instruments may have been a way of approximating and therefore taming this terrifying sound. But gentler models also may have contributed to the development of percussion. The gorilla beating on its chest is an example of body percussion known to even the smallest child. And what of the beaver slapping its tail on the water to warn other beavers of danger? Or spiders that drum in their webs, or termites that hammer the ground as they march?” (1991:12-13)

Regardless of the differences of time (Blades' book was written in 1970, Hart and Lieberman published *Planet Drum* in 1991), nationality (Blades is English, Hart is North American), and musical background (Blades was an eminent orchestral percussionist, Hart is an acclaimed rock drummer) we see that these authors make use of similar concepts to affirm that percussion's development was, at least, inspired by those natural forces of the elements and animal behaviour they describe.

It is interesting to note that such ideas operate together with notions of evolution in music and humankind. As in Blades' descriptions, Forsyth affirms that "the first and lowest type of music is the purely rhythmical" (Blades 1970:33). The term 'lowest' assumes an evolutionary hierarchy, which communicates the idea that rhythm and percussion are not only simple but also inferior.

Andrade, in his discussion on 'primitive' music, also attaches a particular quality to it, by opposing notions of rhythmic elements (rhythm) and melodic elements (sound). He says:

"Os dois elementos constitutivos da música são encontráveis em todos os povos primitivos atuais. E, com efeito, o ritmo bastante desenvolvido, o som, no geral, em estado muito elementar." (1976:13-14)

"These two elements [sound and rhythm] are found among all primitive groups today. While rhythm is well developed, sound is generally at very elementary levels."

Observe that Andrade does not consider sounds produced by clapping hands and other natural sounds potentially useful for the production of music. With the word 'rhythm', he contrasts the term 'sound', neutralizing any possibility of considering rhythm as musical in itself. He naturalizes rhythm, and sees primitive music as non-musical, even if rhythmic complexity is present. Analysing some musical examples of the *Bororo* in Brazil he says:

"Embora o ritmo esteja quase sempre bem desenvolvido e principalmente bastante complexo,... penso que não se pode ainda chamar uma coisas dessas de 'música'." (1976:14)

"Although the rhythm is generally well developed and complex... I think that this cannot be called music."

In this sense, Blades also observes how the modern timpani reminds us of *much simpler* instruments used when the world was in its *infancy*. To support this idea of ‘infancy’, he comments on how early man *attempted* to play:

“We are also reminded in Old Testament history of man’s earliest rhythmic efforts.” (1984:35)

In doing so, Blades establishes a clear distinction between timpani and *other* percussion instruments and ‘simpler’ percussion practices. Figure 10 is an illustration taken from Blades' book, featuring the modern timpanist and the primitive musician.

The key to understanding Blades’ statement concerning modern timpani’s superiority is the opposition established between drums that are equipped with foot-tuning mechanism (timpani), and are thus capable of playing melodically, and other percussion instruments that are ‘purely rhythmic’. He makes reference to other specific characteristics that support this difference, e.g. the way in which the performance is carried out, with aplomb and the material timpani are made from, burnished copper. Clearly, such an opposition also refers to Leppert’s discussion of how instruments are assigned status depending on the quality of the material they are made from.

Hart and Lieberman express this notion of ‘infancy’ similarly when they comment on how a gorilla beating its chest is familiar to the smallest child, reinforcing the primitive and natural aspects of rhythm and percussion.

The interest in the origin of music in animal behaviour, as well as the notion of infancy concerning humankind and music, seems to parallel anthropological interest in these matters in the Eighteenth century. As Horigan observes, in his book *Nature and Culture in Western Discourses* (1988):

“We have seen how the voyage of discovery helped to stimulate and kindle an interest in the origins of human societies, and of culture, and how important these developments were for the emergence of anthropology. We have seen, too, the interest shown in relation to the anthropoid apes and in questions concerning their relationship to humanity. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that an interest in these questions should draw attention to stories of wolf children reportedly found living a solitary life in the wild, isolated from any human contact...; it was not surprising that they were seen as the possible subjects for the ‘crucial experiment’, an experiment designed to lay bare the essential characteristics of human nature, to distinguish between the

natural and the cultural - in effect to try and answer the question: what is the nature of man?" (1988:76-77)

Considering the idea of music, nature, and evolution further, Leonard Williams, in his book *The Dancing Chimpanzee* (1967), criticises the approach used by authors such as Blades, Hart and Lieberman, saying that:

"There are histories and studies of primitive music and of the origins of music by field workers who are themselves great musical scholars, though some of our 'musicozoologists', determined to find music in nature, in the twittering of birds and the call-cries of animals, do not seem to be aware of their existence." (1967:11)

Williams demonstrates how Darwin's theories of evolution have affected the ways in which the origins of music have been understood.

"A recent study... has concerned the instinctive power of birds and mammals to produce and respond to musical tones and rhythms and has sought to establish the origins of music, dancing and rhythm in nature. More particularly, it is maintained that apes sing, dance and drum." (ibid.9)

He continues:

"Now, while we may say, loosely speaking, that chimpanzees dance, this does not mean that they dance *to or with rhythm*: it is my contention that their rhythmic powers are as mythical as their other musical faculties. The whole complex context of primitive music is not to be found in the ape's world and what they do is almost entirely different in kind and purpose from what the first men did. If they 'dance' rhythmically it is because it is difficult to jump up and down unrhythmically, just as it is unnatural to breathe irregularly. A parrot will sway rhythmically on its perch. It would be an eccentric bird that did otherwise." (ibid.12)

"... it would be very difficult to perform any repeated action without some semblance of rhythm..." (ibid.66)

I would like to use Williams' text more extensively, and point out how this notion of drumming and chimpanzees still exists today. William comments on the Victorian zoologist R.L. Garner,

"whose inventions on ape behaviour form a classic in their own right." (ibid.61)

The description assumes ironic proportions:

“When he [Garner] describes chimpanzees as indulging in rhythmic dancing or drumming it is plain that he is putting a colourful and false interpretation on what is in fact no more than a release of pent-up energy such as is seen in the intimidation displays of chimpanzees. Accompanying his article is a reproduction of ‘a sketch by the author of the *Kanjo Nytago*, or chimpanzee dance ritual, a remarkable social carnival in which chimpanzees beat an improvised drum while others dance and utter rolling sounds as if singing!’ My favorite is the chimpanzee in the background doing ‘knees up Mother Brown’. To the best of my knowledge Professor Garner has only one rival - Bonnet-Bourdelot, who tells us in his treatise *Histoire de la Musique* that ‘the monkeys in New Guinea play the flute’, overlooking the fact that there are no monkeys in New Guinea.” (1967:64)

In a similar way, the so-called ‘heart of dark Africa’ has been a favorite locus for the construction of ideas of primitiveness, nature, animals and drumming. A recent production by Disney, ‘George of the Jungle’ (1997), presents similar notions by featuring a group of apes playing drums and sending messages in the jungle. It is significant to notice how, in the imagination of those authors described, as well as in popular imagination, drums are the favoured instruments of apes. The images featured in ‘George of the Jungle’ demonstrate how such concepts are very much alive in people’s imagination as a whole. These images of percussion practices inspired by, and based on nature, have been perpetuated throughout the past decades with no significant changes.

I have discussed how percussion has been represented by two of the three modes I have established before, i.e. percussion as analogous to natural forces and related to animal behavior. I now turn my discussion to the third mode - percussion as a by-product of the actions of the first hominids. It is here that specific mention to scrapers is made.

### **Prehistory: Percussion as a By-product of the Actions of the First Hominids**

#### **Tools and everyday actions**

The existence of scrapers appears to be directly connected with similar Stone Age tools and the actions involved in their making and use. In fact, they have been called ‘scrapers’ in the fields of both music and archaeology. Hart affirms that actions associated with tool making relate to the emergence of rhythm itself:

“Australopithecines were our earliest ancestors who walked erect as we do. They lived between eight million and one and a half million years ago. We cannot pinpoint the moment when music began, but evidence suggests that these hominids used repeated rhythmic movements to fashion tools.” (1991:13)

Once again, the notion of rhythm is intrinsically related to non-musical practices. Concerning early musical instruments, Hart says:

“At some point in our development, early humans began accompanying... songs with simple instruments, concussion sticks and beaters, on which they produced that special kind of vibration, that sharp shock of percussive noise. As toolmakers we were busy scraping, striking, rubbing, shaking, swinging - verbs that perfectly describe the class of percussion instruments known as idiophones. The bodily rhythms and the percussive payoff are similar; only the context separates the striking of two flints to make a spearhead from the whacking of two sticks to make a rhythm - sound tools.” (1991:30)

We observe that these physical movements (scraping, striking, rubbing, etc.) were, at first, performed in order to produce something else - tools, not music. The idea of percussion as something simple and non-musical relates to the fact that physical movements found in the performance of percussion are the same as those used in everyday life. Most people perceive percussion as easy to perform, as well as less musical, because these qualities (striking, scraping, etc.) are present in everyone's daily actions. Thus, anyone is able to access and perform it. This idea is reinforced when we consider instruments that do not produce melodic sounds, but produce the type of ‘percussive noise’ referred to by Hart.

By considering such ordinary acts as the source and origin of percussion practices, we automatically associate percussion with the non-musical. This is another way in which percussion is naturalised.

Bragard and De Hen, in their book *Musical Instruments in Art and History* (1967), comment on this transformation of tools into musical instruments thus:

“Before very long, primitive man discovered that, depending on how they were struck, plucked or rubbed, some of his tools and weapons were capable of producing sounds which differed both in pitch and in timbre. It is hardly surprising that he then set about transforming these tools so as to create proper musical instruments. As early as the Magdelian era (15,000-10,000

B.C.) we find in France a *scraper*, made of a reindeer bone. Archaeologists have found them at Laugerie-Haute (the Dordogne), La Madeleine (the Dordogne), Lorthet (Hautes- Pyrénées) and at L'Abri du Château-lez-Bruniquel (Tarn-et- Garonne)." (1967:19)

Figure 11 features a scraper from the Palaeolithic era, as presented in Buchner's *Encyclopédie des Instruments de Musique* (1980).

It is interesting to note that Bragard and De Hen make a distinction between tools and *proper* musical instruments, which recalls Hart's statement that

"only *the context* [italics are mine] separates the striking of two flints to make a spearhead from the whacking of two sticks to make a rhythm - sound tools." (1991:30)

This is just one example of how percussion is associated with functional objects. There are others, as I point out in my text. In my view percussion instruments cannot be seen as 'purely' musical, due to the qualities of physicality, 'noise', and everyday actions that they embody, even if we consider that exceptions do occur. For instance, one can go to a concert and see an entire marimba recital featuring only Bach. However, on an essential level, the physical nature of percussion is always present, regardless of notions of percussion's 'sophistication' and 'increased musicality'. What makes this discussion more interesting is the fact that, lately, some musicians who play the marimba, a more melodic percussion instrument, refuse to be seen as percussionists, and prefer to be called marimbists or marimba players. Similarly to Blades approach to the timpani, this shows that the field of percussion itself is constructed as a series of hierarchies and levels of status attached to distinct instruments, and musicians who play them. This is intrinsically related to the opposition between melodic and rhythmic instruments previously presented.

It is interesting to note that, etymologically, the words instrument and tool are correlated. We use them to communicate the idea that, through their use, we are able to achieve a given purpose. The musical instrument is a tool to produce music, and the tool is an instrument to, for instance, cut an animal skin. But unlike the majority of other instruments, scrapers have never graduated in the Western classificatory system that establishes what is, and is not, musical.

## Ritual Contexts: Scrapers as Devices to Produce Noise

Generally, references concerning the appearance of scraping instruments are to be found in texts dealing with music history and its origins in the Stone Age. In this section I look at how these texts establish musical scrapers as non-musical devices. Recalling Bourdieu once again, it is interesting to note that functionality, as in the case of Stone Age tools, is the basic element for the establishment of percussion as something non-musical in these texts.

Consider the following passage from Geiringer's book on the history of musical instruments:

"The history of musical instruments may be traced back in Europe for some 25,000 years. As far back as the early Stone Age man learned how to cut teeth in a bone and produce a rasping noise by rubbing it against a rough surface." (1945:54)

It is significant that Geiringer sees the bone scraper as the starting point from which all Western music emerged and was created. Also important is his perception that the bone scraper produces a rasping noise, not a musical sound. In Chapter One, I discussed how noise is conceived as oppositional to music. By a process of definition and exclusion, authors such as Geiringer establish the difference between musical and non-musical subjects, scrapers and real musical instruments. Paetkau defines what is musical by presenting an idea of what is non-musical - scrapers. At the same time, he defines the specific quality that causes scrapers to be seen as not really being musical instruments - their sound quality.

"The quality of sound emitted hardly qualifies them [scrapers] as musical instruments; rather, they serve to underscore rhythmic patterns, often in a ritual context." (1962:92)

Paetkau opposes the sound quality of the scraper, its functional aspect and its use in ritual contexts to that of 'real' musical instruments and pure aesthetics sounds. Similarly, Mario de Andrade, in his book *Pequena História da Música* (1976) affirms that primitive music in general, due to its ritual functions, can hardly be seen as something musical. Geiringer, Paetkau, and Andrade characterise sounds functioning in ritual contexts involving supernatural beliefs as less musical, or not musical at all. Bourdieu's argument about a



hierarchy of 'taste' illustrates quite well this distinction between the musical and the non-musical and how it relates to notions of functionality. While the 'pure' aesthetic emphasises form over function, the 'popular aesthetic' subordinates form to function.

Another passage by Geiringer gives an idea of how notions of form 'versus' function have been perpetuated throughout time:

“From these supernatural implications musical instruments *have never been wholly freed*. In spite of the ever-growing importance of the aesthetic aspects of sound that has been brought about by technical improvements in construction and manipulation, the symbolic values of the instruments [bone scrapers, bull-roarers, bone flutes, etc.] have continued to carry weight... ” (1945:55) [Italics are mine]

Concerning this, we are reminded of Hall's comment that the logic behind naturalisation is simple. Geiringer considers that these musical instruments have never changed. They are beyond history and, in spite of any eventual level of development presented, these instruments will *always* embody symbolic and ritual values. In this way, the notion of non-musicality attached to them is perpetuated.

Geiringer establishes that technical improvements concerning the construction of a musical instrument necessarily imply some level of musical development, which recalls Leppert's theory of musical instrument construction and sonority (1993). He also states that if instruments do not show signs of improvement in their construction, they are naturally condemned to be perceived as primitive. Scrapers have been considered primitive because they embody qualities that recall not only early stages of music history and development, but because they are associated with ritual practices. We see that even if there is a distinction between contexts that separate “the striking of two flints to make a spearhead from the whacking of two sticks to make a rhythm - sound tools” (Hart 1991:30), scrapers continue to be seen as functional objects featuring non-musical qualities, both as tools and as 'musical' devices functioning in a ritual context.

Geiringer also establishes the moment when man produced the bone scraper as the beginning of all other *musical* instruments. In this sense, that 'rasping-noise' assumes the same form, and represents the same image used by 'Hart's big-bang', i.e. noise as something chaotic and disturbing, as this word itself communicates. In both cases we have a starting point, 'a birth in chaos' ('In the beginning was the noise') from which all

other things develop, assuming less 'disturbing' stages (less rasping, less noisy, more distant from ordinary actions).

Notions of primitiveness and naturality must be broadly understood in order to observe how they acquire extended meanings. In this sense, it is fundamental to observe that so-called primitive societies in present times, are normally seen as survivors of pre-history. I discuss this idea of a generalised primitive in the next section.

### **The Generalised Primitive**

Firstly, I have found it useful here to employ Torgovnick's notions and definition of the primitive, as described by her in her book *Gone Primitive* (1990). An extensive definition of the term is relevant to my discussion:

"The word *primitive* first appeared in English in the fifteenth century to signify the 'original or ancestor' of animals, perhaps of men. In its dominant meanings through the eighteenth century, it referred to 'the first, earliest age, period, or stage,' usually of church history, later of biological tissue. It acquired specialized meanings in many fields... the common element being that *primitive* always implied 'original,' 'pure,' 'simple' - as the dictionary says... Its references to 'aboriginals,' 'inhabitants of prehistoric times,' 'natives' in non-European lands date from the end of the eighteenth century... By the 1920s, the ancient and the courtly had been removed from the category of the primitive, which from then on referred exclusively to 'tribal' art... When we say 'primitive' today, we generally designate certain social formations within relatively isolated areas of Africa, Oceania, South America, and other areas of the world... As early as the 1890s, but quite strongly by the teens and twenties, anthropologists like Franz Boas argued for the diversity and complexity of primitive social and mental formations... [claiming] that primitive modes of thinking and cultures were not 'simpler,' just different from Western thinking and cultures [cultural relativity]... Along with the processes that led to decolonization, this adjustment in thinking put the word *primitive* in disfavor in the decades after World War II - made it go into quotation marks... In the late twentieth century, whether one uses *primitive* with or without quotation marks often implies a political stance... [W]e in a sense wish away the heritage of the West's exploitation of non-Western peoples or at least wish to demonstrate that we are politically correct. But the heritage of Western domination cannot be abolished by wishing or by typography." (1990:18-20)

Torgovnick gives us a detailed description of the ways in which the primitive relates to notions of origin and naturality:

“A fundamental basis of Western interest in the primitive depends on archaic and evolutionist meanings of the word as the ‘original’ or ‘natural’ state of things. Within these meanings, explorations or representations of the primitive could be seen as explorations of origins and the marking of patterns that could reveal the truth about human nature and social organization. As we have seen, this fundamental conception undergirds many well-known ethnographies, especially those with a psychological orientation. The belief that primitive societies reveal origins or natural order depends on an ethnocentric sense of existing primitive societies as outside of linear time, and on a corresponding assumption that primitive societies exist in an *eternal present* [italics are mine] which mirrors the past of Western civilization (Fabian, *Time and the Other*). This temporal illusion has been among the most persistent aspects of primitivism in the West - both in high culture and in popular culture, like the Tarzan novels.” (ibid.46)

Torgovnick’s description of primitivism serves to clarify my discussion of the naturalisation of percussion and its ‘primitive’ quality.

Most representations of musical scrapers and percussion found in those texts cited, establish them as the source and origin of music. The specific qualities attached to them - noise, simplicity, naturality, physicality, etc. - also serve, as Torgovnick points out, to reveal the truth about human nature. It reveals the first steps of musical organisation which, naturally, culminates in the sophistication of Western music, which is predominantly appreciated in terms of pure aesthetic values.

Percussion fascinates people for what it represents, i.e. not only the origins of music, but also the source of life (the big-bang, the heartbeat, human beings in their natural state with animals, etc.) As in Tarzan stories, it represents the

“ultimate harmony between humans and animals, humans and nature, without troubling relations of hierarchy and Otherness.” (Torgovnick 1990:71)

This is well expressed in the drawings featured on the cover of *Planet Drum*. There, as well as in countless accounts of primitivism such as the film ‘George of the Jungle’ (the jungle being popularly conceived as the locale of the primitive) animals, humans, *and* drums, live in harmony (See Figure 13).

Torgovnick also observes how, in several metaphors of stratification, “[p]rimitives exist at the ‘lowest cultural levels’; we occupy the ‘highest’” (1990:8). This reminds us of Blades comments on Forsyth – “The first and lowest type of music is the purely rhythmical” (1970:33).

Most of the examples presented (Blades, Sachs, Geiringer, Andrade, etc.) serve to illustrate Torgovnick’s description of how primitive societies, and I would include here, their musical instruments, are conceived as being outside of linear time. This relates to Fabian’s notion of a generalised primitive which is basically the same everywhere, anytime, living in “an eternal present which mirrors the past of Western civilization” (in Torgovnick 1990:46).

There is a clear association established between prehistoric and so-called primitive people. There is an idea expressed by several authors, that a general type of primitive exists, regardless of differences of time and place. For instance, several authors make use of uncorrelated sources to justify their definitions and concepts about music and the musical scraper (Geiringer 1945, Blades 1970, Peters 1975, Sachs 1942).

There is an imaginary bridge between prehistoric and primitive instruments. The latter are normally seen as ‘survivals’ of the first. In this way, specific qualities seem to be transferred from one to the other, as Geiringer demonstrates in this passage:

“In this way their musical instruments [Stone Age men and all other men on the lowest rung of the cultural ladder] became inseparably bound up with the mental processes involved. The toothed bone became the instrument of the love-spell, as it still is to-day among countless primitive peoples.” (1945:55)

This notion of ‘survivals’ also has its roots in evolutionism, and is found in the work of Edward Tylor, a key figure of this intellectual perspective. Barret describes how Tylor not only argued that “culture evolved from the simple to the complex”, but also believed in what he termed ‘survivals’.

“Tylor relied on the comparative method, and on what he termed ‘survivals.’ Survivals were ‘traces’ of a prior evolutionary stage. They consisted of aspects of culture which persisted by force of habit into a higher evolutionary stage.” (1996:49)

Torgovnick also discusses this idea of a generalised primitive that has allowed many authors to juxtapose unrelated data to justify anything they want concerning distinct peoples and cultures around the world. Torgovnick says:

“Our culture’s generalized notion of the primitive is by nature and in effect inexact or composite: it conforms to no single social or geographical entity and, indeed, habitually and sometimes willfully confuses the attributes of different societies... Less professional discourses often unabashedly and irresponsibly mix attributes and objects from widely separate geographical locales.” (1990:22)

Blades’ text is also a good example of such practices. His generalised primitive or early man, can be anything from a member of a tribe in South America in the Seventeenth century, a Khoisan (Bushman) in South Africa in 1950s, a Stone Age representation, or even the Old Testament. For Blades, and other authors, there are no significant variations in the specific aspects of the history they are tracing across distinct cultures and times. There are several examples that illustrate this fact. I will discuss those that make reference to musical practices related to ‘body clapping’.

### **The ‘theory’ of body clapping**

Sounds produced by beating different parts of the body have been considered to be one of the earliest stages in percussion’s development. Hart affirms that, besides sounds of volcanoes and thunderstorms:

“... gentler models also may have contributed to the development of percussion. The gorilla beating on its chest is an example of body percussion known to even the smallest child.” (1991:13)

Blades and Peters have used Sachs’ description (1940) of how ‘primitives’ produced body effects. Peters considers that such practices can be found among many *previous* ages and cultures:

“... even without complete and concrete evidences of many previous ages and cultures, some conclusions can be drawn from archeological, etymological, and anthropological studies. The existence of specimen primitive societies in different parts of the world today further provides excellent study opportunities... Most emotional movements are audible. But primitives probably stamped the ground or struck their bodies long before they became aware of the accompanying sound as a separate phenomenon... They produced various effects from these simple movements: muffled beats with

the hollow hands, clear beats with the flat palms, stamping with the heels or the toes, and hitting either bony or fleshy parts. All these shapes contributed to making an actual pre-instrumental music.” (Peters 1975:5-6)

It is interesting to see how Peters *assumes* that people from many different ages and cultures made use of such *specific* modes of hand sounds - muffled and clear beats, or hollowed hands and flat palms.

As I have already commented, it is the belief that ‘primitive’ artefacts do not present significant variations over time, that allows the construction and invention of such ‘facts’. Blades, for instance, after using the same textual reference used by Peters, presents another reference to body slapping in order to make his reader believe that Stone Age man, and all other ‘primitives’, do the same:

“The seeds of the first instrument were sown unconsciously by an early man as he stamped upon the ground, beat upon his throat, clapped his hands, or slapped his body. He produced contrasting sounds with hollowed hands, flat palms, heels or toes, or by striking either bony or fleshy parts of the body. An early reference to the body slap can be found in the *Third Book of America...* which deals with the ancient Brazilian ceremony *tupinamba* (ritual fire dance) accompanied by *hochets* (*maracas*) and leg slapping. We are also reminded in Old Testament history of man’s earliest rhythmic efforts: ‘because thou hast clapped thine hands, and stamped with the feet, and rejoiced in heart (Ezekiel xxv.6). Percussion - the art of striking - was an art in which primitive man was well skilled.” (1970:34-35)

This process of generalisation, regardless of time and cultural differences, is commonly found in references concerning the use of musical scrapers. For instance, Tylor’s concept of ‘survivals’ is used by Geiringer to communicate the same notion of a generalised primitive. In this way, he affirms that “the toothed bone became the instrument of the love-spell, as it still is to-day among countless primitive peoples” (1945:55).

Sachs (1940:43) gives us another example of this. He describes funeral ceremonies in Ancient Mexico using bone scrapers as being ‘lugubrious’. Later on in the text, he uses the same description in a completely different context - the bone scrapers used by Cheyenne Indians. The result is that similar qualities are assigned to two completely different rituals using different instruments. Not only does he overlook these differences, he does not substantiate his claims that they are similar. Using the notion of sameness concerning the instrument’s form, he transposes a characteristic from one specific

historical context to another. In this way, he infers that the love-charming ritual of the Cheyennes is as 'lugubrious' as the funeral ritual of Ancient Mexico. In both cases, these scrapers are made from bone, thus sharing certain similarities, yet the author does not acknowledge the existence of substantial differences in performance techniques, musical and ritual contexts.

The idea of a generalised percussion that is supposedly simple, inferior and natural, cannot be understood without reference to the ways in which notions of primitivism, and a generalised primitive, have been invented and reinvented in the past five centuries.

### **Primitiveness: Popular Perceptions of Percussion Today**

In this section I look at various meanings of primitiveness, observing how such notions are apparent in current perceptions of percussion. Torgovnick observes how the term primitive has become synonymous with many other terms that are currently in use:

“Given the mixed history of the word *primitive*, the urge to jettison it is understandable. But before we could responsibly do that we would need a viable alternative to designate the kinds of societies it describes. Currently, we do not, since all its *synonyms* [italics are mine] are either inexact or duplicate in various ways the problematics of the term *primitive* itself. And here I include savage, pre-Columbian, tribal, third world, underdeveloped, developing, archaic, traditional, exotic, 'the anthropological record,' non-Western, and Other. Some of these alternatives (third world, underdeveloped, exotic) blur necessary, indeed vital, distinctions between third world nations (which are often urban and industrial) and the remote, relatively primitive, societies they may still harbor. All take the West as norm and define the rest as inferior, different, deviant, subordinate, and subordinatable.” (1990:21).

In this way, 'different' discourses concerning modern percussion are based on the same notion of inferiority. Charles Wood, in his article entitled *The True (?) Nature of Percussion* (1991), has pointed out the odd position and status that percussionists have acquired *in modern times*.

“Almost by definition, to be a percussionist in the western world puts one on an unequal footing with other musicians. Most of us at some time or another have had to confront a certain attitude of condescension because of the 'primitive' nature of what we do.” (1991:45)

It is essential to observe how Wood's text, which was published in one of the most significant percussion magazines in the United States (*Percussive Notes*), mostly dedicated to studies in contemporary classical percussion, brings to the discussion the same notion, that the 'true nature' of percussion is its primitive nature. Using Barret's words, concerning Tylor's theory, this refers to those "'traces' of a prior evolutionary stage" that have persisted into our "higher evolutionary stage" (1996:49).

Wood demonstrates how some aspects of what I have called the 'ordinary world' (i.e. everyday acts and physical movements related to the use of functional objects), operate in such condescension:

"Banging on pots and pans, bells, cymbals, drums, whistle, rattles: it is often hard to draw comparisons between those who just add color and the occasional rhythmic accents and those who are busy with the real work of establishing the harmonic grounds and melodic inventions of music."  
(1991:45)

Wood is concerned with the 'primitive' nature of what percussionists do and how the 'playing' of the vast variety of percussion *objects* (pans, pots, etc.) puts percussion in an unequal relation to real musical instruments playing the 'real work', i.e. harmony and melody.

Wood's passage illustrates well, how percussion is generally perceived, for its capacity to produce rhythmic *accents* and to *add* color, opposing practices of real music, i.e. melodic and harmonic structures. As discussed before, most people make qualitative distinctions between rhythmic and melodic instruments, ascribing different values and levels of complexity to them. Rhythm is generally seen as a necessary framework for the production of melodic and harmonic structures in music, but it is not seen as something complete, integral in itself. In this sense, rhythm appears to be a basic step towards real musicianship, lacking autonomy for the production of real music. Melodic instruments, on the contrary, are seen as complete instruments for their capacity to produce melodies and, in other cases, harmony. These distinct elements form a binary opposition - melody-harmony/rhythm, which constantly recurred in most of the interviews conducted during the course of my research.

Considering the notions of primitivism and percussion presented by Andrade and other authors, it becomes easy to understand what Wood refers to as



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“a certain attitude of condescension because of the ‘primitive’ nature of what [percussionists] do” (1991:45).

Difference or otherness, as fixed by these authors, allows the establishment of a series of cultural meanings. Music, modernity, musical instruments, melody, musicians, are defined by their opposites - noise, primitiveness, percussion ‘instruments’, rhythm and percussionists.

Hall has pointed out how ‘difference’ is dangerous when we observe the more negative aspects of it. My research has shown that percussion, percussionists, and scrapers are assigned specific levels of quality (they are non-musical things) and efficiency (they are limited and deficient). Taking Wood’s text (1991) as an example, one sees that to study percussion’s manifold representations is to recontextualize the ways in which primitivism takes form in modern times.

At the beginning of this chapter I observed that the idea of the primitive serves as a basis to understand other ways of representing musical scrapers. By considering Torgovnick’s point that various terms such as Third World, developing, traditional, exotic, non-Western, Other, etc., are currently used as synonyms for the term primitive, one is able to consider how similar notions of difference and subordination are to be found in other contexts. In the following chapter, the ways in which such notions underlie discourses on Latin, Brazilian, Japanese, and so-called ‘world music’ today will be considered and discussed.

## Chapter III

### FROM THE BEAT OF THE WORLD TO WORLD BEAT (II): REPRESENTATION OF SCRAPERS AND PERCUSSION IN WORLD MUSIC

#### Introduction

In the first part of this chapter I discuss representations of Latin music and musical scrapers as described in specific percussion texts. Developing previously proposed ideas, I observe how these texts are based on an overgeneralised and stereotypical image of Latin music and scrapers, and look at how knowledge about them is fictitiously constructed. In the second part, misrepresentation is discussed using as an example, the way in which musical manufacturers in the United States have marketed the Japanese scraper *kokiriko*. In the third part, I describe how the notions of primitiveness and spirituality, as discussed in the previous chapter, have been used in the marketing of drums and 'World Percussion' today.

#### Part I - Latin and Brazilian Music

I first observe how Latin music has been represented in some texts published in the United States and Europe, looking at specific instances where musical scrapers are featured. I focus on specific cases, such as the Brazilian *reco-reco* and the Cuban *güiro*. I observe, for instance, that the *güiro* is thought to be an instrument used throughout Latin America, even in music such as Brazilian *samba* where, in fact, they are not used at all. In this way, by observing how instruments and musical styles are generally misunderstood, notions of sameness and stereotyping are discussed.

Most of the texts presented in this section overlook musical and cultural differences and give the reader an overgeneralised idea of both the instruments and the people who use them. Opinions about Latin music and its use of scrapers, are generally stated with authority. I argue, however, that such authority is more often than not based on insubstantial evidence. In fact, many of the examples described by them refer to musical instruments and names that exist only in their imagination. Said observes that:

“[i]t is perfectly possible to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind, and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality” (1978:54).

Not only have names and objects apparently been created, but there also appears to be a great deal of ignorance about Latin American geography. Popular discourses, for instance, are generally based on misconceptions concerning Latin America's real geographic location, its different peoples and nations, languages, and cultures. My own encounters with people have always involved formal and informal conversations where many such misunderstandings concerning Brazil and Latin America become apparent. One asked me whether Mexicans Indians inhabit the Brazilian territory.<sup>9</sup> Another asked me if my Brazilian metal scraper (made with springs, screws, and metal parts produced industrially) was made by Brazilian Indians,<sup>10</sup> and so on. Latin America is sometimes referred to as a region where people speak Latin, or where people speak only Spanish.

These generalisations and misrepresentations are not peculiar to the layman. They frequently come about as a result of scattered information in the media. In this way, people acquire fragmentary and simplistic impressions of the region. Many so-called authorities are responsible for establishing and perpetuating these false notions. A passage from Blades' book clearly illustrates this fact:

“Of the modern Latin-America dance orchestra Edmundo Ros says...: ‘To obtain some idea of the backgrounds of Latin-American music we must go back into history. Before the discovery and conquest of South America in the sixteenth century there were two large and highly-developed civilizations [the Aztec and the Mayan] where Brazil, Mexico and the neighboring countries now lie.’ (1970:448)

Considering that such civilizations have never been situated in Brazil, we see that these examples of popular discourses and scholarly research refer to the same problem of locating Brazil and South America aleatorically. According to Said, such limitations concerning information are “the limitations that follow upon disregarding, essentialising, denuding the humanity of another culture, people, or geographical region” (1978:108). Said also comments on this imaginary and arbitrary geography thus:

“this universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs’ is a way of making geographical distinctions that *can be* entirely arbitrary. I use the word ‘arbitrary’ here because imaginative geography of the ‘our-land-barbarian

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<sup>9</sup> A librarian at the music library at the University of Natal in 1996.

<sup>10</sup> A student at the California Institute of the Arts, in 1994.

land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours.'" (1978:54)

Similarly, most affirmations and definitions applied to the musical scraper that are given by these authorities and scholars who establish geographical spaces where 'unreal' musical instruments are used, do not necessarily require acknowledgement by those who are represented by them - Brazilians, Dominicans and Latin people in general. Invariably, these authorities refer to imaginary realities concerning the places, people, and cultures they study.

This constructed knowledge about Latin American music cannot be understood without reference to specific configurations of power involved in the processes of representation. As I have previously discussed, the analysis of the relationship between discourse and power has been the concern of authors such as Edward Said and Michel Foucault. As Foucault pointed out, "representation is itself a form of power" (in Storey 1993:171). By saying that "Orientalism... has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (ibid. 12), Said makes reference to the way in which knowledge about Others is constructed. References are made specifically to the United States. For instance, the use of the name 'United States of *America*' itself gives the impression that all countries on the American continent are necessarily related to Washington, and such a perception is not entirely wrong. In spite of the fact that *other* nations in the Americas are not part of the United States, as people might think,<sup>11</sup> they are strongly related to it by means of historical, political, economic, and cultural domination. Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, in his book *As Veias Abertas da América Latina* (The Open Veins of Latin America) (1994), comments on this problem:

"... até perdemos o direito de chamarmo-nos *americanos*... Agora, a América é, para o mundo, nada mais do que os Estados Unidos: nós habitamos, no máximo, numa sub-América, numa América de segunda classe, de nebulosa identificação." (1994:13-14)

"... we have even lost our right to call ourselves *American*... Now, to the world, America is nothing more than the United States: we live, at best, in a sub-America, a second-class America of nebulous identification."

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<sup>11</sup> Several people in South Africa have approached me with the idea that all nations in the Americas are politically related to the U.S. government. To many people, the name seems to refer to a kind of conglomerate of States (other nations) governed by Washington.

Noam Chomsky, one of the most significant critics of US foreign policy, in his book *What Uncle Sam Really Wants* (1986), observes how George Kennan, head of the State Department in 1948, considered Latin America to be a source of raw materials for the U.S., affirming that the United States has “always assumed that Latin America belongs to [them] by right” (1986:28). Based on plans made by the State Department and Council on Foreign Relations during World War II, specific functions were assigned to parts of the world that were to be “subordinated to the needs of the American economy. The Third World was to ‘fulfill its major function as a source of raw materials and a market’” (1986:11-12). Elsewhere, he observes that former US Secretary of War and State Henry Stimson called Latin America and the Caribbean “our little region over here which has never bothered anyone” (1994:75).

Hernandez, in his discussion of Spanish Caribbean music, observes elements such as migrancy, racial identity, stereotyping and marginality, as they are articulated through music such as *salsa* and *merengue*, in both local (Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic) and international (United States mainly, and Europe) realities. He discusses a distinct form of discrimination towards Latin music and people, in both popular discourses and scholarly research:

“A more likely explanation for the marginality of Spanish Caribbean musics might be that in the U.S., these musics have been the victim of a subtle yet pervasive form of racism, in which Latinos have been stereotyped as greasers and their culture as flashy and vulgar, lacking in the sort of qualities that might interest mainstream audiences. In a recent ‘New York Times’ feature, music and culture critic Enrique Fernandez observed that while African-American culture has fascinated the American public for decades - as evidenced by its visibility in film, television and popular music - Latinos are barely visible in the U.S. media, and then usually trapped within stereotypical roles such as violent drug dealers, lazy and vain pimps, or hot headed seductresses... Ethnomusicology itself has not been immune to this sort of discrimination; as early as 1978, Joe Blum observed that the absence of scholarly interest in *salsa* reflected class and race prejudice: *salsa*, he suggested, so closely associated with poor Puerto Rican immigrants in U.S. cities, invoked a series of uncomfortable political and economic realities difficult for researchers to face. In this country, it seems, the sound of *salsa* and *merengue* may simply not be as appealing to world beat consumers as the music of exotic - and less numerous or more safely distant - others.” (1993:57)

Hall observes that “power, it seems, has to be understood here, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical coercion,” something authors such as Galeano and Chomsky effectively demonstrate, “but also in broader cultural and symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way” (1997:259). Such representations are adapted according to different cultural groups.

Generalisation, and stereotyping, have been important elements in the determination of so-called Latin music. Naturally, this term fails to express the diversity of musical styles and instruments existing in the more than 33 nations situated South of the US border. However, a certain amount of generalisation is unavoidable. There is a need to classify and we do make use of types to do this. Hall comments on Richard Dyer’s description of practices of typing:

“... without the use of *types*, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to make sense of the world. We understand the world by referring individual objects, people or events in our heads to the general classificatory schemes into which - according to our culture - they fit... we are always ‘making sense’ of things in terms of some wider category.” (1997:257)

What concerns me, however, is how overgeneralisation and stereotyping lead to misconceptions and false notions about other realities, and how these authors “get hold of... a few ‘simple... and widely recognized’ characteristics” of instruments and people and reduce them to those features, “*exaggerate* and *simplify* them” (Hall 1997:258). How other realities are imagined and constructed relates to my discussion of how names are misused when identifying musical instruments of distinct cultures.

Taking into account this historical, political and economic background, it is hardly possible to discuss cultural expressions such as music, without reference to the way in which they have been used to communicate similar ideas of subordination and degradation. Hollywood movies, for instance, such as those featuring Brazilian singer Carmen Miranda<sup>12</sup> in the 1940s, are an excellent example of stereotyping and generalising practices that have influenced the popular images of Latinos and Latin music in the United States and abroad. Similarly, *lambada* in the 1980s communicates an image of lust and uncontrolled sexuality in Brazil. International audiences have a general perception of Brazil as the home of provocative dances and sexuality, the land of

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<sup>12</sup> “Carmen was actually born in Portugal, but she moved to Brazil at the age of one.” (McGowan and Pessanha 1991:12)

*Carnaval*, naked women, anacondas, the Amazon forest, and soccer players.<sup>13</sup> Said had this to say about the reinforcement of stereotypes in his study of Orientalism:

“One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media’s resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds.” (1978:26)

Pessanha and McGowan observe how Carmen Miranda has become a symbol of everything Brazilian, “a cultural icon in North America and Europe, a symbol of fun and extravagance” still used today as a “popular ‘character’ for costume parties” (1991:12-13), as well as in ballet and dance school performances around the world. They describe how:

“The 1940s saw the first export of *samba*, as songs like Ary Barroso’s marvellous ‘Aquarela do Brasil’ (known to most of the world as simply ‘Brazil’) reached North America. Ary’s tunes were featured in Walt Disney films and covered in other Hollywood productions by a playful, exotic young woman who wore colorful laced skirts, heaps of jewelry, and a veritable orchard atop her head.” (1991:12)

These images: the clothing, instruments, and dance movements establish the way in which Latinos are perceived and imagined, regardless of the fact that many of these elements are not Brazilian at all. Another good example of this is the many Brazilian musical pieces whose titles are in Spanish, for instance, the album *Bossa Nova Rhythm* (1978). This specific recording also has a cover illustration featuring various ‘Brazilian’ articles such as castanets, panpipes, maracas, Cuban cigars, etc.

Even if Brazil does feature anacondas, specific qualities of sensuality and sexual behaviour not found in some European and North American cultures, and extravagant festivals such as *Carnaval*, my critique refers to the way in which such elements are romanticised, exoticised, and stereotyped and how Brazilians are essentialised. This ‘nebulous identity’ that Galeano (1994:14) describes seems to refer to these ways of imagining and relating to Latin America in both the political and cultural arena. In a similar way, several authors who are now discussed have fictitiously presented musical instruments and styles.

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<sup>13</sup> A good example is the movie *Anaconda* launched in 1997 in South Africa.

## Discourses on Scrapers in General Percussion Literature

The following detailed description of the way in which statements about Latin and Brazilian musics are constructed by various authors, aims to demonstrate how knowledge about the Other can be arbitrarily established. It enables one to see how fiction and imagination interrelate with scholarship. In this way, extensive descriptions of specific instruments serve to point out how each of these authors' statements is not only unsubstantiated, but a product of their imagination. Doubtless, such a 'knowledge' is based on the lack of, or at least limited, available information about the subject under consideration.

Firstly, I comment on Peinkofer and Tannigel's *Handbook of Percussion Instruments* (1976). These authors refer to the existence of a bamboo scraper named 'Sapo Cubana' or 'Bambú Brasileño'. These terms appear to be identifying a Cuban, or even a Brazilian instrument, but the authors do not say where such an instrument is used. Since the text informs us that this fragile instrument has been replaced by a wooden instrument called *reco-reco*, a Brazilian term, it might be that the authors consider the 'Sapo Cubana' or 'Bambú Brasileño' to be a Brazilian instrument as well.

Regardless of the lack of information in the text, both terms are inaccurate. Firstly, the authors are implying that this is a Brazilian instrument. However, if a certain instrument is identified as 'bambu brasileño', the source for such a reference cannot be Brazilian because 'brasileño' is a Spanish word. There is no instrument of this name in Brazil. It is possible that, through a process of generalisation based on the notion that Latin countries invariably speak Spanish, it was simply given a Spanish name. Secondly, with the name 'sapo cubana', it must be noted that the terms *sapo* (frog) and *cubana* (Cuban) cannot be grammatically linked because each has a different gender. Names in Spanish, as well as in Portuguese, assume male and female identities. In this case *sapo* has a male identity and *cubana* a female identity. Both the name and the instrument are therefore a fictitious construction.

However, the most important aspect to be considered here is how something Cuban is brought together with something Brazilian, and how the notion of an eventual proximity between these two realities is established. To do so, the authors connect both names by using an '*or*' ('Sapo Cubana' *or* 'Bambú Brasileño'), meaning similitude and sameness. This example serves to illustrate the type of arbitrary and imaginative geography



previously discussed. In this way, for these authors, Cuban *or* Brazilian, are seen as subjects referring to the same reality.

### **Bamboo and wooden reco-recos**

Peinkofer and Tannigel describe the Brazilian instrument *reco-reco* as follows:

“Reco-reco (Wooden scraper)

The fragility of bamboo led to the production of a scraper made of wood, the reco-reco.” (1976:155)

Although there are several examples of wooden musical scrapers in Brazil, the production of wooden instruments to compensate for the fragility of bamboo has not happened to an extent that would justify these authors making such a claim. When we observe that the great majority of Brazilian scrapers are made of bamboo it becomes clear that Peinkofer and Tannigel’s statement is not correct.

Analysis of the literature on these Brazilian instruments confirms that wooden instruments are, in fact, not so prevalent. In a previous table of references (Di Stasi, 1993) I described, among other items, the material from which a number of Brazilian instruments were constructed, including two wooden instruments whose existence was communicated orally to me. Thus, Peinkofer and Tannigel had no knowledge of these wooden instruments when they published their book in 1976.

In her text of historical references to Brazilian indigenous music from 1500 to 1964, Camêu (1977) makes only one reference to these instruments when she includes a description by Conde Ermanno Stradelli, who alleges that a wooden instrument called *catacá* was found among some Brazilian indigenous people who are not identified in the text. Berta Ribeiro (1988) describes a wooden scraper, commenting on the terms *reco-reco* and *caracaxá* and also presents an illustration that refers to the use of this instrument among Indians from the Alto Xingu region in Brazil. Cascudo makes reference to an instrument of the same name in his *Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro* (1969), observing that the Amazonian *catacá* corresponds to another instrument called *caracalho* among *Tembé* Indians. At the same time, an instrument called *caracaxá* used by the *Tembé* Indians of Rio Capim in Pará can be found in the Museu Nacional do Rio de Janeiro. Julião’s illustration (n.d.), titled *Cortejo da Rainha Negra*, depicts an instrument made of wood that is used by blacks in Rio de Janeiro and Serro Frio in the *Festa dos Reis* (Wise Men Festival). However, observing the form of the instrument in the illustration it is

difficult to confirm whether it is really made of wood and not from a type of bamboo. Similarly, there is a reference in the text *Manifestações Folclóricas: Danças e Folguedos Folclóricos de Laranjeiras* (1985) to a wooden instrument called *pulé* or *querequexé* used in the *Dança de São Gonçalo* in Laranjeiras, state of Sergipe. However, during my fieldwork in this area of the country in January 1993 I found no instruments of this type made of wood. They are, in fact, made from *taboca*, a plant similar to bamboo. Finally, another example of a wooden instrument is the *reco-reco* constructed for the performance of the piece *Nonetto* by Brazilian composer Villa-Lobos. Villa-Lobos required the construction of a specific instrument with a muffle system for the performance of his work in Europe. This instrument can be found in the Museu Villa-Lobos in Rio de Janeiro. In addition, other scrapers are made by mixing wood and other materials such as metal springs (groups of *Moçambique*, *Congadas* and *Cavalo Marinho*) (see figure 5), gourds (*Dança de Santa Cruz*) (see Figure 3), and bamboo (*Bandas de Congo*) (see Figure 2).

These authors do not substantiate their claims that instruments made of fragile bamboo, such as the instrument referred to as ‘Sapo Cubana’ or ‘Bambú Brasileño’, were named *reco-reco* in Brazil due to their construction out of wood. As I have said, Brazilian *reco-recos* are predominantly made of bamboo, regardless of their eventual fragility. In addition, this replacement of bamboo with wood seems to occur in individual instances which do not correspond with the reality of the existence of these instruments in Brazil. It is true that a similar process has occurred in *samba* music when bamboo instruments started to be replaced by metal *reco-recos* with springs around the early ‘70s “due to the increase in volume of some specific ensembles, such as the Escolas de Samba” (Stasi, 1996:33).

Peinkofer and Tannigel also describe the wooden scraper as having “a resonator similar in convexity to that of the *güiro*” (1976:155). However, such an instrument is not found in Brazil either. The ‘closest’ example would be the instrument called *reque* used in the *Dança de Santa Cruz* in Carapicuíba (Figure 3), but this instrument also differs significantly from *güiros*. In addition, Peinkofer and Tannigel include an illustration featuring a ‘reco-reco’ decorated with motifs, drawings and forms that are not representative, or even typical of Brazil. Another case of the confusion between different instruments and different cultures being overlooked by these authors.

### **Güiros and samba**

In the United States, it has become common practice to use the term *güiro* to identify instruments played in Brazilian *samba*. I have been approached on several occasions about the uses of *güiros* in Brazil. As people normally think that Spanish is the language used throughout Latin America, and perceive Latin music to be the same throughout the continent, such a false notion seems to be understandable and justified. In the same way, Peinkofer and Tannigel come to establish that, for instance, "... the güiro is used mostly in the samba..." (1976:154). Tranchefort says that "el guiro marca los ritmos de la samba" (the güiro establishes the rhythm of samba) (1985:68). As I have said before, there is no such instrument in *samba* music. *Samba* does make use of specific scrapers, but they are not made of gourd as *güiros* are in Cuba.

Stiller seems to be correct in his statement that "the most commonly employed rasp is the güiro" (1985:184). However, he is mistaken when he claims that there is a "basic samba rhythm popularly associated with the güiro..." (ibid.185). The fact is that the word *güiro* is a Spanish term that means nothing to Brazilians. Besides that, the rhythmic pattern presented by Stiller to illustrate this 'samba' rhythm seems to refer, in fact, to the basic pattern used by the *güiro* in *salsa* music from Cuba and Puerto Rico. As with the instrument named 'Sapo Cubana' or 'Bambú Brasileño', *salsa* and *samba* are seen as being similar or the same.

Blades says that "[i]n the samba, the basic rhythm is played on the tambourine, popularly known as *samba-tam*" (1970:454). This is an inaccurate term, since the popular name for the Brazilian tambourine is *pandeiro*. He also comments on the existence of a scraper he names *reso-reso*, another term that does not exist in Brazil. He states that the body of the scraper is made from "a stem of bamboo (*reso-reso* or *reco-reco*), or a gourd (*güiro*) serrated to form a series of notches" (1970:454-455). The term *reso-reso* also appears in other texts by Reed and Leach (1969:84) and Brindle (1978:105). One might consider that their findings were probably based on the same mistaken source.

### **Oversimplification concerning pitches on güiros and general rasps**

Stiller states that "güiros tend to be similar in pitch" (1985:186), which is hardly possible since gourds are found in various forms and sizes, and their notched surfaces are also made in very distinct ways. In addition, the spacing of their grooves, and Stiller himself comments on this, are quite different, and this can result in different pitches. However, it

is fundamental to note that he overlooks these significant differences. Besides that, it is a fact that any instrument sounds differently, depending on the type of stick used to perform on it, and what results is in fact the production of various pitches. Different ‘pitches’ can also be achieved by using different regions of the same stick (Track 1 on the accompanying CD). Stiller continues:

“The most common of these [exotic and homemade wooden rasps] is the reco-reco, which may be made of carved wood, notched bamboo, or a notched cowhorn. It is slightly lower in pitch than the güiro and is frequently used to play ‘second güiro.’” (1985:186)

He then describes the instruments in the following way:

“Low-pitched tubular wooden rasps of this type are now also made under the name ‘güiro’; this confusion of names emphasizes the fact that despite differences in appearance all wooden rasps are really the same instrument.” (ibid.)

Since Stiller’s book is directed mainly at classical musicians and composers, his reference to an instrument playing the part of ‘second güiro’ reminds me of a ‘similar’ use made by Edgard Varèse in his famous piece *Ionisation*. Varèse composed this work in 1931 and it is one of the most remarkable pieces in the percussion ensemble repertoire. *Ionisation* makes use of two *güiros* playing distinct parts. However, this is a rare example, and does not serve to establish that wooden scrapers *frequently* play ‘second güiro’. I know of no other instances where these instruments have been used in this way.

### **The ‘same’ instruments: güiros and ‘other’ scrapers**

Stiller’s statement that “all wooden rasps are the same instrument” is contrary to everything I have been trying to demonstrate in this text. If these instruments are all called *güiro* in Europe and the United States, it is not because they are ‘the same instrument’. Stiller’s oversimplification is not based on their ‘differences in appearance’ (he is referring to the instruments’ body forms), but on the confusion around names. For him, the simple fact that they are generally named *güiros* is sufficient to establish that they *are* all the same. He accepts this generalisation as fact, ignoring differences in the appearance of the instruments and neutralising *all* differences. Although Stiller does relate difference in pitch to the width and spacing of the instruments’ grooves, he seems determined to establish that pitches are related only to the two main instruments under consideration. According to Stiller all *güiros* produce high pitches and all wooden

scrapers produce low pitches. However, it is a fact that *güiros* featuring relatively low pitches are frequently used in Cuba, which serves to invalidate Stiller's supposition. Tracks 8 and 9 on the accompanying CD feature Enrique Lazaga playing his *güiro* with *Orquesta Ritmo Oriental* in a recording from 1995 (see Figure 12).

Stiller's text seems to demonstrate that he, like other authors such as Peinkofer and Tannigel, who insist on portraying scrapers as having *specific* measurements, had a very limited number of instruments and sources available to support his definitions. In other words, their texts were constructed on the basis of very few examples of the instruments they inconsistently describe. Specific information about the size of each instrument presented seems to demonstrate this fact. The truth is that these instruments are *naturally* different concerning size and pitch. These authors use 'sameness' as a specific strategy to locate *all* these different elements (people, culture, music and instruments) as 'one'.

This does not mean that there are no serious texts concerning Latin music, as well as the specific subject discussed here. There are exceptions, but most do not disprove the rule, at least in the case of the literature concerning scrapers. John Santos' article *The Making of a Guiro - The Unsung Thriller of Latin Rhythm* (1985) is the best such example, perhaps the only one. In it, the author gives us a more accurate description of *güiros* and their particularities:

"The *Guiro* (pronounced wee-doh) is a percussive musical instrument commonly found in Latin American music. However, it holds a very special place in Cuban and Puerto Rican music. The Guiro goes by different names and has several 'cousins' which are very similar, such as the *Guayo*, the *Guicharo* of Puerto Rico, the *Guira* of the Dominican Republic and the *Reco-reco* of Brazil. All of these instruments produce their sound by being 'scraped' or struck with a stick or 'fork.'" (Santos 1985:45)

I argue, however, that this example is an exception. At the same time, serious literature dealing with Latin music, although fairly representative, does not substantially affect the way in which common notions and images of Latin music and people, reinforced by the literature I have been discussing and the media, have been constructed over the years.

Broadly speaking, the generalisations fall into two basic categories. Firstly, instruments are identified using incorrect terms and are confused with other musical instruments of the same family because, through processes of overgeneralisation and oversimplification,

they are considered to be 'all the same'. Secondly, since instruments are used in specific contexts, there is confusion regarding the different musical styles in which they are featured. *Samba* and *salsa*, for instance, are often seen as being basically the same musical style. However, *salsa* is virtually non-existent in Brazil and there is no *samba* in Cuba or Puerto Rico.

Peculiarly, composers Gordurinha and Almira Castilho, in their song *Chiclete com Banana*, address this confusion by singing:

“Eu só boto bebop no meu samba quando o Tio Sam... aprender que o samba não é rumba.” (O Samba - CD, 1989)

“I put bebop in my samba just when Uncle Sam... learns that samba is not rumba.”

This construction of the 'truth' encourages people to believe in 'realities' that are not based on substantiated facts. As Foucault has pointed out, power is implicit in this process in which some people accept ideas defined by another group of people. Those who claim to be the most knowledgeable, for instance, the many authors described in these sections, assume authority over the subject considered.

### **Latin Music and Music Instrument Manufacturers**

The musical instrument manufacturing industry, on the other hand, given its international significance, affects people in a more consistent and direct way. I focus on the North American company Latin Percussion (LP) for its significant position in the marketing of Latin Music, first in the United States and now in other parts of the world such as Japan. Since LP also produces non-Latin musical instruments I will also be referring to it in the next section, where I discuss some Japanese instruments and the ways in which they have been misrepresented by this company.

I look at how LP uses distinct discourses to promote itself as a respectful manufacturer “guided not by commerce, but by music” (LP Complete Percussion Catalogue, 1994:8). It claims to really care about the various musical cultures it represents, yet, in practice, it contradicts these notions. For instance, LP names instruments incorrectly and does not seem interested in changing the names, even when made aware of the fact.

I draw my discussion from three sources. Firstly, LP advertisements in percussion magazines such as *Percussive Notes* over the past twenty-five years, including its 'Complete Percussion Catalogue' (1994). Secondly, my own experience, along with that of Brazilian percussionist, Edson Giansi, of several percussion instrument exhibitions such as those taking place at the 'Percussive Arts Society International Convention' in the US and 'The International Music Market Show 1997' in California. Thirdly, I draw from personal communications with LP's president, Martin Cohen, which mainly concern a Japanese instrument to be discussed later. I have also owned and played several LP instruments.

Doubtless, LP has produced instruments of a very high quality. The problem I am addressing here is that market demands and a more aggressive marketing strategy by LP, as well as many other companies, in trying to produce a great diversity of musical instruments from around the globe, have a profound effect on the quality of instruments in general. At the same time, not surprisingly, it increases the number of discourses which LP and other companies use to try to demonstrate that their ethos is not just producing good instruments or showing that "percussion matters" (LP Complete Percussion Catalogue, 1994:7), but also that they really care about those musical cultures represented by them.

LP's president is quoted as saying:

"When I started out all I really cared about was Latin music... Now I get into all kinds of music; wherever they're playing percussion, I want to be there."  
(ibid.6)

The point is not that it is impossible to be 'there', wherever percussion is, nor that it is impossible to 'get into' all kinds of music. The fact is that even the culture LP's president seems to have a better understanding of seems to be misrepresented by his company. Consider, for instance, one of the musical scrapers produced by LP, the so-called 'merengue guiro'. To my knowledge, there is not a single Dominican that uses this name to describe what is considered to be the national instrument of that country (see discussion in Chapter Four). If one is in contact with Latin musicians, one should know that Dominicans call their instrument *güira*. The term *güiro* was used in the Dominican Republic to designate a metal instrument (Lizardo 1988). However, Lizardo himself observes that there is national consensus that establishes that the term *güiro* refers to the

gourd instrument, and that the term *güira* refers to the metal one. Considering LP's president's experience of Latin music, one might ask why LP does not name distinct instruments correctly. In this way, LP contradicts its own discourse of respecting distinct cultures through the marketing of their musical instruments. This is reinforced by the way in which LP's marketing promotes the idea that they have a relationship with Latin music and musicians that is almost that of a family:

“Patato [Valdez, a famous musician], a lifelong friend and frequent visitor to their home, liked to come over to cook for them... This story reflects the Cohen family's closeness to industry legends, and their total involvement in percussion; ‘It's not just a business,’ [LP's president says],... ‘it's truly a way of life.’ “ (1994:6)

This discourse does not correspond with LP's use of incorrect names to distribute its musical instruments worldwide. This problem is based, once again, on what people, including LP's president, mean when they use the term ‘Latin’. In this case, most of the artists referred to by LP are not Dominicans, and are predominantly related to music styles such as Cuban-based *salsa*, but not Dominican *merengue*. These clear differences between various Latin cultures should be considered by LP and not taken for granted. However, considering the guiding moral principle of the music business and industry, matters such as cultural difference pale into insignificance.

As I commented in the beginning of this section, unlike the authors and books previously discussed, which I believe to have a limited impact on people's perception of Latin music generally, and percussion instruments in particular, LP has an overpowering influence on popular perceptions. As LP's market assumes international (and mass) proportions, one can see how these incorrect notions become new ‘realities’ for the majority of consumers worldwide who have no knowledge about percussion instruments and Latin music. We must also include here less powerful companies who have been borrowing incorrect terms from LP over the past decade.

## **Part II - To the East: Kokiriko - A Japanese Example**

Another instance of a similar misconception concerning marketing strategies for instruments by LP is the Japanese instrument labelled by them as *kokiriko*. In Japan, this term is popularly used to designate a folk musical scraper, which is also traditionally known as *surizasara*. In addition, the Japanese have a rattle instrument called *binzasara*,



which has also been named *kokiriko* by LP. When I communicated this fact to LP's president, pointing out that, by doing this, LP was misrepresenting Japanese culture worldwide and thereby contradicting its discourse of respect for other cultures, I received the following message:

"To tell you the truth, I have no idea how I came up with the name Kokiriko. When I was in Japan a few years ago someone 'pulled my coat' to the fact that the name was misassigned. Well, I am afraid that the damage is done. Most people around the world know this device by the wrong name. Hopefully they are putting it to good use. It was never my intention to slight the origins of the product. I have always moved fast in getting product to market and sometimes I didn't get it all right. Thanks for advising me of what is the correct name." (13/10/1996)

This statement serves to demonstrate how market needs, which are a direct result of the commodification of traditional musical cultures for global consumption, are more important than LP's 'supposed' interest in respecting the culture represented (read misrepresented) by it. When speed is of the essence in getting products to the market there is almost no chance for any reasonable understanding of the cultural object that is being commodified. The fact that it has been 'misassigned', is seen as unimportant in the face of market and economic needs.

His argument that "most people around the world know this device [*binzasara*] by the wrong name" intrigued me. Being a relatively new product - LP put it on the market around 1983 - perhaps the 'world' knows it as *kokiriko* mainly because LP is selling it under this name. As Japanese percussionist Mika Noda says:

"Binzasara has never been called kokiriko... When people say kokiriko they imagine the surizasara, due to its similar shape and appearance, but never the binzasara." (pers. comm. 11/5/1998)

The fact that people are putting the instrument to good use is not the point. In addition, his acknowledgment that a mistake had been made did not result in its being corrected. What gives LP the right to misuse names in this way, as well as to misrepresent a culture and its musical instruments, is the remoteness of the subjects from our Western reality. The process of crossing cultural boundaries is intrinsically related to World Beat, and the way it articulates images of the 'Other'.

### **Part III - From the Beat of the World to World Beat**

In Chapter Two I discussed the way in which notions of origins serve to establish a relationship between percussion and nature (naturalisation), observing how percussion, as well as the word 'rhythm', refer to specific elements which do not necessarily have a direct relation with musical practices. In this section I look at how such notions are commonly used today in the marketing and consumption of drums and general percussion. This can be observed by considering a number of advertisements for so-called World Percussion and World Beat (or World Music). I show how, in the process of advertising, these concepts are revisited and recreated to facilitate the consumption of percussion artifacts as products in a different global cultural economy.

To preface my description, it is necessary to explain some of these terms. Guilbault observes that:

“For an ethnomusicologist, the use of the term [world music] is certainly not new. What is new, however, is the way it has been appropriated in the 1980s initially by eleven independent record companies in Britain and then by multinational labels in campaigns to promote non-Anglo-American pop music artists... On the one hand, it openly encapsulates a very wide range of new musics and, by so doing, succeeds more easily in controlling a market that had so far remained untapped and uncircumscribed by the dominant music industry. This label, in effect, has served as a means of recuperation and appropriation of popular musics that have developed ‘outside,’ as it were, the traditional channels of the Anglo-American industry.” (1993:40)

Hernandez notes that:

“... what is unique about world beat is not the fact of musical exchange itself - which has been taking place between northern colonial metropolises and their former African and Caribbean colonies for decades - but rather the emergence - practically simultaneously around 1982 - of a new, interlocking commercial infrastructure established specifically to cultivate and nurture the appetites of First World listeners for exotic new sounds from the Third World.” (1993:49-50)

This process has been ongoing throughout this century, in both popular and western art musics. However, world music represents a significant market that has so far been explored to a limited degree by the dominant music industry and musical instrument manufacturers. It might be argued that such a term is, at least, obscure and tricky.

Evidently, it serves to refer to any music that is not 'Western'. This is why the term appears to be both ineffective (it takes difference and diversity for granted) and effective (it is ideal for the marketing of such commodities). Guilbault observes that such a use "could be thought of as an attempt to banalize difference by placing all these non-Anglo-American musics under the same rubric" (1993:41). She also observes how world music "encapsulates a very wide range of new musics and, by so doing, succeeds more easily in controlling a market" (1993:40). Guilbault presents Hopkins' argument:

"There's seldom been a more confusing, arbitrary or universally detested marketing term as the WM-words, and of all the arguments against it, this one seems the strongest: if all it takes for a record to end up in the world music rack is for it to come from Brazil, France, Iceland or in short, anywhere that the Queen's English isn't the first language, then the term is - let's be blunt about it - a meaningless load of crap." (Guilbault 1993:40)

In the same way that the term 'world music' served to bring together musics that were produced outside the Anglo-American industry, the term 'world percussion', used by music catalogues and magazines, also refers to a diversity of musical instruments 'belonging' to other peoples and cultures. As with the term 'world music', 'world percussion' encapsulates a wide range of exotic sounds and musical instruments, enabling greater control of the market, due to a similar confusion to that pointed out by Hopkins. These are the main elements that serve to make 'world percussion' a strong and efficient term. In addition, the use of the term 'beat' makes a clear reference to percussion and rhythm, as Hernandez observes.

"... the very preference in the U.S. for the term 'world beat' rather than the more all-inclusive term 'world music' [as it is known in Europe] tacitly acknowledges the primacy of rhythm, so essential to African musical aesthetics." (1993:58)

In this process, discourses on other musical cultures have been used and reconsidered. At the same time, the fundamental discourse of percussion's origin, primitiveness, and mysticism, has been recreated. World beat and world percussion explore the notion of drums as artifacts related to certain 'spiritual values', an organic existence, cosmologies, and ritual practices of various peoples around the world (as presented by Hart in *Planet Drum*). Drumming, when it is commodified in this way, serves as a means to access other realities more effectively than most other instruments. For instance, we note that all 12 advertisements for the sale of musical instruments in one particular issue of the music

magazine *RhythmMusic - Global Sounds and Ideas*, are for percussion instruments, in spite of the fact that this magazine does not specialise in percussion (volume V, number 4, 1996). On the other hand, the title of the magazine communicates the notion of a relationship between rhythm (vibration, pulsation) and the global. In this sense, percussion occupies a leading position in the world market, in the consumption and production of world music, and in the musical practices related to it. The relation between nature, life, and percussion can be clearly observed in examples such as the following advertisement by Remo:

“From Djembes to Djun-djuns, Remo listens to the world. The heartbeat of life is the beating of a drum. It’s that rhythmic pulse that reminds us of who we are and where we came from. Which is why Remo has a lasting commitment to achieving the most authentic drum sound of the world with every instrument we make. No matter how ancient or far away... Remo keeps bringing the rhythms of life.” (Percussive Notes 1993, 31-4)

Once again, musical rhythm is intrinsically related to the rhythm of life itself. The text asserts that Remo *is* listening to the world, being attentive to it in its entirety. It also appeals to the idea of authenticity, which ensures that drum sounds around the world serve as an effective means of access to other realities. Such representations are often promoted by agents who are quite familiar with Western idealisation of the ‘sacred power of the drum’, ‘the spirit of the drum’ and ‘mystical wisdom’. Examples below serve to demonstrate how these elements are explored further:

1.

“Feel the Beat

Inspired by craftsmen from around the world, Remo offers its World Percussion collection. This unique line of drums offers authentic drum sounds from a variety of instruments... and feel the beat shared around the world.” (Rhythm Music 1995 (4)8:5)

2.

“It all starts with a beat

The cadence of the inspiring graduation speech she will deliver.

The tempo of the recital that will bring down the house.

The patterns he will use to make his painting come to life.

The math and logic she will turn into a scholarship.

The rhythm he will find on the way to winning the 400-meter hurdles.

The symmetry in the buildings she will design.

It all starts with a beat. And the beat starts with Remo.

Drumming teaches children rhythm, the foundation of all musical instruments. It increases coordination and math skills, nurtures creativity,

builds self-esteem and an appreciation of other world cultures.” (Rhythm Music 1996, (5)4:21)

3.

“From your heartbeat to the gait of your walk to the cycles of the moon, rhythm embodies your spirit and soul. Celebrate your rhythm through the power of percussion with Mickey Hart Signature series from Remo.” (Rhythm Music Magazine 1994 (3)11:7)

In the same way, these discourses are presented in the production of recordings such as the albums featured in Figures 14 and 15.

### **Spirituality: ritual and the sacred revisited**

This notion of spirituality concerning drumming has worldwide currency today. A significant example is the recently established notion of ‘drum-circles’, where groups of people congregate to experience the mystical and communal powers of drumming, including, for instance, performances around fires on beaches or in woods. The concept seems to be related to the construction of identity among those participating in these activities. For instance, it seems that most people participating in this movement worldwide have not been raised in a musical *tradition* involving drumming and its spiritual side. In this sense, drumming has been used as a way to participate in a ‘global’ culture that invariably idealises and also refers to the reality, religious systems and cultural values of the Other. Hart, who himself shared this feeling, says:

“I often wonder what kind of drummer I might have become if I had been born into a culture with a tradition of the spirit side of the drum, instead of one with no road maps, no way of talking about those energies and powers you encounter when you play... It is hard to pinpoint the moment when I awoke to the fact that my tradition - rock and roll - did have a spirit side, that there was a branch of the family that had maintained the ancient connection between the drum and the gods.” (1990:211-212)

This reference to otherness and participation in a ‘global drum reality’, can be clearly seen in the ways in which the advertisements above are constructed. They make use of elements that serve as a link to the missing reality, i.e. the ‘rhythmic pulse that reminds us of *who we are* and *where we came from* (notions of origin and identity, or lack of it); the ‘authentic drum sound, no matter how ‘ancient or far away’ (authenticity and remoteness); the ‘gait of your walk’ and ‘the cycles of the moon, rhythm embodies your spirit and soul’, a personal ‘mythical journey’, a journey inside to visit your ancestors

(cosmology and spirituality); the 'spirit of the land' (sacred Mother Earth, a celebration of Mother Nature, Oneness with the Land, Ecological reverence); and history of humankind and the animals (identity and nature). As Erlmann points out:

"Perhaps the assumption does not seem wholly unfounded then that the nostalgia for the totality celebrated in 'world music' answers an old-fashioned, residual desire in the West for a unity and coherence of worldview that has for ever been lost." (1993:8)

Although I have no interest in trying to deny that the personal experience of drumming *might* lead one to such a mystical experience, it is a fact that this notion has been explored as a means to romanticise drumming for the exclusive purpose of global consumption. In the case of some artists who are featured in the catalogs and general texts of music companies, for instance, references to the spiritual side of the drum are constructed regardless of the artist's real involvement with the matter itself. In other words, these texts are fictitious. A good instance of this is the following advertisement for the work of percussionist John Bergamo:

"finding your way with hand drums a user-friendly guide on the spiritual and musical essence of hand drumming. Technical aspects explored include basic drum strokes and tones..." (Warner bros. catalogs - 1996 and 1997)

It is interesting to note that Bergamo's work is not concerned with guiding students and friends to discover the spiritual essence of drumming. The above text was constructed without his knowledge (pers. comm. 1997). Production and construction of meaning - spirituality, remoteness, ritual music, etc. - through consumption, have been central to the marketing of percussion since the advent of world beat.

"... in the new global culture, it is products, images - designed, produced and marketed to represent an experience - that become the basic, universally valid units of culture. The images produced by the world's multinational media networks remain imaginary landscapes, scripts of un-lived lives, whose universality derives from the sole fact that their appropriation depends upon purchase." (Erlmann 1993:9)

A good instance of this is the way in which various images of such 'un-lived' experiences are used in the decoration of several types of drums. These images are generally found on the drum's head or its shell. For instance, the Remo World Percussion Catalog (1992)

shows a series of frame drums and *surdos* (Brazilian drums used in *samba* music) featuring images from Mickey Hart's book *Planet Drum*.

“The authentic sounds of drums from around the World, replicated through Remo technology in an array of high-quality personal percussion instruments - with exciting graphic images from Mickey Hart's Planet Drum collection.” (1992:12)

Examples of such images are the 'Planet Drum' (the book's cover where animals, drums, and humans are depicted), the 'Yin Yang', the 'Big Bang' (see Figure 13), the 'Taiko' (Japanese drum), the 'Shaman', the 'Capoiera' (read *capoeira*, a Brazilian martial art performed with music), etc. In many cases, images that have no relation at all to specific drum traditions are superimposed. For instance, the Brazilian *surdo* manufactured by Remo depicts images of skeletons playing drums. These images are found in Mickey Hart's book *Drumming at the Edge of Magic* (1990).<sup>14</sup> They make direct reference to notions of death, as discussed by Hart in *Planet Drum* (1991:112-116). However, such images, and what they signify, do not exist in the musical traditions where this instrument is used. Similarly, Japanese drumming does not make use of frame drumming, as the image of a *taiko* drummer on the head of this instrument seems to imply.

While such practices clearly show a tendency to romanticise difference and otherness, and exoticise percussion, Erlmann observes that a series of works has recently been produced by authors who:

“insist on the necessity of a dialectic of global cultural politics [and the rejection of] any simple notion of 'world music' as an antidote to the venom of Western consumer culture and cultural imperialism.” (1993:5)

In this sense, dichotomies such as modern and primitive, sameness and difference, local and global, have been reconsidered and reevaluated.

“... if the global culture of commodities depends on the homogenization of cultural diversity to realize the value of any particular product, the producers of these commodities cannot afford to blind themselves entirely to this very diversity as its primary source of raw material, of new images... Translocal production processes and their agents are masked in the idiom and spectacle of local worlds. Locality itself becomes a fetish which disguises the globally

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<sup>14</sup> The book is described on its back cover as a text about music and New Age.

dispersed forces of production. Through the equalizing logic of commodity exchange, then, the global conceals the hegemony of the particular. The global, in Stuart Hall's words, is a 'way in which the dominant particular localizes and naturalizes itself and associates with a variety of other minorities' ... Henceforth, we should put the term 'world music' in quotation marks. Even though the products of the global entertainment industry purport to represent local tradition and authenticity, world music, in this reading, would appear as the soundscape of a universe which, underneath all the rhetoric of 'roots,' has forgotten its own genesis." (Erlmann 1993:9)

In addition, she comments on Garofalo's view on the subject of 'world music' festivals:

"the celebration of difference in such festivals, mediated by technology as it is, also conceals as it rests on a more fundamental 'sameness.'" (In Erlmann, 1993:8)

Evidently, no matter how these elements and systems interact and are articulated, it has become impossible to consider representations of percussion without referring to the new global economy where consumption *always* enters into agency. It is true that spirituality relates to percussion in many cultural contexts, and that one might access such realities by purchasing a drum in order to start a 'personal mystical journey', but it is also true that this dialectic of the global and the local is invariably related to economic factors. At the same time, it refers to a system where both parts interact, penetrate each other and, using Appadurai's words, "cannibalize one another" (ibid.9). As Erlmann, drawing on Fredric Jameson, observes:

"The production of difference... is inherent in the logic of capitalism itself... [A] system which constitutively produces difference, is a system all the same. Difference, in this interpretation, is no longer an antithesis to the system, it is drawn back inside the system." (1993:6)

In this way, it also becomes possible to reconsider some of the aspects and elements included in my previous discussion of Latin music (see 'Güiros and Samba'). Latin music, and the use of scrapers in such a context, is simply another example of the interaction and tension between these global and local realities. The use of the term *güiro*, in such a perspective, also responds to a need to encapsulate a very wide range of musical instruments, thereby making it easier to control the market. While detailed description of the misconceptions established by the different agents discussed (scholars, instrument manufacturers, general media, and lay people) does point out that differences are taken



for granted, a bigger scenario of more significant forces, invariably related to economic factors and power, underlies such 'small' facts. Heterogeneity and difference sustain the system of homogeneity and sameness, and commodified world drumming today is an effective instance of this process.

Let me illustrate this by using as an example the way in which my piece *33 Samra Zabobra* was presented at the World Music Institute in 1997:

"The New Music Consort's PULSE Percussion Ensemble is noted for its innovative appearances featuring works by leading contemporary composers and music inspired by non-Western cultures. Its extensive collection of instruments ranges from African *djembes* and Australian *didgeridoos* to Japanese temple bowls and Hawaiian *puiti*. For this program, PULSE will present three premieres: *33 Samra Zabobra* by Brazilian *guiro* expert Carlos Stasi, *Digital Signal* by David Little... and Wen Loong Hsing's *Media by Media* which reflects the composer's global travels." (World Music Institute Winter Calendar Dec/96-Feb/97)

In this global era, boundaries between Western and ethnic realities have become blurred and displacement plays an important role in this new reality. Several issues concerning the relation between Western and non-Western, central and marginal, are presented in two critiques of the first performance of *33 Samra Zabobra* in New York in 1987. Richard Chon, in his article entitled '*Brazilian Ensemble Stir Vibrant Sounds*' (1987) writes:

"If minimalists like Steve Reich proved anything, it was that native musics have a formal integrity that equals anything that nominally 'intellectual' composers of Western art music have conceived... [The] State University of Sao Paulo Percussion Ensemble... definitely takes its primal inspiration from the native music of its country, achieving ritualistic effects that hint at a certain exalted, archetypal frenzy. Played on native as well as modern Western instruments, the group's performance raised some interesting questions: at what point in its music does the indigenous tradition inform the Western academic one and vice versa? How much is assimilated and how much genuine? And, ultimately, does it really matter?... '*33 Samra Zabobra*,'... posed the question then rendered it superfluous..." (1987)

Similarly, Kyle Gann, in his article entitled '*New Music from Brazil – Sticking It*' observes that:

“The new music crisis, our moral dilemma over whether accessibility or autonomy is the greater good, doesn’t seem to afflict the nations on the periphery of the European/American mainstream... Whether these countries haven’t caught up with us yet or whether they are geographically immune to the crisis brought on by our fragmentation and self-consciousness is something I haven’t figured out yet.” (1987:92)

The piece *33 Samra Zabobra* was included in the programme because of its uniqueness in a system that tends to homogenise differences, masking what Erlmann refers to as the “hegemony of the particular” (1993). In spite of the fact that Group Pulse’s director was aware that the piece had premiered in New York ten years previously, the concert was announced as a premiere. Whilst it could be argued that the concert organiser may not have been informed of the piece’s prior performance, it is still interesting to note that the performance was touted as a premiere. Perhaps the organiser assumed that the piece had not been previously performed due to the relative obscurity of the instrument and author. In addition, the piece was scheduled regardless of whether a written score existed or was available (the group only inquired about the score after the concert had already been scheduled). The first performance of a piece has a certain significance. An almost ritualistic atmosphere exists, in which everyone is given more value: the composer for the creation of the piece, the performers for their act of ‘giving birth’ to something unknown, and the audience for witnessing an historical moment.

A lot of attention was given to the supposed first performance of the piece - an odd work written for unusual instruments by a Brazilian composer, and what it represented within the institutionalised art environment, i.e. otherness, difference, and exoticism. Fundamental information that was made available and which could have been used to facilitate a better understanding and performance of the piece was, remarkably, neglected. Knowledge about scrapers and myself was intentionally constructed, falsely establishing me as an authority on *güiros*, which were not used in the piece itself (and which I had not used in any of my other 40 pieces).

It is interesting to note that while global commodification depends on cultural diversity of ‘peripheric’, particular realities and “the producers of these commodities cannot afford to blind themselves entirely to this very diversity as its primary source of raw material, of new images...” (Erlmann 1993:8), the tendency to homogenise these small realities, to perpetuate sameness, is overpowering. In the case described, this becomes even more evident in view of the fact that, in 1995, I was invited to hold a master-class on scrapers

at the Manhattan School of Music, where the PULSE Percussion Ensemble was resident. It seems that, although exposure to the diversity of scrapers (sounds, techniques, material, nomenclature, etc.) through my master class, did represent a break with general perceptions and representations of these instruments, some of the participants continued to perpetuate this tendency to homogenise. In this sense, I argue that this “hegemony of the particular” is, at least, relative, and constantly subordinate, subjected to more powerful realities. This is exemplified in the response of LP’s president, who, in spite of acknowledging his mistake, made no attempt to change this tendency to homogenise. Once again, as Erlmann pointed out:

“Difference, in this interpretation, is no longer an antithesis to the system, it is drawn back inside the system.” (1993:6)

## Chapter IV

### GüIRA AND GüIRO: TWO CASE STUDIES

#### Introduction

In this chapter I look at how representations of the Dominican *güira*, and the Cuban *güiro* are articulated in the Dominican Republic and Cuba respectively. Although these instruments and the musicians who play them have achieved some status, I argue that this status is fragile and ambiguous. In other words, while their significance is recognised within specific musical circles and contexts, general perceptions of them as being musically defective remain.

The bulk of this chapter relates to the Dominican *güira*. The highly sophisticated technical developments and musicianship associated with this instrument contrast with general perceptions of it as an extremely simple device, played by people who are not necessarily considered to be ‘real’ musicians. The final section of the chapter focuses on the Cuban *güiro*, making transparent another distinct reality, which is a direct result of the social and educational changes established after the Cuban revolution in 1959. In Cuba, the educational system emphasises general musical education, regardless of the instrument one plays. In this way, it is possible for a *güirero* (*güiro* player) to be seen as a ‘real’ musician, like any other. However, I argue, this is also a limited reality. Once again, common representations overshadow a significant, but fragile, condition. Overall, these instances point to the fact that scrapers can be recognized as legitimate musical instruments.

Prior to my discussion, I describe how these instruments have been named and defined in contrasting ways by several authors from these countries. From this it is evident that this kind of confusion is not peculiar to LP as discussed in the previous chapter but has, in fact, been a common reality in Latin local contexts too. However, the LP case differs from the specific literature discussed here in one important aspect: the texts are relatively old and contrast with contemporary notions of these instruments among both Cubans and Dominicans. LP, on the other hand, neglects the present reality by perpetuating images that are no longer acknowledged by the people belonging to the cultures that have been commodified by it.

## Definitions

A great deal of confusion has arisen concerning the use of terms like *güira*, *güiro*, and *guayo* in Caribbean countries. Ortiz describes the *guayo* as a gourd scraper made from a fruit originated from a *güira* (the plant). As he observes:

“En Cuba es algo impreciso el uso de las voces *güiro* y *güira*. Se emplean con frecuencia sin discriminar; si bien hoy día parece prevalecer la forma masculina para el fruto y la femenina para la mata que lo produce. *Güiro* o *güira* se decía en Cuba indistintamente, según Esteban Pichardo; pero en general hoy se le dice *güiro*, y aun podemos asegurar que el fruto que se utiliza es el *güiro macho*.” (1952:165)

“In Cuba, the use of the terms *güiro* and *güira* is vague. They are frequently employed with no distinction. However, nowadays the male form seems to refer more specifically to the fruit and the female form to the plant that produces it. Pichardo says that these terms were used indistinctly in Cuba, but today the term *güiro* is generally used to identify the fruit...”

At the same time, because the term *güiro* also serves to identify other musical instruments made from the same fruit (e.g. the *maracas* and the *chekeré*) Ortiz preferred the use of the term *guayo* to identify the gourd scraper. However, due to variations in the use of such terms over time, the term commonly used today to denominate this instrument is *güiro*. Ortiz also observes:

“En Cuba hay bastante confusión en la nomenclatura de este instrumento. Comienza en cuanto al fruto de cuya cáscara está construido. Antes se diferenciaban la *güira* del *güiro*... El *guayo* también ha sido denominado *calabazo* en Cuba y otros países... [E]n Cuba sí se confunden generalmente en una misma acepción los términos *guayo*, *güiro* y *calabazo*; estos últimos por ser nombres vulgares del fruto vegetal que se convierte en instrumento; el primero, quizás por ser una cubanización del vocablo *rallo*... (1952:164). La falta de precisión obedece a la vaguedad semántica de esos vocablos, según las épocas; pero es indudable que las voces *güiro* y *guayo* son las más aceptadas...” (ibid.166)

“There is a great deal of confusion regarding the naming of this instrument in Cuba. It starts with the fruit from which it is constructed. In the past, there was a differentiation between the *güira* and the *güiro*... The *guayo* also has been called *calabazo* in Cuba and other countries... In Cuba these terms appear to have similar meanings... *Güiro* and *calabazo* are terms that refer to

the fruit that is made into an instrument; and the term *guayo* seems to be a Cubanisation of the term *rallo* (grater). The lack of precision relates to the indistinct meanings of these terms, as they are used throughout time, but it is obvious that *güiro* and *guayo* are more acceptable terms...”

Ortiz also comments on Castellanos’ description of both terms, which is significantly different from his own:

“Castellanos trata de fijar definitivamente las acepciones debidas, diciendo: ‘El *güiro* propiamente llamado, es un *güiro* ahuecado, seco y ranurado. El *guayo* es una plancha de hojalata de 20 a 25 cms. de ancho, curva y dotada de una agarradera en su cara posterior. La superficie está punzonada hacia afuera a fin de que los agujerillos presenten ásperos sus bordes y produzcan ruido al ser restregados por el ejecutante. (ibid.166-167)

“Castellanos establishes that the *güiro* is a hollow, dried *güiro* [a fruit] with grooves. The *guayo* is a tinplate board (20 to 25 cm wide), which is curved and has a handle attached to its back side. It has a rough stippled surface which produces sound as it is played by the performer.”

Castellanos’ description could be used to denominate the two instruments commonly used in Cuba and the Dominican Republic at present, i.e. the calabash *güiro* and the metal scraper *güira*. With reference to the metal scraper, it is interesting to notice that it was in use in the eastern part of Cuba, which is geographically close to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Contemporary Cuban *güiro* player, Enrique Lazaga, observes that similar instruments have been commonly used in these places (interview, 24/3/98). This is shown on the cover of the Cuban album *Organo Oriental ‘Gran Cacique Hatuey’ Hnos. Ajo* (n.d.), featuring a mechanical organ, timpani type drums, conga type drum, and both calabash and metal scrapers. Ortiz refers to the instrument in the following way:

“En la región oriental de Cuba al *guayo* suele decirse también la *ralladera*. Por confusión con el instrumento metálico llamado *rallo*, que está formado por el utensilio culinario, o a su imitación, que sirve para rallar, y al cual se dice *rallo*, *rallador* y *ralladera*. Pero esta voz es cubanismo regional y debe referirse a dicho frotativo metálico y no al hecho de *güiro*, o sea al *guayo*. (ibid.167)

“The *guayo* is also called *ralladera* in the eastern part of Cuba. This happens because of the confusion with a metal instrument named *rallo*, which refers to a kitchen device called *rallo*, *rallador* and *ralladera*, which is used to grate. But this term is a regional Cubanism and refers to this particular metallic scraper and not to the instrument called *guayo*, made out of a *güiro* (a fruit).”

Concerning the *güira*, Luis Alberti, considered by musician Rafael to be Solano *el padre de la música popular dominicana* (the father of Dominican popular music) (Listín Diario - 14/2/98), gives the following description of the instrument:

“... instrumento tropical antillano, completa con la tambora el ritmo propio de nuestro merengue. Su forma es cilíndrica, terminando la parte superior en una curba en forma de bastón, esto es cuando es de bangaña. Si es de metal, su forma cilíndrica termina en punta arriba y abajo. En su frente hay un sin número de rayados en altos y bajos relieves que al friccionarse con una varilla de metal llamada gancho, produce su sonido característico.” (1975:85)

“... tropical instrument of the Antilles that completes, with the tambora, the rhythm of our merengue. When the instrument is made out of a calabash, its form is cylindrical, ending, at the top, in a curve. If it is metallic, its form is cylindrical and ends in a conical form on both edges. Its frontal part features a great number of marks (lines), which are played with a thin metal stick (a rod) called gancho, producing its particular sound.”

It is interesting to observe that Alberti, an important Dominican composer, does not give these instruments different names, as has been conventionally done in the Dominican Republic. Ortiz, who also refers to this problem, says:

“En las otras Antillas hispánicas también se advierte confusión en la nomenclatura. En Santo Domingo al *guayo* se le dice *güiro*, y denominan *guayo* al *rallo frotativo* análogo, hecho de lata. Según Coppersmith, allí llaman *guayo* a una ‘variación metálica del *güiro*, que en realidad es un utensilio de cocina’.” (1952:170)

“This confusion in naming these instruments is also common in other Spanish Caribbean islands. In Santo Domingo [the Dominican Republic] the *guayo* is called *güiro*, and the metal scraper (the *rallo*) is named *guayo*. According to Coppersmith, the term *guayo* is given to a metallic variation of the *güiro*, which is, in fact, a kitchen device.”

Considering the term *guayo* in the Dominican Republic, folklorist Fradique Lizardo wrote:

“El *guayo*, genéricamente, pero en forma impropia llamado *Güiro*, es el instrumento omnipresente en las manifestaciones musicales dominicanas.” (1988:251)

“Generally, the guayo, which is incorrectly named güiro, is an ubiquitous instrument used in Dominican music.”

While Ortiz observes that the calabash instrument called *guayo* in Cuba is improperly denominated *güiro* by Cubans, Lizardo says that the metal instrument, which is called *guayo* in the Dominican Republic, is improperly named *güiro* by Dominicans. Lizardo describes the *guayo* as it follows:

“En todo el territorio nacional se le conoce con el nombre de Guayo, aunque en algunas partes también se refieren a ese instrumento como Güiro, a pesar que un consenso nacional, nos permite afirmar que en realidad Güiro es el de Bangaño o Calabaza, mientras que Guayo es el metálico” (1988:248).

“In all national territory it is known as Guayo, but in some places, it is also called Güiro. However, the fact is that in general ways, nationally speaking, we can affirm that the Güiro is made from a calabash, and the Guayo is metallic.”

Lizardo observes how calabash instruments - *güiros*, also called *Bangaño*, *Calabazo*, *Calabacito* and *Calabacito rascador de Fandango* in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, were formerly used to perform most types of Dominican music:

“Este instrumento aparece en orquestas formales de baile, conjunto de cuerdas, pericos ripiaos, conjuntos de atabales, conjuntos de tambores rituales de la Sarandunga, conjuntos de tambores, como acompañamiento de cantantes de salves y se puede decir con toda propiedad que se usa en todo nuestro territorio, como instrumento indispensable para dar la base rítmica del acompañamiento de la música dominicana... Es un instrumento que para nosotros se puede decir que es de uso universal, púes a excepción de cantos infantiles y de ciertos cantos de trabajo que usan otro tipo de acompañamiento, se puede afirmar que le dá la base rítmica a la música dominicana en general.” (1988:244-245)

“This instrument is found in formal dance orchestras, string groups, *pericos ripiaos*, groups of *atabales*, groups of drums of the *Sarandunga* ritual, and groups of drums and accompanying *Salve* singers. It is certain to say that it is used throughout the entire territory as an essential instrument that provides accompanying rhythmic support to Dominican music... It is an instrument that has a kind of universal use for Dominicans. Except for childrens’ songs and specific work songs, we can affirm that it gives the rhythmic support to the Dominican music in general.”



In discussing the African origin of the *güiro*, he describes a peculiar incident referring to the use of this instrument by a slave:

“Flérída de Nolasco, nos cuenta de un esclavo que fue muerto por un granadero por estar tocando ‘un calabacito rascador de fandango’ y todo cuanto pasó el granadero y las averiguaciones consecuentes.” (ibid.81)

“Flérída de Nolasco tells us about a slave who was killed by a grenadier for playing a calabash scraper, and everything that subsequently happened to the soldier.”

Lizardo also gives us the following description:

“Además del mencionado reporte... hemos encontrado lo siguiente en una poesía de Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz:

‘Un negro que entró en la iglesia  
de su grandeza admirado  
por regocijar la fiesta  
cantó al son de un calabazo:  
¡Tumba, la, la, lá! ¡Tumba, le, le lé!’ (ibid.19)

“Besides that... we found the following reference in a poem by Juana Inés de la Cruz, a nun:

‘A black who entered the church  
admired its greatness  
delighted by the party  
sang accompanied by a calabazo [scraper]  
¡Tumba, la, la, lá! ¡Tumba, le, le lé!’

Lizardo observes how such instruments were replaced by metal ones throughout the country:

“Ultimamente por la dificultad de conseguir los Bangaños o Güiros se está proliferando el uso del Guayo en el acompañamiento de música que siempre hizo el Güiro, no es más que adaptación de un instrumento al uso de otro, pero entonces el pueblo ha decidido obviar esto llamando indistintamente Guayo al Güiro y viceversa.” (ibid.245)

“Lately, due to difficulties in finding gourds, the Guayo has been used to accompany musics that were previously played with the Güiro. It is just an adaptation of one instrument to another, and people decided to name them indistinctly.”

This difficulty in finding gourds was confirmed by musician and instrument maker, Edís Sánchez (interview, 2/98). It is my view that, although this process of replacement has

occurred, it does not seem as simple and natural as Lizardo describes it. The sound qualities of a calabash instrument (which has a ridged surface), as well as its performance techniques, are significantly different from those of the metal instrument (which features a stippled surface). Austerlitz describes the *güiro* and the process of the change to the metal instrument thus:

“The *güiro* is a scraped idiophone used in Cuba, Puerto Rico and elsewhere. It is made from a calabash (*bangaña*, fruit of the *higüero* tree) which is hollowed out and dried. Horizontal serrations are cut around its front and holes are bored in its back. It is scraped with an implement known as *gancho* or *púa* (literally, hook and spike, respectively), which is constructed from a piece of wood into which four or more pieces of wire are inserted. Today, a metal Afro-pick comb is often used. The calabash *güiro* fell into disuse in the late nineteenth century due to a scarcity of calabashes of the proper shape and was replaced by a metal version of the instrument. This is sometimes called *güayo*, which means kitchen grater, as it resembles this utensil. Dominicans usually call the metal variety *güira* and the calabash variety *güiro*...” (Austerlitz 1992:86)

Despite the fact that this last affirmation is attributed to Lizardo (1988:244-49), there is no reference to the name *güira* in Lizardo’s text. In fact, the folklorist appeared not to use this term to describe the metal scraper, regardless of its common use among most Dominicans. Austerlitz also observes that:

“Nowadays, Dominicans use metal *güira* to play merengue and other native styles, and calabash *güiros* (if available) to play Cuban-derived music. Cubans generally refer to the metal version of the instrument as *güayo*.” (1992:86)

It is interesting to note that the opposite phenomena is occurring in Cuba at present, where contemporary groups are making use of the Dominican *güira* to play Cuban music. This will be discussed in the section entitled ‘Cuban *Güiro*’.

## **The Dominican *Güira***

### **Introduction**

The Dominican Republic was colonized by Spain by the end of the fifteenth century. Later, with the destruction of its native population (Tainos and Caribs), African slaves were brought to the island, becoming the majority of the population.

“[It] is a small country - its population of 6.5 million inhabitants occupies approximately three quarters (48,464 square kilometers) of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with Haiti. Its economy has long been primarily agricultural, although this has changed rapidly in the past decade as a result of... a rapidly expanding tourist industry.” (Hernandez 1995:4-5)

Spanish colonization and later French control, Haitian domination, as well as temporary occupation by the United States, served to shape aspects of Dominican culture and music. For instance, Hernandez observes that the country

“has a long history of either actively rejecting or passively ignoring its unequivocally obvious African heritage. This attitude has often been linked to the historical consequences of a twenty-two-year occupation by Haiti [1822-1844] that made the Dominican Republic the only country in Latin America to be subjugated by blacks... In the aftermath of the Haitian occupation, Dominicans conflated their hatred for Haitians with a generalized rejection of blackness and anything associated with African culture.” (1995:130)

The best known musical style of the country, i.e. *merengue*, is described by Austerlitz as:

“[a]n Afro-American transformation of the contradance... [which] developed as an international dance music with urban and rural variants in several Caribbean areas in the nineteenth century.” (1993:abstract)

The development of Dominican *merengue* throughout the twentieth century is closely related to the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961), who also promoted anti-black attitudes. Among several other musical styles existing in the country during that time (e.g. *sarandunga*, *mangulina*, *palos*, and *salve*), Trujillo took one specific regional variant of *merengue*, i.e. *merengue* from the largely white region of Cibao, to be used as a means of propaganda for his regime. Hernandez observes that:

“Trujillo, then, succeeded in isolating one regional music form, the *merengue cibaeño*, and introducing it to all regions of the country and to all classes of Dominican society.” (1995:41)

## Güira playing

Dominican music, due to its diverse range of musical styles using the *güira* and the way this instrument has been used and perceived by Dominicans, serves as an excellent scenario for the discussion of the representation of musical scrapers. To anyone interested in the musical elements and structure of these styles, *güira* playing appears to be extremely diverse and sophisticated, defying any simplistic view of it. Yet, it is commonly seen to be a rather ordinary and easy-to-play instrument by most Dominicans.

The diversity of *güira* playing becomes clear when one listens to different styles of *merengue*, such as the *merengue típico cibaeño* - Cibao-style folk *merengue*, *bachata-merengue*, and contemporary pop-*merengue*. Austerlitz describes *merengue típico cibaeño* as a genre that:

“was performed only among the lower classes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century... This style served as the basis for the national *merengue* that developed in the mid-twentieth century.” (1992:83-84)

This *merengue*, originating in the region called Cibao,

“came to be called *perico ripiao* (literally, ripped parrot) in the 1930s.” (ibid.138)

The term *bachata-merengue* refers to the *merengue* performed by guitar-based groups. As Austerlitz defines it:

“The term *bachata*, which previously referred to a barrio or rural party, began to be applied to Dominican guitar-based music (which is often performed at *bachatas*)... *Bachata* groups specialize in the *bolero-son*, but they include a wide variety of musical types, including *merengue*, in their repertoires.” (ibid.252-253)

The striking differences between *güira* playing in these and other styles are illustrated by a selection of musical examples recorded on the accompanying CD. My discussion on the variety of *güira* playing in the Dominican Republic is far from being a complete panorama of the ways in which the instrument is used, not only in the many styles of *merengue*, but also in the many other musical styles existing in that country. Clearly, distinct contexts interrelate and *güira* playing is constantly transformed by using and adapting musical elements of distinct styles. For instance, Austerlitz observes that:

“The güira style developed by Manuel la Güira and others in pop merengue has influenced típico groups; típico güireros... perform elaborate variations, and sometimes perform improvised solos.” (ibid.350)

To date I have only conducted *preliminary* research on representations of this instrument, mainly in *popular* contexts. Since my work did not include rural groups in any significant way, my discussion is limited. It seems that the status attributed to the *güira* in rural, traditional, folk groups, differs from its status in popular music (Johanna Sanchez, interview, 19/2/98). Also, in certain groups such as the *Atabale* group from Herba Buena, Hato Mayor (see Figure 16), the position of the *güira* is highlighted by the fact that it represents half of the total ensemble (of the four performers, two are *güireros*).

A similar status is accorded the *güira* in *perico ripiao*, groups using the accordion, *güira*, *tambora*, and sometimes the lamellaphone marimba. Figure 17 features Inocencio Rosario, a member of a musical group from the *Casa de Cultura de La Vega*, playing a similar instrument. It is possible that this status is different in pop merengue bands where other instruments are used. However, it would be incorrect to assume this, based purely on this fact. Austerlitz points out that these differences (in rural and popular contexts) relate to the way distinct genres are considered, which is based on their use among different social classes.

“Dominican music genres have clear-cut associations with social classes. Highly African-influenced regional music is associated with the rural population... Popular merengue de orquesta is associated with the middle class and represents the nationalism, modernity, and international connections with which most Dominicans identify.” (1992:255)

### **The instrument**

The *güira*, as it is commonly known in the Dominican Republic today, is a cylindrical metal instrument. Its main characteristic is a stippled surface that is rasped by an implement that consists of a piece of wood with wires attached to it. Generally, original folk ensembles use tins (e.g. oil cans, see figure 16) in their construction and so-called professional musicians play on *güiras* constructed of *acero inoxidable* (stainless steel). These are made by professional specialists. Until the late 1970s *güiras* were constructed with two cones (*copillos*) attached to each end. Sanchez comments on the work of instrument maker Guillermo Güira:

“La güira, según nos explica Guillermo López, antes se construía con dos conos. Uno en cada extrema, pero desde hace mucho tiempo se fabrican sin los referidos conos, ya que, sin ellos se obtiene mejor sonido.” (1991:3)

“As Guillermo López explains, the güira was previously constructed with a cone attached to each end. But this practice was discontinued a long time ago because a better sound is achieved without them.”

Figure 7, which features a member of the Haitian group, *Boukman Eksperyans*, playing the metal scraper, *grage*, serves to illustrate a similar use of these cones in Haiti. Guillermo told me that with the cones, the instrument has a ‘hollow’ sound, and without them a bright one. A musician himself, he looks for the best sound for the instrument he constructs (interview, 13/2/98). He comments on the changes made to the instrument that occurred in the early 1980s:

“En décadas pasadas este instrumento se utilizaba con dos conos en sus extremos. Entonces, cuando surge para 1980 ‘Manuel La Güira’ (güirero de Fernando Villalona), éste cambia por completo la forma de tocar este artefacto y le da un estilo novedoso y moderno. A partir de ahí se le abolen los conos.” (in Pily González 1994:4)

“In past decades this instrument was used with two cones on its extremities. Then, Manuel La Güira (*güirero* of singer Fernando Villalona) who appears in the early 1980s, changed the way the instrument was played, giving it a new and modern style. After this, such cones were abolished.”

Most of my research concerning the construction of the *güira* was conducted in the home of instrument maker, Guillermo González (Guillermo Güira). I also bought instruments constructed by other specialists. The following detailed description of *güira*-construction, puts paid to the commonly held perception that the construction of these instruments is unsophisticated. Leppert (1993) refers to the perception of a musical instrument in relation to the material used in its making, and the degree to which it is worked. The *güira*’s fundamental characteristic is a stippled surface that appears unsophisticated and simple in its form and material. However, even if we do not consider such technical specialisation among professional makers as ‘simple’, making the instrument is not a simple process at all. Musicians often require an instrument to have a specific sound and this relates directly to specific aspects of construction. Instrument makers are generally aware of these preferences and cater for them.

### Guillermo Güira<sup>15</sup>

Guillermo has achieved considerable recognition among *güireros* for the quality of his work. A *güirero* himself, Guillermo says that in the past he did not have enough time to make *güiras*, since he was focused on playing. Later, after his marriage, he started to work full time on the production of *güiras*. This happened after other musicians, observing an instrument he had made for his own use, asked him to construct instruments to sell. He observes how, in the past, the instrument was quite thin and was basically produced by using tinplates. In those days the *gancho* (implement used to play the instrument) had only three wires and its handle was quite small. He affirms that the construction and form of the *gancho* has changed because a new material (*acero inoxidable*) is now being used for the construction of the *güira* itself. This material makes it considerably stronger than the previous one. A stronger *gancho* does not deteriorate too fast when used to play an instrument made of this material. Besides that, having nine or ten wires attached to it, it is quite possible that if the musician loses one, two, or even three such wires while playing, he or she would still be able to play the instrument.

Formerly, the instrument had all its parts soldered together (i.e. the curved tinplate itself and the handle). Guillermo says that, after a dream he had around 1985, he started to use a *remachadora* (rivet gun) instead of solder, thus reinforcing all fixing points of the instrument. This came about because the parts of the instrument would invariably become loose due to the vibration caused by the act of playing it and he had to find a way to solve this problem (free translation from interview, 13/2/98).

Nowadays, Guillermo's instruments are sold not only in the Dominican Republic, but also in several other countries such as Puerto Rico, the United States and Japan. Two other people work with him, Miguel Angel Ramirez Santos and Gil González. Their functions are very specialised. Miguel Angel Ramirez Santos, popularly known as Piraña, is a specialist in *picar la güira*: producing the stippled surface. He has worked on this for the past fifteen years and has been with Guillermo for the past seven years. His nickname, given by *güireros*, refers to his amazing capacity to do this work fast and precisely. *Güirero* Luis Soto, who played with *El Mayimbe* (singer Fernando Villalona)

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<sup>15</sup> Some musicians use the word Güira as their surname. It could be argued that this practice is simply functional, i.e. it serves to identify what the musician plays. However, it is not common to use the names of other instruments in the same way.

in 1998, literally describes Piraña as a machine (interview, 18/2/98). Piraña is the name of a fish that eats animals and people voraciously. Piraña's work resembles the fish's main characteristic, since he 'eats', makes the marks on the *güira*, insatiably. Recognising his own skill, he used to show off, deliberately looking at me while marking the *güira* and producing a straight line without looking at it. On another occasion he put a scuba diving mask on his head while working, demonstrating, once again, his skill and confidence. Besides that he also performs specific movements with his hammer each time he finishes a line, which has approximately seventy seven to eighty spots. Doubtless, his is the most fundamental work concerning the construction of the *güira*. When asked what is essential in order to obtain a good instrument with good sound quality he replies that it is the control of the nail (*clavo*), while marking the instrument's surface. Guillermo carefully prepares this nail, which must not have a sharp tip. Knowledge about the material to be used, how sharp the nail must be, the sound to be achieved, etc., are intrinsically related to the production of this 'simple' instrument. Piraña also observes that, if the plate is torn while the spots are being made the sound quality is destroyed and the instrument will sound like a tinplate (*lata*) (interview, 18/2/98).

Gil González, known as 'Charlie', polishes the plate and transforms it into a cylinder, after the stippling has been completed. Damage to the instrument is avoided by using soft wood in this process, even though his movements when hammering the instrument are quite strong and violent.

#### *The construction of a güira*

1. A piece of metal is cut to a specific size, depending on the instrument to be constructed.
2. This board is polished with thin sandpaper, water and soap, to *dar brillo* (make it shiny).
3. The borders of the plate are folded in opposite directions. Later, when the plate becomes a cylinder, both parts will be inserted. This serves to close the instrument and maintain its form.
4. Pencil lines are drawn to delimit the area on which marks will be made.
5. The name of the constructor is written on one corner of the metal plate.
6. The board is attached to a particular tree-trunk, the surface of which is relatively soft. It must be entirely flat to avoid irregular forms, which could result in the spots being perforated.



7. With a hammer and the special nail that does not have too sharp a tip, a series of marks is regularly produced, one by one, over each of the drawn pencil lines. This forms a rectangle, which delimits the area to be marked.
8. Next, regular straight lines are produced from the top to the bottom of the plate. Holes must be avoided (see figure 18).
9. After each line is completed the metal plate is hammered flat again. The production of marks by down-stroking the nail suspends and deforms the areas close to them.
10. The process is repeated until the entire surface is stippled. The plate is now ready to assume its cylindrical form.
11. Over another trunk tree, the plate is violently hammered on its posterior face with a cylindrical piece of wood, until it starts to bend.
12. The two extremes of the plate, which were previously folded, are finally attached to one another. The instrument takes its common form, but despite its cylindrical shape, is still quite irregular.
13. The instrument is placed on a structure where it is hammered with a piece of soft wood (*caoba*) until a perfect cylindrical form is achieved. To facilitate this the instrument is looked at from above and little adjustments are made with the hands.
14. Two pieces of metal are cut for the production of the *mango* or *puño* (handle).
15. The external part of the longer piece is bent to avoid sharp edges.
16. The smaller metal piece is bent to produce the internal part of the handle.
17. The longer part is bent until it assumes the shape of a handle.
18. Both pieces are marked with a pencil and holes are made in specific places where they will be fixed to the instrument using nails.
19. The handle is filed to avoid sharp points.
20. The right place for the handle to be attached to the cylindrical instrument is calculated.
21. Marks are made in specific places where the handle will be attached
22. Holes are also made in the instrument.
23. The handle is attached using rivets.
24. With a hammer and a nail, small adjustments are made, eliminating sharp points (see Figure 19).
25. The edges of the instrument are bent with a hammer to avoid sharp edges. A file is also used for this purpose.
26. The completed instrument is polished.

The whole process can take anything up to a week to complete.

The process of making a *güira* from a tin plate is similar. However, there is no sophisticated machinery involved in the process. Regularity concerning the marks produced on the instrument is relative. Also, the instrument is not completely closed after being bent and no handle is attached to it. See Figure 17, and observe how the performer holds the instrument.

### *The gancho*

The *gancho* is the apparatus used to scrape the stippled surface of the instrument. Despite the fact that it has undergone several changes in the past few years it basically consists of a piece of wood in which pieces of wire are inserted. Lizardo describes this device in the following way:

“El guayo se raspa con un rascador de alambre completo o uno que se hace con un pequeño pedazo de madera al cual se insertan pequeños alambres metálicos de unos 4 a 5 cms.” (1988:248)

“The guayo is rasped with a wire scraper or similar device, that consists of a piece of wood into which short wires (4 to 5 cm) are inserted.”

Contrasting with Lizardo’s description, the *gancho* produced today (e.g. Jerino’s *gancho*) is 27 cms long. The wires themselves are around 12,5 cms long. While more traditional performers normally use *ganchos* with two, three, or four wires (see Figure 16), professional makers and musicians work with implements that have approximately ten wires. Jerino Güira, who has been producing such implements for the past twenty years, observes that musicians require different sizes of *gancho* to be adapted to their particular style of playing. Depending on such preferences, one *güirero* told me, a musician might even remove two wires, to make the *gancho* slightly lighter and perfect for his particular playing style. Jerino also describes how *ganchos* were formerly constructed using the metal frameworks of umbrellas (interview, 18/2/98). Today, bicycle spokes are used. Contemporary *ganchos* are generally longer than those used years ago. Jerino also says that he inserts the wires up to the middle, or even the end part of the wood, obtaining a specific balance on the implement as a whole. Its shape is also more anatomic, curved to the shape of the musician’s hand. Traditional *ganchos* generally do not present such a regular form. The wood used by Jerino to produce the *gancho* is the Chilean pine (*piño chileno*).

Musician Moreno Güira observes that with a new *gancho* he does not need to make too much effort to play (interview, 5/3/98). Referring to the good quality of Jerino's *ganchos*, he observes that they can last for about five months, quite remarkable considering the high level of friction applied when performing on the *güira*. However, this is also relative, since different musicians play the instrument in distinct ways. Once again, we see that the construction of the instrument, as well as the implement used to perform on it, are directly connected with established notions of sound quality, timbre, and performance practices. Here too, the idea of sameness concerning these subjects, can be dismissed. Musicians, as well as manufacturers such as Guillermo Güira, are extremely aware of such nuances.

### **Instrument sizes: differences and preferences**

Although personal preferences of size do exist, generally there is a common preference that varies from time to time. For instance, during my stay at Guillermo's home, several musicians observed that a specific size of instrument that had been used predominantly, was now in relative disuse. Some of these musicians came to Guillermo's place specifically looking for the instrument that was currently in use. This is also evidenced in the fact that, while Guillermo Güira described seven different sizes produced by him, his real production is centered on the production of two models (18" by 12" and 18" by 13"), as well as a small model (14" by 12"). The first number relates to the width of the plate, the second to the height of the instrument.

### **The ambiguous status of the *güira***

"There is no merengue without the *güira*"  
(Common Dominican saying)

"El *güirero* no es músico"  
"The *güirero* is not a musician"  
(Juan Bosch)

The importance of the *güira* was asserted by literally everyone I met in the Dominican Republic. Pily González sums it up thus:

"La Güira - Indispensable para el merengue  
Así como los vehículos necesitan gasolina para correr; los seres humanos el agua para sobrevivir; los enfermos las medicinas para ser curados, el ave las alas para poder volar y los árboles la lluvia para crecer, de igual manera necesita el merengue de la *güira*." (1994:4)

“The güira - essential to merengue

In the same way that vehicles need gasoline to move; human beings need water to survive; sick people need medicine to be healed, birds need wings to fly, and trees need rain to grow, merengue needs the güira.”

*Merengue* is “considered the national music of the Dominican Republic” (Austerlitz 1993:1). The *güira* is also articulated as a national symbol of Dominican identity. Such an aspect is reinforced by the fact that, of all the instruments used in merengue in the past, the *güira* and the double headed drum called *tambora* are the only instruments still in use today in, for instance, international modern pop *merengue* and other non-regional styles. On the other hand, despite this, Austerlitz comments on how, in the past, Dominicans saw the *güira* as an inferior instrument:

“Until this time [late 1970s] the güira was considered an inferior instrument by some Dominicans.” (1992:232)

Considering this statement one could conclude that this state of affairs has completely, or at least significantly, changed; not only because approximately twenty years have passed, but also because he emphasises that only *some* Dominicans considered the instrument to be inferior. My research on the instrument has shown that, while perceptions of it have changed considerably in recent years, these changes have basically occurred among people who, in general ways, are related with music and art (musicians themselves, instrument builders, artists, intellectuals, etc.). In my view *most* Dominicans today still consider the *güira* and its music, inferior. At least, this was the common impression I got from my interviews with people in urban areas such as Santo Domingo and S. Francisco Macoris. Austerlitz points out that:

“Güira style underwent radical changes beginning in the late 1970s, with new approaches introduced by *güireros* such as Pablito ‘Barriga’ of Johnny Ventura’s band and Manuel ‘La Güira,’ of Fernandito Villalona’s band.” (ibid.232)

Guillermo Güira also comments on these new approaches:

“... [La güira] ha evolucionado bastante musicalmente, ya que en décadas pasadas el güirero sólo tocaba un solo sonido y ahora hay que emplearse bien a fondo para sacarle todos los sonidos que demanda los cambios que ha sufrido el merengue en los últimos años.” (in Jose B. Sanchez 1991)

“... [the güira] has developed significantly, for in the past, the güirero played only one sound and now there is a need to play and use all sounds demanded by the changes that have affected merengue in the past years.”

The most famous Dominican phrase referring to *güira* playing and particularly the *güirero*, and their assumed inferiority, is Juan Bosch's saying “El *güirero* no es músico” (The *güirero* is not a musician).<sup>16</sup> During my stay in the country, I met a number of people who referred to Bosch's phrase, not only musicians, but lay people too. After a conversation about this with musician Edis Sánchez, we agreed that the simple fact that this phrase is *commonly* used today, demonstrates how important the *güira* is to Dominicans. If the object were relatively unimportant, the phrase would certainly have vanished, which has not happened (10/2/98). In addition, Bosch's words have a natural resonance throughout the country due to his status in the country. The following extract from Austerlitz, in which he quotes *güirero* Natanael ‘la Güira’ Cabrera, illustrates this:

“According to the story, Juan Bosch said that ‘güireros were not musicians.’... Juan Bosch was speaking at an affair and the güirero [of the band that was to play] had not shown up. So he made a wisecrack about the güira, saying that ‘güireros are not musicians, because, look, even I, who am not a musician, could play [the güira] in this group.” (1992:232)

He continues:

“One of the best güireros performing today, Natanael ‘La Güira’ Cabrera adds that with the innovations that have taken over güira playing in recent years, Bosch's statement is no longer true:... ‘Things have changed a lot. Nowadays, Juan Bosch would not be able to grab a güira and play in an orquesta.” (ibid.232-233)

However, as musician Vladimir Garcia Pantaléon affirms:

“The majority of people still think like Bosch. For instance, if you consider a band, ask anyone who is the ‘lesser’ musician. The general answer will be ‘the *güirero*’.” (interview, 7/2/98)

Referring to Bosch's statement, Austerlitz comments on the supposed simplicity of the instrument:

“Of course, the simplicity of güira playing had been exaggerated; it had never been so easy. The statement that ‘güireros are not musicians’ may be

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<sup>16</sup> Juan Bosch is a writer, politician and ex-president of the country.

motivated by the Dominican tendency to downgrade autochthonous, African influenced culture. The güira performs an essential role in several Dominican musics, and musicians who specialize in güira performance are highly esteemed and sought after in both rural and urban Dominican music. On the other hand, it is also true that pop merengue güira style has become more complicated in recent years.” (1992:233)

During my first visit to a recording studio in Santo Domingo, the general view of the simplicity and commonality of the *güira* was illustrated for me when I showed a series of pictures of scrapers used worldwide to a person working in the studio. Ironically, she observed that there are people (she was referring to me) who “want to complicate things.” She continued saying, “here everyone plays this, even with the spiral of this book” (she improvised and scraped a notebook’s spiral) (3/3/98).

It is true that *güira* playing has changed radically, featuring a series of innovations and sophisticated techniques, as Austerlitz points out, but I do not see that this has provoked significant changes in the ways in which the instruments, and the musicians who play them, are commonly perceived. Considering that the *güira* is seen as an essential symbol of Dominican identity, and how the same instrument has been consistently perceived as inferior, one is able to see that it occupies an ambivalent position in the imagination of Dominicans.

### **African origin and Dominican identity**

It must be seen that the use of the *güira* as a symbol of Dominican identity occurs in spite of Austerlitz’ observation about the “Dominican tendency to downgrade autochthonous, African-influenced culture” (1992:233). Considering that the instrument is supposedly African, it becomes easy to understand the relationship established by Austerlitz, between the instrument’s origin and its status as a limited and inferior device. Nowadays, as a result of works by pioneers such as ethnomusicologist Martha Ellen Davis and Fradique Lizardo, there is constant interest in Afrodominican culture. This I clearly perceived while visiting the country in 1998, through articles, conferences, and other activities highlighting African origin. As Austerlitz has also observed:

“Eurocentric attitudes have receded among some Dominican intellectuals and artists in the last two decades or so, and works examining the African elements in Dominican culture have appeared. At the forefront of the new orientation in Dominican folklore studies has been Fradique Lizardo, who has

discussed the African influence on Dominican culture as a whole...”  
(1992:37)

Musician Jose Duluc observes the irony of this, pointing out that the former Dominican tendency to deny African origin has now been replaced by a tendency to overemphasise it. This results in the *need* to work with African elements, regardless of the artist’s previous involvement with such a tradition. Thus, a series of ‘artificial’ works and discourses on the subject occur (interview, 14/3/98).

Lizardo, who had been criticised for his assertions concerning African origins in Dominican culture (Austerlitz 1993:37-38), in the chapter entitled *Instrumentos Musicales Indígenas* (1975), comments on the gourd instrument called *güiro*, and discusses the normal Dominican tendency to deny the African origin of such an instrument:

“A pesar que nuestra posición en cuanto a no considerar el güiro como un instrumento indígena, creemos que es clara y firme, pues a la luz de las investigaciones más profundas es un instrumento africano, *no obstante, por una serie de presiones locales que no pudimos eludir*, lo incluimos, aunque con reserva en el presente estudio y vamos a abundar un poco más con testimonios que nos dicen algo más sobre su origen africano... Algunos se preguntarán, si no hubiera sido más fácil eliminar de una vez el güiro en vez de incluirlo como instrumento musical indígena. En cualquier otro conglomerado social, eso era lo factible, pero en nuestro específico caso dominicano, eso hubiera sido ignorar a los ‘*sabihondos que dictan nuestras normas culturales*’ y *que han decretado que el güiro es indígena.*” (1988:19-20) [italics are mine]

“We really think that we should not consider the güiro an indigenous instrument. Based on more serious investigations it becomes clear that it is an African instrument. But due to several forms of intimidation that we could not comment on here, we include it in this text, observing that more data will be given to demonstrate its African origin... Some people will ask if it would not have been easier to eliminate the güiro, instead of including it as an indigenous instrument. In any other social conglomerate this would be possible, but in our case, by doing that, we would be ignoring those pedantic people (self proclaimed experts) who dictate our cultural norms and have established that the *güiro* is an indigenous instrument.”

I once asked a Dominican person about the African origin of the *güira*. She promptly gave a negative answer, observing that, historically, when Columbus arrived on the

island, he found an indigenous people with their own culture, including instruments such as the *maraca*, the *tambora*, and the *güira*. (interview with Alma S. Henriquez, 8/2/98). Identifying the instrument with indigenous people is a way of denying its African origin, and everything it represents to most Dominican people. Doubtless, this relates to an ambivalence in Dominican culture as a whole. In this sense, Austerlitz observes that:

“Although African-derived customs prevail in many areas of Dominican life, the upper class is of predominantly Spanish origin, and centuries of colonial and neo-colonial domination have resulted in a Eurocentric ideology among the population as a whole. On the whole, Dominicans are Hispanophiles, and have traditionally rejected the idea of any connection between their culture and Africa. The cleavage between the reality of Dominican culture and the ideal has caused an ambivalence about Dominican national identity... Noting that ‘ambivalence is inherent in the colonial situation,’ Fanon argues that Afro-Americans colonized by Europeans often take on ‘white masks’... Dominican scholars have noted Dominican ambivalence.” (1992:10-11)

By considering Davis’ assertion that

“most Dominicans prefer to think of the syncretic merengue cibaëño as representative of their traditional culture” (in Austerlitz 1992:11-12)

one can see the ways in which the *güira* could be an essential element in this constructed symbol of Dominican identity. Although the instrument is used throughout the country in distinct musics with strong African influence (e.g. *palos* or *atabales*), it is only through the type of merengue described by Davis and Austerlitz that the *güira* has acquired its status as a national symbol.

### **General representations of the *güira***

As I have said, in general ways, sophistication and innovation in *güira* playing, as pointed out by Austerlitz, do not significantly affect most people’s perceptions of the instrument as inferior and limited. A significant change in the way Dominicans perceive the *güira* would only occur if this inferiority were solely related to playing techniques. I argue that this is not the case. Representations of this instrument go beyond this. In fact, I believe that technical elements concerning *güira* playing are generally taken for granted and overlooked. Most people are not even aware of whether the instrument’s playing is sophisticated or not. For instance, Hamlet Boddem observes that the most popular *güira* players during the first semester of 1998 were not necessarily recognised because they were good performers. One of them was famous for being a comedian and imitating the



president of the country; another, a member of a female group, for her choreography and sensuality. *Güireros*, he says, “are generally unknown” (free translation from interview, 8/2/98).

Representations of the instrument refer to several elements discussed in Chapter One, which are now presented.

### *Harmonic/melodic versus rhythmic instruments*

Due to the incorporation of the European ideology commented on by Austerlitz (1992), there has been constant opposition between melodic/harmonic and rhythmic instruments. Generally the first are perceived as not only more sophisticated, but also more ‘musical’ than the second. Dominicans make a clear distinction between these groups of instruments, attaching specific qualities to them.

### *Formal training*

Similarly, there is a common perception, also evident in other cultures, that musicians playing instruments such as the trumpet and piano, who necessarily undertake formal training (i.e. music schools, conservatories, formal lessons on the instrument, etc.) and are able to read music, are more musical than percussionists, who, mainly in the context analysed here, learn music by hearing it:

“It is not necessary to be a *maestro* to play. It is easy. There is no need to study it [general percussion and *güira*], if you like it, you learn it.” (Alma S. Henriquez, free translation of interview, 8/2/98)

Although the term *maestro* is used more indiscriminately nowadays (Edis Sánchez, interview, 10/2/98), it used to refer specifically to musicians who were academically educated (i.e. pianists, saxophonists, etc.). Lenin Paulino explains that the word *maestro* refers to a certain level of prestige, someone like a professor who has evident technique and specialisation in a given subject (interview, 13/2/98). *Güireros* do present qualities of specialisation and high technical levels. However, because they do not receive the formal (academic) training that musicians playing other instruments do, there is a common tendency to see their skill as a *natural* quality that does not necessarily require effort to be developed. This relates to my previous discussion on the naturalisation of percussion. Learning the *güira* is a whole cultural process that is contrary to the notion of formal learning, as with classical music, with a teacher in a confined room. Even classical

training, at a certain level, relates to this. The ability to play this instrument refers to several modes of learning which break with such limitations. A significant number of the musicians I met, do spend time alone with their instruments, as if engaged in formal training. Generally, most of them play the *güira* by accompanying tape recordings. I met musicians that would dedicate from five to seven, or even more, hours a day, to this activity. With headphones or musical boxes, they develop their skills by accompanying popular hits, including several unison breaks (*cortes*), which are considerably complex. In this way, technical skills are developed and directly applied to the standard repertoire of the moment. On several occasions, while visiting Guillermo's place, I would see his young son, Erickson, who has a small *güira* made by his father, playing with music on the radio.

Although, technically speaking, he was not able to keep up with the speed of the songs, he had a remarkable knowledge of each song's structure, the rhythmic figures of each *corte*, tempo changes, and where he should play specific *güira* patterns such as *el afinque*. Austerlitz describes the use of this technique, as well as the use of improvisation:

“... contemporary *güira* style is characterized by a new rhythm, straight on the beat... This is called *el afinque* (loosely, ‘the groove’), or *el majao* (from *majar*, ‘to mash,’ since the straight up-and-down motion made by the *güirero* while playing this rhythm resembles the motion made while mashing rice or another grain with a mortar and pestle, a common chore in rural areas). The *afinque* is contrasted with elaborate improvised rhythms. Cabrera explains that the *afinque* is used to accompany sections of merengue arrangements that feature the voices or trumpet, while improvisations are best played during saxophone *jaleos*:... ‘During the trumpet section, you have to do the *afinque* [you have to play the beat], and with the saxophones, you can improvise. You can't improvise over the voice, or over the trumpet.’ (1992:233-234)

This knowledge about merengue is reinforced in the way it is played almost everywhere, for instance, in transportation vehicles, by street vendors, in stores, bars, and parties, and through radio and tape recordings as well.

### *Commonality*

Musician Vladimir Pantaleón observes that learning the *güira*, as well as the *tambora*, is something considered quite natural by Dominicans. The naturality, and commonality of *güira* playing, are the reason why it is seen as ‘less’ musical. It is normal to consider that anyone can play the *güira* and that it is quite an easy thing to do (free translation from

interview, 7/2/98). On the other hand, Musician Jose Duluc, in relating his own experience of learning Dominican percussion, gives a different perspective:

“Yo comencé a tocar tambores y era más facil para mí que la *güira*. La *güira* yo tuve que detenerme... para aprender el ritmo del merengue...bién, las variaciones...” (interview, 14/3/98)

“My first instrument was the drums, and they were easier to play than *güira*. With the *güira* I had to stop and check it, in order to learn the merengue and its variations properly.”

### *Noise*

Besides these factors there is a general perception of percussion as noise. To someone who told me she liked instruments like the piano, accordion and guitar, better than percussion, I said: “I think that is why people do not like the *güira* that much, they are synonymous with *bulla* (noise)”. She agreed with that, and by simulating the movements used to play drums, she portrayed them as instruments of disorder (Milagro Escalante, free translation of interview, 14/2/98). Duluc observes how this relationship naturally fixes percussion as non-musical. Commenting on the term noise applied to percussion he says:

“Es interesante porque implica una concepción de no música total.”  
(interview, 14/3/98)

“It is interesting because it implies a concept of not being music at all.”

### *Artisan work and material used in the construction of the güira*

Representations of these instruments as less sophisticated artefacts also refer to the material they are made from. This relates to Leppert’s assertion (1993) that objects are assigned different levels of status based on the material they are made from, as well as the degree of work required for their construction. In other words, there is a relationship between expensive instruments and power and status. I have commented on this fact in my description of *güira* making. As Alma Henriquez says, with regard to the form and construction of the *güira*, “anyone can do it” (a stippled tin plate) (interview, 8/2/98). Besides that, she remembers from her childhood, that these instruments were always easy to improvise in a situation such as an improvised party. Being a considerably easy artefact to make, an opposition between the *güira* and other instruments presenting a certain level of sophistication in their construction is naturally established. For instance,

the tin plate *güira* in folk ensembles does not have any parts attached to it that would give the idea that its construction or, in this case, its playing, are complex (see Figure 17). The fact is that a relationship is commonly established between the instrument's simple form and its supposed simplicity as a musical device. This is the key to understanding basic representations of these instruments. As I have observed before, innovations and sophistication concerning contemporary *güira* playing do not significantly affect perceptions of them as inferior devices. These qualities are generally overshadowed by the commonality and simplicity of its construction and form.

### *Non-musical objects*

The resemblance between the *güira* and functional objects such as cheese-graters has been previously discussed. It is interesting to observe that this analogy, when established by non-Dominicans, invariably reinforces the idea of musical defectiveness concerning the *güira*. Playing a kitchen device, or a household item such as the washboard, as previously discussed, recalls the notion of non-musicality, of a non-legitimate instrument. However, because the *güira* is a symbol of Dominican national identity, Dominicans establish this analogy between the musical instrument and the kitchen device in various other ways, which are not necessarily pejorative. In fact, the opposite is true. A good instance is the use of the image of the *güira* in advertisements for food. I have selected two advertisements that were in circulation in Santo Domingo during 1998. Both of them establish an analogy between the instrument and the grater, based on their similar forms. The first advertisement, entitled '*Cocina Criolla*' (Creole cuisine) (see Figure 20) was brought out by the firm 'Super Pola', a food distributor in the cities of Santo Domingo and Santiago de Los Caballeros. The image juxtaposes a partially grated coconut and a *güira* (simulating a real grater) on a wooden table. The message here is evident, at least for Dominicans. At once, the instrument highlights Dominican identity, both music and cuisine, and its traditions, as represented by the rustic wooden table. To my knowledge, this correlation does not carry any pejorative meaning: the musical instrument is used here as a symbol of the *quality* of Dominican culture.

Similarly, the advertisement for 'Unta Rica' butter (see figure 21), overlaps the images of the instrument, identified by its handle and its playing position, and the hand holding a knife with butter on it (in simulation of the *gancho*), with the image of a corncob, the surface of which resembles the instruments' stippled surface. The notion of quality attached to the instrument, as well as to the product, is reinforced by the saying 'Una suave nota de sabor' (A soft tasty note).

We see that the role of the instrument as a symbol of Dominican identity allows the construction of such advertisements. In this context, the relation between a musical instrument and a kitchen device is produced in a way that emphasises the quality of both elements. This refers to Hall's discussion (1997) of systems of representation presented in Chapter One. The process of attaching meaning, and establishing associations between such distinct images, is primarily cultural.

### **Güira and social status**

During my first visit to the Dominican Republic in 1995, I was told that playing in a band represented an opportunity for success, social status, and also the possibility to leave the country. I started to wonder at what level this related to the need to be a proficient *güirero*. Although there is a clear link between music and social mobility, it does not make sense to assume that one would develop such skills exclusively for these reasons. Musician Vladimir Pantaleón observes that the high level of sophistication achieved by *güireros* is something quite independent of the desire for a 'visa' to the United States (interview, 7/2/98). However, it is a fact that many bands stop playing when they go abroad, and many musicians do not return to the Dominican Republic (interview with Hamlet Boddem, 8/2/98). In some ways, being a proficient musician does bring opportunities, but this is not the main reason for the development of musical skills. Austerlitz comments of the social mobility and status of musicians thus:

“Merengue bands often provide a path of social mobility. Barreira goes so far as to assert that merengue performance is the ‘principal avenue of social mobility’ in the republic, and notes that social mobility via merengue often results in alienation... Youth living in barrios often join merengue bands, and if a musician plays with successful groups, he or she may achieve the appearance, if not the reality, of a raised class status. Natanael ‘La Güira’ told me that... ‘I used to be a kid that people ordered around. I used to sell bottles on the street.’ Beginning around the time that he first appeared on television, people have treated him differently... ‘I have changed social status a bit... People see me differently... They see me as an artist now’. However, his heightened social status has put him in a difficult position, since he is expected to symbolically express his new status, even when the required symbols are beyond his economic means...” (Austerlitz 1992:290-291)

Edis Sánchez also concurs that playing in a combo is a way of raising one's social status, since travelling and playing overseas gives an impression of success at home. He also observes that travelling and leaving the country is a real motivation for many musicians.

The fact that many of them do not return creates problems for other musicians who want to have the same opportunity to perform abroad, in terms of obtaining travel visas (free translation of interview, 10/2/98). Obtaining a visa to immigrate to the United States represents such a problem for Dominicans that musician Juan Luis Guerra has composed a song entitled *Visa para un sueño* (Visa for a dream) about the problem.

Some musicians do raise their social status through performance in real or fictitious terms. The word *aceite*, an oily substance used to style hair to make it quite uniform and distinct (grease), is commonly used to describe how many of them, once achieving this position, become snobs. While visiting the country in March 1998. I consistently tried to meet a specific *güirero de estudio* (a *güirero* working in a recording studio) but after more than fourteen phone calls and messages it became clear that he would not show up. When I communicated this fact to a friend of mine, who is also a percussionist, he criticized the *güirero's* lack of attention towards me, observing that he had too much *aceite*. This musician was one of the most important *güireros* recording and performing merengue in the country at that time. In contrast to the way in which most Dominican musicians treat other musicians like myself, with enormous respect, his behaviour is related to the new social status achieved by him through his playing. Conversely, someone else I interviewed was of the opinion that a *güirero* has no prestige or status *at all*. For example, she considered that if the *güirero* introduced himself to a *muchacha* (a girl), he would have to say, at least, that he played the bongo *as well as* the *güira*. Saying that he played only the *güira* would be embarrassing. (Manuela Feliz, free translation from interview, 12/3/98).

Something else that possibly reflects on the status of the *güira* is the use of cases for its transport. Cases are normally used for the transport and protection of instruments such as the trumpet and saxophone, due to the fragility of their bodies and the fact that they are relatively expensive instruments. The image of the musician carrying a case is generally related to the more legitimate musical instruments. Somehow, its use among *güireros* (some of them) seems to approximate the *güira* to other musical instruments, helping to construct the image of a more professional musician, something that the instrument itself does not achieve.

### **The reality of studios**

Only a small, exclusive circle of musicians known as studio musicians are called upon to record on a regular basis. One percussionist likened them to the *mafia* because they try to monopolise all the recording work (Andres Angele, interview, 18/3/98). Other musicians told me that although there are musicians with the capacity to do recording work, opportunities for them to do so are very limited. Also, musicians like the *güirero* who refused to meet me, who are highly qualified for this activity, are more economically viable for recording studios, since they can do the work faster. As someone told me, musicians who need more time to listen to a song or memorise the breaks, represent a loss of time and money for the studios. This means that studio musicians often replace members of groups in a recording session, which can result in a big difference between the live sound of the band and its recorded album. This happens not only with the *güirero*, but also with bass, saxophone, trumpet and vocals (ibid.). Musician Andres Angele says that in many cases the original percussionist of a band, as well as the bass player, do not record. After the album is released, it is necessary for the band to play the music as it was recorded because the public wants to listen to the music played in the same way. The musician has to “*coger la pela*” and “*matarse a aprender lo que el otro hace*” (work hard, arduously, and kill him or herself to learn what the studio musician did), by listening to a tape of the recording at home (ibid.). Andres also affirms that often studio recording musicians intentionally play in complex ways to make it difficult for the music to be played by others. For instance, he observed that the bassist of his band could not play the elaborate phrases played by the musician who recorded in the studio.

### **Güira and low payment**

While some *güireros*, such as those making studio recordings, do make money out of playing, percussionists and *güireros* are generally badly paid compared with other musicians. This is also a reality for merengue musicians as a whole. As Austerlitz puts it:

“While contemporary merengue producers and some bandleaders have made a great deal of money in recent years, most performers have not fared as well; as one merengüero put it, ‘*el músico es mal pagado*’ [musicians are poorly paid]... Percussionists are usually compensated U.S. \$5 to \$30 per dance, while trumpeters, saxophonists, bassists and pianists receive to up U.S. \$40 to \$45 per dance.” (1992:289-290)

Moreno Güira says that the *güirero* and percussionists receive less money because they play by ear and do not study music formally (free translation from interview, 7/3/98).

Natanael 'La Güira' observes that "... if musicians insist on more money, they are replaced" (in Austerlitz 1992:290). This is a fact, because it seems that there are many percussionists and *güireros* (interview with Joanna Sánchez, 19/2/98).

### **Güira and concepts of sound among musicians**

Oye con amor  
El sonido suave de la güira  
Para que tu sientas  
Lo bonito de la vida  
Estoy reclamando  
Que se una toda la familia  
Para así buscar lo que hace falta  
en América Latina

Listen with love  
To the soft sound of the güira  
In order to feel  
The beauty of life  
I am claiming  
that all the family is united  
To seek what is missing  
in Latin America

(Música Latina,  
Fernando Villalona)

Villalona's song refers to the soft sound of the *güira*. This directly opposes the common belief that the *güira*'s sound is extremely harsh, and noisy - *bullá*. It indicates that a different perception of the instrument's sonority does exist. This is more evident among *güireros* themselves. For instance, Moreno Güira describes the playing of *güirero* 'El Beco' as decent and clear (he was referring to the capacity of this musician to play the *cortes* with extreme clarity). Referring to Manuel La Güira, who used to play with Fernando Villalona in the 1980s, Moreno says "he played a flavoured, tasty *güira*". Of another musician whose playing was not as 'clean', he says "he played a very dirty *güira*" and referring to *güirero* Papi Rosario, he says "he plays the *güira* brutally" (with force), something that was confirmed by Guillermo (interview, 5/3/98).

It is evident that a specific vocabulary is used to describe nuances of sound. A meeting with Ana Floria Hernandez, who used to play the *güira* in the city of S. Francisco Macoris, was quite illustrative of this. For instance, she refers to the sound of the *güira* in a particular physical space and how the sound mixes with the breeze. She observes that practising in a closed room does not give the desired sound amplitude and that playing in



front of a curtain also affects the sound. She establishes a correlation between up strokes and the heartbeat and between down strokes and the tenderness of water. Besides that, she also establishes a clear relation between the lyrics of the song and her playing. For instance, if the lyrics are communicating the idea of tenderness, she plays the *güira* softly, and so on.

Moreover, Ana's perception of performance practices related to the *güira* also relates to other important issues about music and society. She observes that people could get irritated with her practising, thus she plays when people are not sleeping. Percussion serves to 'waken' people, to make them aware, to provoke a moment of scandal. Her neighbourhood is proud of her art, not least because it is rare to see a woman performing *merengue*. In comparison with other musicians, for instance saxophone players, who look down when they play, she observes that the *güirero* or *güirera* is always able to look around, to be aware of what is going on around him or her. This versatility enables *güira* players to improvise freely and respond to musical ideas from the other instruments in the band. No other instrument seems to be used in this way, except for the *tambora* in certain styles.

Ana said that she also played in groups in order to lose weight. Performances are physically demanding, mainly because she moves her body a lot when she plays. She said she learnt how to play using a comb and a tin can and illustrated this by taking a tomato paste can and rubbing its ridged surface with my pen (see Figure 22). Lastly, she confirmed that rasping a hand on the opposite forearm is common practice when teaching people to play the *güira*. (free translation from interview, 8/2/98). As Leppert (1993) describes it, this relates to the way in which people perceive music as a mediation between the eyes, the ears, as well as the body. In this case, the movements used to play the *güira* are widely understood in the Dominican Republic. I met a woman who could not remember the names for the maracas and the *güira*, but she was able to talk about these instruments by imitating the way the musicians play them (Maria Costa, 8/2/98). Everywhere I went people used similar movements to refer to *güira* playing.

Notions of sound differences also become apparent in the particular sonorities of different groups and artists. Austerlitz describes how Cabrera made use of different ways of playing, depending on who he was recording with:

“Cabrera, who has recorded and performed with most of the best merengue groups, including Wilfrido Vargas, 440, Los Rosario, and La Coco Band, notes that he must conform his playing to the style of each group... ‘You have to change your style according to the group you are in. I can’t play the way I did with Ramón Orlando when I play with Dioni Fernández, because these are totally different [styles]... And Los Rosario have their own style, and La Coco has its own way of playing the güira’.” (1992:234)

Bolívar, a sound engineer working at a recording studio, told me that the desirable sound for the *güira* is a rhythmic one that does not sound like a tin plate (*lata*) (interview, 1/4/98). This seems to oppose the concepts of sound quality existent among groups who use instruments made from tin plates. Also, there is a general theory that the more an instrument is used, the better it sounds. This is illustrated by a story told to me by Sánchez about a *güirero* (Felix Güira) in the capital who lent his new instrument to an Evangelical person to play in religious services at his church. A softer and better timbre was achieved once the stippled surface of the instrument had been sufficiently rasped, whereupon the *güirero* repossessed his instrument. This practice has been popularly named *curar la güira* (to cure or to heal the *güira*), meaning to play it regularly to achieve the desired sound. Similarly, when Sánchez had to perform a piece, the same *güirero* selected an instrument that had been rejected by all other musicians due its bad appearance. Regardless of this, the musician affirmed that it had a better sound (free translation of interview, 10/2/98). Guillermo Güira, confirming the use of the instrument among Evangelical people, also affirmed that “the more the *güira* is used and polished (played), the better it sounds” (interview 21/2/98). It is interesting to notice that, while Guillermo has changed the way in which the instrument’s parts are fixed in order to avoid it falling apart, Lizardo observes that it is when the instrument really breaks down that a good sound is achieved:

“El guayo se fabrica con una hoja de hierro galvanizado (zinc) que se dobla hasta hacer un pequeño vaso cilíndrico al cual se le ponen dos conos en los dos extremos y un asa o agarradera en la parte central del cilindro. Cuando están viejos, se le desprenden los conos, se pierde la soldadura y queda una hoja circular que se dice es la que da mejor sonido.” (1988:248)

“The guayo is constructed using a plate of zinc which is folded until it becomes a cylindrical vase; two cones are attached to each of its extremities and a handle to its central part. When these instruments are old, losing their parts and only a circular plate remains, it is said that this plate is the one that gives the best sound.”

Because of sound differences resulting from the degree to which the instrument's surface has been used, some musicians play on two distinct instruments. For instance, they have an instrument to be played in more conventional situations (e.g. shows), and a second one that is specifically used for recording sessions.

### **The diversity of sounds on the güira**

The following is a brief comment on the enormous variety of sounds produced on the *güira*. The accompanying CD helps to illustrate, at least partially, this variety. There are a number of reasons for this diversity. For instance, the material the instruments are made from, e.g. oil can plates or stainless steel; the regularity of the stippled surface; the depth of the spots on the stippled surface; the sharpness of the nail used to produce the spots, and whether the instrument is completely closed (compare Figures 17 and 19). The type of *gancho* used to play it and the number and type of wires attached also affect the sound. In addition, the way the musician holds the *gancho* (with more or less tension), whether the wrist or the entire arm is used to play, and what part of the wire is rasped on the instrument (e.g. its tip or its middle part) which affect the articulation of rhythmic phrases. For instance, the rhythmic figure played at the very beginning of track 33, demands that the *gancho* is held in a specific way and played with quite a loose wrist movement. On the other hand, members of the *Atabale* group from Herba Buena, Hato Mayor (figure 16) hold the *gancho* tightly, and make more use of arm movements. This style is used in other rural groups and results in specific levels of tension and particular scraping sounds. Note, for instance, the *sarandunga* on track 12. By holding the *gancho* in a different way, and using different parts of the hand, wrist and arm to play it, the surface of the instrument is rasped distinctively. For instance, the musician can rasp a great deal of the surface, or just a bit of it. Note that 'staccato' sounds are used in various ways in modern *güira* playing, for instance, in *bachatas* (see track 25), *bachata-merengue* (track 27), and pop *merengue* (tracks 28 and 29). Of course, there are different styles, and *güira* playing must conform to them. Different styles require different rhythmic patterns. This can be clearly noticed in tracks 10 to 34, a selection that includes examples from 1950 to 1997. Some styles of playing appear to be 'looser', for instance, the *güira* on the Mangulina on track 14. Doubtless, *güira* playing can be extremely improvisational. The musician is relatively free to improvise, to respond to other instruments, and to embellish musical phrases. See how the *güira* on tracks 18 and 24 follows, responds to, and completes the melodic line. Styles such as the *Tipico*, and *Tipico Moderno*, normally feature 'adventurous' *güira* playing (see track 21 and 23).

Elaborate rhythmic figures are also used in pop *merengue* (tracks 28 and 29). Different levels of ‘softness’, ‘tenderness’, and control of the rasping movement on the instrument’s surface are illustrated by tracks 30 and 34. It must be said that sounds are also processed in recording studios. One could argue that sound differences basically arise from this practice. As sound engineer Bolivar said, there is a particular sound for the *güira* that is considered desirable, something more rhythmic, dry. (pers. comm. 2/4/98). In this sense, the listener might compare styles of playing in, for instance, pop *merengue* (tracks 28, 29, 31) to a hi-hat or an electronic sound, where the sound of the *güira* is as precise as a machine. However, it is a fact that diversity occurs independently of the capacity of the studios to process sounds. This is evident when one sees the instruments and witnesses live performances in the Dominican Republic.

### **The Cuban Güiro**

In this section I observe the way in which the Cuban *güiro* has been used and perceived in that country. I focus on changes in perceptions of this instrument, as well as of percussion generally, as a result of new cultural conditions established after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. During my short visit to Havana I was surprised to find that the new musical educational system, implemented after the Revolution, appears to have affected conventional ways of seeing this instrument.

The *güiro* has been used in Cuba for approximately two centuries. Santos describes its use in Cuban as well as Puerto Rican musics, as follows:

“The indigenous peoples of the Caribbean area made maracas and guiros out of gourds, deer horns and tortoise shells. The guiro gradually found its way into the music of the Spanish peasant colonists (referred to as ‘Jibaros’ in Puerto Rico, and ‘Guajiros’ or ‘Campesinos’ in Cuba) and eventually into the music of the upper social classes. Its clear, rhythmic sound became a trademark of Cuban and Puerto Rican music. At the end of the 18th century, when the dance and rhythm known as *Contradanza* was introduced into Cuba by the French colonists from neighboring Haiti, the Guiro’s role as the anchor of popular Cuban dance music began. During the 19th century, the *Contradanza* gave birth to the *Danza*, the *Habanera* and the *Danzon*. These were the Cuban popular dance forms of the day. The musical groups that interpreted these forms were generally known as ‘Orquestas Típicas.’ These groups consisted of woodwinds, brass, strings and percussion. The percussion section was made up of *Tympani* (the precursor of the *Timbales*) and *Guiro*. The *Tympanist* would play the more floral embellishments while the ‘*Guirero*’ (Guiro player) held the steady time line. The groups known as

‘Charangas’ emerged from the Orquestas Típicas. The role of the Guiro in Charanga music is comparable to the role of the wings in the flight of a bird. The Charangas used violins, flute, bass, piano, Timbales and Guiro. Later Viola, Cello, Congas and voices were added. In today’s popular Cuban music, as well as in the Cuban-based style known as *Salsa*, the Guiro is also used extensively.” (Santos 1985:45)

Concerning the specific role of the instrument in Cuban music, described by Santos as “the wings in the flight of a bird”, Enrique Lazaga, director of the *Orquesta Ritmo Oriental*, observes that:

“mientras el *güiro* es un instrumento limitado con relación a lo que es la rítmica, la importancia estriba en que él tiene en su poder el amarre, el llevar el ritmo, en que todo el mundo tiene que entrar por él...” (personal interview, 24/3/98)

“Although the *güiro* is a limited instrument in terms of its rhythmic aspect, its importance lies in the fact that it has the power to tie all other instruments together, conducting the rhythm. Everyone has to follow it.”

It is interesting to notice that Lazaga, himself a *güirero* for more than 25 years, conceives this instrument as rhythmically limited. He observes that:

“lo más que se le puede sacar a el *güiro* son de 2 a 3 sonidos, no se le puede sacar mas.” (ibid)

“at best, what can be taken from the *güiro* are two or three sounds, no more.”

During a meeting with Lazaga, I demonstrated some of my ideas about scrapers, as well as the way I perform different sounds on these instruments. Although he was impressed with the diversity of sounds, he pointed out that it was important to differentiate between my work and his work *in relation to* the different musical contexts in which we play. However, he can also be seen as an innovator within his musical context. Commenting on his performance at the Lincoln Center in New York in January 1998, he observed that the audience was surprised by his solo performance on the *güiro*. In the Cuban tradition, a solo performance on this instrument is extremely rare. According to Lazaga:

“... el *güiro* nunca ha soliao... el *güiro* siempre fué un instrumento con el cual se llevaba la marcha, la gente se agarraba...” (ibid.)

“... the *güiro* has never been performed solo... the *güiro* has always been conceived as an instrument to conduct the ‘march’ [i.e. the tempo and rhythm of the music], to which everyone must hold, cling to.”

Lazaga also claims to be the creator of a rhythm called *machete*. According to him, due to the increase of tempo in music, this new rhythmic pattern had to be created for the *güiro* in order for it to maintain its role as an anchor for the entire band (Track 8 on the accompanying CD). He says that:

“Los tiempos van cambiando y la música se hace más viva” (ibid.)

“Time changes and the music becomes more alive” [i.e. its tempo speeds up]

Concerning this innovation, based on his own notion of the limitations of this instrument, he says:

“el *güiro* no se le podía introducir más... ¿Que es lo que había que introducirle al *güiro*? Una nueva rítmica, una nueva temática... esto [he demonstrates the old pattern] tiende a que el ritmo se desparrame, se riegue... Como es mui rápido (también) no da estabilidad...” (ibid.)

“Nothing else could be introduced to the *güiro*... What could possibly be introduced to it? A new rhythm, a new theme... In this way, [the old pattern performed on the *güiro*] does not promote musical cohesion; the rhythm is all around the place. Because it has to be performed too fast, musical stability [he is referring to the time line] is affected.”

Lazaga’s work with the *güiro* must also be understood within the context that this instrument is generally perceived as insignificant, a perception that is challenged by Santos:

“Many people consider the Guiro an insignificant instrument - only to be picked up by a horn player (who usually doesn’t know how to play it) between solos and horn lines - or, used in some other novel or demeaning manner. In reality, the Guiro is a noble instrument of regal extraction with a rich history rivalling that of any musical instrument. In Cuba, Puerto Rico and other areas, many players specialize in mastering the Guiro as their main instrument. Some of the legendary ‘Guireros’ over the years have been Gustavo Tamayo, Oswaldo ‘Chihuahua’ Martinez, Mon Rivera, and Patricio ‘Don Toribio’ Rijos, in whose honor a statue stands in San Juan, Puerto Rico.” (1985:45)

I observed horn players playing the *güiro* at a number of performances I attended in Cuba. During a performance by the group *Los Jovenes Classicos del Son*, the trumpet player played the *güiro*. During a rehearsal of another band in central Havana, the trumpet player played the Dominican *güira*, which has lately been used to replace the gourd instrument in groups where electronic instruments such as keyboards, as well as the drum set, have been incorporated to perform Cuban music. In Lazaga's opinion, the use of the metal instrument "nunca da lo que es entonces dentro de la música cubana" (never gives the flavour and character of what Cuban music really is) (interview, 24/3/98).

In spite of this, according to Lazaga certain groups in Cuba do employ musicians to perform *güiro* exclusively. He himself is a good example of this. His position is also remarkable because he is, in fact, the *director* of *Orquesta Ritmo Oriental* (see Figure 12), a high musical position for a *güirero* to occupy in view of the fact that scrapers have systematically not been considered to be 'real' musical instruments.

This can be understood if one considers the musical education system implemented in Cuba after the Revolution. Cuban music education includes the learning of general musical elements such as piano playing, harmony, and composition, by all players. Musician Eladio Terry, known as Don Pancho, who is responsible for the incorporation of another 'unusual' instrument, the "*chekere*..., widely used in the syncretized African religions that have survived and flourished in Cuba" (Notes for the CD *Los Terry*, 1996), into traditional styles of Cuban music such as the *charanga*, observes that:

"before the Revolution there were no schools and percussion was generally conceived as inferior. Mainstream instrument players had to study formally, but percussion was a different case" (free translation from interview, 21/3/98).

Don Pancho also observes how *orquestas* are constituted by what are called first and second parts, and are classified in categories 'A' or 'B'. Musicians are classified based on these distinctions, a direct reference to their *general* musical knowledge. Thus Don Pancho, himself a former director of the legendary *charanga* group *Maravillas de Florida*, observes how it is possible for a piano player to be paid less than a *güirero* depending on how he or she is classified. For instance, a *güirero* from an *orquesta* 'A' (first level, implying more status and musical skill) earns more than any musician in an

*orquesta 'B'* (interview, 21/3/98). Thus, *it is not* the instrument *alone* that counts for higher status, but general musical knowledge. Lazaga also testifies to this saying “it is not the instrument itself that is in question here” (interview, 24/3/98). Concerning the position of the director, he says:

“antes cualquiera era un director... Al triunfo de la revolución se puso la cosa donde va. El director debe ser un músico técnico..., un tipo con una integralidad..., no importa el instrumento.” (interview, 24/3/98)

“In the past, anyone was a director... With the triumph of the Revolution things were put in their right place. The director must be a musician with technique..., an integral person, no matter which instrument is played.”

In this way, it is possible to see how percussion has come to be seen as ‘more musical’ in Cuba. This can be illustrated by an incident where I was approached by a person named Delvis Ramos who, on seeing me rasping the spiral of my notebook while waiting to meet Lazaga, asked me if I was *studying* under Lazaga (24/3/98). This relation of scraping to *studying*, a notion intrinsically related to formal training and serious musicianship, would not take place in any other country or social context.

What is striking about Cuba is that high levels of musicianship are achieved in spite of a lack of material resources. Francisco González López (Francisco Pancho), choreographer and ballet instructor, observes that this remarkable level of quality concerns art *in general*, not only music. According to him, in spite of these material limitations, that are largely the result of the imposition of North American economic sanctions on the country during the past decades (interview, 25/3/98), students of the arts generally develop a high standard of performance skill.

A number of musicians visiting the country have been struck by this disparity. Brazilian percussionist Ney Rosauero visited Cuba in November 1991 to perform his marimba concert with orchestra, as well as to give percussion clinics there. In his article entitled *A Brazilian Percussionist in Cuba* (1992) he describes the problems he had with broken instruments, the lack of facilities and general material conditions in Cuba. For instance, it was impossible to buy ropes for the marimba bars. Also, he had to play with a very small string section because no photocopying machine was available to duplicate enough scores to accommodate more players. At the same time, he was impressed by the standard of the



musicianship, as well as the fact that both folk and classical percussion traditions were equally emphasised in musical programmes. He said:

“I was very impressed by the talent of Cuban composers and players, especially the younger ones who showed both musical talent and technical ability. I was told that this is because in Cuban music education starts in the elementary grades and that standards for technical skills, such as sight reading and piano proficiency, are very high for young people who want to prepare for professional training... All the students have to go through the two programs [folk and classical percussion] with equal emphasis. The programs include: snare, timpani (with great emphasis in tuning exercises), mallets, and orchestral studies as well as batás, congas, bongos and hand accessories.” (1992:27-28)

However, what is missing in Rosauero’s account, as Francisco Pancho points out, is how material limitations in Cuba relate to political facts, i.e. the Cuban/North American problem.

In spite of the fact that the *güiro* is seen as a ‘more musical’ instrument in relation to notions of *general* musical education among Cuban musicians, the perception of the instrument by Cuban people in general seems to be very different. Gilberto Noriega Sosa, a percussion lecturer at the school *EVA Juan Pablo Duarte*, observes that:

“El *güiro* es un instrumento que la gente lo vé como insignificante... Las personas aquí, a veces los que no conocen de música ven al *güirero* como una gente ahí (que toca el *güiro*...), no saben que el *güiro* es tan imprescindible como la conga... La gente lo vé como una cosa normal.” (interview, 24/3/98)

“People see the *güiro* as an insignificant device... People here, who probably do not know about music, see the *güirero* as someone who is not really needed. They do not know that the *güiro* is as necessary as, for instance, the conga... People do not see the *güiro* as deserving of any special attention.”

According to Damarys Suárez, a specialist in Cuban folk dance, “the *güiro* is relatively insignificant to Cuban people”. She observed that:

“you can perfectly imagine an *orquesta* without this instrument. You do not even hear it. However, this is not true of other instruments such as the piano or the *tumbadoras*.” (free translation from interview, 24/3/98).

Nancy Miro Montalvo, Damary's mother, also observed that "an *orquesta* can play without the *güiro*" (interview 24/3/98). And Damarys complemented her statement by saying:

"the *güiro* is insignificant, and this is the normal perception of those who see an *orquesta* playing. In the past, it could be perceived for its role in specific musical styles. The *güiro* means nothing! Nothing! Nothing! Those instruments that are more important are the bass, the piano and, overall, horns" (interview, 25/3/98).

It is interesting to see that, although they are acquainted with these traditions (Damarys is a professional dancer and plays Cuban percussion and Nancy listens to Cuban music using percussion instruments on a daily basis), they perceive the *güiro* as being insignificant. This is in spite of Nancy's familiarity with the *güiro* and her evident sensitivity to its performance. For instance, she referred to beautiful performances of these instruments by musicians playing for the groups *Los Van Van* and *Orquesta Aragon* (interview, 25/3/98). Although she perceives the instrument as insignificant, she is able to qualify a performance on this instrument. In this way we see that, as in the case of the Dominican *güira*, the Cuban *güiro* is, at a certain level, also perceived ambiguously by Cubans.

As discussed in Chapter One, representations are culturally determined. The case analysed here illustrates how binary oppositions such as rhythm/melodic-harmonic, which normally serve as a way to separate percussion from 'real' musical instruments, have been relatively undermined by the social conditions established by the new political system established in Cuba. This has affected its educational system in significant ways that have resulted in a distinct social condition allowing one to perceive scrapers differently. At the same time, conventional ways of perceiving these instruments are still present in other spheres of Cuban society.

As I discussed previously, people establish a relationship between the form and the act of rasping and certain kitchen utensils. For instance, the popular name for the famous national monument to the hero Jose Martí, the *Monumento Nacional, Obelisco de La Plaza de La Revolucion*, in Revolution Square in Havana, is '*Raspadura*'. This is a direct reference to the kitchen device *guayo*, used to grate carrots and *yuca* (manioc), as well as to elements related to the culture of sugar cane (Francisco González López, and Léa

Maria Regueira, interview, 25/3/98). This analogy is based on the form of the monument, which resembles a grater.

By considering the way in which political changes in Cuba have affected the perception of percussion in general and the *güiro* in particular, one might consider that Cuba has undergone a 'double revolution', in both the political and cultural arenas. The implementation of a new and revolutionary educational system seems to underlie the existence of a 'revolutionary' way of seeing the 'insignificant' scraper in that country.

## Chapter V

### TWENTIETH CENTURY MUSIC<sup>17</sup>, PERCUSSION, AND SCRAPERS

#### Introduction

In this chapter I focus on the ways in which representations of musical scrapers are articulated in contemporary art music. It focuses on the potential that exists in contemporary music to break with traditional ways of representing scrapers. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first part I consider how, and at what level, general contemporary music makes non-representation of these musical instruments possible, while simultaneously perpetuating and recreating old forms of representation previously discussed. In the second part I look at how traditional forms of representations are maintained by looking specifically at the contemporary percussion repertoire. I compare the use of scrapers and other ‘small’ instruments in this context, observing how they are articulated within very narrow sets of practices. In other words, percussion has become a canonized field, and its standard repertoire does not provide a musical scenario in which musical scrapers have a significant place. In the last section I consider how representations of scrapers have been changed, looking at my composition for solo scraper entitled *Xavier Guello* (1993-94). I observe how and why this work has been effective in changing common representations of these instruments.

#### Innovation and Incorporation of New Materials

Twentieth Century music has explored and incorporated a great diversity of sounds into its vocabulary and repertoire, with composers starting to organise these new sounds in innovative ways. When we observe any of the previous historical periods of Western art music, we see that such innovation had never been so profound and extreme. Even those contemporary movements, styles, or composers that could be described as conservative relate, at certain levels, to this search for *the new*. This, of course, not only relates to sound, but also to form, performance, and other elements of music making. In this

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<sup>17</sup> Throughout the text, terms such as ‘contemporary [art] music’, ‘[modern] Western [art] music’, as well as ‘Twentieth Century music’, are used to refer to the music which, by distinct ways, follows the tradition of the Nineteenth Century European art music. Despite its wide diversity, it retains certain features of the old (e.g. the concert-hall, written music/notational system, individual composers as creators, orchestral tradition, symphonic form, aspects of tonal-functional harmony, etc.). The various works of such a tradition differ in regard to the degree of influence by classical and romantic attitudes.

process of innovation, each musical work appears to have quite an individualised existence. As Salzman describes it:

“each conception had to establish its own unique premises... In short, instead of each work being an instance of its class, each work creates its own class (of which it may be the only member).” (1974:183)

By the beginning of this century, percussion had become one of the main sources of sound material for the production of Western art music. Debussy gave extreme value to timbre, Stravinsky broke the subjugation of rhythm to melodic and harmonic structures, and Varèse, through works such as *Ionisation*, created a “new conceptual musical space... [where] melody, harmony, and timbre... are assimilated to rhythm and accent” (Salzman 1974:135).

In many ways, the dominance of percussion was established through contact with non-Western musical cultures. As Wood observes:

“Music of other cultures has often been grounded in the primacy of percussion, but here in the west, before the turn of the century, not a whole lot was available beyond a handful of drums, cymbals, and bells. The true coming of age of western percussion has taken place at the same time as the birth of the modern age and of the avant-garde in art.” (1991:45)

Musical instruments were inspired by, copied, and brought from other cultures. For instance, in his article entitled *A Wealth of Ancient and New Instruments Native to the Orient*, Carrol C. Bratman, founder of Carrol Musical Instrument Service Corporation, describes his business/pleasure trip to East Asia in the following way:

“The trip itself was successful beyond imagination. We toured 12 countries in Asia and the Far East, hunting for new sound effects and percussion items to complement Carrol Musical Instrument Service Corp. In such countries as Taiwan, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia and India, where, more often than not, poverty predominates, I found a fantastic wealth of unusual percussive sounds; these many new items will soon be available to our clients.” (1969:73)

It is not only the extensive use of percussion instruments that has been incorporated from non-Western cultures or European folk music, but also compositional forms and several other musical elements. Reich’s minimalism, and works by Béla Bartók, Henry Cowell,

Alan Hovhaness, Carlos Chávez, Silvestre Revueltas, Amadeo Roldán, Harry Partch and John Cage are good examples of this.

### **Sound autonomy**

By considering several contemporary and avant-garde musical works, one observes that a number of composers consider musical sounds almost as anonymous and autonomous elements. This represents an attempt to emphasise sound for sound's sake, with no reference to, or interest in, emotional or mental associations with them. This notion is presented by Cage, who comments on the work of Christian Wolff:

“In an article called ‘New and Electronic Music,’ Christian Wolff says: ‘What is, or seems to be, new in this music?... One finds a concern for a kind of objectivity, almost anonymity - sound comes into its own. The ‘music’ is a resultant existing simply in the sounds we hear, given no impulse by expressions of self or personality. It is indifferent in motive, originating in no psychology nor in dramatic intentions, nor in literary or pictorial purposes. For at least some of these composers, then, the final intention is to be free of artistry and taste. But this need not make their work ‘abstract,’ for nothing, in the end, is denied. It is simply that personal expression, drama, psychology, and the like, are not part of the composer’s initial calculation: they are at best gratuitous.’” (1968:68)

Cage also describes the importance of percussion in this process of sound exploration, as well as its revolutionary aspect:

“Percussion music is revolution. Sound and rhythm have too long been submissive to the restrictions of nineteenth-century music. Today we are fighting for their emancipation. Tomorrow, with electronic music in our ears, we will hear freedom... Experiment must necessarily be carried on by hitting anything - tin pans, rice bowls, iron pipes - anything we can lay our hands on. Not only hitting, but rubbing, smashing, making sound in every possible way. In short, we must explore the materials of music... The conscientious objectors to modern music will, of course, attempt everything in the way of counterrevolution. Musicians will not admit that we are making music; they will say that we are interested in superficial effects, or, at most, are imitating Oriental or primitive music. New and original sounds will be labeled as ‘noise.’” (1968:87)

This new and revolutionary enterprise has provoked profound changes in musical meaning as a whole. Traditional concepts and notions about music, musicians, sounds, art and its practices, life, etc., are called into question. These new ideas and concepts have provoked changes in the means of artistic representation and prompt one to think about

how contemporary music has been called into question. Sounds have been practically detached from supposed cultural contexts and are valued only for their sonic qualities, at least for those artists and composers engaged in this process. Fundamental questions concerning my discussion of musical instruments and representation could also be raised here. For instance, how does the notion of sounds 'just as they are' affect our notion of musical instruments and general musical practices related to them? What, in fact, is a musical instrument? This question is also addressed by Wood:

“Percussion has been actively involved in the constant redefining and recreation of itself. To the question, ‘What is a percussion instrument?’, one could easily reply, ‘What *isn't* a percussion instrument!’ This legacy of experimentation and exploration continues today on both the corporate level... and on the more individual level... I have always thought... that percussion is not any single instrument, or group of instruments, but rather a meta-instrument (a concept that speaks about the nature of what an instrument *is*, as opposed to any particular example).” (1991:45)

Or, as Cage says, “hitting anything... in every possible way” (1968:87), an emancipation that represents a break with traditional systems of musical representation and, as Bürger points out in commenting on historical avant-garde movements, a “total abolition of the institution that is art” (1984:63). Considering this, other significant questions arise. How do musical scrapers exist (as a concept) within this process of sound emancipation and freedom? Can we look at them without reference to the ways in which they have been systematically represented, for instance, as noise makers? Does contemporary music make a ‘non-representational’ understanding of scrapers possible? And if so, at what level?

As Cage observes, musicians perceive new and original sounds as noise. This has been a common reaction towards contemporary musical works as a whole. In a similar way, scrapers, due to their particular sonority (mainly when they are played alone) are also seen as non-musical, background, or as sound effects commonly used in soundtracks. This not only refers to the ‘new’ sounds, for instance, electronic sounds; but also to a variety of sounds that, at a certain level, were already known, but had never been considered as musical, but rather as noise. Sounds of brake-drums, sirens, machines, whistles, radios; daily activities such as cooking, walking, swallowing water and talking, were (and are) ordinary sounds. Cage (e.g. in *Imaginary Landscape* for twelve radios), Varèse (e.g. *Ionisation*) and others, were the first to use them as musical sounds. In this sense, contemporary music can be seen as a celebration of the everyday, a breaking with

the idea that art is confined to the concert hall and a rejection of the separation between art and life itself. With reference to this, Storey, in commenting on Andy Warhol's work, observes that:

“We can of course object that Warhol's merging of high and popular culture is somewhat bogus. Whatever the source of his ideas and material, once located in an art gallery the context determines them as art and thus high culture. John Rockwell argues that this was not the intention or the necessary outcome. Art, he argues, is what you perceive as art: ‘A Brillo box isn't suddenly art because Warhol puts a stacked bunch of them in a museum. But by putting them there he encourages you to make your every trip to the supermarket an artistic adventure, and in so doing he has exalted your life. Everybody's an artist if they want to be.’” (1993:157-8)

In similar ways, musical works instigated a connection between everyday life and sounds by collapsing the distinction between them. Works by Cage, Christian Wolff, as well as those of the ‘Fluxus’ movement in New York are significant instances of this:

“Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise... The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain. We want to capture and control these sounds, to use them not as sound effects but as musical instruments.” (Cage 1968:3)

In this sense, one could argue that, after such historical movements and enterprise, art would definitely be linked with practices of everyday life, and that distance between ‘musical’ and ‘natural’ sounds would be finally dismissed. Before continuing discussion of this, I would like to refer to Bürger, whose discussion is quite useful here:

“... it is a historical fact that the avant-garde movements did not put an end to the production of works of art, and that the social institution that is art proved resistant to the avant-gardiste attack. A contemporary aesthetic can no more neglect the incisive changes that the historical avant-garde movements effected in the realm of art than it can ignore that art has long since entered a post avant-gardiste phase. We characterize that phase by saying that it revived the category of work and that the procedures invented by the avant-garde with antiartistic intent are being used for artistic ends. This must not be judged a ‘betrayal’ of the aims of the avant-garde movements... but the result of a historical process that can be described in these very general terms: now that the attack of the historical avant-garde movements on art as an institution has failed, and art has not been integrated into the praxis of life, art as an institution continues to survive as something separate from the praxis of life. But the attack did make art recognizable as an institution and also revealed its



(relative) inefficacy in bourgeois society as its principle. All art that is more recent than the historical avant-garde movements must come to terms with this fact in bourgeois society. It can either resign itself to its autonomous status or 'organize happenings' to break through that status. But without surrendering its claim to truth, art cannot simply deny the autonomy status and pretend that it has a direct effect." (1984:56-7)

Considering that the bulk of data used in my work concerning general perceptions of musical scrapers has been collected during the past decade, and the fact that common references found in early material appear to be reproduced in contemporary discourses about these instruments, it seems clear that the efforts of historical movements of avant-garde, as well as contemporary music in general, have not resulted in a situation where sounds are perceived just as sounds, and music is finally linked with life (Bürger, 1984). If they are, and there are some instances, this happens in a very limited sense. Cage is the best example of this limited reality. As Nyman, commenting on Cage's *4'33"*, says:

"Music and life

It is a well-known fact that the silences of *4'33"* were not, after all, silences, since silence is a state which is physically impossible to achieve... Cage... proposed that what we have been in the habit of calling silence should be called what in reality it is, non-intentional sounds - that is, sounds not intended or prescribed by the composer. *4'33"* is a demonstration of the non-existence of silence, of the permanent presence of sounds around us... Henceforward sounds ('for music, like silence, does not exist') would get closer to introducing us to Life, rather than Art, which is something separate from Life." (1974:22)

"For Cage *4'33"* was a public demonstration that it was impractical, if not senseless, to attempt to retain the traditional separation of sound and silence. For the audience it perhaps proved something else: as their attention shifted from listening to something that wasn't really there, to watching something that was (Tudor's restrained actions) they must have realized that it was equally senseless to try and separate hearing from seeing." (ibid.60)

Concerning such a visual aspect of music, Leppert observes that:

"musical discourse necessarily both precedes and exceeds the semantic quotient of any particular musical text. Musical discourse operates, in other words, even in silence, a fact brilliantly articulated years ago by John Cage, who made specific use of human sight as the problematizing agent of 'musical' silence - you had to 'be' there and to 'see' the silence to know that what was happening was nonmusically musical." (1993:17)

Thus, the distinction between musical instruments and other objects is challenged; an instrument is just another source of sound. He also challenges the notion of traditional composition and instrumentation, as well as systems of representation and referentiality. For Cage, even though one transcends everything, everything is still in place. In this sense, even if scrapers are used as a sound that is neither a non-referential composition nor a traditional representational system, elements of both will remain. In fact, one can never get rid of representational meaning.

Two other ways in which musical instruments and scrapers have been used in the music of this century should be considered. According to Weinberg:

“In terms of Western art music, the rasper has now lost most of its indigenous cultural associations and is looked upon by contemporary composers as simply another sound-generating device. Just as the bass drum, triangle, and cymbals were first associated with Turkish music, and later lost this cultural connection, raspers too have followed the same path.” (1990:82)

This suspension of representational systems concerning music and musical instruments is found in the work of several other composers. Although their use differs from the more radical “‘Cageian’ notion” of sound and music, they do represent a break, where sounds are mainly used for their physical qualities. They represent a second model in which non-referentiality is employed. Examples are Varèse’s *Ionisation* (1931), Stockausen’s *Zyklus* (1959) and *Kontakte* (1959-60), Michael Udow’s *Four Movements for Percussion Quartet (Without Conductor)* (1975), Alain Weber’s *Projections* (1975), Pieter Kiesewetter’s *Agonia* (1970), Claudio Santoro’s *Diagramas Ciclicos* (1966), Marta Ptaszynska’s *Space Model* (1971), Dante G. Grelah’s *Fosforescencias* (1983), Rob du Bois’ *Beat Music* (1967), Fernando Cerqueira’s *Expressões Cibernéticas* (1985), Jorge Antunes’ *Invocação em Defesa da Máquina* (1968) and *Music for Eight Persons Playing Things* (1970/71), Luis Carlos Cseko’s *Couro de Gato* and *Corda Bamba*, and Lejaren Hiller’s *Machine Music* (1967).

In considering Wolff’s argument that no psychology, dramatic intentions or pictorial purposes are involved in the perception of scraper sounds (in Cage 1968:68), Hall’s discussion about images, a concept that can be extended to sounds, is cited below:

“They gain in meaning when they are read in context, against or in connection with one another. This is another way of saying that images do not carry meaning or ‘signify’ on their own.” (Hall 1997:232)

In this sense, sounds used by these composers are articulated in specific ways in which referentiality is, at first, not involved. Let us consider that such elements, which “are not part of the composer’s initial calculation” (Wolff, in Cage 1968:68) can be perceived in the very same way by the listener. Imagine, for instance, a performance of Varèse’s *Ionisation*, a musical work that includes two *güiro* parts. It is quite possible, and normal, that a listener would not establish any relation between those sounds (scraping) and anything else, which seems to deny the existence of any system of representation. For instance, the piece has a massive sound structure with a number of instruments sounding simultaneously. There is no reason to perceive the two parts written for *güiro* in detachment from the entire context, so these sounds are perceived, as are all the other instruments, only for their physical qualities in the construction of the piece. In this sense, these instruments, due to their sonority, can also easily be mistaken for maracas or other similar instruments, for instance, shakers. In addition, the music does not call people’s attention to these specific instruments. In this sense, the *güiro* parts would be taken for granted, as they normally are, and this reinforces common representations of musical scrapers as discussed in the previous chapters. At the same time, the fact that the use of these instruments goes unnoticed by most people illustrates that they are, to some extent, considered as colour or effects to be added to the more fundamental parts of a piece. They are accessories, to be used in a structure that privileges other elements. In other words, if the instrument is not noticed, there is no way to call images to mind, to establish relationships. However, the fact that people do not notice them already demonstrates that they occupy an unprivileged position within a system of other elements that are not neglected.

At the same time, there is also a series of works that show a tendency to maintain and perpetuate conventional systems of representation. They form a third group of instances in which these instruments *are* used for their specific colour and quality, and what they refer to, symbolise and represent for both listeners and composers. Regardless of his previous affirmation, Weinberg establishes that:

“The use of raspers and ratchets in the repertoire of Western art music has had a curious life. The rasper would seem to follow the normal progression in that most percussion is ‘...introduced into the orchestra on the basis of a certain instrument to be associated with a definitive set of facts, often not even related to a musical aspect.’... Stravinsky calls to mind the sacrificial

rituals in the Rite of Spring, and composers such as Milhaud brought the indigenous South American dance music into the classical setting.” (1990:82)

He observes how:

“Dances such as the Rhumba, Mambo, Merengue, Cha-cha and more become crazes in North America. Composers influenced by jazz brought these dances and their characteristic instruments into the concert hall. Gangware states that these instruments’... ‘main purpose is to give authenticity to the performance of the music of these Latin American countries.’... Latin American composers, going through periods of nationalism, would write for the instruments, styles, and forms which were native to their home land.” (1990:82)

Thus, once again, authenticity is essential for the production of a significant and extensive part of the Western art music repertoire. The discussion of this repertoire connects with my previous discussion of primitivism and ‘Latinisation’, and the way it revolves around the exoticism of unusual instruments. Schwartz and Godfrey, commenting on the production of this repertoire in Latin America, observed that:

“Although many North Americans and Europeans are inexplicably unaware of it, an active, vibrant musical life exists south of the Rio Grande. This milieu life is especially rich in its overlay of different traditions... Carlos Chavez of Mexico... went beyond cultivated European techniques and materials... His patriotic, nationalist sources include Indian ones, as exemplified by his 1935 *Sinfonia India* and the use of Aztec words in choral pieces... Another important Mexican composer, Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940)... had a special flair for absorbing Mexican popular and folk music into his own style.” (1993:438)

Doubtless, nationalism has an important role to play. Brazil’s most famous composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos, uses the *reco-reco* in several pieces such as *Uirapurú*, *Choros*, and *Bachianas Brasileiras* (Weinberg 1990). However, it is with *Nonetto* (1923) that his imagination goes further concerning the sonority of this instrument. This clear reference to its sonority and colour as Brazilian, is underscored by its subtitle - *Impressão Rápida de Todo o Brasil* (‘Quick impression of all Brazil’), has also been used by other composers such as Milhaud and Marlos Nobre. In *Nonetto*, Villa-Lobos required the construction of a *reco-reco* with a kind of muffle to be attached to one of its extremities. Clearly, the composer wanted to obtain the same effect as that found in instruments such as the trumpet and trombone. However, even if the instrument is played by itself, and not in a musical context involving several other musical instruments, its sonority is not

significantly changed. At least, this was my impression when I visited the Museum Villa-Lobos in Rio de Janeiro in order to see and play this instrument.

It is also interesting that, in the very first percussion piece composed by a Brazilian composer - Camargo Guarnieri's *Estudo para Instrumentos de Percussão*, 1953 (Study for Percussion Instruments), the composer makes almost exclusive use of classical traditional instruments such as the triangle, tambourine, snare drum, military drum, cymbals, bass drum, and timpani. The only exception, in fact, is the use of a *reco-reco*, which performs a short solo featuring a common Brazilian rhythmic phrase (incorrectly written on the score). This assures authenticity and referentiality normally found among nationalist composers such as Guarnieri.

Paul Ruders uses a *güiro* in his piece titled *Cha-Cha-Cha* (1981), which starts with the development of ideas around the *cha-cha-cha* rhythm (used in the dance of the same name that originated in Cuba in the early 1950s). Cuban composer Amadeo Roldan, who wrote one of the first pieces for percussion ensemble - *Ritmica n. 5* and *Ritmica n.6*, also uses the *güiro*. Both pieces are based on Cuban music.

In *North American Eclipse - a 12-Part Ballad for In-Motion Performers, Bone Rasps, & Drums*, Daniel Lentz makes use of indigenous bone scrapers with gourd resonators. These instruments were used by indigenous peoples in North America and Mexico. This also serves to establish authenticity in a work that aims to represent a ritualistic dance of the Seneca Indians. As the score informs us "North American Eclipse is based (ritualistic) on the O-ke-wa, the Seneca Indian Dance for the dead." The piece must also be performed in 'near darkness' and the performers must form a circle around the listeners, remaining "in motion through-out the performance." Scrapers function as producers of "a full and continuous (non-rhythmic) sound...[and] [t]he Rasp players should be situated in the center of the performance space" (*North American Eclipse* performance notes).

In *Los Dioses Aztecas* (The Aztec Gods), Gardner Read, among sixty other instruments, uses two rasps. Although "the basic idea and the inspiration for the work came not from any actual Aztec or indigenous music but rather from primitive sculptures of the Aztec deities displayed in the National Museum in Mexico city" (Read, in the notes for the LP *Music for Percussion*, 1981), the use of scrapers is a clear allusion to similar bone instruments used by Aztec people, *omichicahuaztlis*, which are portrayed in several sculptures to be found in the same museum.

## Conclusions

While specific uses of musical scrapers and other ‘new’ sounds in contemporary art music do represent a detachment from several forms of representation, it becomes impossible to affirm that this represents a *total* abolition of the systems of representation revolving around these musical instruments. In fact, with the development of contemporary music and the institutionalisation of percussion within the western art music tradition, there has been constant use, as well as constant recreation, of the several ways of representing musical scrapers previously discussed. “Hitting anything... and making sound in every possible way” (Cage 1968:87) represented a significant emancipation for those closely related to the processes of composing and receiving contemporary and experimental music. At the same time, this idea (of *anything*), and the practices related to the act of playing *anything*, call into question fundamental notions about musical instruments and musicians. Cage’s statement that “musicians will not admit we are making music; they will say that we are interested in superficial effects” (1968:87) takes on new meaning in instances where musical scrapers have been used since then. To rasp anything, like rasping a cheese-grater, or even any musical scraper (sometimes such a distinction does not even exist) *does* represent a break with traditional systems of musical representation. However, such a break, I argue, is *limited* to specific instances. Playing anything is a concept presented by those artists and composers who aim to abolish art; they believe that everything is music and everyone is a musician. However, generally speaking, people perceive ‘playing anything’ (e.g. rasping an object) in a depreciative way. In this sense, ‘playing anything’ means not producing music at all. This is apparent in the way in which people have consistently approached me to say that they “can play the scraper too!” (notion of commonality). And if, not being musicians, they can do it without some level of specific skill, it means that ‘anything’ is not seen as being music. It is clear that both avant-garde composers and lay people are saying the very same thing. However, the striking difference here is that few composers do see this kind of *anything* as art, or even as the abolition of art. On the other hand, lay people, as well as a significant proportion of those involved in the production of the already institutionalised contemporary music and percussion today (performers, students, publishing companies, manufacturers, etc.) make use of the *non-musical* to refer to musical scrapers in depreciative ways. Thus, the development of percussion and of contemporary music has served as a means to recreate old forms of representation of musical scrapers, to create others, and to abolish referentiality.

Considering such distinct examples, Herwitz (Philosophy professor at the University of Natal in Durban) observes that at least three ways of dealing with sounds and systems of representation involving musical instruments, have been used throughout this century. Firstly, Cage's suspension of 'everything' (notions of life, music, musical instruments, etc.). Secondly, the use of musical scrapers and sound for their own sake, based on their physical qualities, regardless of any psychological reference. And thirdly, the use of scrapers for what they represent in specific systems of reference, for instance, national identity, ritual function and cultural allusion. To study scrapers in a more postmodern way is to consider all these concepts, observing how one concept moves in and out of the others. In this way, scrapers exist between all of these modes of interpretation. They are no longer merely exotic, but on the other hand, they are not entirely abstract (pers.comm. 07/98).

### **Contemporary Western Art Music and its Standard Repertoire**

In this section I look at how notions of inferiority and neglect concerning scrapers have been perpetuated in Twentieth century music. I focus my discussion on the existence of a common repertoire within the Western art music tradition, and the musical practices related to it. To develop this idea, I compare scrapers with other 'small' and underrated instruments in this canonized field. The term 'similar' must be understood here to mean an instrument that produces the same type of reaction generally demonstrated by people when they see a scraper. For instance, 'It looks simple!' or 'What can you really play with that?' In other words, the idea of sound limitation, based on the apparent limitation of the instrument's form. Many percussion instruments such as the bass drum, the maracas, the cymbals, etc., serve as good examples here. Taking into consideration articles written about these instruments, one realises how their authors have invariably looked at the idea of limitation concerning the instruments considered by them. For instance, in his article entitled *The Art of Maraca Playing*, Ed Harrison begins by saying that:

"The maracas are one of the most well known percussion instruments. However, the wealth of potential of this seemingly simplistic instrument is greatly unrecognized." (1990:5)

It would be easy to establish a relation between Harrison's statement and the fact that the musical scraper, one of the oldest instruments in the world, also goes largely

unrecognised. My experience of playing other instruments such as the *pandeiro*, a type of Brazilian tambourine, using Brazilian techniques of playing, is that people show a similar lack of knowledge. These instruments are commonly seen as being a kind of shaker and are often used for this purpose in rock and pop bands. Neglecting the potential of such instruments is also a common practice within the institutionalised music environment: music schools, orchestras, etc. In this sense, referring to the bass drum, Matson observes that:

“With the triangle, these two instruments were the only acceptable percussion instruments in the early days of the symphony orchestra, but often are the most misused in modern playing, especially in school situations.” (1976:85-6)

About the cymbals, Johnson comments that:

“Because of [the] growing use of the over one hundred percussion instruments, players have found it necessary to develop superior playing techniques. One of the instruments that is often neglected is the cymbal. The various kinds of cymbals used in orchestral playing, each involving its own techniques, include suspended cymbals, double cymbals, and gongs and tamtams.” (1975:153)

Stuart Marrs comments on the value attributed to the triangle, as well as on concepts of good sounds:

“What is the ‘good sound?’ When lecturing on the highly *underrated* idiophone known as the triangle, I start with a survey of opinions regarding preferences of sound production on the instrument.” (1991:60) [italics are mine]

We see that all these instruments occupy a position of inferiority. They are invariably unrecognised, neglected, underrated, and misused by both lay people and percussionists. Considering this, it seems easy to conclude that scrapers are not alone in this. However, the existence of a common repertoire - orchestral or ensemble - and the institutionalisation of classical percussion studies in schools programmes, forces students and musicians to be in contact with most of the instruments cited. And if we consider Matson’s observation that, even those instruments which have a more significant repertoire (e.g. triangle, bass drum) are considerably misused, it becomes easy to see how scrapers, which *lack* such a repertoire, are disadvantaged.



There has been much discussion about the impossibility of one person playing hundreds of percussion instruments properly. It is a fact that classical percussion has established which instruments are more valuable and which instruments are, at different levels, neglected. In this sense, when we compare the development of instruments such as the triangle, the bass drum, and the cymbals, with scrapers, we see that the use of scrapers in the standard repertoire, is practically nonexistent. There is no demand or need for the development of techniques, notions of sounds, etc. A conventional performer does not have to know about playing scrapers, because they are not part of the canonised field, the significant repertoire, or the standard musical career involving conventional performances, auditions, examinations, etc. As I have said, it is my view that most musicians in higher degree percussion programmes (e.g. in the United States and Brazil) have no knowledge of the sounds, strokes, and playing movements of the basic scraper, in spite of the fact that these percussion players learn to look for ‘good’ sounds in *any* instrument they play.

“Theirs [percussionists] is a life devoted not to learning how to get a sound from a particular instrument, but rather to *learning how to learn* to get a sound from an instrument, where the nature of the instrument is constantly changing... While everyone is certainly concerned with producing a good tone, for a percussionist sound is the *prima facie* of his or her existence.”  
(Wood 1991:45)

For instance, as I have said, even if a student does not have to play *salsa*, or any musical piece in the repertoire, she or he might learn how to hold a *clave* to produce what classical percussion players judge to be a deeper and better sound for that instrument. Or, if the same musician has to play a ‘simple’ woodblock, she or he might be aware that playing with the ‘neck’ of a snare drum stick gives a more fundamental sound that differs from the sound coming from its tip. Concerning scraper playing, I argue that such ‘basic’ knowledge is, in practical and general terms, remarkably poor. In fact, in many cases, it does not exist at all.

Scrapers demand very specific types of grips to hold the stick, hands and arms movements, and a certain awareness of the amount of pressure to be applied to the surface of the instrument. It is a fact that, in order to play, for instance, a woodblock or a cowbell, musicians will make use of general techniques of playing (e.g. snare drum technique) which allows them to play an array of other percussion instruments. This, I argue, is a basic reason for the uncontrolled and awkward way most percussion players

play scrapers. The technique to be applied to these instruments is dramatically different. In addition, depending on the context, basic scraper playing can also include a technique that mixes rasping and striking 'strokes'. Most percussionists play scrapers as they strike any other percussion instrument, a limited approach resulting in a very superficial sound.

### **Accessory 'instruments'**

Another way to observe how musical scrapers have been used and represented in such a tradition, is through the analysis of musical instrument catalogues and general texts. The term 'accessories', which has been employed in catalogues to describe a category of musical effects not classified as standard musical instruments, serves to demonstrate the notion of inferiority attached to scrapers. 'Accessory' denotes something supplementary, auxiliary, secondary and subordinate. In this sense, percussion catalogues set up a distinction between 'real' musical instruments which are more representative within the percussion tradition (e.g. mallet instruments, snare drum, timpani) and *others* which are not. In his article entitled *Basic Tambourine Technique* (1987), David Vincent observes that:

“The so-called *accessory instruments* are an integral part of any percussion section's technique, but attention to the proper playing of them is often overlooked by players and conductors alike.” (1987:23)

Not only instruments, but also the musicians who play them are categorised in this way. For instance, in his article entitled *On the technical side - The auxiliary percussionist: what to play and where to play it* (1978), David Levine says:

“The job, and main problem of playing auxiliary percussion is to rhythmically help the [set-]drummer while staying out of his way.” (1978:44)

Levine includes the *güiro* in the category of auxiliary percussion.

In this way, we see that such definitions, and the limited use of scrapers in the modern Western art music tradition serve as a means to perpetuate common notions of subordination, as well as the ways in which they are used (read misused). It makes evident how contemporary music sustains old forms of representation.

## Xavier Guello and the Suspension of General Representations of Scrapers

As discussed in the introduction of the dissertation, my own music education is based in the conventional Western musical tradition. Although it is true that my understanding of percussion, and performance practices related to it, have changed, there are elements in my compositions that still refer to traditional Western musical performance. Although some of my pieces can be performed in non-conventional spaces, attesting to their relative distance from Western classical percussion, on many levels, they also refer to the standard Western canon. Following is a discussion of my composition for solo metal *reco-reco* entitled *Xavier Guello*, which will be analysed in the way it challenges representations of the scraper within the context of contemporary art music.

With the suspension of activities of *Duo Experimental* in 1993, I began to refine some of the techniques established by Gianesi and myself, and increase my work with metal scrapers, and with the Brazilian metal *reco-reco* with springs in particular. In *A Harley Davidson Surrounding the Rain Forest* (1994), a solo piece using bamboo *reco-reco* and bongo, I refined the technique first used in the last part of *33 Samra Zabobra* and *Baru*. The bongo had always been the perfect instrument to complement this type of *reco-reco*, which had a more delicately notched surface with thinner ‘teeth’. This idea opposes the use of such a technique as it was found in *33 Samra Zabobra* and *Baru*, which must sound harsher, louder and more aggressive. In *A Harley Davidson Surrounding the Rain Forest* this idea is abandoned, and levels of dynamics, as well as of timbres, are refined at their best. A clear balance between both instruments is achieved, something that was particularly problematic in *33 Samra Zabobra*. A bamboo stick, with a bright sound is used for most of the piece. A plastic one is only used in the final movement, which is a repetition of the first. This piece also represented a significant development in terms of musical ideas and phrases, which were more significantly elaborated.

However, of all the works composed during the period between 1993 and 1998, *Xavier Guello* (1993-1994) was the most effective in the way it challenges people’s perceptions of these instruments. *Xavier Guello* was my first solo piece composed for the Brazilian metal *reco-reco* with springs generally used in *samba* music. The structure of the piece, but also the musical elements used, for instance, melodic and harmonic sounds, have always commanded people’s attention in a way that most other works did not. For this reason, it has been essential to the development of this dissertation. I have used it in many

distinct ways, in order to observe how perceptions of the instrument are invariably affected by its performance.

Luis Carlos Xavier Guello is a Brazilian musician who has been playing percussion since childhood. Since the first time we met in São Paulo, we have been attracted to one another's work. At first, this attraction seemed to refer to two different, and even opposite ways of performing practices concerning percussion. Guello represented the so-called 'popular musician,' playing Brazilian instruments and popular music. On the other hand, I was a more conventional classical player specialising in particular areas of this tradition (i.e. multiple percussion solos and my own work as a performer-composer). When I started to move away from art music in 1990 the distance between us started to diminish gradually and we exchanged knowledge about both fields on a number of occasions. I was very interested in ways of playing Brazilian traditional and popular music on instruments such as *congas*, *pandeiro*, etc. I had never taken formal lessons on the metal *reco-reco* with springs used in *samba* music and had only a superficial sense of the technique and how the instrument should sound. A simple phrase by him has always accompanied me in my performance work on this instrument. He told me that:

“O *reco-reco* de *samba* não é só raspado, mas também batido.” (pers. comm. n.d.)

“The *samba reco-reco* is not only rasped, but also struck”

That has been my only 'lesson' on the instrument.

In spite of the fact that pieces such as *Ilusão* and *Imagem* (multiple percussion solos lasting approximately 80 and 60 minutes respectively) included very few improvisations around established written elements, until 1994 improvising had never been a satisfactory process. Composed and improvised elements never formed a coherent whole. It was only with *Xavier Guello* that the process became definitive and complete in itself. Thus, the piece is a homage to Guello, as a celebration of the meeting of the two 'distant' musical traditions I was involved with.

*Xavier Guello* consists of specific phrases, themes, sounds and techniques that are performed in a certain sequence. There is a sense of the development of one idea to reach another, as well as awareness of the fact that any element can be dismissed, depending on

the context of the performance of the piece. Let me consider several particularities of the instrument, as well as the ways in which I have transformed it for the creation and performance of *Xavier Guello*. These particularities feature in my article entitled *Brazilian People and their Musical Scrapers* (1996), which is reproduced here:

“The metal *reco-reco* has one, two or three springs attached to a body that can have either an aperture or a flat surface under the springs. Since the samba sounds of the metal *reco-reco* are a mixing of strike and rasp, instruments with the flat surface are preferred, due to the instrument’s ability to produce a sound considered to be more desirable for samba. Different mechanisms have been designed to hold springs. A byproduct of this is that the springs, depending on the mechanism, are different distances from the surface of the *reco-reco* (see Figure 24). If the springs are close, it is easier to hold the instrument and use the muffle technique to control their resonance. This is accomplished by using the thumb of the hand that holds the instrument. This technique is required for samba playing, and is even more apparent in contexts other than the *Escolas de Samba*. Around 1989-90 a metal plate was attached above the metal surface, offering a different timbre (see Figure 24, instrument on the right).

‘A new and different approach’

In 1993 I took one of those instruments that had gone out of production due to the great distance from the springs to the surface, and adapted it for myself. Since the springs were quite a distance from the body of the instrument, they had great resonance and produced harmonic sounds. I also adapted three specific springs to different pitches. Among other things, several samba melodic lines, like those originally played by the different *surdos* (large drums) can be played. Other techniques make it possible to spin the instrument in the air while playing specific rhythmic phrases and all these techniques and sounds were used in a ten-minute solo titled *Xavier Guello...*” (Stasi 1996:33)

### **Audience’s response to the piece**

A common response to the piece serves to exemplify how general representations of scrapers are not only challenged, but dismissed. The question usually asked by people not familiar with the instrument, “What can you play with this?”, has been replaced by people asking “How can you play that, produce such a variety of sounds, with ‘this’?” After my lectures and performances, people, including percussion players, have stated that they would never again take these, or any other ‘simple’ or ‘small’ instrument, for granted, due to their apparently limited form, which normally implies sound limitation as well.

I have consistently observed such reactions when performing the piece in both classical and popular contexts, in formal concerts and informal situations, or a mix of both. However, as I said before, an awareness of contextual limitations is always necessary. It has been performed in master-classes and workshops for specialists (percussionists) in the Manhattan School of Music; California Institute of the Arts; University of Michigan - Ann Arbor; Hartt School in Connecticut; São Paulo State University in Brazil; and to non-specialists in Durban, South Africa. It has been performed in formal concerts, in a programme with other pieces of mine (US, Brazil); in a concert with set-drummer Mpho Mathabe at the Jazz Center at the University of Natal, Durban; in a concert including several musicians and dancers at the University of Cape Town; in bars in São Paulo, and Inhambane, Mozambique, and in private concerts at people's houses. These 'small' situations have allowed me to demonstrate the elements and the structure of the piece quite effectively. Also, the audience absorbs such elements in a more complete way. Closer contact with the audience means that techniques, harmonic sounds, and other elements used in the piece are appreciated in a more significant way. In order to demonstrate the potential of the instrument, I do not mind whether I play the entire piece, half of it, or just a few elements, as I have done at *Xiphexo*, a Cultural Association in Inhambane, Mozambique. What started as a formal presentation with musician José Mucavele, was transformed into an informal performance which moved from the stage to the tables, and involved the spontaneous participation of everyone in the audience. At one point I played a few phrases from *Xavier Guello* on the *reco-reco*, but only for a couple of minutes. Other situations oppose such impromptu performances. For instance, in the recording sessions realised in Howard College, University of Natal, South Africa, Guy Chandler, who recorded the piece and had amplified it for the concert at the Jazz Center, memorised the entire structure after a couple of performances as well as the different sounds to be used during the development of the piece. Track 35 on the accompanying CD features the first part of *Xavier Guello*, performed in this recording session in 1997 (see Figure 24, instrument on the right).

*Xavier Guello* is a direct, and *probably* my most effective response to the common perception of scrapers as non-musical. This has become possible through greater proximity to the audience, a more informal relationship between performer and listener, and explanation of the piece to the audience. However, even when such elements were not present, for instance, in the concert in Cape Town, this change of perceptions was evident. To most people who have experienced such performances, the *reco-reco*, as well

as scrapers in general, are definitively removed from the conventional position of limitation, non-musicality, noisery and inferiority, in which they have been systematically placed. Extreme attention to the contextual situation of the performance has been a fundamental element in the process of changing perceptions of these instruments. Affecting and changing general perceptions of scrapers is a delicate business that needs to be conducted slowly. In this sense, as I have previously commented, all musical elements (form, structure, etc.) are subjugated to my fundamental interest i.e. a change in the perception of these musical instruments. However, there have been individual cases where misrepresentations continue to be articulated even after my master classes. This was previously discussed in Chapter Three, concerning the performance of *33 Samra Zabobra* by Group Pulse in New York in 1997. Several aspects concerning individual responses to the musical scraper are further discussed in Chapter Six.

## Chapter VI

### CONCLUSION: CHALLENGING THE CANON - TOWARDS AN INDIVIDUAL AESTHETICS OF SCRAPERS

#### Introduction

This dissertation began with an historical background of my experience with musical scrapers, which forms the basis of this text. My discussion went on to focus on general perceptions of scrapers that occur in specific cultural contexts. In this chapter, I reconsider how the individual is able to establish meaning in relation to scrapers, thereby overcoming traditional ways in which these instruments have been represented. To do so, I refer to Michael Colquhoun's composition, *Das Guiro*, and also make reference to my first composition for scrapers, *Estudos*.

Both pieces reflect our individual experiences as musicians and our consequent different realities concerning scrapers (e.g. their musical potential, contrasted with the general idea of their non-musicality and musical limitation). *Das Guiro* is particularly relevant in that Colquhoun uses the scraper as an icon to challenge general representations in Western music. As a percussionist trained in the Western paradigm, *Das Guiro* can be understood to be a microcosm of my own experience with scrapers over a period of sixteen years. While our approaches to, and use of scrapers may differ, both pieces seek to challenge and deconstruct notions of music in general and scrapers in particular. In this regard, Colquhoun's composition and my general work with scrapers, seek to reconsider general representations of scrapers based on *individual* experience and intent.

I have based my discussion on an analysis of Colquhoun's piece, using selected sections of *Das Guiro* to construct my text. This piece makes reference to fundamental issues of representation discussed throughout my text. For instance, the contrast between two distinct realities, i.e. the popular use of the instrument and its academic study, its use in folk traditions and in Western art music, the ways in which the instrument has been misused and misunderstood, its relation with the erotic, and the overpowering tendency of the West to standardise.



## Das Guiro

Only a few weeks separate the creation of *Estudos* and *Das Guiro*. I finished *Estudos-Quatro Pequenas Peças para Reco-reco Solo* in April 1983 in São Paulo. Composer-flutist, Michael Colquhoun, finished *Das Guiro* in May of the same year in Buffalo, New York. To my knowledge, these are the first two musical works ever written for solo scraper.

A turning point in my own work occurred when I witnessed a memorable performance of *Das Guiro* by Brazilian musician Roberto Saltini in the early 1990s. Seeing Saltini performing parts requiring the musician to play ‘punk-guiro’, and ‘Beethoven-guiro’, was a remarkable experience. However, it would take a long time for me to become fully aware of the significance of this piece, in terms of the philosophical issues it raised.

Colquhoun uses the *guiro* as a symbol for his critique of Western music with mastery:

“I have used the guiro as my own personal icon for attacking western music and its in-bred idiocy. Thus I invented ‘Das Guiro.’” (Pers. Comm. 11/5/96)

Colquhoun explains how the ‘infamous’ *guiro* became a personal icon as a result of his own experience as a performer of Latin music:

“When I first started performing with Latin dance bands (usually in charanga style) it was assumed that I would play some simple cha-cha-cha strokes on the guiro when I was not playing my flute. I was left still holding that ‘thing’ when the band picked up the tempo and started playing a guaguanco dance beat. Thus I quickly learned to play the cha-cha-cha stroke (easy) and ‘tried’ playing the guaguanco pattern (not easy). Back then I was echoing the popular success of Johnny Pacheco who had a couple of big Latin hits in the early 1960s (Charanga Pachanga) and who ALWAYS played a guiro when not playing his flute. Fortunately for both me and my band, my lead singer took over the ‘guiro section,’ and then he kept it happy in the Latin style.” (Pers. comm. 11/5/96)

Colquhoun’s experience makes evident the general reality of this instrument, i.e. the absence of a specific musician to play it. *Someone* (read anyone) had to play that ‘thing’ to give a Latin flavour to the music. Based on this experience, Colquhoun creates a piece where an “unusual member of the percussion family,... often misused and misunderstood” (*Das Guiro* notes), is analysed in a scholarly way. In this way, the *guiro*

becomes a means by which he can critique the “idiocy” of conventional Western music, and contrast it with popular tradition. He takes an instrument that appears incidental to an ensemble and uses it as a central symbol to challenge established canons. Thus, each element presented in *Das Guiro* assumes a political character.

The use of both ‘popular’ and classical references for the construction and development of his critique is the basic element in Colquhoun’s work. This is clear from the way in which the performer assumes two contrasting roles, moving from one to the other. First, the performer ‘is’ a popular musician who plays and sings in Spanish over the *guaguanco* pattern. Second, he is an intellectual who, by reading a written text in German (which is placed on a lectern or music stand set at center stage) approaches and analyses the instrument in an academic way.

The text *must* be read in German, which in my view is a direct attack on ethnocentrism, understood here as a way to judge and analyse others, “the application of the norms of one’s own culture to that of others” (in Hall 1997:258). Colquhoun’s piece gives a tongue-in-cheek representation of the eminent intellectual tradition of the so-called ‘Berlin School of Comparative Musicology’, important contemporary music festivals in Darmstadt, and the idea of a ‘superior’ German culture. As Colquhoun says:

“For further clarification on the pronunciation of the German text, consult your local intellectual.” (*Das Guiro* performance notes)

By stipulating that the text must be read in German, regardless of where the piece is performed, Colquhoun calls into question this intellectual and academic superiority by seeming to perpetuate it. In this way, Colquhoun censures and challenges authority by keeping it in a ‘superior’ position in order to ridicule it. In addition, to emphasise the distance between these two realities - the popular and the scholarly - he suggests:

“For further clarification on the methods and techniques employed in playing the guiro consult your local salsa band.” (ibid)

Matters concerning the standardisation of the instrument’s sound and other musical elements, form and the erotic, the act of classicising the instrument, and authority concerning it, as discussed previously in this text, are likewise explored by Colquhoun in *Das Guiro*. In my view, while criticising the standardisation of musical instruments,

Colquhoun also establishes a 'hidden' analogy between the instruments and men's genitalia. It is another instance of how the erotic relates to these instruments.

"It [the guiro] is made from a gourd or calabash - in fact, you are able to grow one in your garden. There has been a major problem in the past since there could be no standardization of size and shape. Some were tiny, almost worthless things; others were nice and fat, but too short; and some were long, but too thin. Thus every man's guiro has been different." (ibid)

Concerning standardisation and control of size, form, sound and performance, and its essential meaning within Western tradition, he continues, saying:

"I propose a project of genetic engineering in which the genetic material of the guiro plant is modified to produce all-equal guiros which could then be grown under the best scientific controls in large guiro-farm-factories, thus ensuring uniform size and performance for all guiros. This New-guiro could then be properly developed and exploited by new-guiro-composers." (ibid)

He refers also to the composition possibilities of the 'new-guiro':

"The possibilities for the new-guiro appear almost endless. At first, mere transcriptions will proliferate: for example, the Beethoven-guiro. Then, original guiro-pieces will be composed. Eventually, guiro quartets, sonatas for guiro and piano, even guiro concertos will be written." (ibid)

My own work (e.g. *Estudos, Method for Reco-reco*) also refers to the creation of 'new' music bounded by elements of Western tradition, i.e. the use of notational elements of the snare drum, as well as general traditional notation. Other elements refer to the use of fixed and regular forms, melodies, different attacks and strokes, and preferences in sound production, as well as a conventional approach to the instrument and the performance itself.

Perhaps, by making use of established and conventional Western techniques on the scraper, I was attempting to lend credibility to the instrument within a particular context. Similar practices can be noted in the way in which modern percussionists learn to play the marimba by performing Bach and other traditional materials. To critique such practices, Colquhoun asks the performer to

“Sing - loud, nasal, out of tune - the opening measures of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, stopping at the first cadence, and stroke the guiro in rhythmic unison with your singing.” (ibid)

However, Colquhoun is not criticizing the use of traditional elements themselves, nor is he interested in dismissing formal composition altogether. He makes clear reference to this fact when he says:

“... never think that Das Guiro is an attempt to destroy composed music - it just lampoons those academic idiots who can’t see past their ivory tower/prison.” (pers. comm. 4/12/97)

Colquhoun, is mainly concerned with the overpowering tendency to apply traditional (read European, Western), modes of thought to everything musical. To illustrate this, he presents a number of old and new technical elements that can be applied to the *guiro*:

“The guiro has already demonstrated the potential for sound modification through extended techniques. Aside from the basic guiro stroke, there are guiro clicks, sul tasto, sul ponticello, col legno, guiro with voice, and, finally, the windmill stroke. Thus, the Darnstadt-Guiro...Evolves into...The Punk-guiro...”

The development of the material from the classical to the contemporary punk-guiro brings the piece to its extraordinary end:

“Immediately play stiff, even, loud downstrokes and recite DAS GUIRO over and over again for about 20 seconds. Begin aspirating the ‘S’ of DAS in unison with the downstroke. Slowly let this aspirated downstroke become the downstroke of the cha-cha pattern and sing the following [excerpt from ‘Cocinando Suave’ by Ray Barreto] quietly once or twice as you very slowly leave the stage. Continue playing and singing until you have left the performance space.”

In this way, the *guiro* returns to its original setting, and the music stand is left at the center of the stage, as it was in the beginning, before the ‘native’ folk musician appeared.

There is no reason to further dissect Colquhoun’s piece. Doubtless, it can, and must be read in other ways, due to the importance of the issues it raises, as well as its symbolism. On the other hand, rather than emphasising the contrasts between *Das Guiro* and my

first pieces for *reco-reco*, I am interested in demonstrating how Colquhoun's piece and my *general* work with scrapers refer to similar realities and problems.

A striking similarity between *Das Guiro* and my work is that they both bring an unusual musical instrument out of its 'original' setting - i.e. the popular tradition - to 'invade' the academic arena in significant ways. This has produced various responses from people. While they appear to take it seriously, it is often perceived as ridiculous, particularly in view of the fact that it is the subject of a doctoral dissertation. I am aware of many instances when people, upon hearing about my work with scrapers, are amused by the fact that I am undertaking a PhD on such an ordinary object. In this sense, as with Colquhoun's work, my work also mediates different realities and expectations. Both Colquhoun and I mock the idiocy of the academic by demonstrating how the performance of music in the Western traditional canon can reach the realms of absurdity. Our works are serious, but inherently sarcastic and mocking. They exist within the environment they undermine.

It can be argued that works such as *Estudos* and *Xavier Guello* represent the construction of a scraper with both tonal and harmonic aspects, as well as other traditional musical elements, which make it more like 'mainstream' instruments in the European canon. While this can be true, and *Xavier Guello* has been the most important piece to be used in my discussion, a series of other pieces has also been used for the same purpose. In this way, future work must be done to reevaluate some of my points and, perhaps, more attention should be given to other works featuring different characteristics. At the same time, there are several other elements in *Xavier Guello* itself, which could hardly be classified as 'mainstream'.

### **Conclusion: Towards an Individual Aesthetics of Scrapers**

This dissertation has examined general representations of musical scrapers, and focussed on how knowledge about them is constructed and articulated within different cultural contexts. I have demonstrated that this process is based on notions of difference and oppositions, which are arranged in various ways and are culturally determined (Hall 1997). My text attempts to delineate ways in which the West defines itself through these notions of difference, establishing an opposition and contrast between its central position and the marginal position of other cultures; between 'real' musical instruments, musicians, music, pure sounds, modernity, etc. and the 'Other' (scrapers, percussionists,

noise, contextualised sounds, etc.). Furthermore, it attempts to demonstrate how these different realities interact, interchange, and are mediated. Also, the point of this dissertation was to demonstrate how constructed discourses on an object (the musical scraper, *any* object) limit our understanding of it. Thus, it attempted to deconstruct such common understanding through the discussion and analysis of the ways in which collective representations are established. At the same time, it emphasises the role of the individual in this process of calling into question our limited perceptions and common notions of ‘truth’.

On the other hand, my own work with these musical instruments, the production of this text, as well as my own representations of scrapers, might be understood as merely another way of establishing authority; establishing the ‘truth’ about scrapers. Considering that this may be the first text of its kind entirely dedicated to these instruments, such a position seems inevitable. It was impossible not to refer to my own work with scrapers, in view of the fact that this work that formed the basis of the dissertation. However, I tried not to centre the text exclusively on my own ways of representing these instruments. My text represents a limited voice and must be considered a preliminary work that can serve as a basis for future discussions on the many important issues it raises and addresses.

Lastly, I consider that a critical ‘reading’ of scrapers (or *any* given subject) essentially challenges cultural boundaries and entrenched notions about them. In this sense, I believe that *both* my work and that of Colquhoun, have similar and significant purposes. The *güiro* used by Colquhoun, and scrapers used by myself, have been used to highlight that the limitations and meanings that we believe to be real and natural are, at least, fallacious. As Hall says, ‘[t]hings ‘in themselves’ rarely, if ever have any one, single, fixed and unchanging meaning’ (1997:3). The act of perceiving and experiencing such ‘things’ (instruments, people, cultures) cannot be based on tyrannical and vicious modes of thought.

Meaning about scrapers, or any given subject, can be personally constructed, affecting the ways in which we perceive ‘reality’ and ‘truth’. People are generally surprised that musical scrapers are deserving of serious attention or can be used to produce ‘real’ music, and their reactions are often negative. Certainly, reception of music in any society relates to whether the music is perceived as ‘other’. Although reactions to scrapers as musical instruments are generally skeptical, critical reflection on the diversity of sounds and techniques of scrapers is essential for the establishment of a new way of seeing them.

Tatsumura claims that by experiencing music in a new way, one opens “the door to a different world” (1991:526). A piece like *Das Guiro* represents a clear break with the canon, questions it, and offers a new perspective on Western music and scrapers. By extension, critical reflection by the individual on his/her experiences is essential to the revisiting of inherited cultural boundaries and representations.

In a sense, the ending of the dissertation mirrors the ending of *Das Guiro* itself. The ‘folk musician’ turned ‘intellectual’, having uncovered the diversity of these misunderstood and misused instruments, vacates, once again, the ‘performance’ space.



Figure 1: Nadir Rovari





Figure 2: *Banda de Congo Konshaça* performing on the streets of Serra. São Benedito festival, State of Espírito Santo, Brazil.

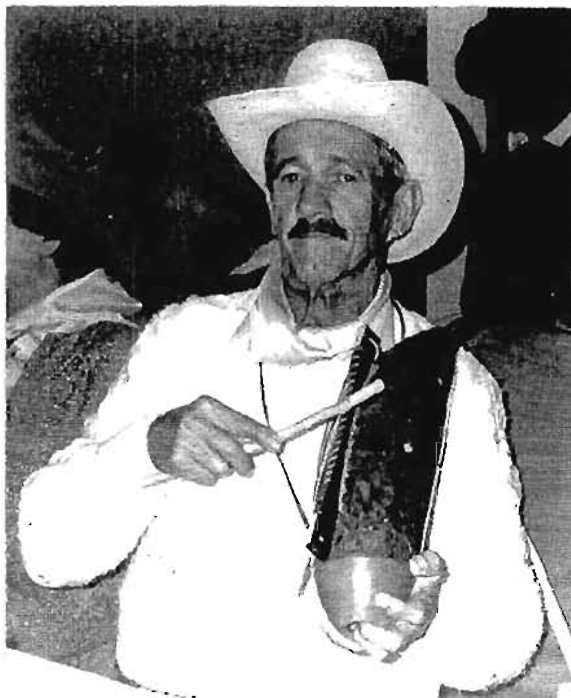


Figure 3: A member of *Dança de Santa Cruz* playing a reque. Carapicuíba, State of São Paulo, Brazil.



Figure 4: Members of a *Catopé* Group with *ganzals* with paper flowers. City of Oliveira, State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 08/94.



Figure 5: A *baje* used in *Cavalo Marinho*. Ferreiros, State of Pernambuco, Brazil. 02/10/93. Photo: Sergio Veloso.



Figure 6: A curator of 'Museo Nacional de Antropologia', Mexico City, demonstrates a scraper of the Zapotec culture made from a whale rib (1995).

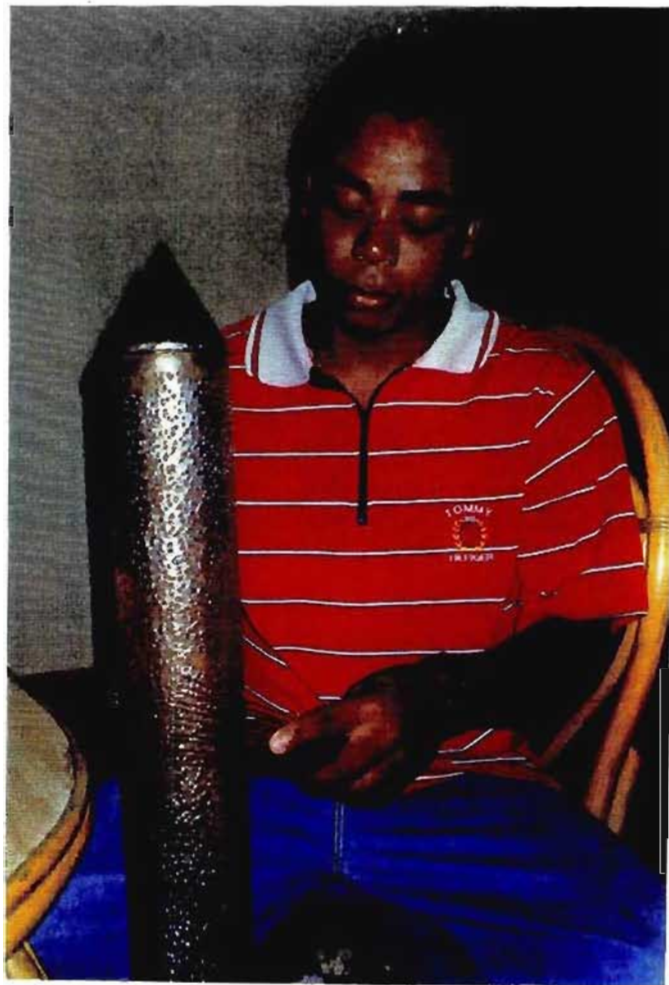


Figure 7: Dominique Hans, member of Haitian Group Boukman Eksperyans, playing the metal scraper *grage*. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 27/3/98.





Figure 8: Cleveland Chenier and his rub-board.



Figure 9: Instruments from the Heard Museum featuring images of clouds, lightning and a frog. Phoenix, AZ, United States of America.



Fig. 1.  
Primitive musician

Fig. 2.  
Modern timpanist



Figure 10: The primitive musician and the modern timpanist. An illustration from *Percussion Instruments and their History*. (Blades 1970)

12 Roqueur.  
Paléolithique, env. 15 000 avant J.-C.

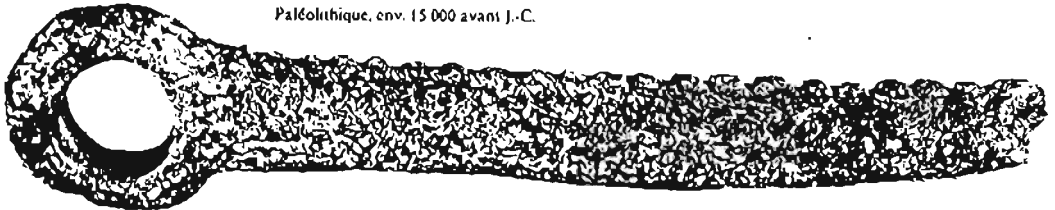


Figure 11: A scraper from the Palaeolithic era - 15,000 B.C.  
An illustration from *Encyclopédie des Instruments de Musique*  
(Buchner 1980)



Figure 12: Enrique Lazaga, director of Orquesta Ritmo Oriental, playing the *güiro*. 'Habana Cafe', Havana, Cuba, 22/3/1998.




Figure 13: Mickey Hart Signature Frame drums. From left to right (back row): the 'Planet Drum', 'Yin Yang', and the 'Big Bang' (far right). (Note: Observe the images on the drums) (Remo World Percussion Catalog 1997)

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Figure 14: Advertisement for Jim McGrath's recordings. (*Rhythm Music* 1996, (4)4:51)



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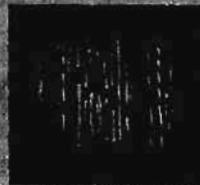
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Figure 15: Advertisement for Australian Music International  
(*Rhythm Music* 1996, (4)4:2)





Figure 16: Members of *Atabale* group from Herba Buena, Hato Mayor, performing at the CE-Mujer festival in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 7/3/98. The *güiras* are made from oil cans.



Figure 17: Inocencio Rosario playing a *güira* at 'Casa de Cultura de La Vega'. La Vega, Dominican Republic, 10/2/98.



Figure 18: Production of regular straight lines on the construction of the *güira*.

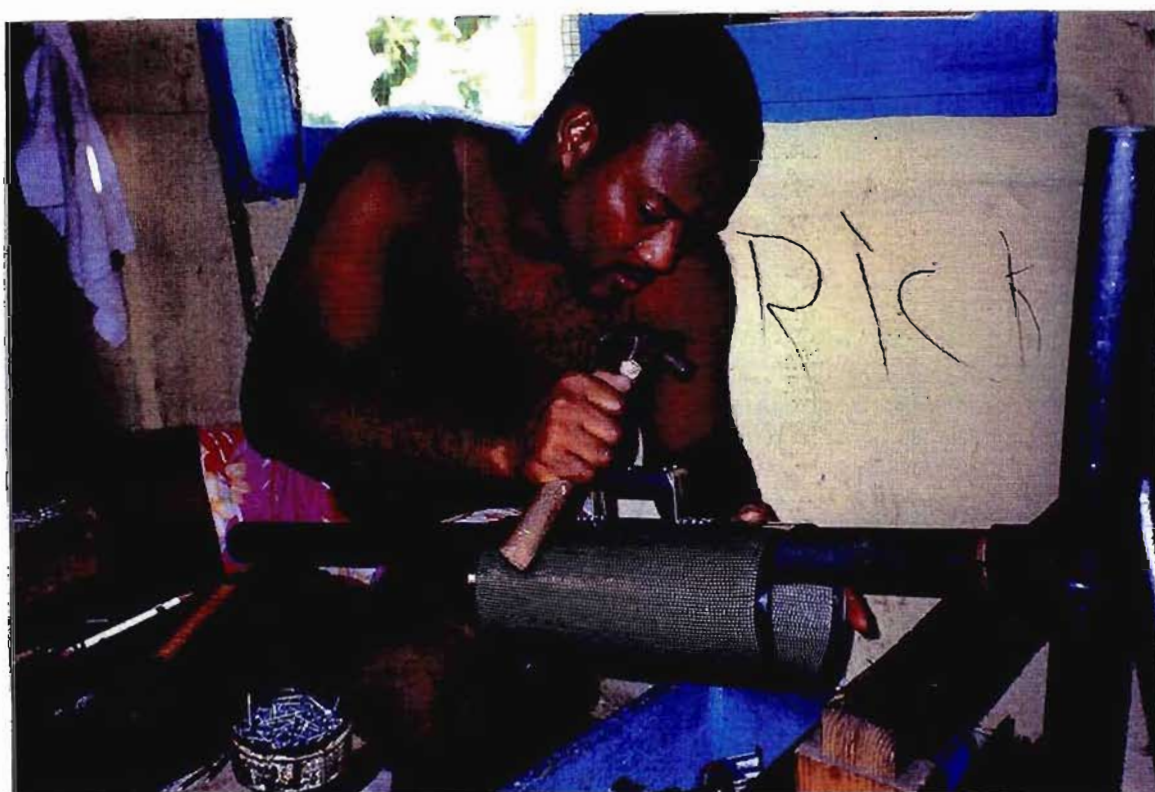


Figure 19: Guillermo Güira makes small adjustments to the handle of the *güira* with a hammer.



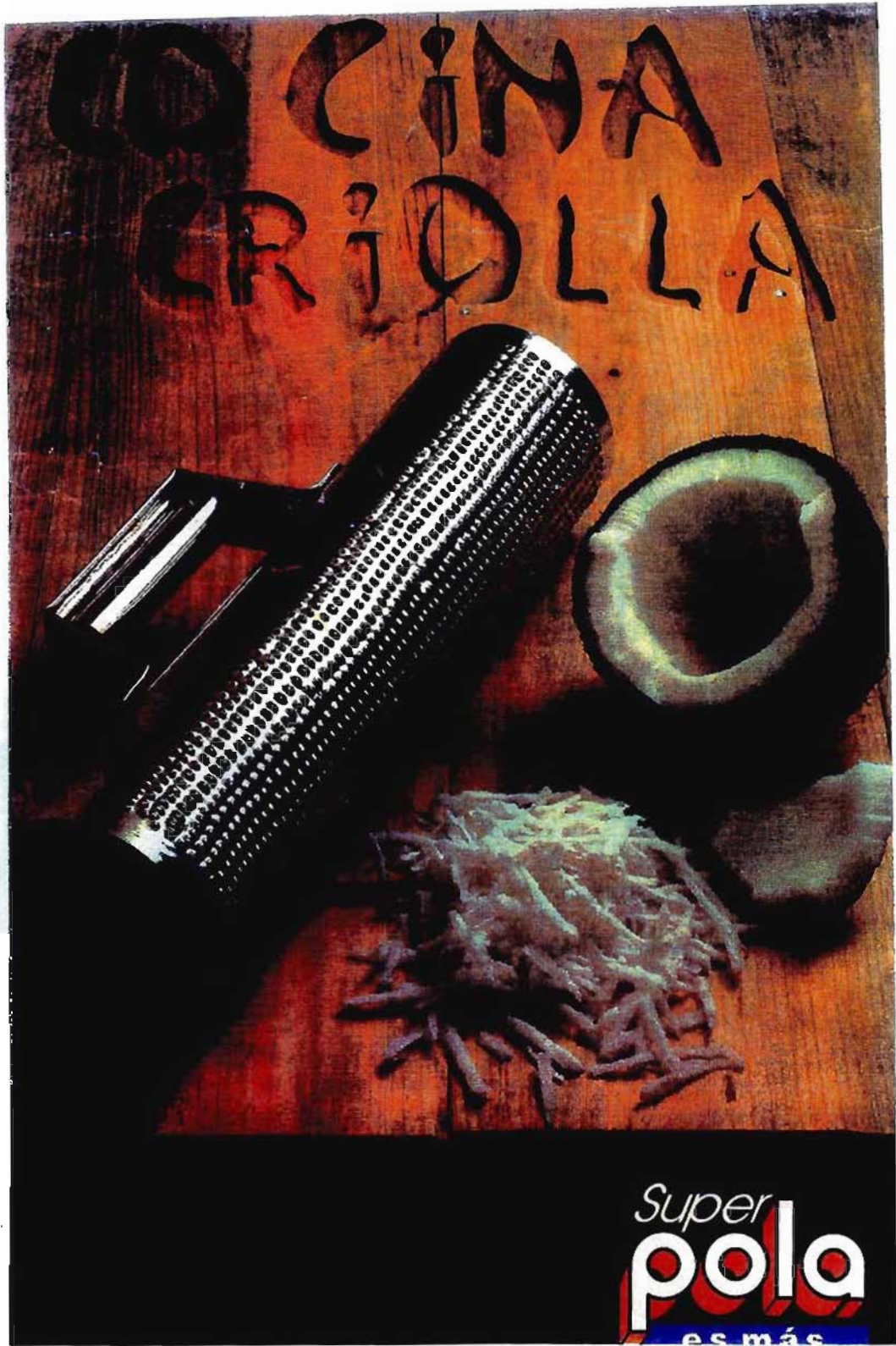


Figure 20: Advertisement for 'Super Pola'.

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*Todo el sabor de la mantequilla.*

The advertisement features a large, golden-brown butter pat with a scalloped edge. A hand on the left holds a butter knife, and a hand on the right is spreading butter onto the pat. In the foreground, there are three packages of Unta Rica butter: a tub, a tub, and a box. The background is a solid dark blue.

*Una suave nota de sabor.*

Figure 21: Advertisement for 'Unta Rica'.



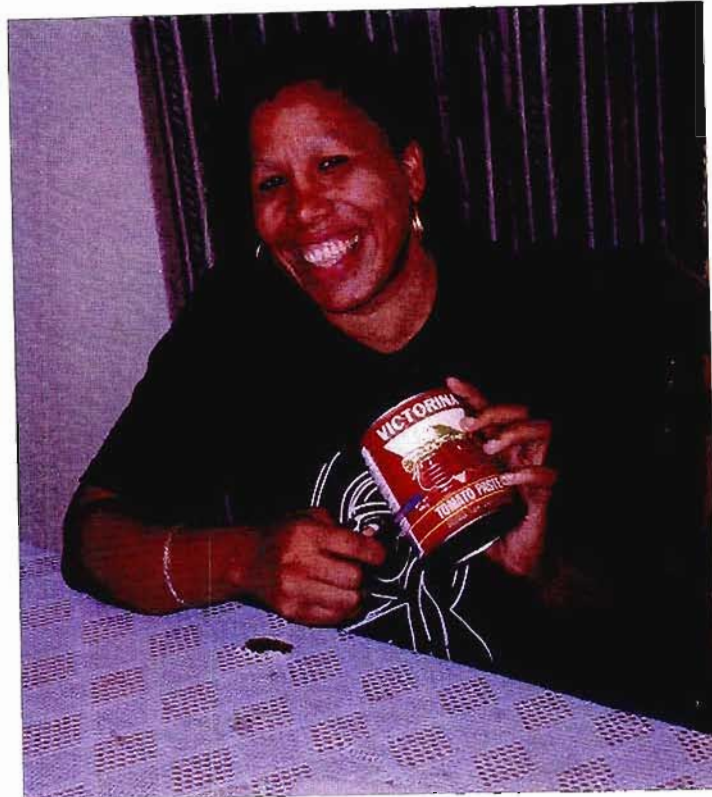


Figure 22: Ana Floria Hernández scraping a pen on a tomato paste can. San Francisco Macoris, Dominican Republic, 8/2/1998.

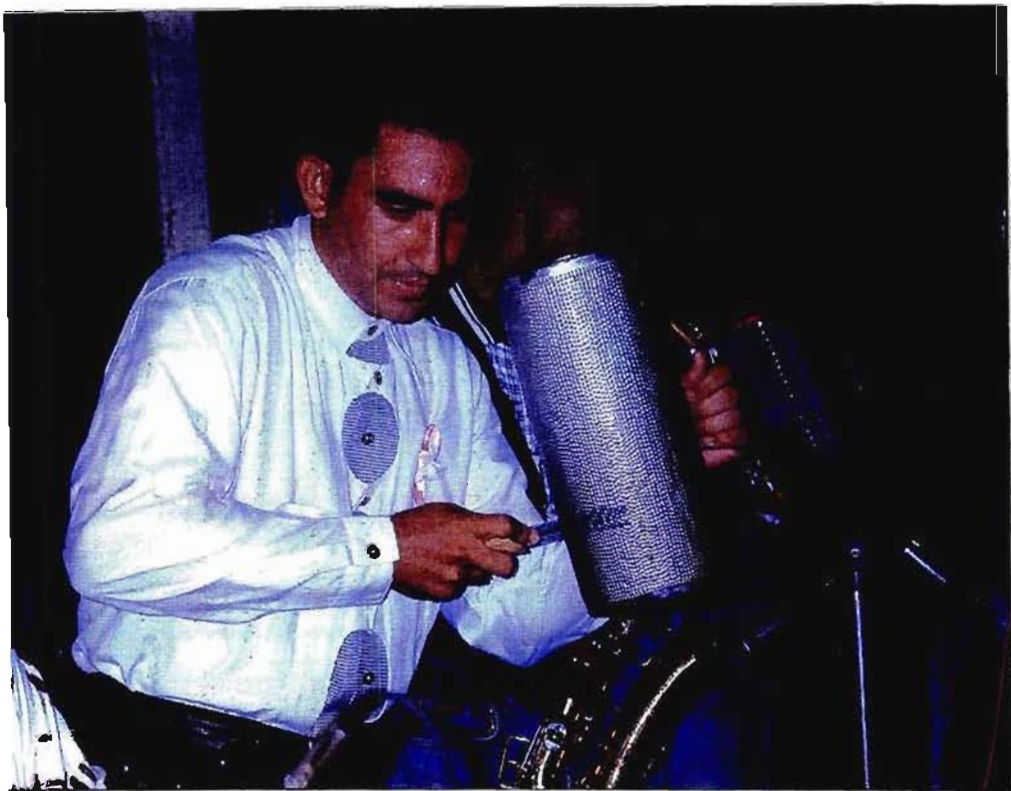


Figure 23: Ambioris Pérez, of Franklin Azcona y Su Conjunto Típico, playing güira. Amina, Mao, Dominican Republic, 14/2/98.

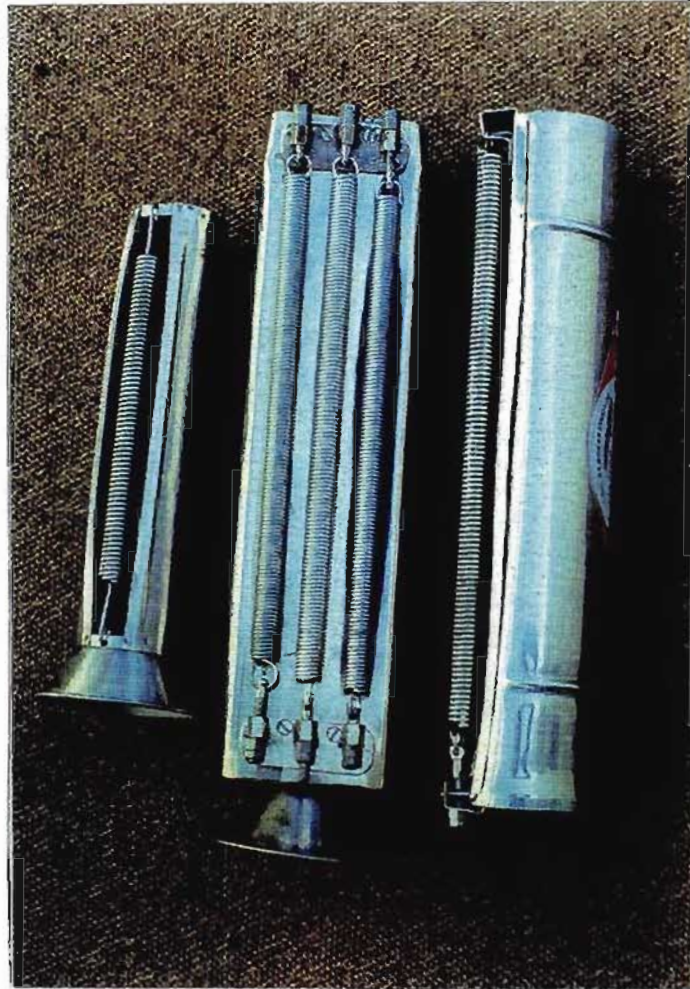


Figure 24: Metal *Reco-recos* with different mechanisms to hold springs. Instrument on the right has a metal plate attached to its surface.

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Ana Floria Hernandez - 8/2/98  
Hamlet Boddem - 8,16/2/98  
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Edis Sanchez - 9,10/2/98,  
Johanna Sanchez - 9,19/2/98  
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Milagro Escalante - 14/2/98  
Miguel Angel Ramirez Santos (Piraña) - 18/2/98  
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## Appendix A

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## Appendix B

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## Notes for the Accompanying CD

Note: The listener may have problems in identifying the particular sounds of various scrapers recorded on the CD. This will be facilitated by the use of headphones.

### 1. Estudos - Four Short Pieces for Reco-Reco Solo (Carlos Stasi, 1983).

Fourth piece, presenting melodic elements, is performed on a bamboo *reco-reco* with a thin notched surface.

Recorded by Maynard Motshoane at the University of Natal, 17/8/98.

### 2. If You Take Me Back

Big Joe and His Washboard Band (around 1939)

An example of washboard used in blues. This track was taken from the album *Good Time Blues: Harmonicas, Kazoos, Washboard & Cow-Bells* (1991, Columbia/Legacy CK46780). Part of the text written by David Evans on the sleeve of this album is reproduced here:

“Big Joe’s Washboard Band was led by guitarist and singer Joe McCoy, who had a long recording career under a variety of pseudonyms... [T]he group heard here [was formed by] versatile Chicago bass player Ramson Knowling, his cousin Robert Lee McCoy on harmonica, and Robert Lee’s girlfriend Amanda Sortier on washboard... Amanda Sortier, one of the few female washboard players ever to record, drifted off into obscurity after making a few recordings. Her simple but effective playing is done on an instrument with a cowbell and cymbal attached. ‘If You Take Me Back,’... has Joe McCoy playing sock chords..., letting his cousin blow the lead lines on the harmonica...” (1991:11-12)

### 3. Zydeco sont pas Sale (The Snap Beans aren’t Salty)

Clifton Chenier

This track features the modern rub-board used in the *Zydeco* tradition. It was taken from the album *Clifton Chenier: 60 Minutes with the King of Zydeco* (1993, Arhoole CD301) (see Figure 8). The notes for these two recordings, as written by Michael Goodwin and Chris Strachwitz are partially reproduced here:

Clifton Chenier: vocals and accordion with his Red Hot Louisiana Band including: Cleveland Chenier – rub-board; Robert Peter - drums; John Hart - sax; Morris Chenier - fiddle; Joe Morris - bass; Elvin Bishop - guitar; Buckwheat, Paul Senegal, James Benoit and others who performed with Clifton between 1965 and 1987 when these recordings were made.

“Clifton Chenier the greatest accordion player ever to come out of the Zydeco tradition. He virtually invented the modern Zydeco style... He grinned at the crowd while his five-piece band, powered by his brother Cleveland’s clattering bottle openers on a corrugated steel ‘rub-board,’ set up a solid, get-up-on-your-feet groove.” (1993)

Figure 8 features Clifton and Cleveland Chenier as they appear on the cover of this album.

#### 4. Elira Yesu Ndayanza

Abana Ba Nasery

This track features a ‘fanta’ bottle used by the group *Abana Ba Nasery* from Kenya. It was taken from the album *!Nursery Boys Go Ahead! The Guitar and Bottle Kings of Kenya* (1992, Green Linnet Records GLCD 4002).

Abana Ba Nasery is made up of Shem Tube and Just Osala (guitars and vocals), and Enos Okola (Fanta bottle and vocal). A partial reproduction of the notes for this track, as presented by Ben Mandelson, follows. Song notes/translations are by Boni Wanda.

“... Abana Ba Nasery - ‘The Nursery Boys’ - a joking reference to their size and school attendance. Just three men, three vocals, two acoustic (box) guitars and the rasp and ring of the Fanta bottle (Fanta alone has the ridges that chirp like a cicada when stroked with a metal rod), made the bright, acoustic dance music sing out... Shem, Justo and Enos are members of the Abaluhya tribe... Their music is based on traditional forms... Shem and Just claim the distinction of being the first to twin-up to integrate [specific traditional forms] into a coherent two-guitar style. This was around 1964, at which point old pal Enos Okola was brought in to add third harmony and the all-important Fanta bottle percussion.”

5. Down Into the Village Sammy Rimer

A piece from Tortola, Virgin Islands.

A track from the album *Caribbean Folk Music* (n.d., Folkways Records FE 4533).

The following text accompanies the piece:

“A local Virgin Islands popular piece played by a ‘scratch band.’  
Instruments: guitar, calabash scraper, gourd rattles.”  
Recorded by Tram Coombs.

6. Heel and Toe Polka

A saw used in the music of the Bahamas.

This track was taken from LP *Caribbean Folk Music* (n.d., Folkways Records FE 4533).

The following text by Harold Courlander is included in it:

“Percussion devices in the West Indies are often supplemented by scrapers, which appear in a variety of forms. In some of the islands, perforated sheet metal is scraped with a nail. In the Spanish-speaking areas of the Caribbean especially, notched or serrated gourds and calabashes are used to provide scraping sounds. Elsewhere notched sticks (having both West African and American Indian precedents) are found. Indeed, the washboard used by United States Negro street musicians comes out of the same tradition. An unusual variant is the saw used as a scraper, as in this piece from the Bahamas.”

7. Aura Waltz

A waltz recorded in Curaçao.

Orchestra, featuring piano and güiro.

This track was also taken from the LP *Caribbean Folk Music* (n.d., Folkways Records FE 4533). Recorded by Walter and Lisa Lekis.

8. Yo no se (Son montuno, Moisés La Rosa)  
9. Evita los comentarios (Chachachá, Miguel Hinojosa)  
Orquesta Ritmo Oriental.  
Director and *güiro*: Enrique Lazaga (see Figure 12).

These excerpts were taken from the CD *El Ritmo de la Ritmo* (1995, EGREN CD 0108).

10. Palos

Group of *Ramoncito* at the *Fiesta a San Miguel* (a celebration to Saint Miguel) in Azua, Dominican Republic, 30/11/93.  
Recorded by Edis Sánchez and T. Vicioso.

Edis Sánchez gives the following description:

“Los *Palos* o *Atabales* son el ritmo más extendido a nivel nacional. Sin embargo, se hace necesario aclarar que se denomina con esta palabra a un sinnúmero de expresiones, e... festividades... En todo el territorio nacional esta expresión está relacionada con casi todas las celebraciones del santoral católico...” (1997:41)

“*Palos* or *Atabales* is the most widespread rhythm in the Dominican Republic. At the same time, this term also serves to identify an endless number of expressive forms and festivals..., generally related to the celebrations for catholic saints...”

11. Pri-pri

Group of Nico Juisito.  
Villa Mella, Dominican Republic, 1989.  
Recorded by Edis Sánchez

Austerlitz gives the following description:

“... several stylistically distinct rural merengue variants, together constituting a *Dominican merengue complex*, are played in rural regions of the Republic. The most often performed of these, other than merengue cibaeño, is merengue palo echao (or pri-pri) of the South and East.” (1997:136)

Referring to the use of the *güira* in *pri-pri*, Edis Sánchez says:



“La güira es tocada de una forma muy peculiar y difícil, ya que se usa con un movimiento de antebrazo, que en otros estilos es sólo de muñeca, con lo cual el músico se cansa menos.” (1997:47)

“The güira is played in a very peculiar and difficult way. The musician uses forearm movements, which contrasts with the way other styles are played, i.e. using wrist movements, which are less tiring.”

#### 12. Sarandunga

Celebration to *San Juan Bautista* in Bani, Dominican Republic, 1995.

Recorded by Edis Sánchez

“Sarandunga es el nombre de una fiesta y un complejo rítmico...” (Lizardo 1974:114)

“Sarandunga is the name of a festival and of a rhythm complex...”

#### 13. Salve

Celebration to *Virgen de las Mercedes* in Bani, Dominican Republic, 14/9/93.

Recorded by Edis Sánchez

“La salve siempre aparece asociada a celebraciones de tipo religioso...” (Edis Sánchez 1997:43)

“The *salve* is always associated with religious celebrations”

#### 14. ‘Ramon Madora’ (*Mangulina*, a Southern dance)

This track was taken from the album *Mento, Merengue, Méringue* (1995, OMCD 028) and features a *merengue* quartet in the City of San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, 1971.

15. Rosaura
16. Consigue me esto
17. Merengue Cerrao

Angel Viloría and his Group.

These tracks were taken from the album *Merengues vol. 1 - Los Éxitos Originales de Angel Viloría y su Conjunto Tipico Cibaeño* (1989, Ansonia Records HGCD 1206).

The sleeve notes of this album comment on the special style of the *güiro* player, singer Dioris Valladares, observing that, with the *tambora*, these instruments are essential to merengue rhythm. This illustrates my discussion on the use of both instruments in merengue (see Chapter Four). At the same time, as the piece *Merengue Cerrao* illustrates, four instruments are introduced as essential to merengue, i.e. *tambora*, *güira*, accordion, and saxophone.

Describing the Era of dictator Trujillo and the International Dominican Community, Austerlitz says:

“The best-known merengüero in the international community was piano accordionist Angel Viloría, who moved to New York City in the 1950s. Viloría’s recordings on Ansonia Records were widely disseminated. Viloría became the best-known merengüero outside of the Dominican Republic. However, he was not well known in his native land... Perhaps misled by the fact that his group did not utilize trumpets and piano, featuring accordion and one saxophone, some music historians have written that Viloría performed merengue típico cibaeño. However, Viloría’s style owes more to Luis Alberti’s music than to merengue típico.” (1992:189-190).

#### 18. Chanfrin

Tatico Henríquez

A track taken from the album *Tatico Henriquez - 20 Éxitos* (1989, Kubaney Publishing/Bachata B 6007). The following description is given by Austerlitz:

“Tatico was the most influential and most highly-regarded típico merengue musician...” (1992:346)

19. Quien fue que le dio perico

20. A Menie

Joseito Mateo

These tracks were taken from the album *Joseito Mateo: El Unico Rey* (n.d).

“Joseito Mateo... came to be known as ‘the king of merengue.’” (Austerlitz 1992:149-150)

21. Cuendo yo me muera

22. Merengue macho

23. La Familia Alonzo

Siano Arias

Tracks taken from the album *Merengues Típicos* (n.d., Mundo Publishing Corp. Guitarra 5025), featuring *Merengue Típico Moderno*, which was developed in the city of Santiago. As Austerlitz says:

“The main difference between típico moderno and the earlier accordion-based merengue cibaëño is the instrumentation. Típico moderno groups have developed new rhythmic patterns... Conga drums have been added to the ensemble and the bass part is carried by an electric string bass instead of a marimba... Tatico Henríquez may well have been the first típico merengüero to utilize the bass and the conga, in the early 1970s... Tatico did not adopt the expanded instrumentation until the end of his career... (1992:346) Típico moderno percussion style is characterized by a confluence of old and new elements... Típico moderno tamboreros are known for their flashy, highly improvisational style; as Bobadilla puts it... ‘típico music never plays the beat tranquilly’. (ibid.349) ... As saxophonist Crispín Fernández puts it, ‘típico musicians play faster than anyone!’... Unison rhythmic figures (cortes, ‘cuts,’ breaks), have also been adopted by típico moderno merengüeros... The güira style developed by Manuel la Güira in pop merengue has influenced típico groups; típico moderno güireros utilize the majao rhythm, perform elaborate variations, and sometimes perform improvised solos.” (ibid.350)

24. Corazon culpable (Bachata)
  25. Por un chin de amor (Bachata)
  26. La Barriguita (Merengue)
- Antony Santos

These tracks were taken from the album *Cójelo ahí* (n.d., RM Records CAT 004).

27. La Muneca
- Joe Veras

A track from the album *El Hombre de tu Vida* (n.d., Hipolito Records)

28. El Loco (Pop Merengue)
  29. El Hombre Llego Parao (Pop Merengue)
- Pochi y su Coco Band

These tracks are taken from the album *Pochy Y Su Cocoband* (1995, Kubaney 409-2T). Ruben Paulino plays the *güira* in this band. However, *güirero* Tony Lucia also participates in this album. The text does not indicate which musician is playing in each of the different pieces recorded.

30. No Engane tu Corazon
  31. Carino con Ella
- Banda Gorda

Tracks taken from the album *Por el mismo camino...Durisimo* (1997, Musical Productions Inc. MPCDPK.6225).

*Güirero* : Tony Lucia.

32. Por Fuera y Por Dentro
  33. Lo Tengo Todo
  34. Cuando No Estas
- Milly y Los Vecinos

From the album *Hasta Siempre* (1997, Sony CDZ-82274/2 469879).

*Güirero* : Samuel Jimenes.

35. Xavier Guello

(Carlos Stasi - 1993-94)

Introduction of the piece.

Instrument: metal *reco-reco* with springs (see Figure 24, instrument on the right)

Recorded by Guy Chandler at the University of Natal, 1997.